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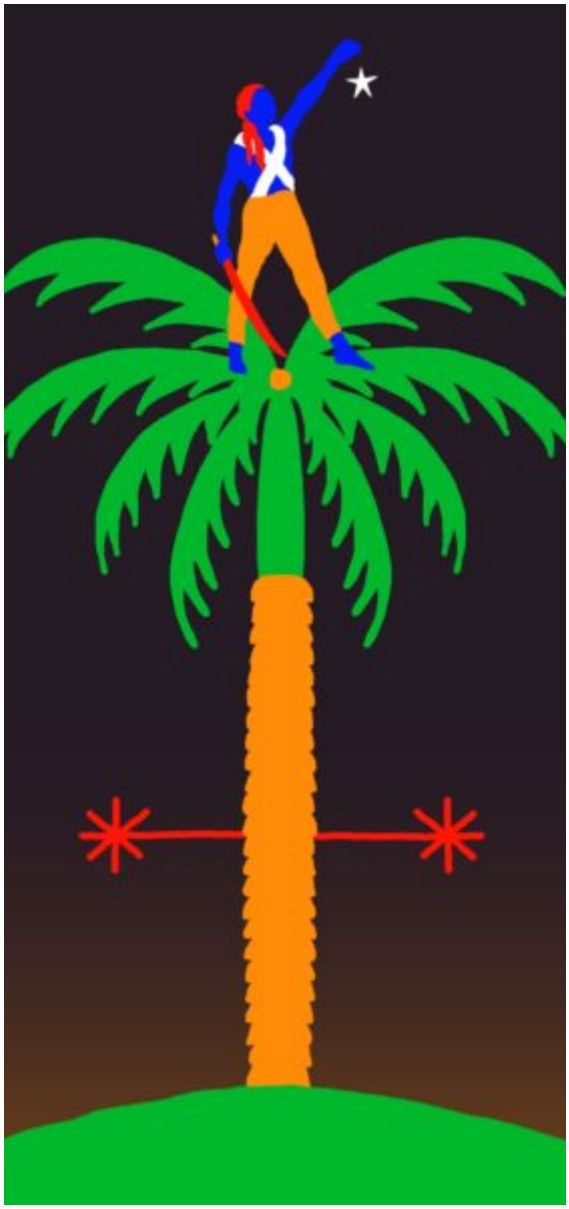
The Haitian Revolution

To recognize the historic milestone of the revolution is a first step for the Global South to reclaime its greatness and importance

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| Haiti |

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The insurrection of the enslaved of Saint-Domingue[1] Name of Haiti during the

French colonial period (1697-1804).**,** and local army's subsequent victory against that of Napoleon, considered the most powerful in the world at the time, culminated in the independence of the country which then became Haiti in 1804. An in-depth understanding of this revolution and its axial aspects enables us to answer two fundamental questions on the nature of the event, and to construct a radical, but logical, and absolutely fair, proposition:

The first question: Why and how was such an original and powerful revolution erased/made invisible from universal history, including and particularly that of Latin America and the remainder of the Global South? The second: What is the relation between this revolution and the economic and political instabilities which have dominated Haiti since the 19th century? The answer to both questions is the argument required for the resulting proposition: that in the Global South we must come to recognize the Haitian Revolution — and not the French — as the milestone instituting the so-called contemporary era.

The answer to these two questions requires a brief description of this revolution and its central characteristics. The point which draws the most attention is that, unlike the French and American 18th century revolutions — the former predominated by the bourgeoisie, and the latter by settlers who preserved the slave structure inherited from English colonization —, the Haitian Revolution was the work of violent uprisings by black people who defended freedom, equality, and the right to land ownership. Born, planned and executed in the most productive French colony of the colonial period, it was directed by the enslaved, and violently repressed by the victorious heirs of the French Revolution.

In effect, a consecration of human rights[2] Within the context of the French Revolution, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was proclaimed in 1789., heralded as a legacy of that revolution, was restricted to serving a specific segment of humanity: the white, European population, or its descendants. Violence against the black population and indigenous peoples continued in the colonies established by the French metropolis — and in other countries on the continent — around the world.

Within this framework, the revolution of enslaved Haitians was unprecedented in the sense

of seeking to materialize the ideals of human rights for *all* humanity. It represented the first revolution in history which radically brought together republican aspirations and a socio-economically and politically democratic and racial perspective — with its central objectives being the abolition of slavery and access to land ownership. This movement, therefore, which was led by black people and focused on freeing them from slavery, is an anti-racist, anti-colonial, and anti-slavery one.

[Anti-racism]: The imagery which sustained slavery on a symbolic level represented the "black" person as a corporeal being, primitive, and barbaric, almost irrational. Therefore, they would be unable to understand the meaning of freedom, without the skills required to apprehend the supporting concepts. However, the slave uprising on Saint-Domingue island, and the resulting independence, were a demonstration of black people's capacity to recognize the value of freedom, and even to place their lives at risk to attain it. It is no coincidence that in the country's first constitution, in 1805, the racial hierarchy in which the regime of slavery was based was challenged immediately, and eliminated.

[Anti-colonialism] When independence was proclaimed, the French were banned from owning land in Haiti, and their properties, a result of the privilege of being representatives of the metropolis, were expropriated. The leaders of the revolution were aware of what structured the colonial regime, and of the importance of breaking away from its economic, legal, and institutional bases.

[Anti-slavery] The first Haitian constitution declared that any black (African) person who put their feet on Haitian soil was automatically free. Amid a hostile environment, since all the other countries in America were still under the yoke of slavery in the early 19th century, the leaders of the first Black Republic demonstrated that independence would not make any concessions to slavery[3]For further information on this aspect of the Haitian Revolution in history, see: Hurbon. L, L'Insurrection des esclaves de Saint Domingue (22 au 23 août 1791). Paris: Karthala, 2000..

The immense challenges of the new, independent

State

The unprecedented nature of the Haitian Revolution meant that its leaders, and the people in general, would pay a high price. Firstly, on the domestic level, they needed to construct a nation-state, without the bases of any previous political experience, in a territory which had experienced different types of regimes in a short period of time, dominated by a secular institutional structure, constructed to serve the interests of the French metropolis.

In turn, externally, the black uprising and construction of Haiti as a country caused an immense trauma in the American colonies and countries, from the USA — where the Thomas Jefferson administration feared for the fragile unity between the North and South — to Brazil, where the fear of a similar revolution caused an increased control of bodies, and oppression of the enslaved — prohibited from access to reading and writing, for example, and to even learn what had happened during the revolution in Haiti.

In this context, destroying the bases of the nation-state experience which was being constituted became a common strategy in European countries, their American colonies, and the USA. In the pursuit of international recognition, Haiti had to compensate the French slave-owners for their struggle for freedom, which is an immense paradox, and ruined its economy. Furthermore, leaders of the revolution were murdered and, with support of colonial countries, a political group, predominantly comprised of those of mixed race — the sons of Frenchmen and enslaved women — was strengthened in the process and dominated the State, preventing strategic measures, such as agrarian reform, from moving forward.

The dispute established among the various Haitian political and social groups for control over the emerging State had an impact on the paths of the revolution. Above all, international pressure for the country to compensate the French slave and landowners in order to have their independence recognized — and to gain access to the markets of the countries controlling international trade — was the main factor for Haiti’s inability to acquire sufficient domestic economic resources to establish the paths of national development, and maintain their productive capacity.

The first republic of freed black people took a further great blow in the modern/contemporary era: the military occupation/invasion by the USA, which began in 1915. Prompted by alleged political instability, which required intervention, the neighboring country executed an effective “colonization” process of the country, and remained there for three decades, exploiting its natural resources, protecting governments which it established as it pleased, and controlling economic activities, in accordance with its own interests.

The retreat of North American troops, in 1934 — under accusations of having appropriated the entire reserve of gold deposited in the country’s public coffers — increased economic destructuring in Haiti, and its most perverse legacy was the installation of François Duvalier — Papa Doc — in power in 1957, followed by his son — Jean-Claude Duvalier, Baby Doc —, imposed on the country in 1971 by his father when he was just 19 years old[4] For a more detailed explanation of the American invasion of Haiti, see the text by Haitian historian, Suzy Castor: Castor, S. L'occupation américaine d'Haïti. .

The dynasty remained in power until 1986, when it was deposed by a popular uprising, the result of the struggle against the immense brutalities and oppression established by the dictatorial regime supported by the USA and France, in particular[5]Removed from power, Baby Doc initially became established in the USA and then in France. Only 25 years later, he returned to his country of birth, where he passed away in 2014. .

During the period, a large proportion of the population was removed from the political process, and the State was radically privatized by private interests. An attempt to defeat this process of suppressing the rights of the Haitian people took place through the election of Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1991. Considered the first democratically elected president of the country, the former priest, who was connected to liberation theology, had his mandate quickly ended by a military coup.

He returned to government in 1994, where he remained until 1996, later governing again between 2001 and 2004. Analyses of the Aristide government until today divide opinions in the country; what particularly stands out during that period is the worsening of political instability, especially following his removal from power by the USA, with support from

France, and an international occupying force which had Brazilian soldiers as its military commanders.

The United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti — MINUSTAH — was established under the argument that the country was dominated by chaos, violence, and gangs which controlled a significant part of the country's territories, particularly its capital. In fact, similarly to other experiences in the past, the intervention did not contribute towards solving the problems which the United Nations had assigned it to resolve, and its peacekeepers were accused of multiple human rights violations, and of having been responsible for the dissemination of a cholera epidemic that led to the death of more than 10,000 people in 2010[6] See the following article: Valo, M. The UN admits its responsibility for the cholera epidemic in Haiti. Le Monde, August 19, 2016..

The repeated failure of the international forces was also accompanied in 2010 by one of the strongest earthquakes ever suffered by the Caribbean island. Its impact was terrible, particularly in its capital, Port-au-Prince. It caused the death of more than 100,000 people, hundreds of thousands of people were injured, and more than one million became homeless. Despite its magnitude, it is a mistake to blame the natural disaster for the problems in Haiti. In effect, many countries have suffered strong earthquakes which did not cause the same impact.

The fragility of the State and Haitian society, dominated throughout its history by colonial pressure, and the creation of obstacles to the project for an independent nation are reasons which more precisely explain the country's difficulty in responding to natural disasters such as the 2010 earthquake.

PetroCaribe and political violence: the establishment of fear by government violence against popular movement

PetroCaribe was a strategic oil alliance (agreement) co-signed by Venezuela and Haiti in 2006. Chavez's Venezuela sold oil to Haiti at a reduced price. The Haitian government paid a percentage and saved the other, to return to Venezuela in 25 years. The national government should have used the extra money to promote the growth of the Haitian economy and to finance social programs for the population. Instead, 4.5 billion US dollars, loaned between 2006 and 2018, simply disappeared, and Haitians saw few of the benefits promised.

The program ended in 2017, and coincided with the inexplicable wealth of many people who had participated in previous regimes, on one hand, and the impoverishment of the majority of the population, on the other. In 2018, this questionable situation triggered the mobilization of civil society against corruption, and to demand explanations from the government. This movement against corruption started with a simple question in Creole: "*Kot kòb petwo karibe a*"? (Where is the PetroCaribe fund money?) on social networks. It went viral, to the point of reaching 3 million Haitians on social networks, 30% of the country's population. Following dissemination on networks, many young people decided to protest against corruption in the streets.

The mobilization of civil society resulted in the Court of Auditors of Haiti undertaking an investigation, which revealed that more than three billion, eight hundred million US dollars (USD 3.8 billion) had been embezzled, a scheme involving four former presidents and more than twenty ex-government ministers. This included former president Jovenel Moïse, from the same political party as Michel Martely (his predecessor and member of the same far-right political regime), who was accused of taking part in squandering the PetroCaribe fund.

Before rising to power, Jovenel Moïse was an economic entrepreneur. The investigation demonstrated that he laundered the money embezzled by the Martely regime, to prepare for his election. Before his assassination while in power, a large percentage of the population demanded the "PetroCaribe Trial". We highlight that with the implication of Moïse and his political allies in this corruption system, materializing the trial would have been extremely difficult. This was one of the reasons which encouraged mobilization of the population, and them taking to the streets in 2018, requesting Moïse's dismissal and the end of the

oligarchic system.

Former president Jovenel[7] This regime came to power with the collusion of the international community in 2011. Jovenel was re-elected in 2016, in an election without popular legitimacy, with only 21.69% participation from the country's population. , together with ideologists of the extreme right regime in the country (PHTK), established a regime of violence and fear, in order to protect themselves from the popular movement. They sought to organize elections to pass on power to a trusted person who would ensure their protection, and avoid further investigation into their acts. In addition, with the collusion of colonial countries, they sought to hold a referendum under their control, in order to achieve legal coverage in relation to the corruption scandal disclosed by the Court of Auditors.

The population continued to demand a transitional government which would hold a trial for those accused of embezzling resources from the PetroCaribe Fund, and have them imprisoned. This transition would break from anti-grassroots, anti-democratic, and anti-republican policies. The regime withstood the will of the people and instituted a regime of terror that conducted massacres in the country's slums, particularly in the metropolitan region of the capital.

It is clear, then, how during the second decade of this century, political conflicts increased and disputes between the various political groups for control of the State were characterized by the absence of a hegemonic force in Haitian society. This crisis situation culminated in the assassination of president Jovenel Moïse in 2021, for reasons which have not been clarified until today.

The violence against the president was followed by the country's institutional insolvency which, two years after the crime, is still without a legislative power, or a date to hold an election for the position. This would lead to the succession of Ariel Henry, the prime-minister maintained in power by the coalition of countries — led by the USA — which has, in fact, controlled the political process since this time[8] For further information on this topic, see the audit report on management of the PetroCaribe fund. .

The inheritance of the Haitian Revolution and superseding the colonial viewpoint of history

The goal of the historic record presented until this point is to demonstrate how the contemporary reality of Haiti was produced. Concomitantly, the narrative that Haiti is a country that “failed” took hold and became hegemonic, as if its existing problems had originated from its people’s incapacity to build a project for a democratic and prosperous nation, based on racial/social justice. This is the dominant version in the world of the most radical, pro-human revolution in history.

In fact, what a more detailed analysis of the Haitian reality reveals, in the light of a critical reading of its history, is the immense struggle of its people to construct new possibilities for their existence; the affirmation of a strong pride in constructing the nation, and the resulting feeling of dignity; the strong community link established in daily life, with the creation of plural strategies to deal with shortcomings, in terms of access to urban equipment and services, a lack of jobs and income, in addition to the State’s incapacity to guarantee sovereignty over the country’s territories — which is not unlike the Brazilian State, for example.

Within this context, we should move on from any narrative centered on characterizing Haiti as an “unfeasible country”. Firstly, we should recognize the leading role of its people in the construction of the most important revolution in history, and — as a fundamental starting point — guarantee the reparation due by France and the USA for the economic, social, and political problems existing today. Having guaranteed this, and from effective listening and the participation of the Haitian population, national forces committed to democracy should mobilize to establish a far-reaching project to recover and value republican institutions, for economic, social, and environmental development, and a national pact to defend life, democracy, and all fundamental rights.

This process will not take place spontaneously. It falls to countries, such as Brazil, currently governed by a president committed to strengthening democracy and overcoming inequality

between countries in the Global North and South, to engage in the search for a solution to the current crisis in Haiti which is based on respect for its self-determination and commitment to constructing an agreed solution for the country.

Within this context, Haitian political forces, the citizens who live in the diaspora, and people around the world should engage in international pressure for a solution to the Haitian issue which will value its people's history and, from this recognition, contribute towards constructing a present full of dignity, and valuing the heritage and legacy of the enslaved people who became free. Much more than this: who taught the greatest lesson ever suffered by the colonizers of America, who continue in world power, but should be continuously questioned on their responsibility for the persistence of the racism that they created, and that sustained the symbolic and material structure of slavery. And they continue to maintain economic and political practices today which reproduce the various forms of inequality and violence which plague the people living in the outskirts.

The struggle of the Haitian people is not isolated, and they are not passive victims of an international system constructed from colonialism. They are the expression of this historic violence, but they are also the expression of the resistance displayed by black people, and their capacity to respond to it, which remains as warranted as it was in 1804.

The great legacy of the 19th century Haitian Revolution served as a beacon for anticolonial struggles throughout Latin America. Its influence for Bolívar, for example, was central to the victory against Spain, and the starting point for the independence of the entire continent. In addition, it was the primary point of reference for materializing multiple slave uprisings, and fed the imagination surrounding the fight against slavery in such a way that its maintenance became impossible.

In view of the above, a commitment from all the people, institutions, and countries committed to democracy and human rights is essential, particularly in the Global South, recognizing the historic debt with the Haitian Revolution and its people. Acknowledging it as the historic milestone which produced the contemporary era is the first step towards a recovery of its greatness and importance. From then on, we must declare the commitment to strengthening democracy in the country, contributing towards finding solutions to the

economic and political crisis which it is experiencing — positioning the weight of colonialism in its production — and acknowledging the people of Haiti's right to self-determination and effective independence.
