

<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7277>



Haiti

“Haiti has always been the scene for violent conflicts between the powers”

- IV Online magazine - 2021 - IV559 - August 2021 -

Publication date: Tuesday 24 August 2021

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

The killing on 7 July 2021 of Haiti's president, Jovenel Moïse, highlighted the status as a land of extreme poverty attributed by the mainstream media of the “democratic countries” to the first territory to have abolished slavery on the “American” continent. It is in the perspective of this “historical revenge” that the historian Marco Morel – author of “A Revolução do Haiti e o Brasil escravista – O que não deve ser dito” (“The Haitian Revolution and Slavery-era Brazil - What not to say”) – analyses the current situation in Haiti and its relationship with Brazil, placing them in their historical contexts. The interview was conducted on 10 August by Gabriel Brito for the Brazilian website “Correio da Cidadania”

What is happening in Haiti? What led to the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, a right-wing figure until recently aligned with the dominant foreign interests in the country?

Although the situation is still unclear, in detailing the circumstances, there is no doubt that transnational imperialism has once again put its foot in the stirrup in Haiti, through its main weapon of war and politics, the United States. Local authorities point the finger of responsibility at the United States and vice versa. It is likely that both are right and that there was a collusion of sectoral interests in the face of the tragic negligence of Jovenel Moïse, who was a successful businessman exporting bananas and had no previous experience of political activity.

It is important to remember that Haiti's territory was literally occupied by the United States through the marines for two decades, between 1914 and 1934, with the objective, not hidden by President Woodrow Wilson (President 1913-1921), of protecting US economic interests. These are structural problems of society.

What is the scale of the crisis in Haitian society?

In Haiti, there is a very serious multifaceted crisis. Political, social, and economic. The national state has lost its monopoly on the use of legitimate violence and the result is that violence has spread. The capital Port-au-Prince is dominated by rival gangs and the practice of kidnapping people and making ransom demands has become recurrent in the country. Gang rapes happen, out of any control.

Parliament was due to be re-elected in January 2020. But the elections were not held. Famine and rising commodity prices are terrible. And such a situation confirms the ineffectiveness of international organizations and international occupations such as MINUSTAH (United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, which lasted from 2004 to October 2017), whose real objective is to maintain order and not to pacify.

MINUSTAH, by the way, has benefited from a significant participation of Bolsonaroist military leaders from Brazil, who, in some cases, even try to shield their actions in that country from criticism.

Exactly. General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz led the United Nations Mission in Haiti from January 2007 to April 2009. He held the secretariat of Bolsonaro's government, after which he opposed the government. General Floriano Peixoto Vieira Neto, commander of the mission between April 2009 and April 2010, also became secretary general of the Brazilian presidency at the beginning of the current administration. General Edson Leal Pujol, who led MINUSTAH from 2013 to 2014, was commander of the Brazilian army from 2019 to February 2021. Tarcísio Gomes de Freitas, Minister of Infrastructure, served from 2005 to 2006 in Haiti as head of the technical section of the engineering company of the Brazilian Peacekeeping Force. General Otávio Rêgo Barros, former spokesman for the

Bolsonaro government, was commander of the 1st Infantry Battalion of the Peace Force. Fernando Azevedo e Silva, former Minister of Defence, held the position of Chief of Operations of the Brazilian contingent in Haiti from 2004 to 2005. And, General Luís Eduardo Ramos, current secretary of government to the president [since 21 July 2021], served from 2011 to 2012 in the Brazilian troops in Haiti.

Not to mention, of course, General Augusto Heleno, current head of the Internal Security Cabinet (GSI) and right-hand man (we might say!) of the president, who was the first commander of MINUSTAH in 2004. He is strongly suspected of being responsible for a massacre in the poor district of Cité Soleil, in Port-au-Prince, in 2005: operation “Poing fort”, with 300 soldiers, invaded this community and caused about 70 deaths, including women and children, after firing 22,000 shots. The fact is that Lula's government, after drawing accusations, withdrew General Heleno from Haiti.

We note that the military presence in Haiti has served as a kind of laboratory for the genocidal policy of the Bolsonaro government, including the federal intervention in Rio de Janeiro in 2018, commanded by General Braga Netto, current Minister of Defence. The latter was not in Haiti, but went directly to the seat of the operation, acting as military attaché to the United States in 2013-14.

It should not be forgotten that the legitimately elected Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was deposed in 2004 by the US army with the support of the French and Brazilian governments, among others. It is a question of controlling the poor and black populations in a situation of increasing poverty, in Haiti and here in Brazil.

Haiti has a specific and little-known history, which stands out in the Americas. How do you relate the country's past to the present?

Haiti was the first country to proclaim the abolition of slavery and the second to proclaim its independence in the Americas. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the French thinker Abbé Grégoire (1750-1831, who argued in the Constituent Assembly for the abolition of privileges and slavery as well as universal male suffrage) stressed that Haiti was like a beacon that shone in the West Indies, bringing hope to the oppressed and arousing the hatred of the oppressors. The Haitian revolution highlighted the capacity for struggle of enslaved workers and their ability to transform society, destroying slavery and colonialism.

Haiti has always been the scene of violent disputes between the powers, and, after its independence, it became a wasteland due to the action of France and other European countries. Little by little, the US has established itself as the new leader. The victorious Haitian independent state at first defeated all the European powers and the United States politically and militarily. But these countries have gradually regained control of the economy and have exercised a kind of terrible revenge.

There is a strong break with the historical past and memory in international perception. Haiti is usually presented today as the poorest country in the Americas. And that's it. The concealment of the Haitian revolution is symptomatic and is one of the ingredients of oppression. Although a large part of the Haitian population, the oppressed majorities, know who Jean-Jacques Dessalines, the slave who proclaimed independence in 1804 and who also became the most popular figure in voodoo, was. The historical past is in permanent reconstruction and in tension with the present.

In the end, isn't the level of interventionism in the country, given its anti-imperialist pioneer past, a cruel and real representation of a certain racism and white supremacism, bequeathed by colonialism and slavery that are at the root of these discriminatory ideologies? Are we not talking about a country punished by bourgeoisies inherited from this historic stage who are simply unable to deal with the self-determination of

non-white peoples?

Yes, it is a good way of understanding what is happening in Haitian society today, beyond the stereotypes of poverty and violence. The Haitian revolution initially brought a dose of political, economic, and social liberation. But even these partial achievements were to be destroyed by colonialism and imperialism. And, it is worth saying, with alliances between the new local elites which emerged from independence and colonialism. The Revolution itself, with its clearly liberating dimension, already bore the germ of its self-destruction, which would be realized in an alliance between national and international dominators; now most of the population is oppressed by the exploitation of its labour power and the concentration of land, even if they are no longer slaves.

Although Cuba and Haiti have presented themselves as two rebellious Caribbean islands, there are differences in this process. What happened in Haiti after independence was an anti-blockade. The new nation-state struggled to structure itself in a sovereign manner, despite the determination of some of its leaders and the population, because the isolation then imposed on Haiti led to a frantic race by the European powers and the United States to a predatory and unregulated trade. Without customs tariffs, charging abusive prices, in a looting imposed by force. That is why the current situation is inherited from post- and counter-revolutionary violence, based on racism, on white supremacy on the notion of considering as unacceptable the sovereign and popular autonomy of the black and mulatto population as protagonists of their own history.

Haiti and Cuba have been (and are) the protagonists of a striking example of resistance to capitalist models and white supremacy, despite the many specificities and dissimilarities of their respective historical trajectories. This explains the treatment they are currently receiving, including from the mainstream media.

In this sense, we have seen this type of tension manifest itself here in the recent case of the burning of the statue of the *bandeirante* (adventurers who from the 17th century penetrated Brazil in search of mineral wealth and reducing Amerindian populations to slavery) Borba Gato in São Paulo (in the early 18th century, he was appointed General Superintendent of Mines and set up two huge fazendas, named Borba and Gato

First, my total and unrestricted solidarity with comrade Paulo Galo, one of those who are still in prison [following this “attack” on the statue of Borba Gato], and to all those who participated in or supported in any way the “attack” on the monument. They are political prisoners in this frightening and sick Bolsonarist Brazil in which we live.

The mainstream media were not outraged when the statues of the “Soviet” leaders were destroyed with much more violence. On the contrary, such acts were considered a gesture of freedom and civilization... It is therefore not the defence of the integrity of works of art that is at stake here.

What saddens me most in this episode is that the statue of Borba Gato remains intact with its structures firm. Businessmen in São Paulo have already offered to finance its restoration, which will not be complicated. It is a crude metaphor for Brazil's history. Colony, independence, empire, republics, and domination metamorphoses, but its general features remain. It has emerged almost unscathed from the offensives to which it was subjected. Therefore, the hypocritical bourgeoisie is affected by attacks on monuments but supports or is indifferent to the daily attacks of the state against the poor population in Brazil. It mourns the memory of those who enslaved Indians and blacks, but not that of the Amerindian peoples and Afro-descendants who are massacred in our daily lives. How many thousands of black people and natives have been beheaded by characters like Borba Gato!

It is necessary not only to destroy all the symbolism of these monuments, but also to move forward and create new reference symbols. This applies to the past, present and future of society. Let us get to know and not forget the Haitian revolution.

“Haiti has always been the scene for violent conflicts between the powers”

PS:

If you like this article or have found it useful, please consider donating towards the work of International Viewpoint. Simply follow this link: [Donate](#) then enter an amount of your choice. One-off donations are very welcome. But regular donations by standing order are also vital to our continuing functioning. See the last paragraph of [this article](#) for our bank account details and take out a standing order. Thanks.