The Elites, the Power and the People: how the Haitian Elites Undermine the People's Aspiration to Social Justice

Moselyn JEAN, May 9, 2025

The birth of Haiti as a nation-state had been put forth by a disruptive circumstance independent of the good will of the Haitian elites who constantly looked down upon the mass of black people as a worthless class for freedom, but at the same time, as a useful class for profit. Prior to the bloody battle that led to the country's declaration of independence on January 1st, 1804, several attempts had been undertaken among mulattos and new freedmen elites commonly called the Affranchis to keep the slaves under the same framework of segregation and exploitation. They used their repressive system to keep them in poverty and exclusion. In the colonial system, the marechaussee militia instituted by slave owners was the epicenter through which the power to kill was disseminated among the slaves to prevent any form of rebellion against the system. This system had been withered away when the indigenous army launched their counteroffensive for independence. The former system consisted of a military group designed to maintain peace in the colony by repressing any troublesome element and ensuring security for the colonial apparatus. In contrast, the latter led the battle for independence and instituted itself as the safeguard of the nation's future. However, the nation's future was never conceived of as an elevation of the spirit, way of life in terms of physical, mental and social needs of the former slaves. Rather, the policy implemented after the independence had been handled in complete demise and denial of this former slave class. The brutality of the past had been replaced by a diffuse form of land dispossession where mulattos and affranchis saw themselves as legitimate inheritance of property belonged to their slave owner parents in the colony. Therefore, they had an absolute right to control the economy in which land possession constituted the base. Through this article, our intent is to shed light about the continuum deployment of brutality as a crystallized form of governance upon the mass of underprivileged people in Haiti by the economic and political elites to serve their own interest at the expense of the society's well-being and well-living. From the plantation system to the extreme corruption of the Presidential Council, we delineate the *modus operandi* of a system shifting from exploiting the slaves at its best to the mental and physical exhaustion of its people at his worst.

The plantation system and the failure of the mulatto's movement

The colonial system was pyramidal based on racial segregation with White French owners as the superior class in the hierarchy. Under them were those white French owners without property commonly called little white or in French Petit Blanc. They came to the colony to work, more often, during three years for the White French Owners or Big Owner and became owners like those on the top. Insofar, they were considered French and free. In the second category of this pyramidal system is the mulatto. This class is made up of children of slaves from their relations to their white owners. They were born free. But they did not get the same privilege as their father. They were not considered French and equal. In the colonial system, they were considered as mixed blood. However, this class saw the presence of some other black men set free called Affranchis or Freedmen by their master. They had the privilege to serve their master and showed loyalty to them. As a result of their skills and behavior, they had been granted, under some circumstances, freedom. The last class of the pyramid is the black slaves divided into three categories. The first one is the field slaves. It is made of those living in the farm. They spend their life working for their masters. They made the whole process of the production from harvesting to reaping even though they did not get any right to live off the products of their labor. They are considered the wretched of the system. this system was built upon them, but not for them. Even mulattos who were born from slaves wanted to perpetuate this system because they also were slave owners. The second category is the domestic slaves or the house slave. They were servants of their masters. They prepared food and cleaned the house in which they lived. They were better off than the field slaves but still, they were slaves. The last category is the talent slaves. They possessed skills and talents that gave them an inch of advantage upon the other two categories. They had better knowledge of racing horses, handling arms and managing tools. They were more prone to attract the sympathy of their master and granted freedom than the field slaves. Most of the slaves who had been set free and participated as leaders of the independence movement came from the two last categories.

This diffuse system with different situations among each class made it difficult to build a strong movement that could overturn the exploitation system. For each movement, proponents had to find a common denominator upon which they could agree. The colonial system did not give this common denominator at first sight. The mulattos, even privileged, did not condone being treated as inferior to white owners and French. This feeling of discontent propelled this class to rebel against the French owners. That's why the system took a sudden turn with their protested against

segregation. Their own segregation. So-and-so, it was a protest. They requested the same status and recognition as French owners. According to Benoit Joachim, author of The Root causes of underdevelopment of Haiti or in French *Les Racines du Sous Développement en Haïti* in 1979, the French Assembly and the organization the *Friends of blacks* recognized the mulattos as equal and French as white owners. However, the French owners did not condone this new order. They kept a distance between them and the mulattos. As tension grew, the mulattos of the north of the colony launched a bloody battle against the owners. Vincent Oge and Chavannes, two mulattos at the head of the movement, were the first insurgent pair who had tasted the bitter wine of the white master's chalice. As a result, they have been beheaded upon the Cap-Haitian public square.

After this failure, mulattos started thinking about new strategies to prevent any eventual setbacks in their thirst for equality. 300 of them who dispersed here and there to prevent them from undergoing the same treatment as Vincent and Chavannes, joined themselves with the slaves to press the white masters and the constituent assembly to listen to their request. In 1791, 500 black slaves fought from head to toe by their side with the hope they would be set free after winning the fight. However, they had been betrayed, hanged and decapitated on the Saint Nicolas Mountain. The mulattos used their strength to get some privilege from the white masters but led them astray after getting what they wanted. This act of betrayals presents the anatomy of a complacent economic elite who yearned for equality for itself while intentionally denying this same right to those at the bottom. This explains the contrast between the American revolution and the Haitian revolution. The first one presents two factions fighting each other while considering each other as equals. The American Freedom Fighters rebelled against England because the taxation and exclusive systems seemed unfair to them. In the second case, the two factions were not considered as equals. The white owners thought themselves superior while the slaves and mulattos fought not because of a shared interest about the injustice of the system but because they saw themselves as inferior.

An alliance between antagonistic groups to overturn the colonial system

It was the failure of the do-it-ourselves or the eponymous declaration of Oge when suggested using the slaves for his battle against the white owners "we must make it happen without them" methods that would have compelled mulattos to join hands with the black slaves. They had

thought if they joined hands with the slaves to rebel against the system, the slaves would go against their own interest, which was the maintaining of the exploitation system. The slaves no longer held any desire to stay captive. They had nothing to lose and decided to fight until their last breath against the colonial system. When mulattos finally joined the slave movement to reverse the colonial system once and for all, it was made by need rather than by will. In joining the slave movement, the mulatto elite fought against segregation, racial injustice and slavery. We can call this battle against their will a battle for their survival rather than a battle for justice and emancipation. This bloody battle for the abolition of slavery was a meandering necessity for the moment rather than an inclination toward justice of the ruling class of generals and freedmen. Prior to the slave battle, Sonthonax, the council representative from France, already armed the slaves and inscribed into their mind that the safeguard of their liberty were their arms. "He who gives them up, loses his liberty," said Sonthonax according to Thomas Madiou in 1847. After a bloody battle against the Napoleon Army, the indigenous army expelled the colonial army and instituted a central power to lead the nation. Most of the enslaved people victims of the transatlantic trade from Africa were accustomed to the convoluted helm ensnaring them. They also tasted the bitter flavor of betrayal from the mulattos and their peers. They were cautious. When the metropolitan Napoleon regimen boarded the shore of the coastline of Cap-Haitian, the indigenous army fought back while expecting the seasonal fever so that they could get rid of them, they had used everything at their disposal "poison, assassination, arson... so that they could defeat the French army". After a bloody battle at Vertières in Cap-Haitian, on November 18, 1803, the Napoleonian army was defeated and led astray from the newly free nation.

As explained above, the Haitian revolution could be considered a serendipity in Human History because of the divergence of interest to make it possible. Logically, the white owners and mulattos profited from this abhorrent system. All rules were in their favor. They had used slaves as their property. This system was worse than the Capitalism of this era in such a way that the force of production and the means of production, both found themselves incorporated in the body of the slave as a tool for profit. This tool could be compared to the robot of the modern time. The mere difference is because a robot is built in a company where one went to buy it so that it could do whatever its owner desires without complaining or exhaustion. Whereas the slave system requires brutalism to keep a person under such violence. Even under such violence, the slaves, most often, reached a nodal point where it said no to cruelty. This no against the whole system would have

been joined by the mulattos, not because they felt empathy for the former slaves but because their interest was at stake. On the one hand, white owners and mulattos considered slaves as outsiders. Slaves, on the other hand, considered those who engaged in keeping the system perennial were outsiders as the American sociologist Howard Saul Becker presented the outsiders in his book *Outsiders* in 1963. It stated that Outsiders are those people who are judged by others to be deviant and thus to stand outside the circle of normal members of the group. He continued that outsiders from the point of view of the person who is labeled deviant may be the people who make the rules he had been found guilty of breaking. In the colonial system, this dichotomy created an impossible link to dialogue between those at the top and the mass of slaves. After this impossible coalition bore fruits and the new nation were born, hostilities would swiftly resurface.

Search for a common ground to build a nation through different expectations

After the independence, how would this newly free nation be governed? Who will be the rulers? How will the government be able to build a common project for everybody? That's where Dessalines Jean Jacques, a former slave became the first Commander in chief of the country. It was important to be free. It was important to defeat any foreign enemy who attempted to frighten a country's sovereignty. But a country is a project. A project of civilization. Civilization encompasses two terms in its etymological roots. Civilis for civil or citizens and civitas meaning city. What project of civilization would this new government bring to/for this class of former slaves? From 1804 to 1806, Jean Jacques Dessalines undertook a swarm of actions to consolidate the country's independence because he knew that the French Army could invade the island at any time. After deciding to nationalize all property so that everyone including former slaves could get access to land, he had unsuccessfully tried to lead the new nation with the support of the mulattos. He was betrayed. On October 17, 1806, he was assassinated by this mulatto class who did not agree with his policy of land redistribution according to Dantès Bellegarde. From then on, the country would be divided into two regions the Kingdom of the North with Henry Christophe as the King and the republic of the West with Petion Alexandre as President. After the death of the ladder, Boyer became president and ruled over the whole country, then the entire island with the Dominican Republic until his exile in 1843. This new class of rulers created a system of government completely unmoored by the problems of the citizens. The rural code of President

Boyer maintained the same system of social distance from the peasants in the countryside, the peripheric class and the city dwellers or the core class. This peripheric class had no land. It had to work for the mulatto and freedmen slave owners. If it had to cultivate 4 acres of land, one fourth belongs to him, the three fourth belong to the Government and the landowner under what is called the Caporalisme Agraire or the Farming Militia. Boyer did not believe in educating the mass of slaves. He thought that education could lead to insurrection. He was also the man behind the debt of independence that had broken the wings of the country. Thus, that decision prevented the new nation from flying on its own.

After the independence in 1803, a sense of self-determination and pride embodied every citizen. In the declaration of independence, Jean Jacques Dessalines swore to never give up to France and to prefer death to life instead of living under its rules. This power accession of a former slave would soon be deterred by his assassination. The main reason for his assassination lied in the fact that he planned an equitable distribution of the land to the newly freed slaves according to Thomas Madiou by declaring this: "And those brothers whose father live in Africa, won't they have something?" After his assassination, Petion Succeeded. After his death, Boyer took power. This latter undertook a swarm of expeditions beseeching France to recognize Haiti's Independence. Each time, the French monarch rebuked and sent their conditions for that recognition. In April 1825, Boyer finally agreed to pay a fine of 150 million Franc in exchange for this recognition.

The people were shocked to learn about this betrayal because they knew this independence was not a favor. Instead, it was the price of the blood of more than 60 000 people who had given their life to exculpate this country from the tyranny of its colonizers. But these subrogators, represented by Boyer, never saw an independent country free from the metropolitan France. Rather, they saw it as a protectorate. As demonstrated above, their thirst and quest for equality and recognition did not include the slave class. After independence, instead of striving to maintain this boundary between this country and the metropole, they had to solicit their recognition. The mass did not want this recognition. They did not ask for it. They abhorred this brutal system. Conversely, Boyer was not part of their same boat, their pride appeared to be the purity of emotion. They did not count. The Boyer's class wanted to look like their father and former benefactor. They craved for the French colonial empire to recognize their existence as a nation. In doing so, Jean Pierre Boyer acted as a subrogator who despised his subrogors, the one who represented the power of the

people and acted as if his feeling represented the people's power. To understand this shift, we need to consider what Albert Memmi called the situation of the colonized. This situation is a function that the colonized cannot escape. It was built within the colonization system. The colonizer and the colonized, both, are constrained by the system in which they are called to play their respective role argued Memmi. This role is not a free one. It is usurped by the system where the colonized has no social responsibility. Memmi emphasizes that this system tends to create a feeling of discouragement, fatigue and weary to the citizens who might think that their voice is not heard, their actions are useless, and the elections are not fixed (Albert Memmi, *Portrait of the colonizer and portrait of the colonized*, 1974). In this case, the Haitian saga for an independent nation free from the brutal colonization system was discarded by the thirst of Jean Pierre Boyer and his obsession for recognition not by the people, but by the imperial metropole that he had identified as supreme.

Government Corruption: a weapon against the people

After his exile, most of the Haitian government tied the knots with the bourgeoisie to create this world of sparks of community. They use puppet presidents to maintain the status quo. After Boyer, all Haitian presidents from Pierrot to Philippe Guerrier were puppets. With the advent of president Soulouque, the wheel would have taken a turn. They bent, but they did not fall until the American Occupation after a total chaos ramped up the Haitian capital leading to the beheading of President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam according to Leslie Péan in 2003. The subsequent administrations continued their political stratagem without paying attention to the mass. By 1957, the country had faced a brutal dictatorship regime where violence and brutality got along to institute an absolute form of control upon the population. Instead of adopting an apotropaic method to tackle the acute problems of food and electric shortages, healthcare deficient, environmental degradation and unemployment rate among young people, the Duvalier besieged every corner of the country and put its opponents on their knees. The administration became a private source of income for the Duvalier's family. According to the economist Sophie Perchelet, the public debt during the Duvalier in 1986 amounted to 750 million USD while the family's personal wealth amounted to 900 million USD. It is mind-boggling to conceive this amount of wealth from a single family while a huge part of the population lived in desperate need. It is more despicable to realize that a government representative is richer than the whole country he was appointed to serve.

After the fall of this regime that ruled with imperium, the country continued to parade in turmoil. The elites did not devise any serious programs to relieve it from its chronic political turbulence. According to Christian Antoine Girault, in 1987, the lieutenant Henry Namphy seized power to organize a fair and peaceful election. He had failed to do so. The author stated that in 1988, Lesly F. Manigat got into power after an election and was ousted by the same Henry Namphy five months later. Subsequently this year, Gen. Lieut. Prosper Avril overturned Gen. Lieut. Henry Namphy and ruled over the country until March 1990. By December 1990, after what is considered the first democratic election in the country, Jean Bertrand Aristide won the race for presidency and tried to come up with a new deal for the most vulnerable people. Unfortunately, his government was short as he was ousted by the Brig. Gen. Raoul Cedras eight months later. From Aristide to Rene Preval, inflation and insecurity sprung over the country. With the advent of the Tet Kale (Bald Head) regime with Michel Joseph Martelly as president in 2011 and Jovenel Moise in 2017, the situation did not ameliorate as more than 4 billion dollars of Petro Caribe programs were spent without real impact on the society. This bilateral agreement called Petro Caribe between the Venezuelan government and Haiti were based on the decision of the Venezuelan government to provide 7 000 barrels of gasoline a day to Haiti. The Haitian government had to pay back after selling the petrol. This reimbursement should have been done by the Monetization Office of Development Support Program commonly called BMPAD (Bureau de Monétisation des Programmes d'Aide au Développement). It was the institution in charge of managing this money to launch a series of actions with the aim of developing the country. Instead of ensuring the money served the most vulnerable people, according to the 2019 audit of the Superior Accounting and Litigation Management Court, the Heads of the Haitian Government such as Michèle Duvivier Pierre Louis (2008-2009), Jean Max Bellerive (2009-2011), Gary Conille (2011-2012), Laurent Salvador Lamorthe (2012-2014), Evans Paul (2015-2016) and Enex Jean Charles (2016-2017) from President René G. Preval to President Michelle Joseph Martelly to President Jocelerme Privert, use the money to enrich their inner-circle while the population were struggling day after day.

The following governments of Ariel Henry from 2021 to 2023 and the Presidential Council of the Transition from April 2024 to this day did not demonstrate their inclination to reclaim the

nation from delving too far into the abyss of corruption and gang violence. Each declaration, each decision of those governments speak volume about their inability to grasp the complexity of the country's social problems and come up with better solution to them. Like Jovenel Moise whose name was part of the petro Caribe audit from the CSCCA (Cours Supérieure des Comptes et du Contentieux Administratif) in 2019 for participating in money laundering and false declaration in link to the Petro Caribe's contract, three members of the presidential council (Louis Gérald Gilles, Smith Augustin and Vertilaire Emmanuel) were denounced for bribing the Credit National Bank former chairman Raoul Pascal Pierre Louis. They demanded that Mr. Pierre Louis transferred to them at least 100 000 000.00 HTG in exchange for keeping the position. According to AyiboPost commenting the Struggle Against Corruption Unit (ULCC) report, all of them have received a card from the bank with 13 000 to 20 000 USD prior to that meeting. During this time, the people in the capital could not sleep well due to gang violence and kidnapping. Children are killed and shot in their classroom. Women and girls are raped every day. All these did not matter more than their egoistic gain.

From exploitation to exhaustion

From the battles that led to the independence to this day, the history of Haiti is made of betrayal, manipulation, corruption from those accessing the power to serve the citizens. After two centuries of fight, the elites never reach a point of togetherness where they could agree on a program to move the country to the core promise of freedom and opportunity for everyone. The citizens continue to bear the weight of independence as if the battle for liberation was made so that the country could get trapped in an infernal circle of bloody battles between different factions of elites who could not find a common language for stability and prosperity. The sparseness of gang violence continues to shed tear down the cheeks of each family. They constantly mourn the passing of their fellow relatives while the living condition is deteriorating at a brutal speed. Instead of converging efforts and energy to stop the blatant corruption in the public administration, this new presidential council's greed festered it by turning its attention toward its own interest.

As a result of these policies of bad governance, corruption and irresponsibility, the Haitian population continues to suffer the consequences of its political and economic elites. These elites never paid attention to the need and aspiration of its people. Their policies never served the people

but themselves. When they got into public service, they never thought of their position to serve those who propped them up into power. Instead, they used the public forces not to ensure the population's security, but their own security. They preferred building walls delimiting their space with those who had supported them. They created a space where the population's suffering is seen via a transparent glass without expressing care. The population, behind this crystal wall, could perceive the jolly presidential procession with disdain. The harmony that should characterize the relationship between the people and their government reaches its point of dysfunction. The colonizers of the past made room for an economic and political elite today whose functions consist of extracting from the people prestige, power and wealth through lies and trick while turning their attention elsewhere. In the colony of Saint-Domingue, when executing their duties as demanded, the slaves could expect to wake up the next morning even under duress. The exploitation was real, so was the prospect of seeing tomorrow. After the independence, the country experienced different forms of government systems, from empire to democracy to the Transitional Presidential Council. These systems implemented by mulattos and former slaves never reach a point where the people's interest holds the core element around which revolved their actions. In these regimes, the day-today life loses its meaning because the spectrum of death runs in every brain. Violence, kidnapping, arsons from gang members... gave freeway in almost every part of the country. According to the Economist, killer gangs are inches from ruling all of Haiti. At the same time, the national police experienced a shortage in important materials to protect the people, according to RNDDH, each member of the Presidential council received roughly 10 million HTG a month for their personal use. Above that, their estimated spending for a year is 1 122 000 000 HTG. As Thomas Sowell pointed it out in his book Social Justice Fallacies, honesty is a human capital in a country with limited resources. He continues to mention that when there is corruption, the money destined to serve the majority will be engulfed in the hands of the most corrupted authority. As a result, the public service will be scarce, and the quality of life will be deteriorated. Every time a government in a limited resource country like Haiti gives in corruption, it commits a crime against the Humanity of the Haitian people because this lack has been and continues to be felt so deep in the quality of citizens and country we ascend to build.

Through this asymmetric interaction between the people and their government where the power to serve is confused with the power to be served, the nation grew, toward the government,

a legitimate discontent that could burst and wreck everything on their way at any time. The politics of insecurity in motion right now could create an environment conducive for demagogue to take over government in any near future. Our government authorities, despite their attractive university backgrounds and experience, did not make any difference in tackling the challenges of gang violence and corruption. Every week, more people continue to get killed. More spaces from the Country's Capital of Port-au-Prince and other areas like Mirebalais where a hospital was taken hostage by armed groups, are lost. The regular citizens felt lonely in dealing with these issues. The exploitation system of the past uses a new method to continue its machine of extraction by arming young people in ghettos to kill one another. Thus, creating a system of exhaustion among the people finding its roots in their inability to cope with the superior quality of weapons used by gang members. As Thomas Schelling cited by Alexander C. Karp, professor of economics at Harvard University pointed out in the 1960s, war is always a bargaining process. In the case of Haiti, the request from armed groups for negotiation with the government is a play between two colonized groups whose existence lied in extracting life from the people. This life is convertible in money and energy via the ransom from kidnapping or arson from propriety lost due to gang violence. This exhausting environment created in those at the bottom a desperate feeling that no matter what they did or do, the government will constantly avert their aspiration to harmonious life despite episodic factors that could emerge.

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