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SOVEREIGNTY CHALLENGES IN FAILED STATES:  
THE CASE OF HAITI

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*Ai miei nonni  
E all'infinito bene che mi dimostrate  
Ogni volta che incrocio i vostri occhi*

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## **Abstract**

Despite the growing visibility of other occurrences more central to the future of the great powers, state failure remains a critical concern among international actors due to the vastness of destabilizing consequences it can produce. This thesis examines the nexus between failed states and sovereignty, a key concept for understanding the potential upheaval of political order. The case of Haiti guides the research as a well-known example of a collapsed state. Through the analysis of Haiti's historical trajectory characterized by foreign interventions and domestic instability, the research demonstrates that sovereignty is a relational concept decisive to maintaining order, providing public goods, and organizing violence in a country. The international community has frequently prioritized efforts like promoting democratic governance, implementing neoliberal policies, or providing financial support to non-governmental organizations, underestimating the inviolate role of the modern state in the contemporary world. By identifying sovereignty as the main issue in Haiti's prolonged chaos, the author advocates for a more realistic approach to state-building, where restoring domestic Haitian sovereignty through dismantling criminal gangs and the formation of stable and effective institutions should be the guiding principles.

## Introduction

To be sincere, my knowledge of Haiti and its tumultuous contemporary times was limited until recently. European and especially Italian newspapers' coverage of what happens in this small country on the other side of the world is sparse. Geopolitical interests and societal preferences often direct European media focus elsewhere. Only the images of the tremendous earthquake in 2010 and the huge presence of NGOs in the Caribbean country are phenomena that have momentarily turned the gaze of our institutions and society, even for a limited period. My awareness was confined to short articles describing coups d'état, revolts, or reports on the disastrous living conditions. In my view, Haiti was just a point on the map characterized by weak institutions and continuous turmoil, just like other countries in the so-called *Third World*. However, last year, I watched some video footage of the country's current environment, depicting a situation where the state is essentially absent, and citizens are forced to align with criminal gangs for a semblance of security, most of the time under threat. This kind of environment was challenging to conceive through the tools I had at that moment. This recognition coincided with the reading of *Political Order in Changing Societies* by Samuel P. Huntington<sup>1</sup>, which completely opened my mind to the regime-type and political debate despite its publication being dated 1968. Therefore, I started to reflect on the Haitian case with a different perspective, trying to avoid a Western-centered perspective and stereotypes of failed states.

The absence of sovereignty in failed states has immediately been a topic that emerged from my analysis. When we read Huntington's work, we see

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<sup>1</sup> Huntington (1968)

that he does not extensively discuss the concept of sovereignty. He only touches on the idea when addressing the consequences of political modernization, referring to external and internal sovereignty <sup>2</sup>. Despite this limited dissertation, sovereignty and its relevance in the contemporary world implicitly characterize his whole analysis of the political order and state efficiency in developing countries. Its importance has resonated in my mind since the first reading. The research on sovereignty is fundamental to the study of international relations and political science. According to most scholars, the peace of Westphalia in 1648 set the rise of a new sovereignty system, establishing the principles of non-interference in domestic affairs and the exclusive sovereignty of a state over its territory. Since then, major transformations have occurred in the international system, and delegation to sovereignty principles is becoming increasingly more frequent. Humanitarian interventions, the imposition of specific economic policies from international economic institutions like the IMF on borrowing states, and regional integration initiatives like the European Union are examples of this trend. Sovereignty - or its absence - is frequently associated with the challenge of failed states. I will delve into this concept in the following pages. For now, it is relevant to consider these entities as unable to perform the basic functions of a modern state and, consequently, to maintain control over their territory and exercise the legitimate use of violence. Analyses of state failure are often driven by focusing on the absence of basic services like health and education, the lack of stability and a functioning bureaucratic system, a large proportion of poor population, or discussions on the development of the democratic system. However, these perspectives tend to overlook that the sole organism able to ensure the provision of these goods or features is the modern state. This thesis individuates the most important issue of failed

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. (p. 34)

states on the absence of an ultimate authority capable of performing the right to sovereignty. Haiti serves as a compelling case study due to the repeated foreign interventions and exploitative administrations that made it dependent on the provision of external support. Haiti's current crisis, where the political landscape is managed by criminal gangs and foreign forces are not able to reclaim control over the territory, is just the culmination of decades of mismanagement and an inability to understand the real issue with this country.

The thesis consists of three core parts. It starts by delineating the theoretical framework, built upon three pillars that will accompany the reader throughout the research: the basic characteristics of the modern state, as studied by classical and contemporary thinkers; the review of the current debate on failed states; the evolution of sovereignty from being a monolithic concept to representing a relational feature that takes on significance thanks to the relationship with other entities. The second part focuses on the case study of Haiti. The historical analysis explores the revolutionary origins of this country and its following years, where foreign domination, internal dictatorship, and poor institutional performance are the main traits. The following discussion examines how the relationship between failed states and sovereignty has evolved in the 21st century. After that, the focal point returns to Haiti, where the absence of sovereignty damaging the territory and institutions has determined the almost complete collapse of the state. The thesis concludes by proposing a path forward for this country that involves the rebuilding of the state through an international transitional administration tasked with the restoration of domestic institutions capable of governing society.

The principal aim of this research is to propose a new way of analyzing the Haitian nightmare, recognizing the previous failures of the

international community and the importance of establishing a functioning central government. This approach could provide new lenses through which to understand contexts like Haiti, where sovereignty and a performing state are deficient.

# **1. Theoretical framework and conceptual foundations**

This chapter constitutes the foundation of the whole thesis. Analyzing the current situation in Haiti and understanding why the institutions in this country cannot provide basic needs to the population means delving into the concepts of state and sovereignty. State failure is the last step in a continuum between countries that work optimally and obtain legitimacy through their citizenship and states characterized by chaos and anarchy inside their borders. However, it is impossible to define and analyze state failure without considering the state's role in the modern world and what it is supposed to do. In other words, state failure assumes meaning in this study only through the definition of its ideal type, an expression widely cited by Max Weber. A young chef who is extremely talented and has started working in a famous restaurant cannot be compared to another apprentice chef; however, at the same time, he does not have the same abilities as a veteran chef who has won multiple awards and is well-known all over the world. With this in mind, the following chapter will be divided into three sections. Even if the concept of state does not represent the core of the research, a brief introduction about it is necessary. After that, the main issues are theoretically framed. Sovereignty and its relationship with state failure are the lenses through which Haiti can be understood.

## **1.1 State**

Today, most citizens around the globe assume the existence of the state as granted. No alternative form of organizing the life of every individual seems as effective as the contemporary state system. In this framework, every country develops strong or weak relationships of various kinds with other countries in a sort of playfield in which every entity is formally equivalent to the other. Even if this system does not seem as balanced as

some years ago, it is accepted because there is no other equivalent or more desirable alternative. However, the emergence and evolution of the modern state is a relatively recent development. This history is marked by highs and lows, alternating periods characterized by revolts, killings, civil wars, and revolutions to times of stability and development. Although the birth of the modern state and its development lie beyond the scope of this thesis, a brief overview of history and how the state has been perceived and defined over the centuries is imperative. And it is necessary not only for the sake of completeness but also for understanding what brings to its failure and the corresponding consequences.

As obvious as it is, setting a year in which we can start tracing the history of the modern state is indicative. Despite this, the modern international state system emerged in 1648 with the Peace of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years War and facilitated the emergence of sovereign and independent authorities mutually recognized. Even in this embryonic phase and subsequent decades of prolonged wars of conquest or absorption of territories by more powerful entities, states began centralizing power, exchanging the provision of security for taxes necessary to maintain the whole project. This reciprocal exchange between citizens and institutions led to the emergence of new parts of the like representative bodies designed to protect citizens from the state's exploitation<sup>3</sup>. The development of the state in Europe was fully completed in the XX century. Even so, we often forget that the Western concept of the state and the following formation of the system of states has been completed only with the decolonization process after World War II.

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<sup>3</sup> Milliken and Krause (2002)

To elucidate more clearly the concept of state, we should depart from the work of Thomas Hobbes. He claims that the ultimate state's purpose is to protect its citizens from external threats and internal despotism. In his political writings, he assumes that human beings are naturally inclined towards chaos and anarchy. Escaping from this kind of environment means creating a social contract between society and a strong authority embodied in the *Leviathan* who can bring security and order. Although the *Leviathan* might seem oppressive, it is necessary due to the features of human nature. Therefore, it should be intended as a pacifier in a context where individuals are perpetually keen to fight for power. Another author who has profoundly explored the concept of state is Max Weber. The German sociologist defined the state as a "human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a given territory."<sup>4</sup> This definition delineates the state's borders, who belongs to it, and who needs to be considered something else. Moreover, it specifies that the state has jurisdiction over a specific territory, subjects, and events. The state alone has the legitimate right to authorize the use of force by institutions and individuals, at least as long as the relationship between the state and the population remains stable.

Distinguishing between strong and weak states is crucial for understanding state failure. Even in this case, the agreement among scholars is lacking. Joel Migdal defines state strength as the state's capacity to extract resources, balance relationships among actors, and decide on resource allocation, while state weakness features corruption, lack of coercive power, and social fragmentation<sup>5</sup>. One of the most prominent political scholars, Samuel Huntington, has underlined that discussing strong and weak states does not involve any debate around regime type. He states that:

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<sup>4</sup> Weber (1972)

<sup>5</sup> Migdal (1988, p.4)

The most important political distinction among countries concerns not their form of government but their degree of government. The differences between democracy and dictatorship are less than the differences between those countries whose politics embodies consensus, community, legitimacy, organization, effectiveness, and stability, and those countries whose politics is deficient in these qualities<sup>6</sup>.

The form of the regime, whether it is democratic or autocratic, should not be the priority to be worried about when debating the failure of a state and its stability worry. Moreover, Huntington has established that the strength of a political organization depends upon the scope of the support for it and its level of institutionalization. While the former is easily comprehensible, the author pays particular attention to the second factor. The level of institutionalization determines the value and stability of organizations and procedures. Their strength and weaknesses rely upon four criteria:

1. *Adaptability*: capacity to adapt and modify depending on the environmental challenges.
2. *Complexity*: the extent of the system's control of the community; usually, a system with multiple subunits has greater control over it.
3. *Autonomy*: the degree to which organizations and procedures exist and operate independently from what surrounds them.
4. *Coherence*: the cohesiveness and unity among the actors of the system<sup>7</sup>.

It should be noted that coherence and complexity are linked to the relationship between the organization and the external world, while adaptability and autonomy pertain to the organization itself. Furthermore, these four factors that determine the strength of a system can be reduced to two properties. Firstly, adaptability is the ability to adapt to the environment but up to the edge of autonomy. Secondly, cohesion means

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<sup>6</sup> Huntington (1968, p. 1)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. (p.12-23)

the unity of intents up to the margin of complexity. Then, the interrelatedness of the four criteria is readily obvious.

## **1.2 Sovereignty**

The entity discussed thus far is frequently referred to as a nation-state. The concept of nation refers to those cultural and affective elements that define a common belonging identity. This collective identity is built around themes like language, religion, ethnic features, historical occurrences, and cultural heritage<sup>8</sup>. The union between the state and the nation has given form to political entities characterized by a strong cohesiveness internally and a marked differentiation from external subjects. Among the various aspects worthy of analysis about the nation-state, sovereignty is extremely helpful in understanding the intrinsic nature of this actor that today continues to shape international relations.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, sovereignty was primarily understood as internal sovereignty, denoting the monopoly of authority over a specific territory and its actors. This form of sovereignty can be associated with Bodin and Hobbes's work. Jean Bodin, a French political philosopher, articulated a theory of sovereignty tailored to the emerging modern state system. According to his political theory, sovereignty is seen as the highest authority, absolute and indivisible, and as the regulative ideal determining political stability and identity. The significance of Bodin's theory lies in recognizing that sovereignty must be distinguished from the figure of the sovereign. Furthermore, absolute sovereignty's nature is asymmetric: sovereign commands but cannot be commanded. Without sovereignty, the cohesive force that unifies the community would

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<sup>8</sup> Gellner (1987)

be absent. Regarding Hobbes, it is essential to reiterate the importance of the English author and his theory of state. In Hobbes's theory, sovereignty is still absolute, but not in the sense of Bodin. Sovereignty is absolute not because it comes from the positive actions of the sovereign but because "the authority given and the obligation taken on by subjects are unconditional, within the limits established in law and by the presence of law"<sup>9</sup>. In the later centuries, other authors like Locke, Marx, Weber, Mill, and Dahl have been involved in the examination of sovereignty. However, what has been the main development of this concept is the characterization of it in an international setting. Sovereignty became understood as international sovereignty, implying that states should be equal in the international arena, should not intervene in other states' affairs, and should not claim authority over another state<sup>10</sup>.

Based on this premise, sovereignty is both the internal and external face of authority. While internal sovereignty constitutes the highest authority in the territory of the state, external sovereignty involves a formal equal relationship with the same state entities. We should note then that sovereignty is a strongly relational concept recognized every day by each state when involved in whatever kind of relationship. In the international system, actors acquire sovereignty "from how others treat them and then engage in practices designed to confirm those identities"<sup>11</sup>. Krasner calls this sovereign framework as "organized hypocrisy." This concept is used by the author to describe the normal state of affairs in the world where:

Outcomes in the international system are determined by rulers whose violation of, or adherence to, international principles or rules is based on calculations of material and

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<sup>9</sup> Prokhovnik (2008, p. 87)

<sup>10</sup> Sartori (2008, p. 457)

<sup>11</sup> Wendt and Friedheim (1995)

ideational interests, not taken-for-granted practices derived from some overarching institutional structures or deeply embedded generative grammars.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, Krasner identifies four types of sovereignty: domestic sovereignty refers to how the authority of the state is structured inside it and the degree of control exercised by those in power; interdependence sovereignty refers to the state's authority to control transborder movements; international legal sovereignty refers to the mutual recognition among states or entities that has formal juridical independence over a territory; and Westphalian sovereignty refers to the exclusion of external actors from internal affairs shaped by authority structures within a given territory<sup>13</sup>. I will reconsider this typology in the empirical analysis of the Haitian case. What is relevant now is that Westphalian sovereignty, as noted by the same Krasner, has extensively been violated in the history of international relations, such as in the case of the treatment of citizens or economic policies. The conditions that new states must respect to enter the European Union exemplify this. Consequently, this led me to conclude that sovereignty, as a relational concept wherein *de iure* and *de facto* elements should be distinguished, is an asymmetrical concept and should be understood as such within the academic field.

### **1.3 Failed states**

The concept of failed state is a modern phenomenon, gaining scholarly attention, particularly from the end of the Cold War. The term itself was coined in 1992 by Gerald B. Helman and Steven R. Ratner in an article on Foreign Policy, who defined them as states incapable of maintaining their position as a member of the international community<sup>14</sup>. But what

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<sup>12</sup> Krasner (1999, p. 9)

<sup>13</sup> Krasner (1999, p. 9-25)

<sup>14</sup> Helman and Ratner (1992)

prompted academia to focus on this concept? A historical premise is necessary. During the post-World War II, through various means and forms, emerging states in the international environment received support from both the United States and Russia. While the former was determined to prevent Soviet expansion, the latter was eager to weaken what was remaining of European empires and bring the newly formed states within its sphere of influence. Indeed, new global attitudes, especially towards African countries, were emerging from the 1960s onwards. European colonial empires were losing their grip on these countries due to the anti-colonial movement. The former empires could no longer maintain their sovereignty on these territories or claim that these subjects were not ready for independence. Furthermore, in December 1960, this shift was further bolstered with the approval by the United Nations General Assembly of Resolution 1514, which supported self-determination and empowered people to pursue the right to freely determine their political status and not be labeled as criminal or illegitimate by the former empires<sup>15</sup>. This shift in the international paradigm, partly determined by forced reasons, raised concerns around the world about the unpreparedness of these countries to manage all the functions that a state must accomplish. Most of the time, these countries were institutionally weak, damaged by decades of imperialistic exploitation, unstable, and poor. The independence was occurring with an extreme speed and with a sense of urgency that European states did not have during their formation centuries before<sup>16</sup>. The end of the Cold War caused further attention to these entities, especially after the American intervention in Somalia during the 1990s. The prominence was amplified through the work of Robert Kaplan about the state of anarchy in Liberia and Sierra Leone and the attempt to warn the international community about similar cases. Then, state failure entered

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<sup>15</sup> United Nations General Assembly (1960)

<sup>16</sup> Hill (2012)

the mainstream discourse, assuming an emotive dimension through the words of leaders, economists, politicians, and other public figures who associated these kinds of entities operating in the global context with security concerns. The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon exacerbated the perception that failed states constituted a shelter for terrorist groups and criminals. Additionally, other consequences of failed states preoccupied the international community, like the refugee flows or the spread of disease due to the miseries occurring in these places.

To approach the discussion on the characterization of failed states, it is important to revisit the works by Huntington about political decay. According to the American author, political decay occurs in those states that are experiencing corruption, institutional decline, consecutive coup d'état, and authoritarianism. In particular, he claims that coups are a key feature of low levels of political institutionalization. Using the same terms explained in the paragraph about the state, those countries are characterized by political institutions lacking autonomy and coherence. Therefore, new groups in the political sphere are not integrated and do not accept existing political procedures of the current institutions. These countries experience frequent decay of administrative organizations and disruption of political organizations due to the incapacity to differentiate the political structures, which means expanding the function accomplished by the central state, and rationalizing institutions, which means concentrating power and obtaining legitimacy by the population<sup>17</sup>. This led me to consider Migdal's theory, which constituted a pivotal work in the 1980s when the concept of state failure was becoming prominent. In his pivotal work, Joel Migdal studied what capabilities a state must possess and deliver to its citizens. He refers to this concept as "capabilities to

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<sup>17</sup> Huntington (1965)

penetrate society, regulate social relationships, extract resources, and appropriate or use resources in determined ways”<sup>18</sup>. Weak states, according to Migdal, cannot perform these capabilities. Corruption and the collapse of a state’s coercive power are just examples of this inability.

With these premises in mind, we can now delve into the concrete meaning of state failure. There is a high degree of difference among scholars due to the various points of view that each one adopts. Iqbal and Starr have highlighted the breadth and complexity of this topic by looking at the “Special Issue on Failed States,” in which each of the five articles in the publication approaches state failure in its own manner and certain cases with notable differences<sup>19</sup>. Despite this, as Jonathan Hill shows, definitions of this concept have two central elements in common. Firstly, the literature agrees on recognizing as failed those states that are unable or do not want to fulfill their essential functions. Secondly, every definition assumes that these core functions include providing welfare, maintaining law and order, and providing security<sup>20</sup>. Based on these common assumptions, the policy community and various scholars have provided more precise definitions. Shahida Aman and Shagufta Aman categorize these definitions into three groups:

1. State failure as the lack of institutional and functional aspects of the modern state. Jackson, for example, defines a failed state as being unable to guarantee minimal civil conditions of peace, order, and security.
2. State failure as the lack of legitimacy and economic development. In this category, Fukuyama defines state failure as the weakness of

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<sup>18</sup> Migdal (1988, p.4)

<sup>19</sup> Iqbal and Starr (2016, p.17)

<sup>20</sup> Hill (2005)

a state's institutional capacity to implement and enforce policies and the lack of legitimacy of the political system as a whole.

3. State failure as the lack of juridical and international aspects. Brooks defines state failure as the absence of legal functionality determined by the inability to abide by treaties, human rights agreements, and participation in international trade and institutions<sup>21</sup>.

Having assumed this common basis, failed states are examined in various ways, as mentioned before. Gros has decided to categorize failed states in four ways based on their typology. He starts by assuming that a state should guarantee internal order and protect itself from external risks or aggressions. Then, State Failure Type I does not protect against both internal and external risks, causing the loss of control over the territory and the following collapse of the state. State Failure Type II protects only against external issues. This type of state features an illusory ability to defend its borders, but its lack of legitimacy makes probable the collapse from within. State Failure Type III protects only against internal risks. This is the case of several Third World countries, encouraged by international law and norms to not develop their capacity to protect from external aggression. Lastly, State Failure Type IV is a fluid phase in which the state typically has low control over the periphery and still performs some basic functions, even if they do not protect from internal and external risks. These four types should not be intended as monoliths but as a continuum in which states could advance to another type of failure or improve their condition. The author also notes that violence is not synonymous with state failure, and at the same time, its absence does not mean that internal order is secure. A state is failing when violence has “a (political) nature, intensity, and scope that its purveyors present a real

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<sup>21</sup> Aman and Aman (2015)

challenge to legitimate authority”<sup>22</sup>. Even Chesterman and other co-authors define state failure as a continuum. According to their vision, states with weak institutions are affected by a continuum of circumstances in which political power finds new alternatives or means of expression that do not involve the classical political structures of a successful state<sup>23</sup>.

Another differentiation that still creates a typology is the one introduced by Robert Rotberg, who describes three types of weak states. The first category contains those states that are held together only through repression and not performance. Secondly, there are weak states that are perennially on the edge of collapse because of intercommunal antagonisms but are still able to manage those divisions. The last category is about those states that are enduringly frail. In this last category, he includes, for example, Haiti, which I describe later. Rotberg defines this country as having always been “the poorest polity in the Western hemisphere”<sup>24</sup>. Before concluding this literature review, it is important to specify that alongside these definitions, scholars and policymakers have developed some ways to measure state failure. Each of those measures includes various indicators that go from capturing political outcomes to analyzing the features of the state. An example is the Fund for Peace, a nongovernmental organization that publishes each year the Failed States Index. The index consists of 12 indicators, including the flow of refugees or internally displaced people, progressive deterioration of public services, and intervention of other states or external political actors. These indicators create the index that ranges from 1 to 10, with 0 representing the most stable countries and ten the least stable. Indexes like the one created by the Fund for Peace have raised numerous criticisms in the

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<sup>22</sup> Gros (2011, p. 37-40)

<sup>23</sup> Boas and Jennings (2005)

<sup>24</sup> Rotberg (2005, p. 17-19)

literature. As noted by Ezrow and Frantz, “existing measures of state failure generally include the very outcomes that are of interest, making it impossible for researchers to understand the nature of the relationship between state failure and these outcomes”<sup>25</sup>. Despite these considerations, if we pay attention to the infamous rankings on failed states, we can notice that the same countries, regardless of the criteria used, always occupy the top of the rankings. Indeed, leaving aside Haiti, which I will talk about later, Somalia, Yemen, and Afghanistan are widely recognized as the most preoccupying states. Somalia has faced a prolonged civil war and persistent terrorist activities since the collapse of Siad Barre’s regime in 1991. Yemen is characterized by the same tragic situation even if the eyes of the world are more focused on that case due to the influence it has on global transport and the equilibrium in the Middle East. The civil war escalated in 2015 when the Houthi rebels started a rebellion against the internationally recognized government. Finally, even if it gained independence in 2011, South Sudan is plagued by ethnical violence and power struggles among its leaders. All these countries and others not mentioned here are facing enormous difficulties in providing the basic services to their populations like food shortages, collapsing health care systems

An additional criterion for evaluating success, often not considered in the literature about failed states, is the relationship between failed states and sovereignty. According to Robert Jackson, what determines a state to be successful is the possession of positive sovereignty, as distinguished by negative sovereignty. Drawing from Isaiah Berlin’s distinction between negative and positive liberty and Max Weber’s concept of the ideal state, Jackson defines positive sovereignty as the capabilities “which enable

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<sup>25</sup> Ezrow and Frantz (2013, p. 35)

governments to be their own masters: it is a substantive rather than a formal condition”. Positive sovereignty has three rights: nonintervention, other international immunities, and the resources to provide political goods for its population. It is a political attribute rather than a legal status, involving the authority to declare and implement public policies both internationally and domestically. Furthermore, positive sovereignty is not an absolute condition but a matter of degree, subject to change over time. Positive sovereignty enables states to create alliances and enter into international agreements. Simply put, they are states that, concerning the criteria of a successful state previously said, possess the will and the ability to act as the main source of power both in its territories and in the international environment. On the opposite side, negative sovereignty characterizes failed states today. Compared to the successful cases, states with negative sovereignty only possess formal and legal recognition by other countries. As a result, they are unable to protect their borders, project and implement policies inside their territories, and develop relationships with other entities. Jackson has noted that negative sovereignty is the result of the decolonization process after the Second World War which led to a rapid increase in the number of states in the international arena. It is in this context that a new sovereignty game emerged due to the fall of the European imperialistic scheme and the rise of new state entities that were supported by Moscow and Washington. At the same time, most of these countries were not prepared to fulfill the functions of a sovereign state, resulting in several coups, rebellions, and disorder. In essence, while positive sovereignty encompasses both *de facto* and *de iure* aspects, negative sovereignty is confined to *de jure* dimension.

It is crucial to note that the concept of sovereignty changed completely after World War II. The dismantling of Western colonies promoted many states, often created artificially by the major powers, to enter as members

of the United Nations system and consequently be defined as sovereign states. In the meantime, the international system was gradually creating constraints on the use of military force and aggression by other powers aiming at conquering these territories. Therefore, these countries benefited from recognized sovereignty and from an international environment in which the use of force against these entities was considered obsolete. But are these criteria still appropriate to define a sovereign state in the XXI century? Likely not. Indeed, these countries face inner difficulties that make them vulnerable not only to internal acts of terror or violence but also to external pressures from major powers, perpetuating the same hierarchy that characterized what seems to be the old world. Through the words of Krasner, the rules of recognition of juridically independent territorial entities and nonintervention constituting conventional sovereignty are no longer effective and are failing<sup>26</sup>. Instead, we must recognize the inability of these countries to respect these criteria and the necessity of them to rely on stronger actors, which has led to the erosion of old sovereignty rules. The case study of Haiti, examined in the next two sections, will reveal how these theoretical frameworks have been applied and continue to manifest in a specific context.

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<sup>26</sup> Krasner (2004)

## **2. Haiti and its tumultuous journey from revolution to despair**

This chapter aims to show the complexity of Haitian history, tracing its trajectory from the most radical revolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the contemporary times marked by chaos and anarchy plaguing this country. The analysis of Haitian history, though not excessively detailed, will guide the reader in understanding the subsequent chapter, wherein I will reflect on the concepts of sovereignty and statehood, previously enunciated, through the lens of Haiti's historical experience. It is not the main purpose of this chapter to write extensively and thoroughly about Haitian history. What is my objective here is to elucidate the various factors and occurrences necessary to grasp the reality of Haiti as a failed state. Indeed, some events and features, like the Nietzschean's eternal return, are constantly repeated in the history of this country and should not be neglected.

The role of history in the political development of this Caribbean country is enormous, and the consequences of occurrences and choices made two centuries ago are still concretely visible today. The impact of the historical trajectory on the future of a country is not limited to the Haitian case but has been examined in various contexts by the literature. Douglass North has captured the importance and the influence of the past in his famous theory on path dependence. Path dependence can be defined, using his words, as the "constraints on the choice set in the present that are derived from historical experiences of the past"<sup>27</sup>. In scenarios where societies are troubled by inefficient organizations or institutions, people in power do not want to change the rules of the game and will fight to maintain their

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<sup>27</sup> North (2005, p. 52)

private gains instead of promoting an alternative regime closer to the needs of society. However, it is important to underline two important aspects of this theory. Firstly, this theory is far from promoting a deterministic view of things where the outcome of a future event is determined by what has happened before. Rather, North claims that current decisions are influenced by past events in a variety of ways. Secondly, change is possible only when the interests of the ruling class coincide with the public interest. This brief premise on path dependence helps grasp the political development of Haiti and the chain of events that has brought this country to the contemporary tragic situation.

To facilitate a coherent and nuanced comprehension of Haitian history, this chapter will be divided into three different periods. The first part will talk about the revolution that freed Haiti from colonial rule and the difficult context in which this nascent autonomous state tried to establish itself. The second section will focus on the revolts, foreign invasions, and dictatorships that characterized the 20th century. Finally, the last paragraph presents the last three decades and the contemporary situation in which Haiti is trapped, trying also to demonstrate the sufferings of the common people living in this territory.

## **2.1 The 19<sup>th</sup> century: colonial rule and the Haitian Revolution**

The territory now recognized as Haiti was colonized soon after the arrival of Christopher Columbus in Hispaniola. The island was populated by the Indigenous Tainos, who were brutally exterminated with the appearance of the Spanish due to forced labor and smallpox viruses. The presence of silver mines in Central and South America soon became more appetible for the Spanish, who consequently switched their attention to these

colonies. This lack of interest facilitated the arrival of French and English pirates by 1629. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the French presence in Western Saint-Domingue was very solid and accepted by the other colonial powers. The Treaty of Ryswick, signed in 1697, formally recognized the division of the island and settled the hostilities: the western third of the island was assigned to the French, who renamed it Saint-Domingue, while the Spanish maintained the possession of the East <sup>28</sup>.

The French rule represented a turn of events for the Haitians. The colonizers exploited the island's resources to a greater extent than the Spanish did, making Haiti the wealthiest French sugar-producing colony in the New World in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Sugar exports, valued at 115 million francs in 1789, were not the only export goods. Cacao, indigo, coffee, and cotton represented important exports as well, frequently outperforming the other French colonies. Therefore, it is not surprising that in this period, Saint-Domingue was called “the pearl of the Caribbean” and was considered a key colony by France. Despite this positivistic depiction of the situation, French authorities were far from interested in developing infrastructures and institutions and providing basic needs to the population. For example, the reasons for the vulnerability to natural disasters that still hamper the growth of this country can be found in the deforestation of gigantic tracts of land and the loosening of the soil in this period <sup>29</sup>. Moreover, Gros has demonstrated why “the seeds of state failure in Haiti were sowed during the colonial era.” The original intentions of the colonial rule were to create a centralized system, at least on paper. A governor, nominated by the crown, was the administrator of the colony. He was assisted by the *surintendants*, the deputies, who in turn managed the local administrators called *intendants*. Nevertheless, this system of

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<sup>28</sup> Sepinwall (2013, p.13)

<sup>29</sup> Gros (2012, p. 55)

authority was far from being respected: each plantation was a self-governing authority, which reminded medieval France instead of absolutism<sup>30</sup>. Moreover, Saint-Domingue was not a state in Weberian terms due to the political atomization of its territory. It was composed of three distinct parts, informally ruled. The North was heavily populated and inhabited by the ruling class and wealthy people, constituting an independent enclave. The government seat was in the West, where Port-au-Prince, the capital since 1749, was located. The South, controlled by mulatto, formed a quasi-independent micro-state. In addition, the class and racial structure of the colony perpetuated the atomization of the colony. *Grands blancs* or big whites were the dominant class composed of the Creole planters, the absentee owners who left their properties to be managed by overseas or procurators and returned to France, and the colonial administrators. The middle class was composed of smaller plantation owners with fewer slaves compared to the top class. It included white Creoles and *affranchis* (i.e., freed slaves or those born free). This class was born after the so-called coffee revolution of the 1750s and 1760s, caused by the racial discrimination perpetuated by the administrative class and which allowed them to take possession of unclaimed lands. The middle class included professionals as well, such as lawyers, military officers, plantation overseers, and merchants. The top and the middle class counted 40,000 whites and 28,000 *affranchis* and formed the free population. These numbers are shocking if compared to the lowest class, composed of 452,000 slaves, mostly arriving from Africa, who worked not only in the plantations but also as domestic servants or whichever job was not performed by the ruling classes<sup>31</sup>. To sum up, as the revolts in the 1720s, 1730s, and 1750s demonstrate, along with the vertical polarization, the Haitian environment was also profoundly divided based on the racial

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<sup>30</sup> Gros (2012, p. 55)

<sup>31</sup> Dupuy (2014, p. 38)

differences among blacks, mulattoes, and whites, highlighting a horizontal fragmentation. The main interest of the colonizers was not to build sustainable commercial and industrial development for the country but simply to maintain Haiti as a market for France and accumulate capital and resources.

The slave revolution of Saint-Domingue, which led to the independence of Haiti, is one of the most researched historical topics of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, thanks to the unexpected results and the radicality of it. The originality of this phenomenon can be captured if we compare it to the other two revolutions in this period. While the American and French Revolutions maintained the hierarchical system of slavery, considering black men and women not fit for freedom and citizenship, the Haitian Revolution challenged the structures of the West by abolishing slavery and spreading the principles of Enlightenment not only to small segments of individuals but to the whole society. The brutal war in Saint-Domingue lasted from 1791 to 1804. It started in August 1791 when the French regime had been unable to manage a slave rebellion sustained also by the white planters who were seeking more autonomy from their homeland. Significant portions of the colony were obtained by the rebels two years after the start of the war. Toussaint Louverture soon emerged as a key leader creating a well-organized movement and defeating external powers like the Spanish and English and his internal rivals characterized by the black and mulatto forces. He then promoted a new order through a revolutionary constitution in 1801 that abolished slavery, declared all those born in the colony free, equal, and French citizens, and implemented the right to private property. However, the tensions with France did not cease. In October 1801, Napoleon ordered a successful expedition to reestablish French authority, during which Louverture was captured and deported to France. Even without the head of the revolution, war broke out again with a new

effective leader, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Toussaint's former lieutenant, who forced the French army to retreat. On January 1, 1804, Dessalines declared the independence of Haiti, in front of the astonishment of contemporary observers, who felt threatened by the dominant global order<sup>32</sup>.

Even after the impressive revolution, Haiti did not find the stability that it desired. According to one of Haiti's leading scholars, Michel Hector, the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be divided into three phases. The first phase follows the state's formation and the conclusion of the war against the French militias. After the proclamation of Haitian independence, Haiti was split into two competing regimes due to the assassination of Dessalines in 1806. Henry Christophe led the Northern state, while Alexandre Pétion led the Southern military republic. *Anciens libres* (black free and wealthy people even before the Revolution), who tended to support Pétion's government, and *nouveaux libre* (the slaves freed thanks to the Revolution), who largely backed Christophe's regime, continued to fight. In 1818, Pétion died, and Jean-Pierre Boyer succeeded him. A civil war erupted in 1820, which ended with the suicide of Christophe and the reunification of Haiti thanks to the conquest of the North by Boyer. The next phase in the Hector's periodization lasted from 1822 to 1859. During these years, Haiti conquered the Eastern part of Hispaniola for a limited period, numerous uprisings persisted, and a new revolution, led by Fabre Geffrard, occurred in 1859. The last phase, from 1859 to 1915, can be distinguished into two segments. A rare period of stability and prosperity characterized the government of Fabre Geffrard, thanks to the first steps towards modernization and increasing revenues from agriculture. However, a new civil war broke out during the presidency of Sylvain Salnave (1867-1869)

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<sup>32</sup> Hallward (2010, p. 9-11)

and between 1870 and 1883. During the last ten years of the century, international financial institutions guided by Germans, French, or Americans became the real rulers of the country. Haitian elites began the exploitation of the country's resources, consuming Western and industrialized products to not seem backward to foreigners. They were unconcerned by the lack of efficient institutions that were characterizing the country. Every surplus generated by agriculture or coffee production was used to buy foreign goods and not to foster the development of new infrastructures or encourage local investments. Furthermore, they did not recognize the increasing power and influence those foreign institutions had on the present and future of Haiti. On the other perspective, foreigners and their businesses were attracted by accessible gains and motivated by a presumptuous and short-sighted oligarchy. Meanwhile, instability and a succession of inefficient governments became the main features of these fifty years. It is not surprising then if seven presidents governed the country between 1911 and 1915, several of whom were either overthrown, assassinated, or died under doubtful conditions <sup>33</sup>.

Apart from the events narrated, it is relevant to note for the research purpose two main traits that pertain to the relations between Haiti and foreign powers: the dependency of Haiti on France soon after the independence and the silence around the events happening in this territory by foreign powers. Regarding the former, the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized did not end after the revolution. It happened quite the opposite. Charles Forsdick, in a relevant article called *Haiti and France: Settling the Debts of the Past* <sup>34</sup>, has demonstrated the diplomatic and financial influence that France has had on Haiti for a century after the revolution. The acknowledgment of Haitian independence by France

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<sup>33</sup> Hector (2009)

<sup>34</sup> Forsdick (2013)

occurred in 1825. The period in between witnessed the attempt, encouraged by relevant planters, to reintegrate Saint-Domingue into the French Caribbean islands, possessions cut significantly following the demise of the Ancien Régime Empire. After the independence, French traders and shipowners started trading exchanges with the newly autonomous country thanks also to foreign vessels or sailing under false foreign flags. The main disputes that delayed the independence's recognition were the lobbying of the French oligarchy but also the amount of indemnity demanded by the former colonizer. Formality arrived under the reign of Charles X. France imposed considerable reparations and commercial privileges aimed at favoring them. The following disastrous years for this country are considered a consequence of the 150 million francs of indemnity. The repayments, consisting of 15 percent of national income for six decades, cut national reserves, depreciated the Haitian currency, and almost impeded commerce with countries other than France. In other words, the still strong link between France and Haiti damaged immensely the construction of the new institutions, and repaying the debt began its defining element in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The influence on Haiti by the European country softened at the end of the century when the Spanish-American War and the so-called Banana Wars marked a shift of authority in Central America and the Caribbean among powers. Furthermore, the French loss of authority was linked to the development of new interests in the north and sub-Saharan Africa, the Pacific, and Indochina and the subsequent formation of a new colonial empire. The United States started imposing influence on those territories, which culminated with the occupation of Haiti in 1915.

Equally relevant to remember is the climate of international hostility around the Haitian revolution. This event aroused wide fear throughout the Western world, worried about maintaining privileges and control over

its colonial rule around the world. Put differently, it set off an alarm bell that must be silenced to avoid its spreading. Michel-Rolph Trouillot called this event “an unthinkable history,” emphasizing the size of the shock generated. The fact that a group of black slaves, supposedly inferior to the seizing power in terms of strategic and military capabilities, fought and obtained their freedom by killing whites and defeating a more powerful power was not admissible among the oligarchies located in Europe. The global astonishment was shared both by whites in Europe and the Americas and by non-white plantation owners. Trouillot, looking at the official debates and publications of the times, has shown why this event was unthinkable and impossible to understand by the contemporaries. The categories through which they read the news and interpreted it were unfit to capture the significance of the revolution <sup>35</sup>. Consequently, the reader should not be surprised by the isolation that characterized Haiti in the aftermath of the revolution. I have already talked about the relations between France and Haiti. However, the former rulers of the Haitian territories were not the only ones who did not want to help the transition of this country. The United States was not willing to recognize Haiti for various factors such as the inability to impose hard power soon after its own independence, the isolation foreign policy pursued, and the ongoing presence of slavery in its territories. Similar reasons impacted the decision by Britain, the dominant colonial power in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to maintain the isolation of Haiti. Britain controlled colonies near the island, and the necessity to protect slavery in these territories was essential. The whole international system was not fit to accept the shocking phenomenon of Haiti. Furthermore, if the process of state-making had failed, it would have given the contemporaries another reason for weakening attempts by other colonies.

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<sup>35</sup> Trouillot (2013)

The two features now enunciated are not the only reasons for the underperformance of Haitian institutions in this century. Several more factors constitute the seeds for the sufferings that Haitians had suffered and are still trying to overcome today. For example, Haiti lacked political knowledge about the state's concept. The most influential Haitian men were frequently incapable of reading, like Dessalines or Paul Vernet, finance minister under the former leader. Even if there were debates about the political regime for post-independent Haiti, the leading figures of the new country conceived the state as a more developed structure of the plantation's system in which there was an absolute military leader with power over his servants. The state of things was very far compared to the convention in Philadelphia to write the new constitution around the same period. Despite these facts, hostility by external institutions, as demonstrated by the discussion about French influence and international silence, played a crucial role in harming the Haitian institutional development needed to create a strong basis for future prosperity. Moreover, Haiti, strongly dependent on international trade before becoming independent, was obliged to stipulate agreements and trading partners to repay its debt, sell its goods, and develop human capital to run the country <sup>36</sup>. Hence, if hostility characterized Haitian international relations in this period, the counter reality is that the external debt contracted by Haitian governments represented a huge benefit both for creditor countries (mainly France's financial sectors and high banking) and foreign investors interested in financing extractive, agricultural and industrial manufacturing sectors. To sum up, there is no doubt that Haiti suffered profoundly from its unpopularity and its uniqueness in a world that was not already prepared for this revolution. Albeit with its specific

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<sup>36</sup> Gros (2012, p. 82-92)

features and events, the following century will not change this persistent weakness.

## **2.2 The 20<sup>th</sup>: US intervention, chaos, and Duvalierism**

Profound political, economic, and social changes marked the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Haiti despite the country's perennial instability, uprisings, and hardships. The consequences of being the first Black independent republic and a climate of both hostility and exploitation profoundly influenced the following decade. Three events pivotal to elucidating Haitian persistent crises characterized this century. First, the US invasion and occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934 significantly altered the society's structure, furthered dependency on external power, and mobilized the peasantry. Second, revolts occurred in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, demonstrating the consistent rise of new social classes that began to play a key role in political affairs. Finally, a new dictatorial regime conquered power. Duvalier's government under François "Papa Doc" Duvalier and his son Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier spanned three decades of Haitian history, committing human rights abuses and economic mismanagement that forced thousands of Haitians to leave the country. Let's now examine each historical phase more precisely.

Between the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and 1915, Europeans achieved a huge influence on Haitian internal matters. Direct capital investments increased their diplomatic, financial, and commercial dominance, especially in the agricultural sector, where more accessible concessions of lands were available. However, a new paradigm in the US foreign policy led to a switch of authority in this territory. This increasing interest began at the beginning of the new century and constantly expanded. By 1913, US

exports had risen to \$1.7 billion compared to \$1.4 billion at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while imports increased from \$850 million to \$1.2 billion <sup>37</sup>. The United States started to consider Central America and the Caribbean as part of its sphere of influence, as the Roosevelt Corollary (1904) to the Monroe Doctrine demonstrated. Military intervention or occupation were tools not disregarded by the United States if its interests were not guaranteed. Stable governments were crucial to securing hegemony, providing assurance to US borrowers, and making profitable tons of investments coming to the region. All these conditions were at risk in Haiti when the United States decided to invade the country: frequent rebellions impeded the maturation of stable institutions, inability to repay the debt incurred, and US interests were constantly threatened by European powers. Therefore, the overthrow of the government of Vilbrun Guillaume Sam in July 1915 and the subsequent unleashing of revolts were considered just the perfect occasion to intervene. The United States Marines landed at Port-au-Prince to prevent the leader of the rebellion, Rosalvo Bobo, from taking power <sup>38</sup>. After peace had been restored, the US Navy and State Department imposed Sudre Dartiguenave, president of the Haitian Senate, as president of the country. In February 1916, the Haitian-American treaty, approved by the US Senate without comment, “legitimized” the occupation and conceded relevant privileges to the Americans, such as financial control and federal supervision of public work<sup>39</sup>.

The protectorate had a profound and unprecedented influence on the Haitian historical trajectory. This is the reason why the literature has spent a huge number of pages analyzing the impact on socio-economic and

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<sup>37</sup> Turnier (1955, p. 207)

<sup>38</sup> Nicholls 1979, 146

<sup>39</sup> Schmidt (1995, p. 72–75)

political structures<sup>40</sup>. Among the various changes that occurred in these two decades, some traits need to be mentioned. Firstly, as an obvious consequence, the United States established itself as the most influential country in Haitian matters. Banking and finance control shifted to US banks, and the Haitian gourde was pegged to the US dollar instead of the French franc. Consequently, the new dominant power emerged as the primary market for Haitian exports and imports. Moreover, hectares of land were expropriated, transferred to foreign companies, and destined for agricultural companies producing sisal, bananas, pineapple, and coffee<sup>41</sup>. From now on, foreign companies outside the US orbit will find a hostile environment in investing in these territories. Germany, Britain, and France were the greatest challengers to US interests. For example, following French criticism over the arbitrary and bureaucratic handling of the Haitian customs service, the State Department firmly claimed that Haitian tariff regulations should not concern countries other than itself<sup>42</sup>.

One of the most tangible consequences of the protectorate was the technocratic interventions in the administration, the army, and bureaucracy both for modernization and strategic concerns. Authority was centralized in the hands of a High Commissioner who exercised legislative, executive, and judicial power. This figure was appointed by and responsible to the president of the United States. The Haitian government could not approve any laws, regulations, or policies without the permission of US authorities. This power was further affirmed through a new constitution in 1918. This constitution represented a major change in Haitian destiny, considering that it allowed land ownership by foreigners for commercial, agricultural, or educational purposes. Another

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<sup>40</sup> For example, see “*Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940*” by Mary A. Renda

<sup>41</sup> Dupuy, (2014, p. 63)

<sup>42</sup> Plummer (2013, p. 244)

intervention pertained to the army, which was fundamental to American interests in maintaining order and guaranteeing profit on capital investments. The old and inefficient Haitian army was dismantled and replaced by a modern military and police force called Garde d'Haiti or the Gendarmerie. The old army's infrastructure was destroyed by the Marines, and the aging ships of the weak Haitian navy retired. The Gendarmerie was not only responsible for repressing potential rebellions but also for several other responsibilities, such as protecting foreign individual and property rights, supervising public works, and controlling prisons <sup>43</sup>. Ultimately, according to the US view, a well-functioning bureaucratization was needed to attract investments and make them profitable. All internal and customs taxes required to finance government agencies, programs, and services started to be collected by the Bureau of Internal Revenue. The Public Health Service played a crucial role in providing clinics to rural areas, building new hospitals, vaccinating parts of society, and other minimum services. Miles of new roads and bridges were built, and old ones were repaired by the Public Works Ministry. For the first time, the streets of Port-au-Prince were paved <sup>44</sup>. In other words, what the protectorate authorities tried to develop is what the Haitian oligarchy had failed to do on its own after the revolution due to perennial selfishness and short sight. The modernization of the country was the primary objective of US policymakers. Even so, ethics and morality were far from being the guiding principles under which development was pursued. Indeed, strategic concerns topped the ranking. Remunerative investments, political stability, and the absence of rebellions could only be established through an efficient central power and modern bureaucratic and military services.

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<sup>43</sup> Dupuy (1989, p. 133)

<sup>44</sup> Schmidt (1995, p. 186)

Despite a period of relative peace that started in 1922, protracted protests began during the fall of 1929. Antioccupation sentiments spread out due to economic hardships, harsher tax policies, and changes in the scholarship policy at the agricultural college. Soon, what was unorganized and sporadic protests became a nationwide general strike that culminated on December 6, 1929, in Aux Cayes, when Marines fired on a crowd of 1,500, wounding twenty-three and killing twelve. Furthermore, a phase of disengagement by the United States in Latin America was initiated in a period where expensive interventions and economic depression were constituting a burden for US funds. President Herbert Hoover, pressured by international condemnation, appointed a Commission headed by W. Cameron Forbes to review the situation in Haiti. The members of the Commission were forced to admit the riskiness of events and recommended the US withdraw. The withdrawal process ended when the Marines officially withdrew in December 1934, but not before the signing of a treaty that terminated all the functions of the protectorate except for some key financial and legislative policies <sup>45</sup>.

By the time the United States left its territories, Haiti was a completely different country. First, it should be noted that the withdrawal happened only when the invaders were certain to informally control the country. The treaty signed by the two parts guaranteed financial administration, alienation of land, the avoidance of entangling alliances, and law and order. In the Thirties, the United States was also the dominant power in the country, having uprooted the Europeans, ruled the Haitian banking and financing system, and obtained monopoly rights for industries like rubber and bananas. Put differently, “the United States understood that it could maintain its hegemony over countries like Haiti without a direct

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. (p. 219)

occupation”<sup>46</sup>. Local allies and proxies were sufficient, especially if trained and armed by the United States. However, the occupation exacerbated the authoritarian trait of Haitian’s way of governing. Both political and economic power were further concentrated in Port-au-Prince through the presence of military headquarters and bureaucracy, exacerbating the discrepancy with the other provincial port cities<sup>47</sup>. Moreover, a transformed class structure and balance of power emerged in Haiti. Apart from the proletarianization of the peasantry, according to Alex Dupuy, the most significant change corresponded to the emergence of a small but influential urban middle class of professionals and white-collar workers involved in the private sector, public bureaucracy, and institutions, army and police<sup>48</sup>. The significance of this phenomenon marked the subsequent political development in the 1930s and 1940s when two ideological tendencies crystallized. On the one hand, there were communist, socialist, social democratic, and populist parties, also supported by progressive trade unions, that considered it necessary to fight for social justice, democratic values, and the “class question.” On the other side, nationalist, populist, and anti-socialist parties prioritized the “color question” and the tensions between mulattos and the black bourgeoisie<sup>49</sup>.

This is the premise for another major event in Haitian history. The two-sided struggle mentioned before culminated in 1946 when, after a five-day general strike instigated by themselves, the black-nationalist forces won the election and appointed Dumarsais Estimé as president. This event is considered revolutionary for two reasons, as thoroughly elucidated by Matthew J. Smith. Primarily, for the first time in Haiti and in the post-World War II Latin American context, a popular movement characterized

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<sup>46</sup> Bellegarde-Smith et al. (2015)

<sup>47</sup> Dupuy (1989, p. 141)

<sup>48</sup> Dupuy (2014, p. 63)

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. (p. 64)

by local radicals overthrew a US-supported dictatorship. Secondly, a new political class, profoundly anti-American and nationalist, emerged thanks to the increasing politicization of Haitian laboring classes. Political and social issues became part of the Haitian laboring class's life, and a political theory based on authenticity and nationalism struck the right chords of their perception. Most of them were young black radicals who heavily emphasized distinctions of class and color and felt responsible for following and accomplishing what Toussaint and Dessalines tried to do 150 years before. The ideology born from this movement is called *noirisme*, which ultimately aims to total control of institutions by black members and popular classes. From then on, racial authenticity became the main criterion of political leadership, thanks to the insufficient popularity of other popular movements like Marxism<sup>50</sup>.

The apogee by the black-nationalist forces was reached in 1957 with the election of François Duvalier to the presidency. Without a doubt, among the various forms of dictatorship that marked Haitian history, the Duvalier dictatorship had been the most brutal experienced by this country in two centuries. Rotberg, already in 1971, defined the regime in these terms: "Haitians experienced tyranny, rapacity, and an all-encompassing, disfiguring dictatorship which surpassed all its Third World counterparts in the single-mindedness of purpose, tenacity, and lack of redeeming social and economic features"<sup>51</sup>. Two phases characterize this tragic experience, the one led by the father between 1957 and 1971 and the other led by his son, Jean-Claude, between 1971 and 1986. But how did this dynasty reach power? The electoral campaign in 1956 and 1957, far from being democratic and free as Western citizens are used to, was rather a power struggle, and it came after five provisional governments in these

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<sup>50</sup> Sepinwall (2013, p. 270)

<sup>51</sup> Rotberg and Clague (1971, p.197-198).

two years. Duvalier succeeded thanks to the decisive support of the military. General Kebreau, who rose as the main strongman in the army in May 1957, expelled two major candidates from the race and supported the victory of his preference, Duvalier<sup>52</sup>. Moreover, there is evidence that he was the favorite candidate of the United States because he seemed less threatening than the other candidates, and he studied for a brief period at the University of Michigan<sup>53</sup>.

Among the main features of the 29-year dictatorship, one should start with the repression of every form of dissent in the country. An estimated between 20,000 and 50,000 Haitians were murdered by the government. Prison, torture, murder, and exile were the main tools to silence imagined, potential or real opponents. Control over the press and its censorship became permanent features of the regime, though in various forms and intensity. In the 1960s, Haitian newspapers were forced to print no more than 5,000 copies. A few months after his election, four relevant newspapers, *Haiti-Miroir*, *Le Matin*, *Le Patriote*, and *Indépendance*, faced heavy intervention by the government, which bombed or destroyed their printing shops and tortured the staff. Broadcasters, journalists, and publishers were tortured, and their properties destroyed and consequently coerced to hire members close to the will of the regime. Universities and trade unions, considered a potential epicenter of opposition, were no less touched by the censorship. Strikes were banned, and the State University of Haiti was put under severe control (often, students were selected based on their affiliation or loyalty to the president). Another influential

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<sup>52</sup> The power struggle was profoundly characterized by internal violence and armed confrontations among candidates. The major ones were: Dejoie, Duvalier, Fignole, and Jumelle. Each candidate advocated for the interests of three major social classes, that are the middle class, the bourgeoisie, and the proletariat while the peasantry remained out of the political spectrum. The two candidates referred to in the text and expelled by Kebreau were Dejoie, defeated through an internal fight against its backers, and Fignole, forced into exile. During this fierce battle, five provisional governments ruled the country.

<sup>53</sup> Dupuy (1989, p. 155)

institution in the Haitian environment was the Catholic Church, which was declared the official religion by the 1860 Concordat. Duvalier expelled all the foreign clergy and replaced them with Haitians. Historically, religion represented a powerful means of control in the hands of the bourgeoisie, and its control was considered mandatory by the regime. Diplomatic relations with the Vatican were interrupted during the most brutal period of Duvalier's persecution against the church, between 1959 and 1964, which culminated with its excommunication, rescinded in 1966 <sup>54</sup>. The second feature I want to elucidate is linked to how Duvalier maintained the power for such a long time, especially if we think about the countless number of governors Haiti has had during its history. Surely, as mentioned before, repression was one tool, though not unique. According to Dupuy, Duvalier's regime was characterized by a triple alliance composed of the black bourgeoisie and middle class, the mulatto bourgeoisie, and foreign capital. The first two parts constituted an inferior role in the coalition, mainly due to the purging of most mulattoes from the top positions in Haitian institutions. This alliance allowed the regime to not profoundly alter the structure of the society and keep unchanged the positions of the oligarchy, distributing various types of benefits to them <sup>55</sup>. Furthermore, the Duvaliers exercised power with the help of foreign assistance, which enabled them not to impose taxes on wealthier sectors of society and to distribute state resources generously <sup>56</sup>. The conservation of power was possible through the formation of a dual power structure in the military sector as well. Duvalier was conscious of the dangers that could come from the army, and the eleven different invasions, plots, mutinies, and palace intrigues throughout his tenure were proof of that. Therefore, besides the replacement of old military members with black middle-class

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<sup>54</sup> Sepinwall (2013, p. 280)

<sup>55</sup> Dupuy (1989, p.168)

<sup>56</sup> Gros (2012, p. 104-105)

officers, he created a parallel structure, called popularly *Tontons Macoutes*, that doubled the members of the regular army and police. They spread terror around the country due to persistent violations of basic human rights and corrupt practices. In the article called *The Macoutization of Haitian Politics*, Patrick Sylvain concludes that:

The macoutized state became the emblematic vehicle of resistance (albeit symbolic) to foreign intervention, mulatto economic supremacy, Vatican interference, liberal and democratically oriented university education, and organized labor. The macoutized state transformed the nation into an obedient, non-pluralistic entity where political action depended upon the blessings of the supreme executive <sup>57</sup>.

The evaluation of the Duvalier regime is not favorable even in the economic sector, where both father and son developed a corrupt and exploitative economic regime instead of modernizing the country. The fiscal regime was favorable to the wealthier part of society: taxes remained very low or even absent on the luxury goods imported. At the same time, revenues were obtained from higher taxes on coffee and the selling of essential commodities like edible oil, rice, or fish. Scholars have estimated that the peasant's potential income from coffee was cut by more than 40 percent due to the increase in taxes between 1964 and 1971<sup>58</sup>. Thanks also to other forms of wealth extraction, the government was able to sustain the *macoutized* state by paying the salary of employees, military, and police forces and considering the country's economy as a source of enrichment for the oligarchy <sup>59</sup>. The obvious consequence of the brutal economic and political conditions was the outrageous number of emigrants. Between 1950 and 1970, around 8 percent of the population left the country, reaching the United States, Canada, or the Bahamas. These numbers grew

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<sup>57</sup> Sylvain (2013, p. 79)

<sup>58</sup> DeWind and Kinley (1986, p. 26)

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. (p. 28)

in the following years. Emigrants, many of whom were technically skilled and educated, caused a huge brain drain, hardly to recover for Haiti <sup>60</sup>.

The 19-year-old Jean-Claude Duvalier succeeded his father, whose death was caused by heart disease and diabetes in 1971. It is hard to note relevant changes that could distinguish the two presidencies. However, popular demands for reforms and improving living conditions, the attempt to broaden the base of support to include the mulatto bourgeoisie, and the worsening political and economic crisis were no more manageable by institutions. On top of that Jean-Claude lacked the ability of the father to hold the power who used the deepened knowledge of Haitian culture and the ability to satisfy the elite to rule the country. The coup de grace occurred in February 1986 when the United States withdrew its support for the tarnished regime and provided a plane to leave Haiti for France.

### **2.3 The Post-Cold War period: from Aristide to the present day**

The political stability that the repressive and dictatorship regime of Duvalier imposed on Haiti will not happen again. The years following the collapse of Jean-Claude Duvalier's regime proved very brutal and chaotic. Between 1986 and 1991, the mobilization of the popular class in the political debate resulted in an intense fight for power and made Haiti a laboratory for popular participatory democracy. The lower classes demanded a more egalitarian society in which foreign powers had limited authority on Haitian matters and where a structural reorganization of society allowed them to count in the political sphere. However, their desire to obtain more privileges and better living conditions collided with the shield of ideologies of color that obscured the corruption and exploitative

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<sup>60</sup> Polyné (2013, p. 99)

behavior of the oligarchs <sup>61</sup>. The unreadiness or unwillingness to democracy was still perpetuating the military's leadership in the country. Letting aside the short-term interlude of Leslie Manigat's presidency in 1988, power succession occurred in the hands of generals and Duvalierists, which supported the state of terror and oppression.

The first free and fair elections in Haitian history, granted only in 1990, resulted in the victory of an anti-Duvalier figure and were facilitated by the monitoring of the UN, the Organization of American States (OAS), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and the United States <sup>62</sup>. Jean-Bertrand Aristide was a priest from the lower class and a popular figure among the upsurging political cause against the old rulers. He was the leader of the Lavalas, a movement deeply rooted in the rising influence of the emerging, though poorly organized, mass of impoverished people asking for social justice. Aristide's contribution to Haitian politics was to center the political debate around the class structure and not on the fight among people of different colors. During the election, Aristide had been perceived as the Messiah who was brought into the political arena to defeat Duvalierism, exploitation, and privilege impersonated by the satanic forces of the elite. Put differently, Aristide's message and way of communicating were profoundly populist, prophetic, and theological <sup>63</sup>. However, the climate of tension and symptoms of instability did not vanish. Despite Aristide's attempt to improve working conditions, end corruption in the public administration and private sector, and broaden access to education, a year later, this brief experiment came to an end. Haitian elite felt immediately threatened by the measures that the

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<sup>61</sup> Dupuy (2014, p. 85)

<sup>62</sup> Kumar (2000, p. 29-30)

<sup>63</sup> Moïse and Ollivier (1992, p.148)

government was trying to implement and, mainly, by the extent of people entering the political field <sup>64</sup>.

As often happened in this history, a coup overthrew the government and proceeded to dismantle the Lavalas members from power. The coup's leader, General Raoul Cedras, agreed on the establishment of a joint OAS/UN civilian mission to monitor human rights and help in the rebuilding of the institutions. However, international and internal support soon expired. Aristide returned to Haiti by October 30 to finish his five-year term. He was backed by 20,000 US troops deployed by the Clinton administration that guaranteed Aristide's return in exchange for no prosecution against the leaders of the coup and the adoption of a neoliberal agenda. Furthermore, the US force's deployment of troops had complete control over the national police force, aiming to modernize the army and create a new civilian police body. The reality is that the Clinton administration was forced to accept the use of military force in Haiti due to internal criticism, the growing number of people arriving onto US shores by boats, and the rejection by Aristide to integrate members outside the Lavalas movement in the government <sup>65</sup>. Another aspect that influenced the upcoming years should be noted. After 1991, the Lavalas movement never fully recovered due to the extreme violence committed by the military leader of the coup. In a 2007 interview by Peter Hallward, Patrick Elie, Haiti's former secretary of state for public security under Aristide, stated that when the Lavalas returned to power, they had lost more than 30 years. The momentum would not be there anymore. Moreover, important people for the party left the country, never returning or were killed by the army <sup>66</sup>. Ending Aristide's term, a new election took

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<sup>64</sup> Dupuy (2014, p. 86)

<sup>65</sup> Fatton (2013, p.306-307)

<sup>66</sup> Hallward (2007, p. 44)

place in 1996 where René Preval, close to the Lavalas party, succeeded. Preval's presidency implemented a new national police force, privatized public entities, and decreased the unemployment rate. This presidency lasted five uninterrupted years, completing the term and constituting a rare occurrence in Haitian history. Aristide returned to power from 2001 to 2004 after winning the election in November 2000. Indeed, the constitution did not permit two consecutive terms, but a former president can serve two nonconsecutive terms. However, the climate was changing. Firstly, some alleged that the election was fraudulent. Critics claimed that the 2000 elections were "tainted by corruption, intimidation, and violence that destroyed legitimacy and incited passionate and long-lasting protests"<sup>67</sup>. Secondly, the Aristide government was governing very similarly to his infamous predecessors. Gangs were employed to threaten the opposition, corruption among government figures and drug trafficking expanded, and policies aimed at harming the lower and middle classes were instituted<sup>68</sup>. Aristide betrayed the change from a political landscape centered on class factions to a debate on whether the regime has the legitimacy that he was pursuing. As noted by Dupuy, "Aristide ultimately lost his legitimacy because he betrayed the trust the people had put in him to champion their interest over those of the foreign investors and the Haitian elites"<sup>69</sup>. In 2004, he was overthrown for the second time, forced by a revolt that started in the north and rapidly reached the capital. Escorted by the US Marines, Aristide left the country exiled. After the interim rule of Prime Minister Gérard Latortue imposed by the foreign powers, Préval returned to power in 2006. His second-term presidency did not mark a rupture with the past. Haiti's development strategy was still defined with the neoliberal approach and focused on agricultural

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<sup>67</sup> Scott (2004)

<sup>68</sup> Sepinwall (2013, p. 223-224)

<sup>69</sup> Dupuy (2014, p. 88)

exportation and assembly manufacturing. The liberalization of agriculture led to the loss of food security due to increasing food prices and resulting starvation and food riots in 2008<sup>70</sup>. International forces were still present to stabilize the country, though not touching the social structure constituting the root of the whole issue and demonstrating the fragility of Haiti. However, even with these constant difficulties and a tropical storm that resulted in 331 deaths and about 800,000 in need of humanitarian aid, symptoms of progress and improving conditions for Haitians could be recognizable before 2010<sup>71</sup>.

12 January 2010 is a date that no Haitian will ever forget. A devastating earthquake with its epicenter close to Port-au-Prince killed hundreds of thousands of people and left homeless around 1.5 million. \$7,8 billion was the estimated damage. Solidarity around the world generated from the tragic scenes of destruction and despair led to the mobilization of substantial resources for relief and reconstruction projects. As if that situation was not already catastrophic, a cholera outbreak began in October 2010, killing over six years 10,000 people and sickening more than 800,000. Despite immediate accusations, the UN always denied its involvement in the outbreak. Only six years later, former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recognized the responsibility: sewage contaminated with pathogens from United Nations peacekeepers contaminated a river<sup>72</sup>.

The years after the earthquake were as tumultuous and corrupt as the previous decades. Michelle Martelly, a pop singer before becoming president, led the country from May 2011 to February 2016. His electoral campaign was characterized by populist rhetoric and a strong right-wing

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<sup>70</sup> Chinai (2008)

<sup>71</sup> Sepinwall (2013, p. 225)

<sup>72</sup> Government of the Republic of Haiti (2010)

stance for law and order, ensured by a more powerful military. Martelly was well-integrated into the wealthy oligarchy of Haiti. He admitted to having joined Duvalier's *Tonton Macoutes*, supported the dictatorship of the early 1990s, and participated in the campaign of destabilization that led to Aristide's ouster in 2004. Thus, it should not surprise anyone if he became president thanks to the financing by supporters from the elite. During his term, major political, economic, or social changes did not occur, perpetuating authoritarian rule and maintaining the profound division among the population <sup>73</sup>.

New elections were held in 2016 after several postponements and indications of potential manipulation. Jovenel Moïse became president and marked a period characterized by a deepening economic crisis, corruption, and violent protests against the regime, which started in 2018. In July 2021, a group of gunmen assaulted Moïse's home and killed the president <sup>74</sup>. Since then, the situation in the country has only worsened. No election has occurred since 2016, and the last parliamentary session was held in 2020. Gangs had taken control of the country after preventing Prime Minister Ariel Henry from returning home from Kenya. Gang violence has been a permanent feature of Haitian history, but their power has soared after the assassination of Moïse. Currently, 300 gangs operate in Haiti, mostly in Port-au-Prince, the metropolitan area, and in Artibonite Valley, situated in the north of the capital and place of food production. The power of gangs has never been touched or dismantled due to the close relationships with the wealthiest people in Haiti, who used them as a private army. Today, gangs have grouped into two rival coalitions. On the one hand, G9, led by Jimmy "Barbecue" Chérizier, has always been affiliated with the ruling Haitian Tèt Kale Party. On the other, G-Pèp tends

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<sup>73</sup> Burrton (2013)

<sup>74</sup> Gomez (2023)

to support opposition leaders and draws most of its resources from kidnapping and drug trafficking. In the 2023 revolt, there is no doubt that the former obtained superiority. Months by month, the gang's geographical reach has expanded, imposing their influence over the south and northeast of the capital <sup>75</sup>. Human rights are constantly violated: children are recruited into gangs; individuals suspected of association with other gangs or responsible for small crimes continue “to be lynched, stoned, mutilated, or burned alive by members of the population or so-called self-defense brigades, armed with all manner of weaponry, including high-caliber guns.” In 2023, gang violence across the nation caused the killing of 4,451 persons and 1,668 injured; sexual violence is frequent both to spread fear and subjugate the population or during the attacks (some of these victims are mutilated or killed after the attack); absence of medical services, limited access to food and water, schools forced to close and the looting or destruction of houses are the obvious consequences. By December 2023, the violence in the country had led to the internal displacement of 313,900 people, and families who left their homes are currently struggling to meet their basic needs <sup>76</sup>.

To sum up, Haiti is in a state of chaos and anarchy, with gangs impeding operations that a functioning state should accomplish and 1.6 million people at risk of starvation. The UN authorized the deployment of international forces to Haiti to erode the authority of the armed groups. The first group of international law enforcement officials sent by Kenya arrived at the end of June in the gang-plagued Caribbean nation <sup>77</sup>. The perception is not favorable for Haitians, and their sufferings will probably continue.

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<sup>75</sup> International Crisis Group (2024)

<sup>76</sup> UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2024)

<sup>77</sup> Nichols and Psaledakis (2024)

### **3. Discussion**

The core chapter of this thesis will be structured as follows. First, I will address the concept of failed states in the contemporary world, exploring how sovereignty can help understand the main challenges these entities are suffering from. I will revisit the theoretical framework discussed in the first chapter by updating specific assumptions on failed states and sovereignty according to the current international context. Second, I will apply this theoretical lens to what has been said about the Haitian context. In particular, I would like to point out that sovereignty (or the lack thereof) represents the most significant challenge in this country, demonstrating that all the foreign interventions or attempts to improve the conditions of Haiti have largely failed due to the deficient attention on that. The historical analysis provided in the second chapter has been central to introducing this part. Finally, it is fundamental to develop a concrete and viable solution to the ongoing Haitian nightmare. The discussion about the lack of sovereignty in failed contexts should ultimately be aimed at overtaking and tackling the issues a country is suffering. For this reason, I assert that the international community must draw attention to the Haitian crisis and the solutions available. Past occurrences and failures by the foreign powers are certainly not encouraging the international community to intervene. However, having in mind past failures, scholars and policymakers should recognize that the only solution on the table is external intervention. Given the current situation, Haitian institutions are not able to provide security and basic needs to their population since gangs possess large parts of national sovereignty. Therefore, I argue that international forces should organize an intervention and establish a transitional administration defined by program and time frame. The final objective of this mission must be building institutions capable of resisting

internal struggles for power and ensuring a long-term peaceful environment in which governments head the country towards a bright future.

### **3.1 Sovereignty in the XXI century and failed states**

Before assessing the Haitian case, it is essential to revisit the concepts analyzed in the chapter about the theoretical framework and explain how the study and the subsequent policies that pertain to sovereignty and states have evolved from the end of the Cold War to today. State failure and statehood emerged as a matter of attention since the collapse of the Soviet Union. International concern was further increased after the terrorist attacks on American soil conducted by Al-Qaeda. At the turn of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first century, the United States had solicited its position as the most powerful country in the world. Consequently, this hegemonic status was perceived - both within the US and internationally - as the only entity that could rule and arbitrate international relations. In other words, a sense of invulnerability developed among American institutions and scholars, perfectly demonstrated by Fukuyama's thesis on the end of history and the intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq. In this context, state failure became a relevant threat to the world order, and both deep and soft interventions were considered essential to maintain peace and security. There was no longer a major and imperial power to fight. Quite the opposite, there were frequently small or medium states that were facing the collapse of their political authority, causing the development of new concerns like the proliferation of armed or terrorist groups, humanitarian crisis, violence, and increasing refugees who aimed at reaching the wealthier part of the world.

Even if conflicts and civil war started before the end of the bipolar order<sup>78</sup>, Neil Robison has elucidated the two reasons why the Cold War order ensured an illusory perception of order and stability. First, the two competing powers did not want to bear the cost of conflicts in weak states that were not perceived as relevant factors for the ultimate goals. Second, the Soviet Union and the United States provided military and economic aid to these countries, stabilizing the internal regimes and maintaining order even if it was not ideal for the good of that country. A clear example of that is the Duvalier dictatorship in Haiti, discussed in the second chapter. This dynamic led to several consequences. Internal forces and institutions did not feel the pressure to pursue development and build strong institutions. Moreover, failure or collapse was rare because political representatives were receiving arms and money, which helped to maintain the control of the military supremacy and control of the economy<sup>79</sup>. The period that followed the end of this equilibrium coincided with the failure of several states like Rwanda and Sierra Leone, while others, like Indonesia and Zimbabwe, developed some traits of instability and weak control over the territory. During this time, the United Nations started to get involved in various types of missions, including overseeing cease-fires and encouraging peace agreements. These interventions, immediately after the end of the Cold War, were confined to their original aim, which was developing a peaceful environment in failing or weak contexts. As a result, managing disarmament, supervising elections, and providing frameworks for post-conflict reconstruction were broader missions but, at the same time, were confined to the objective of a peacekeeping intervention. The responses to these crises grew more complex in their objectives and resources, driven by four key developments: the emergence

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<sup>78</sup> Fearon and Laitin (2004)

<sup>79</sup> Robinson (2007, p.8)

of “the responsibility to protect” doctrine during the conflict in the Balkans; increasing awareness of the inefficiency of aid due to the lack of positive results in some developing countries during the Nineties; the Asian crisis of 1997-1998 which undermined the faith on globalization and emphasized the need to improve better governance and coordination between countries; the emerging determination by the United States to address the problem of state failure and zones of anarchy, perceived as the main cause of the terrorist attacks on September 11 <sup>80</sup>. In this context, political and economic measures were implemented in fragile states, mostly with insufficient results. The interventions by the dominant superpower in the world, the United States and the UN, were mostly aimed at pursuing democratic state-building and implementing neoliberal economic reforms. Notwithstanding scarce results, a determined paradigm shift among intervening actors did not occur during these last years, especially because of the increasing attention by the most powerful powers on new issues like COVID-19 and the emergence of new rivalries between major powers. The development of democratic governance was perceived as the solution to instability, violation of human rights, and lack of basic needs for the population. Therefore, international bodies sought to expand democratic features such as elections, not recognizing that what these countries needed was to strengthen the capabilities of local institutions to maintain power. As Chandler observes, “Democracy and political autonomy are then seen to be the end goal, rather than crucial aspects of the process of state-building itself ” <sup>81</sup>. Moreover, the deficiency of political measures was exacerbated by economic policies followed by the IMF and the World Bank, which caused the reduction of state presence and authority on internal matters, encouraging privatization and financial liberalization. Put differently, the problem with failed states is not, as

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<sup>80</sup> Wesley (2008)

<sup>81</sup> Chandler (2007, p. 71)

generally believed, the too-large presence of the state in a specific country, but rather the too limited of it and the lack of capability to develop a stable order.

As illustrated in the first chapter, a sovereign state is the only contemporary authority that can create a peaceful community inside a territory and develop economic, social, and political conditions that guarantee the well-being of people. Security and order constitute two essential characteristics that a state should pursue to promote stability, inclusion, and accountability in any given population. No alternative mechanism or vehicle is currently able to ensure these features. Even international organizations that, in various ways, interfere in the domestic policies of specific countries are not able to intervene for an indefinite period and should refrain from doing so. The final objective must always be the development of sovereign institutions capable of providing the basic needs of the society which they are responsible for. Contrary to that opinion, in the 1990s, several authors argued that it was wrong to apply the Western framework about the nation-state to countries prone to failure, characterized by weak institutions, or experiencing the legacies of colonialism. Focusing mainly on African countries, they argued that the European model is not compatible with the characteristics of these countries due to geographical, political, and social features that differ from our conceptualization<sup>82</sup>. However, their view lacks an alternative as efficient and feasible as the nation-state. What is the other political authority up to the task of maintaining internal and external security and order? At present, it does not exist. As a result, the international community should not focus on the alternatives to the current system,

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<sup>82</sup> See for example Jeffrey Herbst, “Responding to State Failure in Africa” where the author suggests to move away from the current response to state failure and on the claim to maintain the same units

especially in contexts where anarchy and suffering are daily constants, but try to identify the adequate way to reestablish public institutions. The nation-state will be effective only when it possesses the necessary sovereignty. As already cited, Krasner explains the conventional idea of sovereignty according to three features: international legal sovereignty, Westphalian sovereignty, and domestic sovereignty. Here, the core issue of a failed state is guaranteeing domestic sovereignty, which pertains to the ability of internal authorities and institutions to control activities inside the state's border. The point from where every consideration about failed states should depart must not be the first two features of sovereignty. These entities are still internationally recognized despite their weak status, often possess Westphalian sovereignty, and in some cases, like Haiti, they are protected from external invasion by a major power<sup>83</sup>. What they are missing is the control over internal affairs. Using Robert Jackson's words, they are lacking of *positive sovereignty*.

To conclude this section, I want to remind you that every analysis of the current conditions of failed states should remember the pioneering work of Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*. The American author underlined the centrality of political order in a political community. Without a government that owns power and authority, a community will fall into chaos and the Hobbesian state of nature. Therefore, the central political problem is not what type of political organization is built for these entities - whether democracy or another regime - but how to create institutions equipped with the strength and capability to act<sup>84</sup>. Surely, human rights violations, the proliferation of terroristic or armed groups, the absence of a proper education system, or the lack of basic goods are all worrying features of a political community.

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<sup>83</sup> Krasner (2004)

<sup>84</sup> Battegazzorre (2012, p. IX)

However, what is most worrying is the absence of a sovereign authority with effective and legitimate power. Huntington, with his constant precision and accuracy, states:

The function of government is to govern. A weak government, a government which lacks authority, fails to perform its function and is immoral in the same sense in which a corrupt judge, a cowardly soldier, or an ignorant teacher is immoral <sup>85</sup>.

Therefore, it is with these premises in mind that the Haitian failed states should be evaluated.

### **3.2 Haiti's sovereignty crisis**

The following paragraph is pivotal to understanding the suffering of Haitian people today. It will help to recognize that the root cause of widespread human rights violations, scarcity of food, and killings is the lack of sovereignty. State sovereignty, as underlined before, is the only viable mechanism capable of providing what the Haitian people need and steering this country to a decent and more peaceful future. It is from this point that this paragraph will depart. It will be divided into three themes. First, I recall some parts of the historical chapter evidencing how imperial powers have constantly interfered with and dominated Haitian internal affairs since independence, focusing particularly on the last decades. After that, I will answer the question of who owns sovereignty in contemporary Haiti. The last part will demonstrate why the international community has failed to achieve relevant signs of progress within this context.

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<sup>85</sup> Huntington (1965, p. 28)

**Table 1:** Formal foreign interventions in Haiti.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Circumstance</b>	<b>Intervening actor(s)/Organization</b>
1791 - 1804	Wars of independence	Spain, France, UK, US
1825	Charles X order	France (not use military force but threatened to do so if the Haitian government did not agree to the terms of the order)
1865	Salnave vs. Geffrard	UK
1902	Alexis vs. Firmin	US, UK, Germany
1915-1934	US occupation	US
1993 - 1996	UNMIH (United Nations Mission in Haiti)	UN
1993	MICIVIH (International Civilian Mission in Haiti)	UN and OAS
1994	Operation Uphold Democracy	US, UN
1996 - 1997	UNSMIH (United Nations Support Mission in Haiti)	UN
1997	UNTMIH (United Nations Transition Mission in Haiti)	UN
1997-2000	MIPONUH (United Nations Civilian Police Mission in Haiti)	UN
2004 - 2017	MINUSTAH (UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti)	UN (military intervention led by Brazil)
2010	Post-earthquake intervention	International community (led by the UN, US and NGOs)
2017-2019	MINUJUSTH (United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti)	UN
2023	MSS (Multinational Security Support mission)	Kenyan-led Multinational Force, supported by the UN

*Source:* Adapted from Gros (2012, p. 92) with additional own data.

It is not an exaggeration to affirm that Haiti has never experienced complete autonomy from external powers. Since its primordial signs of secession and rebellion, its destiny has been linked to what Spain, France, and, in a more nuanced way, the United States wanted to influence this country, mainly according to their interests. Table 1 shows all the types of formal interventions by foreign powers or international organizations experienced on Haitian soil. Varying in nature, reasons, and actors, these interventions highlight the almost complete absence of internal stability.

I have already explained in the second chapter the impact of France's domination even after the decades that followed Haiti's independence from colonial power. The colonizers admitted their loss while recognizing that they could still have a role in Haitian matters, influencing trade and obtaining monetary compensation for giving them what they desired. Therefore, resources continued to be exploited, the Haitian elite was persuaded to accept French investments in their soil, and deforestation of large areas caused damages still visible today. Furthermore, I have also evidenced the attempt by the international community to silence the shocking event that happened on the island of Hispaniola. Their state of mind could not accept this revolutionary event, still obsessed with perpetuating colonial rule around the world. It was not admissible that a black group of people with scarce military capabilities had been capable of defeating the colonizer, better organized and protected by Western white supremacy. Apart from that, it should be added that during the period before the US invasion in the twentieth century, the main threat to Haitian security was coming from its internal territory. Haiti was obliged to defend its independence from external powers. Consequently, the country's ruler decided to form a land-based army instead of a navy that protected the coasts and dispensed favors serving corruption instead of

developing an efficient way of government. Sovereignty was further undermined by the indemnity of 150 francs that Haiti agreed to pay to France, which impeded investments from other public sectors like infrastructures, health, and education. In other words, as stated by Gros, “For much of the nineteenth century, it may be said that the sole objective of Haitian diplomacy was to keep Haiti from being occupied, which Haiti had paid for to prevent and eventually experienced anyway”<sup>86</sup>. With the new century, Haiti was absorbed under the US sphere of influence, and France’s interest eroded progressively, concentrating on other colonial territories. Letting aside the US intervention in 1915, which I have extensively talked about in the second chapter. I want to further underline how the external American role has influenced the upcoming events since its withdrawal in 1934. Certainly, the role of the United States was decisive in maintaining relative stability during the dictatorship of Duvalier’s family. According to historians, there is increasing evidence that in the 1957 elections, François Duvalier was the preferred candidate because he was incarnating the role of a middle-class man, and he received an education in the United States for some years<sup>87</sup>. Another factor that persisted during his presidency was his ferment of anti-communist sentiment. The period characterized by the Cold War saw a strenuous attempt by the two major superpowers to limit the fighting in peripheral areas through the support of autocratic regimes, only interested in receiving aid for themselves and the elite in power instead of developing some form of the welfare state. In this context, Duvalier took advantage of American influence, receiving technological, military, and economic aid that allowed him to maintain power. The numbers are outrageous. From 1957 to 1986, it is estimated that economic aid amounted to \$900 million; at the end of 1983, 40 percent of Haiti's government budget and

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<sup>86</sup> Gros (2012, p. 88)

<sup>87</sup> Courlander and Bastien (1966, p. 55)

60 percent of its development funds came from foreign sources <sup>88</sup>. Gros has illustrated how foreign aid has allowed this process of keeping stability and order, especially in a context harmed by perennial fights among the elite. First, loyalty from the oligarchy was maintained through the lack of need to put pressure on them through taxes. The missing fiscal responsibility then-existing is still a problem that oppresses the development of the country. Second, economic aid was a means through which to dispense favors or punish members of the same elite. In Haiti, the bourgeoisie, or what looked like it, was closely dependent on public funds due to the absence of private accumulation <sup>89</sup>. Despite the ups and downs in the relationship between Duvalier and the United States administrations, the support and aid by the latter continued through the former's mandate <sup>90</sup>. Foreign support is exemplified by the smooth transition from François's regime to his son, Jean-Claude, ensured by the intervention of US Ambassador Clinton Knox and the formation of US naval units. Moreover, worrying internal domestic conditions but mostly threats to US businesses and increasing flows of migrants pushed Americans to withdraw their support to Jean-Claude's regime, forcing him to leave the country. Haitian sovereignty violations have continued until the present day in different manners. In 1994, the UN Security Council approved a US-led intervention called "Operation Uphold Democracy" aimed at restoring Aristide's power. Subsequent UN missions took place in Haiti during the following years to assume a more active role in capacity-building and protecting free and fair elections. 2004 marked the beginning of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), approved by the Security Council under Resolution 1542 (2004). It has been the UN's mission with the broadest objective in the

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<sup>88</sup> Bellegarde-Smith (2013, p. 277)

<sup>89</sup> Gros (2012, p. 104-105)

<sup>90</sup> For example, the Kennedy, Johnson, and Carter administrations limited humanitarian aid to this regime while Nixon and Ford restored them during their years of government.

twenty-first century. Its mandate included building an efficient military force, restoring constitutional rule, and developing security and justice institutions. 6,700 were deployed, and the mission's overall budget easily outperformed Haiti's government's budget <sup>91</sup>. This is significant in understanding the minor role of Haiti in deciding those kinds of interventions.

Coming to our days, who are the main challengers to Haitian sovereignty and alter its development? My analysis of the current state of things in this territory leads me to assert three core elements that impede the growth of the state's institutions: dependence on external intervention by the international community; the large presence of NGOs who take care of providing basic needs; control of the territory by increasingly powerful gangs and forms of organized crime. Starting from foreign challengers, there is no doubt that their role in the development of Haiti can be judged as negative in most cases. The history of this country examined in the previous pages demonstrates the continuous deployment of external forces, whether directly on the island or indirectly through obligations and forms of persuasion, to address the recurring situations of anarchy and disorder that were also undermining the security of the intervening countries. In over 200 years since Haitian independence, this country never experienced an autonomous path to self-development, always forced to depend on others or necessitating external help. Depending on the specific case, external powers were reluctant or eager to intervene, whether they were resolving an issue that was influencing their internal matters or they would have obtained economic or geopolitical gains through interventions. Apart from that, downplaying the role of external forces in undermining Haitian sovereignty would be an enormous error.

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<sup>91</sup> Buss (2015) and Cockayne (2009)

The erosion of soil during the French colonization that prevented Haitians from developing the agricultural sector and the large support to the Duvalier regime by the US are just two examples among the several. Moreover, during a roundtable to discuss the occupation of Haiti by the US in 1915, four of the most prominent scholars of Haitian history examined the imposition of neoliberal policies by the IMF and the World Bank in the 1980s. These policies caused the necessity to become a big importer of foodstuffs, large flows of migrants to neighboring countries, the absence of development programs directed to invest in productive activities, and the sale of state assets <sup>92</sup>. The second challenge of Haitian sovereignty is constituted by the presence of NGOs in this territory, which has increased throughout the years so much that Haiti is also commonly recognized as the “Republic of NGOs.” The situation has even become worse after the tragic earthquake of 2010. Jean-Max Charles has identified two distinct periods where NGOs proliferated. The first occurred during the 1980s. Duvalier’s failure to engage the country in economic progress caused poverty and starvation in the worst cases. International concern grew exponentially, exacerbated also by the extensive media coverage of migrants’ deaths in the attempt to leave the country by sea. The second wave occurred in the 1990s and 2000s due to the gradual deterioration of institutional capacity. Some scholars have underlined this situation, calling the situation “the cacophony of aid” <sup>93</sup>. NGOs have come to be the recipients of aid provided by the international community, passing over functions that a state should perform. The last challenge is the presence of urban gang groups that constitute a powerful alternative to the role of the state. Gangs fill the gap in security provisions that a functioning state should accomplish and are viewed by Haitian citizens as the only tool through which to ensure security and self-defending. Gangs constitute

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<sup>92</sup> Bellegarde et al. (2016)

<sup>93</sup> Zanotti (2010) and Marcelin (2011)

non-state armed groups that have been used repeatedly during the history of this country. Paramilitary forces were central to the imposition of authoritarian rule by Duvalier. The dictator spent a huge part of his effort in both strengthening the public forces through a modernization process and building a private militia aimed at counterbalancing the power of the military<sup>94</sup>. After the fall of the regime, state institutions exploded, causing the proliferation of small criminal groups that heavily influenced the post-dictatorship period and became closely woven together with the political sphere. Aristide himself used armed groups to consolidate his power in the urban territory and silence the opposition<sup>95</sup>. Therefore, especially in the last thirty years, the relationship between the political sphere and criminal groups has constantly grown, coming to the contemporary situation where gang rivalries have determined the collapse of the country and millions of people suffering from the lack of basic services. In 2021, it was estimated that 167 gangs were contending territorial control, profits, and political influence, contending the sovereignty of the state to the public security forces and political actors<sup>96</sup>. Then, as César Niño and Camilo González claim, the Haitian political environment is experiencing a new form of sovereignty called *criminal sovereignty*. Here, domestic institutions are forced to accept the coercive involvement of criminal actors in exercising power since the latter own political and territorial dominance. However, one should not be surprised by this kind of environment where the only capable provider of security comes from criminal groups. Moritz Schubert interviewed a former social mobilization consultant for UN-Habitat recently. He told him, “When the state is not there, the armed group which controls the neighborhood can offer jobs, can distribute money, and can send kids to school, so it’s a bit like Pablo Escobar”<sup>97</sup>.

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<sup>94</sup> Snyder (2002)

<sup>95</sup> Schubert (2018, p. 37)

<sup>96</sup> Wyss 2021

<sup>97</sup> Schubert (2018, p. 44)

Presenting a viable solution to the Haitian context requires understanding the errors perpetuated by international organizations and countries through the measures they have implemented. I will make some order to the various mistakes already presented in the previous pages. As mentioned in the last paragraph, the neoliberal economic policies encouraged by the IMF, the World Bank, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) since the 1980s and 1990s have resulted in negative results. Between 1986 and 1988, the first neoliberal phase started when the three organizations mentioned before influenced the government to open the economy to global capital and remove barriers to the import of goods and services. This intervention caused devastating consequences harming the agricultural sector and incentivizing food dependency, especially from the US. The market competition between Haitian and externally produced food was simply unfair due to the lower price of the latter. Consequently, in this period, many peasants decided to sell their land located in rural areas and were forced to leave the country or move to urban areas despite the incapacity of the manufacturing sector to absorb the large number of people asking for jobs. The demographic change continued in the following two decades. Port-au-Prince was hosting 25% of the total Haitian population (corresponding to 2,643,000 people) when the 2010 earthquake occurred. Most people did not have formal employment, obtaining resources for living thanks to remittances, help from NGOs, and above all informal economy<sup>98</sup>. The various Haitian presidents depended on foreign funds and were constantly pressured to accept external help. The economic interventions applied since the 1990s that caused the complete erosion of state institutions characterizing the present-day were like the ones sponsored by the World Bank and the IMF and accepted by Préval in October 1996. The reforms featured lower import tariffs for

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<sup>98</sup> Jean (2023)

international companies, minor state intervention in public services, selling state-owned firms, and encouraging foreign investments through tax benefits <sup>99</sup>. This dismantling process of governmental institutions culminated in the collapse of the state at the time of the earthquake of January 2010 and the subsequent year when the Haitian state was at the complete mercy of the international community, unable to address the disaster <sup>100</sup>. Showing these inefficient results leads me to conclude that foreign aid has failed to reconstruct and develop Haiti. It happened quite the opposite. Haitian institutions have weakened, and their capacity to implement concrete measures is extremely low. In 2010, aid from bilateral and multilateral donors amounted to around 400% of the country's internal budget <sup>101</sup>. Since the earthquake, \$13 billion arrived in Haiti from the international community <sup>102</sup>. With a central state not able to utilize these funds properly, a huge part of them has gone into the hands of NGOs, which are functioning as a parallel state. Today, a large part of Haitian sovereignty lies in NGOs for three reasons:

1. The international community prefers to fund NGOs directly rather than passing through a corrupt and inefficient central government.
2. The large amount of money that they receive is allocated to the provision of public services. Healthcare, education, water provision, infrastructural sector, and reaching the people in remote areas are all sectors that should concern the national government but are accomplished by these external groups. Most of the time, this happens with the approval of the elite, who are relieved from the burden.
3. The most important point is the amount of influence that NGOs have over the government. The scope, modality, duration, and location of the projects are decided by them. Furthermore, the potential

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<sup>99</sup> Pierre-Etienne (1997, p. 86)

<sup>100</sup> Fatton (2014, p. 73)

<sup>101</sup> Buss (2015)

<sup>102</sup> Maria Abi-Habib (2024)

withdrawal of donors (far from being rare) from the projects is determined by the results that the same NGOs present to them <sup>103</sup>.

The neoliberal policies and the cumbersome presence of the NGOs on the island lead me to state what is the main problem that foreign interventions have not resolved. In various ways, the several missions by international organizations and foreign countries, especially in the last thirty years, aimed at addressing or at least limiting the status of anarchy and corruptive power characterizing the history of Haiti. However, national institutions have continued to be extremely dependent on external intervention or donors for assistance. Policymakers should have acknowledged that they were not modifying the structural issues but rather only providing temporary remedies. Disorder and extractive elite have always spread in the country as soon as international involvement is lacking or has been weaker. Then, it is not surprising that the Haitian environment has been transformed into a fertile ground for the fighting between organized crime and the collapsed state. MINUSTAH constitutes a well-known example of peace operations not reaching the expected results. The United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti started in 2004 after political instability and violence ramped up again on the island. The explicit goal of the mission was to ensure that this mission would have the last one necessary. More precisely, the scope of the mandate was very large, including support for the political process and elections, operational support to the Haitian security forces, strengthening state institutions, and support for the rule of law reform and criminal justice system <sup>104</sup>. 13 years later, in April 2017, the Security Council decided to end the mission in October of the same year, managing the transition through the provision of a smaller follow-up peacemaking mission. The anarchic state that Haiti is experiencing today is far from what was the initial objective of MINUSTAH. Moreover, if

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<sup>103</sup> Jean (2023)

<sup>104</sup> Le Chevallier (2011, p. 117)

you ask the Haitian people what the legacy of this UN mission is, they will name the cholera epidemic (caused by Nepalese troops) and the sexual abuses of women and children by peacekeepers who then left the country<sup>105</sup>. Apart from this tragic reality, this demonstrates the unsuccessful results of this experience. The Haitian state does still not retain the legitimate monopoly over the use of violence in its territory. MINUSTAH, as in the previous peace operations, failed to create a peace agreement among the various sectors of society. The state, territory, and commercial flows are still soil for the competition among public and private groups that gives rise to ruptures and coups. The Center for Global Development has pinpointed the sore issue of Haiti's demand for stability:

The problem of governance in Haiti is not only of a weak state. It is also of a political field occupied by excessive and disordered forms of governance, with multiple actors and intervention procedures that “confuse the locus of sovereignty.” This is an important observation that is largely overseen by donors operating in the country when they bypass the state to implement projects. The implication is a deep sense of statelessness on the part of the population and the emergence of alternative sources of power, like gangs, that further erode security and stability <sup>106</sup>.

Furthermore, peace operations in Haiti underestimate what has been one of the major lessons by Huntington. It is not important the type of regime a country represents but the amount of power and institutionalization the central state has. Therefore, promoting democratic values and traits in the Haitian context will simply not be effective in a country where large amounts of territories are run by criminal gangs. How should we expect that fair and democratic elections will be held without the institutional capacity to exercise authority on its own territory? To be clear, the electoral and democratic processes are important, but “political reconciliation and the development of a shared sense of political

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<sup>105</sup> Kolbe (2020)

<sup>106</sup> Echebarria (2023)

community should precede them”<sup>107</sup>. Put differently, policymakers and scholars should never project the features of most developed world countries as the main goals of a UN operation. Most of the time, reaching that point requires decades of stability and negotiations in the internal political sphere of a country. Failed states like Haiti require processes of state formation that eventually will lead to that. The next section will try to define what I think is the right way to direct the country to the right path.

### **3.3 Addressing state failure in Haiti**

It would be incomplete to conclude my examination of the Haitian context without providing a viable long-term solution to the issues already discussed in the previous pages. Analyzing Haiti as a failed state and underlying its lack of sovereignty should lead to a viable solution. I recognize that this is an objective that would require new separate research, given the complexity of the state-building topic. However, throughout the process of writing this thesis, I was asking myself: despite the various failures provoked both by the international community and Haitian institutions over the past centuries, should we leave Haiti to its own destiny? The answer has been always no. Finishing my thesis without putting into a concrete framework my knowledge of the Haitian case would make me unsatisfied with the contribution of my work. Therefore, this last paragraph will center on providing a modest framework for a potential solution or just an improved condition for this troubled country.

The discussion of the proposed solution should start by recalling what statehood means. Moving from the Weberian wisdom, statehood has two

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<sup>107</sup> Chandler (2007, p. 75)

essential categories of attributes: the first pertains to the administrative capacity to provide public services like health, education, and security and obtain the resources necessary to provide them; the second is the legitimacy dimension that is linked with the recognition by the citizens of state authority. These two broad attributes are exercised over time in a defined space or territory and scope of activities <sup>108</sup>. There is no doubt, as repeatedly demonstrated that Haiti is situated at the lower position within an ideal continuum of statehood when compared to other countries of the international community. Moreover, in my work, I have highlighted another dimension of statehood that is key to understanding the Haitian case: the lack of sovereignty. It has been underscored that Haiti has constantly been weakened during its history by the inability to identify the interests helpful to the future of the country and pursue them throughout the various tasks of institutions like economic policies. This does not mean that Haiti should close its borders and isolate itself from the external world. Sovereignty is a relational concept, and consequently, it is a matter of degree. In the contemporary international environment, even the most powerful and prosperous countries in the world have recognized the necessity to cede part of their sovereignty for their convenience. The issue lies in the fact that Haiti has practically always experienced foreign interventions in its internal affairs since its independence, lacking the capacity to administer its territory and affairs.

Finding a solution for Haiti means entering the discussion about statehood. Recently, it emerged as a fundamental topic among international agencies and states, with the formers assuming an increasingly direct role in trying to stabilize and provide better conditions to fragile contexts. After the end of the Cold War, the United Nations assumed a protagonist role in the

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<sup>108</sup> Baranyi (2012)

attempt to promote peace agreements and oversaw ceasefires in a wide range of countries like Nicaragua or Angola. Progressively, its role gradually expanded through wider interventions like monitoring elections or developing functioning security forces. A change of paradigm occurred in the 2000s when humanitarian crises, terrorist attacks, and the frequent insufficiency of aid increased the urgency of intervention. Furthermore, the concept of nation-building, prominent during the decolonization process, has been replaced by the term state-building, narrower in its objectives. The focus of this approach is strictly on state institutions and their subcategories, like bureaucracy. Here, the goal is to develop a functioning and efficient system that will be pivotal in determining a positive impact on the economy, society, and politics <sup>109</sup>. It is a narrower and more technical approach to addressing institutional decay where the international community accepts exceptions to the non-intervention and sovereignty of the Westphalian paradigm. This exception is a core feature of the new doctrine about a “responsibility to protect” that emerged following a series of UN reports during these years. According to this argument, states are responsible for what occurs inside their borders and for protecting their population. If these duties are not fulfilled, it is the responsibility of international bodies to become decisive actors in these contexts, applying their “responsibility to protect” from these abuses <sup>110</sup>. Additionally, the discussion about state building and the approach toward state fragility evolved from a focus on state capacity and the debate around the regime type, particularly on the lack of democracy, to the role of political authority and the importance of its legitimacy <sup>111</sup>. Despite these developments, an examination of the measures implemented by international agencies and local institutions in Haiti reveals a minimal

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<sup>109</sup> Wesley (2008)

<sup>110</sup> Jacob (2014, p. 64)

<sup>111</sup> See for example Zaum (2007) and OECD (2011)

change over the past three decades. NGOs still have a prominent role in the country, foreign investments lack a medium or long-term view, and a provisional local government has been appointed to build a new project for the country. These types of solutions have never led to positive results, as the contemporary chaos underscores. The international community continues to emphasize the role of democratic processes, for example, deploying interventions to safeguard free and fair elections. However, as Chandler notes, “This privileging of *governance* over ‘government’ is based on the assumption that the political process is a product of state policies rather than constitutive of them. In terms of state-building, democracy and political autonomy are then seen to be the end goal, rather than crucial aspects of the process of state-building itself”<sup>112</sup>. The democratic process should only be conceived as an intermediary step towards development, never the primary objective. After all, how can we expect the proliferation of democratic features without an agreement on mechanisms and rules between existing political forces that exercise authority inside the borders of the country? Therefore, two guiding issues emerge from my analysis. The first issue has also been offered by Krasner: weak, collapsed, and dysfunctional states that lack administrative capacity and consequently are unable to maintain internal security should not be left on their own<sup>113</sup>. Second, before any discussion about the regime type and way of governance, an internal process of reconciliation among the various areas of authority in Haitian society should be the priority to develop a lasting political solution. This issue is closely related to the problem with the political elite. They perceive the political arena as a zero-sum game, where compromise and mutual recognition are absent, and each party is either a winner or a loser. Consensus on the rules of the political process is lacking, and rivalries and mistrust determine the behaviors. As

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<sup>112</sup> Chandler (2007, p. 71)

<sup>113</sup> Krasner (2004)

this is not enough, the Haitian elite are essentially focused on maintaining their positions in society, continuing to exploit resources from the population and transferring them to other places. It seems like the oligarchy and population are two completely different sections of Haitian society in which the former is disconnected from the reality of their nation, and no communication and attempt of comprehension exists <sup>114</sup>.

Now, given the complexity and peculiarity of Haiti, a soft intervention by the international community is not adequate to the context and will not be able to address the situation. The most recent updates on the situation characterizing the island depict an environment where a UN security mission authorized to fight the criminal gangs that control parts of the island is unable to center the objective. Kenyan police, which leads the mission as the most prominent force, do not have the necessary tools to move and obtain total control of the territory. At the same time, the level of involvement by the United States is still insufficient to determine some results <sup>115</sup>. Then, it is obvious that there is a huge distance between the commitment of external powers and international bodies and what Haiti needs, which is a profound reform of institutions and state apparatus.

Demonstrating why a limited or moderate mission will not be enough in Haiti helps me claim that the favorable tool should be the International Transitional Administration (ITA). It refers to the assumption of governmental functions over a territory or a state by one or more international organizations, often mandated by the UN. To be clearer, Daniel Jacob has highlighted three main features of ITAs:

4. Foreign military forces are deployed aiming to control another state's territory.

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<sup>114</sup> Buss (2015)

<sup>115</sup> Reuters (2004)

5. The implementation of binding decisions and the ultimate source of authority are given to the same foreign power, which exercises a monopoly on the legitimate use of force.
6. Their application has a limited duration, and the ultimate objective is to strengthen local institutions to be efficient after the withdrawal of foreign forces. In some cases, ITAs' goal is to resolve disputes among political parties and try to implement those decisions in contexts where previous fights were an obstacle to strong institutions <sup>116</sup>.

It is important to note that these interventions are the most intrusive among the various types of employment by international agencies. Full sovereignty of the country would be paused for a certain period. For example, while aid, humanitarian help from NGOs, or foreign investments are still considered as transfer of sovereignty, they are limited in measures and scope. In these cases, local institutions are still the ultimate source of power: executive, legislative, and judicial functions are still in their hands. On the contrary, ITAs replace central government, and functions that usually pertain to the Westphalian state are temporarily exercised by a new administration. The amount of responsibility that international organizations hold in these involvements is even broader if we take into consideration their role in state-building or reconstructing authority. ITAs acquire the authority and a formal legal mandate, usually through resolutions approved by the UN Security Council. The degrees of authority and broadness of intervention vary depending on the mission. The most recent examples are the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) from 1999-2002; the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja, and West Sirmium (UNTAES) in Croatia which was responsible for rebuilding sub-state level institutions; the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)

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<sup>116</sup> Jacob (2014, p.4)

from 1999 which had the important goal to strengthen state-society relationships and institutions; the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) from 1992-93, characterized by a limited control over some government departments to supervise free and fair elections. As evidenced here, ITAs do not possess a unique way of acting even though most of them had explicitly state-building mandates and the task of managing the transition to local powers. It depends on the degree of necessity and the nature of the crisis. Peace negotiations and, eventually, agreement could precede the establishment of an ITAs. The Balkan case is emblematic of that. The Dayton Peace Agreement, set up after the end of the Bosnian War in 1995, included the authorization to two ITAs, in Croatia through the UNTAES and in Bosnia through the Office of the High Representative.

A few more words should have been added on ITAs. First, I want to reaffirm that these interventions are limited in time and scope. Few missions of these types have lasted over a decade, especially due to the willingness of foreign powers who may want to withdraw their resources after security concerns disappear. On the other hand, they are limited in scope because the objective is the transition of power from foreign sources to local ownership. Therefore, the objective should be circumscribed to the formation of state structures that will be able to manage and adapt to the political process after the withdrawal of foreign troops. This type of involvement by external agencies should not become a long-lasting feature of the Haitian environment, and every step forward must be intended as a step toward stability and progress for Haitians. An issue often encountered by ITAs in their previous experiences is exactly the relationship with the domestic authorities. While it is unavoidable a certain degree of imposition by the external power that is intervening, scholars recognize that operational legitimacy and effectiveness come from involving local

actors in the state-building process <sup>117</sup>. However, this acknowledgment should not be perceived as self-determination: external troops are involved in the matters characterizing a specific territory precisely because of the inability of local authorities to resolve controversies among themselves. Therefore, international authorities should find a balance between involving local power in those processes that they will exercise progressively during the transition and forcing them to adopt those strategies helpful for a brighter future. Put differently, “local ownership must be the end of a transitional administration, but it is not the means” <sup>118</sup>. Another point of discussion among scholars around ITAs is the accusation of being a new form of colonialism or imperialism <sup>119</sup>. I distance myself from this for various reasons. Let’s start with what can be extracted from the previous knowledge on the matter I provided. Even if several times imperialism has justified its role in creating a better world and civilizing indigenous societies, its objective was just to extract as many resources as possible for foreign powers’ convenience and expand national glory, as the Haitian case has shown. This purpose is extremely different from what ITAs aim to reach, which is creating a society where conflict and rivalries are managed inside state institutions. Furthermore, as the name suggests, involvements of this kind are transitional: external forces have a limited period during which to achieve their purpose. Even in contemporary interventions, external involvement is not moved only by ethical and moral concerns. National interests are still the main guiding principle in international relations. Nonetheless, what concerns contemporary powers are the bad externalities that failing states and territories without a ruler could generate. Terrorism, refugee flows, damage to international trade supplies, the spread of diseases, and

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<sup>117</sup> Von Billerbeck (2015)

<sup>118</sup> Chesterman (2005, p. 344)

<sup>119</sup> See for example Caplan (2007) and Bain (2003)

instability in the neighboring countries are just some of these externalities. Another accusation against ITAs is to violate the principles of sovereignty and deny the right of a country to determine its future. However, this matter underlines the hypocrisy in the Third World discourse. It is the international system they accuse that allows weak, failing, or collapsed states to still be part of the international community and enjoy subsequent privileges like protection against invasion from external powers. Furthermore, states like Haiti have for years taken advantage of economic aid to sustain their public infrastructures and military support to ensure a minimum capability of defending themselves. Sovereignty is undeniably compromised through ITAs, but it can also be violated in the absence of foreign troops in the territory of these countries. Self-determination would be difficult to pursue by the political community in those circumstances without running high risks. What matters, as multiple times highlighted, is not the mere recognition of independence or being part of the international community but the capability of local rulers to effectively exercise power<sup>120</sup>.

Despite ITA being the optimal option available for Haiti, its implementation is not without risks. Previous missions of this kind have not always been successful in reaching their objectives, and the Multinational Security Support Mission (MSS) does not seem to be the right intervention. James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin have identified four challenges that may arise when such operations are considered for collapsed states: recruitment, coordination, accountability, and exit strategy<sup>121</sup>. Recruitment is the most difficult obstacle to overcome among the four mentioned due to the growing unwillingness of major powers to intervene in these contexts during recent years. Among the major powers,

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<sup>120</sup> Clapham (1999)

<sup>121</sup> Fearon (2004)

there is no doubt on the fact that the United States should be the designated country to play a central role in addressing the Haitian problem. In recent times, the focus of US Administrations has mostly been on other regions like Eastern Europe due to the war in Ukraine or the Pacific due to the geopolitical confrontation with China. However, the United States still acts as the main foreign protagonist in Haiti. The MSS, authorized by the Security Council and mainly composed of Kenyan police forces, is largely funded by the United States, which conceived, organized, and managed it despite other nations' involvement. The US State Department has committed \$200 million to support the mission, and it is undeniable, observing the coming activities, that this country is the ultimate authority<sup>122</sup>. Being part of Central America, Haiti has always been part of the US' most prominent interests, and instability may only create inefficiencies in its interests. Refugees, drug trafficking, money laundering, participation in the arms trade, and negative influence on neighboring countries are just some risks that Haiti can pose to the US security concerns. On the other hand, third-world countries like Kenya often lack the necessary equipment, expertise, training, and advanced technology to conduct operations of this kind <sup>123</sup>. Consequently, Haiti needs a mission where the main contractor is a major power equipped with organizational and technical capabilities to make strong decisions and establish a chain of command. Until now, the MSS lacked transparency and features several ambiguities about the game plan, the delivery of financial resources, time frame, and lines of command. Doubts about this mission are linked to the following three issues of these operations. Coordination, accountability, and exit strategy indications are absent from the US program. These features are worrying, given the previous failures of UN missions in Haiti and the episodes of sexual abuse and cholera

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<sup>122</sup> Espérance (2024)

<sup>123</sup> Fearon (2004)

outbreaks that occurred. Who will assume the responsibility for this new mission? In May, President Joe Biden clarified that the United States was looking for a partner or partners that would lead the effort. “We concluded that for the United States to deploy forces in the hemisphere just raises all kinds of questions that can be easily misrepresented about what we’re trying to do,” he said <sup>124</sup>. This highlights the reluctance to send US troops to Haitian territory, at least for the moment, and the absence of any framework on how to build a peaceful political environment. Military troops will not be enough for a state close to total collapse. Criminal gangs are increasingly encouraged to continue the fighting due to the weakness of the international community and the compliance by the internal elite, which are part of them in most cases. Political decisions are needed to establish Haitian sovereignty, and a transitional administration provided with state-building objectives constitutes the minimum requirement for ensuring a prosperous future.

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<sup>124</sup> Biden (2024)

## Conclusion

Haiti has long been perceived as a unique nation. The international depiction of the country is predominately shaped by two paradigms. The first is the status of Haiti as the first black country, an event still seen as something both romantic and shocking, given the period in which it occurred. The second attitude towards Haiti refers to its status as “the poorest country in the world” and as a terrifying environment where Vodou is practiced, violence and corruption are spread, and the ruling class should not be trusted. It is not surprising, then, if the reaction of the international community that follows every crisis in this country is “Haiti again?”. However, as this research has highlighted, the perception of Haiti should not be confined to these features. Haiti has faced tremendous difficulties for decades where foreign imperialism aimed to isolate it or exploit its human and material resources, thereby suffocating any attempt to overcome critical situations. Haiti must also be remembered for the failures of international agencies that have frequently implemented ineffective policies and for the presence of an irresponsible oligarchy that has further compounded these difficulties. Put differently, while recognizing its uniqueness, Haitian people have faced the same challenges as any other nation in the globe. As Fatton Jr has evidenced, “to claim Haitian exceptionalism when it comes to intelligibility is to claim unintelligibility tout court”<sup>125</sup>.

This rejection of Haitian exceptionalism, far from advocating for a “one size fits all” approach, has been the underlying principle throughout the previous pages. This thesis has explored the complex theme of sovereignty in the context of state failure. I have argued that sovereignty should not

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<sup>125</sup> Fatton (2014, p.5)

only be intended as a legal or formal concept that allows every independent state to act in international relations. Today, more than ever before, sovereignty is a relational concept characterized by highs and lows in a continuum that goes from the most powerful countries in the world to the ones experiencing state collapse. My focus has been on the latter states, which also included Haiti. It is morally challenging to assert that the Caribbean country has ever experienced some form of full sovereignty. France in the first century since independence and the US from the nineteenth to the present deeply influenced Haitian institutions to implement policies close to their interests. On the other hand, internal strife, violence, and corruption - mostly perpetuated by the domestic elite - have played a decisive role in undermining sovereignty and prosperity. Therefore, the Haitian case has demonstrated that sovereignty is a key condition for the establishment of strong institutions, the maintenance of order within borders, the regulation of violence, and the provision of basic needs to the population. Being protected by international sovereignty norms and transnational organizations does not guarantee success in occupying the role of ultimate authority in a country. Haitian institutions are not endowed with the capability to represent the ultimate authority inside its borders. Therefore, criminal gangs, which currently control large sectors of the country, are just one of the main challengers to Haitian domestic sovereignty.

In light of this analysis, this thesis proposes a reconsideration of the traditional approach employed by international organizations in addressing state failure in Haiti. How can we expect that delivering financial aid to local institutions, authorizing NGOs to supply basic goods to the population, and deploying police forces provided by weak countries will improve the anarchic environment in Haiti? Stability and prosperity can only emerge from effective and legitimate institutions, not from the

long-term provision of authority to external groups. The proposed solution calls for the UN, with significant support from the US, to establish temporary ITAs, aiming to eradicate criminal gangs from Haitian territory, rebuild state institutions, and establish domestic sovereignty at the expense of other sources of authority. A clear mandate, timeline, and objective are essential to prevent the mistakes caused by the previous interventions. Furthermore, Haitian elite involvement should constitute a priority since these individuals – whether through formal participation in the government or behind-the-scenes influence – will profoundly influence the political landscape when foreign intervention is withdrawn. Here, I do not want to sound naïve: the interests of intervening states will inevitably impact the final framework. However, all stakeholders must keep in mind that the primary objective is the restoration of domestic sovereignty in Haiti. This is the only sustainable target through which Haitians can pursue a more prosperous future, and external powers can mitigate risks that they are already experiencing in their own territory, like drug and arms trafficking, huge migrant flows, and regional instability. In sum, this thesis's central recommendation is to treat sovereignty as a core theme in the state failure debate. Too many times, scholars are absorbed in presenting statistics on the myriad issues oppressing the country, overlooking that the ultimate provider of population needs is an efficient state.

My final thought is oriented to the Haitian people. The amount of suffering that these people have encountered during their history is not comprehensible from my privileged position. There has been no decade in which Haitians have looked to the future with optimism, expecting progress and better living conditions. Today, after long periods in which various forms of assistance to the *Pearl of Antilles*, the international community seems completely hopeless. However, there is nothing worse

than apathy and indifference. Getting used to the number of rapes, killings, and tortures occurring in Haiti and turning our gaze to other contexts is just immoral. The same events in another country would have shocked international audiences. My faith in a political solution gives me hope for the future of this cursed as well as inexplicably wealthy country.

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