

# haiti solidarity

The journal of Haiti Action Committee.

# A luta continua

# *Lit la ap vanse*

# TULOY ANG LABAN

# والكفاح مستمر

# La lucha continúa

# mapambano yanaendelea

# The struggle continues!

art by nia

# haiti solidarity

The journal of Haiti Action Committee.

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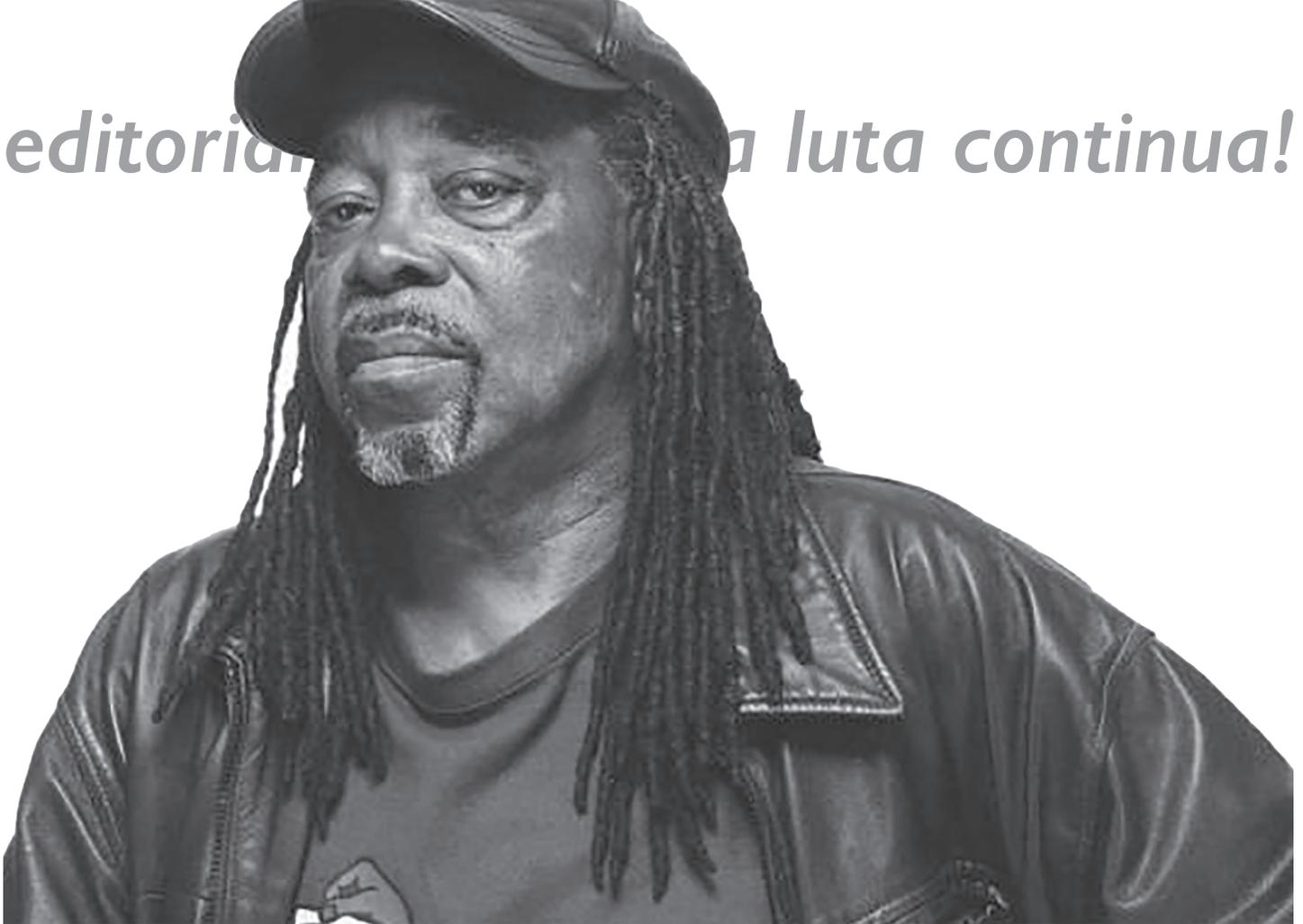
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The late Richard Brown, Black Panther and member of the San Francisco 8. Photo credit: Bryan Shih.

Welcome once again to *Haiti Solidarity*, the journal of the Haiti Action Committee. This is our tenth issue and our fifth anniversary of publication! We welcome your feedback, ideas, and suggestions.

We publish this issue in the wake of the horrific massacre at Lasalin, one of the most militant and organized communities fighting for democracy in Haiti. On November 13, 2018, Haitian police forces entered the community and—with the support of criminal elements within the area—went house to house, slaughtering and raping activists and community members, burning houses, and terrorizing the population. Reminiscent of the My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War, this atrocity was immediately covered up by both the Haitian government and the United Nations occupying forces, who blamed it on “gang warfare.” We stand in solidarity with those families who have lost loved ones in Lasalin and pledge to do our utmost to bring to light the facts of what took place there.

The attack on Lasalin was orchestrated by an illegitimate and corrupt Haitian government, selected in a fraudulent election, and doing the bidding of its sponsors, the United States Government and the United Nations. The coup of 2004—which overthrew the democratically elected government of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide—continues to this day. This same government recently stood with the Trump Administration and its clients in the Organization of American States (OAS), when it recognized the self-proclaimed coup government of Juan Gaido in Venezuela. What hypocrisy!

While the US, OAS, and European Union hailed the

ascension to power of Haiti’s current puppet president, Jovenel Moïse, in a stolen election, they turned around months later to denounce the legitimate government of Venezuela. Like the 2004 coup in Haiti or the coup in Honduras in 2009, the attempt to overthrow the Venezuelan government is yet another step in the US plan to reassert its control over the Americas. Twenty-first century Manifest Destiny, alive and well.

This issue also contains in-depth analysis of the central role played by market women in Haitian society—and how the Haitian elite is attempting to undermine their very existence. We also take a careful look at the Petrocaribe scandal, where Haitian government officials and their well-placed friends have stolen billions of dollars in aid from Venezuela aimed at improving social programs and relieving the economic plight of everyday Haitians. And we include an overview of the refugee crisis at the US border with Mexico, noting the underlying causes of that crisis.

It is now fifteen years since the coup of 2004 overthrew the democratically elected government of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. What is most remarkable about the fifteen years that have passed is the unwavering resistance of the Haitian population. We take inspiration from their struggle and their commitment.

As always, we honor those who have passed in the time since our last issue. In particular, we send our hearts out to the family and comrades of our dear brother, Richard Brown, who died on June 21, 2018. A Black Panther for life, a member of the San Francisco Eight—father, grandfather, brother, friend of Haiti.

We miss you, RB. ❁

# The Lasalin Massacre

## Is it an Accidental Event, a Fight Between Rival Gangs to Control an Area, or a Calculated and Planned Political Act?

By Vladimir Durace

*This article was written for HS by a new contributor, Vladimir Durace. Originally written in Haitian Kreyol, it was translated by Haiti Action Committee.*

Lasalin, a shantytown in the capital of Haiti, is crossed by two main thoroughfares, which make it a strategic area coveted by several economic and political groups for many reasons. On one side is Jean-Jacques Dessalines Boulevard, with Lasalin Boulevard on the other. Facing Lasalin are truck terminals and private ports that receive goods and merchandise from abroad. The center of the shantytown is situated directly across the terminals and ports. For one of the powerful ruling *social groups*—whose origin and methods of operations will be discussed later—Lasalin is considered to be a menace. This is a view that is generally shared in the oligarchy, which is determined at all costs to force out the residents of the community and take over the land to enlarge its economic empire. Edouard Baussan, the owner of Unibank,<sup>1</sup> now controls these terminals after buying out the other shareholders. For this group to achieve its dream, it must remove the people who live in the shantytown of Lasalin. The majority of the residents are active members of *Fanmi Lavalas Political Organization* who always publicly declare their great appreciation and loyalty to former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who implemented many projects in the area for the residents of Lasalin to live in dignity.

It is no secret that these economic groups are connected with wealthy businessmen in the international community, particularly in the US, who supported and helped them install PHTK (Haitian *Tèt Kale* Party) to power; they continue to provide support in order to defend their interests. It is easy to understand why major international media provide very little coverage of the political crimes—massacres committed against the Haitian people; it is similar in the case of the local Haitian media that they control. If it were not for the network of social media—Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp—the world would not know what had occurred in Haiti on November 13, 2018, when hundreds were killed, scores of houses were burned, young women raped, and children and elderly mutilated with machetes.

Let us take a little time to examine the origin of the disadvantaged class in Haiti.

The struggle of the popular masses—the black descendants of enslaved Africans—throughout the history of Haiti, to claim their rightful place in the nation, goes way back to the time of slavery. The war for physical, economic, political, and cultural independence had forced all social classes in the colony of *Saint Domingue* to unite their forces so that the struggle could be easier for them, as each social class had interests that differed from the others.

The massacre on November 13, 2018 is not the first to have taken place in the community of Lasalin. In 1957, in order for

General Antonio Thrasybule Kebreau<sup>2</sup> to stage elections to install dictator François Duvalier as president, he massacred many supporters of President Eustache Daniel Fignolé,<sup>3</sup> who lived in working class neighborhoods such as Lasalin, Bele, and Site Soley. They did not want to obey and accept the coup d'état that the Haitian Army had committed against President Fignolé and which sent him into exile. On September 11, 1988, the Haitian Army in the service of the Haitian oligarchy enabled paramilitary affiliates to massacre parishioners during a mass officiated by Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide at St. Jean Bosco Church in Lasalin.<sup>4</sup> And during the first coup d'état against President Aristide that started on September 29, 1991, the Haitian Army, together with paramilitary affiliates, massacred many activists in working class neighborhoods, particularly in Lasalin, over the course of several years. On February 29, 2004—the date of the second coup d'état against President Aristide—the working class neighborhoods were once again victims of the enemies of democracy. The Haitian people and the neighborhood of Lasalin were not spared; many activists were killed.

Can we consider the enslaved population as a social class in the colony of *St. Domingue*? Social classes have traditionally been defined as:

1. *Bourgeoisie* – The whites who possess a lot of money, wealth, plantations, and land.

2. *Middle class* – The small landowners, “mulattos,” and freedmen who do not possess a lot of money, wealth, plantations, or land, but who are living comfortably.
3. *Working class* – Among which are blacksmiths, shoemakers, tailors, teachers, shopkeepers, etc.
4. *Enslaved population* – In which class belongs the enslaved who owned no plantations or riches, those who were not workers because they were not paid for the work that they did. For these reasons we speak of *social group* instead of *social class*. In his book *Haiti-Haitii: Philosophical Reflections for Mental Decolonization*, Dr. Jean-Bertrand Aristide references “Article 22 of the Black Code” which explains how the enslaved were treated.<sup>5</sup>

Why do we speak of “physical” independence? The behavior and actions of a number of officials in Haitian society shows plainly that, to this day, they still have in their mind that they are dependent on the countries of the former colonizers. Moreover, they believe that any action they take has to be blessed by the colonizer. These officials act as governors who are at the beck and call of the metropole. This means that to this day, “mentally,” they think and act as slaves. This behavior is favorable for the Haitian oligarchy in the “mulatto class/group,” in organizing a system of corruption and repression that assassinates and massacres people—the working class—any time they take a stand to demand their fundamental rights, such as the right to food, education, health care, housing, and work.

If the struggle for physical independence forced a unity, for the moment, between the various social classes, *group* interests and personal interests led to division after the victorious War for Independence. Each group fought to maintain and defend their interests and to enlarge the economic empire of their particular group.

In all of these social groups, *only the enslaved group* spoke words such as “creating a nation,” “equitable distribution for all the people of the land,” and “live free and independent or die.” However, the other social groups saw it differently. Black people coming out of slavery were not considered human beings; they had no rights in the new nation. They were not part of the societal project. Alexandre Pétion was a leader from the mulatto group, which started behaving as the new masters. They built no schools or hospitals. In short, what was needed for a state apparatus to function in the service of the population was not in their interest. If the descendants of the enslaved learned to read, they would have a lot more clarity on what is happening in the world. *They would become a threat to the system*. For these reasons, the Black Code continued to be implemented under a different guise to maintain the people in misery.

The “mulattos” considered the colony as a place to conduct business and make money. They considered themselves French citizens or subjects. It was the black officers, the formerly enslaved in the indigenous army who, raising the problem of

exclusion, demanded inclusion for all, in particular, for the formerly enslaved. We can cite the following examples: Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Henri Christophe, François Capois—those who spoke for total, unconditional independence: economic independence, political, cultural, and physical independence.

It is this same group, the formerly enslaved, who throughout the history of Haiti have been fighting a continuous struggle to claim their rights in this brand-new nation, to live with honor and dignity and the right to work; the right to healthcare; the right to food, education, justice, and good housing. From this standpoint, Jean-Jacques Dessalines stated, “What about the blacks whose fathers are in Africa? There will be nothing for them?” This declaration is one of the causes for the killing of Jean-Jacques Dessalines. “*All for them, nothing for the masses of the people.*” From this time on, this class of assassins has always come together to crush the majority population—the formerly enslaved, the marginalized, those kept on the margins of society.

The ruling elite which not only controls the economy but also the local media, engages in lobbying foreign governments and international media, in order to tarnish the image of the struggle of the majority population. Local and international lobbyists have concocted a variety of names throughout the history of the majority population’s struggles to free themselves from unparalleled misery and from the label of the poorest and most corrupt nation. Lobbyists have labeled them with derogatory names: *kamoken, chime, bandi, dechouke, rat pa kaka, kidnape, ravet...* This is part and parcel of a psychological war to work on public opinion, so that when they commit a politically-motivated massacre, the rest of society will conclude that the police are killing bandits and criminals.

No nation can develop if it is not politically independent; it will find it impossible to choose the leadership that the people want to govern. When other people are choosing, it is not in the best interest of the population. The enslaved understood this. Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Christophe understood it, too. The disadvantaged group understands it, and this is the motivative force for the struggle for independence—political, cultural, *et cetera*—that is being carried out today. One of the better ways to wage this struggle is to *mentally decolonize* all the groups and classes of Haitian society who are still colonized.

In these modern times, there is a different approach to slavery, but the results remain the same. This is why it is referred to as modern-day slavery. Working class neighborhoods like Site Soley, Lasalin, Solino, Raboto, Sentelen, and Jalouzi are considered by colonialist countries as “warehouses for modern slaves.” If one reads the Black Code that states how to manage slaves in the colony of *St. Domingue*—if one reads the book by Dr. Jean-Bertrand Aristide, *Haiti-Haitii: Philosophical Reflections for Mental Decolonization*, it becomes understandable and easy to observe that while it is the same politics, only the methods have changed—they have been modernized. We see the silence of the big media and the international community as

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# We Are Seeing Ourselves Being Dragged Back Into a Time When Women Were Dehumanized

By Judith Mirkinson

*“They came into our house, attacked my husband, and told us they would kill him as they raped me in front of him and my children. Then they set fire to the house and we were just able to get out with nothing.”*

This quote, all too common these days, could have come from any number of places:

Syria? Congo? Iraq? Myanmar? But it happened in the city of Lasalin, Haiti, just a few months ago.

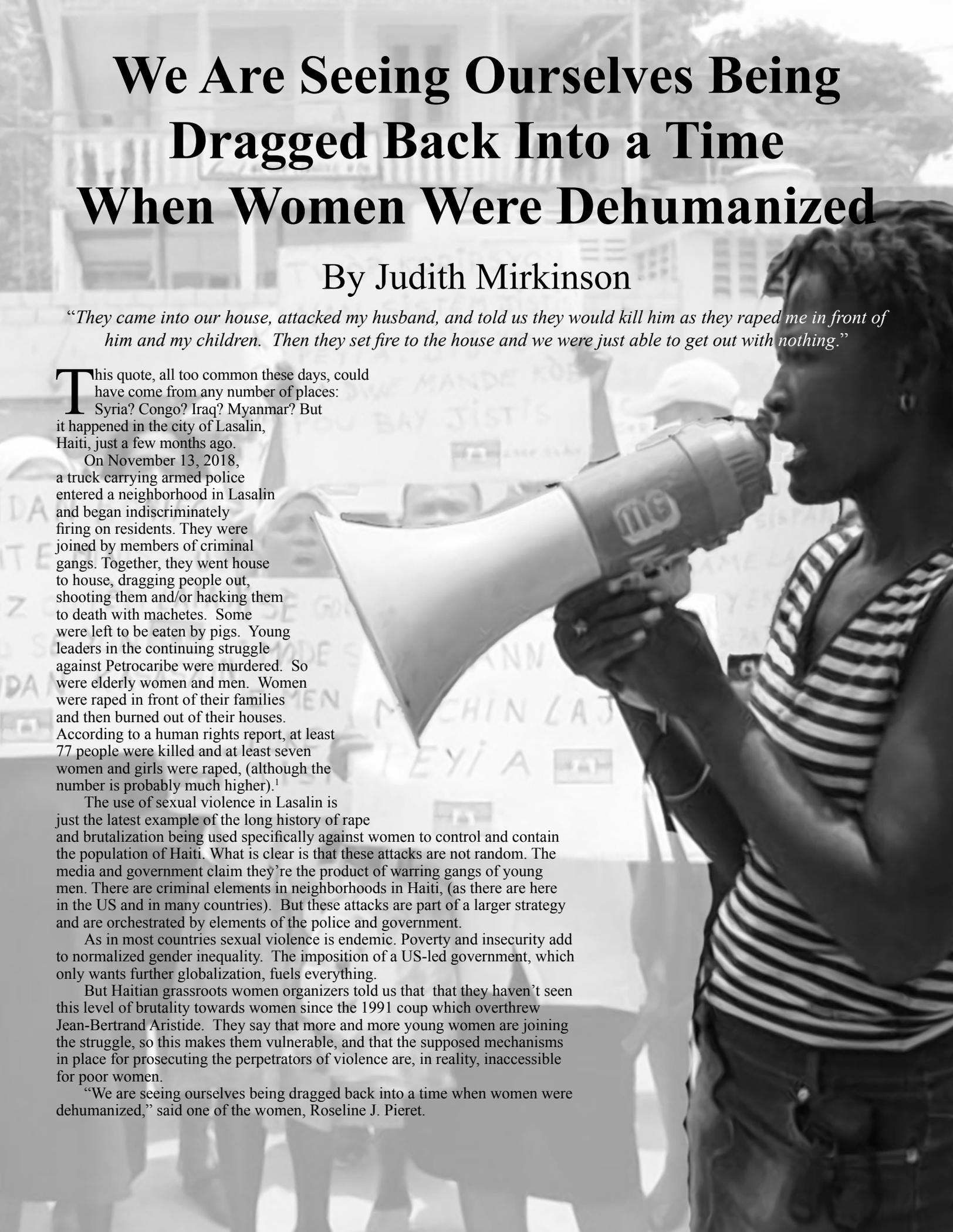
On November 13, 2018, a truck carrying armed police entered a neighborhood in Lasalin and began indiscriminately firing on residents. They were joined by members of criminal gangs. Together, they went house to house, dragging people out, shooting them and/or hacking them to death with machetes. Some were left to be eaten by pigs. Young leaders in the continuing struggle against Petrocaribe were murdered. So were elderly women and men. Women were raped in front of their families and then burned out of their houses. According to a human rights report, at least 77 people were killed and at least seven women and girls were raped, (although the number is probably much higher).<sup>1</sup>

The use of sexual violence in Lasalin is just the latest example of the long history of rape and brutalization being used specifically against women to control and contain the population of Haiti. What is clear is that these attacks are not random. The media and government claim they're the product of warring gangs of young men. There are criminal elements in neighborhoods in Haiti, (as there are here in the US and in many countries). But these attacks are part of a larger strategy and are orchestrated by elements of the police and government.

As in most countries sexual violence is endemic. Poverty and insecurity add to normalized gender inequality. The imposition of a US-led government, which only wants further globalization, fuels everything.

But Haitian grassroots women organizers told us that that they haven't seen this level of brutality towards women since the 1991 coup which overthrew Jean-Bertrand Aristide. They say that more and more young women are joining the struggle, so this makes them vulnerable, and that the supposed mechanisms in place for prosecuting the perpetrators of violence are, in reality, inaccessible for poor women.

“We are seeing ourselves being dragged back into a time when women were dehumanized,” said one of the women, Roseline J. Pieret.



She continued:

“Although you may have seen more men in the streets, women are in the forefront of all the organizing—therefore, if women are terrorized and traumatized, it hurts the whole movement. It is a combination of factors: weaponized gangs, extrajudicial paramilitaries, and elements of the police itself. Sometimes after a woman is brutalized, the families know they are on notice, so more and more families have to leave their area—their community of support. It is part of a plan for destabilization. Those in authority know it’s going on but no one is speaking out against it. We are poor women so nobody cares.”

From the time of colonization to the present, rape and violence against women have played a particular role in Haiti’s history. Sexual violence is a way of terrorizing the entire population by showing that no one has any power or control. It tells men that not only are they colonized but they cannot “protect” the women and children. And because rape is more often than not considered the women’s “shame,” it can isolate women and have consequences for generations to come. Rape is a form of dehumanization. It takes away one’s control over one’s body. The message is: “You are nothing—you belong to us.” Rape by the French slave owners and colonizers also created a society in which those with more “white” blood were privileged over others. Thus, class and race became integral to Haitian society and the Haitian state.

From the very beginning European patriarchal practices impacted the gendered relations of Haitian society. In 1794, during the revolutionary period, there was a system of semi-feudal relations already developing in the south of Haiti. Women as well as men worked as sharecroppers. When the women organized, demanding equal pay for equal work, (this demand is not only a current one), the French colonialists appealed to the men on the basis of their gender. Trying to use male solidarity, the French stated that the women were getting “above themselves.”<sup>22</sup>

The 1915-1934 US Military occupation brought further paternalism. US Marines treated Haitian women as commodities to be bought and sold. Haiti was “theirs for the taking.”

The imposition of the Duvalier regime in 1957 ushered in a level of violence and repression not seen for many decades. Opposition was crushed at every opportunity. The paramilitary Tontons Macoutes operated with full impunity under the direction of the national authority. A state of terror was imposed on the entire population.

Ironically, under Duvalier, there was equal treatment of women and men—in terms of repression and terror. In 1958, Yvonne Hakim-Rimpel, a feminist and an anti-Duvalierist journalist, was kidnapped, beaten, and raped. The next morning, she was found in the street naked and unconscious. Those who would speak out were put on notice! Women were targeted for both their opposition to the government and for their relationships with their husbands, brothers, and other family members. In other words, any organizing by women was to be crushed.

This was a time when Haiti was viewed by much of the outside world as a sexual playground where white men (and women) could have exotic sex with no consequence to them.<sup>3</sup> Entire books have been written about the gender component of

the Duvalier period but, suffice it to say, this view of Haitian society and Haiti by Americans continues to this day.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the level of violence, repression, and state-enforced subjugation—until 1979, for example, married women were legally considered minors, subject to their husbands—women began to organize and were an indispensable element in finally overthrowing the Duvalier regime in February 1986. In April of that year, more than 30,000 women marched to demand jobs, full political rights, and an end to prostitution and all gender discrimination.<sup>5</sup>

#### ELECTION OF JEAN-BERTRAND ARISTIDE AND THE FIRST COUP

Women from all classes continued to organize and played a pivotal role in the first democratic election in Haiti, when Jean-Bertrand Aristide and the *Lavalas* party came into power.

President Aristide valued the contributions of women. In many of his writings he makes a special point of singling them out and talking about the necessity of including women. It was a fundamental part of his program and analysis. But only seven months into his term, President Aristide was overthrown by a military coup: a reign of terror returned. Under the US-supported regime of General Raoul Cédras and his paramilitary force, FRAPH (ironically, standing for the Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti), the rule of constitutional law was virtually suspended. Entire neighborhoods were targeted as Aristide strongholds. It is estimated that between 4,000 and 7,000 people were killed. There were numerous political assassinations, disappearances, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and the torture of prisoners. There was also a clear gender component as women were beaten, mutilated (fingers and arms cut off), and raped. Peasant and working class women were attacked not only for their own activism or perceived loyalty to Aristide, but also due to the activities of their husbands and family members.<sup>6</sup>

This was all happening at the same time as news of rape camps was emerging from Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia. The world was also becoming aware of the vast system of sexual slavery that was instituted by the Japanese Imperial Army in WWII, involving hundreds of thousands of women euphemistically referred to as “comfort women” in Asia.

In 1993, the United Nations enshrined the Vienna Declaration of Human Rights. Article 38 states:

*The World Conference on Human Rights calls upon the General Assembly to adopt the draft declaration on violence against women and urges states to combat violence against women in accordance with its provisions. Violations of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict are violations of the fundamental principles of international human rights and humanitarian law. All violations of this kind, including in particular murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery, and forced pregnancy, require a particularly effective response.<sup>7</sup>*

Haitian activists in exile issued press releases detailing the rapes that were taking place and drawing parallels to what was happening elsewhere, but there was little response from the international community. Haitian women were either ignored or, worse, their reports were dismissed as fabrications.

In fact, the US State Department issued its own denial in

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# *Kote Lajan Petrokaribe A?* (Where is the Petrocaribe Money?)

by Nathan Acaau

*This article was written for HS by a new contributor, Nathan Acaau.*

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This simple question has captivated the Haitian population's imagination. All seem eager to share their rendition of the question, and with the repetitive nature of cyber-phenomenon, the issue is isolated, apparently shielded from the distractions of partisan politics. Yes, what has become of the billions that could have been used for the country's development? How were the funds used? Who spent all that money?

Songs, comic strips, video vignettes, articles, and the inevitable multiplication of "know-it-all-experts" who suddenly—on radio and TV programs—remember the existence of poor people. "These funds were earmarked for this; should have been used for that"—as if they really care about their poor neighbors. In reality, they are merely trying to get ahead of the phenomenon and reestablish themselves as the only voices which count in the country. Human rights experts, anti-corruption experts, democracy experts—all in a frenzy—trying to recapture a narrative, running away from them.

But can a complex social or political phenomenon be explained in simple terms? One of the best ways to do this: break it in small independent parts. So, we will start by taking a look at the Petrocaribe program, its goals and objectives.

The government of Venezuela, under the Chavez presidency, decided to help Caribbean nations with their energy needs. The objectives were simple: offer oil at a preferred and affordable price. The expected results were clear: control the negative impact of energy on these small islands' economy. Haiti joined the program in 2006, and since then has been granted loans to purchase gas in a very advantageous way.

Avoiding an in-depth presentation, we'll describe the transactions as follows: Venezuela offers a loan to facilitate the purchase of the gas. Part of the loan is repaid right away, while the balance can be structured as a long-term loan, at a one percent interest rate. One extra benefit stemmed from the actual climbing price of oil. Indeed, a cap of \$100 was put on the price of a barrel, with the balance of the cost left to the benefit and discretion of the receiving country. The Préval government decided to sell the gas to established Haitian distributors at market price, putting the balance in a special fund, which according to Préval collaborators, was to

subsequently repay the debt.

Towards the end of the Préval presidency, Port-au-Prince suffered the tragic earthquake of 2010. Venezuela, as part of its aid package, expunged Haiti's existing debt, thus gifting the millions accrued up to that point. During the Préval presidency, Haiti paid approximately 40 percent of the actual cost of the gas used. Furthermore, since the gas was sold at current market value, millions were accumulated in the government's account.

What impact did the program have on the Haitian government? It is needless to say that the Préval and Martelly governments had a more stable budget and depended less on international agencies that allocate illusionary but often never-disbursed funds. So all of a sudden, funds were available. However, we should note that Haiti's inclusion into this program came at a political cost to Préval and his collaborators, since "the internationals"<sup>1</sup> did not desire financial independence for the Haitian Government.

Though very shy in development projects, the Préval administration did plan some construction projects and used some of the money as part of a few disaster relief events. Of course, the 2010 earthquake should not be included among these disasters, since other funds controlled by the Interim Commission for Haiti's Reconstruction—much more than those generated by Petrocaribe—were offered by the populations of the world.

All infrastructure projects planned by either of the two governments that managed the funds—though rich in rhetoric—were short on outcome. Nonetheless, sums were disbursed. A long "unofficial" list is circulating, including friends of Préval and Martelly, suspected of having benefited from the looting of Haitian Government's coffers. The Préval administrations had a reputation for stimulating the financial sector and creating modern infrastructures inviting to foreign capital. In the process, both in 1997 and 2006, Préval's friends were given the lion's share of available resources, to establish banks and other financial instruments, thus establishing a solid grip on the Haitian economy.

Though empowered by Petrocaribe money, post-2006 Préval administrations ignored the labor-intensive projects touted in 1994 and 1997, consistently choosing privatization over popular job programs.

Under Martelly, the national budget grew steadily, spanning from \$300 million under Préval, to over a billion a few years later. Most of the projects focused on infrastructure development. Some more obscure “tech” related industries were promoted. Petrocaribe money looting was systematized, and the few social and economic programs seemed to have been used to create smoke screens to divert funds, leading to the Petrocaribe movement.

#### WHERE DID THE PETROCARIBE MOVEMENT COME FROM?

Anyone who followed the 2016 elections and listened to the different campaigns’ messages will tell you that *Fanmi Lavalas*, the party of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, focused on the very themes now central to the people’s demands, which highlighted the huge sums of money looted; stolen funds left as debt and burden to the nation; funds that should have been used to the benefit of the population; “health and education funds” that have been diverted and stolen—all facilitated by blatant lies designed to confuse and distort. This message resounded in the poor sectors of the population, but was ignored by the “collaborating” mainstream media. Yet this silencing of *Fanmi Lavalas*’ message in the media did not affect the people that count—the millions of poor people hopeful that one day honest people will take the reins of Haiti and implement a truly progressive agenda.

The spectacle of millions of *Lavalas* supporters—Port-au-Prince’s mainstream media reported millions—proudly marching through the streets of Port-au-Prince as the “Dignity Caravan,” up until the very last minutes of the campaign, must have left its mark. So it is not surprising that one more effort was made to coopt a message that has been hijacked before.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of cooptation efforts, the focus on corruption has continued to unite the population and to steadily enlarge the tent. All, even some who participated in the looting, are calling (or pretending to call) for justice. So, when it became obvious that the current PHTK president,<sup>3</sup> who participated in the looting, could not preside over Petrocaribe trials, people started to call for his resignation.

#### HOW DID THE GOVERNMENT REACT TO PETROCARIBE?

At first the new president, Jovenel Moïse, pretended to want to get to the bottom of the affair. Faced with billions disappeared and a current budgetary deficit, the government had no choice but to pretend to hear the cries of the people. However, this posture did not last long. When the attempt to use a change of Prime Minister did not appease, the government started to use force.

The steady spread of political activism centered around Petrocaribe prompted immediate, but not well thought

out governmental action. The continuous demonstrations culminated in huge coordinated demonstrations in all the big cities. So the government opted to establish a reign of terror. Along with the police and the army, paramilitary groups were mobilized. The objective was to inflict pain and terror. Militants were disappeared, foreign mercenaries were recruited, and along with disappearances, a steady diet of sniping started to literally blow demonstrators brains off, culminating in the sniping of a toddler holding his young mother. Both were shot in the head by a cowardly hiding sharp shooter.

An attempted return to the hideous days of totalitarianism is clearly looming in Haiti. What makes for a more distressing situation is the fact that the totalitarian regime has the support and the blessings of international institutions which in the past pretended to wish a law-abiding government in Haiti.

#### WHAT IS THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY DOING?

The UN put an end to their MINUSTAH project in Haiti, and started a new project, MINUJUSTH, supposedly focusing on justice. MINUSTAH was supposedly designed to facilitate the pacification of the Haitian environment. It was supposed to favor “diplomatic” solutions and avoid politicizing all aspects of life. Yet over its many years of existence, we observed a systematic deterioration of every aspect of life in the Haitian environment. Here, we are not merely talking of the gangs that terrorize the society. We are talking of an impossibility to have free and fair elections, thus the denying of the right a people have to choose their leaders. We are also talking of a restructuring of the economy. From attempted privatization of the mineral resources, to new customs laws, to the destruction of small merchants’ wealth through burning down popular markets.

These are only two examples of the restructuring that have happened in Haiti, under UN tutelage. But in reality, this plan was not merely implemented by the UN, but rather by the Core Group—which claimed to have the interests of Haitians at heart—including the OAS, CARICOM, the EU, and all the other globalists organizations intent on “opening Haiti for business.” Part of their plan is to prevent the inevitable next *Lavalas* government, by promoting globalist sycophants, well-versed in parroting the *Lavalas* agenda but determined to do the bidding of foreign interests bent on controlling Haiti.

#### THE BLURRING OF THE LINES

In order to obfuscate, the illusionists establish false equivalencies. So the current PHTK president, Jovenel Moïse, like his predecessor, will not tell you that he did

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# NGO CRIMES GO FAR BEYOND OXFAM

*This letter, initiated by Global Women's Strike, was originally published in The Guardian (UK) on February 13, 2018.*

In 2008 some of us had written to Barbara Stocking, then Oxfam chief executive, objecting to a report that it sponsored, "Rule of Rapists in Haiti," which labelled Haitians as rapists while hiding rapes by occupying UN forces. The year before, 114 soldiers had been sent home for raping women and girls, some as young as eleven. No one was prosecuted. We wrote: "NGOs like Oxfam have known about rapes by UN forces, as well as by aid and charity workers, for decades. It's the pressure of victims, women, and [children] in the most impoverished communities who had the courage to speak out that finally won...public acknowledgement." There was no reply.

The latest revelations of sexual abuse by major charities are but one facet of NGO corruption.\* The people of Haiti were the first to free themselves from slavery, but the colonial "masters" they defeated—France, Britain, and the US—have continued to plunder and exploit, including through imported NGOs. Haiti has more NGOs per square mile than any other country and it remains the poorest in the western hemisphere. Corruption begins and ends with neocolonial powers.

While celebrated for "doing good," NGO professionals do well for themselves. They move between NGOs, academia, and political appointments, enjoying a culture of impunity while they exercise power over the poorest. The Lancet described NGOs in Haiti as "polluted by unsavoury characteristics seen in many big corporations" and "obsessed with raising money."

Figures for earthquake relief range from \$10 billion to \$13.4 billion. Some of us who visited Haiti have seen little or no sign of that money. The public was outraged when they discovered the Red Cross intended to build a luxury hotel and conference center in Haiti with some unspent donations. Big NGOs are far from nongovernmental. For example, Oxfam receives millions from the UK government. USAID is another major funder. Unsurprisingly, NGO politics follow the cash.

In 2004 the US (backed by Canada and France) overthrew Haiti's democratically elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide. He headed a popular movement to chart an independent course that would move Haitians "from destitution to poverty." His government supported small farmers, raised the minimum wage (the lowest in the western hemisphere), built schools and hospitals. (UNIFA, his medical university will be celebrating the graduation of its first class of doctors in March.) The coup against him had NGO support. Charities thrive on the poor, not on ending poverty.

\* Booth, Robert. "Oxfam warned it could lose European funding over scandal." The Guardian (UK). February 12, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/12/haiti-demands-oxfam-identify-workers-who-used-prostitutes>

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**Margaret Prescod**

Women of Colour Global Women's Strike

**Lawrence Renee**

Payday Men's Network

**Sidney Ross-Risden**

Haiti Support Working Group

**Becky Titah**

All African Women's Group

**Sam Karl Weinstein**

Refusing to Kill Network

**Nichola Marcus**

Red Thread, Guyana

**Petrocaribe**  
(continued from page 9)

him, his government may have abused some of the funds, but he meant well. He will pretend that his “tough stand” is an effort to protect democracy. However, he will not mention that he consorted with gangs and campaigned with gang leaders. He will never admit that the looting of state wealth is allocated to gangs and mercenaries to protect democracy by shooting three-years-old baby girls in the head. He will not talk about his promises to foreign interests willing to risk their future, in order to compromise Haitian current and future well-being. He will not tell you that his idea of democracy is a systematic and continuous terrorizing of Haitians, like Martelly before him.

**WAR AGAINST THE POOR**

**W**e have a responsibility to expose the current Haitian reality for what it is. That the UN participated in this debacle is not our concern. We understand some of the useful aspects of the UN, however we know that in Haiti it succeeded in solidifying apartheid. Yes, this ugly plague of yesteryear South Africa has reemerged in Haiti. There are two political, economic, social, cultural Haitian realities, systematically reinforced by the UN. Consistent with this design, human rights organizations, diplomats, and the international media seem to only be moved by abuse towards certain classes. When massacres take place in Lasalin, they are ignored. When attempted dispossession take place in poor sectors of the population, it is ignored. When the fatal gassing—yes, poisonous gases have been used to repress demonstrations of poor students on university campuses—it is ignored. UN diplomats are mute. European diplomats are mute. CARICOM diplomats are mute. OAS diplomats are mute. It is as if these lives are not sacred. They obviously value only certain classes in Haiti. They have successfully implemented the divide and conquer desired.

**WHAT WILL THE FUTURE BRING?**

**T**he government is expanding its reign of terror, especially since former Western ambassadors are willing to lobby on their behalf. The army created by Martelly,<sup>4</sup> in collaboration with the UN-OAS coalition, trained and armed by Ecuador, is in full repression mode. What is even more appalling is the PHTK use of death squads to intensify the terror. A strange mixture of masked squadrons is roaming the streets, often in unregistered vehicles, shooting at random and disappearing democracy activists. This new terror is “enhanced” by a buying power that can afford the hiring of sniper mercenaries, masked of course, aiming at demonstrators’ heads.

When Papa Doc Duvalier established his reign of terror, his henchmen were also masked at first, until the terror and Western diplomats’ collaboration allowed the *Tonton Makout*<sup>5</sup> the luxury of dropping the mask. Today the terror is blamed on gangs. Some gang leaders are arrested, but the police chief says that official government officials come to free them and offer them safe passage to their “base,” to continue wreaking havoc. The “paid” media interviews “gang leaders” routinely. Judges, militants, and honest citizens protesting are openly intimidated—same as under Duvalier—by death squad night visits and automatic weapons assaults. Clearly, we can conclude that Jovenel and MINUJUSTH continued the Martelly-MINUSTAH job of Duvalier terror reinstatement.

Since the writing of this article, the situation in Haiti has continued to evolve. The violence has increased at all levels. No one is safe, and the police seem unable to protect the people, for the criminals are the ones in power. The lies of the campaign, the corruption, the denounced thieves, they are still there, better equipped than the police. So the police, rigged with illegally recruited members, are in limbo. Yet in spite of the increased repression, the Haitian people continue to make clear their rejection of the PHTK. They reject, along with PHTK, all national or international actors that have caused the deterioration of the Haitian environment. They know that the solution must be local. The popular movement is resisting, organizing, teaching, and learning—determined to create a Dignity Caravan with the word “inclusion” central to its motto. They know that to defeat apartheid, they must practice inclusion. And they know that Moïse’s PHTK will continue to deny justice to the masses of Haitians... unless the people have their say! ❖

**ENDNOTES**

1. A group of foreign representatives calling themselves the Core Group, with a firm grip on UN, OAS, CARICOM, and EU positions in Haiti.
2. Préval was elected twice under the pretense that he adhered to *Lavalas*’ agenda. Moïse Jean-Charles was propelled as a *Lavalas* vote-splitter, to facilitate the post fraudulent elections narrative in 2016. The *Fanmi Lavalas* campaign tour throughout the country was called “Dignity Caravan.” Is it any wonder that Moïse and PHTK initiated a social program labelled “Caravan” shortly after that? Even though they dropped the word dignity, PHTK could not pretend to be dignified. It is easy to see through the attempted cooptation.
3. PHTK—Haitian Tèt Kale Party.
4. Early in the Martelly administration, an accord that was never ratified by the legislature engaged the OAS to reestablish the army under the guise of “Border Security. So in Haiti it is not a wall, but a repressive army that kills Haitians.
5. Feared armed gangs that disappeared opposition members for the Duvalier dictatorship.

# The Honduran Refugees of US Foreign Policy

By Christopher Lopez

*This article was written for HS by a new contributor, Christopher Lopez, a member of School of the Americas Watch East Bay and Alianza Honduras NorCal.*

The refugees who arrived at the US-México border in November fled some of the most violent regions in the world—El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Televised testimonies and migrant accompaniment have reaffirmed the credibility of gang violence, police aggression, and chronic poverty as factors that force people to flee Central America.

However, what often goes overlooked is how US intervention and Honduran political authoritarianism created this humanitarian crisis. The historic wrong of US foreign policy is assuming that investing in Central American despotic armies and governments will ensure social development and preserve the rule of law.

Thousands of Hondurans march towards the US either unaware of how much irreparable damage US foreign policy has caused their country or conscious enough to understand their asylum-seeking as a reparation for the violence this regional approach continues to generate.

For over a century, the US has bought shares in Honduras and used them to influence their national politics, economic direction, and armed forces. Their stakes in the future of Honduras undermined their independence and converted it into a “banana republic”—a politically unstable country with an economy dependent upon the exportation of a limited source product. North American multinational corporations, with the backing of the US Government, were able to overthrow a government in 1910. In 1954, the CIA and the US Secretary of State conceived and launched their plan to overthrow Guatemalan democratically-elected President Jacobo Arbenz on Honduran soil. During the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan transformed Honduras into a military base of operations and experiments, converting Honduras into a safe haven and platform for Nicaraguan Contra invasions. Most recently, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton supported a military coup that overthrew democratically-elected president Manuel Zelaya in June 2009. This set the stage for the current autocratic, corrupt regime that for the past decade has overseen more than 250,000 Hondurans flee Honduras.

What is omitted from these very brief historical examples of US intervention in Honduras are the detailed violent repercussions that followed. Generations of Hondurans suffered oppressive labor conditions working for the United Fruit Company at the beginning of the twentieth century, a transnational company whose business continuity was prioritized over the local population’s wellbeing. After the 1954 banana workers general strike and the humble victory they temporarily won, union leaders and left-leaning workers were violently targeted, and labor rights organizing was criminalized for decades to come. Peter Kornbluh, in his book *Nicaragua: The Price of Intervention*, argued that in Honduras, “A steady increase in US Military aid reinforced the armed forces as the final arbiter of Honduras politics.” The millions of dollars the US poured into this military apparatus three decades ago contributed to the institutionalization of its impunity, considering their role in the recent coup d’état, their appalling human rights record, and active participation in the regional drug trade.

Contextualizing the history of intervention in Honduras improves our understanding of this migrant caravan as an exodus of refugees who are fleeing not misguided, but *reckless* policies of US imperialism. As a result, this modern banana republic represses working class, indigenous, and rural Hondurans who peacefully demand a dignified living wage, respect for their ancestral and communal land titles, and an end to governmental corruption.

Trump’s administration is rallying anti-immigrant sentiment to galvanize support behind its congressional demands regarding the border’s physical infrastructure and the refugees that want to seek asylum. He’s threatened to cut off foreign aid to these Central American governments, despite saying that the money “is probably just stolen” by corrupt leaders at a campaign rally in Georgia. This verbal claim does little justice to the actual web of corruption that’s prevented the Honduran state from achieving sustainable economic development, a functional democracy, and sound citizen security.

On the night of November 26th, 2017, Juan Orlando



**Honduran migrants trying to reach the US; at the border checkpoint between Honduras and Guatemala in October 2018.  
Photo credit: Jorge Cabrera/Reuters**

Hernández (JOH) of the Nationalist Party stole the presidential election in Honduras, and this electoral result was recognized by the US within a month. Despite its unconstitutionality and the corruption that engulfed Hernández's first administration, this fraudulent election was upheld because JOH does not challenge the manner in which the US dehumanizes his own transnational constituency. The last sentence of the US State Department's press statement states, "The government must ensure Honduran security services respect the rights of peaceful protestors, including by ensuring accountability of any violations of those rights." In reality, the Honduran government declared a ten-day curfew, suspended constitutional rights, arrested over 1,500 people, and murdered over 25 unarmed citizens, including a 19-year-old girl named Kimberly Fonseca. This is a recent example of the unfortunate, regional political tendencies that form the caravans we are seeing arrive at the border.

If this has not been enough to seriously call into question this bilateral relationship, millions of Honduras hope the recent arrest of the Honduran president's brother in Miami on charges of cocaine trafficking will provide an undeniable reason for this government to be held accountable.

I visited Tijuana in December 2018 and had the opportunity to talk to some Hondurans about their reasons for seeking asylum in the United States. I had asked them if they heard about Tony Hernández's arrest, and a Honduran man from El Progreso told me that many in the caravan received this very well. He admitted he still felt concerned,

however, as to what would be the outcome and what impact it would have on their current status.

Among the thousands of Hondurans detained in Tijuana, I came across some of the hundreds of Haitians who began immigrating to this border state in 2016. They are not only refugees of the 2010 earthquake but of US foreign policy as well, and many have been seeking asylum since the seventies and eighties. Like Honduras in the 1910s, US marines invaded Haiti in 1915 and created the national army that would commit crimes against humanity with impunity.

The foreign policy of this country under Ronald Reagan's presidency intentionally denied political refugee status to thousands of Haitians, while it eagerly upheld the Duvalier dictatorship. Blood thirsty military generals in Honduras and Haiti, trained and supported by the US, created a generation of refugees this country continues denying asylum to.

The US has historically treated Central America as an industrial business park and counterinsurgency platform that violently instigated the Central American civil wars. US manufactured arms and capital flow easily across the same southern border whose enforcement is becoming more discriminatory and militarized towards those displaced by US geopolitics. While there is reluctance to let migrants in and give them due process, hypocritically, the US ardently upholds government leaders and military officials internationally denounced for their corruption and human right violations. \*

# HAITI'S MARKET WOMEN

BY LESLIE MULLIN

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*“On a plain high in the mountains of Haiti, one day a week thousands of people still gather. This is the marketplace of my childhood...The sights and the smells and the noise and the color overwhelm you. Everyone comes. If you don't come you will miss everything...Goods are displayed in every direction: onions, leeks, corn, beans, yams, cabbage, cassava, and avocados, mangoes and every tropical fruit, chickens, pigs, goats and batteries, and tennis shoes, too. People trade goods and news. This is the center: social, political and economic life rolled together.”*

– Jean-Bertrand Aristide –

*Eyes of the Heart: Seeking a Path for the Poor in the Age of Globalization*

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In March 2017, a massive fire broke out in Haiti's Croix-des-Bossales market near the center of Port-au-Prince. Fierce flames ravaged a section of the market where hundreds of *ti machann* (small merchants) sold used clothing, with heavy losses to vendors—mostly women—who rely on commerce for day-to-day survival. Market fires have become a routine occurrence in Haiti,<sup>1</sup> drawing our attention to the significance of Haiti's market system—which is the main vehicle for commerce throughout the country—and to the essential role of women, who are its engine. Haiti's market system is at the heart of the nation. It is the backbone of the economy, as well as “the center: social, political and economic life rolled together.”<sup>2</sup> Most trade is in the hands of women. In trying to make a life for themselves, market women confront foreign policy-makers, a hostile government, and big business interests out to undermine the economic power represented by these resourceful women traders. The purposeful labor of market women offers material and symbolic resistance to powerful forces who aim to control Haiti's market economy.

## ROLE OF WOMEN IN HAITI'S MARKET SYSTEM

Haiti's open-air markets date back centuries to pre-revolutionary days when enslaved African people lived under the vicious French colonial slave system. They farmed small plantation plots to feed their families, and sold the surplus in town markets to earn a bit more to survive. After independence, as freed black men and women created new forms of family life and labor based on land cultivation, it was primarily women who took over the market system. These are the foremothers of today's market women, their skills passed down mother-to-daughter over generations.

Through this unique history, women have come to play a central role in the Haitian economy. But this legacy does not shield women from the struggle for hegemony over Haiti's most important institution, the market economy. Rather, it puts women at the center of an unrelenting fight by Haiti's tiny privileged elite to exclude the popular masses from power and to control the nation's resources and institutions.

Women occupy the lowest rungs of Haiti's social order, with the fewest liberties and the greatest socioeconomic responsibilities. Lack of access to education, poverty, exclusion from political

life, responsibility for the basic needs of children and elders, and exposure to gender-based violence are key markers of women's standing in Haitian society. For many, trade is the only way to make a living for themselves and their families. Over 80 percent of Haitian women engage in commerce.

## MARKET WOMEN UNDER ATTACK

There is a great deal of money to be had in Haiti's markets, and Haiti's elite merchant class has received free rein from the current contested government to go after this wealth. The conflict has given rise to increasing attacks on women traders and marketplaces for control over the commerce that most Haitians rely on, and to the exploitation or elimination of small merchants' trade.

The official label for this system, which represents 85 percent of Haitian trade, is the “informal economy.” Around the world, the informal sector makes up a \$16 trillion-a-year economy of which women are responsible for \$11 trillion. “The economic strength of this sector in Haiti is a surprise to most economists,” wrote President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in *Eyes of the Heart* (2000), his insightful book about globalization. “It has a total combined asset and property value estimated at \$4.71 billion, or more than 72 percent of the total assets and property of the 123 largest private enterprises in Haiti.”

Aligned against market women are the wealthy Haitian elite who represent only one percent of the population, yet control over half of the nation's wealth and are supported by Haiti's brutal army. Market women encounter daily aggression from agents of this privileged class for control of commercial space in order to reinforce the power of the ruling elite over Haiti's impoverished majority.

Class and gender oppression intersect in the unrestrained violence carried out against women vendors. A local mayor sends hired criminal elements to drive women off the street where they routinely sell. The mayor's henchmen brutally beat a pregnant woman and scatter her goods, depriving her of her meager income. They set fire to the women's makeshift market structures. Another time, police rough up a woman selling washing supplies in front of her home, confiscating her goods. Haitian police recently arrested scores of market women on charges of littering,

# RESIST GLOBAL FORCES



carting them off to Haiti's notorious jails where only a bribe can secure release. Incidents like these are routine under Haiti's anti-democratic occupation government.

## HAITI'S VAST MARKET SYSTEM

Haiti's market system covers some 300 rural and urban markets, reaching into every village and urban neighborhood and facilitating the flow of commodities and currency around the country. A few examples suggest the scope of this commerce. The Croix-des-Bossales market—once the largest slave market in the Americas—is an outlet for goods from eight of Haiti's nine geographic departments. Wholesalers, retailers, restaurant owners, supermarkets, and consumers purchase staples there. In rural Haiti, 700,000 small farms rely on women traders to package and convey their products from the countryside to urban markets.

Market enterprise ranges from the wholesale trade of imported goods like shoes and second-hand clothing, to the poorest vendor selling small quantities of rice and beans to an equally impoverished populace. Small vendors purchase goods from wholesale dealers to sell throughout the city: cosmetics, shoes, charcoal, washing supplies, coffee, chocolate, plantains, matches, cigarettes, corn, toothpaste. A mother living in the countryside sells homemade bread at the weekly market; nearby an aunt sells small cakes and cookies. Transactions occur in huge open-air markets filled with wooden stalls, concrete arcades stuffed with

merchandise, neighborhood streets and sidewalks, by the sides of roads and thoroughfares, from women's homes.

Women often depend on loans from moneylenders to purchase inventory at sky-high interest rates of anywhere from 30 to 60 percent. The harshest terms are reserved for the poorest women. Some loans have to be paid back the same day. These onerous practices are countered by the Haitian tradition of *sol*, a practice of mutual support whereby women contribute to a collective fund and take turns using the pooled capital. "Everyday, everyone gives 25 *gourdes* [32 cents], and one person takes the collection," explained Mrs. C. *Sols* are communal and democratic, and provide a way for grassroots Haitians to save and borrow money, and survive.

## HAITIAN WOMEN IN THE NEOLIBERAL WORLD ORDER

Most Haitians are not employed in salaried jobs. Work promoted by the global economy—tourism, the garment industry, and export agriculture—represents only 15 percent of the economy. The global economy governed by free trade and neoliberal policies relies on the exploitation of women because cheap labor is women's labor—Haitian women's wages are 32 percent lower than men's for work in disposable jobs that are concentrated in low-earning sectors.

While statistics are poor conveyors of embodied experience, a few facts offer a glimpse of what Haitian women grapple with to make a life for themselves and their children. With the greatest

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Colorful images of market women decorate Haitian art, but we should be under no illusions about the difficult, risky work that market women perform. Commerce coupled with responsibility for families is a very hard life. Women endure long days of physical labor in harsh environments, habitual debt, and the risk of lost or damaged inventory from theft, fire, and flood. The markets themselves are grim public spaces without lighting, sanitation, or clean water. They are also dangerous spaces for working women.

Poverty puts women at increased risk of sexual violence when out of necessity their work takes them into unsafe spaces.<sup>6</sup> Many women travel long distances to market, carrying goods and cash; when they arrive, they sleep overnight on the dirt floors of their stalls. Market women have been robbed on their way to farms to buy goods or leaving with their merchandise; threatened with sexual assault and rape at bus and taxi depots where they wait for transportation. Criminal elements roam the marketplaces extorting protection money from women, using any pretext to beat or sexually abuse them. There are no provisions for public safety; women contend with these dangers largely alone.<sup>7</sup>

Haitian women rely on an extraordinary array of grassroots women's organizations to support each other and to fight for better living conditions. "If we don't take responsibility for our own destiny, no one else will," said Mrs. L during a meeting of the market women's organization OFAV—Organization of Valiant Women. Hundreds of grassroots women's organizations emerged during the fight to overthrow Duvalier, in which women's role figured prominently. "Women bend in the wind, but we do not break. Organization is how we make things better."

#### RESISTING GOVERNMENT CRACK DOWN

Haiti's border with the Dominican Republic (DR) is an arena of heightened conflict between the government and tens of thousands of Haitians who cross into the border every week to buy wholesale goods for resale in Haiti. By one estimate, Haiti's street merchants earn \$165 million a year from the sale of basic goods like diapers, brooms, beans, spaghetti, and cement that are purchased from the DR.<sup>8</sup> Over the past decade, in an apparent move to generate more revenue, the Haitian government has instituted a crackdown on this trade, imposing a ban on imported eggs—that's 30 million eggs a month—along with twenty-three other items from the DR. A passport is now required to cross the border. The government increased import taxes on goods favored by street merchants, a move that targets the least powerful vendors who are super-taxed, while wealthy hotel owners engaged in the tourist trade receive generous tax breaks.

Customs agents have increased border inspections and are authorized to confiscate items that have not been declared. In small daily acts of resistance, women traders find ways to avoid or outmaneuver customs agents, defying government restrictions that they consider unfair. They brave state officials as well as unofficial agents who demand bribes and may assault or rape them whether or not they comply with the bribe. Recently, a customs agent opened fire on a market woman who argued with him when she was singled out for inspection as wealthier merchants freely passed by. The shot missed the woman, but killed a nearby resident. During the angry response, Haitian witnesses of the incident burned a police station to the ground. Four police were killed.

income inequality in all of Latin America, 60 percent of Haitians live on less than \$2 a day. Haiti ranks near the bottom of 172 countries in food energy intake. Maternal mortality is five times higher than the regional average. One in five children are malnourished; one in ten are extremely malnourished.

Within these desperate parameters live millions of women preoccupied with the struggle to survive. US foreign policy plays a key role in imposing these conditions on the Haitian people—both by direct intervention and by backing the Haitian elite, who monopolize political and economic power. For example, in the 1980s, with the support of Haiti's dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier, USAID dictated the eradication of Haiti's entire Creole pig population. During this same era, USAID revamped Haiti's agricultural system, seizing 30 percent of cultivated land from small farmers—who grew food for domestic consumption—in order to impose export farming on rural Haiti. USAID was fully aware that widespread hunger would result from these draconian measures.<sup>4</sup> Many thousands fled to the cities. Up until then, Haiti was self-sufficient in growing its own food. Today, a nation of farmers can no longer feed itself.

This early example of globalization had an especially dire effect on rural Haitian women, who survived by subsistence farming and sales of local produce. In 1984 food shortages prompted riots in which Haitian women were the main organizers and participants. "At a societal level, the riots constituted a struggle by working people for control of resources, but food and fuel shortages were also a gender issue. Through their massive participation, along with children, in these riots, Haitian women demonstrated as female members of households, whose expected roles were severely compromised by the cost and scarcity of two staple commodities."<sup>5</sup> Two years later, Duvalier fled the country.

According to sources, countless market fires are thought to be deliberate attacks by paid criminal elements in the service of Haiti's elite merchants "who have found no other way of competing with the resourcefulness of poor small traders than by completely destroying not only their goods, but also the market itself."<sup>9</sup> A former commander-in-chief of Haiti's National Police claimed that the origin of a public market fire in Haiti is rarely an accident: "It is either political or criminal."<sup>10</sup>

"HAITI MERCHANTS FEAR FOR LIVELIHOOD AFTER MARKET BLAZE," read February 2018 headlines, after a raging fire burned 60 percent of the historic Iron Market in Port-au-Prince. A woman wept because the small profit she made at the market allowed her to send her eldest son to university in the Dominican Republic. "What am I going to tell him now? To stop his studies and come back here to end up like me without a job?" Another vendor, age 75, who had worked in the market her whole life, said, "Without help to restart my business I am going to die on my feet, because I never had anything else and, at my age, there's nothing else I can do."<sup>11</sup>

The following week, flames engulfed the largest clothing market in Port-au-Prince, the third fire at that market in less than a decade. Fifteen hundred vendors, mostly women, lost their entire inventory, along with their livelihood.

Grassroots activists report that market fires have been used to intimidate insurgent neighborhoods, like the November 2018 fire that partially destroyed the historic market near Lasalin just days before nationwide protests against government corruption and injustice. For decades, the Lasalin community has been the target of state-sponsored repression because it is a center of resistance and popular mobilization.

#### TOUT MOUN SE MOUN: EVERYONE IS A HUMAN BEING

Despite the resilience, both individual and collective, of market women, the immeasurable human suffering, harm, and loss brought to bear by powerful antagonistic forces cannot be underestimated.

There was a time not very long ago—during Haiti's 2000-2004 democratic government headed by President Jean-Bertrand Aristide—when the essential role of market women was recognized and valued. After a long period of resistance to dictatorship, the poor had achieved power, and the popularly elected government began to build a society based on the dignity of every human being. President Aristide recognized that the market economy and market women had to be at the very center of any economic plan for Haiti.

To that end, Haiti's marketplaces underwent many changes to address women's concerns and improve working conditions. Laura Flynn, long-time Haiti activist, reports: "Historically, the markets that serve Haiti's poor majority were ad-hoc, unplanned, and dirty. While Aristide was President from 2000-2004, 53 public market places across the country were constructed or repaired.... Clean and dignified stalls were created for vendors; roofs, drainage, and toilets were put in. Public literacy centers, and medical clinics were set up inside the markets for the benefit of both sellers and customers."<sup>12</sup>

Market women are at the forefront of Haiti's struggle to survive against the savage impact of global capitalism on this small nation. The poor endure because of their tremendous capacity for survival. Through their daily contest with an oppressive hierarchical system out to crush them, market women carry on Haiti's irrepressible fight for human dignity and freedom. ❄

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# Haiti: Roots Of An Uprising

By Robert Roth

Editor's Note: This article, originally published online by *The International Committee for Peace, Justice and Dignity to the Peoples*, was written in August 2018. In the months that have followed, largescale demonstrations broke out against the ruling elite's theft of Petrocaribe funds, earmarked to lower gas prices and fund social programs. Demonstrators were shot with live ammunition, beaten with whips and batons, and tear-gassed. On November 13, 2018, Haitian police and armed vigilantes working in unison terrorized the Lasalin neighborhood, killing at least 77 people. No one has, as yet, been brought to justice for these atrocities. *A luta continua.*

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*"The cauldron of corruption and lies has been boiling nonstop 24 hours a day. The time has come to overturn it, for Haitians to begin to see the light of peace. Haiti is for all Haitians."*

– *Fanmi Lavalas*\* statement, July 8, 2018 –

\**Fanmi Lavalas* is the party of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti's first democratically elected president, and represents Haiti's poor majority.

On July 6, 2018, Haiti exploded. By the tens of thousands, Haitians poured into the streets of Port-au-Prince to demand the resignation of President Jovenel Moïse. The protests were sparked by the government's announcement that it would reduce or remove subsidies on fuel, leading to a rise of 38 percent in the price of gasoline, and that the price of kerosene would jump 50 percent to \$4 a gallon. The uprising spread across the country and lasted three days. Port-au-Prince was brought to a standstill. Protesters set up barricades in the streets, burned tires, and attacked stores owned by the rich. Luxury hotels in the Petionville area were sacked by angry demonstrators. In the immediate aftermath, the government rescinded the price increases (for now), and Prime Minister Jack Guy Lafontant—the same official who announced the fuel price hike—resigned. And a squad of US Marines was sent to Port-au-Prince, supposedly to increase security at the US Embassy, but also to send Haitians an ominous warning of what was to come should the protests continue.

The Moïse administration had waited until the World Cup to make the price hikes official, in the vain hope that Haitians would be so preoccupied with the festivities that they would ignore this attack on their already precarious standard of living. But the writing had been on the wall since February, when the new Moïse government reached an agreement with the International Monetary Fund on an austerity package in exchange for \$96 million in loans. Even after the protests, the IMF insisted that the steep price rise was necessary, but that the price increases should be

introduced more gradually. Clearly, the end of this story has not yet been written.

The powerful and militant popular upsurge caught the mainstream US media by surprise. Having ignored months of continuous demonstrations against the stolen elections that brought the current Haitian government to power, media outlets like the New York Times and Miami Herald could only guess at the underlying causes of the rebellion. CNN focused its reporting on the plight of US missionaries who were "trapped" in Haiti. Media coverage was replete with the usual racialized code words: "rioters," "looters," "violence."

What was missing from the headlines was the fact that the Moïse government was already operating under a cloud of popular suspicion and anger long before the uprising. Birthed via two elections so replete with fraud and voter suppression that they were denounced as an "electoral coup" by opposition parties, the current Haitian government has no legitimacy among the population. The first round of elections in 2015 was annulled after weeks of mass protests backed by *Fanmi Lavalas*, the party of Haiti's first democratically elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The overwhelmingly peaceful demonstrations were met by police clubs, chemical agents, tear gas, and bullets, but the grassroots movement persisted, finally forcing the annulment, leading to a new round of presidential elections in October 2016. The new round was yet another charade, resulting in the inauguration of Jovenel Moïse as the new president in February 2017.

The electoral coup spawned a corrupt presidency. Even before being installed as president, Moïse was implicated in a money laundering scheme after an investigation by Haiti's banking watchdog agency. Dating back to 2012 when Moïse's mentor, former president Michel Martelly, was in power, the money laundering is said to have garnered Moïse over \$5 million. In one of his early acts as president, Moïse replaced the director of the investigating agency with one of his cronies for the purpose of suppressing the investigation. Peasant organizers have also spoken out against Moïse's expropriation of land for his banana plantation in northern Haiti. Not only did small farmers lose land, Moïse's much-heralded banana exporting business now appears to have been a short-lived election image gimmick. In reality, \$25,000 was spent to export only one container of bananas worth \$10,000 to Germany. This is part of a pattern where government officials tout projects, get funding, take over land, and then pocket the money, rather than develop the country's agriculture or infrastructure.

In addition, a massive scandal has been brewing over the outright theft of \$3.8 billion in Petrocaribe loans given to Haiti by the Venezuelan government. Yes, \$3.8 billion. These funds were supposed to lower energy costs and fund education, agriculture and infrastructure, but they ended up instead in the coffers of government officials, including members of Parliament. "Where is the Petrocaribe money?" Haitians demanded in an anti-government demonstration on August 24. Where is the money for hospitals desperate for supplies of blood and in need of new medical equipment? Where is the money for education, as families prepare to send their children back to schools with reduced or nonexistent subsidies for school supplies and uniforms?

In the Artibonite region, the center of Haitian agriculture, recent rains have led to dangerous floods due to neglected infrastructure, but sanitation workers have not yet been paid to clean up sewage canals and drains, while the hurricane season looms. In Port-au-Prince, police have burned down the stalls of market women, a particularly cruel form of gentrification tearing at the heart of Haiti's economic life and the foundation of so many families' ability to survive. Haiti's prisons are now bursting at the seams, with one epidemic after another sweeping through overcrowded, nightmarish cages.

When Haitians took to the streets in July, they were demanding an end to *all* of this. In essence, they were letting the government know that there would be no peace without justice. They went far beyond the call to curtail the fuel price increase, insisting that the Moïse government had to step down. The protests were a reminder that Haiti's popular movement—long the target of both the US Government and the Haitian elite—remains viable and powerful. Despite two US-orchestrated coups against the administrations of former president Aristide; despite a sophisticated COINTELPRO-

style campaign aimed at dividing and marginalizing Fanmi Lavalas and its allies; despite fourteen years of United Nations military occupation; despite stolen elections; and despite the grinding economic misery facing most Haitian families, the popular movement has persisted.

Why? This is a movement that has sunk its roots deep—and it remains the central force in the country capable of building an alternative to corruption and repression. During the years that *Lavalas* governments were in power, more schools were built than in the entire previous history of Haiti. Health clinics sprouted up throughout the country, as the Aristide administrations spent unprecedented amounts on health care. When the earthquake hit in 2010, killing over 300,000 people and forcing over one million people to live under tarps in desperately overcrowded camps, it was grassroots activists who immediately went to work with limited funds to set up mobile health clinics and provide food supplies. In the wake of the devastation unleashed by Hurricane Matthew in 2016, *Fanmi Lavalas* organized caravans to provide aid to the affected regions. As living conditions have spiraled downwards, grassroots organizations have stood with the poor—backing striking teachers, garment workers, and students; supporting market women as they defend themselves against government attack; and increasing the reach of independent media to combat the lies of the elite-run radio and TV stations that dominate Haiti's airwaves.

One prime example of the movement's vision for a democratic and inclusive Haiti can be seen in the work of the University of the Aristide Foundation (UniFA). Founded in 2001 as President Aristide began a new term in office, UniFA's medical school was violently shut down after the 2004 coup, its campus taken over by US and UN occupying troops. When President Aristide and his wife and colleague Mildred Trouillot Aristide returned to Haiti in 2011 from forced exile in South Africa, he announced UniFA would be reopened and expanded. As promised, seven years to the day since the Aristides' return, UniFA held its first graduation ceremony. With over a thousand people in attendance, UniFA graduated 77 doctors, 46 nurses, and 15 lawyers. Many of the graduates were recruited to the university from poor communities that have had little access to higher education. Already, UniFA doctors are working in areas that have rarely, if ever, seen a doctor before. With 1,600 students now studying in the fields of medicine, nursing, law, engineering, physical therapy, and continuing education, this is only the beginning, a microcosm of the kinds of advances Haiti could make with a true people's government in power. The contrast could not be more stark—education or militarism, democracy or authoritarian rule, inclusion or exclusion, development or corruption, self-determination or occupation. With the July uprising, the Haitian people have once again made known their choice. ❖

## Women Dehumanized

(continued from page 7)

an April 12, 1994  
cablegram, later  
leaked to the US

press, from the US Embassy in Haiti to Secretary of State  
Warren Christopher:

*The Haitian left manipulates and fabricates human rights abuses as a propaganda tool, wittingly or unwittingly assisted in this effort by human rights NGOs and by the ICM [UN/OAS Civilian Mission]. Migration is primarily caused by economic conditions, but is aggravated by violence.... We are, frankly, suspicious of the sudden, high number of reported rapes, particularly in this culture, occurring at the same time that Aristide activists seek to draw a comparison between Haiti and Bosnia.*

Because the violence was often done by state agents—police, military, paramilitary, and weaponized criminal gangs known as *zenglendos*—women were reluctant to report this abuse. If women did report, they and their families would be further targeted and repressed. There was total impunity: this was a government strategy of gender-based violence.

The FRAPH was led by Emmanuel Constant who at the time was on the CIA payroll. After Aristide was restored to power in 1994, Constant escaped to the US, which made him subject to US law. In 2004 he was sued by the Center for Justice and Accountability and the Center for Constitutional Rights for torture and rape, particularly of three women who testified against him. He was later convicted in US courts on a minor charge of fraud with a 15-year sentence but ordered to pay \$19 million to the women.

CJA described one of the women in court documents:

*Jane Doe I is a citizen of Haiti and current US resident. In 1992, Jane Doe I's husband was abducted and killed by members of the Haitian Armed Forces. After her husband's disappearance, members of the Haitian Armed Forces also arrested Jane Doe I and held her for a week until they released her into the streets in the middle of the night stripped of all her clothing. Once she finally made it home, Jane Doe I became outspoken about the disappearance of her husband. On two separate occasions masked members of FRAPH raped Jane Doe I in her home. Her children were present during the attacks. During the second attack Jane Doe I was stabbed in the neck and left for dead. She was impregnated by her attackers and bore a child.<sup>8</sup>*

Countless other women have come forward to describe their ordeals. Their testimonies are chilling. One woman said:

“When I started to get involved in politics, my mother told me that I shouldn’t, that I would get killed. So I said, ‘Mother, it’s a matter of will. It’s what I want to do. You have to live and die for what you believe in.’”

“I used to work in Cite Soleil in the poor sector. I taught people to read and write. I was mandated to work in the electoral campaign for President Aristide and my husband was also involved and they came looking to kill him. They came to arrest me on April 27, 1992. They came into my house....my mother was sleeping and they beat my mother. They took me, handcuffed and kicked

me and pushed me to the ground. They hit me on the back with their rifle butts. There were six of them and they took me in the jeep and took turns hitting and kicking me. I told them I was three months pregnant, and while they had me on the ground and kicking me I had a miscarriage. They burnt cigarettes on my arms so I would answer their questions. I didn’t say anything and blacked out. I was bleeding and they put me in a cell.”<sup>9</sup>

Trying to deal with the trauma and consequences of what happened after the coup, a group of women founded FAVILEK (Women Victims Get Up, Stand Up) in 1993. They wanted to use their experiences to help others heal and survive. They developed theater pieces and toured the country helping others to speak out and gain solidarity with each other. Other grassroots women’s organizations also sprang up, urging the government to establish ministries for women and to put women in the forefront of their programs.

When he returned to power, Aristide was only allowed to serve out his original term and thus had only 18 months left in office. During that period his government initiated an independent National Commission for Truth and Justice. Its report, called “*Si m pa rele*” (“If I don’t cry out”), is almost twelve hundred pages and details many acts of violence, naming their victims and perpetrators.<sup>10</sup> It also includes nine recommendations concerning rape and sexual violence including reclassifying rape in the legal code and compensation for all substantiated rape victims.

Aristide received the report as he was leaving office and gave it over to his successor, René Préal. Yet nothing was done with it. As Bryant Freeman wrote in an introduction to the report: “...the Préal administration eventually released only 75 copies, and with the fourth Annex Report containing the names of the supposed perpetrators....The Commission Report calls for actions within 30 days, yet more than two years later, no action whatever appears to have been taken and it appears none ever will. The detailed events described in the Report’s most moving sections...can only give a small indication of the terror which resulted in the death of at least 3,000 human beings, not to mention those tortured and scarred for life.”<sup>11</sup>

The restoration of civil society in 1994 brought relief. The army, so despised and so intertwined with dictatorships and repression, was disbanded. A cabinet post expressly for women’s affairs was founded and programs were initiated dealing with the trauma resulting from the reign of terror. In 1995 President and Mrs. Aristide founded the Bureau des Avocats Internationaux (BAI), a legal office in Haiti working with both Haitian and US lawyers.<sup>12</sup> Its job was to prosecute those who committed human rights abuses including those of violence against women. The Haitian judiciary is independent of the presidency and many of the judges were leftovers from Duvalier times. BAI was one way of both applying outside pressure and holding them accountable.

A legacy of colonialism, patriarchy, occupation, and dictatorship takes generations to change. The physical damage caused by such torture is matched by deep psychological scars. These levels of trauma and PTSD can last a lifetime. Imagine what this means to a country when so many people have suffered abuse, when so many women have been raped and molested.

It is universally acknowledged that societies in turmoil and subject to instability encourage violence. The rule of law is

either suspended or intermittently enforced, and an atmosphere of fear and distress ensue. Haiti is no exception. In the period just before the coup and in the months following, rape and domestic violence went up, often at the hands of weaponized gangs or by anti-Aristide forces.<sup>13</sup>

Although lionized as wives, homemakers, and mothers, Haitian women's reality is more complex. As in all societies, women form the backbone of both the economic and cultural life of the country. Also, as in many societies, women are often the sole support of families as men go elsewhere looking for work. In Haiti this means that at least 40 percent of families are led by women. Women are still subject to economic, legal, and sexual abuse. Sons are prioritized over daughters when it comes to education, and since education is not free in Haiti this means that often girls are pulled out of school early or don't get to go to school at all.

Aristide was elected to a new presidential term in 2000. Between 2000 and 2004, before the US-orchestrated coup, his government began to address some of these issues. Grassroots women continued to organize. The government helped women's groups such as FAVILEK and COFEVIH (Coordination des Femmes Victimes d'Haiti) which gave women rape victims material support and allowed them to speak out—sometimes for the first time. In 2001, the Haitian government opened 20,000 adult literacy centers in a national campaign which resulted in 100,000 people being taught to read. The majority of these were women. New community stores and restaurants were opened which again greatly benefited women. Health care programs were launched, giving women maternal and prenatal care. A record number of women were elected, and women for the first time held major posts in the government (among them, Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Minister of Finance). Most of these achievements were wiped out by the second coup against President Aristide.<sup>14</sup>

With the space afforded by the Aristide administration, more middle class (mainstream feminist) organizations also grew. Although these organizations pushed for women's rights, they did so within a narrow framework, not linking the struggle for women's equality and empowerment with that of structural inequality and entrenched racism in the entire country. They also systematically organized against the Aristide and *Lavalas* administration. And for the most part they were the ones with the contacts to funding agencies and NGOs in the US and Europe which in turn led these organizations to support the coup. Grassroots women from poor communities even reported that mainstream women's organizations told them they should join protests against Aristide as part of their membership.<sup>15</sup>

### THE BLUE HATS

In 2004, the US, backed by Canada, France, and the international community, overthrew the democratically-elected President again. US marines invaded the country and a UN "peacekeeping army" called MINUSTAH (the French translation of United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti)

occupied the country. Many people romanticize UN forces or think that they symbolize peace and honor. However, they are simply army personnel from other countries: far from home with their own ideologies of class, race, and gender—united under a blue helmet. An army is still an army, and all military forces bring violence and violence against women, along with prostitution and sex trafficking. UN peacekeepers have been accused of all these things in their missions in Kosovo, Congo, and Rwanda. Haiti was to be no exception.

*Many people romanticize UN forces or think that they symbolize peace and honor. However, they are simply army personnel from other countries: far from home with their own ideologies of class, race, and gender—united under a blue helmet.*

Participating in MINUSTAH was one way that governments could show their loyalty to the US. Thus, militaries from all over South America, the Middle East, and even the Philippines patrolled Haiti. Brazilian forces were in charge of the south and Chileans in the north. Along with everything else, they were contemptuous and racist toward the very people they were supposed to be aiding.

It is well documented that MINUSTAH forces from Nepal brought cholera to Haiti resulting in at least 10,000 deaths. There have been reports about gender-based violence, but the reality has been much larger than even the headline news articles.

The UN's own report "UN SEA: Sexual Exploitation and Abuse at the Hands of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti" begins:

*A preliminary independent investigation conducted in areas close to existing or abandoned bases for MINUSTAH brings to light the alarming magnitude of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) at the hands of United Nations personnel in Haiti....*

*The results of our investigation strongly suggest that the issue of SEA by UN personnel in Haiti is substantial and has been grossly underreported. A thorough and in-depth investigation would be expected to identify 600 victims who would agree to in-person interviews. These preliminary findings are based on one investigator during 27 days of investigation. With a professional team, comprised of individuals with specialized expertise and the resources to cover the entire country, the likely number... would be much higher.<sup>16</sup>*

In 2005, the UN commissioned the Zeid Report which both documented sexual abuse by UN personnel around the world and laid out new protocols to prevent it. Yet two years later, investigations in Haiti resulted in 114 soldiers from Sri Lanka being sent home for committing sexual exploitation, including rape and transactional sex, often for food. None of the soldiers were prosecuted or held accountable either by the UN or by the Sri Lankan military or government. Further MINUSTAH abuses occurred on a regular basis, including rape, sex for food, kidnapping, and abuse. These abuses were not limited to women and girls but involved men and boys as well. Although the UN expressed outrage, no one has been prosecuted, either by them or by the Haitian government.

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## Women Dehumanized

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Mark Snyder, the author of the report, goes on to say:

*...the true levels of UN SEA and the number of victims remain largely hidden from view. Perpetrators are often militarily armed...in significant positions of power....They are from outside of the victims' known community and are untouchable by the Haitian system of justice or other traditional systems or possible support. Fear of reprisal is an understandable concern....Coupled with these barriers and the belief that reporting a case will bring social stigmatization more than real solutions, it is highly unlikely that victims will bring cases forward. SEA victims remain largely in the shadows.<sup>17</sup>*

The 2004 overthrow of Aristide again brought a reign of terror to Haiti. It's estimated that 8,000 people were killed and tens of thousands of women were raped in the period following the coup.

In 2005, in a bit of bitter irony, as thousands were being brutalized, Haiti finally passed a law against rape, making it a felony with a ten-year sentence. Before then, it was legally codified as a "crime against morals," meaning the impact on a woman's standing in society and the impact of the rape on her family and husband. This wording also ensured that a woman could not be raped by her husband.

Why did this happen just at this point? Could this be just another example that the US, while sanctioning murder and occupation, was rewarding those elements in the women's movement and NGOs both in Haiti and the US who supported the coup? The US often uses the issues of women's rights to justify their actions of occupation and invasion. A prime example of this is the invasion of Afghanistan.

### THE EARTHQUAKE:

#### NGOs DESCEND AND WOMEN ORGANIZE AND RESIST

On January 12, 2010 a massive earthquake hit Haiti. Three hundred thousand people were killed. Medical facilities or clinics were almost all destroyed. Two million people lost their homes. Jobs disappeared. Food became scarce and government food aid only lasted until April. Water and sanitation were almost nonexistent. People lost family members and friends. Their homes and belongings were gone. Trauma was extreme.

Whatever security existed before vanished overnight. Women living in the camps were subject to abuse. All this is and was a prescription for sexual violence.

What happened is not unique to Haiti. In 2004, after the Indian Ocean tsunami, hundreds of Sri Lankan women and girls were raped by their so-called rescuers and men in relief camps. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, women reported being attacked in shelters and public places. Disasters mirror conflict zones, especially when you add in foreign soldiers and military occupation.<sup>18</sup>

Much has been written about the issue of gender-based violence after the earthquake. There was a flurry of articles blaming Haitians themselves, painting Haitian men as monsters and predators and Haitian women only as victims, incapable of taking care of themselves. Sensationalist articles decried the "rape culture" that was Haiti, like this one in CBS news: "Rape Rampant in Haiti's Earthquake Camps,"<sup>19</sup> or this article in

Mother Jones: "Aftershocks: Welcome to Haiti's Reconstruction Hell. Dispatches from the tent cities, where rape gangs and disaster profiteers roam."<sup>20</sup>

Once the earthquake happened countless NGOs flooded the country, already inundated with aid organizations. These included women's NGOs armed with their own ideas and methods. Often these agendas don't fit those of grassroots women, and they operate through systems not accessible to those women such as international contacts, conferences, and even the language used in the international human rights community for funding. Most people in Haiti are not on social media nor do they have unfettered access to the internet.

Haitian women did need help. Many of their leaders and members had been killed in the quake. They needed support for their ideas and work, including food, water, and housing security. Yet for the most part, foreign NGOs called for more security and more police, despite the fact that some of these groups were also committing sexual abuse including trading food for sex. NGOs regularly put food and water distribution in the hands of men, furthering inequality and often leading to sexual misconduct. Rural women were also in desperate need, yet few NGOs dealt with life outside of the urban areas.

KOFAVIV and FAVILEK along with others from the grassroots stepped in. Members of both organizations lived in the camps and both had members who themselves were victims of violence. KOFAVIV was started in March 2004, right after the second coup, to help combat violence against women and to provide a place for women to come together. After the earthquake the organization had agents in every camp, working to gather resources for women and children. They distributed whistles so when there was a threat, women could whistle and others could be alerted and come together. Before the earthquake they ran a school and a clinic. Although the earthquake wiped many of their physical buildings out, they started gathering children in makeshift schools and maintained a sense of organization. They encouraged women to speak out about their experiences; to build solidarity among themselves. They said: "We are victims because we haven't gotten justice, but we are survivors who will build and demand justice until we get it."

Women continued to organize. On March 8, 2010, International Women's Day, over 1,000 women from all over the country gathered at the Aristide Foundation. They asserted their continuing commitment to the Aristide vision and program and strategized on what to do given the devastation of the earthquake.

In the months following the earthquake, women participated in trauma reduction, setting up mobile mental health clinics and offering therapy, both individually and through group discussion and theater.

International solidarity with the women did and continues to have a positive impact. Women lawyers working with the BAI/IJDH (Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti) and US-based groups like MADRE wrote reports and began to file cases on sexual violence using both Haitian and international law. (It should be noted that Haiti is a signer to most of the international conventions concerning human rights including the CEDAW, Rights of the Child, etc.) This work has continued to the present day; current cases are being filed and people are being brought to court.

Grassroots women have worked with more mainstream organizations to demand new laws and more access for rape victims. The issue of sexual violence and abuse is also being examined in regards to the LGBT community, although

homophobia continues to be a fact of life.<sup>21</sup> The added organizing combined with international pressure have forced the government to enact some reforms for women. For the most part, however, these are not accessible to the majority of the poor and grassroots women.

The new law against rape requires a reporting window of 72 hours and, although it is not required legally, judges regularly also require a medical certificate. The result? Even if women wanted to report the crimes, these conditions made doing so extremely difficult. Then, too, the courts are much more likely not to listen to women from poor communities.

There are also other well-known hurdles to accessing timely medical care. “You’ll still find a lot of women who, for different reasons, aren’t able to report the rape and get the medical certificate,” stated Jocie Philistin, Director of Advocacy at KOFIV. “There are a lot of obstacles, including the distance of camps from hospitals and the lack of money for transport.” And, she adds, “There are a lot of women who never report it at all. There’s still so much stigma, and they’re afraid. Why? Because after they come here they still have to go back to the same situation.”<sup>22</sup>

### THE US SELECTS A MISOGYNIST FOR PRESIDENT IN HAITI

In 2011 there was another election which *Lavalas* was again barred from entering. The results of the fraudulent election showed Michel Martelly in third place. Martelly, a rock star, was known for his crude, sexist and homophobic lyrics and performances. However, he supported the Clintons’ business plans for Haiti and, lo and behold, after then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and her team flew to Haiti, he became the number two candidate and eventually “won” the election. In July 2015, he was at a rally when a woman complained about the lack of electricity. He responded with typical sexist language: “Go get a man and go into the bushes [to have sex].” Women protested in Port Au Prince and several members of his cabinet resigned.

Both the Clintons and Obama lauded him and his presidency. Haitians were outraged that such a man could represent their country. Clearly, to the US, defending women is not as important as defending business interests in Haiti.

### BIG SURPRISE: NGOs FOUND TO COMMIT SEXUAL ABUSE!

It’s been well documented that the NGOs did more for themselves than for the people of Haiti. While hundreds of thousands lived in tent cities, NGO aid workers lived in hotels and had new ones built for them. Corruption was rampant. So was sexual abuse.

In February 2018, it was revealed that Oxfam, the British international aid agency, had covered up a report from 2011 detailing the use of prostitutes by its staff in Haiti, including their head of section. The report detailed “an atmosphere of impunity,” as those accused were just allowed to quietly resign with no other action taken. In many instances the transfers took place without any record of past misconduct.

It later came out that Oxfam had interviewed over 40 witnesses, among them women aid workers, who detailed their experiences of working in an atmosphere of male intimidation and harassment. They also said that whistleblowers were intimidated, bullied, and threatened with being fired and sent home. Women reported that they were afraid to speak up for

fear of reprisal. Women of color were even more afraid, as their numbers are small and they are more vulnerable to losing their jobs.

None of this is very surprising, and there are reports that other aid workers have also engaged in transactional sex—trading favors such as food and goods for sex. Following the exposure of Oxfam in Haiti, reports on sexual abuse by their workers in Chad and other areas of Africa and the Philippines emerged. Women from Save the Children, the Red Cross, and CAFOD (the largest Catholic charity in Britain) also began to speak out.

Aid workers have power and money. They come to Haiti drenched in paternalism, white supremacy, and “do-goodism” for “the poor Haitians.” Once there they encounter young women and girls who are extremely vulnerable. It’s a prescription for abuse.

Exposure is one thing but it’s not enough. The reality of so few consequences means very little has changed. Agencies have long lists of rules and “codes of conduct.” They write endless reports but in essence nothing is done.

In June 2018, Haiti banned Oxfam UK on the grounds that they had violated Haitian law. Oxfam US remains in Haiti.<sup>23</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Economic and political insecurity, stigma and entrenched practices of gender inequality remain. Yet the impact of women speaking out is being felt, and laws and attitudes are slowly changing in many parts of the world. Haiti is no different.

Throughout history rape has always been considered a crime. There are strictures against it in documents from Roman law to English jurisprudence to the Catholic Church. It has been outlawed in the rules of engagement in warfare from the Middle Ages to the present day. These laws on paper are rarely if ever observed. However, over the past several decades, there has been added scrutiny and a steady increase in international laws against sexual violence.

Starting in 1932 and throughout WWII, the Japanese Imperial Armed Forces created the largest system of institutionalized sexual slavery in the twentieth century. Led and administered by the army under the command of the Imperial Government, Japan coerced and/or kidnapped more than 400,000 women and girls from all the countries it occupied, with the majority coming from Korea and China. In so-called “comfort stations,” the women and girls were raped, sometimes by up to 30 or 40 times a day, by Japanese military personnel.

Most of these women died. What happened was a well-kept secret, fueled by the stigma of rape, that punished the women rather than the men. But in 1991, Hak Soon Kim, a former comfort woman from Korea, broke the 50-year silence and described her ordeal. Hundreds followed from Korea, the Philippines, and other countries. Their testimony—coming at the same time as ethnic cleansing and mass rape in Yugoslavia and followed by the genocides and femicides in Rwanda—helped lead the UN to a series of resolutions and conventions concerning women.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, in force since July 2002, includes rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or “any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity” as a crime against humanity, when it is committed in a widespread

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## Lasalin

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massacres are taking place in Haiti, particularly in working class neighborhoods that they consider to be slave warehouses. And yet, it is not only the working class neighborhoods that are viewed as slave warehouses, but the entire country of Haiti. If not, can anyone explain why a Haitian worker is expected to live on a minimum wage that is less than only five dollars a day, for a full day of work?

The bourgeois class in Haiti includes descendants of mulattos and freedmen, with nationals from the US and countries of the Middle East and Europe, such as Reginald Boulos, Sherif Abdallah, Reynold Deeb of the Deka Group, Andy Apaid, Dimitri Craan, Gilbert Bigio, and Handal.

Members of the bourgeois class invest a lot of money in the campaigns of candidates for parliament deputy, senator, and president, favoring people involved in criminal acts and corruption. Thus, they can participate in contraband, corruption, illegal weapon trafficking, crime, drug dealing, and kidnapping. The political connections of members of the bourgeois class are strengthened by investments in the campaign of selected candidates, making possible their great influence in the state apparatus to impose ministers, directors general, and members of the electoral council. They also benefit by receiving duty-free status, paying no taxes on their imported merchandise that is later sold to the population at inflated prices.

For all these reasons, each group that is part of the Haitian oligarchy has its own clique within the Haitian National Police—for example, Jimmy “*Barbecue*” Cherizier and Gregory “*Ti Greg*” Antoine—that works with armed civilians such as Serge “*Ti Junior*” Alectis to eliminate adversaries. Whether political, economic, or social, the December 21, 2018 assassination of Alain Douge, who was working on a new labor code for Haiti, stands as an example. With the complicity of the police, government officials, senators, and deputies in the parliament—using their private customs office right across from Lasalin—these groups from the oligarchy can easily bring any type of weaponry in the country. How can anyone explain that a poor person living in Lasalin or Granravin—who cannot even afford to eat and receiving a wage as little as \$3 for a full day’s work—can buy a weapon that costs several thousands of dollars, not to mention cost of the bullets?

The politics to maintain monopolistic control lead to these economic groups becoming very violent, stopping at nothing to defend their interests. Presently in everyday language, one hears of *Groupe Bigio*, *Groupe de Bourdon*, *Groupe Acra*, *Groupe Unibank*, and *Core Groupe*.

Thus, various groups seek to have at their disposal an armed militia under the cover of a security service. They make alliances with a few outlaws in some of the working class neighborhoods, provide them with money and weapons, creating groundless rivalries that conveniently allow for the elimination of political adversaries. The assassination of Paul “*Ti Koton*”

Ambroise by Gregory “*Ti Greg*” Antoine is a clear example. Ambroise was a potential candidate for mayor of Port-au-Prince under the banner of *Fanmi Lavalas*; he was assassinated in plain view of the police after attending a soccer game at the Sylvio Cator stadium.

In conclusion, gang warfare does not exist and has never existed in Haitian society, especially in Lasalin, Granravin, and similar working class neighborhoods. If working class neighborhoods are viewed as warehouses for modern day slavery, we have to conclude that it is all the people of the country of Haiti who are viewed as a slave warehouse by a particular sector of the international community. It is not surprising that there is no coverage of the massacres that are occurring in various areas of Haiti, in order to maintain a system that is built on a new Black Code that is no different from the old one. Two-hundred-eighty-three people were killed in Lasalin during the month of November 2018 alone, according to community residents and various human rights observers. What gang would have the capacity to carry out such a massacre without the complicity of the government and the police? What gang would have enough money to buy all of these weapons of war? The Lasalin massacre amounts to *slaves killing other slaves*, as *colonialists* white and black are implementing the theory of William Lynch.<sup>6</sup>

What do Barbecue, Ti Junior, Ti Greg, Vlaw, Ti Je, and Arnel Belizaire represent in the struggle? Without a doubt, they are the “weapons” placed in the midst of the enslaved that the bourgeoisie can use whenever needed. What do Boulos, Edouard Baussan, Andy Apaid, Baker Charles, Dimitri Craan, Sherif Abdallah, and Bigio represent? The oligarchy. If Lasalin, Vilaj de Dye, Matisan, or Granravin become a political obstacle, it follows naturally that the oligarchy will try to eliminate all of their political adversaries, in order for the field to be wide open in advance of the next elections. Since the majority of community residents in these neighborhoods is *Lavalas*, it is repression against *Lavalas* itself. The Lasalin massacre was neither an accidental occurrence nor an intergang turf war. It was a political act, calculated and planned. ✱

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2. <http://www.potomitan.info/ayiti/kebreaux.php>
3. [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel\\_Fignol%C3%A9](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Fignol%C3%A9)
4. [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/St.\\_Jean\\_Bosco\\_massacre](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Jean_Bosco_massacre)
5. “Article 22 [of the Black Code]: ‘...Every week, the slave master must give every slave that is 10 years old or more 2 and a half pots of manioc flour, according to measures used in Paris, or else 3 cassavas that each weigh at least 2 and a half pounds...and 2 pounds of salted beef or else 3 pounds of fish...As for infants, once they are weaned and until the age of 10, they will be given half of the quantity of food indicated in article 22, every week.’” Aristide, Jean-Bertrand. *Haiti-Haitii: Philosophical Reflections for Mental Decolonization*. Paradigm Publishers. 2011.
6. <https://pasadenajournal.com/the-making-of-a-slave-the-infamous-willie-lynch-letter/>

## Women Dehumanized

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or systematic way.<sup>24</sup>  
Arrest warrants issued  
by the ICC include

several counts of rape as both a war crime and a crime against humanity. In 2016 the UN declared rape as a form of torture.

These changes in the laws and the recognition of rape as a crime against humanity came about because women organized and women spoke out. Women demanded accountability and an end to impunity.

There are many causes of sexual violence, many reasons that men commit sexual harassment and rape and abuse. This is a subject for another paper. One thing is clear however, men, militaries, and governments must be accountable. The almost universal impunity for these crimes must end. This is essential if we are to challenge the age-old practices and inequalities so entrenched in our societies.

The stigma attached to sexual violence which blames the woman must also be eliminated if women are to be allowed to voice their reality and heal from their experiences.

As Dr. Denis Mukwege Mukengere, director of Panzi hospital in Bukavu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, put it: “Beyond laws, we have to get social sanction on the side of the woman. We need to get to a point where the victim receives the support of the community, and the man who rapes is the one who is stigmatized and excluded and penalized by the whole community.”<sup>25</sup>

Hak Soon Kim broke her silence because she knew she had support of a women’s movement in Korea and throughout Asia. Women in Rwanda, the Congo, Syria, and Myanmar are speaking out as well. The #MeToo movement is a continuation of this discussion and in this time of instant communication has moved the conversation forward.

In 2018, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Dr. Mukengere for his work in the Congo and to Nadia Murad, a Yazidi woman who was sexually enslaved by ISIS. She escaped and, despite the threat of stigma, spoke out immediately. This too is a symbol of change. Haitian women are part of this international movement as well.

But international solidarity for Haiti has been lacking. On the one hand, NGOs and mainstream women’s organizations have a narrow view of feminism and tend to dismiss the larger grassroots movement in Haiti. This in turn leads them to ignore the work of grassroots women and *Lavalas*. On the other hand, many Haiti solidarity activists don’t talk about gender-based violence at all, or, if they do, it is only in the context of broader repression. In researching for this paper, I looked in many books that discussed the coups of 1991 and 1994. Many of them did not even list women in the index!

Having laws on the books is one thing. But, as we can see by the actual increase in the strategic use of sexual violence around the world, this is just one tiny step. The use of sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and sexual violence must be part of our analyses when we discuss changing the world.

Not having a gender analysis as part of an overall assessment means that activists will miss one of the essential strategies being deployed to destabilize and demobilize the grassroots movement. It also undermines the work of women who are so critical to the struggle for democracy.

Haitian women have always fought for justice. Part and parcel of this is the fight to end this use of sexual violence. As Eramithe Delva of KOFIVIV stated: “Before we started, victims wouldn’t speak out. But if all victims do nothing,

women will continue to be victims in this country. We’re starting a revolution. We’re saying things must change. Women must have justice and this violence must stop.” ❄

## ENDNOTES

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7. For a full transcript see [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Events/OHCHR20/VDPA\\_booklet\\_English.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Events/OHCHR20/VDPA_booklet_English.pdf)
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17. *Ibid.*
18. Nolan, Clancy. “Haiti Violated.” *World Policy Journal*. Vol 29, No 1 (Spring 2011) p. 97
19. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/rape-rampant-in-haitis-earthquake-camps/>
20. <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2010/11/haiti-rape-earthquake-mac-mcclelland/>. This article was so controversial that it led to wide condemnation.
21. The issue of homophobia and organizing in the queer community is a subject for a whole other paper. There are lesbian and gay and transgender organizations in Haiti such as Femmes en Action Contre la Stigmatisation (FACSDIS), SEROVIE and KOURAJ.
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# Dr. Jean-Bertrand Aristide's UniFA Graduation Speech

*Dr. Jean-Bertrand Aristide, former President of Haiti, delivered this speech to the first graduating UniFA, class of 2018, at the UniFA graduation ceremony on March 18, 2018.*

Distinguished Members of the Board of Administration of UniFA, Distinguished Members of the Rectorate, Deanships and the Professorial Corps, Dear Friends in the 11th Department, Distinguished guests, very dear parents, very dear recipients, very dear students, ladies and gentlemen,

We, Mildred and I, have the singular honor to extend to you our warm greetings and cordial welcome to our first ceremony of conferment of diplomas.

Henceforth, March 18, 2018 and March 18, 2011 are inscribed in golden letters in the annals of UniFA. After seven years of exile the return home was necessary to rekindle the flame of education on this campus. A story that is captivating and inseparable from the historic welcome reserved for us, as we moved from the Toussaint Louverture airport to the house.

As you can see, March 18, 2018 and March 18, 2011 are twin dates. Many million thanks for the many million people who were thirsty for this return. A beautiful crown of thanks to every person who lent a hand to, together, water the garden of education with the rain of the return. I am certain that Mildred and every members of the Board of Administration are happy to admire the beautiful seeds of hope flowering, blooming, and ripening—from which the University will harvest many, many diplomas, licenses, and doctorates. Congratulations! Honor, respect for all of you! Bravo for all of you!

Yes, gratitude is the memory of the heart. Dear recipients, dear students, may every fiber of our heart intone a symphony of gratitude for the Members of the Board, the Rectorate, Deanships, Professorial Corps, the legal counsel, all employees, and friends of our University community! If the Board symbolizes a source of light, the Rectorate, the Deanships and the Professorial Corps represent the three first neurons of UniFA's visual field. Without the synchronization of these hierarchical structures, UniFA would be like one struck by achromatopsia. That is, these bursting colors of our first graduation ceremony would not shine before our eyes. We address to them a special thanks on this memorable day.

Like you, dear recipients, the “Unifaristes” radiate with happiness. Here, they discover the taste of scientific knowledge. This is what we propose to all young people of every geographic, economic, and social origin: *Educare sine exclusione!* Education without exclusion! Welcome to all of you, young women and men, hungry for scientific knowledge and burning with the desire to contribute to the renaissance of our dear Haiti. May the perfume of this graduation yet infuse your future.

September 25, 2011, Mildred and I experienced the great joy of welcoming to our home 126 medical students. That morning’s encounter, where we explored the grand precepts of neurolinguistics, left an indelible imprint. Seven years later, I am addressing 138 recipients and 1,687 students in medicine, dentistry, nursing, physiotherapy, law, civil engineering, and permanent education. Rightfully, we tremble with joy as we offer our sincere congratulations to you, dear recipients.

Because you fulfilled your responsibilities before your parents—whose hearts open to the fragrance of this celebration—your studies are today crowned with success. Here you are standing, proud and ready to join the grand family of legal and health professionals! The pride blooming in the faces of your parents, accompanied, of course, with innumerable sacrifices endured through the course of your studies. Let your hands express your gratitude towards them with a hearty applaud! Bravo to father and mother, to all those who allowed you to attain this noble goal!

Dear recipients, born with two eyes that open and close, you must be reborn with two eyes that open and never close. How do we define these special eyes? As organs? No. Indispensable eyes? Yes. Here are their names: Science and Conscience. On a global level, science progresses, conscience regresses. May your professional conscience contribute to the awakening of the social conscience.

To achieve this, I urge you to retain the three celebrated words drawn from the Cradle of Humanity: *Umuntungumuntu ngabantu*. A person is a human being through other people. The quintessential essence of social conscience is found clearly in this philosophy of Ubuntu. I am because we are. The intelligence of our Ancestors invites us to reread the history of Haiti with the eyes of the conscience. Indeed, for a word to be perceived either consciously or subconsciously, it needs only 275 milliseconds to travel through the retino-thalamic tract and the optical radiation. However! However! If the word perceived subconsciously disappears rapidly, the word read with the consciousness pursues its path across the cerebral cortex. One example: in 575 milliseconds it reaches the parietal cortex.

It is my ardent wish that these precise biological underpinnings of consciousness motivate us to read our history with new eyes. There, we will discover not “shithole,” but the sap of human dignity. Respect for every person’s dignity. Dignity is inherent to human nature. From the scientist to the illiterate person, from the Black human being to the White, we are all born free, equal in dignity and before the law. This is why we say with great conviction: In order for our lamp of education to shine, it must have a wick of science and gas of conscience. Yes! Gas of conscience, or petro-conscience. Petro-conscience to guard over petro-caribe.\*

Dear recipients, you can, yes you can contribute effectively and humbly to the awakening of the collective conscience. After receiving good grades in exams in anatomy, constitutional law, ethics...you need to achieve good grades for the exam in conscience.

Pursuant to Article 6 of our Constitutive Act, critical conscience is not an ordinary subject; rather, it is a fundamental subject. You will need it *semper et ubique*—that is, always and everywhere. Eradicating evil at the macro level is not easy. But at the micro level, you can combat it rationally.

Combatting corruption in the schools, the universities, the public and private sectors is the obligation of ethics. We must, as educators, fulfill our responsibility of conscience. Like a metastatic cancer, institutionalized corruption devours our social fabric, the future of our children and of the Haitian youth. The exodus of youth is a product of this cancer. Where there are a multitude of corruptors suffering from hemispatial neglect and anosognosic corruptors, we must, with great urgency, prevent a social collapse. *Non impedire malum, favet*. He who does not prevent evil, favors it, exclaimed Cicero.

Dear Sisters and Brothers, Haiti could not prevent the January 12, 2010 earthquake. But we must absolutely avoid and repulse this social collapse or social earthquake, and then honor Haiti in Dignity. Science and Conscience lead to social cohesion, economic solidarity, and of course education without exclusion. These two beacons of light illuminate the royal path that will lead humanity to a civilization of love.

In renewing my love and determination to always be in your service, allow me to conclude with this wish: Dear recipients, born one day with two ocular globes, may you be reborn everyday through these two illuminating globes: Science and Conscience. So, to you, Success! Happiness and much love!

Thank you,  
Dr. Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

*\*Under Venezuela’s Petrocaribe program, Haiti was supplied with oil at a favorable price and under a flexible credit mechanism. The benefit to Haiti, estimated at approximately \$3 billion (recently updated to \$4.2 billion), was intended to combat poverty. All reports indicate that the funds were stolen and misappropriated by the past two governments—an unprecedented act of state corruption.*



A mother protects the body of her son, Roberto Badjo Thelusma—killed by Haitian Police forces, known as CIMO, in February 2019—to prevent the police from disappearing her son's body, as is their practice. Across Haiti, people are searching for unknown numbers of loved ones killed and disappeared by police and mercenary forces.