

Chapter 8

Anthropology of Violence: A Review from the Haitian Perspective*

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Abstract: Violence is a phenomenon that has hindered state consolidation in Latin America. In this context, Haiti represents an emblematic case, marked by ungovernability and insecurity, whose consequences have had a considerable impact at both the national and regional levels. Violence exacerbates and perpetuates the multiple barriers that impede the country's economic, political, and social development. This chapter aims to analyze the Haitian case, focusing on the effects of violence on national development. To achieve this, a qualitative methodology is employed to collect information from primary sources, specifically Haitian citizens. The results lead to the conclusion that expressions of violence—physical, structural, and cultural—are the consequence of a complex interaction of endogenous and exogenous factors that have contributed to perpetuating an environment of instability that limits the possibilities for sustainable development in the country.

Keywords: Anthropology of violence; direct violence; structural violence; ungovernability; insecurity

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Introduction

Haiti's history is marked by a succession of dictatorships and more than a hundred internal armed conflicts, which have hindered its social, political, and economic development. These internal crises, which persist into the 21st century, have had serious consequences, including coups d'état, instability in presidential governance, the suspension of electoral processes, and the emergence of radical social movements, including insurgent groups. Complicating this situation is a geostrategic factor: Haiti's location in the Caribbean and its proximity to the United States.

Due to its strategic location, Haiti has become a vulnerable and fertile ground for drug and arms trafficking. This problem is exacerbated by the proliferation of unauthorized airstrips and clandestine docks along its extensive coastline, which facilitates illicit activities. As a result, challenges related to national security, territorial control, and institutional governance intensify.

The situation in Haiti deteriorated drastically after the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse. This assassination unleashed a wave of violence and political destabilization, allowing criminal gangs to rapidly expand their influence and consolidate their control over various urban areas. Consequently, the first five months of 2023 were particularly bloody, with a 28 % increase in the number of fatalities, totaling 1,446 deaths. This relentless cycle of violence has led several analysts to warn that, should current conditions persist, social problems could worsen, further increasing concerns about the stability of the Haitian state.

Haiti's land and sea borders are highly vulnerable due to a severe shortage of material and human resources in key institutions, including the National Police, border patrols, and the Coast Guard. These agencies, essential for the control and security of border areas, lack the operational capacity necessary to confront

the challenges posed by criminal gangs. As a result, Haiti's borders have become highly permeable, facilitating the trafficking of people, weapons, and illegal goods.

Corruption has been an endemic problem in Haiti, reflecting profound institutional weaknesses and fragmented governance. According to the Corruption Perceptions Index, the country ranks 171st out of 180 nations assessed, placing it among the states with the highest perceived levels of corruption globally. This situation underscores the scarcity of state resources, the high incidence of organized crime, and persistent political instability. In the last 35 years, Haiti has had 20 presidents—a figure that illustrates the lack of continuity in political leadership, which has hindered the development of a solid and functional democracy.

The objective of this chapter is to analyze the phenomenon of violence in Haiti, its manifestations, and its impact on the country's social, political, and economic structures. A qualitative methodology is employed in a case study, enabling a contextualized examination. The information is processed using primary and secondary sources, an approach that facilitates the interpretation of the social and cultural dynamics that shape and perpetuate the conflict in Haiti.

This chapter is organized into sections that address the stated objective. First, the methodological aspects are presented, detailing the methodology adopted, the case study design, and the sources used. Second, the anthropology of violence is addressed as a theoretical approach, providing the conceptual framework that guides the analysis. Third, an overview of violence in Haiti is offered, describing its manifestations, causes, and consequences. Subsequently, an analytical triangulation is developed to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, integrating theory, data, and context. The chapter concludes by synthesizing its findings and reflections.

Methodological Aspects

Qualitative methodology offers a deep and contextualized understanding of complex phenomena in specific settings by focusing on the analysis of the "how" and "why" of their emergence and evolution (Martínez, 2006). In this sense, the case study is particularly useful for addressing the dynamics of violence in Haiti.

Two data collection techniques are employed: document analysis and semi-structured interviews. The former involves the systematic examination of primary sources, including official reports, academic research, newspaper articles, and institutional documents. This technique enables reconstruction of the most relevant events of the last decade, providing a basis for subsequent analysis.

Conversely, the semi-structured interview is based on a set of questions classified into two types: opinion and knowledge-based (Hernández et al., 2014). These questions were structured around three categories: direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence. This not only allows us to capture individual perceptions of the phenomenon but also to understand the knowledge constructed around its causes, manifestations, and consequences.

Regarding the semi-structured interviews, two Haitian professionals participated, whose backgrounds and perspectives provide valuable, complementary contributions to the analysis. On the one hand, Jean Gary Apollon, a journalist and social communicator, provided a critical and experiential perspective, based on his direct experience as a witness to the episodes of violence that have marked the country's recent history. On the other hand, Abdaham Victoire Moncoeur, a mechatronics engineer and social activist, contributed through his commitment to development and education in Haiti, reflecting on the structural implications of poverty and inequality and on the role of the international community in shaping the Haitian context.

The information is processed through triangulation, which integrates three fundamental elements: the analytical categories of violence, the socio-historical context of the violent phenomenon in Haiti, and the analysis of the interviews conducted. This process enables the comparison and integration of data from different sources, thereby strengthening the interpretive validity of the conclusions. Furthermore, this triangulation informs and consolidates the theoretical approach of the anthropology of violence.

Anthropology of Violence as a Theoretical Approach

The anthropology of violence is a theoretical approach that allows us to understand violence not as a univocal or closed concept, but as a complex, multifaceted phenomenon deeply rooted in specific sociocultural contexts. It is important to emphasize that this perspective requires the convergence of an anthropological approach—which prioritizes situated, relational, and contextual understanding—and the study of violence as a social, symbolic, and structural fact. Thus, this perspective denaturalizes violence, questions its cultural normalizations, and examines its forms of reproduction and legitimation within society.

The anthropology of violence lacks a universally agreed-upon definition. Within the framework of this work, an analytical approach is adopted to examine the phenomenon from an anthropological perspective. This implies understanding

violence not only as a physical or visible act, but as a social and cultural construct that takes multiple forms, is embedded in diverse contexts, and operates at different levels. By focusing on human behavior, symbolic meanings, and social structures, anthropology offers essential analytical tools for exploring how violence is produced, reproduced, and naturalized within the everyday fabric of societies.

Recasens (2004) argues that, among the discipline's various branches, social anthropology is a relevant field for conducting a comprehensive analysis of violence, as it incorporates the methodological and theoretical contributions of ethnology and ethnography. Furthermore, the author points out that violence, when it emerges in a society, manifests itself in the ways of life it impacts or from which it originates. Consequently, it can be inferred that violence is configured within sociocultural relations and is in constant interaction with the normative and axiological frameworks that structure and legitimize certain social practices.

For Recasens (2004), social anthropology is a particularly relevant analytical framework for the study of violence. This is because the discipline examines the evolution of humankind and its cultural and social productions over time and across different geographical contexts. In this regard, anthropology allows us to investigate the origin, processes of transformation, and functioning of the cultural and institutional complexity of societies (Berdichewsky, 2002).

Following this same logic, various works have emerged that address the phenomenon of violence from an anthropological perspective, each with different approaches and emphases. The contributions of Garriga and Noel (2009) stand out, who problematize the concept from a theoretical perspective; Rosemberg (2012), who examines violence in urban contexts from an intersectional perspective; Baños (2005), whose proposal draws on biological approaches; and Tello (2013), who offers a methodological approach centered on the ethical dimension of the phenomenon.

Despite the diversity of approaches and perspectives on how to address violence from an anthropological standpoint, the authors agree on several key aspects. Among these, they emphasize the need to conceptualize violence in terms of its nature and the multiple ways it can be understood, depending on the contexts in which behaviors associated with the phenomenon manifest. They also share an interest in investigating the origins of human violence: is it a biological manifestation, a learned response, or a behavior elicited by social interaction? This type of questioning represents a significant step forward if the aim is to develop a rigorous scientific approach to the study of human violence and, thus, to the multiple consequences it has had—and continues to have—in contemporary societies.

However, one of the most definitive works on violence is Jiménez's, whose objective was to establish its origins and the various forms it takes, paying particular attention to the factors that trigger violent behavior in humans. In his study, Jiménez proposes a particularly useful conceptual framework for this chapter, as it offers a way to group the different scenarios of violence based on their manifestations. Inspired by the theoretical contributions of intellectuals such as Johan Galtung and Pierre Bourdieu, the author revisits the categories of direct, structural, and cultural violence (Galtung) and the notion of symbolic violence (Bourdieu) to integrate them into a single concept: hybrid violence.

From this conceptual integration, Jiménez concludes that "man is conflictive by nature, but violent by culture and education" (2019, p. 9). He also argues that human beings live in a state of naturalized hybrid violence, that is, in a scenario where different forms of violence—direct, structural, cultural, and symbolic—converge and become normalized.

By this logic, this chapter addresses the phenomenon of violence in Haiti, a country that, in recent decades, has become one of the main cases of insecurity in Latin America. In this context, it is essential to understand the causes and dynamics of this phenomenon and to reflect on the lessons this case can offer other countries in the region, particularly Colombia.

The types of violence previously mentioned are treated as analytical categories. The Haitian case is approached using a methodological strategy inspired by anthropology. In addition to identifying and describing violent behavior in the country, this chapter proposes a typology of violence as a conceptual guide, setting aside, for methodological reasons, the extensive theoretical discussion surrounding its definition and manifestations.

Direct violence is defined as the material and immediate action carried out by an individual, generally a product of aggressive impulses inherent in human nature. However, from a temporal perspective, Galtung (2016) distinguishes among three types of violence: direct, structural, and cultural. Thus, direct violence is conceived as a specific and observable event; structural violence, as a sustained process with long-term fluctuations and dynamics; and cultural violence, as a persistent state that legitimizes and naturalizes other forms of violence in the collective imagination.

To contextualize the types of violence, Jiménez (2019) proposes a classification that breaks down direct violence into three subcategories: physical, psychological, and verbal. These are characterized by causing harm to a subject without any type of intermediation (subject, action, object). Structural violence, by contrast, refers

to forms of violence that operate through social institutions and structures. It manifests as an injustice that prevents the satisfaction of the basic needs of certain groups or individuals. Finally, cultural violence is understood as the normalization and legitimization of violence within a society that occurs through values, beliefs, discourses, and traditions that justify and perpetuate it.

Finally, Jiménez (2019) highlights that, as conceptualized by Bourdieu, symbolic violence is the invisible facet of structural violence. This indirect form manifests itself in relations of power and domination. That is, the dominated subject is unaware of their subjugation; in fact, they recognize and legitimize it. Symbolic violence resides precisely in its capacity to render invisible the delegitimization inherent in the violent act, thus achieving tacit acceptance through the internalization of potential benefits or advantages.

Haiti: Current State of a Country Affected by Violence

When it comes to studying violence and its multiple consequences, Haiti emerges as one of the most emblematic cases in the Latin American context. Former (2007), based on various studies, argues that Haiti "is a kind of living laboratory for the study of affliction, regardless of how it is defined" (p. 65).

The Haitian reality, characterized by decades of political instability and institutional disorganization, seems to have normalized chaos as a permanent condition, leading to a form of social resignation. In this context, building a culture of peace would require structural and symbolic transformations of the political and social reality, as well as a process of acculturation that enables the reconfiguration of behavioral patterns.

Currently, the concept of *complexity* encapsulates the situation in Haiti. This notion allows us to grasp the multidimensional nature of the violent phenomenon affecting the country. From an anthropological perspective, this reality can be explored through the logic of the violence triangle. This perspective will be applied to the analysis of empirical data and interviews to provide a deeper understanding of the manifestations and dynamics of this phenomenon within the Haitian context.

To develop an accurate picture of violence in Haiti, it is necessary to address a key challenge: the reliability of the available data. This limitation hinders the characterization of the phenomenon and, consequently, prevents a realistic approach to its causes. A preliminary systematization of data from the international press and from governmental and non-governmental organizations has been conducted. This information has been classified according to the manifestations and typologies of violence over the last five years.

Table 1. *Types of Violence According to Governmental Organizations and the International Press*

Manifestation of violence	Number of victims	Type of violence	Source	Year
Homicide	600	Direct	United Nations	2023
Kidnapping	31	Direct	Unicef	2021 - 2022
Food emergency	4.5 million	Structural	Amnesty International	2022
Kidnapping	395	Direct	Statista	2022
Homicide	846	Direct	Statista	2023
Homicide	144 thousand	Direct	Deutsche Welle	2023
Sexual violence	98	Direct	France 24	2022
Internal displacement	165 thousand	Direct Psychological	United Nations	2023

Source. Adapted from Amnesty International (2022), Deutsche Welle (2023), Florencia (2022), France 24 (2023), UNICEF (2021), and United Nations (2023a; 2023b).

It is evident that, instead of moving towards building alternatives aimed at reshaping a persistent culture of violence, Haiti is currently experiencing an intensification of this problem, the structural and situational causes of which are still not entirely clear.

In this context, and following the previously developed logic, interviews were conducted with Haitian citizens to explore, from their own perspectives, elements that contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of violence in the country, as well as to identify possible lessons applicable to security and institutional stability.

Direct Violence

Currently, Haiti is experiencing an alarming spiral of violence, characterized by a sustained increase in human rights violations. Various reports from international organizations agree that criminal gangs (e.g., the G9) are primarily responsible, seeking to control certain territories to satisfy their economic and political interests. According to these reports, there are more than 70 active gangs in the country, involved in crimes such as homicide, kidnapping, and forced displacement.

This reality raises key questions: Where do these gangs come from? What are their political objectives? The interviews reveal aspects that are generally not addressed with sufficient specificity in official reports or pronouncements by the international community.

Professor Jean Gary and Adaham Victoire caution that, while the existence of approximately 80 criminal gangs in Haiti has been estimated, this figure is uncertain and, therefore, cannot be considered conclusive. However, they agree that approximately 90 % of these organizations are based in the country's capital. Likewise, both point out that the emergence and strengthening of many of these gangs are closely linked to electoral processes.

Given the extremely low voter turnout, armed groups storm “voting offices”—referring to polling stations or ballot boxes—to fraudulently introduce large numbers of votes in favor of specific candidates. This practice also constitutes one of the gangs' main political objectives. However, those interviewed also note that many members of these organizations are illiterate, which forces them to arrive armed and with pre-marked ballots.

While the exact origin of Haitian criminal gangs is not entirely clear, it is essential to consider their close relationship with the political sphere, particularly with the instrumentalization of electoral processes as a means to legitimize power through vote manipulation. However, this explanation is insufficient to understand the extreme violence perpetrated by these groups, which raises further questions about the reasons that lead them to resort to practices such as homicide and kidnapping, including the abduction of minors.

In this context, the interviewees highlight two key factors for understanding this dynamic. First, they point out that many members of these gangs lack formal education and any ethical or moral guidance. Second, they emphasize the absence of an effective state presence in matters of security, which allows these abuses to continue with complete impunity.

The gangs are out of control. They kill children, they kill women, they kidnap people because they have a gun, and who is going to confront them? They are uncontrollable. Even politicians sometimes fear them. This has become a cultural issue; you put a gun in their hands and tell them it is a profitable way to make money. The violence is more prevalent in the capital and has a negative impact on daily life. The population feels threatened, and security is a constant concern. Furthermore, lack of education and illiteracy contribute to the manipulation of people into joining these gangs. Violence also hinders tourism development, despite Haiti's potential to be an attractive destination. (J. Apollon, personal communication, June 6, 2023)

Gender-based violence in Haiti is rooted in culture and a lack of education. The lack of development and the influence of certain powerful groups have

allowed violence against women to persist. Besides, some gangs have been used to exert control over the population, including through violence against women and girls. (A. Victoire, personal communication, June 6, 2023)

From this perspective, it is evident that in Haiti there is a close relationship between the political sphere and violence, with the former often triggering the latter. While the persistence of violent acts, such as homicides, injuries, and kidnappings, is undeniable, it is crucial to consider the role that weapons play in the execution of these acts.

In this regard, an apparent contradiction emerges: Haiti is among the poorest countries in the world, with more than 60 % of its population living in poverty and 24 % in extreme poverty, and it has recorded meager economic growth (World Bank, 2020). This reality raises profound questions: Where do the weapons come from? Who finances or sponsors the armed groups?

Politicians direct these criminal groups, providing them with what they need. They exist to obtain personal benefits. So what happens? These politicians also create their own armed branches, even within the public forces, since it is impossible to obtain these weapons without some form of contact within the navy or the police. On the other hand, there is arms smuggling. From where? From Miami, from the United States. (J. Apollon, personal communication, June 6, 2023)

Professor Apollon's observations coincide with what various sources have reported regarding the illegal trafficking of weapons to Haiti. For example, at the end of 2021, Gorder, from the think tank InSight Crime, documented several arrests of U.S. citizens of Haitian origin. These individuals were attempting to smuggle firearms hidden in their luggage, using air or sea transport. In these operations, short- and long-range weapons were seized, such as AR-15 rifles, 9mm pistols, ammunition, assault rifles, and Uzi-type submachine guns.

Investigations identified that the origin and destination of these individuals were linked to various U.S. states—such as North Carolina and Florida—suggesting the existence of transnational networks involved in supplying weapons to Haitian armed groups.

Additionally, Gorder (2021) argues that the United States is the main supplier of illegal weapons entering Haiti:

Due to its lax gun purchase regulations and its proximity to the Caribbean, the state of Florida is the largest supplier. A prime example of this came to light in 2019, when a Florida gun shop owner was accused of conspiring with Haitian government officials, including a senator, to smuggle 166 undeclared semiautomatic weapons into the Caribbean country. (p. 10)

Following this logic, Gorder (2021), based on estimates by the UN and the National Commission for Disarmament, Dismantling, and Reintegration, indicates that between 250,000 and 500,000 illegal firearms are circulating in Haiti.

Lederer (2023), from the international publication *Los Angeles Times*, reported an increase in arms trafficking between Florida and Haiti, characterized by the high degree of sophistication of the weaponry involved (.50 and .308 caliber and automatic machine guns). According to the journalist, the *modus operandi* involves using intermediaries to acquire weapons in jurisdictions with less restrictive legislation. Once in Florida, the weapons are concealed among everyday consumer goods and transported by sea to Port-au-Prince. In some cases, shipments are diverted to the Dominican Republic, where intermediaries smuggle the weapons into Haiti, taking advantage of weak customs and border controls.

According to a report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, a firearm legally purchased in the United States for an estimated \$400 to \$500 can be resold in Haiti to criminal groups for prices reaching up to \$10,000. This disparity in cost reignites one of the most troubling questions surrounding this phenomenon: How is it possible that a country where approximately 80 % of the population lives in poverty has the economic capacity to sustain such a lucrative and expensive market?

Professor Victoire agrees on the need to dismantle a deeply ingrained myth: that Haiti is a poor country. In his argument, he maintains that this perception ignores the existence of abundant natural wealth, which has historically been underutilized or mismanaged:

[...] to begin with, we can say that Haiti is a country that is too rich to be poor, it is too rich a country... because Haiti has many natural resources that could develop the country, but without management, there is no development. But if we appear to be a poor country, why are powerful nations so interested in this poor country? Why are the United States and some technology companies so interested in Haiti? These are questions we ask ourselves. (A. Victoire, personal communication, 2023)

Structural Violence

At this point, it is pertinent to question the idea that Haiti is, in essence, a poor country, inviting a more complex reflection on the structural dynamics that underpin this perception. While large sectors of its population face severe poverty, this diagnosis needs to be nuanced. These structural effects are compounded by natural disasters and state weakness, which deepen conditions of vulnerability.

However, Apollon and Abdaham agree that Haiti is not a poor country and that the real problem lies in the extreme concentration of wealth and the inefficiency of its redistribution:

The pursuit of power in Haiti is linked to the acquisition of wealth and resources within the country. Although we are among the poorest countries in Latin America, we possess natural resources that can be exploited. Political families, such as the Duvaliers, have amassed fortunes by plundering the country. Inequality is evident, as 5 % of the population owns the majority of the wealth. (J. Apollon, personal communication, June 6, 2023)

Within the framework of structural violence, poverty should not be understood as a single cause but rather as an expression of multiple, intertwined dynamics—e.g., the concentration of wealth, institutional weakness, environmental disasters, and corruption. However, attributing the generalization of violent behavior solely to these factors is reductionist, as it omits the complexity of the social, cultural, and historical dynamics that also shape its configuration.

Apollon and Victoire highlight the role that education—or, more precisely, its absence—plays in the current Haitian social crisis. They both point out that there is a relationship between educational deficits and the proliferation of violence, as if these phenomena were inherent to the country's reality.

Violence is more prevalent in the capital and has a negative impact on daily life. The population feels threatened, and security is a constant concern. Furthermore, a lack of education and illiteracy contribute to the manipulation of people into joining these gangs. Violence also hinders tourism development, despite Haiti's potential to be an attractive destination. (J. Apollon, personal communication, June 6, 2023)

Educational reform and a stronger focus on education are needed to enable the population to make informed decisions and avoid manipulation. In addition, it is essential to promote social justice and equal opportunities for all.

Economic opportunities must also be created, and investment in the country's development encouraged, so that resources benefit the population as a whole rather than a few. (J. Apollon, personal communication, June 6, 2023)

You do not have the best education system, but we can copy the education system that Colombia has, for example, CENA [sic]. We can establish a similar institution in Haiti to provide technical and technological training, so that young people have the knowledge to defend themselves. (A. Victoire, personal communication, June 6, 2023)

Both professors highlight education as a nonexistent yet crucial factor in shaping the crisis in Haiti. In their view, education is not only a fundamental path to overcoming conditions of violence and social precarity, but it also deepens the vulnerability of large sectors of the population. In particular, they emphasize that people without access to formal education are more susceptible to being co-opted by criminal gangs.

Addressing education in Haiti poses a significant challenge, given the lack of up-to-date, reliable statistics that enable analysis of key aspects of the education system, including its coverage, quality, and structure, as well as its implications for the country's social structure.

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (2023), the most recent official report, for 2016, reported literacy rates of 83.4 % for men and 82.6 % for women. However, other unofficial sources estimate that, by 2022, the literacy rate had fallen to 61 %, which calls into question both the reliability of the available measurements and the actual evolution of educational access in the country (Lervolino, 2022).

It could be argued that Haiti's literacy rate is relatively high given its historical and structural context, although it remains several percentage points below the regional average. Nevertheless, the country faces serious difficulties in expanding and sustaining these levels.

In recent years, it has been shown that violence is closely linked to structural violence, especially in the area of education. On the one hand, lack of access to education limits opportunities for social mobility, exposing large sectors of the population—particularly young people—to co-optation by criminal gangs. On the other hand, these same gangs act as destabilizing agents of the education system, attacking schools, threatening teachers, and hindering the regular operation of institutions.

In February 2023, UNICEF reported an alarming increase in violence against educational institutions in Haiti, manifested through shootings, kidnappings, and looting perpetrated by criminal gangs. As a result, approximately 72 schools were attacked, leading to the closure of one in four schools by the end of 2021. This situation not only severely impacted access to education but also exacerbated the structural crisis of the Haitian education system.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 60 per cent of Port-au-Prince is controlled by armed groups. When groups target schools, they frequently loot school equipment, including desks, benches, boards, laptops, photocopiers, batteries, and solar panels. Bags of rice, dough, and maize used for school meals—a lifeline for countless children in Haiti—have also been stolen, together with canteen equipment. (UNICEF, 2023)

This scenario paints a picture of growing uncertainty and deepening structural violence, which not only exacerbates Haiti's already critical situation, mired in disorder and chaos, but also transcends the realm of security. Thus, insecurity is not limited to containing the power of criminal gangs; it extends to a deeper dimension linked to fundamental human conditions.

In this context, the primary need is to create a conflict-free environment that enables efforts to be directed toward governance focused on development and institutional strengthening. Only in this way will it be possible to reconfigure the Haitian social fabric on the basis of a culture of peace, rather than the consolidation of a culture of violence, which, in the current context, appears to be emerging as the dominant pattern.

From Cultural Violence to the Culture of Violence

The history of Haiti is unique and complex: it was the first and only country in the Western Hemisphere to achieve independence through a revolt led by enslaved Africans. However, this victory had profound repercussions on the shaping of its political and cultural identity. Although it was an act of resistance against the slave system and colonial oppression, Haiti's independence also gave rise to a series of challenges, both internal and external, that have conditioned its historical and social trajectory.

The struggle for independence left a deep mark on the Haitian psyche. The violence experienced during that period, although legitimized as a form of resistance against oppression, was etched into the collective memory and contributed to

the development of a perception of constant struggle as an inherent part of its historical experience. This narrative of rebellion and armed conflict became a fundamental component of Haitian national identity, conditioning how political and social problems have been addressed in subsequent decades.

The origin of criminal gangs in Haiti is related to the lack of recognition and support from other Latin American countries after Haiti's independence. Although Haiti played a significant role in the independence of other Latin American countries, they did not reciprocate in a meaningful way. Furthermore, the European powers, especially France and Spain, never fully accepted the independence of a country led by people of African and enslaved descent. (J. Apollon, personal communication, June 6, 2023)

In Haiti, one of the cultural aspects that contributes to the consolidation of a culture of violence is the education system, particularly the lack of access to inclusive, quality education. Throughout its history, the country has faced persistent structural limitations in this area, evidenced by insufficient public investment and fragile institutional capacity. This has deprived large segments of the population of the necessary tools to understand, question, and transform their social reality. As in any society, education is a fundamental pillar of development and the primary means of promoting values that foster peace, tolerance, and social cohesion.

In the Haitian context, limited access to quality education has contributed to keeping large segments of the population vulnerable to political manipulation. This condition has fostered the development of a society with limited critical thinking and argumentation skills that reacts impulsively to situations. An example of how the lack of a solid education can fuel a culture of violence is the instrumentalization of criminal gangs by political actors. These groups, composed mostly of people with low levels of education, are easily manipulated and used by corrupt politicians to serve their own interests.

These groups were used to enter polling stations and falsify votes for certain candidates. The lack of education and political manipulation has perpetuated the existence of these gangs to this day (A. Moncoeur, personal communication, June 6, 2023).

Furthermore, a lack of education fosters the proliferation of myths, stereotypes, and prejudices, thereby intensifying hostility and conflict between groups. Education not only fulfills an instrumental function by providing knowledge and skills but also

plays a fundamental role in the formation of values, such as understanding, respect, and empathy. These elements are essential for building more just and peaceful social relationships and constitute a key tool for counteracting the dynamics that sustain and reproduce a culture of violence.

Another determining factor in the consolidation of a culture of violence is the profound economic and social inequality that pervades the country. Despite possessing valuable natural resources, the majority of the population lives in extreme poverty, while a small group concentrates most of the national wealth. This disproportionate concentration of income contributes to a perception of structural injustice and fuels feelings of exclusion and social resentment.

The idea that the political and economic system is designed to favor an elite at the expense of the majority erodes trust in institutions. Moreover, it reinforces the notion that violence can be a legitimate—albeit distorted—way to demand justice, equity, and social recognition.

Corruption is another structural factor that has contributed to the consolidation of a culture of violence in Haiti. The lack of transparency and accountability mechanisms has allowed corrupt politicians and businesspeople to enrich themselves at the country's expense. This situation has eroded public trust in state institutions and fueled the perception that the system has been captured by special interests. Consequently, the belief—especially among the most marginalized sectors—that violence represents a legitimate form of resistance against an order perceived as corrupt, unjust, and oppressive is reinforced.

Violence in Haiti is not an inherent trait of Haitian culture. In reality, external actors have perpetuated this situation to maintain control over the country and its resources. The lack of education is a crucial factor contributing to the rampant violence in the country. Politicians can also manipulate these gangs for their own interests, further exacerbating the situation. (A. Moncoeur, personal communication, June 6, 2023)

[...] Violence in Haiti has multiple causes, but one of the main ones is the lack of education among both criminal gangs and some politicians. These groups can act with impunity and commit violent acts as a result of their lack of education and control. (J. Apollon, personal communication, June 6, 2023)

In Haiti, cultural violence can be interpreted as the expression of a historical legacy marked by struggle and resistance against colonial and slave-owning

oppression. This trajectory, although legitimate in its origins, has left an imprint on the collective memory, thereby contributing to the internalization of violence as an acceptable—and even necessary—resource for social and political transformation.

In addition, factors such as limited access to quality education, economic inequality, and corruption contribute to these challenges. These elements not only perpetuate conditions of exclusion but also reinforce the perception that violence is a valid response to the multiple forms of injustice suffered by Haitian society.

In this way, the culture of violence is revealed in the proliferation of criminal gangs, political violence, and gender-based violence. These expressions have progressively displaced the traditional components of a vibrant Caribbean culture, characterized by oral, festive, and communal expressions.

Given this situation, it is essential to recognize and address the structural factors that fuel this violent culture. This implies, on the one hand, investing in a quality education system that empowers citizens and strengthens their critical thinking. On the other hand, it is necessary to eradicate corruption to restore institutional trust and promote greater economic and social equity. Likewise, it is essential to foster constructive dialogue and strengthen mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of conflicts as pillars of a culture of peace and truly democratic coexistence.

Conclusions

One of the main problems facing Haiti is foreign interference in its political affairs. The country's history has been profoundly shaped by a series of external interventions that have destabilized the political system and eroded trust in democratic institutions. The manipulation of electoral processes and the imposition of international interests—alien to the priorities of the Haitian people—have fostered the rise of corrupt, weak, and illegitimate leaders. This constant interference has undermined national sovereignty and limited the Haitian state's capacity to make autonomous, sustainable, and effective decisions.

Corruption is one of the most serious problems facing Haiti, with profound effects on the state's legitimacy and social cohesion. The lack of transparency and accountability mechanisms has allowed some political and business actors to misappropriate the country's resources. This dynamic has contributed to perpetuating poverty and inequality. Furthermore, by eroding the state's capacity to design effective public policies, corruption has not only hindered sustainable development but has also fostered the proliferation of criminal gangs and increased violence.

Based on the testimonies gathered, Haiti's current situation reflects its complex historical trajectory and a failed coordination among political, economic, and social factors. The material poverty affecting large sectors of the population contrasts sharply with the instrumentalization of violence and crime as mechanisms for obtaining power and accumulating wealth. In this regard, what is evident is not a lack of natural or material resources, but a structural deficit in democratic and institutional terms.

Moreover, education is a fundamental pillar for Haiti's development and structural transformation. However, the lack of public investment in the education system has limited access to genuine opportunities for social mobility, thereby perpetuating inequality and exclusion. The precarious state of educational infrastructure, the scarcity of teaching resources, and the limited teacher training have adversely affected the quality of education. Added to this are political instability and persistent violence in various regions of the country, factors that have hindered continuity and effective access to education, thus deepening a persistent cycle of poverty, vulnerability, and marginalization.

In general terms, the situation in Haiti demands a comprehensive approach and a genuine commitment from national actors and the international community. Violence, poverty, and lack of access to education are the result of a history marked by colonization, foreign interference, institutional fragility, and the unequal distribution of resources. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated intervention strategy that not only responds to the crisis's immediate consequences but also addresses its structural causes.

It is essential to tackle the structural causes of the problems facing Haiti by designing comprehensive, sustainable, and coherent strategies that ensure the Haitian population's participation in decision-making. Likewise, the international community must responsibly assume its historical role in shaping the Haitian crisis, adopting a cooperative approach that transcends geopolitical and economic interests and prioritizes the well-being of society. Only through a joint effort will Haiti be able to successfully confront current challenges and build the conditions for a more just, secure, and prosperous future.

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