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Resistance in the Time of Cholera: The Limits of Stabilization through Securitization in Haiti

NICOLAS LEMAY-HÉBERT

The United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) is the latest of seven UN missions in the country, stretching over 20 years of international involvement. If the UN's Security Sector Reform (SSR) mission has had a 'stabilizing' influence on the country following Aristide's forced exile since 2004, a string of sexual scandals and the cholera scandal has progressively contributed to modify the local perception of the mission, seen as yet another foreign 'occupation' in Haiti. This article argues that while the resistance to the UN in Haiti is clearly contextual – linked to certain events and actions of certain individuals – it is also, and more fundamentally, structural in form. The article explores themes around the local resistance encountered by the UN in Haiti, using James Scott's multi-levelled approach of the landscape of resistance to highlight the complex nature of statebuilding in Haiti, while linking the more recent form of resistance to MINUSTAH to the specific securitization approach adopted by the mission and its restrictive mindset.

Introduction: The Limits of the *Failed State* Framework for Haiti

While Haiti has been hard-hit by a number of catastrophes over the years – a mix of man-made and natural factors coming into play – the earthquake of 12 January 2010 brought a degree of international attention that no one in the small island had seen before. The degree of infrastructural destruction and human life lost warranted this extraordinary attention: estimates oscillate between 200,000 and 300,000 persons injured and 65,000 to 316,000 deaths; most of the state apparatus was destroyed and infrastructural destruction extended to the cities of Leogane, Grand-Goâve, Petit-Goâve, Jacmel and Carefour. While estimates provide more a 'rough indication of the situation'¹ than anything else, some three million people are believed to have been affected in some way by the earthquake. Everyone felt concerned about the fate of the Haitians, and the phrase 'today we are all Haitians' emerged as a persistent refrain that reflected both the unprecedented character of the event, and the international response to it. International volunteers came from almost every region of the world, turning Port-au-Prince, already described as the capital of the 'Republic of NGOs' before the earthquake² into a 'wounded city mobbed with rescue and relief workers'.³ More than US\$10 billion of aid was promised at the Montreal Conference, and even if only a portion of the aid has actually been disbursed so far, the consensus was that Haiti was in dire need of a 'Marshall-like' plan.⁴

However, international involvement has increasingly been greeted by ambivalence in Haiti, and this initial reluctance has progressively taken the form of active

resistance, with the United Nations as the focal point of attention in the process, going back even before the earthquake. Following a string of sexual scandals involving UN peacekeepers, and, perhaps more crucially, following the cholera scandal that rocked the United Nations – the Nepalese contingent being described as a potential source of the cholera outbreak in October 2010 – the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH)'s 'capital of legitimacy' has quickly floundered. In this context, and as will be explored in more detail below, local actors started to openly criticize the United Nations, referring to it as a 'force of occupation,' sensing perhaps that there was gain to be made at the expense of the international organization. Quite tellingly, in his last speech to the United Nations Security Council President Préval criticized MINUSTAH for not adapting quickly enough to the new situation, stating that the international intervention in Haiti has 'practically led to 11 years of military presence in a country that has no war'.⁵ I argue that this apparent 'bifurcation' between international and local agendas⁶ is at the heart of both Haiti's alternative paradigms of development as well as the debate surrounding possible international involvement in Haiti, which has long been described as a perennial 'failed state'.⁷ However, it can be argued that this specific discourse fixes culpability on Haitian society, rendering it dysfunctional while at the same time 'casting international rescue interventions as functional'.⁸

While it may appear intuitive to label Haiti *failed* – after all, everyone recognizes, local politicians included, that the Haitian state is not up to the task – semantics has tangible implications, and maybe more importantly, specific limitations.⁹ I suggest four limitations here as applied to the specific case of Haiti, which will inform the theoretical stance of this article. First, as already noted, the failed state discourse tends to underplay international factors in the *failed statebuilding* process. When the 'failed state' discourse meets the 'empty shell approach'¹⁰ – where infrastructural destruction is equated with societal bankruptcy – it suddenly legitimizes all forms of international intervention, providing 'an open season on institutional invention'.¹¹ While this discourse¹² has offered a convenient legitimization basis for the setting of international administrations in the past,¹³ the same discourse has also emerged in the context of Haiti, with pleas for the setting-up of international trusteeships as the solution to 'Haiti's misery'.¹⁴ There is no way around the fact that international factors played and still play an integral role in the *failed statebuilding* process in Haiti; actually Haiti's failed state status is not only a story of lack of governance, but also the product of 'too much governance'.¹⁵

Second, the failed state discourse takes the OECD's list of 'developed countries' as the standard against which other states are measured, in the process ignoring the specificities of the state formation process. 'Failed states' are thus understood as falling short of specific standards of social, political, and economic performance. In this context, the expressions 'failed' or 'failing state' seem to be a convenient neologism describing nothing more than a state with low standards of living, a country that has not attained the same level of development – measured as the public goods provision of state institutions – as the 'developed world'.¹⁶ Haiti went through a very specific process of state

formation – one could argue that it is the case for every political community – which will be quickly summarized in the next section, and thus understanding Haiti only in terms of indicators of state capability obscures more than it reveals.

Third, the failed state discourse, by isolating local factors of fragility from structural and international ones, and by focusing almost exclusively on state capacity (or the lack thereof), encourages and promotes a technocratic approach to statebuilding. Success for an international intervention is defined through various technical benchmarks, which can make David Malone and Sebastian von Einsiedel say for instance that ‘the case of Haiti presents an instance in which UN operations were broadly successful – yet the patient failed to recover’.¹⁷ The ‘technocratization’ of international statebuilding (and SSR as part of it) in turn leads to cases of attention-deficit disorder for international actors and undue compartmentalization of programmes, focusing on specific benchmarks (number of police officers trained at the academy, number of arrests, etc.) without taking into the broader picture of Haiti’s political evolution. In this context, I agree with Paul Jackson that there is a strong case for linking security sector reform and statebuilding together,¹⁸ which implies a degree of understanding of the logics of integration and exclusion at the local level and across time. These logics have often been neglected in the case of Haiti in favour of traditional security and stability benchmarks.

Fourth and finally, the failed state discourse through the objectivization of state fragility promotes, consciously or unconsciously, a ‘one size fits all’ approach. Following diverse and numerous ‘lessons learned’ from various humanitarian interventions in the world and successful examples of development, plans for Haiti have been tailored following Taiwan’s (‘Taiwan of the Caribbean’ discourse in Duvalier’s time), post-tsunami Indonesia’s or the Dominican Republic’s experiences.¹⁹ However, too few of these plans are truly specific to the Haitian context and endogenous in their elaboration and application. Trying to do justice to the vibrant literature on Haitian history, this article advances that it is simply impossible, or at least quite limiting, to attempt to understand the challenges, difficulties, and accomplishments of MINUSTAH, as well as the local resistance to the international presence, without putting the mission back into the wider context of the complex web of interrelations between international and national actors. For resistance to international statebuilding projects is not a new phenomenon in Haiti, and quite the contrary, it can be argued that it forms a constant in Haitian history, fuelling and playing into social class struggles.

Using James Scott’s innovative approach of landscape of resistance, the first section develops a three-staged approach to resistance that aims to highlight the interplay between class struggles and between international and local actors, with a specific focus on the security sector and SSR programmes conducted in Haiti throughout the years. Through a cursory overview of Haiti’s political development, including the *background* of class relations and the formation of the postcolonial state, the *middle ground* of democratization and international interventions (including seven peace missions), and a *foreground* of MINUSTAH, the earthquake and the cholera outbreak, this article looks at factors structuring the landscape of resistance in Haiti. Building on this analysis, the second section

looks more specifically at the limits of the securitization-first approach adopted by MINUSTAH since 2004 and its impact on the landscape of resistance.

Landscape of Resistance in Haiti

MINUSTAH's official mandate as stated by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1542 (2004) is to 'build state capacity' by 'extending state authority throughout Haiti' and by 'ensur[ing] a stable and secure environment'. However, in order to correctly assess its accomplishments and shortcomings in terms of statebuilding, as well as the nature of the international-local relations established over time, there is a need to further elaborate on the specific nature of the Haitian state. Actually, the state – or, more precisely, its modern Western fantasy – has never existed in Haiti, at least not as a coherent idea binding citizens together and reflecting a Rousseauian social contract. It has consistently been a platform for competing factions, vying for positions of power. It is quite telling that *pouvwa* (power) in Haitian Creole refers to the 'powers' associated to a particular civic post or office, whereas a second concept that can be understood as a translation of power, *fòs*, this time refers to a broader definition of 'moral force' of a community.²⁰ Additionally, *leta* (the state) refers to powerful individuals in Haitian Creole, regardless of their actual ties with the state apparatus, and the same word can mean 'state' or 'bully'.²¹ To highlight the complex nature of statebuilding in Haiti, and how it is embedded in class relations and has been frequently influenced by outside interventions, I will use Scott's 'Neo-Brodelian' approach to the structural factors informing the study of resistance. This, I hope, will enable me to shed an additional light on the agency of local actors 'to resist, ignore, engage with, disengage from, and exploit' international involvement,²² but also on the agency of and constraints on international actors in their quest to 'transform' and 'fix' Haiti.

Background: Predatory State, the Security Sector and Class Relations

For Scott, the characteristic features of the background of the landscape of resistance 'create palpable limits to what, in the short run at least, is possible; they also create opportunities and exert a determinate pressure on the nature of class relations'.²³ In the case of Haiti, this background enables us to understand resistance 'as a structural condition,' rooted in existing conditions of poverty,²⁴ but also more specifically anchored in class struggles that have structured Haitian society before and after independence. Three specific features of class struggles permeate Haitian history from colonialism to the postcolonial state and help us understand the dynamics of exclusion and resistance: 1) a hierarchical social order – marked by racial tensions between white colonizers and African slaves and 'free people of colour' in the colonial period, then between mulattos and blacks after independence²⁵ – and, more generally, social tensions between a privileged few and an impoverished majority; 2) an autocratic and militarized political system, built on the colonial heritage, reinforced by international encroachment and outright occupations, and crystallized in the development of the Haitian predatory state and the predominance of the military establishment

for most parts of the Haitian history; and 3) an export-oriented economy, from the plantation system to the free trade regulations, clashing with the subsistence agriculture model (subsistence farmers represent two thirds of the population). Taken together and understood as the background of the landscape of class struggles and resistance in Haiti, these features tell us a specific story made up of local and international factors meshing together, producing a more nuanced account of the logics often associated with the simplistic discourse on ‘failed states’.

The struggle between Haiti’s impoverished majority (*pèp la* in Haitian Creole) and the wealthy few has been at the centre of Haitian politics before and after independence. Politics has constantly been a zero-sum game, orchestrated by ‘predatory elites,’ a term coined by Robert Maguire to describe the peculiar blend of gangsterism and populism that has defined the country’s political superstructure for most of its history.²⁶ Haiti became independent in 1804, but the colonial legacy far outlasted the French colonial regime. Isolation on the international scene – the Haitian state was unevenly recognized by the international community between 1804–1862 while there was a looming and constant threat of military invasion by France up until 1825 – made Haiti’s independence so insecure that early regimes devoted significant state resources to safeguarding sovereignty to the detriment of the population’s overall welfare.²⁷ To support the costs associated with the military build-up and to perpetuate the elite entitlement ‘to obtain a work-free outcome out of the masses’ – the authoritarian *habitus* in other words²⁸ – the plantation system was retained and the new Haitian rulers began to put the ex-slaves back on the plantations where they had to work under military supervision.²⁹ The temporary solidarity that had developed among members of diverse ethnic backgrounds, classes, and status during the war of liberation dissipated and was replaced by the ‘emergence of opportunistic factions who exploited racial and class differences to maximize profits and self-interest’.³⁰ As Robert Fatton Jr. puts it, virtually all Haitian rulers looked at political power ‘as a brutal, indivisible quantity that could be won collectively, but that had to be kept individually and exercised absolutely’.³¹

Resistance in this context was almost structural for the impoverished majority. Ex-slaves who composed the rural base could not easily be compelled into a new servitude, and many chose to escape in a process called *marronage*. The process of *marronage* – *petit*, implying deserting the plantation temporarily, and *grand*, attempting to leave the plantation for good – echoes Scott’s concept of everyday forms of peasant resistance, understood as ‘the prosaic but constant struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents and interest from them’.³² While the plantation labour system faced a steadfast resistance from the ‘counter-plantation’ system built around self-sufficient agriculture,³³ the ‘agrarian problem’ became the main driver of the ‘historical fissure between a militaristic state of the few and the wider society of the many’.³⁴ There were a few open confrontations with authority throughout the years, for instance uprisings took place in 1679, 1691, 1697, 1703, 1719, 1734 and 1751, and after independence, in 1844 (known as the Piquet Revolt), but such outbreaks of violence were not typical³⁵ and resistance

was more 'diffused' and more rooted in the everyday. Finally, the patronizing, top-down approach taken by US officials during the American occupation (between 1915 and 1934) turned initial enthusiasm into animosity and rancour;³⁶ over time, resistance to American policies fuelled protests, strikes, sabotage, and riots,³⁷ culminating in the 1929 uprisings in Port-au-Prince and Cap-Haïtien, and a bloody repression by American troops. Hence, class struggles between an impoverished majority and a privileged few – which permeated the constitution of the predatory state in Haiti and the security sector associated with it, and reinforced by international interventions – can be seen as constituting the *background* of the landscape of resistance, enabling us to shed additional light on the *middle ground* and *foreground* of the landscape of resistance.

Middle Ground: Perpetuation of Class Struggles, Democratization and UN Involvement

The middle ground of the landscape of resistance in Haiti encompasses the post-Duvalierist evolution of Haitian politics, marked by the rise of the popular movement and numerous international interventions aimed at consolidating democratization through the re-installment of elected leaders (first Aristide administration 1994–1996) or their forced eviction (second Aristide administration 2001–2004). Haiti's democratic transition formally began in 1986 after Jean-Claude Duvalier went into exile. Indeed, the rise to power of the 'popular movement' in 1991 (The *Lavalas* coalition, meaning 'the flood' – a word popularly used for the deluge of water and mud which descends into the capital after a storm) has clearly been one of the most potent symbols for progressive political change in Haiti, and even arguably, in the entire world.³⁸ However, this period was still marked by constant social struggles between the political and economic elite and the *moun andeyo* (or outsiders), those who are not considered part of the nation and are excluded from its benefits and recognition.³⁹

After an immediate period marked by a transitional military government ('Duvalierism after Duvalier'), Jean-Bertrand Aristide was triumphantly elected president in 1991. The initial goal of Aristide was to challenge the hierarchical fabric of Haitian society, an approach encompassed in his slogan *tout moun se moun* ('every human being is a human being'). However, less than eight months after Aristide's inauguration, a group of army officers organized a coup, replacing the elected president with a military *junta* and sending him into exile in the United States. Aristide's reforms of the armed services and his steps to create a distinct police force clearly led to unease in the army.⁴⁰ It also has to be said that from the first day of the post-Duvalier era, Haiti's dominant classes never ceased to oppose, undermine, and challenge Lavalas' rule.⁴¹ The 'international community' responded with an embargo and international sanctions on the leader of the military junta, Raul Cédras, which inadvertently reinforced the dependency of the country on international economic aid. Aristide returned to the presidency in 1994, with the backing of US troops and the UN, and one of his first decisions was to dissolve the *Forces Armées d'Haïti* (FADH – Haitian Armed Forces). Another member of the Lavalas coalition, René Prével, was voted in as his successor in 1996, and Aristide returned for another

term in 2001. However, a small group of former military officers took up arms against Aristide, and this time the US did not support the elected president – on the contrary, Aristide himself described the event as a kidnapping by the US, France and Canada.

In this context, the UN and other international actors have constantly been drawn into Haiti's politics and have thus become principal actors in local politics. A succession of security sector reform missions – UNMIIH, UNSMIIH, UNTMIIH, MIPONUH and MICAH – were deployed to Haiti to help the development of the new *Police Nationale d'Haiti* (PNH), as well as to support prison and judicial reform. These missions were an integral part of the Haitian *failed statebuilding* process, insisting for instance on the inclusion of former FADH personnel in the new police force, which not only undermined the legitimacy of the new police force in the eyes of large parts of the civilian population but also fuelled corruption.⁴² The series of UN interventions following the re-instatement of Aristide were all framed in a very technocratic way, 'outside of development programming'.⁴³ Furthermore, the missions were inherently limited by their insufficient understanding of the country's history, society and culture.⁴⁴ This had a direct impact on the perceived legitimacy of the international interventions. At first, many Haitians welcomed the peacekeepers, perceiving them as a new kind of security force able to pull the country out of the horrors that had transpired between 1991 and 1994,⁴⁵ with a greater perception of legitimacy outside of Port-au-Prince than in the capital city.⁴⁶ Quickly enough though, the international peacekeepers' legitimacy withered, when 'blamed to a degree by the populace for [the] actions' of the Haitian security institutions.⁴⁷ With the massive arrival of foreign NGOs, the 1990s is also a period marked by the emergence of scepticism about both the real impact of the aid apparatus, and the role played by external actors in undermining social cohesion and state capacity.

Foreground: MINUSTAH, Security Sector Reform and the Cholera Crisis

The foreground of the landscape of resistance covers the second exile of Aristide and the establishment of MINUSTAH to initially support the transitional government and then to pursue a security sector reform agenda. It also covers a period characterized by a series of external and internal shocks, including the worldwide food price inflation of 2008, numerous storms in 2004 and 2008, and the earthquake of 2010, which all led, in turn, to sporadic but intense concentration on Haiti by donor agencies. Traditional fault lines between an impoverished majority and a privileged few once again mark this period, with international influence intertwined with local structures of power.

Following the second (forced) exile of Aristide, the international community imposed a government of technocrats, headed by Gérard Latortue, to assure the transition to the elections of 2006. The approach of the Latortue government, and its domestic and foreign supporters (including the United Nations) was to use a military solution to what is fundamentally a social problem, anchored in profound social, economic and cultural inequalities.⁴⁸ However, if we take into account the historical process of state formation in Haiti, the central question remains: what is the United Nations supposed to stabilize in Haiti? While the

securitization of socio-political issues by the Latortue/MINUSTAH regime will be detailed in the next section, it is possible to say that MINUSTAH relied on the same old SSR practices that failed in the first instance.⁴⁹ MINUSTAH actually oversaw the same policy of incorporating ex-army paramilitaries into the police force,⁵⁰ thus contributing once again to the disputed process of state formation. In general, police reform in Haiti since 2004 has followed a relatively narrow, technical agenda, emphasizing training and vetting; an agenda that has been challenged by structural constraints and on-the-ground realities.⁵¹ Hence, there was and still is no vision of a holistic SSR approach within MINUSTAH,⁵² which sets the UN on a course to reinforce the same dynamics that caused tensions in the first place.

In this context, the *foreground* of the landscape of resistance is both multiform and complex. First it is hybrid in form and content, and not restricted to 'local' actors rejecting international hegemony, echoing the resistance process in other locales such as Kosovo and Timor-Leste.⁵³ Prominent international officials have also voiced their opposition to current international policies.⁵⁴ Second, and in continuity with the past periods, the resistance is diffuse and not restricted to the UN – it takes the shape of the fault lines dividing Haitian politics. For instance, dissatisfaction with aid delivery was acute and spilled over into the political arena in 2008; after the 2010 earthquake, the dissatisfaction was abundant and not only within the camps.⁵⁵ Also, due to the intertwinement of international and local structures as discussed before, resistance is usually not restricted to one actor, whether international or local. For instance, anti-UN demonstrations in 2010 also targeted Jules Célestin, Préval's heir apparent.

Concerning the specific resistance to MINUSTAH since its establishment in June 2004, many in Haiti felt that it represented a return to international occupation, this time under a new disguise.⁵⁶ The string of sexual scandals that dogged the military components of MINUSTAH certainly contributed to the anti-UN sentiment in Haiti: in 2007, 111 Sri Lankan soldiers have been repatriated on the grounds of sexual exploitation and the abuse of under-aged minors;⁵⁷ in January 2011, Pakistani troops were accused of the rape of a young boy in Gonaïves and sexual relations with minors in the capital; three of them were later found guilty of sexual exploitation and abuse and were condemned to a one-year jail sentence.⁵⁸ In July 2011, Uruguayan troops were accused of sexually assaulting a young man in the southern town of Port-Salut (while only being charged with 'coercion' charges).⁵⁹ Echoing the various levels of the resistance landscape described earlier, there was an amplification factor at work with each scandal, building on the narrative of occupation in Haiti and the latent hostility toward international troops in certain segments of the society (especially the student circles in Port-au-Prince).⁶⁰ This 'legitimacy issue' was also further aggravated by a few public relations fiascos following the 2010 earthquake, such as the hiring of two vessels to accommodate UN staffers,⁶¹ which was perceived by some as an obscene demonstration of power and wealth in the midst of the catastrophe, a story which echoes a similar scandal in Timor-Leste in 1999.⁶² However, despite the sexual scandals and a few dubious decisions by MINUSTAH leaders, this resistance was first and foremost

structural. It should be noted that MINUSTAH was also a convenient scapegoat for everything that went wrong in Haiti (and for the inaction of the Haitian government), echoing what has been dubbed the 'legitimacy dilemma' in earlier work, where everything internationals try to do when put in a situation of authority turns against them.⁶³

Support for the UN mission has been decreasing for a long time but it fell sharply after the introduction of cholera.⁶⁴ Opponents to MINUSTAH took resistance to a whole new level with the cholera outbreak in October 2010, a few months after the massive earthquake that levelled Port-au-Prince and surrounding towns. The epidemic that started in Mirebalais in the Artibonite region has killed more than 8,000 people since and infected over 670,000. While the origin of the outbreak is still debated,⁶⁵ but most likely to have originated in the UN Nepali camp,⁶⁶ most Haitians have already firmly concluded that the new pathogen was introduced by UN peacekeepers.⁶⁷ The catastrophe, described as the 'Haitian 9–11' by an interviewee,⁶⁸ was also reinterpreted with local signifiers, best suited to cope with such a traumatizing event. As one Haitian official put it in an interview, 'MINUSTAH is a *houngan* [vodou priest], and behind the ougan hides the cholera',⁶⁹ while a second interviewee mentioned how Haitians often observe that 'MINUSTAH and cholera are Marrasa [twins in Haitian vodou, endowed with supernatural powers]'.⁷⁰

In such an explosive atmosphere, overt resistance did not take long to appear. In effect, within weeks of the first cases, there were reports – some unconfirmed – of crowds throwing stones at UN peacekeepers' armoured personnel carriers and of repeated clashes between Haitians and the UN forces, many ending in deaths.⁷¹ Following the news of the sexual scandals, protests have spread around Haiti, as angry people took to the streets demanding that the United Nations get out of their country. A number of surveys have been conducted, telling divergent stories. The crackdown on 'gangs' in Bel Air and Cité Soleil, which will be addressed in the next section, has, according to two surveys, dramatically improved the sentiment toward the mission.⁷² However, after the cholera outbreak and the series of scandals that rocked the UN mission, a Columbia University survey conducted in 2011 showed that 65 per cent of Haitians living in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince would like MINUSTAH to leave within a year,⁷³ while another survey conducted a year later has 72.2 per cent holding similar opinion.⁷⁴

MINUSTAH's Securitization First Strategy and its Limits

International and local statebuilding practices were intertwined for most of Haiti's history, leading to hybrid governance structures, and hybrid resistance to it. Hence, all statebuilding policies have repercussions for socio-political cohesion, intentionally or not. The institutions, which external interveners help create, affect the society as a whole, thus bringing outside actors into the sphere of nation-building.⁷⁵ As discussed earlier, security institutions in Haiti have traditionally played a crucial role, being central actors of governance especially before the Duvaliers. Paramilitary institutions were also quite instrumental in

the quest for power and protection in Haiti: from the *tonton macoutes* under François Duvalier, to the *attachés* in the immediate post-Duvalier era or the pro-Aristide *Chimères* (or *chimè*) and renegade anti-Aristide military officers (regrouped under the Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haïti and the Revolutionary Front for the Liberation of Haiti). In this context, externally-led SSR policies in Haiti are fraught with risk, having to tread the fine line between strengthening security institutions in a *predatory statebuilding* context and trying to disarm paramilitary groups pursuing distinct political agendas (in a ‘continuation of politics by other means’ mind-set). In such a context, an ‘apolitical’ security reform process is simply not an option, despite the technocratic rhetoric of certain international actors.

In a heavily politicized context of social struggle between Haiti’s impoverished majority and the wealthy few, accentuated by Aristide’s controversial ‘exile’ and a transitional government perceived as siding with the economic and political elite (in fact, no Aristide supporter was included in the ‘national coalition’), MINUSTAH’s SSR approach to strengthen security institutions and to disarm rebels was doomed to be seen as highly partisan, and in continuity with past interventions and occupations. While MINUSTAH hesitantly challenged the hegemonic presence of the disbanded Haitian army in a few localities, it used significantly more repressive means to curb the power of the *Chimères* (‘chimeras’) in Cité Soleil.⁷⁶ In a context of increasing insecurity in Port-au-Prince,⁷⁷ MINUSTAH and the HNP proceeded to ‘clean’ the ‘difficult’ urban areas of Cité Soleil (or *Cité Soley*) and Bel Air. The joint MINUSTAH and Latortue government’s approach was quite simply to equate all *Chimères* or ‘armed gangs’ with ‘Lavalas *Chimères*’, and then these *Chimères* with bandits.⁷⁸ UN forays in these areas to fight ‘bandits’ led to 100 wounded in October 2005 and between 170 and 205 in December 2005. A half of these persons were women and children,⁷⁹ which, for MINUSTAH’s head of mission Edmond Mulet, were mere ‘collateral damage’.⁸⁰ As Robert Muggah notes, the end result was that these muscular enforcement-led operations ‘appeared in some cases both to disperse and simultaneously to radicalise youth and so-called gangs’.⁸¹

There is no denying that insecurity became a major social issue in Haiti after the departure of Aristide, that this hostility degenerated from political violence aimed at the interim government, the PNH and MINUSTAH into more random acts of violent crime and that MINUSTAH/PNH operations managed to bring a modicum of stability in these areas. However, to look at the *Chimères* phenomenon, and the post-2004 surge of violence solely through a security lens is limited at best. ‘Security issues’ are interwoven with political and economic claims, brilliantly summarized by Madison Smartt Bell in the case of the *Chimères*: ‘before the term was coined, Haitian delinquent youths were called *mal-élevé* (“ill brought up”) or still more tellingly, *sansmaman* [“the motherless ones”] (. . .). The *Chimè* were indeed chimeras; ill fortune left them as unrealized shadows (. . .) These were the people Aristide had originally been out to salvage: *Tout moun sé moun* was his earliest motto’.⁸² This is an opinion confirmed by a recent ethnographic study of the youth in Cité Soleil, whose main finding was that

‘youth frame their experiences in terms of a broader social conflict between the “included” and the “excluded”’.⁸³ In this context, MINUSTAH is accused of responding only to the symptoms of violence rather than the causes of the violence.⁸⁴ As one interviewee mentioned, all UN reports look at the district [Bel Air] strictly through the lens of violence.⁸⁵

If MINUSTAH’s securitization first strategy has been predominant in Haiti – by the number of troops involved (more than 8,000 uninformed personnel including more than 6,000 troops) and by its role in Haiti’s security landscape – it is worth noting that it is not the only approach existing in Haiti. An example of an alternative approach to stabilization in Haiti is the ‘integrated security and development programme’ in the Bel Air district by Viva Rio, a Brazilian NGO.⁸⁶ The programme aims to engage communities in an informal way and to bring ‘gangs’ into a dynamic process of negotiation and dialogue between themselves, and with the HNP and MINUSTAH. Another example is the Community Violence Reduction (CVR) programme, established in 2008 as an attempt by MINUSTAH to do things differently, and which aims to create economic and social opportunities with a view to extracting former gang members from violence.⁸⁷ As the CVR team leader puts it, ‘we realised that the DDR strategy was ill-adapted to the context, that local dynamics were more complex. (...) If the other sections will deal with the state, this section will focus on the community-level’.⁸⁸ As other CVR officers noted: ‘each time the military officers “screw up,” we have to pick up the pieces. (...) We constantly have to stabilise a situation previously destabilised by military units’.⁸⁹ It might be too soon to see it as a ‘model for future interventions’⁹⁰ – and we also need to be careful with ‘one size fits all’ mindsets – but this clearly represents an interesting evolution in the security landscape in Haiti.

Conclusion

While insecurity in Haiti is quite marginal compared to other Latin American and Caribbean countries, there is a wide agreement that the social structures that played an important role in the post-Aristide surge of violence (known as *bazes*) are still active and could resume their active resistance to international and local governance structures⁹¹ – if only because the social chasm separating the privileged few and the impoverished majority is as wide as it has ever been. This article highlighted how class struggles, combined with continuous international involvement, have influenced Haiti’s political evolution since its independence, an evolution that can be understood as a *failed statebuilding* process. Building on James Scott’s innovative approach of landscape of resistance, the article developed a three-stage approach to resistance (*background*, *middle ground*, and *foreground*) and used this to examine the interplay between local and international factors in the process in order to better understand the recent wave of resistance to MINUSTAH. The article also focused on the evolution of the security sector in Haiti in different stages of its political evolution, putting in context MINUSTAH’s securitization first strategy and its limits in addressing issues related to the social gap in Haiti.

Haiti's lack of proper sewage and sanitation system, exacerbated by the 2010 earthquake, and the deficiencies in the UN's sanitation standards, which was already an issue back in 2008,⁹² have been labelled a 'perfect storm' for the outbreak of a massive epidemic of cholera.⁹³ While the 'perfect storm' theory has been used by the UN to absolve itself from responsibility for the outbreak in a context of a pending multimillion lawsuit,⁹⁴ one could also use the 'cholera outbreak as a perfect storm' analogy to understand the nature of resistance to MINUSTAH, unveiling the limits of its securitization policy and the international role in 'strengthening' what has always been a highly politicized security sector. Similarly, debates surrounding the cholera outbreak in Haiti shed a new light on the growing importance of the 'unintended consequences' issue in the context of peacebuilding. There is a need to properly assess not only the positive aspects of outside interventions, which are usually assessed through scores of 'lessons learned' papers and scientific articles written by policy experts, but also the detrimental aspects of (sometimes massive) international presences, including the impact on local economies and on local structures of governance. Haiti's cholera crisis has inadvertently put this agenda at the forefront of peacebuilding debates.

In this context, there is a need to break from technocratic approaches to peacebuilding and move toward a proper recognition of the social and political aspects of peace consolidation in Haiti, which has been cursorily highlighted not only in this article, but first and foremost in the existing literature on Haiti (in French and in English). Paradoxically enough, a proper understanding of the social divisions integral to Haiti's past and present political development forces us to put in perspective the opportunity for a quick exit of UN forces in Haiti. MINUSTAH has undoubtedly helped to 'stabilise' Haiti,⁹⁵ even if in a very biased, partisan and *political* way. Had it not been for the UN's presence, the transitional government would probably have been engulfed in the 2004–2006 surge of violence.⁹⁶ Having said that, there is a need to move beyond 'stabilization' discourses toward addressing structural violence, which require a comprehensive perspective on the intended and unintended impacts of international policies in Haiti. In this context, the first step toward a change of paradigm in Haiti is to recognise that international influences are integral parts of the *de facto* 'social contract' (or lack thereof) in Haiti.

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NOTES

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