

FILM REVIEW



## 'It stays with you' (Cahal McLaughin and Siobhán Wills, 2018)

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*O Haiti é aqui* (Haiti is here),  
*O Haiti não é aqui* (Haiti is not here).  
Caetano Veloso, Brazilian musician

'You know what you know, it stays with you.'

What do we know about MINUSTAH (United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, 2004–2017) and its effects and impacts? According to the UN, the 'successful work achieved by MINUSTAH' included 'the wide range of reconstruction efforts conducted after the 2010 earthquake' (UNSC, res.2350, 2017). Brazil was in charge of the military command of MINUSTAH during those 13 years and had the largest contingent of troops. According to Brazilian commentators, the success of the Mission gave international credibility to many other Brazilian diplomatic ambitions.

Nevertheless, NGOs and human rights defenders have repeatedly denounced the abusive use of force, cases of rape and robbery committed by MINUSTAH soldiers, as well as the introduction of cholera in the country. Those claiming for recognition of the atrocities and consequent reparation have now an important instrument for their struggle. 'It stays with you: use of force by UN Peacekeepers in Haiti' is a 2018 documentary shot by Cahal McLaughin and Siobhán Wills that gives voice to those Haitians who have been most affected by MINUSTAH operations. It also listens to what UN officials, academics and governmental representatives have to say.

The 52-minutes long documentary is a bruising and informative work that aims to

show another side that needs addressing – in particular the excessive use of force in a populated neighborhood, the failure to provide medical care, the lack of any investigation by the UN or any other authorities, and the fact that houses have never been rebuilt and people are homeless as a result (<https://itstayswithyou.com>).

This award-winning documentary is part of a broader endeavor to 'raise awareness of the long term effects of the use of force on *Cité Soleil*, within the UN and beyond, and to advocate for an investigation.' Such an endeavor encompasses public screenings and discussions, as well as the creation of a website (*idem*) where one will find not only information regarding the project, including the documentary making-off, but also suggestions concerning 'what you can do.'

Violence, deprivation, injustice and external domination are nothing new in Haiti, one of the poorest countries in the Americas. The successful slave revolution of the end of the eighteenth century made Haiti the world's first black Republic, but the country was never granted full autonomy. 'It stays with you' does not directly question the extent to

which MINUSTAH reached its stated goal of stabilizing and bringing peace to the country. The documentary gives human meaning to what military rhetoric usually calls ‘collateral damage’ and demands accountability and reparation from the UN. The way the excessive use of force has ruined lives, families and properties is portrayed dramatically in the documentary. The interviewees recall all their pain and the great fear they felt during night raids. They were not safe even at home, as bullets easily penetrated fragile buildings. As a woman remembers, ‘there was nobody shooting the whites’; the ‘whites’ were responsible for the ‘massacre.’ Helplessness is everywhere: in the stories that no one cared to listen before; in the general deprivation showed by a camera that also portrays beauty; in the fact that ‘whites’ and locals spoke different languages; and in the children that seem to be incapable of smiling in front of the camera, even when they are not around their parents recalling their fear and losses.

Two of the initial scenes of *It Stays With You* show young people playing football in Port-au-Prince and MINUSTAH soldiers, carrying heavy weaponry with the Brazilian flag on their uniforms. In August 2004, a couple of months after the arrival in Haiti of the Blue Helmets led by the Brazilian armed forces, the Brazilian national football team, that had earlier won the America Cup, played against Haiti in the capital, in what became known as the ‘Peace Game.’ The country stopped to see the famous Brazilian players, very few of them were white. Till today Haitians cheer for the Brazilian team with devotion, perhaps because many of them used to think that Pelé, who stopped playing football in 1977, was born in Haiti. It is probable that few know that the music that is being played on the streets in one of the final scenes of the documentary is a Brazilian one. It is called *Valsa da Saudade* (Longing Waltz). As the music starts, a man smiles.

#### VALSA DA SAUDADE

*Adeus amor eu vou partir;  
Ouço ao longe um clarim!  
Mas onde eu for irei sentir os seus passos junto a mim.  
Estando em luta, estando a sós,  
Ouvirei a sua voz.*

#### LONGING WALTZ

Goodbye my love, I’m leaving;  
In the distance I hear a clarion!  
But where I go I’ll feel your steps next to me.  
If I am struggling, or alone,  
I will hear your voice.

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