

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANIZATIONS?: UNDERSTANDING & SUPPORTING CIVIL SOCIETY IN URBAN HAITI

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Haiti's January 12, 2010 earthquake exposed the consequences of centuries of underdevelopment, inequality, and exclusion, both within the country and between Haiti and the rest of the world. Images of the earthquake, each more horrible than the next, circulated on the Internet and in the traditional media. According to Gina Athena Ulysse (2010), these images reinscribed Haiti as the "*bête noir*" (black sheep) of the Caribbean. In the weeks after the quake, the mainstream media showed images of riots, fighting, violence, and gangs engaged in turf warfare for control of the rubble. Working to circumscribe knowledge of existing civil society institutions, these media representations—influenced by centuries of postcolonial racial anxiety concerning the world's first free black republic—display the "crowded" and "unruly" capital, the "Republic of Pòtoprens," segments of which were deemed "the most dangerous place on Earth" (Leth and Loncarevic, 2006).¹ As a result of such images circulating in media and policy circles, humanitarian agencies approached Haiti's urban locations as *terra nullius*, a place without law or institutions, and justified a militarized and instrumentalized response (Vorbe, 2011). These media images denigrate or negate urban civil society and render the official response to the earthquake more difficult.

The pervasiveness of these images necessitates a correction to the erasure of Haitian civil society. Having a decade's worth of anthropological engagement with Haiti, and having collected both qualitative and quantitative data in the summers of 2009, 2010, and 2011 with the aid of over two dozen research assistants from the Université d'État d'Haïti and the City University of New York, I know that Haitian civil society is very much an active force in the country (table 1). As many researchers have documented (e.g., Gabaud, 2000; Smith, 2001), there are vibrant collective civic organizations in the countryside, which are in all respects, the "DNA" of Haitian public life. Despite powerful discourses that declared life in Pòtoprens to be violent and anonymous after the earthquake,

this article argues that civil society continued to exist, however in a “genetically modified” form as it “adapted” to the managerial regimes of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the creation of resident committees in the approximately 800 camps for internally displaced persons (IDP). My research, which finds that Haitian civil society remains a vital force in the country, should encourage a reevaluation of aid policy, particularly as it pertains to the relationship between NGOs and those in IDP camps, especially since official aid for IDP camps is currently expiring.

BEFORE THE EARTHQUAKE

GWROUPMAN KATYE

Discourses about Haiti’s governance and the country’s weak institutions seem omnipresent. Commentators as diverse as Bill Clinton, Sean Penn, Oprah Winfrey, Ban Ki-Moon, Paul Collier, and even Haitians themselves have remarked on Haiti’s “bad governance.” Statements about Haiti’s “bad governance” or “weak state” have been repeated so often (e.g., Fatton, 2004, 2007; Rotberg, 1997, 2003) that to interrogate their meaning or definition seems “unthinkable” to most scholars (Trouillot, 1995). However, work on the governance of Vodou institutions, particularly the annual pilgrimage sites in Gonayiv, by Haitian anthropologist and long-time director of the Bureau National d’Ethnologie Jean-Yves Blot (n.d.) proves otherwise. Blot’s work challenges the conventional wisdom of Haiti being ungovernable as institutions such as Badyo have been in continual existence and functional for over 200 years. For Blot (2012) and his intellectual predecessors, Jacques Roumain and Jean-Price Mars, the divisions and infighting of the political class—Haiti’s “governance problem”—result from the Kreyòl’s exclusion and denigration of the Bosal. In other words, Haiti’s problems in governance stem precisely from the postcolonial project’s rejection of African values and promotion of European forms of civil society. Although much more empirical work is required to fully explore this evocative analysis, it nonetheless shows the presence of indigenous governance structures which also exist in forms of urban grassroots organizations.

Nonetheless, social scientific research demonstrates that Haiti has a tradition of collective governance. Anthropologist Gérard Barthélémy (1990) presents one of the most thorough analyses of peasant life, including social organization. In a similar vein, Haitian sociologist Pierre Simpson Gabaud (2000) published several analyses of peasant associational life, studying moral, political, and social aspects. These studies were updated

Table 1. Overview of Research Methods Used Across Research Studies

Year	Research Assistants	Observation (Months)	Qualitative Interviews	Quantitative Interviews	Other
2003-2005	3-UEH	20	128	N/A	Database of registered NGOs
2006-2009	1-UEH	10	78	N/A	Documentary
2009	4-UEH	3	16	45	Kriswa
2010	8-UEH	2	16	108	Database of IDP camps, survey
2011	8-UEH 5-CUNY	3	102	791	N/A

by anthropologist Jennie Marcelle Smith (2001), who conducted a rich ethnography of peasant civil society that combined Gage Averill's (1997) analysis of the *chante pwen* with James C. Scott's *Weapons of the Weak* (1985) to discuss daily interactions and cultural beliefs as the primordial soup of Haitian collectivism. Smith discusses several forms of autochthonous (home-grown) civil society, from the *kòve*, *konbit*, *atribisyon*, and a "hybrid" *gwoupman peyizan*, explicitly organized with a political intent and engaging with official development aid. Smith critiques mainstream development institutions for their exclusion of local peasants and organizations, grounding the critique with a linguistic discussion of *andeyò*, outsiders. City dwellers often use the word *andeyò* disparagingly to refer to rural peasant groups, as traditional Haitian society considered rural dwellers to be backward, Kreyòl speaking, black, and uneducated. By extension *moun lavil* (city people) were considered lighter-skinned, French-speaking, and professional. Despite the lack of services and resources, *moun andeyò* had something that *moun lavil* did not: social capital (Putnam, 2001). Contrasted to the anomie, atomization, and the anonymity of city dwellers, rural peasants traditionally know their neighbors and have an array of civil society institutions, even if they are tenuous.

However, these arrangements have undergone several "mutations" as worldwide economic patterns have shifted. As Deshommes (1995, 2006), Dewind and Kinley (1988), Dupuy (2005), Farmer (1992), and others have argued, neoliberalism destroyed Haiti's rural economy, especially following USAID's eradication of the Haitian pig population following an outbreak of swine fever in the Dominican Republic (Diederich, 1985). The food aid that followed forced Haiti to lower its tariffs, leaving peasant farmers unable to compete with subsidized US rice (Dewind and Kinley, 1988). At the same time that neoliberal foreign aid policies made life in the countryside increasingly untenable for most of Haiti's rural population, this population was ever more drawn to Pòtoprens with the promise of jobs in newly constructed industrial parks. Thus the population of Pòtoprens exploded in the two decades following neoliberalism, from 732,000 to almost 3 million inhabitants (Dupuy, 2010). In 2011, I conducted a study of 800 households in eight IDP camps. I found that 57.9% of people were born outside of Pòtoprens, half arriving since 1996. Of the former rural dwellers, almost half (48.5%) came because of economic reasons and over a quarter (27.9%) came in search of an education.

With the rapid influx of internal migration, conditions in Pòtoprens decayed. Violent crime in the city rose dramatically, and Pòtoprens had difficulty meeting its new infrastructure needs. Ethnographic accounts of this period often highlight violence in the capital. For example, M.

Catherine Maternowska (2006) has documented how USAID sponsored family planning initiatives went hand in hand with political violence in Sitesolèy during the 1991-4 coup period. Erica James (2010) uncovered bureaucratic indifference to women rape victims in Matisan following the 1994 restoration of the constitutional government. Christopher Kovats-Bernat (2006) details the dangers that Pòtoprens' many orphaned children face: gangs, drugs, prostitution, and police raids. Similarly, accounts of post-neoliberal Pòtoprens almost universally highlight negative aspects of urban life, particularly regarding civil society indicators. Living conditions in many areas of Pòtoprens, especially in the *bidonvil* (shantytowns) created since the massive urban migrations in the 1980s, were difficult. Most of these *katye popilè* (popular neighborhoods)—low-income areas that include the *bidonvil* like Sitesolèy and mixed neighborhoods, as well as hollowed-out established neighborhoods such as Bèlè—lacked running water, electricity, paved roads, garbage collection, adequate drainage, and sewage collection, or access to primary health care even before the earthquake.

While a small group of NGOs worked to address some of these issues, creating health clinics or training health auxiliaries, most (84.5%) NGOs working in Haiti targeted areas outside of Pòtoprens (Schuller, 2007). NGO directors cited two major reasons for this. Mainstream NGOs follow donor mandates and deploy donor discourses that the city of Pòtoprens is undevelopable because conditions there are too violent, and that nothing works because of people's weak social ties (e.g., Bebbington et al., 2004). Alternative NGOs point out that Haiti is the most rural country in the Western hemisphere, and that they prefer attacking the root causes—urban migration—through sustainable rural development.

My personal observation of Pòtoprens throughout the decade revealed two thriving collectivist traditions stemming from rural collective practices such as the *konbit*, suggesting that urban poor had more “social capital” than donors and mainstream NGOs acknowledged.² Even during the worst urban violence of Haiti's turbulent transition period (2004-2006), *gwoupman katye* (neighborhood associations) from various sections of the city organized collective work groups to fix minor infrastructure problems such as drainages or potholes. Factory workers organized *sòl*, solidarity lending groups, in which members pool their bi-weekly pay, and one member receives all of the funds for that period, to pay a child's school fees, the annual rent, or a funeral. This interest-free, completely autonomous institution contrasts with donors' increasing promotion of Grameen-Bank style microcredit programs with increasingly professionalized management.

Both forms of autochthonous Haitian civil society—*gwoupman katye*

and *sòl*—were expressions of the *youn-ede-lòt* (one helps the other) traditions reproduced by displaced peasants in popular neighborhoods. In other words, Haiti's social fabric e.g., the *lakou* (extended family compound system) continued even after urban migration (Laguerre, 1982). Both *gwoupman katye* and *sòl* were organically organized and sustainable with no need for outside resources. These indigenous urban institutions, rich in social and human capital, but poor in financial capital, had obvious constraints. For example, although neighborhood associations fixed potholes, they remained unable to build a well or pave a ditch so that rainwater did not flood rocky pathways and tin-roof houses, to say nothing about larger, high-impact, resource-intensive projects such as health clinics or schools. Clearly, it is necessary to explain and to assess how these organizations functioned before the earthquake.

ASSESSING NEIGHBORHOOD-LEVEL INSTITUTIONS

During the summer of 2009, four fellow researchers and I studied urban institutions in four neighborhoods in Pòtoprens, two mixed (Ba Pè Choz and Kriswa) and two *bidonvil* (Kafou Fèy and Nazon). Research began with a social mapping of the neighborhood. We produced a database that listed schools, clinics, churches, and other non-economic institutions, documenting the names of the institutions, responsible parties, and three separate observational periods to assess the hours of operation. We also produced a map that labeled these locations. Kriswa numbered 52 institutions, with almost half being schools (25), followed by health (10) and religious (9) organizations. The majority (66%) of the institutions were private, but a substantial percentage (19%) consisted of church or religious institutions. There were six community institutions and only one state institution. By contrast, the other mixed neighborhood of Ba Pè Choz had 90 institutions, the majority of which were open all three visits (64%) and 10% open at least once. More than half (59%) were schools, 14% were health institutions, and 10% religious. Like in Kriswa, the remainder was a mix of social or cultural institutions, or those that engage in development, according to the respondents. Ba Pè Choz, possibly owing to its central location and more established history, had more public institutions (5) and was also home to 5 NGO offices, but like Kriswa the majority of the institutions were private (74%).

The two *bidonvil* were similar to one another and more diverse than the mixed neighborhoods. Kafou Fèy had 42 institutions, with 16 schools, 8 health institutions, 7 churches, and 7 engaged in “social” activities, and others spanning environment, music, and development. Eleven of the institutions, over a fourth, were community groups. Among Nazon's

Neighborhood	Schools	Clinics	Churches	Other	Total
Kriswa	25	10	9	8	52
Ba Pe Choz	53	17	9	11	90
Total Mixed	78	27	18	19	142
Nazon	19	8	17	11	55
Kafou Fey	16	8	7	11	42
Total Bidonvil	35	16	24	22	97
TOTAL	113	43	42	41	239

TABLE 2. Domain of Urban Institutions

Neighborhood	Private	Public	Religious	Community	Other	Total
Kriswa	34	1	10	6	1	52
Ba Pe Choz	67	5	9	3	6	90
Total Mixed	101	6	19	9	7	142
Nazon	30	2	16	3	4	55
Kafou Fey	20	3	7	10	2	42
Total Bidonvil	50	5	23	13	6	97
TOTAL	151	11	42	22	13	239

TABLE 3. Sector of Urban Institutions

Neighborhood	Always open	Sometimes	Never open	Total
Kriswa	21	0	31	52
Ba Pe Choz	58	9	23	90
Total Mixed	79	9	54	142
Nazon	18	3	33	54
Kafou Fey	22	2	16	40
Total Bidonvil	40	5	49	94
TOTAL	119	14	103	236

TABLE 4. Functionality (Note: This information could not be verified for three organizations, one in Nazon and two in Kafou Fey. The table reflects only verified responses.)

55 institutions, more were religious (17) than educational (16), six were development or economic, and the rest cultural, social, or political. Like Kafou Fèy and in contrast to the mixed neighborhoods, slightly more than half of Nazon's institutions were private. From this preliminary research one can see that *bidonvil* had more churches and fewer clinics and far fewer schools, and were more likely to not be open than those in mixed neighborhoods. But there are some interesting differences among the individual neighborhoods: for example, Kafou Fèy had more social, cultural, and development institutions, and judging from the research, far more likely to be open than the institutions in Nazon. Somewhat paradoxically, the *bidonvil* had more public/community and fewer private institutions than mixed neighborhoods.

In addition to this social map, we obtained official lists from the Ministry of Social Affairs. These lists proved more interesting as an archive of community organization than as a current database. For example, in Nazon, of the 60 groups listed, only two still existed in 2009. Interestingly, given the month and year of the founding of these institutions, and information provided by long standing neighborhood residents, it is possible to reconstruct the motivation of the founding of these organizations. In 1997, the same month an NGO paved a drainage ditch, 11 organizations were founded. In 1999, another NGO did work on a bridge. Immediately afterward nine organizations were founded in a two-month period. While this data alone does not relay a causal relationship between these incidents, representatives for the two extant organizations believe that an NGO project was indeed the impetus for their creation.

Given these official sources, it appears that local institutions and organizations were private, dependent on NGOs, and that many did not appear to function. This is indeed an important part of the analysis. But following Smith's analysis of *gwoupman peyizan*, it is best to think of *gwoupman katye* as "hybrid" associations, with a mix of Haiti's *youn ede lòt* "genetic material" and support and direction from foreign (at least foreign-funded) NGOs. With an ethnographic eye trained to look for other, more culturally specific forms of civil society, a broader definition of local civil society emerges, and existing collectivist efforts actually become visible. Sociologists at the Sciences Humaines overlooked the community water taps, failing to see them as "institutions" because they were neither housed in buildings nor were the managing community groups necessarily officially registered. But when we returned to these taps with digital recorders to ask about their history, a more complex picture emerged. GRET, a French, self-proclaimed fair and sustainable development NGO made the initial investment, and the public water utility, Centrale Autonome

Métropolitaine d'Eau Potable (CAMEP) provided the installation and provision of water. Whenever CAMEP was turned on in the area, the neighborhood committee would collect fees from users to fill their bucket, a practice called *kotizasyon*. This grassroots practice of *kotizasyon* allowed the group, which was not officially recognized in Kriswa, to not only pay their CAMEP bill but also to maintain the physical space and, in the case of Kriswa, to pay to haul away the trash gathered by volunteers in a dump truck instead of the ravine below. Existing under the radar is most assuredly the reason this group was able to succeed and exist for so long, since the Duvalier dictatorship (1957-1986) forced a clandestine approach in many arenas.

With a culturally sensitive ethnographic lens rendering visible existing sociality, other collective projects can be analyzed. In neighborhoods across the city, groups of workers (almost always men) would often work to fix potholes on busy streets and intersections, and collect *kotizasyon* from the users of the streets. Several neighborhood associations provide electricity to residents by purchasing an account, a counter, and a transformer, letting residents take a *priz* (plugging into the main line). This is also an example of *kotizasyon*. Other forms of community organizing were invisible to the research team because they occur at night. Block parties, *ti sourit*, are social gatherings where neighbors can listen to music, often very loudly. Not explicitly political, they can also be platforms for *brase lide* (literally, stirring ideas, community discussions) or *konsyantizasyon* (consciousness-raising) sessions, sometimes using skits or short films.

IMPACT OF NGOS

Given the relative stability following the restoration of constitutional order in 2006, some NGOs and bilateral donor agencies established projects in *katye popilè* in recent years. Two donors in particular have attracted both praise and criticism: Brazilian NGO Vivario and USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI). Vivario is currently working in Bèlè and OTI worked in Sitesolèy and Matisan among others with US-based NGOs. Both efforts favor high-visibility projects such as soccer fields and physical rehabilitation of human services like schools and clinics. In the four neighborhoods in the study, the NGOs working within the community and not simply headquartered there invariably worked with "youth" in the larger effort for HIV/AIDS prevention.³

Preliminary research findings suggest that the impact of NGOs on popular neighborhoods is mixed. While NGOs can provide necessary infrastructure such as community water taps or trash cleanup, their relationships with established grassroots community leaders and social

movement organizations can disrupt existing social ties and usurp local priorities. For example, most residents were ignorant of even the existence of the NGO ostensibly working in their neighborhood. In addition, NGOs' priorities differed from residents' stated needs. All researchers were asked who was funding this research before people answered the questions, suggesting that residents' answers were to be geared toward their expectations of material resources, itself a potential clue as to the long-term impacts of NGOs on local needs deliberation. Finally, for reasons that may have been methodological, noted above, there was little evidence of grassroots organizations. However, when they did actually exist, it was NGOs themselves that had created them.

For more detail about the impact of NGOs on local urban associations, it is vital to see how these relationships work themselves out in daily interactions. I was also engaged in participant observation research with a coalition of neighborhood associations self-consciously organized as part of a social movement, since the beginning of 2008. In March 2009, this movement fissured over a conflict over their foreign collaborator and funding. The coalition offered free schooling for the disadvantaged residents in the five neighborhoods where the local assemblies were located. They also opened a literacy program for street kids on Kafou Ayewopò, the corner of the road leading to the airport and the main thoroughfare leading from the port to the rich suburb of Petyonvil. In addition to being free, the education was in the vein of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1985), encouraging students to draw upon their own experiences. The two remaining groups were different: one was in a *bidonvil* and the other a mixed income neighborhood just downhill from Petyonvil, home to many NGO, government, and university employees. My time was split between the two neighborhoods. Several independent observers noted that the neighborhood group downhill, in the *bidonvil*, was more organized, unified, and successful in meeting objectives than their uphill colleagues, despite, or perhaps because of, its lack of funding from this foreign NGO.

In addition to tension within local organizations, NGO aid can create or augment "turf" struggles between them. When walking down to the school, still operating despite a lack of funds, colleagues and I were often nearly run over by young men in bright green T-shirts with "Vivario" emblazoned on them, speeding along on their motorbikes. They presented themselves as the neighborhood patrol. Their girth suggested they either came from a middle class origin or that Vivario fed them well and often. Vivario was founded by Brazilian troops in their effort to win local support as head of the UN mission. Not to be outdone, the yellow-clad young volunteers for Initiative Pour le Développement des Jeunes

(IDEJEN) stood at the busy street corner in their oversized dark glasses, acting as gatekeepers. IDEJEN was funded by USAID to conduct HIV/AIDS education, a priority of USAID. Whenever either group hosted an event in the community they could count on the DJ with the biggest sound system for their *ti sourit*. One night was literally a battle of the bands, with one NGO and their DJ on one stage and the other a half a block away, with both groups competing with their sound systems to attract the largest crowd. The youth at the grassroots organization with whom I studied could not hope to match this level of spectacle, and they gradually had to account for their quietude while their US solidarity partner and NGO who had financed the school processed their future funding relationship. In one wrap-up meeting following the successful graduation of 74 neighborhood school children from the poorest families, one of the community leaders said wryly, “*Bèl mayo pa devlopman.*” (Beautiful T-shirts aren’t development.) His critique was directed more toward the parents who were frustrated at the deteriorating school conditions and surprised that we four *blan* were not there to give them money. His statement was also a defense of their grassroots orientation and a critique of the two foreign powers’ attempts to buy off the local population. It was, after all, a turf battle, with Brazil leading the increasingly distrusted UN mission, and the United States controlling the geopolitical and economic terms of Haiti’s engagement with the world.

The result of these new forms of engagement between NGOs and urban grassroots organization is mixed: projects can be completed (and maybe maintained) like trash clean up, water taps, recycling, etc. But the top-down, project logic may be replacing the collectivist *konbit*. New NGOs may be in conflict with more established youth leaders, popular organizations, and churches. These thoughts must remain hypotheses, unfortunately, because the planned long-term research was amended by the events of January 12, 2010.

CIVIL SOCIETY AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE

THE EARTHQUAKE’S IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH

The horrors of the earthquake are well-known, even as the official death toll became subject to debate following a non-official report commissioned by USAID (Schwartz, 2011). Unfortunately the story of Haitians banding together surviving adversity received almost no airplay. A special issue of *Meridians* edited by Gina Ulysse (2011) corrects some of this, as do a couple of disparate accounts published on blogs and some book chapters (Trouillot, 2012). Haitian novelist Gary Victor (2010) published a collection

of stories of Haitians triumphing over adversity, and Michele Montas (2011), a Haitian former spokesperson for the UN Secretary General, also compiled and reported such stories. This section of the paper, based on my experience as part of a medical mission in Pòtoprens a week after the earthquake, documents the forms of collectivism that enabled the earthquake survivors to go on living.

AID NOT GETTING THROUGH

After the earthquake, no aid could get into Haiti for several days. The US military assumed control of the airport, already the site of a UN base, and then coordinated aid flights. Commercial flights stopped, and many operating under the US military control were rerouted for lack of fuel. UN forces closed the border with the Dominican Republic, citing security issues and a potential flood of refugees. The long standing animosity between the two peoples and the recent mistreatment of Haitian cane cutters did not help the situation (Sagás, 2000; Wucker, 1999). Furthermore, the earthquake destroyed the capital's port, where most of Haiti's food, fuel, and manufactured goods usually arrived. As reported in the *London Telegraph* and the *New York Times*, bureaucratic blockages between Florida and the US government stopped life-saving medical evacuations and deliveries, including French NGO Doctors without Borders (Haiti earthquake, 2010; Thompson, 2010).⁴ No doubt, Haiti's inability to receive foreign aid during the immediate aftermath of the earthquake was tragic. However, what Haitians call the international community's "death plan" for the island nation exasperated this tragedy; neoliberal economic policies had long destroyed Haiti's agricultural and industrial self-sufficiency. In short, what would have been a calamitous situation was made worse by international interventions both immediate and long standing.

Nonetheless, there have been notable success stories since the earthquake involving international actors. Rehabilitating the deteriorating state-run general hospital, Partners in Health teamed up with the Haitian government and even the US military to provide desperately needed emergency medical aid. The French NGO Doctors without Borders has been performing urgently needed trauma surgeries, as has the US military aboard the *U.S.S. Comfort*. The medical team I was part of delivered services to 1,000 neighbors in a scant week, and a few people wrote a report offering lessons learned about the grassroots effort.

ON THEIR OWN

While aid was being held up for either political or logistical reasons, Haitian survivors took very good care of themselves. For the period

immediately following the earthquake, both political and economic divisions seemed to belong to some *ancien régime*. Before the earthquake, stark social divisions marked life in Haiti. In 2006, Haiti became second in the world in terms of income inequality (Jadotte, 2006). Although Haiti had long been declared the “poorest country in the Western hemisphere,” it also contained the most millionaires per capita (Trouillot, 2004). In tandem with this economic inequality is a pervasive social exclusion, with the majority of people *andeyò*, literally “outside” (Barthélémy, 1990; *Haiti parmi les vivants*, 2010; Laferrrière, 2010; Lahens, 2010; Smith, 2001). This exclusion seemed to ish in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. Middle class and *pep la* (Haiti’s poor majority) all slept on the ground, looking out for one another and sharing what resources they had. Money became less important than barter and relationships, a situation that Karl Polanyi (1944) calls generalized reciprocity (see also Solnit, 2009). Neighbors found ways to help one another. For example, people on my block set up a medical clinic and an information gathering apparatus under a tarp a foreign neighbor left. Residents somehow managed to connect to the Internet, and had a team of people listening to the radio.

Despite these successes, the people I encountered were very traumatized. Every time there was another minor tremor the whole city erupted in loud prayers or cries for help. The doctors in the neighborhood were on high alert, running up the mountain to Petyonvil and down to the state hospital. Neighbors collecting information showed signs of fatigue. The staff at a nearby clinic who had built a makeshift wall out of corrugated tin had not slept since the earthquake, in part out of trauma and in part out of a fear that gangs would come and steal what little medical supplies, food, and water they had. Someone had to keep guard at all times. Meanwhile the earthquake had imposed formidable roadblocks such as fallen houses or crumpled asphalt. These conditions meant that people’s social sphere became very small, producing a new community and family wherein rich and poor survived together and shared what they had. During my three-to-five minute walk from my house to the clinic, I traversed four distinct “cellules.”

Most survivors can recount similar stories of heroism, of a nascent *youn-ede-lòt* coming out of the woodwork. Having worked in Haiti since 2001, I have heard many such stories. Neighbors who had been strangers before the earthquake rescued total strangers. Good Samaritans offered rides to the Dominican border and money to get to the Dominican airport. Unfortunately the storytellers—and the heroes mentioned—are often deemed unimportant as members of a country stigmatized for centuries, so these narratives are also silenced. Consequently, the story that is most

powerfully told is that of foreigners saving Haitian victims. Most stories focus on the good intentions of foreign actors, so by extension any failures or continued lack of progress are framed as Haitians' fault.

INTO THE CAMPS

On my second trip to Haiti after the earthquake, in late March 2010, I was primarily involved in setting up the logistics for donations from the proceeds of the documentary that I produced and directed with Renée Bergan *Poto Mitan* (2009). Importantly, since the film was being used as a fundraising tool for groups like Partners in Health, Fonkoze, and Lambi Fund, many people were asking if the women in the film were living, and if so, where. Thankfully, all five women featured were alive (a sixth woman whom we interviewed and whose testimony is heard on a couple of occasions did pass away). I followed the women into the IDP camps, where three of the five were living at the time. I also returned to visit grassroots groups like the one discussed above. Many of them were living in camps as well, and shifted their activities to serve people in camps in addition to low-income neighborhoods. These women and the grassroots groups implored me to conduct an analysis of the camps' conditions.

METHODS

To select which camps to analyze, I used the OIM's latest "Displaced Tracking Matrix" (DTM) spreadsheet. On the Cluster for Camp Coordination and Management (CCCM) website, run by OIM, the latest database was dated May 3, 2010, with 1,282 camp sites overall and 841 within the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area.⁵ I selected every eighth camp for inclusion into this research, for a total of 106 camps. In addition to the percentage of communes which was obviously very similar to the DTM, since the DTM was organized by commune, the sample was similar in many other aspects to the overall DTM.

Assistants went to the field with a three-part survey in their hands. Part one investigated the conditions and services based primarily on observation; part two asked a series of questions about people's level of knowledge and involvement in the committees, and part three interviewed committees about their history. The data reported below is drawn from the second and third parts of the survey. I instructed researchers to interview individuals for the second part by themselves, with a target of four interviews each. This task was sometimes difficult; many aid agencies conducted research, and their presence attracted attention. It was particularly difficult to find people by themselves in small camps. In these cases, in order to maintain the integrity of the data, only two people

were selected.⁶ In several cases, representatives of the camp committees directed contact between assistants and residents, in some cases answering for the residents. For quality control purposes, I had three camps analyzed by two different assistants. In addition, I followed up with at least one site visit per assistant. In several instances residents themselves invited me to discuss the situation and document conditions. I visited 31 IDP camps during the summer of 2010.

RESULTS

Understanding camp committees. Studies of development show that without local participation, even the best laid plans and most technically sophisticated projects fail (Collier, 2007; Dollar, 1998; Easterly, 2006). The state of affairs in the camps reproduced top-down decision and communication structures, wherein the well-connected few controlled the resources for many. To many of the UN clusters, “NGOs are the voice of the people.” Yet NGOs relied on camp committees to know the needs and priorities of the population within the camps. According to the May 2010 DTM, 95% of camps had resident committees. NGOs were officially encouraged to work with the committees, as one agency staff put it, “to check off the box for local participation.” Some NGOs gave committees the power to distribute the aid, either from a belief in local empowerment or efficiency. But according to the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP), NGOs knew very little about the committees (HAP and IOM, 2010).

Low Levels of Participation. Although NGO and UN representatives consider the committees to be the official voice of the camps, the majority of the committees leave the population out of decision-making and even communication. While 77.5% of the respondents (up to four per camp) answered that there was a committee in their camp, less than a third even knew the committee’s name (32.4%) or plan/strategy (31.5%). Less than half of residents knew what the committee’s activities were (46.3%) and this affirmative response included people who replied that the committee was doing “nothing” owing to an oversight in coding.

Despite the fact that most people did not know what the committee was called, 62.8% of respondents could name the committee’s leader. In the words of many, committee leaders have become *gwo nèg* (big men). In many cases these were pastors, judging from the titles given by respondents. That said, just over half (51.6%) of people felt they had the right to participate in the committee. Because of the lack of precision during these short interviews, “participation” could mean that people received the aid that passed through committees’ hands. This was slightly

lower than responses given by committee members themselves; 50 of 88 (57%) said that people were welcome to participate in meetings. Still, according to the committee members themselves, 43% of camps did not have open meetings. More telling is the issue of communication between committees and residents. Residents of the camps were ill informed about the future, be it resettlement, future aid to be delivered, or housing. Only 106 of 328 people, or less than a third (32.3%) said they were informed about the future.

Dependency. This article details systems of solidarity, in terms of the collective efforts of survivors. How was this solidarity transformed by the system of camp committees? Elisabeth Senatus, a leader within l'Étoile Brillant (Shining Star), a women's organization that plays an active role in their camp, recalled their beginnings: "We didn't wait for millions to arrive; we created. We went to an agency that works to save children, and asked for funds for education, child protection, etc. We went through the whole process but they never supported us. So we created our own space." After several weeks of being on their own, L'Étoile Brillant created a childcare center, school, weekly film nights, weekly skits, and a bracelet-making workshop for the women in the center, with the support of MUDHA, the Association of Dominican-Haitian Women led by Sonia Pierre until her untimely death in December 2011. It should be noted that this camp was outside of Pötopens, in a rural section of Leyogann.

The principles of *kotizasyon* and *youn-edè-lòt*, characteristic of Haiti's rural grassroots organizations, were alive and well in many spontaneously organized camp committees. In a Kafou camp, CAJIT, the camp committee operated a volunteer clinic, organized neighborhood clean-ups, and sponsored a nightly security vigil, with absolutely no outside money (they only received tarps in April 2010). They passed the hat to collect funds to cook a hot meal for the male volunteers who took turns staying up all night patrolling the spread out grounds.

These stories of self-reliance and self-help appeared to be outliers in the officially recognized committees seven months following the earthquake. The most common answer to the question about why a committee was created was some variant of the phrase "to receive NGO aid." And yet, the majority of committees—around 70%—reported not doing an activity for lack of external aid. On top of this the NGOs are remapping Haiti's civic infrastructure, displacing the government. Twenty-eight of 88 (30%) camp committees said that a government representative visited, whereas 49 out of 87 (56%) camp committees said that they work with an NGO.⁷

Gender Concerns. Before general food aid was stopped in April 2010,

many NGOs gave camp committees power to distribute ration cards. However, the committee members abused this system. I visited the Solino camp the day of the last general food distribution at the end of March, 2010. The cards were distributed between 11 p.m. and midnight the night before. We spoke with a dozen women who had not received a ration card. One of them, Nathalie, a 26-year-old mother of three, said, “You can’t afford to sleep when you hear that there’s a card distribution. You never know where and when they will give it out. You just have to follow the noise of the crowd and hope you will get yours.”⁸ Sylvie, who lived with 14 people in her ripped tent, said that she never got a card because she did not know the NGO representatives: “It’s all about *moun pa* (your people) getting the goods.” Researchers from New York University’s School of Law Center for Human Rights and Global Justice (2011) found that this abuse of ration cards did not stop with *moun pa*, but there were disturbingly high accounts of transactional sex, when women were forced to submit to sex with men in order to obtain the ration cards. As this study suggests, men predominate in official camp committees. Out of 61 camps with sex-segregated data, there were 160 women committee members out of a total of 587, or 27%. While this number is much lower than the population within the camps, this was higher than expected. In 10% of the camp committees, women comprised a majority.

Democracy Indicators. How did people become members of committees? Official recognition came not from a process of grassroots discussion but simply the appearance of an outsider agent, whether it was a representative of an NGO, UN cluster, or the Haitian government asking who was in charge. “What were we going to do? Hold a town hall meeting? We didn’t have the time to organize meetings. It was a crisis, and time was of the essence,” said one NGO worker. The majority of committees, 59%, are self-selected, according to the committee members themselves in interviews with researchers. Also according to these individuals, 2% were chosen by NGOs and 8% by someone else. Only 18% of committees came to power through an election process. In many cases, officially recognized committees have elbowed out neighborhood groups that existed before the earthquake. This was the case in Delmas 2, in Place de la Paix. The managing NGO excluded Men Nan Men (Hand in Hand), a grassroots group with around 2,000 members and regular membership meetings that had been working in the neighborhood since December 1990, almost twenty years. Similar exclusions took place in Solino and several other camps. Since 2008 I have been working alongside a grassroots association that was shut out by the two NGO-supported committees. In this case, the US NGO won out and got the “turf” of their camp.

In a presentation to the CCCM cluster meeting in July 2010, HAP reported that in the camp they studied, the camp committee actively excluded other local organizations that had existed before the earthquake, organized “subcommittees” to concentrate power in their hands, failed to include the population and certainly the most vulnerable (people with disabilities and women with infants), and distributed aid in a non-transparent manner to their friends. At the cluster meeting, many NGO camp managers shared similar stories of unaccountable committees.

NGOs, government, or landowners created many of these committees. Qualitative interviews confirmed that NGOs created the committees in at least four of eight camps studied in 2011. Committee leader Gladys recalled the top-down fashion through which the central committee at St. Louis de Gonzague was formed: “On Monday or Tuesday [March 29 or 30], a representative of the government told us we need to create a central committee to make arrangements for when we all are forced out that we do so in an orderly fashion.” In addition to the top-down nature of the committee, it was formed to execute an externally driven priority of forced removal. The committee at Soeurs Salésiennes in Carrefour, that forced residents out in the summer of 2010, was comprised of school officials themselves, the owners of the land.

Differences across the Camps. Governance and civic infrastructure issues varied from camp to camp. According to a report by French NGO ActEd, 80% of residents were aware of the committee at Ti Savanne, compared to 34% at Tapi Rouge. Twenty-five percent as compared to six percent were aware of the selection process, and 31 as opposed to 5% had regular contact with the committee. There are also numerous stories of Herculean efforts by camp leaders to organize and form security brigades. For example, residents at Mozole reported no cases of rape as of August 2010, whereas KOFAVIV reported 22 cases of rape in the first three months in nearby Plas Petyon, Channmas.⁹ Camp leaders also mobilized neighborhood clean-up efforts, opened schools, sponsored cultural events, and initiated income-generating activities such as handicrafts.

Somewhat paradoxically, NGO-managed camps had worse governance and civil society indicators than those not managed by NGOs. People in NGO-managed camps were slightly less informed about the name of the camp committee (27%, compared to 35%), less aware of the committee’s plan (25%, compared to 35%), and less familiar with the committee leadership (50.5%, compared to 69%) than those in camps not managed by NGOs. Most interestingly, only 39.8% of people in NGO-managed camps felt they could participate in the committee’s activities,

whereas 57.5% of those in camps without an NGO management agency felt they could participate. NGO-managed camps were only better than average at informing residents about the future, 39 as opposed to 29%. Further, longer-term qualitative follow up research is necessary, but this could suggest that in the eyes of the population, the committees are farther from the residents and closer to the NGOs giving out the aid. It could also suggest that committees that work with NGOs feel less of a need to include the population since they are in regular contact with and receive aid from the NGOs.

Camps with committees in which the majority of the members were women were more informed about the committee's name (43% compared to a 32% average), and slightly more likely to feel they could participate in the committee (60% compared to 52%), for example. They were also more likely to recognize the committee's leader, but less likely to know the plan or activities of the committee. Whether committees were led by women or not made little difference in informing residents about the future. This may be because of the small sample: only 30 people responded to questions from 9 camps that had majority of women on their committees. However, it might not be coincidental that the most organized and active camps, including CAJIT and l'Étoile Brillant, are led by women and Mozole has near gender parity on the camp committee. After all, the women's movement in Haiti is widely understood as being a key component in the democratization movement (Bell, 2001; Benoit, 1994; Charles, 1995; N'Zengou-Tayo, 1998; Racine, 1999).

GENERAL ASSESSMENT

This article demonstrates that urban civil society institutions in Haiti are complex and diverse. Only recently have NGOs begun to interact with them, and they have done so largely without understanding or even seeing what forms of civil society actually exist. Consequently the official aid, especially after the earthquake, has had several unintended consequences. To continue the metaphor, if *gwoupman peyizan* and *gwoupman katye* are "hybrid" institutions cross-breeding Haitian *youn ede lòt* with NGO aid, camp committees are best described as "genetically modified" organizations. Informal solidarity groups as well as formally organized grassroots groups have often been pushed aside in favor of structures that exist primarily to service NGOs. The processes by which camp committees became sole conduits for billions of dollars of life-saving aid, with limited mechanisms for grassroots participation and communication, appears to have reproduced vertical, top-down, clientelistic, *gwo nèg* relationships.

As of the time of the submission of this article, the NGOs have all

but left the camps, despite the fact that half a million people still take up emergency shelter there. In March 2012, there was a wave of arson attacks to pressure remaining IDPs to leave. The public agency responsible for water and sanitation, reorganized and renamed in 2009 as Direction Nationale de l'Eau Potable et de l'Assainissement (DINEPA) to include sanitation, has begun a process of working within the neighborhoods. The World Bank and other donors financed President Martelly's "6/16" plan, relocating residents from six priority camps on a public plaza by redeveloping sixteen neighborhoods. While four of the camps have been closed, redevelopment of the neighborhoods is moving much more slowly. The question of urban associations has once again returned and with much urgency. This article hopes to raise some difficult questions. Hopefully, it has offered some historical lessons, lessons that are much needed if the important work of the reintegration of IDPs and neighborhood revitalization is to become a reality. This article suggests that, like the plan to revitalize the rural economy, supporting *natif natal* efforts should be a priority. For this to work, donors, the government, and NGOs need to be able to distinguish "grassroots" from "Astroturf." To do this requires a culturally sensitive eye to be able to see which civic institutions are actually functioning, and assess their health. Learning from the mistakes of the past will hopefully lead to new approaches to supporting Haitian grassroots institutions that reinforce the ethos of *youn ede lòt*, the approach of *konbit*, and the self-sufficiency of the *kotizasyon*.

Notes

I would like to first thank editors Fabienne Doucet, Adam Kaiserman, Claudine Michel, and Jody Dublin for their helpful edits, and the two anonymous readers for their insightful critiques. Research was made possible from the National Science Foundation, the JFK Junior Foundation, and the Professional Staff-Congress, CUNY. A hearty thank you to research assistants Marie Laviode Alexis, Sabine Bernard, Théagène Dauphin, Jean Dider Deslorges, Mackenzy Dor, Edwitch Edouard, Elisabeth, Jean Rony Emile, Junior Jean François, Robenson Jn-Julien, Vanessa Louis-Charles, Sandy Nelzy, Adlin Noël, Rose-Mercie Saintilmot, Stephanie Semé, Roody Jean Therlius, Tracey Ulcena, Castlot Val, and Jude Wesh. Finally, a special *chapo ba* to the grassroots organizations and their members whose activism makes not only this research possible but offers hope for other visions for Haiti.

This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 1122704. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and do

not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

- ¹ Rather than write “Port-au-Prince,” which is more conventional in English, I have opted to refer to place names in the original Kreyòl. Since the ratification of the 1987 Constitution, Kreyòl shares official status with French, and is the first language of all Haitians and the only language of the majority. Despite this, Kreyòl continues to be marginalized.
- ² This term is in quotes because it is an ideologically-laden term, and as such has many different definitions. It is often deployed to critique entire social groupings. See Arneil (2006) for a detailed analysis and critique.
- ³ The term “youth” is in scare quotes because it was used by donors, and did not clearly define a person’s age. For example, one particular NGO considered a man over fifty as “youth.”
- ⁴ However, the US military allowed the Pennsylvania governor to evacuate an orphanage run by two Pennsylvanians in their twenties.
- ⁵ This May 3 database was the first listing on the website, “list of sites,” as of July 23.
- ⁶ In one camp, according to the researcher, responses were similar because people did not want to participate, because this was not the first time someone came by and there was never any follow up. Nothing improved in the camp.
- ⁷ To some people, DINEPA, being a new agency, was thought of as an NGO or “company.”
- ⁸ The previous story, with a full name, was published at the website *Afaceaface.org*. The complete URL is <http://www.afeaceface.org/2010/08/part-of-the-dream-for-national-reconstruction-haitian-refugee-camps-model-future-society>, so her real name was used. Typically, anthropological accounts use pseudonyms to protect the identity of the research subjects.
- ⁹ Police agents set fire to Mozole after residents could not find replacement housing in March 2012

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