

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Forging New Paths to Solidarity: Organizing in Haiti and Beyond Since the 2018 PetroChallenge

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## ABSTRACT

Solidarity involves “showing up,” putting one’s body on the line. In this afterlife of NGOs, dissent is rooted in what Palestinian activist scholar Rabab Abdulhadi calls “the indivisibility of justice.” Since 2021, activists across Haiti and its diasporas, and people in solidarity with Haiti leveraged their differently-situated experiences and critiques of the NGO model to self-consciously create spaces of solidarity action on the ashes of failed US/UN interventions. They were motivated by the transformative potential of the 2018 *peyi lòk* (general strike) and the subsequent PetroChallenge movement, both expressions of cross-class nationwide solidarity against the degradation of material conditions for the entire population. In this article, we examine our respective positionalities as social movement organizers, academic workers, and members of NGO networks in the United States as well as Haiti over the last 20 years. Our reflection on our interconnectedness to this article’s object of study obliges us to provide an overview of solidarity movements in Haiti and with Haiti. We particularly examine the 2018 PetroChallenge that drew millions of protestors to the streets and the crescendo of international solidarity in 2021 when grassroots organizations, NGO networks, and academic institutions throughout the Americas showed up for the people of Haiti.

## 1 | Introduction

In July 2018, over 2 days, thousands of unarmed protestors across all 10 departments of Haiti erected wooden and metallic pallets to barricade (inter)national trade routes, ceasing all commercial activities. They referred to this general strike as “*peyi lòk*” (country lockdown; Civil 2020). Disrupters rejected President Jovenel Moïse’s acquiescence to the International Monetary Fund’s mandate to end fuel subsidies—which maintain the cost of living—and opposed his 2017 withdrawal of Haiti from Venezuela’s oil procurement agreement, the PetroCaribe program. A month later, social media activists launched the “PetroChallenge” with the following question: “*Kot Kòb Petro-Caribe A?*” (Where is the PetroCaribe money?). By September, they joined *militan*<sup>1</sup> from grassroots organizations and not-yet-

organized dissidents in Port-au-Prince, Petit-Goâve, Cap-Haïtien, Gonaïves, Saint-Marc, Cayes, Jérémie, Ouanaminthe, and Jacmel to amplify that demand (Anakawona 2019).

Haitian organizers in diasporic communities in the United States and Canada echoed the call for an investigation into the squandering of more than \$2 billion of PetroCaribe funds on incomplete and stalled infrastructure projects by Moïse’s Parti Haïtien Tèt Kale (PHTK) during the government of Michel Joseph Martelly (2010–2015).<sup>2</sup> Following the November 2018 massacre of residents of La Saline, known to mobilize resistance in the capital,<sup>3</sup> non-Haitian activists throughout the Americas joined the movement. They advocated for policy changes within their congresses and parliaments, they protested at sites of governmental and supra-national decision-making, and they educated their comrades and

colleagues on the complicity of their respective states in the destabilization of the country. Over the next 3 years, international solidarity with Haiti ramped up, reflecting on-the-ground demands for arms control, democratic rule, and sovereignty, including the resignation of Moïse, who exceeded his mandate and was named in the PetroCaribe embezzlement scandal.<sup>4</sup> Internationalist activists were inspired by the 50th anniversary of the year of global revolutions, and many sought to enact the kind of solidarity demonstrated by the Movement for Black Lives.

After the assassination of President Moïse and the US nomination of Ariel Henry as prime minister in July 2021, the PetroChallenge movement was institutionalized into the Montana Accord, an agreement signed in August by some progressive civil and political formations to put in place a new provisional government (Francisque 2021). The quest for state power and the complete turn to a US/Canada advocacy-focused strategy reimposed bureaucratic hierarchies. Disagreements between visible leaders and movement adherents, as well as between international NGO and academic workers and organizers, led to the fragmentation of international solidarity.

The social science literature of the first two decades of the 21st century on social movements is preoccupied with the deradicalization of militant antisystemic organizations, as many transformed into nonprofit formations making demands of the neoliberal state while delivering social services to populations abandoned by this same state (e.g., Hassanain and Sidig 2024; Lever 2024; Rich 2019). The neoliberal iteration of capitalism relies on nongovernmental or nonprofit organizations to manage social unrest, inequality, poverty, and underdevelopment (e.g., Chakraborty 2021; Ismail and Kamat 2018; Viola et al. 2019). Additionally, critical scholars argue that neoliberalism produced a culture of dependency, even among grassroots movements (e.g., Jalali 2013; Longa 2024; Qadir and Alasutari 2019). Scholars of social movements and NGOs intimated that solidarity across sectors and national scales requires continual work (e.g., Estes and Dhillon 2019; Hayes and Kaba 2023; Shah 2024; Taylor 2016).

In this article, we focus on the ways individuals and groups across the Americas during the “mass protest decade”<sup>5</sup> (2010s–2020s) responded to these radical critiques by refashioning their relationship to capital and their roles in various social movement, academic, and NGO formations to redefine solidarity with Haiti. This text is an archive of analysis as activists were directly involved with the events from 2018 to 2021. We do not evaluate the movement as successful or failed. And we resist the temptation to update our storytelling to the most recent events in Haiti, refusing to uphold a fiction within ethnographic writing of the present tense. Instead, we chart a movement that brought the neoliberal state to account and raised international attention to Haiti. This article is itself an exercise of solidarity. We vacillate between a manifesto and an academic tone. As a conversation, the text acknowledges individual contributions but also retains a collective voice at times.

We also recognize how Saidiya Hartman’s (2007) concept of “the afterlife” to understand the lingering structural effects of anti-Blackness and slavery helps to think through the ways that social movements adapted NGO forms. “NGO afterlives” explains the persistence of “NGOing” (Hilhorst 2003; Schuller

2018; Sharma 2014)—reproduction of bureaucratic practices and institutionalization—even after attempts to discipline and defund the “NGO form” (cf. Bernal and Grewal 2014) heralded the “end of the NGO” (Abrahams 2023). As noted in the introduction (Lewis and Schuller, [this issue](#)), NGO afterlives theorizes unresolved contradictions in movement strategy around funding and objectives underpinned by different understandings of and the centrality of the state as a necessary tool to ensure liberation and democracy. Rather than a lament, this text follows militant abolitionist scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2023) in affirming rehearsal. The transformation remains a work in progress.

In this multivocal article, we continue to lift the collective resistance across issues and borders against racial capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy that occurred during the 2010s (Alvarez et al. 2017; Bevins 2023; Leach et al. 2024; Perry 2016; Vanden et al. 2017). Even in this afterlife of NGOs, dissent is rooted in what Palestinian activist scholar Rabab Abdulhadi (Against the Current 2020) calls “the indivisibility of justice.” Specifically, since 2018, activists across Haiti and its diasporas and people in solidarity with Haiti have created spaces of solidarity action as they leverage their differently situated experiences and critiques of the NGO model. They/we were motivated by the transformative potential of the 2018 *peyi lòk* and the PetroChallenge movement, both expressions of cross-class nationwide solidarity against state corruption. This commitment to solidarity with Haiti was reignited during what Black social movement scholar Chris Harris (2023) calls “the time of the Movement for Black Lives,” when non-Black allies are expected to mobilize for the collective self-defense of Black people. This shift in consciousness took place not only in the United States, but it also impacted movement organizers in Latin America who denounced their countries’ involvement in the 2004–17 United Nations Mission for the Stabilization of Haiti (MINUSTAH), or what Haitian militants view as a foreign military occupation of the “first Black Republic” (Jubileo Sur 2020; Rivara 2020, Schuller 2015).

In what follows, we examine our respective positionalities as social movement organizers, academic workers, and members of NGO networks in the United States and Haiti over the last 20 years to contextualize this recent period (2018–2021). Our reflection on our interconnectedness to this article’s object of study obliges us to provide an overview of solidarity movements in Haiti and with Haiti. We look closely at the 2018 PetroChallenge that drew millions of protestors to the streets and the crescendo of international solidarity with Haiti in 2021, when grassroots organizations, NGO networks, and academic institutions throughout the Americas showed up for the people of Haiti.

## 2 | Writing (in) to Right Solidarity

MAMYRAH: A few days before the eighth anniversary of the 2010 earthquake, Boumba, a few others, and I had gathered on the rooftop of Mark’s apartment rental in Christ-Roi, overlooking the Port-au-Prince Bay. We were bemoaning the rise of fundamental Evangelicalism and the fragmentation of progressive and radical social movements in Haiti. We all longed for a time when the Left was “unified and strong.” Noting that 2018 marked the 50th anniversary of revolutionary activity worldwide, Boumba, Mark, and I decided to assess the current state of solidarity in

Haiti. We labored together to develop a praxis of writing (in) solidarity in two different languages—Haitian Kreyòl and American English—via email, WhatsApp, and Zoom while located in different locations: New York City, Chicago/DeKalb, Port-au-Prince, and even Havana and other areas in Cuba. While US Marxist historian David Roediger (2019) reminds us that solidarity is uneasy, translation and distance can be surmounted.

We opted for a multivocal conversational approach, not only to disclose the links between our respective positionalities, experiences, and modes of analysis and critique but also because we anticipated different interlocutors and audiences for this text. In the sections below, we waver between naming and anonymizing specific formations or individuals to foreground our claims. Drawing inspiration from and educated by the various movements of which we are participants, we build off the affirmation that the “personal is political”—foundational among Haitian and other Black feminist activist scholars (e.g., Charles 1995; Collins 1990; Combahee River Collective 1981; Jean-Charles 2022; Lamour 2021; McClaurin 2001; Merlet 2010; Ransby 2018)—to present a text that is reflexive and even at times militant.

In our discussions, we considered our involvement with peasant, worker, women’s and feminist, LGBTI/ “Kominote M,”<sup>6</sup> and “popular neighborhood” social movement organizations from different geographical regions in Haiti, across generations, and with varying progressive ideologies. Focusing on how these organizations—which operate sometimes independently of one another, sometimes in coalition, and have unique but overlapping strategies—build and dissolve political coalitions within their sector and across issues at regional and national levels and how they handle their uneven relationship with international allies, we noted that solidarity takes constant work. And we examined our navigation of public and private neoliberal academic institutions in the United States—a settler colony—to politicize our work, our participation in Global North-based progressive NGOs that accompany Global South-based movements, and our own commitments to multiracial unions, feminist organizations, and Black collectives as well as climate change and reparations movements demanding state accountability and redistribution. These formations depend on capital through the Nonprofit Industrial Complex (NPIC; INCITE! 2007). Yet, they serve to educate, organize, and mobilize to stand in solidarity with the people in Haiti.

### 3 | Beyond NGOization: Social Movements in the “Afterlife” of NGOs in Haiti

MARK: In 2009, social science professor Jean Anil Louis-Juste published a scathing critique of NGOs in Haiti as colonial instruments (Lwijijs 2009). He argued that NGOs facilitate the penetration of foreign capital in areas abandoned by the state and that they serve to demobilize and deradicalize dissident populations through charity. Janil Lwijijs came to the same conclusion as INCITE!, a US network of radical feminists of color (2007), demonstrating that the NPIC surveils, controls, and derails political movements. Lwijijs’s analysis did not spare social movement organizations that refashioned themselves into the “NGO form” (Bernal and Grewal 2014) after neoliberal policies fueled the “NGO boom” (Agg 2006; Alvarez 1999). Latin

American social movement scholars expressed similar anxieties about neoliberalism undermining internationalist solidarity and revolution (Alvarez 1999; Rahier 2012). One decade later, INCITE! reissued *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* (originally published in 2007), offering caution for grassroots organizations established after the 2013 #BlackLivesMatter rebellions.

BOUMBA: Though there is a robust literature analyzing the relationship between NGOs and social movements (e.g., Chakraborty 2021; INCITE! 2007; Kaba 2021; Lwijijs 2009; Paternotte 2016), we still need to go deeper into history, into the complexities of the social and economic formations of specific national contexts, from divergent ideological and political visions, mobilizing several social science disciplines to keep the debate open. Moreover, to characterize the relationship between NGOs and social movements, it is necessary to not only define an NGO but also to establish what a social movement is.

MAMYRAH: As Boumba points out, social movement theories abound, and disciplinary particularities bound social movement theorizations (Aurélien 2023; Bayat 2005; Buechler 1995; Bunting 2024; Edelman 2001; Engels and Müller 2019; Escobar 1992; McAdam et al. 1996; Opp 2009; Rossi and von Bülow 2015; Tilly et al. 2020; Valocchi 2017). Here, we offer a working definition: a social movement is a loosely coordinated network of large groups of people and individuals engaged in political and cultural struggle (protests, sit-ins, activism, solidarity economies, etc.) against more powerful elites. Organizations depend on (human) labor to recruit adherents, educate them, and build relationships with communities—what James Petras (1997) calls “identity work”—as well as to navigate political alliances and to intervene in the discursive battle of ideas. To retain their human resources, organizations also seek funding from their own constituencies and progressive foundations.

MARK: NGOs are famously hard to pin down, conceptually. The first problem is that the term specifies what they are not: governments (Bernal and Grewal 2014, 7; Fisher 1997, 441). This instability serves several interests, playing ideological roles (Lewis and Schuller 2017). This conceptualization has a political dimension: Is it true that NGOs are not-for-profit and apolitical? Is it true that NGOs are truly outside of government? Lwijijs’s manifesto (2009) clearly defines NGOs as governments.

MAMYRAH: Formalized in 1945 in the United Nations Charter, the category of “nongovernmental organization” designates groups of people registered as independent of government control that seek neither profit nor public office (Willetts 2011). By the 1980s, they became what Petras (1997) refers to as the “community face of neoliberalism.” US and Western European NGOs promoted individualized solutions to fill in for an absent state, thereby subverting more collective antisystemic indignation and action. At the same time, local social organizations adopted the same form, refusing funding from supranational institutions like the World Bank and European and US governmental agencies, and aiming to link and organize power across various sectors and at varying scales against predatory capitalism and imperialism.

MARK: As a neoliberal ideological tool, NGOs are posited as “good” actors against the “bad” state. Some political scientists

and development economists hail NGOs as more democratic, closer to the people, and more effective. A similar binary holds that NGOs are “bad” and social movements are “good.” The conceptual imprecision—“blurred boundaries” (Bernal and Grewal 2014)—makes such moral claims difficult, further politicizing and policing borders between NGOs and other “assemblages” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Ong and Collier 2005).

Some of NGOs’ harshest critics can otherwise be considered NGOs. They have many similarities with NGOs: nonprofit status, a board of directors, and (often) a central office. Bureaucratization has been a preoccupation in the Left since at least Rosa Luxemburg (1900) and Vladimir Lenin (1922). Activists have long warned against permanent union bureaucracies representing obstacles for change. So-called new social movements (post-1960s, moving beyond simply class struggle) gave it a new name: “NGOization” (e.g., Choudry and Kapoor 2013; Edelman 2005; Heideman 2017; Paternotte 2016). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, feminist movements remained vigilant about NGOization (Alvarez 1999; Lang 2000). This took a more radical position at a 2004 conference of INCITE! Women of Color against Violence. This work (2007) parallels Petras’s (1997) or Lwiji’s (2009) proposed solutions to protect autonomy and a radical militancy, like giving more power to volunteer members, member contributions, a clear strategy, absolute transparency, and permanent vigilance.

BOUMBA: In Haiti, critical intellectuals and certain activists began analyzing this phenomenon in the late 1990s, an important period in contemporary Haitian history, including the 1991 coup d’état,<sup>7</sup> the economic embargo, the return of the neoliberal democratic order, the United States military occupation in 1994, and the United Nations military occupation since 2004. These two occupations used NGOs as force multipliers, as their civil component. These critiques gained steam in between 2000 and 2010, and after the earthquake, they were fully exposed for all to see. The effort to characterize NGOs as “NGOization” really took shape after the 2004 coup d’état, which had the collaboration of an actor very much in vogue in Haiti: “civil society.”

NGOs are mechanisms to manage contradictions and the “soft” control of civil society (Gramsci 1971). The Tricontinental Center (Cetri) focused an entire journal issue on NGOs, seeking to determine whether they function as “instruments of neoliberalism or popular alternatives” (Houtart 1998). Sauveur Pierre Étienne (1997) considers NGOs not only as an invasive force but also as imposing themselves as indispensable, a decisive actor in the process of imagining different ways of living. Lwiji (2009), a critical intellectual who observed NGOization and depoliticization of social struggle, denounced NGOs as part of an offensive of “the International Community” to block solidarity between exploited and oppressed people within the struggle for a total international socialist emancipation.

Many institutions that formerly proudly presented themselves as progressive NGOs or leftist NGOs now categorically refuse the name, presenting themselves as institutions, social organizations, “support” institutions accompanying popular movements, or simply “social movement organizations.” Many of these organizations take great pains to distance themselves from that

appellation, even as their practice stays the same. This concern or distance comes at a time when NGOs are actively criticized for their role in undermining the transformation of the unjust, unequal, exclusive, neocolonial, discriminating, and patriarchal Haitian society.

MARK: Activists in Haiti have moved beyond the critique of NGOization—of becoming an NGO—because it still retains unproductive, fixed, essentialist identities of “NGOs” as a noun. Whatever the form, it is more relevant to challenge actions, so activists began using the word as a verb, critiquing “NGOing” (Schuller 2018; see also Hilhorst 2003; Sharma 2014), even in those who vehemently reject the label.

This opens avenues for self-critique—including for those of us employed in higher education—to see parallels. Navigating the “audit culture” (Strathern 2000) is common to both universities and NGOs. Theorized as the “neoliberal university” (e.g., Davis 2015; Greyser and Weiss 2012; Hyatt et al. 2015) or the “imperial university” (Chatterjee and Maira 2014), universities (particularly public universities) are also increasingly under the thumb of capital, reproducing White supremacy and anti-Blackness (e.g., Harney and Moten 2013; Williams et al. 2021). Ilionor Louis (2021) details how the Haitian state undermines Haiti’s public university system, imposing foreign neoliberal policies and frameworks (see also Dubuisson 2024).

These contradictions also reflect the ambivalent perspectives toward states. We theorize the state here along with Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Craig Gilmore (2007, 143–44)—that is, as a “territorially bounded set of specialized institutions” that seeks “to maintain supremacy over all other organizational forms in the social order (family, religion, unions, etc.) by controlling who may commit violence, how, and to what end.” In the United States, abolitionist movements demand the dismantling of the police state (e.g., Cullors 2022; Gilmore 2023; Kaba 2021; Purnell 2022; Shange 2019), meanwhile creating systems rooted in community care and horizontal decision-making. Some social movement leaders in Haiti experiment with alternative economies via tactical collaborations with progressive international NGOs. These 21st-century conceptualizations of states and NGOs rework principled activists’ articulation of emergent strategies (Brown 2017) and address the changing landscapes, constituting the “afterlives” of NGOs.

MAMYRAH: Yet, we also agree with Max Ajl (2023) when he says that for countries of the Global South, the state is still a much-needed tool to intercede with capital on behalf of the populace. While the neoliberal state of Haiti conspires to defeat its subjects, the Cuban state sends medical doctors and nurses, and the Bolivarian state ships petroleum products below market prices to the country.

In what follows, we briefly discuss the PetroCaribe Agreement, and we ascertain the size, shape, and impact of the PetroChallenge movement that emerged in Haiti in 2018. We also explore the attempts of Haitian organizers in the diaspora(s) and their internationalist allies to navigate their NGOization to generate a rhizomatic practice of solidarity that linked demands in Haiti to their own struggles against the US Empire.

## 4 | Solidarity in Action: PetroCaribe and the PetroChallenge Movement

BOUMBA: PetroCaribe was launched in 2005 by Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez to offer subsidized petroleum products and financing mechanisms for development projects, especially to small Caribbean Island nation-states. In 2006, Chávez visited Haiti to sign the agreement with President René Préval. In 2007, Venezuela officially started to supply the country with fuel. In 2017, after US President Donald Trump increased sanctions already imposed by former president Barack Obama against Venezuela—whose international trade relies on US currency—he enlisted the official withdrawal of Caribbean countries like Haiti from the program, and PetroCaribe ceased.

PetroCaribe was another form of solidarity between peoples, and in fact between states, that distanced itself from the dominant paradigm. The agreement between Venezuela and other Latin American and Caribbean countries is a form of solidarity rejecting “pity solidarity.” PetroCaribe had 2 goals: (1) establish solidarity between Latin American countries in the fight against slavery, colonialism, racism, and colonial looting of Latin America, and (2) break the chains of domination and exploitation of current imperialist institutions, such as the World Bank, IMF, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), European Union, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Canadian International Development Agency, and all other foundations that redistribute bourgeois charity.

PetroCaribe is in essence a key message of the Bolivarian revolution, highlighting the will to dismantle relationships of imperialist and neocolonialist domination. It is not just rhetoric; PetroCaribe created new regional diplomatic ties and offered billions of dollars in financing for dozens of projects across the Caribbean, offering tangible benefits for low-income communities. For example, the cash transfer program Progresando Solidaridad (PROSOLI) enabled the Dominican Republic to meet the Millennium Development Goal 1 regarding food, reducing child malnutrition by over 5%. In Belize, PetroCaribe funds helped create the Belize National Bank, offering credit to smallholding farmers.<sup>8</sup> This model of cooperation ruffled the feathers of the global gendarmerie. They always hoped it would fail. This also explains international institutions’ and the Core Group’s<sup>9</sup> deafening silence when Moïse expelled the BINUH (International United Nations Office) representative in Haiti—something very rare in Haiti’s contemporary history—after this diplomat made a statement asking for a proper investigation into PetroCaribe.

PetroChallenge certainly contributed to forcing some branches of the state to be held accountable. For example, the CSCCA (Haiti’s Superior Court of Appeals) reports fueled many street protests. PetroChallenge lit a fire inside the parliament, even without a numerical majority. This PetroChallenge was a rare occurrence of new mobilization, not only regarding the number of people who took to the streets demanding passage of the “Petrocaribe Bill” but also in terms of the diversity of expression, tactics used, age, and social strata. Tactics varied, such as an overnight vigil at the CSCCA, music shared via social media, and media-savvy protest—like hearkening the biblical battle of Jericho—in addition to traditional street protests. Culture, art, spirituality,

street protests, and media—all forms of protest—asked in unison: Where are the PetroCaribe funds? The Haitian people considered PetroCaribe funds as theirs, partly because PetroCaribe comes from Latin America rather than the United States or France. This is the people’s money, a form of solidarity.

The PetroChallengers were more visible. They were the “influencers” whose role was to share information, but they failed to grasp the nature of the historical and social transformation occurring in Haiti. The popular masses, residents of poor neighborhoods, came to PetroChallenge to protest: hundreds and thousands of people, not the petty bourgeoisie. The petty bourgeoisie carried the flag, standing in front, but the masses from the popular neighborhoods joined the stage and politicized Haiti’s fundamental social problems, social injustice, and exclusion.

The popular masses raised the most radical demands, to *chanje sistèm nan* (change the system) to *chavire chodyè a* (literally, overturn the cooking pot): Within this neocolonial capitalist system, you will never find out where PetroCaribe funds went, so popular protest in Haiti is also anti-imperialist and decolonial. We must start over from zero, *tabula rasa*. To truly start from scratch, to change the system, means not only pushing Moïse or PHTK (the “baldhead” political party) out of power. You can’t make change demanding that *de facto* presidents and prime ministers step down in favor of the self-selected leaders favored by the opposition. Faced with popular demands of *tabula rasa*, of overhauling the system, why should anyone be forced to choose one over the other?

While “combating corruption” dominated the narrative, Haitian people do not put stock in the struggle against corruption. Nevertheless, the PetroChallenge movement had the potential to socially transform the country. Over the years, organized militants in Haiti and its diasporas revitalized existing activist networks and enlisted new allies. By March 2021, international solidarity with the people of Haiti was calling for the return to constitutional order. Below, we discuss some of these expressions of solidarity, despite recognizing that they emerge out of a liberal framework.

## 5 | Bridging Activist Spheres

MARK: In the lead-up to and following Moïse’s assassination in July 2021, US-based solidarity activists mounted increased efforts, including scores of public statements and petitions, a lawsuit in federal court, lobbying meetings in Washington, press conferences, Zoom briefings, and street protests in Washington and cities with a large Haitian presence, like Miami and New York.

My Haiti solidarity activism was mostly at a distance as part of US-based, mostly White solidarity networks, trying to bridge activist spheres and leveraging the various social capitals I accumulated as a scholar and an activist. As union steward, I brought this international solidarity to our work, building our power base and plugging away at anti-racism and social justice “at home” (Schuller and McKinney 2021). I was also a member of Welcoming Western Counties to make our community safer for immigrants, including undocumented people.

## 6 | International Day of Solidarity With Haiti

As 2021 opened with a massive deportation machine—Biden deported over 26,000 Haitian people, almost as many in 1 year as the previous three presidents had over the previous 20 (Ricker 2022)—I reached out to comrades in the United States and Haiti and created a WhatsApp group to deliberate on strategy and messaging. I de-emphasized my role and had other folks facilitate meetings. Joining this trio were two other Haitian activists publishing a series of blogs, PetroAnalysis, literally translating Haitian activist analyses to inspire solidarity actors.<sup>10</sup> Following the 2021 earthquake, which struck Haiti's southern peninsula and killed at least 2248 people, was a campaign to raise the minimum standards for NGOs seeking aid. Many agencies pledged to support dignity, self-determination, and full participation.<sup>11</sup>

I also was president of the Haitian Studies Association (HSA). In the height of the pandemic, the HSA was forced, like many others, to go online. Members kept asking for more opportunities for connection, so we began a monthly webinar series, screening documentaries like *Stateless* and *Chèche Lavi*.<sup>12</sup> As the constitutional crisis in Haiti ramped up, wherein Moïse refused to step down on the day his term expired, Mamyrah and I launched our special issue of *NACLA Report on the Americas* (Dougé-Prosper and Schuller 2021), and Mamyrah fired people up during the webinar commemorating Constitution Day, launching the International Day of Solidarity. We began working with advocacy groups in Washington and activist collectives in Haiti, and the conversations merged into advocacy trainings and action days, joined by US Representative Ayanna Pressley (D-MA).

Weeks before our annual HSA conference in 2021, when the world was sickened by the photo of a Haitian asylum seeker, Mirard Joseph, being whipped by a White ICE agent on horseback at Del Rio, Texas, we cohosted an emergency brainstorming session in which folks split into task groups, including media work, political messaging, social media mobilization, translation support, and activating local organizations to welcome the influx of asylum seekers. The following year, we convened a face-to-face conference in Washington, where scholars and NGO advocates learned from one another and were energized and mobilized. I cofacilitated exchanges about solidarity with NGO activists. In Washington, I cohosted a conversation with Haitian, diaspora, and foreign scholars and activists deliberating on messaging and appropriate solidarity roles.

Gradually, NGO tendencies returned, with forces of institutionalization and contests over visibility and planting the flag, in the solidarity network in the United States, while the Montana Accord became more prominent, edging out other actors. As activists in the United States protesting the 2003 invasion of Iraq, we noted the same tendency of political party capture of movement energy (Currans et al. 2011). As an in-progress movement, it is too soon to evaluate the impact. However, inspired by Robin Kelley's *Freedom Dreams* (2002), it is important to value the collective visions put forward. And I hoped that working together, people in scholarly associations can dream together and identify—and overcome—challenges with NGOs involved in solidarity (Schuller 2023).

MAMYRAH: “On Saturday, March 6, 2021, 14 organizations across the Americas called for and coordinated an International Day of Solidarity with the people of Haiti fighting to overthrow neocolonialism and dictatorship on the symbolic day of March 29.”<sup>13</sup> This was the first line of the coalition's press release. Organizations are in Canada, the United States, the Dominican Republic, Argentina, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Some identified themselves as Haitian. Many had Haitian Americans in their leadership. I was the international coordinator of an NGO-ized Black anti-imperialist organization in the United States. Cadres spanned the gender spectrum; we were Black, Brown, and White, among other racialized people. We all share certain ideological penchants: anti-imperialist, anti-racist, antipatriarchal, anti-capitalist. All claimed direct connections to movement organizations in the country. Many of our Haitian comrades overlapped, including the more radical PetroChallengers.

Most attending the meeting had worked together before around issues other than Haiti: for Black liberation, Palestine liberation, immigrant rights, reproductive rights, Indigenous land reclamations, reparations for African enslavement, unionization across all industries, against police violence and militarization, gentrification, the wars in Syria, Afghanistan, and Ethiopia, and other conflicts in Colombia and the Philippines. Every organization within the alliance has constituencies, members engaged in community work: running political education and literacy programs, coordinating mutual aid, convening gatherings and celebrations, gardening, meeting, and thinking together. And all these organizational members are willing to occupy public space and shout.

While the international alliance agreed that all participating organizations had full autonomy over their actions in their respective cities, it deferred to the Haitian cadres to determine the language to use: “Down with US Imperialism!,” “Long Live Haiti!,” and “No to Dictatorship in Haiti.” Cadres outside Haiti understood their roles as translators and amplifiers of movement needs and wants, rather than mentors, experts, or strategists. We frequently appeared on progressive news and analysis shows and ran webinars using Zoom, usually streamed on YouTube. We also dropped pithy political commentaries on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter (now X). We did so in the different languages the coalition operated in: Haitian Kreyòl, English, Spanish, and Portuguese, to expose the struggle in Haiti against state corruption.

The day of actions included a rally in Little Haiti, Miami, and protests targeting Haitian Consulates/Embassies in Ottawa, Montreal, Santo Domingo, and Paris; members of the Core Group, like the UN in New York and Brasilia, the US State Department in Washington, DC, and the OAS in Santo Domingo; countries that led the former MINUSTAH occupation; the headquarters of the presidents and congresses in Buenos Aires and Montevideo; sites of US imperial power in Burlington, Boston, and San Juan; and corporations benefiting from land grabs in Haiti, like the Coca-Cola building in Atlanta.<sup>14</sup> The day also involved artwork: a visual art contest, solidarity video campaigns, and a mural dedicated to Jean-Jacques Dessalines in Caracas. Additional organizations endorsed local protests in

New York, Newark, Atlanta, San Juan, and Santo Domingo. More than 100 organizations participated in the International Day.

Cadres willing to make time for Haiti made the March 29 actions possible. They set aside other priorities to meet for dozens of hours as an alliance to share with one another their respective vision for their local protest and to keep up with current events in Haiti. Meanwhile, they continued with other responsibilities for their own organizations. They labored without receiving direct compensation. However, organizations are relatively resourced formations, some more than others. Some depend on unpaid labor and member donations. Others flirt with the NPIC by applying Gilmore's (2004) advice to "take the money and run." Regardless, adherents to social movement organizations showed up, risking their physical and emotional safety to confront power in the name of Haiti.

## 7 | New International Solidarities With Haiti

When we set out to write this article, the first *peyi lòk* and PetroChallenge in 2018 had not yet taken place. We could foresee neither the cross-class, cross-sectorial, and cross-regional solidarity these protest events captured nor the international enthusiasm they provoked. Yet, during the previous decade, we had witnessed the rise of new Marxist, feminist, and Kominote M organizations (Dougé-Prosper 2025; Solages and Gerez 2023). We had observed peasant movements against PHTK's land grabs to establish Free Trade Zones in Caracol in 2011 (Dougé-Prosper 2021), La Gonave in 2013, and Ile-A-Vache in 2014 (Osna 2023); and feminist mobilizations against the masculinist state's appointment of functionaries accused of sexual assault in Port-au-Prince in 2013. We had also witnessed the swelling of popular protests against President Martelly's rule by decree that started in the capital in 2013 into a national movement rejecting the 2015 presidential electoral results that placed the PHTK candidate Moïse in the lead (Kivland 2020). This critical mass of citizens across sectors, generations, political ideologies, and regions, despite decades of movement NGOization, came together again under a new configuration and leadership in 2018 to launch the PetroChallenge.

We also could not predict that millions of people would rise up in all 50 US states to defend Black lives against White supremacy, White people included (Johnson and Edgar 2024). In the aftermath of the 2013–14 #BlackLivesMatter protests, non-Black allies in the United States had heard the call to show up. By this second wave, the movement had not only turned international, reaching as far as Belgium and South Africa (Westerman et al. 2020), but also internationalist, expanding to include demands around immigration reform and Palestine Liberation (Ransby 2018). Haiti, Cuba, Venezuela, Colombia, Congo, Sudan, and Ethiopia, to name a few, became central points of discussion, political education, and solidarity protest actions, and the US diasporas from these territories now living and organizing in the United States played crucial roles in this shift. Young militants in Haiti also picked up the #BlackLivesMatter slogan to reframe their anti-imperialist castigation, momentarily altering the terms of the struggle. In Latin America, against the backdrop of right-wing authoritarianism, Marxist, feminist, and other anti-imperialist radicals heeded the call of the Movement for Black Lives to reckon with their anti-Blackness. They were

also directly challenged by newly arriving Haitian diasporic militants in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile to accept their countries as subimperialists for their leadership in the MINUSTAH occupation of Haiti (2004–2017) (Rivara 2020).

## 8 | Conclusion

In this article, we offer our dialogue shared in person and extended on WhatsApp, learning from Haitian militants and Haiti solidarity activists across the Americas, other scholars of social movements, activism, solidarity, and social movement organizers and NGO workers who grapple with the complexities and contradictions of confronting existing indivisible injustices, expressed locally and rooted in the global capitalist system (e.g., Schuller 2021). Haiti is a part of a global wave of contestation over the past decade (Bevins 2023). As Olúfẹ̀mí Táíwò (2022) argued, "despite differences in local context, when people around the world rose up against the police terror and violence to which they have been subjected for hundreds of years, it was immediately clear that something global was at stake." Rising from the rubble of the Republic of NGOs, militants in Haiti and their *diaspora* and solidarity partners forged new nodes of connection, with some leveraging the experience and tools gained through their entanglement with the NPIC. The resulting solidarities, NGO afterlives, are consequently ephemeral and contradictory. As noted above, this article is an archive of emerging activist strategies and work in progress.

While the state continues to be the target of demands, many social movements throughout the Americas increasingly dream of not revolution or reform but of the abolition of the state altogether. They rehearse the future in the present through crafting and disseminating new language or concepts of collective self-determination, developing cooperatives and other mutual aid, and pushing for movement horizontality. In the United States, Black social movements organize toward this goal through the abolition of prisons and the police. In Haiti, social movements strategically joined the political opposition to dismantle the state. And the recent *konbit* to construct a navigational canal in the northeast of the country to irrigate over 5,000 hectares of agricultural lands, without any government funding or protection, attests to another emergent mode of governance (Francisque 2024). Finally, following the passage of H.R. 9495, US President Trump's promise to weed out the communists, feminists, anti-Zionists, and Black identity extremists hiding in 501(c)(3) structures may be just the push antisystemic militants need to transition out of the NPIC into other forms of solidarity based on shared visions of another possible world and the voluntary redistribution of wealth from the inheritors of power.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> *Militan* in Haitian Kreyòl is the equivalent of activist organizer in English.
- <sup>2</sup> Under Martelly, the political opposition and grassroots movements had already denounced the PHTK's embezzlement and misuse of the \$12 billion of reconstruction funds following the 2010 earthquake in Haiti.
- <sup>3</sup> For more information on the massacre, see Jameson Francisque (2019).

<sup>4</sup>In 2015, following a fraudulent election organized by the sitting PHTK president, mass protests led to the installation of an interim president and organization of a new round of elections in 2016, which confirmed Jovenel Moïse's victory. Despite his 5-year term beginning in 2017 (and ending in 2022, as he had claimed), constitutional scholars and jurists argued that according to Haiti's electoral calendar, Moïse's mandate expired in 2021.

<sup>5</sup>See Bevins (2023).

<sup>6</sup>The "Kominote M" is akin to the coalitional politics of LGBT (see Chapman et al. 2017; Dougé-Prosper 2025).

<sup>7</sup>Haiti's first democratically elected leader, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was removed from office by a CIA-funded and School of the Americas-trained military.

<sup>8</sup>See the 2015 report jointly published by the UN Food and Agricultural Organization and PetroCaribe: <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/0a07ee56-c8cb-413a-b1ff-e920de8e9c44/content>.

<sup>9</sup>The "Core Group" is a self-named group of foreign powers maintaining dominance over Haitian affairs, including the United States, Canada, the European Union, France, Germany, and Brazil, the latter being the head of MINUSTAH.

<sup>10</sup><https://www.anthropolitics.org/petroanalysis/>.

<sup>11</sup><https://www.haitiresponse.org/pledge>.

<sup>12</sup>See Michèle Stephenson. 2020. *Stateless*. <https://www.pbs.org/pov/films/stateless/> and Sam Ellison. 2020. *Chèche Lavi (Looking for Life)*. <https://www.collectiveeye.org/products/cheche-lavi>.

<sup>13</sup>See the Leve Kanpe Pou Ayiti website for more information about organizations: [levekanpe.org](http://levekanpe.org).

<sup>14</sup>The day after Jovenel Moïse was scheduled to step down in 2021, he published a decree giving textile industrialist André Apaid agricultural lands to produce stevia for Coca-Cola.

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