

HAITI IS A SLIDING LAND: DISPLACEMENT, COMMUNITY,  
AND HUMANITARIANISM IN POST-EARTHQUAKE PORT-AU-PRINCE

Laura Rose Wagner

A dissertation submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
Anthropology Department at the University of North Carolina.

Chapel Hill  
2014

Approved by:

Peter Redfield

Laurent Dubois

Charles Price

Michele Rivkin-Fish

Merrill Singer

Karla Slocum

© 2014  
Laura Rose Wagner  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## **ABSTRACT**

Laura Wagner: Haiti is a Sliding Land: Displacement, Community, and Humanitarianism in Post-Earthquake Port-au-Prince  
(Under the direction of Peter Redfield)

A Haitian proverb suggests that the country has long been a sliding land, a site of uncertainty and chronic catastrophe. On January 12, 2010, Haiti collapsed suddenly into sudden, tectonic disaster when a devastating earthquake hit its capital, Port-au-Prince, killing hundreds of thousands of people and destroying much of the city. The disaster both gave rise to an unprecedented urban displacement crisis, and engendered the promise of humanitarian and reconstruction aid and a flow of moral sentiment. Yet the earthquake and its aftermath were but the most striking manifestations of centuries-long patterns of vulnerability, life under an aid economy, and displacement. Even before the earthquake, Haiti was infamously known as the "republic of NGOs", while the history of slavery, uprooting, revolution, internal migration, and exile shaped Haitian people's conceptions of home and community.

Despite – and because of – Haiti's long history of foreign intervention and the initial appeal to "save Haiti" in the wake of the 2010 earthquake, the post-disaster humanitarian effort has been regarded by Haitians, non-Haitian aid workers, and the media alike as an unequivocal failure. This work examines the lived experiences of Haitian people (including aid beneficiaries and those who did not receive aid) and expatriate aid providers alike to provide a nuanced, personal, behind-the-scenes perspective on a well-known, highly publicized disaster in a long-misrepresented and sensationalized land. It also presents an analysis of the structural limitations

and personal obligations experienced by Haitian and non-Haitian actors operating within a complicated aid economy. This work is ultimately about everyday responses to and ways of speaking about exceptional conditions. Amid suffering, loss, and sudden and chronic disaster, everyday life endures in Haiti, however unrepresented by the media and aid organizations. Haitian people depend on everyday practices, ordinary acts of cooperation, compassion and community, and humor to survive, cope with, and comment on everything from the initial moment of disaster to long-term displacement, loss and grief, the structures, limits, and failures of international aid, and death itself.



To Melise Rivien, a strong woman who had faith  
And to Claudine St. Fleur, for the past and the future.

*Tèz sa a dedye a Melise Rivien, yon fanm djanm ki te gen lafwa  
Epi a Claudine St. Fleur, pou tout sa k pase ak tout sa ki pral rive.*

*Ayiti se tè glise.*  
Haiti is a sliding land.  
-- Haitian proverb

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Yon sèl dwèt pa manje kalalou.* A single finger cannot eat okra. In honor of all the *moun jeremi* whose stories and experiences shape so much of this narrative, and all the tonmtonm with okra sauce that we ate together, that is the proverb that should start us off. One of the few things as slippery as okra sauce is a dissertation that tries to cover so much time and so many things, and there is no way on this earth I could have done it without the support, knowledge, expertise, and energy of so many people, in so many roles, in so many places.

First I must profoundly thank countless friends, storytellers, and ordinary acquaintances in Haiti who shared their lives, their time, their experiences, and their expertise with me – who showed, time and time again, the meaning of community ties.

M pa tap la si li pat pou kouraj ak vayans Prenel Michel ak John Ornélus te genyen 12 javye. Mèsi paske nou pat lage m; mèsi pou lavi m.

Claudine St. Fleur, mwen pa ka menm ekspriye tout sa ou ye pou mwen, men mwen kwè ou gentan konnen deja. Istwa sa a pa tap egziste si li pat pou ou ak fanmi w. Mwen remesye w enfiniman, epi mwen renmen w anpil. Pou tout manm Kojepens yo – sitou Claudine, Wesline Ciceron, Bazelet St. Louis, Élie Dupalis, Nancy Petit-Frère – talan ak enèji nou an se yon gwo sous enspirasyon pou mwen. Mèsi pou tout pasyans nou te pran avè m. Besita ak Bencille Jeune te vin tankou fanmi m – mèsi. Kéthia Édouard se yon bon timoun. Se nou menm ki fè ti apatman mwen tounen yon *kay* tout bon vrè. Mwen remesye tout moun nan lakou a – sitou David ak Jocelin, Gwo bo ak gwo remèsiman a makomè m Damilove Gorguette ak fiyèl mwen Alissa Nazaire. Mwen remesye tout moun Dejèm yo pou tout tonmtonm nan; kominote sa a

tèlman akeyan.

Joëlle Coupaud gave me a place to stay when I was afraid to sleep under roofs and picking fights. Hèrn Marcelin and all the folks at INURED made my first experiences in Haiti possible and facilitated my entry into Cité Soleil. INURED's Félix St. Fleur, who died too young, was so patient and kind as I learned Creole. My years in Port-au-Prince would not have been complete without coffee every morning at sunrise on the galerie of Maryse Jean-Jacques, listening to the radio, talking about politics and watching my cat chase anoles up the almond tree. Kathie Klarreich told me to get off my butt and get to work – I thank her for tough love and second chances. Jean Casimir never let me give up on my research and showed me what true grace and diplomacy look like; Venante Thermogène is simply one of the best people out there. Josiane Hudicourt-Barnes is the kind of *manman poul* who gives you a needed peck with her beak when necessary – thank you, Josiane, for your friendship and support, and for being okay with my borrowing your uncle Max's desk for a while. If my work in any way does justice to that generation of Haitian intellectuals and fighters, I'll consider it a success. I am one of many researchers and writers to rely upon Jacques Bartoli and his lakou – thank you for all of it, Ti Jak, but particularly for bringing the past to life.

Stateside, incalculable thanks to Martha, Bradley, and Adah King (and often Rosemary), who unquestioningly took me into their home and family for three months after the earthquake, who showed, as much as anyone else, the vast possibility of household and of fictive kinship. Thank you for the roof over my head, for the games of Settlers of Cataan, for the ice cream. Their acceptance and support made what should have been one of the hardest moments in my life into one of the sweetest. Rachana Rao Umashankar and Dragana, Michael, and Jana Lassiter all welcomed me into their homes as well, and gave me the space to figure out next steps. Mónica,

Raúl, and Lázaro López were the first people to show up at the hospital, and I am grateful for their years of friendship. Thank you to the entire Department of Anthropology at UNC for their support during that time. Particular thanks to Caela O’Connell, ever practical, ever effective, ever full of common sense, for making sure I had clothes to wear.

I am ludicrously lucky; I could not have had a more supportive dissertation committee. With humor, ease and truth, Charles Price has always reminded me to keep my feet on the ground and to make sure my work remains engaged and useful. Laurent Dubois is generous with the spotlight – to him I owe not only this dissertation, but also my first forays into public scholarship and ultimately into published fiction. It is a privilege to be in dialogue with someone who knows so much about Haiti and whose mind works so quickly. Karla Slocum taught me to contextualize my research in the larger history of race and kinship in the Caribbean, and is a model of calmness, professionalism, clear thinking, and resolve. It has been an honor to have Merrill Singer on this committee; it is wonderful to have as a mentor and a friend someone who is so committed to keeping anthropology beholden to social justice and public engagement. Michele Rivkin-Fish has shaped and refined my thinking about health and justice, and has always encouraged my writing in all its forms. Her generosity and enthusiasm – as well as her deep sensitivity for the human – have contributed greatly to this work. Finally, no graduate student could have a better adviser than Peter Redfield – an insightful, inspired scholar, an unconventional thinker, a gorgeous writer, and a kind person. Peter has shown me how to take my work seriously without taking myself too seriously, to embrace my literary sensibilities, to accept and know that it is possible to be many things at once, and to laugh at God. Thank you for your guidance, your humor, and your patience. In addition to their intellectual contributions to this work, I must also thank them all for their encouragement and care (and more than a few

meals) in the strange months directly after the earthquake, when I found myself suddenly back in North Carolina and adrift.

Beyond my committee, I have been so lucky to have intellectual and personal support by other faculty, at my own university and beyond. Silvia Tomášková is proof that one can be happy without being naïve. She scoffs at impossibility and inspires by her example, has saved me from despair, and is pretty good with a well-timed Czech proverb. Deborah Jenson at Duke showed uncommon commitment to my work and my progress, for which I shall always remain grateful. Jocelyn Chua is the kind of friend and colleague we all should have, brilliant and humble and a total inspiration. Chris Nelson made sure I had a loaner laptop in 2010, and reassured me that Leach had lost his fieldnotes and it had worked out quite all right for him. Conversations with Anna Agbe-Davis gave me new ways to think about burial, landscape, and memory. Josh Nadel is one of the kindest and most genuine people in academia.

At the UNC Department of Anthropology, Suphronia Cheek, Matt McAllister, and Shamecia Powers make this strange process possible. This research would never have gotten off the ground without the hard work and commitment of Shelley Clarke and the miracles worked by the endlessly inventive and supportive Beatriz Riefkohl-Muniz at the Institute for the Study of the Americas at UNC.

I am fortunate to belong to an uncommonly kind and intellectually generous community of scholars and writers who work in Haiti and the *dyaspora*. My thinking was shaped by long conversations and shared fieldwork experiences with the brilliant and funny Jenny Greenburg – hers is the dissertation I most want to read, and I eagerly look forward to further collaborations. Julia Gaffield shows us all how to get things done, and is a remarkably easy-going houseguest and traveler. Liza McAlister has shared so much knowledge and experience, her work is an

inspiration, and she is a whole lot of fun, to top it off. Beverly Bell created spaces for collaboration and usefulness amid so much loss and helplessness. Alexis Erkert loves Haiti even when it hurts. Pooja Bhatia and Susana Ferreira are both great friends and astute, wonderful writers and observers— they get it. Kathy Smith is one of the best ethnographers I’ve seen in action, and I thank her especially for introducing me to the Gede spirits. Pierre Minn is an elegant, enthusiastic scholar of humanitarianism. Jessica Hsu is as much a moun abriko as a blan can be, and she has been an invaluable resource on Grand-Anse. Rodrigo Bulameh’s knowledge of the rural lakou was invaluable; he is a generous colleague. It has been a pleasure knowing and talking with Claire Payton and Jonathan Katz, from Port-au-Prince to all the way Durham. Paul Clammer shares my nostalgic fascination with a Haitian past we never knew. Vincent Joos is one of the best ethnographers and fieldworkers I’ve ever had the privilege of knowing and working with. I keep bumping into Lauren Fordyce everywhere I go, and about that I am very glad – I remain grateful for her support and enthusiasm. Chelsey Kivland and Lynn Selby know what it was like.

My scholarship and my life would be far less rich without my wonderful cohort-mates, colleagues, and writing partners in the Room of Requirement. At UNC, Martha King, Erin Nelson, Claire Novotny, and Alice Brooke Wilson are exactly the kind of people you want to spend several years with. Laurel Bradley is an extraordinary thinker, and I have benefited so much from discussions with her about human rights and institutional absurdity, and from the time she sat down and drew me a table of precedence with everything but the silver gravy boat. Caela O’Connell and Amelia Fiske have given me new ways to think about and conceptualize disaster, and are wonderful friends to boot. Bill Westermeyer shows us all how to think and write about sad and infuriating things without becoming jaded. Lindsay Bloch can literally do

anything and is an island of calm amid the storm. Taylor Livingston has a good head on her shoulders. Guy Shalev can laugh at anything and is a formatting genius. There are not words to express my admiration for Saydia Gulrukh, who is living proof of what public scholarship and activist anthropology can do.

Down the road at Duke, Fredo Rivera shows how joyous and unpretentious academia can really be. Thanks for the chisme mags, the Nutter Butters, my first post-earthquake beer, a whole lot of RuPaul, and for making my return to Haiti via Miami so much less frightening than it was about to be. Reggie Patterson's irrepressible enthusiasm for all things Caribbean is contagious. I'm glad we spent January 11 together. Lorien Olive and Erin Parish made the last year of writing so much better, and also made me think about cities and displacement in new and meaningful ways. The incomparable Christina Chia is the single reason my dissertation does not still have highlighted yellow bits in it. Saiba Varma is an insightful scholar of trauma and humanitarianism who gave me so much to think about.

Sharon Abramowitz and Catherine Panter-Brick created the opportunity and the space to think about medical humanitarianism in new and fruitful ways. It could not have been a bigger thrill and dose of needed encouragement to meet the wonderful Byron Good, the wonderfully candid Mary-Jo Good, and the incomparable Sa'ed Adel Atshan when I did. Mike Degani, ever clear-headed and bright, understood this whole project in the loveliest and truest way and more than earned his keep. Sarah Kamens is a huge source of support.

Ti Boum, Tatou, Olguita, and Kakine are proof of how vast and inclusive kinship can be (as well as evidence of the importance of a good nickname). Claudette Wadestrandt showed that love and family can transcend exile and loss, over and over again, in many ways.

A modified version of the section on Cité Soleil and the interlude "A Day on the Inside"



appeared online in *Truthout* in November 2010 under the title “Why Rumors Rule in Cholera-Torn Haiti.” A modified version of the section on jokes and humor appeared online in *Savage Minds* in January 2011, under the title “Something to Laugh About: A Few Thoughts on Humor in Post-Earthquake Haiti.”

This research would not have been possible without logistical and financial support from the Royster Society of Fellows at UNC Chapel Hill, the Duke University Haiti Lab, the Department of Anthropology at UNC, the Department of Romance Studies at Duke, the UNC-Duke Consortium in Latin American Studies, US Department of Education Foreign Language and Area Studies Dissertation Grant, the Inter-American Foundation Grassroots Development Fellowship, and the Social Science Research Council International Research Development Fellowship.

I would also like to thank everyone, particularly the nursing staff, at Jackson South Hospital in Miami for their kindness and care in January 2010. Thanks also to the Departments of Neurology and Orthopaedics and the Hand Center at UNC Hospitals, particularly Sue Myers, who showed me what occupational therapy was all about and who got my hand working again.

And finally, to my parents, Arne and Gail Wagner: thank you for your boundless support for an unconventional life.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations .....	xviii
Places in Metropolitan Port-au-Prince .....	xxi
Places Near Port-au-Prince .....	xxiv
Andeyò - “Beyond” Port-au-Prince .....	xxiv
INTRODUCTION: THE EVERYDAY AMID DISASTER .....	1
Representations and Mythicohistories: Haiti’s Heroic Past, Haiti’s Hopeless Present .....	6
Representations and the Trope of Haitian Hopelessness .....	9
Ordinary Kindnesses in an Unkind World .....	20
Voices, Style and Theoretical Influences .....	27
Methodology - or, How I know what I know .....	32
Imperfect Witnessing, Ambivalent Patronage .....	38
Structure .....	45
PART ONE: DISPLACEMENT, COMMUNITY, AND LOSS .....	49
Multiple Displacements .....	51
The Question of the Internally Displaced Person (IDP) .....	54
First Displacement: Africa to Saint-Domingue .....	57
Haiti, Nostalgia and the "Refrain of Home" .....	64
Food, Aid, Displacement, and Everyday Life .....	70
Nostalgia, Homeland, and the Urban Lakou .....	79
Two Case Histories of Displacement .....	84
Melise Rivien: Migration, Household Work, and Loss .....	88
Second Displacement: Provinces to Port-au-Prince .....	92
To Grand-Anse and Back Again: Looking for Life .....	99
Life in Port-au-Prince in Other People’s Houses .....	107

“Living With” .....	109
Household Work and Notions of Rights .....	118
January 12, 2010 .....	124
Absence .....	128
Diaspora: Mobility, Possibility, and Rupture .....	138
Third Displacement: Dyaspora and Exile .....	143
Julienne in Miami .....	148
Kerlange and Celita: Tragedy, Charity, Family, and Mobility .....	151
Fourth Displacement: Earthquake.....	156
October 2010 - North Carolina .....	170
Port-au-Prince – December 2010/January 2011 .....	181
Port-au-Prince: April 2011.....	183
Fall 2012-Summer 2013 .....	188
Displacement, redux .....	194
<b>PART TWO: A HISTORY OF INTERVENTION AND AID .....</b>	<b>199</b>
A Timeline of Selected Events and International Interventions in Haiti .....	200
The Past in the Present: Historical and Economic Macro Context .....	203
A History of International Intervention in Haiti .....	204
Slavery and Revolution.....	206
Post-Independence .....	210
US Marine Occupation - 1915-1934.....	211
Fear and Foreign Intervention Under Duvalier.....	219
Duvalier fils .....	225
USAID Slaughters Creole Pigs: 1983-1985 .....	228
Jean-Claude: The End.....	229
Aristide: The Beginning.....	230
1991 Coup, the US Embargo of Haiti, and the first UN Peacekeeping Mission .....	232
The Presidencies and Removal of Jean-Bertrand Aristide .....	234

MINUSTAH .....	238
Cité Soleil, Microcosm .....	243
After January 12.....	250
Dependence and the Legacy of Aid.....	252
PART THREE: STAGING AN INTERVENTION: PERFORMANCE AND TRAGEDY IN A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS .....	256
Yon monn kè kase/A Fearful World.....	257
The Performance and Tragedy of Humanitarian Intervention.....	259
Dramatis Personae.....	270
Prelude: The Immediate Aftermath.....	271
ACT ONE.....	274
Scene One: Enter Aid.....	274
Emergency, Excitement, and Hope.....	274
Interlude: In Dominique Durand's garden .....	277
Scene Two: Unpreparedness.....	281
Scene Three: Unraveling.....	284
Interlude: A Day on the Inside.....	303
Scene Four: Failure .....	315
Scene Five: “Aid Effectiveness”.....	348
ACT TWO .....	355
Scene One: Routinization of Failure.....	355
Scene Two: Beyond the Narrative of “Failure” .....	407
Scene Three: “Building Back Better” and Other Sadsurdity .....	412
PART FOUR: CODA: DEATH, , LOSS, MEMORY, RETURN .....	419
Fèt Gede, 2011 .....	420
Death as Displacement and Return .....	426
The Promised Land .....	428
Death, Mourning, and Celebration.....	437
An Urban Funeral .....	439

A Rural Funeral.....	440
Disaster, Death and Humor.....	447
Among the Living and the Dead Titanyen, 2012.....	460
Works Cited .....	466

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

GOH – Government of Haiti

ICRC – International Committee of the Red Cross

IDP – Internally Displaced Person

IFRC – International Federation of the Red Cross

IHRC – Interim Haiti Recovery Commission

IOM – International Organization for Migration

MINUSTAH – United National Haiti Stabilization Mission

MSF – Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders)

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNICEF – United Nations Children's Funds

UNOPS – United Nations Office for Project Services

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Map of Port-au-Prince.....	xxi
Figure 2: Map of Haiti .....	xxi
Figure 3: Jean-Jacques Dessalines on the Champ-de-Mars Camp.....	7
Figure 4: USAID rice.....	74
Figure 5: An abundance of bouillon cubes.....	74
Figure 6: Okra sauce.....	76
Figure 7: Tonmtom with okra sauce.....	76
Figure 8: Whipping boiled okra.....	77
Figure 9 and Figure 10: Degerme.....	88
Figure 11: Grand-Rue.....	99
Figure 12: “Titid Nap Tann Ou”.....	238
Figure 13: “MINUSTAH Together for Peace”.....	239
Figure 14: “MINUSTAH and Cholera are Twins”.....	242
Figure 15: MINUSTAH tank in front of destroyed National Palace.....	243
Figure 16 and Figure 17: Used Prostheses.....	267
Figure 18: Operation Unified Response.....	275
Figure 19: Distribution of Water in Rubber Bladders.....	292
Figure 20: The International Community Bòkò Drives the Haitian Zonbi.....	318
Figure 21: Plywood “T-Shelters” Under Construction.....	332
Figure 22: T-shelters, Amid Existing Concrete Structures.....	332
Figure 23: Public Toilets.....	364
Figure 24: Water collection near public toilets in a public plaza, Cité Soleil.....	364

Figure 25: Public toilets during camp removal, Champ-de-Mars.....	364
Figure 26: Cholera Awareness Message.....	365
Figure 27: TOURISTA at Kanaval.....	379
Figure 28 and Figure 29: Maïs Gaté 2, December 2010.....	382
Figure 30: Where a Tent Once Was, February 2012.....	383
Figure 31: One of the Few Remaining ShelterBoxes at Maïs Gaté 2.....	383
Figure 32: ShelterBox with Stick Figure.....	386
Figure 33: Maïs Gaté from Above.....	391
Figure 34: Jalousie.....	412
Figure 35 and Figure 36: Cemetery in Léogâne.....	421
Figure 37: Offerings at the Kwa Bawòn.....	423
Figure 38: Waterproof Gede Feet.....	423
Figure 39 and Figure 40: Hills of Titanyen.....	429
Figure 41: Losing at Dominos at the Wake.....	444
Figure 42: Haiti Nailed to the Cross.....	460
Figure 43: “We Will Never Forget the Ones that Went Before Us”.....	463
Figure 44: Uprooted Crosses at St. Christophe.....	464



## LIST OF PLACES

As this work concerns displacement, movement and geographic fluidity, migration, and the changing city and country, I will refer to many neighborhoods, areas, and towns. Many of these are within Port-au-Prince; some are not. The map below shows, roughly, where these places are in relation to one another, and some indication of when they became part of the city. It focuses on those areas and sites that are of particular interest to this dissertation; it is far from a comprehensive map, but rather is an intentionally selective one.

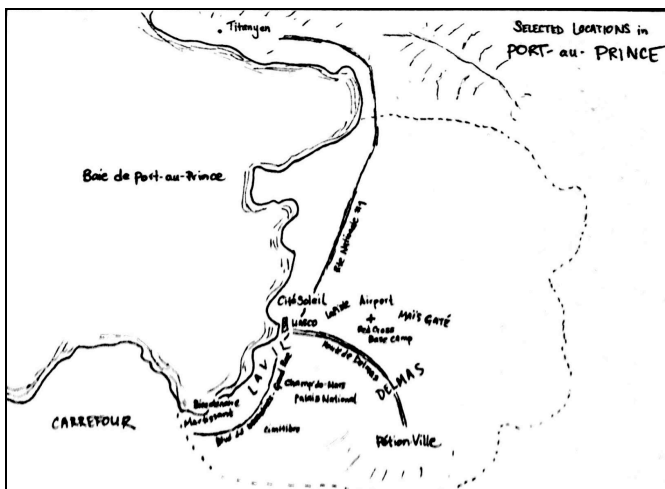


Figure 1: Map of Port-au-Prince

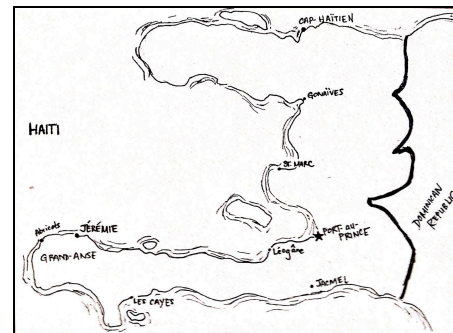


Figure 2: Map of Haiti

### Places in Metropolitan Port-au-Prince

*Bicentenaire* - The seaside area of Martissant that was, in 1949, the site of an international exposition celebrating Haiti's bicentennial and supposed "modernization." At the time, the Bicentenaire featured kiosks, cinemas, restaurants, museums, and fountains. Today, little of this remains, and the Bicentenaire is a poor area that has known years of gang rule.

*Carrefour* – Large commune on the southern side of Port-au-Prince, past Martissant and on the way to Léogâne. Carrefour was hit hard by the earthquake.

*Champ-de-Mars* - Once the social and aesthetic center of Port-au-Prince, the Champ-de-Mars was a series of plazas and green space surrounded by the Palais National, various government ministries, the former army headquarters (Casernes Dessalines) and hotels. Each of its main plazas features a prominent statue of one of the founding fathers of Haiti (Toussaint Louverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Alexandre Pétion, and Henry Christophe). Directly across

from where the National Palace once stood is Haitian sculptor and scholar Albert Mangonès's famous "Nèg Mawòn" statue, featuring a liberated slave victoriously blowing into a conch shell. The Champ-de-Mars has metamorphosed over the last century, and even in the last few years, and its changes mirror those of the city and the country. In the beginning and middle of the twentieth century, the Champ-de-Mars was a genteel and well-maintained area of downtown Port-au-Prince (whatever decadence or violence may have been happening in the Palais or the Casernes). In the decades that followed, as the population of Port-au-Prince exploded and insecurity became more pronounced, the Champ-de-Mars and other public spaces were less frequented, especially by the Haitian elite — though on the eve of the January 12, 2010 earthquake, had again become a space of social interaction for young, poor and lower-middle-class people. After the earthquake, the Champ-de-Mars became a sprawling tent city of perhaps 17,000 people. The inhabitants of the tent city were incrementally removed by IOM, and by May 2012, the Champ-de-Mars was empty.

*Cimetière Nationale* – Port-au-Prince's vast “mega-necropolis,” located downtown at the end of the aptly-named Rue d'Enterrement. Full of above-ground tombs in shades of blue, pink, and white, it is where luminaries and ordinary people are buried, where the indigent live, where Fèt Gede takes place every November 1, where offerings are left for the dead.

*Cité Soleil* - Famously referred to in media as the "most dangerous place in the world" and "hell on earth," Cité Soleil is a vast poor neighborhood on the northern side of the capital, stretching from Boulevard Jean-Jacques Dessalines to the sea. Originally created as a worker city for factory employees in the mid-twentieth century, it is now home to 200,000 to 300,000 people (ICRC 2006), mostly rural to urban migrants and their descendants. Though generally poor, it also has considerable internal heterogeneity, from the relatively stable concrete structures of "upper" Cité Soleil to the marshy shanties of "lower" Cité Soleil. In recent years, it has been subject to military intervention (the MINUSTAH offensive to uproot gang leaders — chimères — from 2004-2006) and a variety of humanitarian and development projects, which have inculcated distrust in many of its inhabitants. After the earthquake, residents of Cité Soleil claimed that aid agencies believed that the community had not been hit hard and was not a "viktim" (INURED 2010); compared to other parts of Port-au-Prince, relatively few buildings in Cité Soleil collapsed (in part because it had few large buildings to begin with). However, people from Cité Soleil died in other parts of the capital, and owing to the community's preexisting precarity, the earthquake had a bigger economic and social effect than could be measured by physical destruction.

*Delmas* - Route Delmas is the main thoroughfare in Port-au-Prince, going from Pont-Rouge up the hill to Pétionville. More than one hundred parallel streets branch off it, on the right and the left; these are called Delmas 2 through Delmas 101, and they are newer residential neighborhoods with cement construction (compared to historical residential neighborhoods like Bois Verna and Pacot). In general, "lower Delmas" is poorer (Delmas 2 is a bidonvil with little infrastructure and a strong gang presence) while "upper Delmas" is wealthier — although this is often blurred in reality. Many of the intermediate Delmas neighborhoods (particularly larger ones, such as Delmas 19, 41, and 75) are socioeconomically mixed, with middle- and upper-class homes abutted by dense bidonvils and katyè popilè.

*Grand-Rue* - The downtown portion of Boulevard Jean-Jacques Dessalines, which stretches from Cité Soleil in the north to the National Cemetery in the South. The Grand-Rue was formerly the commercial and social heart of the city, and many prominent bourgeois Haitian families used to live there. It was changed slowly by decades of poverty, political, and instability, and then changed quickly by the January 12 earthquake.

*HASCO factory* - Defunct since the mid-1980s, the Haytian-American Sugar Company was once a huge enterprise, and is now an abandoned chimneyed behemoth on the outskirts of Cité Soleil.

*Lavil (Fr: La ville)* - The downtown area around the Grand-Rue. Once the commercial and social center of Port-au-Prince, and still one of the main market areas, but increasingly filled with crime and insecurity.

*Maïs Gaté* - Neighborhood of Port-au-Prince near Toussaint Louverture International Airport. Until February 2012, had two large IDP camps (Maïs Gaté 1 and Maïs Gaté 2) which were administered by the Red Cross. The Red Cross Base Camp (for the IFRC, ICRC, and various national societies, including the Haitian Red Cross) was also located at Maïs Gaté, near the camps and behind a well-guarded wall.

*Martissant* – Neighborhood of Port-au-Prince, just past downtown. An older neighborhood, which contains several bygone glories, including the Bicentenaire and Habitation Leclerc, the gardens and villa built by American dancer turned Haitianist Katherine Dunham. Today, it is a densely-populated *katyè popilè* which, like Cité Soleil, has known insecurity and violence, and international military, humanitarian, and development intervention, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Pétionville* - Named after the *mulâtre* revolutionary leader and president Alexandre Pétion, Pétionville is technically its own municipality, was long inhabited by members of Port-au-Prince's mixed-race elite and was practically synonymous with the Haitians bourgeoisie. It was formerly geographically separate from Port-au-Prince, but with increased population and urbanization, it has become contiguous with Port-au-Prince. While many upper-class Haitian families still live there, and it features many of the supermarkets, galleries, shops, discothèques, restaurants, and hotels that serve an elite and expat clientele, it has become increasingly diverse in recent years. Many of the hillsides of Pétionville have become bidonvils, the streets are filled with market women from Lavil who went up the hill after the earthquake, and many of the economic and social elites who used to live in Pétionville have moved still further up the mountain and away from the city.

*La Piste* - An area of Port-au-Prince near Cité Soleil and the abandoned HASCO sugar factory. It is a strange place, featuring reminders of Aristide's unfulfilled projects, including a huge, towering, pillar-like flagpole that never had a flag upon it. After the earthquake, la Piste became a vast camp, many of the inhabitants of which were relocated from the Champ-de-Mars. It was one of the first places in Port-au-Prince to feature brightly-colored plywood “T-shelters” (temporary shelters) as opposed to tents.

## Places Near Port-au-Prince

*Léogâne* – A town to the southwest of Port-au-Prince, and the epicenter of the earthquake. Some surveys indicate that eighty percent of buildings in Léogâne were destroyed. Historically, Léogâne has been known for its strong vodou tradition and secret societies (Bizango).

*Titanyen* – The treeless hills to the north of Port-au-Prince, past Cité Soleil. Under the Duvalier regime, it was a potter's field for dissidents and victims of political violence. After the earthquake, it became the mass burial site for tens of thousands more. It is also, now, one of the largest post-earthquake settlements – and one of the most critiqued and reviled, by both Haitians and foreign observers.

## Andeyò - “Beyond” Port-au-Prince

This is in no way an exhaustive list of places far beyond the Haitian capital. Rather, it is a glossary of places that matter to this particular monograph.

*Grand-Anse* – department on the far western coast of Haiti. Geographically, it is as far from Port-au-Prince as you can be and still be in Haiti. It can be reached by ferry, road, or plane. Owing to the poor conditions of the roads and the distance, it remains one of the most verdant areas of a largely-deforested country. Many domestic workers in Port-au-Prince originally hail from the Grand-Anse department.

*Jérémie* – capital of Grand-Anse. Historically the “city of poets,” many intellectuals hailed from Jérémie. Many migrants from Grand-Anse living in Port-au-Prince say they are “from Jérémie,” but this generally means that they are from small rural communities, not from the city.

*Abricots* – seaside town about an hour (via motorcycle) from Jérémie.

## INTRODUCTION: THE EVERYDAY AMID DISASTER

*The majority of Haitians live quite ordinary lives. They eat what is – for them – quite ordinary food. They die quite ordinary deaths from quite ordinary accidents, quite ordinary tortures, quite ordinary diseases. Accidents so ordinary that they could be prevented. Tortures so ordinary that the international press does not even mention them. Diseases so ordinary that they are easily treated almost anywhere else. Exceptional, is it?*

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “The Odd and the Ordinary: Haiti, the Caribbean and the World”

This work is about a small country that has long occupied a disproportionately large place in the foreign political and affective imagination of the U.S, and which came to occupy a still-larger place after the cataclysmic earthquake of January 12, 2010. The central focus is on home and displacement, kinship and community, suffering and disaster, loss and grief and memory, international aid and local suspicion at the limits of good intention. Unavoidably, it is also about the complexities — the dangers and necessities — of representing Haiti and Haitians, as a foreigner, both for myself as an ethnographer, and for members of the media and international aid organizations.

One of the central tensions of this work is the challenging relationship between the ordinary and the extraordinary in post-earthquake Haiti. It is at once about crisis and disaster — including the earthquake and the aid effort, and other identifiable emergencies, such as the cholera epidemic and moments of political upheaval — and about the everyday, the cultural routines and manners and jokes that make up people’s daily lives. These two themes — crisis and ordinary life — might appear to be in contradiction. To rethink this seeming contradiction, I would first assert, as have many others before me, that while the earthquake itself was a sudden

and unprecedented event of indescribable force and loss, it was the *result of* and occurred *in the context of* what Kai Erikson terms "chronic disaster" (1976) and slow violence. In Erikson's words, these are disasters that "gather... force slowly and insidiously, creeping around one's defenses rather than smashing through them" (255). The earthquake did of course smash through everyone's defenses — physical, emotional, economic, psychological — but economic precarity, political insecurity, poverty, overt and subtle forms of oppression, and direct and structural violence are chronic and insidious, and without them, the January 12 earthquake would not have been as massive and incalculable a disaster as it was. At the same time, amid those chronic conditions, forms of everyday life persisted, and continue to endure; moreover, the conditions of oppression which had long been part of the fabric of the ordinary took on new dimensions. In the words of Olga Shevchenko, writing about a very different context, "the crisis evolves from a singular and alien happening into the very stuff of everyday life, the immediate context of decisions and actions, and, after a certain point, the only reality with which individuals have the social and cultural tools to deal" (2). The crisis is not only present in internationally televised and obviously dire moments like the earthquake or the onset of the cholera epidemic. Crisis can also be routine; it stands not in opposition to the flow of everyday life, but becomes part of it. It becomes difficult, sometimes impossible, to differentiate between manifestations of the crisis and "normal life" (Shevchenko 2010: 3); people experience, and live through, and participate in "routines of rupture" (James 2008: 139).

This is not, however, to rationalize or dismiss the suffering of Haitian people or any other group of people living amid chronic crisis; it would be relativistic to the point of immorality to claim simply that "Haitians are used to it" or "this is their normal." My goal is to both highlight the injustice, while also acknowledging and describing how everyday cultural life becomes the

mechanism that allows people to survive and endure amid injustice and chronic and sudden disaster. In so doing, I hope that this work contributes to a more humanizing representation of Haitian people, who have long been represented as little more than subjects of their suffering.

Writing about the everyday amid the Haitian crisis is surprisingly political and contentious. The standard trope of “Haiti” is one of suffering and scandal, and the focus has been on “big” newsworthy stories. I present an ethnographic moment to reveal the challenges of this task — how scandalous and even discomfiting the notion of “ordinary life” in Haiti might appear to some. In February 2012, a series of improbable events found me having dinner on the patio of what remained of the Hotel Montana, eating a \$16 entrée with a varied table of expatriates. The swimming pool, into which the main hotel had completely collapsed in the earthquake, more than two years before, now flickered in the lovely light of the hotel's generator-based electricity. One of the attendees was an American human rights lawyer, two were photogenic European aid workers employed by an organization headed by a famous American celebrity. Our host was a white corporate lawyer from California who had founded an organization in Haiti after the quake. She spoke no Haitian Creole. She was at once defensive and abrasive, seemingly eager to highlight both her own naïveté and her moral commitment. “I’m nothing here,” she said, over and over. It was hard to discern her tone — a mixture of defensiveness, humility, and anxiety. “I’m nobody here. I have no reputation. I know I came after the earthquake,” she went on, and I thought she was speaking especially to me, because she knew I had been in Haiti before the disaster. “I’m one of *those people*. I have no cred.” Was she dismissing her own presence, or was she looking for validation, appreciation, recognition, or reassurance from those of us who had been “on the ground” longer? Thinking about this was exhausting. I took a sip of my rapidly warming, sweating Prestige beer (\$3.50 at the hotel, a

dollar or less on the street).

Despite her professed lack of “cred,” the lawyer pronounced that “I never hang out with *blan*,” a term that comes from the French “blanc,” literally “white people,” but in the context of Haiti, meaning “foreigners.” “I don’t know those people. You’re the only ones I hang out with,” she smiled at the two attractive young Europeans. In her terms, she was helping “the poor” and “the poorest of the poor” — the deserving victims. She repeatedly excoriated “the Haitian elite,” which seemed strange and misplaced, as she sipped wine and cut up her filet mignon on the lavish veranda of the Hotel Montana, which is owned by an “elite” Haitian family, and where only “elite” Haitian people (and foreigners) could afford the food, drinks, or rooms. Yet despite her strong, edgy personality, she was likable, and her commitment to her victims seemed absolutely sincere and true and her intentions were undeniably good.

After some time, she asked me what I did. Never one for elevator speeches, I explained that I was a PhD student in anthropology. “My research is on beneficiaries’ experiences of the post-quake relief effort.” The lawyer nodded. I went on, taking a drink of my now-warm Prestige beer. “I also write about ordinary, everyday life in post-disaster Haiti.”

“*Ha!*” the lawyer brayed, lurching forward and laughing mirthlessly. “Now *that’s* a paradox!”

This short example shows something that anyone who lives in, writes about, and reads the news about Haiti encounters regularly: the unthinkability of the ordinary. This lawyer had plunged into Haiti for the sake of the people she termed “the poor” and “the victims” — and while her charitable intentions allowed her to recognize the suffering and crisis of their lives, her inability to speak Creole or to stay in Haiti for more than a few days at a time made invisible to her the everyday patterns and interactions that exist alongside the suffering and crisis. For her,



Haiti and Haitians *were* the suffering: the suffering was the most important thing about the place and the people, perhaps the only thing. They were homogenous victims that cried out for intervention, and should be intervened upon. My suggestion that something akin to ordinary life might endure or exist in Haiti was, to her, laughable and unthinkable.

In focusing in part on ordinary life, I do not mean to say that Haitians are “used to” crisis, so it is “okay” — that they can deal with it. Over and over, as this narrative goes on, I will critique the notion and rhetoric that “the Haitian people” (however defined) are particularly, inherently resilient. The inclusion of everyday life is just to acknowledge that the day-to-day does not disappear, even in the aftermath of a seemingly unthinkable and epic crisis and tragedy. In fact, the persistence of the everyday may be – more than catharsis, more than medicalized notions of trauma, more even than religion – how people cope with crisis. As Veena Das writes, “life was recovered not through some grand gestures in the realm of the transcendent but through a descent into the ordinary” (2007: 7).

Crueler, perhaps, even than the shock, and the deaths, and the loss, is that the anticipated sea change that we all expected after January 12, 2010 never came to pass. In the immediate aftermath of the quake, countless instances of fierce decency and nobility crystallized, but they dissipated when the emergency faded (Solnit 2009). The streets of Port-au-Prince were clogged with white Land Cruisers before the earthquake; they still are. Decent, livable housing was beyond the reach of most people before the earthquake; it still is. People maneuvered for scarce jobs as household workers and NGO drivers and security guards before the earthquake; they still do. People struggled and schemed to present themselves as deserving aid beneficiaries before the earthquake; they still must. People died in preventable, unjust ways before the earthquake; they still do. For that matter, people fell in love before the earthquake; they still do. People

cooked delicious food, and embroidered names onto their preschoolers' school uniforms, and told jokes, and swept their floors, and made art, and went to church, and poured out rum for the spirits before the earthquake; they still do. Indeed, people still get married, have babies, select baby names, and try to find means of sending small children to school once they come of age. Life forced people to *degaje* — to manage, to get by — before the earthquake; it still does.

That patterns and routines of ordinary life in Haiti reemerged as quickly and easily as they did is at once frightening and comforting. Even for those living in camps, or otherwise displaced by the earthquake – whose routines are new or altered – everyday life quickly became patterned. The earthquake and post-quake aid situation have revealed more clearly the perilous circumstances and complicated strategies of living in urban Haiti — both within the camps and beyond them — and the long-standing, enduring impacts of living in what has been dubbed “the republic of NGOs”, but it did not create them (Dubois 2012). Though the earthquake rendered it all more visible and jarring, and temporarily commanded the world's gaze, Haiti's many problems are deep, historical, and global — and older than the country itself. So too is Haitian culture and its role as a wellspring of everyday life.

### ***Representations and Mythicohistories: Haiti's Heroic Past, Haiti's Hopeless Present***

If we wish to understand why Haiti is the way it is today, we must not only know the events of Haitian history, we must also understand how they have been remembered, retold, and internalized by people growing up and living in Haiti today. Liisa Malkki defines *mythicohistory* as "not only a description of the past, nor even merely an evaluation of the past, but a subversive recasting and reinterpretation of it in fundamentally moral terms" (54). She continues that this is "*not meant to imply that it was mythical in the sense of being false or made up...* What made

[their] narrative mythical, in the anthropological sense, was not its truth or falsity, but the fact that it was concerned with *order* in a fundamental, cosmological sense" (55 - italics Malkki's). It is important to reiterate that the events that I am about to discuss are not untrue (though some of them, I will try to show, are subject to immense controversy); it is their interpretation and perceived connection to moral order that render them "mythical." The principal events that form this mythicohistory are the Haitian Revolution and its immediate aftermath, and the two hundred years of foreign interventions and political upheaval that came after the revolution. Many of these events — from the Revolution and the death of Dessalines, to the US occupation of 1915-1934, to the Duvalier regime, the increasing presence of international organizations, and the presidency and exile(s) of Aristide — have been interpreted and reinterpreted in moral terms that relate to Haitian emancipation, independence, sovereignty, and justice (Casimir 2004).



Figure 3: Jean-Jacques Dessalines above the Champ-de-Mars IDP camp

April 2010

The 1804 Haitian Revolution — in which Black slaves, some of them Africans and some of them descendants of Africans, overthrew their colonial masters en masse — was an unprecedented, unthinkable, and world-changing event. To put into context how extraordinary the Haitian Revolution was, recall what the world looked like in 1804. The global economic

system was firmly and unquestioningly entrenched in slave labor in extractive colonies — indeed, it was more than half a century before slavery would be outlawed in the United States, and while the first glimmers of abolitionism and the incipient end of the transatlantic slave trade were visible on the horizon to keen observers, a new order was far from inevitable. The Haitian Revolution, like most touchstones, was far more complex than mythicohistory allows (Malkki 1995), and serious students of the revolutionary era should look beyond heroics to larger considerations of international politics, economics, and disease that shaped the outcome of the struggle (Dubois 2004, Gaffield 2012). Still, in that historical moment, the Haitian Revolution was a stunning demonstration of military prowess, organizational skill and diplomacy; the persuasive power of incipient human rights discourse, and the temerity of people who took up arms against wealthy and technologically sophisticated European powers, rather than continue to be abused like chattel. And so Haiti became, famously, "the first independent Black republic" and the only country to emerge from a successful, large-scale slave rebellion. The Revolution is regularly invoked in Haiti to this day, both in political discourse and everyday speech, and it remains a tremendous source of pride and a central aspect of Haitian identity. The names of the revolutionary and founding heroes — especially Jean-Jacques Dessalines — are touchstones. Dessalines's name is nearly synonymous with Black power and independence; his image and name are ubiquitous; his 1806 assassination is seen by many Haitians as the beginning of the end of the emancipatory promise of the Revolution.

It is, to be sure, an alluring and heroic history to be celebrated — yet the mythology around the Revolution also erases the complications of creating a new sovereign state from the ashes of war and the ruins of slavery, with an overwhelmingly uneducated, rural population only just liberated from bondage. As Haitian history demonstrates, the Revolution can be invoked,

and national pride can be used and abused, by politicians and others who do not have the interests of the Haitian people at heart.

Political intervention, military invasion, and the provision of social services by foreign powers or non-governmental organizations in any sovereign nation is fraught with implications; it is all the more so in a country whose core identity is based on armed liberation from colonial oppression.

### ***Representations and the Trope of Haitian Hopelessness***

There is another mythicohistory at work here, and that is the perception of Haiti as an organically doomed, impoverished, and uncivilized land, in which Haiti poverty is dehistoricized and stripped of context. This is widely the perception outside of Haiti, in many North American and European media accounts and in certain kinds of humanitarian agitprop, much of which (as I discussed in the previous section) hinges on representations of Haiti and Haitians as quintessential victims or quintessential criminals. This stereotype sometimes competes and sometimes intersects with the narrative of Haiti's independence: there is the glorious Haiti of history, symbol of emancipation and universal rights, and the notorious Haiti of now, hopeless and helpless, icon of atrocity and poverty.

These "standard" tropes of Haitian poverty, criminality, and misery did not come into being after the earthquake: they existed already, and those preexisting patterns of representation and expectation set in motion how the media explained and depicted the earthquake. Haiti has standardly been referred to as "the poorest country in the Western hemisphere" in the mass media (with such predictability that critiques of the phrase now border on cliché, themselves.) but with little or no context or history explaining how that widespread poverty came to be. Haitian

people, meanwhile, are depicted as either inherent victims or quintessential criminals — with, again, little discussion of the macro economic, political, and social processes that led to that seemingly natural suffering, or to those seemingly natural forms of political or street violence.

Sensationalistic, lurid media representations of Haiti existed long before the January 12, 2010 earthquake, and have undermined the contextualizing of social problems and injustices, and rendered invisible the existence of the everyday and the ordinary. Indeed, such representations go back to the Haitian Revolution, which foreigner observers and commentators depicted not as a highly strategic war for emancipation and human rights, but as a set of irrational, chaotic acts by bloodthirsty blacks empowered by the black arts of subversive magic. And these representations were not accidental, but rather a way for dominant geopolitical powers to explain to themselves how Haiti came to defeat a reigning white European power and to undermine Haitian sovereignty. As Gina Ulysse writes, “Haiti’s history would be silenced, disavowed, reconstrued, and rewritten as the ‘Haytian fear’ – code for an unruly and barbaric blackness that threatened to export black revolution to neighboring islands and disrupt colonial power” (2012: 244). This set the tone of discourse for more than two centuries until today: Haiti is, organically and unquestioningly, a place of violence, suffering, and eeriness, or, as Sibylle Fischer elegantly puts it, Haitians are imagined as no more than “insurrectional bodies, tortured bodies, bodies in trance” (70). While some foreign journalists — particularly those who had spent significant time living in Haiti — produce, or endeavor to produce, thoughtful, analytical pieces that provide historical, social, and political context for Haiti’s problems, the speed of the news cycle and editors’ demands (not to mention the public’s expectations) make it hard for those pieces to sell.

The earthquake thrust Haiti briefly to the center of international attention, and popular understandings of what Haiti was like quickly shaped the way the print and television media

spun the disaster. For me, it was jarring to experience the earthquake and its immediate aftermath, and then suddenly transform into an interview subject and ultimately a distant viewer of US media coverage. By the time I was evacuated, two days after the earthquake, the tarmac was a blur of international search-and-rescue workers, dogs, and television journalists. A television journalist from MSNBC put a microphone in front of my face. “How did you feel when you were under the rubble?” he asked, his plump pink face contorted into an unconvincing mask of compassion. I think he wanted to make me cry. I started to giggle instead, as everything felt so absurd, so out of the ordinary of the everyday I had known and lived until the day of the quake. I almost said something vulgar and flippant. But instead I said, honestly, “I was hoping I would die quickly.” My words did not fit his narrative of trauma and redemption, and he grew flustered.

By the time I was admitted to a hospital in Miami, the earthquake was the only thing on cable news. After x-rays and CT scans, I was finally allowed to take a shower and wash the dust and rubble and blood off. Then I sat in a gown in my shared hospital room, my hair wet and cold, as a kind nurse tried to rinse as much of the debris as he could out of my wounds. On the mounted TV in the corner, Anderson Cooper stood by and tried to interview people as they were pulled from the rubble. Words flashed over the screen, three bullet points, which were:

*hundreds of thousands of people dead,  
the national penitentiary has collapsed and the criminals are loose on the street,  
and looting and violence have begun.*

It was the same narrative about Haiti that had always been; two days into this massive unfolding tragedy, the US media were already spinning a story about Haitian criminality and violence. I got so angry I couldn't stop shaking; hospital staff came in and turned off the TV.

Within days, pundits, talking heads, and other public figures weighed in with predictable prejudice and bombast. Televangelist Pat Robertson pronounced, semi-coherently, “[The Haitians] were under the heel of the French, you know, Napoleon the Third and whatever, and they got together and swore a pact to the devil. They said, 'We will serve you if you'll get us free from the French.' True story. And so the devil said, 'O.K., it's a deal.' ”

Aside from Robertson’s lack of knowledge of the finer points of French history (he presumably meant Napoleon Bonaparte; Napoleon III was not born until 1808, four years after the Haitian Revolution), his basic argument is clear: Haitian people are devil-worshippers (a willfully misguided reference to *vodou*) who had the temerity not to want to be slaves anymore.

Robertson’s words were so harsh and outrageous that even most evangelicals denounced them (McAlister 2013). So, clueless and pitiless though Robertson’s statement may be, it is less insidious than David Brooks’ callous January 15, 2010 *New York Times* op ed, for Brooks pretends to be engaging in public scholarship and his words might be mistaken for truth by readers with little background in Haitian history:

...it is time to put the thorny issue of culture at the center of efforts to tackle global poverty. Why is Haiti so poor? Well, it has a history of oppression, slavery and colonialism. But so does Barbados, and Barbados is doing pretty well. Haiti has endured ruthless dictators, corruption and foreign invasions. But so has the Dominican Republic, and the D.R. is in much better shape. Haiti and the Dominican Republic share the same island and the same basic environment, yet the border between the two societies offers one of the starkest contrasts on earth — with trees and progress on one side, and deforestation and poverty and early death on the other ... Haiti, like most of the world’s poorest nations, suffers from a complex web of progress-resistant cultural influences. There is the influence of the voodoo religion, which spreads the message that life is capricious and planning futile. There are high levels of social mistrust. Responsibility is often not internalized. Child-rearing practices often involve neglect in the early years and harsh retribution when kids hit 9 or 10 ... We’re all supposed to politely respect each other’s cultures. But some cultures are more progress-resistant than others, and a horrible tragedy was just exacerbated by one of them.

Brooks was widely excoriated by Haiti experts and activists — among them, anthropologists



(Mintz 2010, McAlister 2010) — for his poor understanding of context and the exploitative and violent relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, facile mischaracterization of vodou, and reduction of history and vicious structural inequality to “culture.” Brooks’ op ed is a chilling example of victim-blaming which draws upon nearly every stereotype and misconception about Haiti: that Haitians are backward, violent, and uniquely subhuman. His scapegoating and delegitimizing of vodou is but one of the latest manifestations of a centuries-old pattern (stretching back to the Haitian Revolution) of wrongly locating the cause of Haiti’s social, political, and economic problems in the “exotic” religion (Hurbon 1987, Ramsey 2011<sup>1</sup>). But Robertson and Brooks are low-hanging fruit. It is easy to pick apart and spit invective at pieces that are so obviously harmful and filled with misinformation. Other forms and examples of popular representation, however, are more ambiguous in their ethics and usefulness.

Photographic representations of a disaster like the earthquake can be useful, contributing to humanitarian appeals by bringing the supposed reality of the suffering into the homes and hearts of people far away – assuming that the images do not, over time, simply become “vehicle(s) of voyeurism” (Pressley-Sanon 2011) and contribute to desensitization. But this so-called reality is always a mediated one, and it often perpetuates stereotypes and perpetrates symbolic violence against the subjects. The victims of the Haiti earthquake, both dead and alive, were widely photographed by western journalists in deeply intimate poses that are standard for suffering black and brown bodies but rare for suffering white bodies (Pressley-Sanon 2011): the bloated, broken dead; the chalky dead faces of people crushed under the rubble; the mourners, their faces contorted with grief; the homeless, dusty stunned and adrift; the injured, with wounds bleeding and gaping; the dead woman lying amid the concrete with her skirt hiked up around her

---

<sup>1</sup> In fact, as Kate Ramsey compellingly argues, state attempts to persecute and criminalize the vodou religion have in fact created and worsened wider social problems.

<sup>2</sup> Hence, most likely, the joke among children of Haitian *dyaspora* about their parents always keeping plastic covers

waist, her panties visible, her belly visible, one of her high heels broken off. This intimacy is the photojournalistic norm for black subjects, be they victims of famine or war in “Africa,” victims of the earthquake in Haiti, or victims of a hurricane in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans. These kinds of intimate representations of white, relatively privileged subjects are, by contrast, unusual, “out of respect” for the dead or their loved ones. In the case of the September 11, 2001 attacks — an example of a “first world” disaster — the publication of images of the dead or the soon-to-be-dead falling from the Twin Towers was controversial, even when the individuals were not identifiable. The suffering Other is not accorded the same respect. This inequality is not always dependent on race – though it is often racialized – but on context and on power, and on the particular moral imperative attached to the representation. At the same time that death and suffering of certain kinds of people are rendered public and open, the lives and suffering of these bodies are largely decontextualized. The distant observer knows little or nothing about the sufferer as a human being, or the circumstances that led to the suffering. This decontextualization reinforces the idea that Haitians (and other poor, non-white people) are “ahistorical, universal humanitarian subjects” (Malkki 1996), mute and powerless, and erases the structural reasons for their suffering.

Representations have real and lasting implications for policy; they may effectively *become* reality and reinforce notions of powerlessness, criminality, and victimhood. As Arthur and Joan Kleinman write, “Suffering is presented as if it existed free of local people and local worlds... The next step, naturally, is to assume that there are no local institutions or programs. That assumption almost invariably leads to the development of regional or national policies that are imposed on local worlds. When those localities end up resisting or not complying with policies and programs that are meant to assist them, such acts are then labeled irrational or self-

destructive. The local world is deemed incompetent, or worse" (7-8, 1998). Again, I am primarily concerned with media (journalistic) representations and representations by international aid organizations. (These two seemingly disparate categories overlap, as journalists often rely on NGOs for access and NGOs rely on the media for publicity — see Benthall 1993). My opposition to representations of Haiti as fundamentally violent is not merely a matter of rhetoric or political correctness; such representations are actually objectively wrong. As of 2010, Haiti's per capita murder rate was one of the lowest in the Caribbean, at 6.9 per 100,000 people — significantly lower than that of the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Jamaica, and only slightly higher than that of the United States (at 5 per 100,000) (UNODC 2011). Still, the prevailing stereotype is one of violence and lawlessness — largely because that is what many viewers from the Global North expect a poor, predominately Black country to be.

Foreign representations of Haiti and Haitians have influenced not only how the outsiders view and react toward Haiti, but also how Haitians themselves act. I recall a day I spent in Cité Soleil in the fall of 2010, in the camp at the Place Fierté, where I was led by community leaders toward the most shredded, pitiful makeshift tents and told, "Lolo, take photos of the ugliest things." They savvily understood that children energetically playing soccer or relatively sound and clean living structures — both of which were also present on the plaza — did not make for morally compelling images. Representative truth did not matter, and even Haitian people who might on another day criticize the foreign media for degrading them also knew how useful those representations could be in securing aid. These images are not false or contrived, but they are selected for a purpose; they are but one truth, and a "motivated truth" (Redfield 2006) at that. As Kleinman and Kleinman explain, "trauma stories... become the currency, the symbolic capital, with which they enter exchanges for physical resources and achieve the status of political

refugee” (10) — or, in the case of post-quake Haiti, the status of camp-dweller, of legitimate earthquake victim. Maya, an American journalist and writer who has lived in Haiti for several years, and who frequently tries to tell stories that challenge preconceptions of what Haiti is like, explained the difficulties of doing investigative journalism in a place where people have been so conditioned to perform their misery. "Even if you're not talking about something bad, you're just trying to get an opinion, there's a lot of performativity that Haitians put on for it. So you'll be talking to someone, really quietly, just sitting in their tent, just shooting the shit, and then you turn on your tape recorder, and she sees the tape recorder, and she completely changes! The whole demeanor changes." She went on. "All in all, I've always been a little alarmed at people's willingness to talk to me. I'm like really, you're going to let me use your story? This story?" I mean, in some ways I feel like... I don't know. Like – this isn't true, but I'm going to say it because it sounds like it could be true. But it also sounds like something a bad journalist would write. Okay, with all those qualifications: sometimes I feel like when I talk to Haitians, suffering is the only thing they have. The only thing they have to offer."

As Maya herself knows, suffering is certainly not the only thing that Haitian people have to offer, but it may be the only thing that fits into journalists' market niche (Pedelty 1995, Hannerz 2004). It is not ultimately about individual journalistic choices or personal initiative – the politics of representation are inextricable from market considerations, the hierarchies of the “newsroom” (here a metaphorical, global newsroom), tensions between parachuters and embedded journalists, and editors' demands. Maya, like other correspondents I knew in Port-au-Prince, knew that journalism presented a particular view of life in Haiti that focused on disaster, suffering, violence, and scandal, but acknowledged that the power to pick their own stories was largely out of their hands; representing crisis was, in Maya's words, their “bread and butter.”

As for my own ways of representing, I have tried to balance the imperative of presenting an analytic, clear argument with the desire to depict Haiti and Haitians in nuanced, human complexity. There have already been enough examples of foreigners using intimate accounts of Haitian suffering in ways that are exploitative, unethical, and potentially destructive to both the individuals represented and the larger society (see journalist Mac McClelland's 2011 piece on rape and PTSD and the widespread backlash to it). My goal is to tell a story that includes great suffering but is not only about suffering. The story of the earthquake is not only a story of trauma and disaster. It is also a story of solidarity, tenderness and care, frustration and humor. In other words, the goal of this dissertation is to deconstruct and critique the political messages (and hence utility) of (mis)representation, in the media and beyond, by describing human complexity and the ordinary even in disaster – to, in the words of Carolyn Nordstrom, describe and analyze the disaster in terms of “unsung deeds and unrecorded acts.”

At times I have, with permission, used the real names of certain people. Most names, however, are pseudonyms. My friend Melise, the woman who worked, lived, and died in the house where I lived at the time of the earthquake, and whose story features prominently in this work, is obviously not able to give me permission to use her real name. However, her close family encourages my using her real name as I tell her story. For my part, it feels like an act of violence to give her a pseudonym at this point, when so much of her life and identity has already been erased. However, in the case of most of her relatives and other people whose lives were affected by hers, I have used pseudonyms, unless otherwise noted.

I will also draw, with permission, from texts and poems written by my friends and collaborators in Haiti. From 2010 to 2012, I co-founded (with a friend from Cité Soleil) and worked with a group of young writers from Port-au-Prince's bidonvils, which called itself the

Konbit des Jeunes Penseurs (Konbit of Young Thinkers), or KOJEPENS. The *konbit* is the traditional unit of cooperative labor in rural Haiti, generally for a harvest, construction, or other forms of physical work. The term has been used for other projects and programs that are done in a spirit of solidarity with the masses (such as the photography program FotoKonbit). In proclaiming themselves to be a konbit, KOJEPENS is claiming not only to be a cooperative, but also claiming autochthonous Haitianness and a connection to the rural countryside from which the members or their parents hailed.

From my perspective, the objective and strength of KOJEPENS was that it provided an opportunity for young Haitian people from some of the poorest and most vilified neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince, such as Cité Soleil, to express themselves to one another and to audiences within Haiti by writing and performing poetry and other texts. One of my principal roles was to translate their texts into English (with some difficulty) and seek ways to promote their work beyond Haiti. It was also a way to recapture a sense of community that many people had lost in the earthquake – it sometimes resembled a writing group, sometimes an intellectual community, sometimes a session of group therapy, and sometimes a comedy club.

I recall one day in 2011 in a major NGO's office, I saw a sketch of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs on a white dry-erase board. In short, this hierarchy states that a person needs food, water, shelter and security in order to survive, and if a person lacks those things, she cannot flourish, she cannot focus on the higher-level motivations, such as love, creativity, and self-respect. Maslow's theory dovetailed all too well with the Haitian proverb *chen grangou pa jwe* (the hungry dog doesn't play). Yet the writings and activities of KOJEPENS felt like an affront to this hierarchy, for many of its members experienced chronic food insecurity, violence and housing instability. They wrote poems by the light of their cell phones when there was no

electricity, and they wrote poems when they had little more to eat than crackers and sugar water.

Why would writing and self-expression matter to them, when other needs were much more evidently urgent?

I asked one of the writers, Élie Dupalis from Cité Soleil, why he had decided to participate. He responded:

I participated in KOJEPENS to make the entire world hear the voices of the lowest of the low, to show that they have talent. I participated so I could walk in the footsteps of the writers of the patriotic school, so I could continue the battle of the writers of the indigenous school. I participated so I could weave words, so I could paint life, so I could caress tomorrow, so that someday we can find where hope dwells, for death not to erase my name, so I can pose questions to existence itself, so I can write my name in the notebook of history, so that I can find where our sorrow ends.

The writers wrote texts about social issues: about the earthquake and grief, their perspectives on the international community and NGOs, the advent of cholera. They wrote about Haitian history, and racial identity, and nostalgia for an idyllic rural lifestyle that has been lost and perhaps never truly existed. But they did not only write about sadness and social phenomena; they wrote about ordinary things as well – daily life in the “ghetto,” the thrills, travails, and betrayals of love, the process and politics of writing itself.

I periodically draw from and quote their writings in this monograph, for even as I have attempted to present a vision of Haiti beyond cliché, I also want to create a space, however limited, for underrepresented young Haitians to represent themselves and their realities. Beyond the mere fact of representation as a political stance, the writings themselves are extraordinary: powerful and true, beautiful and unexpected. Their work — which addresses complex social themes such as international aid, nostalgia, history, homeland, as well as seemingly more pedestrian issues like sex and love — provides a sense of the originality, articulate wisdom, and

personality of young Haitians who are not often given the chance to represent themselves in international discourse.

### ***Ordinary Kindnesses in an Unkind World***

Throughout this work, I try to provide texture and detail about everyday life in Port-au-Prince. Partly this is an authorial choice, to set the scene and try to evoke a place that many of my readers do not personally know. But partly it is a political choice, as well. If the mere notion of ordinary life is unthinkable to someone like the American lawyer-philanthropist in the example above, then I must show that it in fact exists, and what it looks like. In a sense, this feels like a return to anthropology's roots — the routines and rituals of daily life, viewed from an etic perspective. And it is an acknowledgement that the seemingly superficial and unremarked-upon patterns of interaction betray a larger social significance (Elias 1978). Some of these observations are woven literarily into the fabric of the text, for the ordinary exists alongside the more visible and seemingly important crisis. But there are a few things I will highlight here, for they are important to understanding many other things. Most importantly for my argument, they illustrate how the routines of everyday life in Haiti are shaped by the chronic crisis. It is an attempt to do justice to Michel-Rolph Trouillot's argument that amid all the seemingly extraordinary particularisms of Haitian history and culture, "the majority of Haitians lead quite ordinary lives" (Trouillot 1990b: 5)

Haiti is an overwhelmingly *social* place; the Haitian masses conceive of themselves in terms of their kin and community relations. Among vodouizans, but also among the poor in general (including those who do not practice or who even disparage vodou), "the bounds of the self must be viewed as extended or permeable...we are presented with an image of the embodied



subject whose social relationships and environment are also constitutive aspects of that person” (James 2008: 146). Broadly speaking, these influences and obligations include not only living kin and neighbors, but the ancestors and the spirits (Brown 1979, James 2008). This sociability and sociocentricity — the degree to which people's lives are oriented not narrowly around themselves and personal aspirations but in terms of their networks and social relations — shall be discussed as it relates to the aftermath of a massive social rupture. Humans, of course, are by nature social, and hence there is nothing uniquely Haitian in this generally, but, in terms of emphasis and specific expression, the construction of sociality in Haiti is distinctive and certainly quite contrastive with patterns in the U.S. More of the social is also apparent in and fundamental to the mundane trappings of everyday life. People greet each other daily with, "How are you? How are all your people?" (*Ki jan ou ye? Koman moun yo ye?*), in which "people" generally refers to one's family but does not exclude other forms of connection and affinity. Haitian people, particularly poor Haitians in both urban and rural settings, generally do not like to be alone, to live alone, or to sleep alone. That I rented a small apartment and lived alone, though within a lively courtyard — the solitude was, I insisted, a requirement for my work — was a matter of concern for my Haitian friends, who worried that I would be lonely and afraid. As it worked out in practice, I was rarely alone while living in Haiti. During the day, friends and acquaintances stopped by without warning, and my small living room became a social hub for many of the domestic servants employed in the neighborhood (many of whom lived in IDP camps). These were relationships of reciprocity: they knew my politics, and that I could be counted on for a cup of coffee or some breakfast or a couple of aspirin, electricity to charge their cell phones, a place to sit down and cool off for a few minutes, or a place for their kids to sit and do their homework. Meanwhile, they were concerned about my being alone, and would bring

me food they had cooked at home, and generally keep me company (whether I necessarily wanted company or not). In a country where people rely heavily on one another, and particularly in a capital city with a recent history of political insecurity, violence, and kidnapping, this sociality not only is a social norm, but a pivotal survival strategy.

Another manifestation of Haitian sociality that I learned (the hard way) is that it is extremely ill-mannered to ignore one's cell phone. Not picking up the phone or replying when someone texts is considered rude – as rude as ignoring the approach and greeting of someone who is physically present. By contrast, answering the phone during a meeting or while deep in a conversation, keeping one's hands-free device in one's ear all the time, and constantly texting while someone else is speaking to you, are not considered rude. If I was busy or tired when someone called, I would sometimes ignore the call, and plan to call back later. The caller would then call back over, and over, and over, and over (sometimes to check if I was okay, but as often, just to call and say hi) until I finally picked up or switched the ringer to "silent". If I did the latter, the caller would likely send a text message: "I keep calling you and I *never* reach you." If someone did not have sufficient funds on their phone to make a full call, they would "beep" (*bipe*) — calling just quickly enough for your phone to ring for a fraction of a second, with the expectation that you would call back immediately. The possibility that I — or any other person — might be engaged in something more important, urgent or immediate than the phone call was unthinkable. To the caller, nothing was more important, urgent or immediate than the phone call. Often when I first shared my phone number with a new acquaintance, he or she would say, "So can I call you at any time?" I learned to take this as a literal possibility. During the wee hours, the main cell phone company offers "free nights" (which in Creole is transformed to "frinay") which allow people to phone one another for free. The first time someone called me at

3:30 in the morning, I answered in a sweaty panic: *what's wrong?* The caller, a casual friend, replied, "Hey, Lolo, how are you? What's going on?" It was a chatty social call, not an emergency. The desire to connect with other people overrode any expectation that the receiver of the call might be asleep at that hour, or might resent being awakened.

As 3G coverage became far more widespread and affordable in Port-au-Prince and even in the provinces (one of many ways in which Haiti was transformed during the years I was there, from 2009 to 2012), the social networking site Facebook became wildly popular among young, poor and non-elite Haitians. Email did not experience the same surge of popularity. Facebook — more interactive, more social, far more public — was the preferred method of communication with friends and family in Port-au-Prince, throughout Haiti, and abroad. People posted photos of themselves — generally flattering ones, often dressed-up and standing next to someone else's shiny car — photos of their friends and family, photos of parties, photos of a trip to the beach, photos of food, photos of their rural homes when they went home during school vacations. Missing from most of these photos were the images of Haitian poverty and suffering that are typical of foreign representations — though many of the posters lived in shantytowns and overcrowded, poor urban neighborhoods and were very familiar with trash-filled ditches, flooded streets, street dogs, and rubble. It was not so much the case that these young Facebook users were in denial of the injustice and poverty that they observed and endured on a daily basis; it was simply the expectation that there was no reason to put ugly things on Facebook. Like anyone else, poor Haitian youth's Facebook personas reflected not their realities, but an idealized, packaged, cultivated image of themselves.

Part of this sociality, and desire not to be alone, is that the idea of "personal space" is unheard of for many poor Haitians. Indeed, the notion of "private life" itself is a fairly recent

invention, a product of nineteenth century bourgeois society and the emergence of the notion of the supreme individual (Ariès and Duby 1991). The absence of privacy or personal space, in Haiti and in other poor contexts, is in part due to a lack of resources: if one lives a small house crowded with one's extended kin, no one is going to have her own personal bedroom. The absence of personal space – better said, the sharing of space – is not a source of shame or discomfort. While people apologized to me for many things when I visited Haitian homes — apologies for their poverty, for the heat, for the dust — no one ever apologized for having me share a bed with one or several other people. The expectation was that people live together and sleep together, and while anyone might be teased because they "dòm lèd" (literally "sleep ugly"), tossing and turning and hogging the bed, the fact of sharing sleeping space is largely unremarkable. Related to this lack of personal space, there was no shame or privacy around bodily functions that are often considered embarrassing, or at least private, in the US. In poor households in Port-au-Prince and the Haitian countryside, a plastic basin is placed on the floor for everyone to pee into at night; if someone wakes to the unremarkable sound of another person urinating, they just roll over and go back to sleep. Menstruation and its sequelae are freely discussed among women, and people of the same sex bathe with and in front of one another (though often with underpants on), and tease each other about their bodies: "My god, look how much pubic hair you've got!" Fart jokes approach being a cultural universal. Even violent and potentially contagious conditions, such as diarrhea or vomiting, are approached with practicality, care and concern, but not with disgust or fear (with the notable, and novel, exception of cholera).

When the electricity comes on — and for poor Haitians who cannot afford generators and inverters, that is up to the whims and schedule of Electricité d'Haïti — the bidonvils and camps of Port-au-Prince are ablaze with light and noise. The lightbulbs, TV, and radio all come on;

everyone plugs in their phones to charge. Noise and activity — either from their own homes, or from the bar or discothèque down the street — seems to bother people little. People sleep with the lights and other devices on — indeed, some people turn on their radios (quite loud) just for the ambient noise to which to fall asleep. I have slept in poor households where people blasted Christian music from the radio all night, but this phenomenon, this apparently aversion to dark silence, is not limited to the poor. I know members of the Haitian intelligentsia who cannot sleep unless the radio is playing news and opinions next to their pillows all night.

One of the major critiques of the IDP camps by foreign and Haitian organizations, activists, and journalists alike is that conditions are cramped and unhygienic, and that privacy is impossible. These critiques are valid, especially as they relate to physical security, and the spread of cholera, and the possibility of sexual violence. But it is also dismissive of the fact that conditions of space, hygiene, and privacy are similar in poor neighborhoods that are not camps, and that notions of space, hygiene and privacy are not cultural universals — that more important than personal space might be being together.

While concerns about hygiene and sanitation in the camps and in poor neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince are understandable, the focus in Haiti (in radio ads and jingles, in public health campaigns, in billboards, in television commercials) was overwhelmingly on personal behavior. "*Men pwòp se zanmi lasante! Men sal se lenmi lasante!*" went one TV spot: "Clean hands are the friends of health! Dirty hands are the enemy of health!" Wash your hands with soap, put bleach drops in your water, shit in a latrine. Little of the public discourse by either the NGOs or the Haitian government focused on larger — and more difficult — structural and infrastructural issues around sanitation or sewage. These behaviorist interventions have their place, but the rhetoric also reminded me of anti-Haitian stereotypes in the US, the widespread misconception

that Haitians are particularly dirty or unsanitary. In fact, Haitian people are overwhelmingly clean and their homes, no matter how poor, and especially when they are poor, are almost universally spotless and tidy. They put considerable effort into this cleanliness. It often means hauling heavy buckets of water from a public pump or a river several times a day, making sure there is money for soap and detergent, scrubbing then ironing one's clothes daily, sweeping and mopping the dust from the house or the tent several times a day, scrubbing the mud from one's soles and shoelaces, powdering one's body with talcum and spraying it with perfume or cologne. When I lived in Haiti, I was regularly chided for being a mess: my clothes were too wrinkled, my shoes too muddy, my hair too frizzy.

That Haitian people and homes are particularly neat and lovely is another manifestation of everyday life amid ongoing crisis. Among post-economic crisis Muscovites, Shevchenko speaks of "a pronounced, almost obsessive preoccupation with the beautification of their personal living quarters" (2010: 3) as a way of exerting their independence and self-sufficiency. For Haitians, domestic tidiness has long been a way of creating a microcosm of order, control, and beauty in a larger world of disorder and unpredictability.<sup>2</sup> And so Haitian homes, be they tin-roofed cinderblock structures in Port-au-Prince's bidonvils, tents in Port-au-Prince's camps or mud and palm houses in the rural countryside – or, for that matter, apartments in low-income neighborhoods of Miami or Brooklyn – are almost invariably spotless, swept and mopped daily, and decorated with lace curtains, plastic flowers and other small, affordable objects of beauty and color. The best chair, and the best plate, are always offered to a guest.

Throughout this monograph, I will refer to ordinary acts of generosity among poor Haitian people. This is a cultural value that is inculcated from a young age. Small children, not

---

<sup>2</sup>Hence, most likely, the joke among children of Haitian *dyaspora* about their parents always keeping plastic covers on all the living room furniture.

even two years old, are conditioned not to be *chich* (stingy, selfish) even before they can speak. When a toddler is eating something (a packet of crackers, a piece of boiled plantain or some fruit, for example), her relatives or neighbors – adults or sometimes older children — will say “*banm yon ti kal*” (“give me a little bit”) and the child is expected to share her food. This isn't because the older person actually wants a taste of the child's snack; it is a test. The child should be taught from an early age to share whatever she has, particularly when it comes to food – that what is hers is not truly hers. This is largely the standard among poor Haitians, who are forced by circumstance to share their resources. If you have food today, you share it with your relatives, your friends – with your *lakou* or the people around you in your camp. Some Haitian people would tell me that this is more common in the countryside – where people are viewed as being kinder and less corrupted by city ways and the need to buy food, rather than grow it – but I witnessed the same phenomenon with almost daily regularity in Port-au-Prince as well. The focus is almost entirely on preparing and eating today, not on saving for tomorrow – for tomorrow is only tomorrow, God-willing. The thought occurred to me, more than once, that *chich* was one of the worst things a person could be in Haiti – that people who were *chich* were more distrusted, more suspect and condemned, than people who were hot-headed. Ordinary acts of sharing and generosity, however modest, are overlooked by many foreigners (who do not witness them) and undervalued by many Haitians themselves (who do not see such acts as remarkable). While much of the foreign discourse about Haiti focuses on dependency on aid, and much of the Haitian discourse about Haiti focuses on sin, cruelty, and selfishness, these everyday acts of sharing and solidarity go largely unremarked upon and unrecognized.

### ***Voices, Style and Theoretical Influences***

It is not possible for me to separate myself from this narrative, and as is acceptable in much contemporary cultural anthropology, I cannot pretend to be an objective observer. Though I endeavored, throughout the course of my fieldwork, to understand, analyze, and make sense of the social and cultural context and unfolding events, I was not a mechanical or dispassionate observer but rather an emotional and involved player. That said, I find something self-indulgent about writing a book about Haiti— as yet another foreign white woman. Amid the many injustices and acts of violence that Haiti and Haitians have endured throughout history, the substantial body of irritating texts created by foreigners is probably among the more minor ones. Still, writing about Haiti by non-Haitians is pervasive. Many writers, academics, journalists, photographers, and aid workers have created meaningful and thoughtful documents, but others have written insufferable memoirs and travelogues that are ultimately about their own struggles, loves, and traumas, in which Haiti is neither the subject nor the setting, but rather an ambivalent mixture of protagonist and antagonist. (“Haiti, I love you so, but oh how you’ve made me suffer” – is a theme, for that matter, that courses through writing by Haitians both in Haiti and in the *diaspora*.) Likewise, I’ve always found much “self-reflexive” anthropology to be tedious, solipsistic, and narcissistic. How can the anthropologist, unwilling and unable to divorce herself from the narrative (and, in this case, inextricably implicated in the narrative) not make the thing about her? Or can we consider the personalistic narrative style to be a rhetorical choice that provides access to the everyday?

This work is intended to be accessible and useful to a broad audience – not only anthropologists and other social scientists and academics, but health workers, aid workers, and anyone interested in Haiti. So while certain aspects of anthropological theory course through this narrative, they often remain implicit and are at times relegated to the footnotes. My purpose



here is also political, vis-à-vis the discipline of anthropology. I believe that while anthropologists often have deep and wide firsthand experience of the societies about which they write, and have the potential to make meaningful contributions to other academic fields, and to policy, our ideas are often cloaked in inscrutable writing. It is ironic that so few anthropologists examine what is an unquestioned practice in our discipline – that the appearance of complexity, the ritualized use of posturing language, is an indicator of the value of a work. This habit crosses from being merely annoying to perhaps unethical when the anthropologist is writing about a place like Haiti, where social justice issues are so pressing. Why write something about an important, urgent, and timely topic that so few people can actually read and make sense of and apply? This book attempts to be readable.

I remain an ambivalent anthropologist. I am uncomfortable with strains of academic anthropology that are relativistic to the point of near-nihilism. Still, I appreciate the deep embeddedness that is part of anthropological fieldwork practice, and the increasing variety of subjects that are considered appropriate for anthropological study. Understanding power means studying both the comparatively powerless and the comparatively powerful; understanding poverty means studying both the poor and the wealthy; understanding aid interventions means studying both the recipients and the providers. I love the fact that anthropology, at its broadest, contains the possibility of being literary and descriptive while also directly engaged in processes of change.

“Structural violence” – a concept to which we will return repeatedly over the course of this work --is a term used by social scientists and others to describe the systematic ways in which social, economic, and political structures harm or disadvantage certain groups of people: the poor and marginalized. Unlike direct violence, structural violence (although not its effects) is subtle

and invisible, ostensibly unintentional if not at all accidental. It is difficult to point fingers or place blame, because in a sense we are all implicated inasmuch as we all participate in the structures that maintain the existing power relations and oppression.

Critical medical anthropologists have done important work in illustrating how structural violence affects the trajectories and constrains the agency of individual lives (Singer et al 1992, Farmer 1996, Singer 2009). In Haiti — as in other contemporary sites of suffering, injustice and humanitarian crisis — it is imperative to contextualize the present within historical and political patterns of marginalization and exploitation. At the same time, the focus on macro processes can sometimes obscure the identifiable humanity of the people who are victims of those processes. Especially in the case of Haiti — a country which has long been represented in international media accounts and humanitarian and missionary promotional materials as a hopeless, doomed, pathologically backward and violent land — the focus on suffering can make Haitians appear to be little more than consummate, stereotypical sufferers. These representations, especially the most rhetorically lazy ones, may even — paradoxically and counterintuitively — make Haitian suffering seem natural and intractable, a historical inevitability. The line about Haiti being the “poorest country in the Western hemisphere,” which works its way into seemingly every Haiti story regardless of whether the story has anything to do with poverty, has become something of a cliché and a bitter joke among Haitian and Haitianist writers and scholars. In a satirical blog post from July 2010, titled “How to Write About Haiti,” US journalist Ansel Herz began with, “For starters, always use the phrase 'the poorest country in the Western hemisphere.' Your audience must be reminded again of Haiti's exceptional poverty. It's doubtful that other articles have mentioned this fact.” Because the suffering appears unthinkable, unrecognizable, the humanity of the sufferers becomes unthinkable and unrecognizable, too. Haitians are transformed, in

certain kinds of writing, into a unique kind of being. Meanwhile, those representations which hinge on the extraordinary "resilience" of the Haitian people still pivot around suffering as the single most important thing about Haiti — at once naturalizing the suffering and suggesting (with implicit racism) that Haitians are better suited to bear it than the rest of us. Is it possible to show how people are victims of structural violence and deep-seated political-economic and historical injustice while also writing about them as human individuals with complex internal lives? Are these two things — a focus on the macro sources of suffering, and a focus on the intricacies of the human — mutually exclusive?

My purpose here is to say, at once, that structural violence is real and powerful, and it severely limits personal agency, and there is no ethical or accurate way of understanding the January 12, 2010 earthquake and its effects without beginning with the deep historical context — *and* also to demonstrate that those people who died or survived on January 12 were first and foremost *people*, not quintessential victims, not people for whom the most salient fact of life was suffering.

This is why I have elected to include long chunks of verbatim narrative, with the goal of preserving, whenever possible, the voices of the people who spoke to me. I have done so with the hope of putting forth an emic perspective, when possible, that reflects the reality of the people who have lived those lives, but perhaps more importantly, to create a space for the individual personalities of the speakers — their emotions, their speaking style, their humor, their use of proverbs and expressions — to stand alone, and to, in that way, approach "ethnographic honesty" (Lassiter 2005). In the case of Haiti, this is a matter not only of style but of politics, as Haitian people have a history of being unfairly represented and objectified. At the risk of conflating voice with politics, I would hope that this work could be a testament to the ordinary

human lives that exist even amid seemingly unthinkable tragedy.

An attempt to honor the voices of Haitian writers, thinkers, and artists is part of the reason that I have made liberal use of epigraphs from popular Haitian music and literature, as well as proverbs, which convey a sense of the richness of expression, voice and language, both in Creole and in French. There is a wonderful literary tradition in Haiti; novelists like Marie Vieux Chauvet and Jacques Stephen Alexis combine evocative description with keen analysis that is as accurate and revealing as any work of social science. In addition, the popularity and ubiquity of many of these sources — from rap and konpa lyrics that reverberate through the camps and discothèques and taptaps, to proverbs that fall easily from the lips of rural peasants, the urban poor, and the bourgeoisie alike, to the words of renowned Haitian writers — indicates something like a generalizable significance.

### ***Methodology - or, How I know what I know***

In the anthropologies of humanitarianism and disaster, there is little work on the "beneficiary perspective," and little research that covers the disaster-producing event in any way other than retrospectively. As Susanna Hoffman writes, "Rarely has any study covered the triplicate of time and change perspectives, that is, been in place to cover prior organization, the actual event, and the extended post-event eventuations" (1999).

That I am in a position to write about life in Port-au-Prince before the earthquake, the earthquake itself, the immediate aftermath and the long-term outcomes is nothing more than a coincidence. I did not set out to write about the earthquake and post-quake displacement and aid; when I went to Haiti and began my dissertation fieldwork in August 2009, there had not yet been an earthquake. My original research concerned human rights discourse practices and

experiences of domestic servitude, and this theme does inform my post-earthquake research as it relates to households, kinship, and care. But it is no longer the main focus. It no longer felt like the most relevant issue; the earthquake seemingly became the only thing I could ever write about, or think about, again. I am compelled to write about the earthquake because I was there before it happened, while it happened, and after it happened. Inadvertently, this has become something like a work of salvage ethnography — of documenting a world that was at least partly lost, while also documenting (however contradictorily) the ordinariness and continuity that were not lost.

There is some methodological looseness here, both circumstantial and intentional. For a year and a half after the earthquake (until August 2011), I was not officially an anthropology graduate student conducting her fieldwork. I was mostly in Haiti (though I also traveled back to the United States for medical follow-up for my earthquake injuries), and I was busy — first volunteering and translating for foreign medical teams at a Haitian hospital, and then working with young Haitian poets and writing my own pieces here and there for non-academic venues. I took notes and did interviews, but identifying myself — both to myself and to others — primarily as an anthropologist and researcher who was studying the earthquake and its aftermath seemed inaccurate. It implied an objective distance that I did not feel, and often still do not feel.

But I believe that this methodological looseness was also useful. During that period, a great many foreigners were descending on Haiti with defined agendas. There were humanitarian aid workers and development workers, there were missionaries and doctors, there were US Marines and MINUSTAH peacekeepers, there were private defense firms and "disaster capitalists," there were journalists and activists. This is not to blur the lines between those various categories (although as I will try to show later, the lines did often blur, both in reality and

in the perception "from below"), but simply to point out that post-earthquake Port-au-Prince was a place that many, many non-Haitian people came to with particular goals and purposes (to help, to save, to modernize, to turn a profit, to witness the tragedy, to expose the truth, to intervene in a human crisis). As my friend Rachelle from Cité Soleil said, "The difference between someone who came before the earthquake and someone who came to the country because of the earthquake, I think there's a big difference, because people who were here before know the country better. They know how to recognize the needs of the people. But other foreigners who came after the earthquake, they don't know a single person. They just come to this country and want to take action." The control and sense of predictability and purpose that these other foreigners seemed to feel was strange to me. My own agenda, at the time, was vague; the earthquake had shown how easily and quickly plans can dissolve.

Moreover, there was significant distrust among many Haitian people of "the international community" and foreigners in general. This is far from a new phenomenon: the difficulties of obtaining "accurate" and truthful information from skeptical and suspicious informants in Haiti — and the possible expectations that those informants might have for social improvements hinging on their cooperation with the research — have been known for decades (Chen and Murray 1976). More recent events — the massive post-earthquake influx of foreigners who have come to "make people talk" and the pre- and post-quake proliferation of non-governmental organizations — have exacerbated both distrust of foreigners and the hope that talking to those foreigners might still result in material gain. For a long time, I simply observed, and listened, and let the people speaking set the agenda and the topics.

This dissertation is the result of more than three years' worth of fieldnotes (for among many merciful absurdities, my pre-earthquake notebooks and laptop were recovered from the

debris), from September 2009 to October 2012. My dissertation fieldwork was preceded by preliminary fieldwork in 2008 and 2009, during which time I was part of a community assessment of aid and development in Cité Soleil, which gave me a valuable initial perspective on how supposed aid beneficiaries in one of Port-au-Prince's poorest and most feared *bidonvils* view the presence and activities of international humanitarian, development, and peacekeeping actors. From 2010 to 2012, I conducted more than sixty semistructured interviews (in truth, conversations) with Port-au-Prince residents of diverse economic and social backgrounds — people who were poor and people who were relatively privileged; people who hailed from the countryside and people born in the capital; people who lived in IDP camps, people who lived in pre-earthquake homes, and people who had been forced to move because of the earthquake but who did not live in camps; people who had received significant assistance from foreign aid organizations, and people who had not. This might seem like a relatively small number of interviews, given the length of time that I was in Haiti, but there are reasons for this. In short, I was more interested in depth than breadth. There are many shallow representations of Haiti out there, and I was more interested in talking about things that were perhaps less obvious and that lay beneath the surface of the familiar narratives of suffering and loss and frustration. The one thing that is common among the people with whom I spoke is that I had existing relationships with all of them; some were good friends that I had known for years, others were people I had perhaps met once or twice. None were cold interviews. Many of them lasted several hours and were, by turns, tearful, funny, boring, revelatory, political, and discursive. I believe that this familiarity (and at times intimacy) beyond the "rapport" that ethnographers always try to achieve was necessary because of the justifiable distrust of foreign agendas, owing to Haitians' long and complicated history of aid and intervention. In most of these cases, people knew and, I believe,

trusted me; I had traveled to their homes in the countryside with many of them to meet their families, and had eaten meals and slept in their homes in Port-au-Prince. My approach was the same with the foreign aid workers I interviewed or spent time with. Owing to how the post-quake relief effort has been represented in largely negative terms by the media, many expats were suspicious of writers asking questions about what they were doing. I had to build rapport and familiarity with them – over meals in their apartments or headquarters, in hotel swimming pools or in bars and discothèques — before asking the kinds of questions I wanted to ask, as much or even more than I had to build rapport with ordinary Haitians.

Most of this research was conducted in Port-au-Prince, on the shifts and experiences of people in the aftermath of the January 2010 earthquake. But in order to talk about post-quake displacement, we will also examine pre-quake displacement. Thus, my secondary research site was in a small village outside of Abricots, in the Grand Anse department. This came about because many of the people with whom I had developed relationships as friends and interlocutors — particularly those who worked in other people's houses as cooks and servants — originally hailed from Grand-Anse. This multi-sited approach illuminates experiences of fluidity, bereavement, and community, and allows us to understand how people from this area of the Haitian countryside view Port-au-Prince as both a city of opportunity and a place of loss.

Touchingly, and surprisingly to me, many of my friends in Haiti believed in the importance of this work. Rachele, one of my first friends whom I had met on my first trip to Haiti in 2008, who is a dynamic young woman from the poor, historically violent and much intervened-upon neighborhood of Cité Soleil, borrowed my digital recorder and began to conduct interviews within her community — community leaders, young people, local politicians. One of the people she interviewed, in a quiet, breathy voice, was herself. She was not formally a



research assistant and I did not ask her to conduct any interviews; she did this because she wanted to do it. Later, I asked Rachelle why she felt it was important to do those interviews, amid all the pressing concerns of life in Port-au-Prince, and especially Cité Soleil, after the quake. Her response revealed both great optimism about the purpose and practical utility of research, and a poignant recognition of the real precarity and uncertainty of life.

Collaborative research helps you hear what your ears can't hear, what your eyes can't see – it lets you hear and see it through others. If you come to a country to do work and you don't find anyone to help you, I guarantee you'll never do anything. I'm invested in this research, this research is worthwhile, because I consider someone who comes to do research in this country to be a great friend, and I'm going to give them whatever help I can so that that research can move forward. Research is something that you do now, and maybe, if it can't be used in one year, two years, three years, four years, five years, someday someone will be able to use this research. And then they'll know how to take action, they'll know when and how to begin. Social change happens slowly. It doesn't happen overnight. This is the help I can give. If people come to do something meaningful in this country, we have to help them. If they are writing a book, help them write it. You give your ideas, and then when people read that book, from the moment they start putting that book into practice, they'll know what they should do. That is my own orientation, and that of all the people who helped that book be written. And those people will be happy – assuming they are still alive.

Though this research focuses mainly on the "beneficiary" perspective on aid, it also touches on the experiences of professional aid workers, volunteers, and journalists. In writing about experiences of displacement and aid, it is important not only to write about the displaced and the people who receive (or do not receive) aid, but also to write about the aid providers and those who would provide solutions to the displacement crisis, as well as those who are tasked with representing and documenting those events. In addition, I also spoke to relatively privileged and educated Haitians — doctors, professors, educators, entrepreneurs — and though I would never consider this to be a full ethnographic study of the Haitian "bourgeoisie," their opinions and experiences form part of this narrative. All of these people — poor Haitians,

privileged Haitians, foreign interventionists and journalists — are also actors in these events, and their experiences and perceptions are ambivalent, nuanced, and complex. Moreover, in order to document, analyze, and understand the unfolding disaster of the January 12 earthquake, one must study not only the poor and powerless, but also the relatively powerful (Nader 1969).

### ***Imperfect Witnessing, Ambivalent Patronage***

What kind of a witness am I? And should an anthropologist consider herself a witness at all? For "witnessing" carries with it a sense of righteous purpose and passion that some anthropologists might eschew: those who claim it is our role to observe and to analyze, but not to *witness* or *claim to be witnesses* in the explicitly moral way that activists or, say, humanitarian workers with Médecins Sans Frontières (Redfield 2005) would. "Testimony, which is inscribed in a globalized media space, is now as essential a part of humanitarian activity as rendering aid (Fassin 2008: 537). Still other anthropologists overtly engage in such acts of testimony, that "the act of witnessing is what lends our work its moral (at times its almost theological) character" (Scheper-Hughes 1992: xii). Given the events that unfolded during the time I was in Haiti, and given my own politics, personality, and attachments, there is no choice but to act as a witness, and to call this ethnography an act of witnessing. But if I am a witness, I am an imperfect one. Agamben (1999) discusses two kinds of "perfect" witnesses as they appear in Roman law: the *testis*, who stands on the outside looking in and whose authority rests on his objectivity; and the *superstes*, who lives the situation herself and whose authority rests on her experience. Didier Fassin (2008) discusses the blurring of these two categories of witness, the ultimately hazy distinctions between "experiencing" and "seeing." I am neither kind of perfect witness, possessing neither objectivity nor complete personal experience.

At 4:53 pm, on January 12, 2010, I was typing up fieldnotes on my laptop in the bedroom

I rented in a middle-class household in the Bourdon neighborhood of Port-au-Prince. When the earthquake began, I ran through a swerving corridor and stood in the doorway to the kitchen on the first floor, which is where I was when the house collapsed. On the second floor were my landlady and her servant, Melise. According to my landlady, Melise cried out to God (“*lètenèl, lètenèl!*”) and got down on her knees to pray, when a wrought-iron door fell on her. She died instantly. My landlady survived with minor scrapes, but could not get out of the collapsed building. On the floor below her, I was pinned under the rubble. My left arm was crushed in the door frame and under the fallen ceiling. The air was thick with cement dust and my lips tasted like chalk. I was covered in warm oily liquid, everything smelled strange and metallic, but I did not at first realize that it was my blood. A little sunlight filtered through the rubble and the dust, but soon it grew dark. The aftershocks continued, and the ceiling grew heavier with each one. I knew I would die, and hoped I would die quickly. I knew the world had not ended because from where I lay, I could hear people screaming, and crying, and singing, and praying.

My landlady and I were rescued, however, thanks to Prenel and Bòs John, two men she employed as a groundskeeper and a driver. Their actions demonstrate how ordinary people can become extraordinary heroes, exhibiting courage and clear headedness amid chaos, a fact to which I owe my life. Due to my injuries, Prenel decided to take me to the UN headquarters, not yet realizing that it, too, had collapsed. I joined a growing group of shocked, injured, and cold people on the ground of the UN headquarters, where we huddled for the night. The next day, we were moved to the UN Log Base in a convoy, and the day after that, I and several other foreigners boarded a plane to Miami as part of a medical evacuation.

I experienced the earthquake — I know the terror and helplessness of those thirty-five seconds and the hours and days that followed — but I am not Haitian. I did not experience the

destruction of the city I had grown up in, the loss of family and friends I had known my whole life, the loss of house and home, or the seeming interminability of displacement. I have no right to say that I was fully *inside* the experience of the earthquake, but I also cannot claim to be fully outside of it, either. Even as I endeavor to witness, I know the limits of my own objective God's-eye vision and subjective personal experience, the sense in which no one still alive can claim complete vision nor complete experience of what happened that day.

Like many ethnographers, I have developed strong emotions about and attachments to the people and places about which I write. Like many ethnographers, who know that our presence affects what we purport to observe (we are not generally flies on walls), I wish to do my due diligence in writing about my own position and shifting roles in Haiti. My primary reason for going to Haiti was to conduct ethnographic research in order to write a dissertation in anthropology. Over the three years I was there, I played other roles formally and informally: an earthquake victim, a post-quake volunteer, a writer, and a person who grew increasingly willing to parlay my white privilege and access into helping people I knew. The relative oddness of my position — visibly a foreigner, but a gregarious one who spoke Haitian Creole very well and who eschewed (or was unable to afford) most of the trappings of expat life — granted me an extraordinary degree of access to different kinds of social settings. I possessed unusual mobility across settings and social classes and urban and rural geography — of course more than the Haitian popular classes (who could never or rarely enter the rarefied worlds of upper-class Haitians or foreign aid workers), but also more than most foreigners (who, because of institutional regulations and lack of time and social connections, could only interact with poor Haitians within the limits of the provider-beneficiary relationship). Because I had been in Port-au-Prince during the earthquake and, for a period of time, had visible injuries from it, other

people who survived the earthquake were often interested in discussing— indeed willing and eager to discuss — our respective experiences. People of diverse nationalities and backgrounds were inquisitive, eager to welcome me into their lives and tell me about their experiences, and ask me questions about my own — for I was a curiosity for Haitian people who had rarely or never met a *blan* who wasn't working for an "organization," and sometimes a curiosity for other *blan* who envied me my lack of curfew, driver, and institutional regulation. Amid many difficulties and exigencies of living and doing research in post-earthquake Haiti, the question of access was not one.

The naïve thought often occurred to me that if only everyone possessed my mobility, if they had the ability to cross social and linguistic barriers and listen to one another, that it might be a useful thing. How much better if foreigners could live with Haitians in their homes and hear how reflexive and thoughtful they could be about their lives and their countries, if Haitians could see foreign aid workers in their own private lives and know the inquietude and ambivalence with which they approached their work. It broke my heart when a young Haitian friend confessed that I was the first *blan* he had ever spoken to. "In Haiti, we find a lot of people who are the same color as you. There are Americans, there are French, there are lots of people who are the same color as you. But it's difficult to meet those people. I mean, for someone like me to speak with them. So this is all to tell you that this is the first time — well, it's the first time I've spoken with someone who has your skin color." And then he went on. "We Haitians, we don't have a problem. We go downtown and sit, we eat in the midst of big piles of garbage, or we walk through the dust and garbage, or we might be in the taptap [bus], and another car goes by and sprays a bunch of garbage water over us. But you, you're not Haitian. How do you feel in a country like that?" And it broke my heart as much when a young foreign development worker,

lamenting her lack of connection with the people she had supposedly come to help, asked me, "What do you *talk* about when you're talking with these people, these Haitian friends of yours?"

Amid other considerations of position, objectivity, subjectivity and intervention emerges the question of patronage. This is inevitable in resource-poor settings, all the more so when one develops real and meaningful daily relationships with people who are desperately poor, and even more so when a massive crisis hits that place and the people in it. I am not merely an observer of the aid economy. Like many others I participated in it directly, by sending remittances immediately after the earthquake and in the longer term, helping people pay for school fees or medical expenses and so on. I know that acts of individualized charity cannot replace sustainable change and reinforce existing patterns of power, but how should one proceed when the alternative is not paying for a child's schooling or not taking someone to the hospital? And while non-Haitians might immediately characterize such acts as charity or patronage, the line between patronage and fictive kinship is not always clear. Haiti is a place where those categories become easily conflated. Nearly any Haitian living abroad can attest to the same kind of relationships I describe here, in which family and friends rely on them for both emergencies and day-to-day living. It is a continual conflict between one's conscience and one's own needs, and many Haitian *dyaspora*, struggling to pay their own bills and rent or mortgage and other expenses, come to dread phone calls from their relatives in Haiti, whose needs are always serious and never-ending.

When I returned to Haiti after the earthquake in April 2010, Melise's daughter Julienne wanted me to come live with her and her relatives in Port-au-Prince. "We are practically family now," she told me, meaning that the earthquake and its aftermath had brought us closer together, made us more intimate. (As I was volunteering at a hospital in Pétionville at the time, I did not

stay with them full-time, but I spent my weekends at their house.) There are also aspects of my relationship with them that would fall under the heading of “patronage.” But in the Haitian context, like many others, patronage and kinship are far from mutually exclusive.

One of the consequences of living in a place where so little infrastructure functions is that people become dependent on each other in ways large and small. These routines of interdependence are everyday a central part of everyday life. In due course, I was one of those people who gave, and also who received. In the course of this narrative, there will be several moments in which I participated in activities that a foreigner living in Haiti would not usually participate in, and several other moments in which I intervened in situations of medical, economic, or social emergency or need. If at times I intervened, or helped, it was not an unusually moral act, but simply the thing that most humans would do in that situation. Perhaps that question – to intervene or not to intervene – is not the one we should be asking. The question, rather, is who intervenes, and on behalf of whom, and what resources and connections they draw upon to do so. Because I possessed white foreigner privilege — and the literal and symbolic capital that goes with it — I could sometimes effectively intervene in ways that many Haitians could not. Far more often, however, I was the recipient of people's kindness and generosity, rather than the provider, from the stunning post-quake heroism to which I owe my life, to smaller, more everyday acts of sharing and care. The everyday experience of people in Port-au-Prince — into which I both entered willingly and was swept — is one of care and reciprocity, which is often tested by extremes of circumstance and scarcity (not only material and economic, but social and emotional as well).

But the stresses of extraordinary crises as well ordinary life amid suffering and scarcity take their toll, and, under the weight of all of this, people do not always act nobly. Indeed,

suffering can produce both heroism and ugliness, complexly and inextricably intertwined. The threshold of reactivity is lowered; it felt at times as though everyone were reacting with incommensurate emotion to seemingly small situations (someone looks at you funny or unwittingly says something hurtful, a taptap stops in the middle of the street and blocks traffic, a market woman won't lower her prices for clearly underripe breadfruit). A shallow current of pain and anger coursed just beneath the apparent functioning of day-to-day life, and it was apparent that people were reacting emotionally not to the proximate cause of their frustration, but to many things, including events and patterns that long preceded the earthquake: political instability, state violence, uncertainty, kidnappings, other losses and bereavements. Though the diagnostic criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder include a heightened state of irritability and reactivity, the framework of trauma and particularly of "post-traumatic stress disorder" presupposes identifiable *moments* of trauma past which people can move. As Erica James observes, writing of Haitian people in an era of political insecurity, "...PTSD still fails to capture the sequelae ... [the] suffering [of poor residents of Port-au-Prince] corresponded to continual stressors, rather than to a single etiological traumatic event from which there was now a 'post'" (2008: 139). Moreover, the label of PTSD medicalizes and pathologizes what are fundamentally social problems and inequities, erasing other potential ways to talk about violence (besides trauma) or other potential ways of identifying oneself (other than being a victim) (Fassin 2008). But this is all to say that when it comes to expressing emotion around the earthquake and suffering, visible despair is not the only, or most evident, reaction. I experienced some of this as well and, possessing a desire to "help" and create change on a large scale and little power to do it, was openly conflicted. The fact is that much of the time I was in Haiti, I could neither ground myself in humanitarian noblesse nor hide behind anthropological distance. Much of the time, not



immediately after the earthquake, but in the months and years of seeming stasis that followed, I was sad, surly, depressed, cynical, lost, and irritable. These emotions were my own; I would not purport to project them onto anyone else, Haitian or foreigner, who was there in the earthquake and the aftermath. But reflecting now on those feelings perhaps allows me to comprehend some of the complex ways that the people I met and spoke with processed their grief, loss, and sense of vulnerability – not only due to the earthquake, but to the other events, including coups d'état, long periods of political insecurity, hurricanes, deaths foreseen and unpredicted, that they had endured in their lives. Experiences of unease and anger, as well as experiences of kindness, can offer insight.

### ***Structure.***

This work is divided into four main sections. The first deals with the history and experiences of displacement and uprooting in Haiti, and the role of memory and nostalgia in the changing landscape of Haiti and Port-au-Prince specifically. I argue that while the January 12 earthquake was in ways a singular and unprecedented calamity, it was not a natural disaster. As anthropologists who study such things are fond of saying, there is no such thing as a natural disaster. Plate tectonics and weather patterns are forces of nature, and as such should be termed “hazards,” but all *disasters*, from Hurricane Katrina to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, are the result of socioeconomic factors and “slow violence”, and the poor and marginalized disproportionately bear the long-term effects. As Anthony Oliver-Smith says succinctly, “disasters do not simply happen, they are caused” (1999: 74). This earthquake proved a disaster because of poverty, Port-au-Prince's centralization and overpopulation, and nonexistent building codes, not simply because the earth moved. The Haiti earthquake must be understood as the

product of centuries of structural violence, and as the latest and most sudden in a series of displacements (which includes the enslavement of Africans in colonial Saint-Domingue, decades of rural to urban migration, and diaspora and exile). I provide two extended life stories that illustrate how pre-earthquake social and economic processes shaped people's lives, homes, families and communities, and how those trajectories and communities further changed in the aftermath of the disaster.

The second section provides an abbreviated history of aid and military, political, and humanitarian intervention in Haiti, which provides context for the considerable distrust and skepticism that many Haitians today feel toward the international community. It focuses on particular moments of intervention, and how they are remembered and discussed, rather than being a coherent chronology. This chapter focuses primarily on the brutality of plantation slavery, post-Independence embargoes and indemnity, the 1915-1934 US Marine occupation, US complicity with the Duvalier dictatorship, the development of NGOs, structural adjustment and foreign debt, the role of the US in the presidency and departure of Aristide, and the ongoing UN peacekeeping mission.

The third section explores the experiences and perceptions of several poor Haitian people — among them, those who received and those who did not receive aid in the aftermath of the earthquake. It also provides the viewpoints of foreign humanitarian and development workers, as they ambivalently negotiate their personal beliefs and ideals amid the politics, expectations, and limitations of the aid apparatus, and the attitudes and actions of “beneficiaries.” It moves from the initial moment of emergency and hope after the earthquake, to the almost immediate unraveling of the aid response, through the perhaps inevitable and much-discussed “failure” of the international community to save Haiti and for Haiti to save itself.

The fourth section is a coda of sorts, and again addresses displacement, loss, community, and aid —this time, by examining rituals around death and grief. It focuses largely on Titanyen, a denuded, mountainous area just north of Port-au-Prince, which has been, in the last few decades, a potter's field for victims of political violence, and then more recently the site of the mass graves for tens of thousands of earthquake victims and the site of some of the largest and most reviled and critiqued post-quake IDP camps. In an archaeological sense, Titanyen is a burial place of Haitian oppression, a stratigraphic graveyard of a country's tragic history of engagements with internal and global power.

This work is full of personal stories, voices, and characters. Yet for every person who appears, for every story that is told in detail, there are many that must necessarily go untold. Telling certain stories — and perhaps certain kinds of stories — would render the speakers too vulnerable. Likewise, some of the details (beyond real names) have been smudged, obscured, or changed, in ways that make the stories no less true — as examples, as social facts — but less identifiable. This is a luxury and privilege enjoyed by an ethnographer that other kinds of writers and storytellers are not often afforded: to tell a story for its elemental truth, without including every single detail. My journalist friend Maya recalled a sad and absurd example of this, from the morning after the earthquake, when her ethics as a human and her abilities as a storyteller came into conflict with her supposed duties as a reporter. “On January 13 in the morning I filed something, like a memo for the *Journal*, and I had some stories about people – I didn't have their first and last names, I didn't have their occupations, I didn't have their ages. And there was – one of the lines in the memo was about a man I had seen in the street who was just sitting on a chair and next to him were his two children, dead, he's holding a pair of Mary Janes, and when I saw him I just like, like I ... I held his hand and was crying, and he couldn't

talk, and I ... I put this in the memo, too. And they're like, 'you didn't get his name. We can't use it unless you have his name.' They told me that they needed names. They needed first and last names.”

Unlike Maya, I am under no obligation to give first and last names, ages, occupations — for my discipline, those are not the things that make a story true. So in some stories, I have omitted or changed some details. And some stories do not appear at all. It has been difficult to exclude certain stories that I know would be both analytically valuable and emotionally resonant; as a writer, it is tempting to include them. But as an ethical researcher, and as a friend, the possibility of doing harm outweighs matters of art and intellect. Even more germane than the question of individual harm is the question and the politics of collective representation, and of how to write about everyday life in the midst of sudden and chronic disaster. With that in mind, this work does not aim to be *the* story of the earthquake, or of the Haitian people. It is about individual lives, experiences, and stories. It is still another representation, aware and conscious of the impossibility of perfect representation.

**PART ONE: DISPLACEMENT, COMMUNITY, AND LOSS**

*"Haiti's displaced: how long must they clamour before they are heard?"*

So begins an October 2013 Amnesty International blog post on the ongoing plight of people displaced by the January 12, 2013 earthquake. It recounts more than three years of suffering and uncertainty endured by those Haitian people who lost loved ones and homes in the quake, moved into precarious tent cities that became increasingly unsanitary as non-governmental organizations scaled back their aid out of fear that camp-dwellers would become "dependent," and who now face forced eviction. For Amnesty International and other human rights organizations, both international and Haiti-based, the unending displacement and peril that thousands of poor and dispossessed Haitian people still confront represents a clear violation of human rights and dignity, as well as the ongoing crisis of the earthquake — that the true devastation was manifest not only in those thirty-five seconds of seismic shuddering, but in the weeks and months and years of uncertainty and threat that resulted.

*"Ann tounen lakay!" [Let's go home!]*

In November 2013, these words stretch exuberantly across an NGO-sponsored billboard in the Port-au-Prince neighborhood I used to live in, a neighborhood that was hit especially hard by the quake, and where many homes collapsed, including the one in which I was living. The billboard shows, in comic strip-style drawings, Haitians cheerfully destroying their own tents with hammers and moving back into pre-earthquake neighborhoods. It intends to be encouraging — the emergency is over, the precarity is over, let's all get life back to normal already — but under the circumstances it rings tone-deaf. It implies that homelessness or living in a camp is a matter of choice, that those people who live in a camp by apparent "choice" simply need a little nudge to go back home, or indeed that "home" (as it is imagined and depicted in humanitarian

propaganda) exists somewhere as a secure, stable site.

### ***Multiple Displacements***

Though "displacement" as a political and human rights designation emerged in the aftermath of the earthquake — through the mass destruction of homes and buildings, proliferation of tent camps and attendant concerns about hygiene, disease, sexual violence, storms and security, and eventual camp evictions — displacement itself is not a new condition in Haiti. Indeed, Haitians have been displaced since before they were “Haitian.” In order to understand people's experiences and perceptions of the social shifts that followed the earthquake, we must contextualize post-disaster displacement and homelessness in this broader history. Haitian people's sense of home and identity are the result of multiple, sedimented experiences of displacement and relocation. And so while the rhetorical question "*how long must they clamour?*" implies that people have been suffering since the earthquake, they have, in fact, been displaced for far longer.

I intentionally use a rhetorically loose definition of “displacement,” one that includes but encompasses more than conventional definitions of displacement as it relates to IDPs. This is to at once underscore the historical and experiential relationship of formal displacement after the earthquake to other moments and forms of dislocation and uprooting in individual lives, to position this most recent displacement as part of a pattern for Haitian individuals and the Haitian people, and also to highlight the ways in which these seemingly more prosaic and unforced movements and shifts were caused by structural violence. The UN formally defined “internally displaced people” as people forcibly displaced by “armed conflict, violence, persecution, or natural disaster” (1998). Though the other moments and patterns I will discuss are not labeled

“displacement” as is the post-quake IDP crisis, they are caused by and part of the same violence and persecution that undergird Haitian history and that made the earthquake and its aftermath a massive disaster. "Displacement," rather than an exception or a rupture from ordinary life, is a principal and central characteristic of life, identity, and personhood for Haitians. They — both as individuals and as a collective — have endured displacement and continue to endure it. The memories and experience of past displacement, current displacement, and the possibility of future displacement — geographic, but also cultural and spiritual — shadow and underlie everyday life in Haiti. This is particularly true in the capital city of Port-au-Prince – a city of migrants, a city in flux. I argue, following many others (Brown 1991, Laguerre, 1998, Richman 2005, Désir 2011), that dislocation is an integral part of Haitian personhood and experience. Dislocation is not, however, the only way that one can understand or conceptualize Haitian society. Indeed, using terms like "exile" as the dominant trope for Haiti can reify uprootedness and erase other ways of looking at experiences and histories of Haitian people (Ménard 2013). Reliance on the notion of "displacement" certainly does not explain everything. Using the term too simply — implying, as it can, a total break from the routines of ordinary pre-displacement life — may also minimize the degree to which people strive to maintain communities and ties despite shifts in geography and population. In this respect rootedness, as much as exile, defines the experience of Haitian people within Haiti and abroad (*ibid.*). Nonetheless, the rhetoric of displacement (as it is deployed primarily by the international community and aid providers), and ideas and memories of homelessness and loss (as they have been used and perceived by Haitian people) remain key analytic frames for the post-earthquake situation.

These considerations — fraught as they are with uncertainty, nostalgia, and loss — are important not only for the sake of poetics and abstract "understanding" of a general condition.



They have real applications as Haitian and foreign institutions attempt to address the post-earthquake displacement crisis. As organizations (particularly IOM and the Red Cross), the UN, and the Haitian government set a priority of helping people cope with the trauma of loss and displacement and moving people "home" — out of the camps, back into "neighborhoods" through programs like 16/6 — it is crucial to consider what "home" has ever meant, and what has been lost, before the quake, and after. The point is not to diminish the very real suffering that resulted from the earthquake. Rather, the point is to recognize the longer arc of suffering, deprivation and endurance beneath its most immediate forms and manifestations. A dehistoricized focus on post-earthquake displacement as a unique problem unto itself, and the implied corollary that the clear solution and priority should be rapid repatriation to pre-quake neighborhoods or relocation to dusty, treeless plywood T-shelter colonies, risks overlooking the long-standing structural problems that made those neighborhoods precarious in the first place, that made those hillsides dusty and treeless, and that made the earthquake the massive disaster it was.

The earthquake was a startling and shattering event, a disaster with a clear Before and After, rupturing the lives of an estimated 1.5 million people. At the same time, its effects are the product of centuries of Haitian turmoil, uncertainty and movement. Here I will discuss four dislocations in the background of the quake. The first, the brutal transport and enslavement of hundreds of thousands of Africans, is a clear example of forced migration and direct violence. The other two events — ongoing rural to urban migration within Haiti, and emigration from Haiti to other countries into the "diaspora" — may on the surface appear to be voluntary. Some people have fled under the direct imminent threat of political violence, but many others have left their homes or homeland because of desperation. Yet these episodes, too, include elements of

coercion at a deeper level, as poverty and political instability were produced by decades — even centuries — of structural violence. From this perspective even the massive post-earthquake displacements stemmed not just from the earthquake itself, but also from the social and economic conditions that led to a concentration of poor people in poorly constructed buildings. Thus we should look at post-earthquake displacement in terms of its continuity as well as its rupture, and its reflection of those same conditions that produced all the displacements and migrations that came before.

### ***The Question of the Internally Displaced Person (IDP)***

According to the UN's 1998 *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, an internally displaced person (IDP) is someone who has fled his or her home because of armed conflict, violence, persecution, or natural disaster, but who remains within the original country's borders. Unlike refugees, who have explicit protection under international law and a firm legal definition, "IDP" is a looser and more uncertain and fluid category. The *Guiding Principles* are descriptive, rather than binding (Collinson 2009); they may imply the international community's normative values vis-à-vis IDPs, but they lack legal force. Generally, the international community's goal has been IDPs' "right of return" to the pre-conflict or pre-disaster status quo. This is a complex issue in many countries with IDP populations, as the circumstances that led to forced migration may have transformed the social, economic, and political structures that existed before the crisis. In the case of Haiti (and in other places), of course, the pre-crisis status quo was one of political instability, widespread poverty, and structural violence – a condition in which, as I suggest above, people displaced by the earthquake had already endured multiple dislocations.

While displacement as the result of conflict or "natural" disasters is obviously not a new

phenomenon, the formal category of "IDP" only began to attract international attention in the mid 1980s and became an increasing topic of concern for state actors and various experts through the 1990s (Aparicio 2007). This occurred after the end of the Cold War amid changing conceptions of state sovereignty, and the idea that international actors would be interested in the internal affairs of states for the sake of protecting dispossessed or abused people within those sovereign borders (Aparicio 2009, Collinson 2009). The fate and anguish of the "suffering stranger" became a global concern (Butt 2002). Yet, while the international community has created a normative definition and frameworks for IDPs, those frameworks remain difficult for humanitarian actors to translate into action, and only receive sporadic acknowledgement from governments (Collinson 2009).

The Haitian earthquake produced a massive, unprecedented urban displacement crisis. The existing descriptive framework for IDPs however, was not developed with urban populations in mind. The abstract image of the IDP camp is a place on or beyond the outskirts of the city, remote and rural places, dusty and deserted. The camp is isolated, an entity unto itself. And while some of the Haitian post-quake IDP camps were in peri-rural spaces (such as Titanyen), many more were in the heart of the capital, perfectly visible, fully present and penetrable, contiguous with the goings-on of everyday life. Public squares, soccer fields, and plazas became camps. Camps sat directly across the street from supermarkets, posh restaurants, and hotels. In February 2011, a relatively subdued and rainy Kanaval parade even wound through the Champ-de-Mars camp in downtown Port-au-Prince.

Much media and NGO attention in post-quake Haiti has focused on those people living in formal camps. As I detail later, these camps have become the most poignant and catalyzing symbol of the enduring crisis. Indeed, in the Haitian context, "IDP" has become virtually

synonymous with "camp inhabitant." Residing in a recognized camp, and possessing the right kind of institutional documentation, formalizes one's status as an IDP and one's deservingness of aid (Aparicio 2007). In the case of post-quake Haiti, formal recognition hinged on receiving an ID card and registration number from IOM or the Red Cross, and with it access to direct food aid, food vouchers (*kat*), hygiene kits, and relocation money. However, the focus on the formal camp overlooks people displaced by the earthquake — meaning driven from their homes or habitual residences — who do not live in camps. The majority of the world's 28.8 million IDPs actually live outside camps (Brookings-LSE 2013). Due to this fact they remain "under the radar" of the aid apparatus and enjoy less access to resources than more obvious camp-dwelling IDPs. The Brookings-LSE report on IDPs in non-camp settings sums up the situation that applies to many displaced Haitians as well as people in other contexts: "They may be in urban, rural or remote areas; they may own or rent housing; they may be sharing a room or living with a host family; they may be occupying a building or land that they do not own, or living in makeshift shelters and slums or living on the streets ... liv[ing] side-by-side with the non-displaced poor and economic migrants." The stories I tell later illustrate how not all people "displaced" by the earthquake — meaning people who are coping with the loss of home, family units, social structure, and place — fit the official categories or received recognition. The camps were the most visible identifier of displacement status, but untold others lost their homes and the contexts on January 12, 2010. Moreover, especially after a sudden disaster and in a context of tremendous pre-existing precarity, "the distinction between displaced and non-displaced is often difficult to determine, and their respective vulnerability and need for assistance hard to gauge ... Many of those forcibly displaced are dispersed among the local population ... and may be difficult to distinguish from other migrants" (Collinson 2009). The life stories I present later in

this chapter depict two families adrift in the wake of catastrophe, but never officially "displaced."

### ***First Displacement: Africa to Saint-Domingue***

*Whether a field slave or a house slave, man, woman, or child, the slave is a creature who has lost his soul between the mill and the sugarcane, between the ship's hold and its steerage, between the crinoline and the slap in the face. Shame stains our every gesture... Only our gestures of revolt belong truly to us.*

Evelyne Trouillot, *Rosalie l'Infâme*

The first loss which the rightless suffered was the loss of their homes, and this meant the loss of the entire social texture into which they were born and in which they established for themselves a distinct place in the world.

Hannah Arendt, *On Totalitarianism*

Haiti is a nation founded on mass uprooting, the loss of home and community, oppression, and eventual revolution. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, hundreds of thousands of Africans were uprooted, brought in chains across the Atlantic Ocean to toil as slaves in French-ruled colonial Saint-Domingue. Many died in the passage, and many more died quickly of disease and brutal treatment in the sugar plantations, thus requiring the colonial masters to continually import more and more people from Africa. By 1787, Saint Domingue was receiving more than forty-thousand African-born slaves per year — one-third of the entire Atlantic slave trade (James 1963).

For these African people - hailing, as they did, from a variety of geographic areas and cultural, religious, and linguistic groups and social classes - to become rightless slaves in the New World, they had to undergo processes of physically and psychologically violent "seasoning" and dehumanization. Throughout the Americas, African slaves were systematically separated from their families and ethnic and linguistic groups, in order to further "break" the individual and prevent the Africans from communicating and organizing against their masters. The forced disintegration of family ties was integral to the perpetuation of the slave economy.

Carolyn Fick, echoing Orlando Patterson's definition of slavery as "social death" (1982) writes:

To assure the submission of the slaves and the mastership of the owners, slaves were introduced into the colony and eventually integrated into the plantation labor system within an overall context of social alienation and psychological, as well as physical, violence. Parental and kinship ties were broken; their names were changed; their bodies were branded with red-hot irons to designate their new owners, and the slave who was once a socially integrated member of a structured community in Africa had, in a matter of months, become what now has been termed a "socially dead person"... (27)

The brutality of this process and its effects on families and communities can scarcely be rendered in words: people ripped from their homelands, children torn from their mothers, women raped and made to bear the children of their masters, all with the goal of turning human beings into disposable tools for the enrichment of the Empire. Haitian intellectual Jean Price-Mars lamented in 1928 that "the status of the Negro family has been denigrated, destroyed, annihilated by the most wretched abomination that has ever maculated the face of the earth..." (217). The voyage from Africa to the plantations of Saint-Domingue was not only a geographic and physical uprooting, it was a social and spiritual displacement. People were stripped not only of their physical homeland, but their communities and very identities.

Given the complete and systematic nature of this dehumanization, and the threat of violence and death that accompanied any form of defiance, it is a testament to the unvanquished spirit of enslaved Africans and their descendants that many of them engaged in acts of collective resistance, and that those acts of resistance sometimes succeeded. The Maroons — escaped slaves — created independent settlements throughout the Americas, from the US South through Central and South America and in the Caribbean. Nanny, an African-born Maroon woman in eighteenth-century Jamaica, led a rebellion against the British, created an autonomous area known as Nanny Town, freed and resettled hundreds of slaves, and became Jamaica's National Hero. Throughout the 18th century and into much of the 19th century, there were several slave

revolts attempted throughout North America — most of which were suppressed, and which ended bloodily for the rebels and their allies. The most famous successful plantation slave rebellion is, of course, the 1804 Haitian Revolution. The "unthinkability" of the revolution, and of the existence of Haiti itself (Trouillot 1995) makes sense when one begins to appreciate the degree to which the machine of slavery tried to completely break the wills, minds, and bodies of the enslaved. The story of slavery in St. Domingue, and elsewhere, involves unimaginable cruelty and suffering, and of the loss of home and family. But it also tells a story of people forging new communities and seeking solidarity in the face of power, anguish and death. As we will see, this duality of suffering and responding runs through the long grain of Haitian history.

African origins feature prominently in the accounts Haitian people give about their identities and present-day suffering and injustice. For example one young woman from Cité Soleil, shortly after the earthquake, drew a straight line between slavery and the post-quake situation: “Haiti – I don't know what sin it committed that it's paying for. We've been paying since we left Africa, we arrived on this land, and until this day we are shouldering the consequences. Nothing that we have can stay. We don't even have the clothes upon our backs.” At the same time, any discussion of Haitian people and how they speak about, remember, and cope with their ancestors' forced displacement from Africa and enslavement involves more than history and geography alone. The displacement occurred not only at the level of geography, family, and community, but also at the level of spirituality.

\* \* \* \* \*

*“When I ask, ‘How are gods made?’ I am also asking, ‘How are histories told?’”*  
Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods*

The obvious place to begin this conversation is with vodou, a syncretic and complex

system of belief that combines elements of West and Central African belief, creolized under the influence of Catholicism. In vodou cosmology, life for Haitians is itself a displacement; understanding this displacement requires a fluidity of spirituality, geography, and history. As Karen Richman writes, "the term Guinea" - or Ginen - "refers to the far-off, mythical place 'on the other side of the water' from where the ancestors migrated and to which they return at death, and where the lineage's spirits continue to live" (17). Elizabeth McAlister (2005) writes that Ginen is "the original Africa across the waters, from whence the slaves were taken and to which the Vodouist will return after death" (88). The physical area of Africa called Guinea, from which many slaves were taken, is recast as not only a geographical homeland, but also a spiritual homeland, and the afterlife. "To enslaved Africans in colonial Saint Domingue," writes Marc Christophe, "Vodou constituted a rationalizing process as well as a philosophy of remembrance that allowed memories to be kept alive, for to lose one's past is to lose oneself ... Vodou can be defined as a magical space that allowed Africans to reconnect with the land left behind — its traditions, cultures, gods, and ancestors" (87). Moreover, as McAlister explains, "Ginen is a mythical place, but it is also an ethos" of being a "morally upright" person who employs vodou for good and "accepts the will of the spirits", rather than manipulating the spirits for mercenary reasons (88-89). This is one of the shapes that memory and mourning of, continued connection to, the lost homeland takes in daily life in Haiti. For vodou "worship" is not separate from mundane everyday life; it is in ways less a religion than an encompassing worldview.

The notion of an African homeland is particularly evident in Haitian art, music, and other forms of expressive culture, which work to create what McAlister terms a "diasporic identity." The connection between music and identity is, McAlister argues, deep and far-reaching: "the sounds of music, with their capacity to index memories and associations, become sonic points on



a cognitive compass that orients diasporic people in time and place." It is, to borrow from Ilana Feldman (2006: 10), a literal "refrain of home." Sometimes this connection to Africa appears in the explicit and self-conscious invocation of African geography and ethnicity — Ginen, Kongo, Dahomé, as in the music of the popular political and vodou-influenced band Boukman Eksperyans and in the contemporary Haitian Rasta movement in music and art — and other times it is apparent in the drumming, rhythms, and language of traditional vodou songs. Historically – from the revolution to the present – vodou has been central to resistance and political organizing among Haitian peasants (Ramsey 2011). Music and song have been used to express discontent, spread information and political messages, and narrativize the reclamation of rights (Clérismé 2006).

Not all Haitians are explicitly *vodouizan*, even if, as in the old joke that Karen McCarthy Brown cites in the introduction to *Mama Lola* (1995), many Haitians who openly disdain and do not practice vodou still believe *in* it: "of Haiti's six million people 85 percent are Catholic, 15 percent are Protestant, and 100 percent serve the Vodou spirits" (5). Nonetheless, the ways that Vodou explicitly connects its practitioners to Africa, the past, and the ancestors cannot be extrapolated wholesale to all segments of the Haitian population. Particularly in the cities and among the younger generations, more "conventional" forms of Catholicism, evangelical Christianity, and other Christian practices (such as Seventh Day Adventism and Jehovah's Witnesses) have been embraced as modern, educated religions at odds with the "devil worship" or "mystic stuff" [*bagay mistik*] of parents and grandparents.

McAlister argues that the notion of diasporic identity can be tied, however subtly, to the recent waves of evangelism in Haiti that are less explicitly "African" in origin (or in reference) than is the vodou complex. The emphasis on the Promised Land, deliverance, and the coming

"return" to the New Kingdom of the Lord invoked by evangelical and other non-Catholic Christian groups, resonates not only with a biblical, Judaic notion of diaspora, but also with the longed-for homeland of the descendants of African people forcibly displaced to the Caribbean (McAlister 2011). Indeed, after the earthquake pushed Haitian displacement and homelessness to its most startling crisis point, evangelicals began to publicly apply biblical tropes of displacement, land, and return to their own situation. On the sprawling tent camp on the Champ-de-Mars, one month to the day after the earthquake, Christians of various stripes convened and pastor pronounced, "Every time the bible says Israel, we will say Haiti" (McAlister 2014). Of course, Haitians are not the only people to have experienced displacement or diaspora, nor are they the only people to turn to a religion promising redemption in the face of upheaval, uncertainty, and affliction. A particular brand of evangelical Christianity has taken root in Haiti — one that preaches that the suffering shall be rewarded and vindicated in the next life, that in order to be a good Christian one must suffer and accept one's lot, however dreadful or seemingly unjust, as God's will. Its appeal stems from the promise of salvation for people struggling to make sense of a world in which simmering, mundane suffering is punctuated unpredictably by moments of calamity. It is what one friend referred to as a "God of misery" (*bondye mizè*), and he lays the blame squarely on foreigners:

"They came, they came! The evangelical missionaries, they came to bring us a *bondye mizè*. They're telling us that the Lord is coming tomorrow. We don't need anything, just sit and wait for the Lord, it's the Lord who is going to do everything for us. They make us think that the Lord— we don't even need to go look for a bucket of water to drink, because the Lord is going to bring a bucket of water for us to drink. If we're sick, we don't need to go to the hospital. We should just sit there praying, because the Lord is going to come and cure us. And so we can't protest in the streets, no! What right do we have to protest? We don't have that right! That's what they're teaching us, so we don't protest in the streets!"

Tropes of displacement and return, then, are used by both vodouizans and evangelical

Christians, and for both, the lines between the spiritual and the physical are blurred, as literal homecoming becomes entwined with redemption. However resonant the image of wandering in the wilderness may be, for some people, belief in the Judeo-Christian notion of a Promised Land and God who rewards suffering is inseparable from the humiliation and resignation of being a humanitarian subject.

## *Haiti, Nostalgia and the "Refrain of Home"*

A theme of nostalgia — the yearning for the world that was lost — ran through nearly all the interviews and conversations I had with people in Port-au-Prince, regardless of background or socioeconomic class. In her thoughtful and nuanced study of Palestinians displaced in the conflict that accompanied the founding of the Israeli state in 1948, Ilana Feldman describes their "refrain of home" as an effort to enact their connection to a lost and mourned-for homeland. Feldman focuses on "the ways that people reflect on the meaning of home, its place in their lives, what its loss meant to them... the sometimes mundane, sometimes extraordinary ways that they continued to interact with the places that had been home" (2006: 13). She explains that "a sense of home is made in part in repetitive details of daily interaction and use of space ... With the loss of this material intimacy, people seek other ways of enacting and repeating connection, ways that... join a narrative articulation of home with a material relation with place" (*ibid.* 11). Feldman's concept resonates in the Haitian context, though it is not clear which home or homeland is being remembered and mourned. Is it Africa, the ancestral home across the sea? Is it the *lakou* in the provinces where people were born, or where their parents and grandparents were born, where they have most of their kin and community ties? Is it Haiti itself, yearned for from spaces in Miami, New York, Boston, or Montreal? Is it a home lost in the earthquake, collapsed or rendered uninhabitable? In some cases, it is several or all of those things.

Rural migrants to Port-au-Prince express nostalgia for life in the countryside. Like most nostalgia their sense of loss focuses less on the countryside as it truly is, given that most rural Haitians are very poor, inhabit a mostly dry and denuded land, have few means and employment opportunities, possess limited access to basic infrastructure, and rely in large part on unpredictable and temporary development programs. The longed-for, idealized countryside

functions as part of a trope in which all that is good and desirable in the countryside contrasts with all that is bad and unpleasant in the city. If Port-au-Prince is crowded, filthy, and urban, the lost rural homeland is verdant, natural, and lovely. If even basic needs like food and water are unaffordably expensive in the city, in rural Haiti they are free: food grows on the trees and you can simply pick it, water flows from the source. If Port-au-Prince is full of thieves, gangsters, selfish and uncaring people — if it "rots" and "degrades" people and gives them "another mentality" (as I heard, again and again) — rural Haiti remains populated by generous, sincere people with good manners who share their resources, no matter how scarce. None of this may be objectively *true*. But for many rural migrants living in Port-au-Prince, this was the paradoxical social fact: life appeared more comfortable in the countryside, but the only way to have a better life, to search for life (*chèche lavi*), was to come to the capital.

Melise's cousin Isaac never stopped yearning for his rural home, even though his origins were indisputably difficult. He was born in Grand-Anse, and orphaned before he was a year and a half old; he does not remember his parents, and says that their absence is "the story that makes me sadder than anything in life. As long as I can remember, I grew up without a mother, without a father, without a godmother, without a godfather, without a grandma, without a grandfather. I never knew those people. I don't even know their faces." He does not know how they died, but as poor rural Haitians living in a remote area, far from any health services, odds are good that they could number among the victims of structural violence. Isaac was raised by extended family, and, revealing himself to be an exceptionally bright student, did well in school despite many financial and practical obstacles to his success. He worked the land from childhood on, and hiked up and down mountains for hours every day to attend school in Abricots, the nearest town. Once he had finished the equivalent of middle school (thanks to a well-regarded charitable

school founded and run by an upper-class Haitian woman), he moved to Port-au-Prince. Melise and Bòs John helped him find work as a bricklayer, and so he labored and attended high school, which he finished in his early twenties. Life for Isaac was hard in Port-au-Prince, but it had been hard, too, in the rural countryside. Still, in Isaac's mind, his rural homeland remained the ideal, while Port-au-Prince was simply the place he had to endure for access to a better life. "I don't consider myself *moun Pòtoprens* [a native of Port-au-Prince]. And I'll never be *moun Pòtoprens*. And if it weren't for school, I would never have come to Port-au-Prince. If I could find everything I need in Jérémie, I would never come to Port-au-Prince. I hate it very much. Very very much. When I'm in Jeremie I'm more comfortable. I bathe well, I eat well, I sleep well, I go wherever I want. What's wrong with that? What do I have to come to Port-au-Prince for? Only education." In 2011, he wrote the following nostalgic poem about his homeland, which largely focuses on nature, fruit, fish, and food. In it Jérémie appears as a land of plenty, far surpassing actual experience. (As his cousin Claudine asked sardonically, "Were you hungry when you wrote this?")

*Lè m' panse ak Jeremi  
Senbòl paradi  
Kote lavi ap fleri  
Tout kalite bon fwi...*

*Dè fwa mwen santi kè map senyen  
Lè m sonje zaboka ak lam boukannen  
Boul manyòk nan sòs pwa kongo  
Manje mango jòn sou pye ak kouto...*

*Pou m' chante lanmou lakay  
Dous tankou ji papay  
Tonbe sou koulè lavi m'  
Tache tout lespri m'  
Jeremi, je tèm, je tèm.*

When I think of Jérémie  
Symbol of paradise

Where life flourishes  
All kinds of good fruit...

Sometimes I feel like I'm bleeding  
When I remember avocado with roasted breadfruit  
Yucca balls in Congo pea sauce  
Eating a yellow mango with a knife, sitting in the tree...

So that I can sing of my love for my home  
As sweet as papaya juice  
Falling on the colors of my life  
Sticking to my soul  
Jérémie, I love you, I love you.

The refrain of home and the trope of nostalgia are not confined to rural-to-urban migrants. The same kinds of themes — of a lost world-that-was, of lost nature — are evidenced by both older, often relatively privileged people who remember (or reimagine) the genteel Port-au-Prince of yesterday, and by *dyaspora* (Haitians living abroad). Colette, a sweet-voiced, light-skinned, highly educated woman in her sixties, is an example of both. One of the first times we met was at a posh grocery store in Port-au-Prince early August 2011, on the eve of Tropical Storm Emily's landfall in Haiti. Expatriates and well-to-do-Haitians were getting ready for the storm, stockpiling food and worrying somewhat abstractly about the people in the camps, unsure of how hard the storm might hit or whether it might turn into a hurricane. Colette greeted me with a kiss on each cheek.

"Are you ready for the hurricane?" I asked her.

"It won't be a hurricane," she assured me. "It's a tempest."

"A tempest! So we are living in Shakespeare?" I tried to joke.

She regarded me with bemusement. "Ma chère, we have been living in Shakespeare since 1804!"

Colette was one of those educated exiled emigrées who left Haiti in the early 1960s.

Members of her family had been victimized under Duvalier *père*, included several relatives killed in the Jérémie vespers massacre of 1964. To this day, she jumps at noises in the dark, and does not discuss politics in public, for fear that someone might be listening. And though she had valid reasons not to stay in Haiti — and though her family possessed the means for her to live comfortably and successfully abroad — she was ultimately drawn back to the country through her sense of homeland. Over lemonade and cookies, she explained how her commitment to this homeland is tinged with nostalgia, by the memories of what that homeland used to look like. She has returned from the *diaspora*, but she remains, in a sense, displaced from the city and the country as it once was. The neighborhoods she speaks of are *bidonvils* now, poor and full of crime, unrecognizable as the pastoral places she remembers. The nostalgia of a member of the bourgeoisie for the days when the old residential neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince were clean, comfortable and verdant may strike some as evidence of class prejudice, of disdain for the urban poor, or, at best, a minor issue amid the myriad injustices and tragedies of Haiti. But the processes that led the beautiful neighborhoods of Colette's memory to become part of what Trouillot terms "dirty slums" — extreme centralization forcing rural to urban migration, the lack of infrastructure in both the provinces and the capital, a corrupt and totalitarian regime followed by decades of corrupt and powerless administrations — are the same processes that have created the poverty and devastation of the masses. And it is a reminder that Port-au-Prince was decaying under its own weight long before the earthquake leveled it.

My dear, when I was a child, when I was a young woman, I always thought I wouldn't spend my life in Haiti. I had an uncle who was the Consul in New York for a long time, and then he became the Consul in Miami. From time to time, we'd travel. I saw other countries, and I said 'I'd like to live somewhere else.' But once I had spent three years abroad, I knew that I'd end up coming back to Haiti.

I'm always living with those souvenirs. What was Haiti like in those days? Well,



I must tell you, when I was a child, first off, I was born in the areas up from Carrefour-Feuilles. It is a neighborhood that was full of trees, and we lived on five acres. My great-grandfather had a brother who planted roses, and who sold roses to the florists in Port-au-Prince. And when we went down to Carrefour — it was a little narrow road with almond trees on both sides — I still remember that, to this day. And, when I was a child, before I was ten or eleven years old, we used to go to swimming every Sunday with my whole family — the sea was beautiful, here, right near Port-au-Prince. So that's to tell you, Port-au-Prince had trees. There were trees, there was a lot of cool fresh air, there were rivers for people to go on picnics. And I'm not really such an old lady! When you would go down into the valleys of Carrefour, higher up, when you'd go in, there were rivers. I remember when I was very small, I spent holidays with all of my cousins and my grandmother at Rivière Froide. But nowadays, Rivière Froide is brimming with trash.

But I remember my older cousins would make little swimming pools for us, for the little ones, with big rocks, in that river. It was beautiful. It was beautiful, the river. There were trees, it wasn't really so hot, and there were sidewalks. And so, long ago, that's what Port-au-Prince was. When I was a young woman, I used to go on foot downtown, on Saturday mornings. I'd get up, get dressed, and I would go down on my route, on foot, crossing everything, across the Champ-de-Mars, doing everything that I would never do now. It's too hot, it's too dirty. There are too many cars, there are holes in the road, and people have become rude [*maledvè*]. And there are thieves [*bandi*], too.

There are times, for example, when I remember the cinemas, when I remember the sidewalks for people to walk on, I say to myself, 'My God, I've accepted living in whatever condition! I'm should be disgusted with myself!'

But... I'm going to tell you something that's maybe funny. The fact that I know the names of the trees — that's important to me. I know the names of the trees, I can stand there and look and know what they are. And my dear, now that I am getting older I realize that this is something that is extremely important for me. It's so important to me. I don't know why it's so important. But I know their names. I know what they are. When I travel, more than anything, I try to recognize the trees. Even though I have spent so many years outside. I don't know the names of many trees *lòt bò*. I don't know. It's here I was born, it's here I have to be.

People strive to re-create community, familiarity, and home amid all these forms of displacement. Africans, centuries ago, carried their gods, languages, art, customs and social patterns to St. Domingue and attempted to hold onto and retain them, amid forced, systematized

attempts to break them and turn them into slaves. And even now the *vodou* religion reaches back to Africa, to Ginen, to the other side of the sea. Vodou songs, rhythms, and words are echoes of Africa. And even now, Haitian people — even those who are not vodouizan, those who would call it "devil-worship" — view Africa as a symbol, a homeland, amid their mythicohistory of revolution and liberation.

### ***Food, Aid, Displacement, and Everyday Life***

At several moments, as I wrote this dissertation, I wondered if I was not in fact writing a cookbook, instead. So many of the scenes and situations unconsciously drifted toward descriptions of food preparation and eating. It may be a remnant of my initial pre-earthquake research with household workers, during which time I spent a good deal of time in kitchens, or perhaps it indicates something about my ethnographic methods and how my own identity as a young woman allowed me relatively easy access to private domains and gendered spaces. Or maybe it is nothing more than a reflection of Haitian people's strong and contagious enthusiasm for their national cuisine. Analyzing foodways — the social, cultural, and economic underpinnings of food production and consumption — provides a way of looking both at everyday life and at patterns of displacement, migration, loss and retention. Food is part of culture, it is what nourishes the body, it provides a sense of connection to landscape and to place — even, at times, when the place itself has ceased to be or changed irrevocably (El Haddad and Schmitt 2012). Food is also a way to talk about misrepresented places in ways that challenge convention — it is fundamentally humanizing and normalizing, because, simply put, it is a thing that all people do. The role that food plays in the collective imaginary — the thing that nourishes, that is taken into the body — helps explain why media reports of starving Haitians “eating mud” inspired

indignation on the part of activists, horror on the part of readers and resentment on the part of Haitian people, who found it both incorrect and debasing.<sup>3</sup>

*Interlude: December 2010*

*During the few days of political dezòd, after the contested first-round presidential election, people (with the exception of protestors and journalists, who looked for the action, and household servants, who tried to avoid it as they walked from home to work and back) didn't go out much if they could help it. Vaguely anxious yet curious, stir-crazy, bored, and restive, people became irritable with one another and brought up memories of the coup years, when people spent days or weeks on end inside. "I got so sick of playing Scrabble," one of my neighbors recalled. "I never want to see a Scrabble board again."*

*I had gone with Claudine to a friend's house to listen to the election results and got stuck there. It was a motley assemblage of rich Haitians, poor Haitians, and foreign journalists, activists, and one anthropologist. Claudine located some dusty old Harlequin novels and did some light reading. A US activist sat at the table, typing on her laptop. I kept busy in the kitchen, helping Georgette, the woman who cooked for the family. Since the main roads were blocked and many of the open-air markets and grocery stores were closed, we had to make do with whatever ingredients we had on hand, which led to innovations.*

*"Do we have any miskad?" I asked Georgette, in Creole. I was trying to do something with nutmeg.*

---

<sup>3</sup> Various media sources, particularly in 2008 amid riots over the cost of food, reported that starving Haitian people were "eating mud" in order to survive. Some Haitians do eat a kind of hardened clay cake from the Central Plateau, sometimes as an antacid, or when pregnant, or when craving it. This clay can also be eaten with avocado or other things, and it generally has butter in it. It is indeed relatively inexpensive (five to ten gourdes, around twenty-five cents) and may be eaten to fill one's stomach. Other Haitian street foods, like deep-fried dough white flour, did not inspire similar outrage, though they are likewise cheap and filling, likely worse for people and certainly much more a product of the aid economy. They are, however, identifiable to Americans as "food" rather than "mud."

*"Oh, that's so interesting!" interjected the US activist, at the table -- passive-aggressively, I thought. "Our Creole vocabularies, I mean. You know all the food words and I know all the social justice words!"*

*This assumed a clear line between "food words" and "social justice words" -- a conception of politics and activism that took place in public spaces, rather than in domestic spheres. It implied that social justice could be the agenda of a certain kind of poor people -- the self-proclaimed masses (pèp la) who marched in the streets or who knew how to articulate their suffering in particular approved ways, and that social justice was not connected to poor people like Georgette, quietly working in other people's houses for a nearly unlivable wage, quietly living in a camp, but not possessing the right vocabulary or the right social connections or perhaps even the wish to make public claims about those things.*

*But "food words" are social justice words, because justice does not, or should not, exist beyond the supposedly apolitical realm of the everyday.*

I particularly love Haitian food, and I have loved it since the first time I ate *diri ak legim* (rice and vegetable stew), spicy and oily and delicious, from a streetside restaurant on NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue in Miami's Little Haiti in 2004. It is flavorful, spicy, and prepared with care. It has a unique blend of spices. (For savory foods, these are generally garlic, green onions, parsley, thyme, Scotch Bonnet peppers, and cloves, and sour orange for disinfecting meat or fish, and – perhaps less salubriously – the now-omnipresent Maggi bouillon cube. For sweet foods, the spices include cinnamon, nutmeg, star anise, and bergamot.) Haitian people are generally discriminating about food – particular about the ingredients, and about how they are prepared – and proud of and enthusiastic about their national cuisine. (This came as a surprise to some aid

workers, who couldn't understand why "hungry" Haitian people would not touch the unfamiliar and, to them, unappetizing food served by foreign volunteers.) Haitian households, even the very poor, cook lovely food by using spices ingeniously and knowledgeably.

Haiti has an abundance of dishes. Like all cuisines, it is ever evolving, incorporating different cultural influences. For example, kibbeh, the Middle Eastern meat-and-bulgur croquette, was originally brought to Haiti by Syrian and Lebanese immigrants. By now, kibbeh is a standard dish at Haitian parties, and most people consider it "*nasyonal*" – native, authentically Haitian. Everyday Haitian cuisine has also been shaped by the aid economy, the decimation of Haitian agricultural production, and the growing reliance on cheap imported food, primarily from the Dominican Republic and the USA. People use these products – white rice in plastic mesh sacks stamped USAID or MEGA, canned USAID fish (stamped, somewhat unnervingly and nonspecifically, FISH), white flour, spaghetti, cornflakes, plump frozen chicken parts sold by the damp cardboard case – in creative ways, by combining them with local ingredients and/or methods, that recast them as "Haitian." People cook cans of FISH in sauce topped with sliced raw onion. They turn white flour into spiced fritters called *marinad*. Spaghetti is most often a breakfast food, boiled and then fried with spices, onions, and mashed salted herring (which is, itself, a remnant of the colonial era, in which slaves were fed cheaply on salted fish; this herring comes mainly from Norway) and topped with ketchup. And they make what is known as *ji spageti* ("spaghetti juice"), which involves boiling spaghetti until it is very soft, then blending it with evaporated milk, ice, sugar, and generous quantities of vanilla extract. The result is something akin to a starchy, very filling milkshake.



Figure 4: USAID rice. Port-au-Prince, April 2010

Figure 5: An abundance of bouillon cubes. Petit Rivière de l'Artibonite, August 2011

The fact remains that most Haitian people would prefer to use “national” products, partly out of politics but also out of preference. Most people agree that Haitian rice tastes better than imported rice (it has a nutty, slightly sweet flavor), but it is prohibitively expensive, even for the middle classes. Most people prefer to eat local eggs, saying that they are better tasting with rich orange yolks – but they are three times as expensive as eggs from the Dominican Republic. Most people prefer to eat Haitian chicken (*poul peyi*), which, though smaller and tougher than imported chicken, has a stronger flavor. But, yet again, Haitian chicken is too expensive for most people (particularly in the capital) to regularly afford.

People also consider Haitian-grown food to be intrinsically healthier than foreign-produced food. As diabetes and high blood pressure become more diagnosed, people speak of days in which people ate fresh food “with all its juice in it,” and often point to very old people living in the countryside as proof that eating fresh, just-harvested crops from their own small subsistence gardens leads to health and longevity.

Many foods are found throughout the country, such as rice and beans (either *diri kole* in which the rice and beans are cooked together, or *diri ak sòs pwa*, which is white rice served with

a soupy bean purée), yams, manioc, sweet potatoes, and various meat and fish dishes. And of course there is perhaps the most well-known Haitian dish – *griyo* (chunks of fried, spiced pork) and *banann peze* (fried unripe plantains, what are called *tostones* or *patacones* in Latin America) served with *pikliz* (a very spicy, vinegary and dearly beloved cabbage and carrot slaw). Other foods, however, are more regional, owing to production and to tradition. In the Artibonite – historically a fertile agricultural region – the most famous dish is locally-grown rice with *lalo*, dark-green jute leaves cooked with other leaves and often crab or pieces of salted beef. In the area around Cap-Haïtien, one of the most distinctive dishes is *poul ak nwa*, chicken with cashew nuts, as cashews are produced in northern Haiti. And Grand-Anse is famous for the sweet, hard ginger-coconut bread called *konparèt*, and for the local staple known as *tonmtonm*.

People from Grand-Anse are, to generalize, in love with their tonmtonm. There are people who say they will never feel sated unless they have eaten tonmtonm. Tonmtonm is not exclusively a food of Grand-Anse – some people eat it in in the areas around Cayes and in northeastern Haiti, and people from elsewhere in Haiti who have friends from Grand-Anse sometimes develop a taste for it in the capital – but it is the food that is associated with Grand-Anse, the food that is linked to the identity of people living in or hailing from Grand-Anse.

Tonmtonm is breadfruit pounded into a thick, yellow, doughy purée in a massive wooden mortar and pestle, which is eaten – swallowed without chewing — with a slippery sauce of okra. The okra sauce contains coconut milk (it is a good-humored joke in Haiti that people from Grand-Anse put coconut in everything), savory spices, and some kind of protein if available – crab, beef, tripe, fresh fish or salted fish, or some combination of those things.



Figure 6: Okra sauce, full of meat, fish, small crabs, and a clove-studded pepper.



Figure 7: Tonmtonm with okra sauce.

I cannot say that I loved tonmtonm the first time I tried it. Melise had cooked the sauce and Claudine had pounded the breadfruit. This was a quietly important event, I sensed. Normally Melise and her family ate the remains of whatever they cooked for Madame Joseph. If she had rice and beans and chicken, they might have small amounts of rice and beans, with some of the sauce from the chicken. The tonmtonm, though, was theirs and theirs alone. I watched as Melise made the sauce over her charcoal stove. She began by boiling a large quantity of okra until it became slime. This, she told me, was desirable. I had always liked okra in the US, but as a people, we tend to downplay okra's inherent sliminess by breading and deep-frying it, or drowning it in curry. This dish, on the other hand, embraced and emphasized okra's mucilaginous qualities. Any knowledgeable cook or consumer of tonmtonm knows that committing certain errors, like adding too much acid in the cooking process, will cause the okra



sauce to be less slimy than it should be.



Figure 8: Whipping boiled okra for maximum slipperiness, pedicure in background (Port-au-Prince, 2013)

Melise gave me some tonmtonm to try. I wanted to like it. I should also add, a little defensively, that I was getting over a head cold at the time, and the slippery viscosity of the sauce was deeply familiar and unappealing in that moment. I tried to swallow a gob of tonmtonm without chewing, and gagged. Melise laughed and told me not to worry. Claudine, meanwhile, was eating her serving so fast and with such enthusiasm that I couldn't help but wonder what I was missing. In the years that followed, after the quake, I came to love tonmtonm and to crave it, and I learned to eat it properly, to the pleasure and mild amusement of friends from Grand-Anse – but I never did eat it with Melise, and was never able to show her that I loved the food of her home.

Tonmtonm is a food of belonging and of displacement. For people from Grand-Anse living in Port-au-Prince, tonmtonm is the single food and everyday cultural practice that connects them to home. It is possible to get tonmtonm in Port-au-Prince, but generally only if you know someone from Grand-Anse or go to the parts of town where people from Grand-Anse congregate. People from Grand-Anse make tonmtonm often – as did Melise and her family. It is as much a beloved staple as it is a marker of cultural identity. The way a person consumes tonmtonm demonstrates his authenticity. Real *moun jeremi* will swallow big hunks of tonmtonm

dipped in sauce with no problem, and they will only use their thumb and forefinger to do it. Real *moun jeremi* find it funny and, at times, revolting to see someone chewing tonmtonm rather than swallowing. (Claudine, for example, will avert her gaze dramatically, burying her face in the crook of her elbow, and say something like, “I can’t watch this!”) Tonmtonm, like most things and people who come from the countryside, undergoes changes in the capital. Whereas in the countryside, the breadfruit is steamed under banana leaves, in dusty Port-au-Prince people are more likely to use plastic grocery bags, which are far more available. In some areas of Grand-Anse, people eat tonmtonm every single day, particularly in breadfruit season (so much so that the word “tonmtonm” comes to stand in for “food” or “dinner” – as in “are you coming over for tonmtonm?” or “my aunt left you some tonmtonm!”). Breadfruit is one of the primary staple crops of Grand-Anse, and when it is in season, it is so abundant that people can eat their fill and sell the rest in the nearest market. People who live along the coast have ready access to fish (either freshly caught or preserved with salt). In short, in rural Grand-Anse, tonmtonm is a delicious, nutritious, and filling food that can be prepared in quantity for little or no money. In Port-au-Prince, on the other hand, everything costs money. All the ingredients must be haggled over and purchased. Ironically, the very qualities that make tonmtonm an affordable and accessible everyday food in rural Grand-Anse make it relatively unaffordable in Port-au-Prince: its localness, its Haitianess. Unlike so many of the ingredients that make up the bulk of people’s diets in the capital (like imported white American rice), the ingredients for tonmtonm are totally Haitian. Breadfruit does not travel well, and so it must be sourced as locally as possible. (It does not travel well even within Haiti, and for people who grew up in the countryside surrounded by large breadfruit trees ready to be picked at the height of ripeness, the fact of overpriced, underripe or overripe breadfruit in the Port-au-Prince markets is a continual

source of irritation and anguish.) The case of urban tonmtonm shows clearly how patterns of consumption are shaped by the aid economy, subsidies for US-grown products, and the ongoing, centuries-long weakening of Haiti's agricultural sector.

But tonmtonm is not only a food of rural to urban migration; it is a dish that locates its origins in that first catastrophic displacement and that first remarkable endurance, in the enslavement and transport of millions of people from Africa. Tonmtonm is very similar to West African *fufu* – a starch (generally yam or manioc) pounded to a doughlike consistency and then dipped into sauce and swallowed without chewing. In fact, tonmtonm is, less commonly but interchangeably, called *fufu* in Haiti. Tonmtonm is not identical to African *fufu*, however. Breadfruit is not native to Africa or to Haiti, but rather to southeast Asia; like several other ingredients in Haitian cuisine, it was brought to Haiti by Europeans as a cheap food for their slaves. Of all the foods commonly eaten in Haiti, and perhaps in the whole Caribbean, tonmtonm is the most obvious African retention, a dish that was brought to the Saint-Domingue by Africans and onto which they held, despite slavery, despite oppression, despite the colonizers' conscious efforts to break them and disconnect them from their cultures and their homes.

### ***Nostalgia, Homeland, and the Urban Lakou***

And so in Port-au-Prince, people from the countryside try to hold onto the lifeways of home. If they have a little patch of land, they plant vegetables and herbs brought from the provinces. And in Miami and New York, where good breadfruit can be hard to come by, people from Jérémie buy powdered West African *fufu*, made of plantain flour, and cook it in pots over their electric or gas stoves, even though it doesn't taste the same. In Port-au-Prince, regional enclaves form: people from Grand-Anse come together at the Guerite beyond the sinking old

train tracks in downtown Port-au-Prince, at the Wharf, in so-called Cité Jérémie in Cité Soleil, and even within post-quake camps. In the *diaspora*, Haitians form communities in Little Haiti and Flatbush, with markets selling Haitian products, and where people hang pastel-colored lace curtains over their doors, so the breeze can blow in, like at home. In the *diaspora*, exiled and expatriate artists create work of literature and music speak movingly of loss, rootlessness, and the yearning for home, and Creole-language radio stations play Christian music and news from Haiti, and every storefront advertises calling cards.

This nostalgia has deep roots, extending back through a historical system of household relations. After the Haitian Revolution, the newly-formed government broke up the former plantations and distributed the land to former slaves turned peasant smallholders. These inherited family land holdings became the principal source of peasant families' sustenance and capital, as well as being central to their identity and sense of kinship and community. At the center of each homestead was the *lakou*, a social space, a site of socialization, cooperation, and sharing resources and responsibilities. Lakous are homesteads consisting of several – sometimes dozens – of structures, in which the extended family resides. The lakou is often where the dead are buried — on the same land where they grew up, and where their descendants continue to live. The word “lakou” also refers to the principal site of vodou prayer, which (unlike Catholicism or Protestantism) has traditionally been a decentralized and individualized system of belief and worship.

The lakou structure is, in the words of anthropologist Gérard Barthelemy, “an egalitarian system *without a state*” (1990: 28). This is to say that it is an innovative form that developed in the absence of, or in opposition to, the state in the troubled years after the Haitian Revolution, during which the new leaders attempted to reinstate the pre-Revolution plantation order (Anglade

1982, Dubois 2010); peasants instead developed a “counter-plantation” system for farming (Casimir 2004). The lakou continues to be an autochthonous and effective form of social organization and cooperation to this day (Bulameh 2012), in the absence of a functional state or official authorities. This aspect of the lakou is particularly relevant to keep in mind as we consider forms of spontaneous post-disaster social organization.

In the city, and particularly in the post-disaster city, the traditional kinship-based lakou has transformed into a more inclusive, non-strictly familial settlement pattern (Miller 2013) — in other words, lakous have come to represent and embody new forms of community and fictive kinship. As the majority of people in Port-au-Prince are originally from the countryside, they have imported elements of the lakou structure to the capital (Anglade 1982, Dubois 2010). In the camps, accordingly, people have created versions of the lakou which, like the rural lakou, consist of several homes surrounding a common area, in which labor and available resources are shared. The camps are often massive and vast, and "run by" committees that ostensibly represent the camp residents to the NGOs but which, according to most people, are simply out to profit for themselves. The camps are imagined to be places of social disorder and terrible need, where aid has failed. Yet *within* the camps, there are different, smaller orderings of space, ones that (unlike the "camp committees") are not formally created by the NGOs that administer the camps. They are spaces in which people are not defined as "camp residents" or "aid recipients" but rather as members of small, collaborative social communities. The urban lakou has served as a source of "resilience" (here defined in the technical sense)<sup>4</sup> for people in the midst of crisis and uncertainty

---

<sup>4</sup>"Resilience" is a technical term in psychology and public health, referring to an individual's ability to positively adapt to stress and adversity, and which is specifically not designed to be applied to a population or society at large. I, like others, am cautious about using the term, as it has been sometimes abused in aid and journalistic accounts. As one long-term foreign journalist working in Haiti put it, somewhat cheekily, "I've found the term to be used in my industry as a catch-all positive to balance out the catch-all negatives: After ten stories about how they're poor, violent, chaotic and uneducated, we sweeten the pot with one about how, despite it all, they stay so gosh darn resilient." Although "resilience" as a technical term is not meant to be ascribed to a population writ large, the

(Miller 2013). In an interview with US freelance journalist Alice Speri in April 2010, Haitian journalist Michèle Montas (who also took on an advisory position with MINUSTAH after the earthquake) eloquently criticized the humanitarian organizations for setting up the camps in ways that accorded with international standards but did not foster the formation of *lakous*:

They have their own culture, they have to be given a choice of where they are going and you should explain to them why they should go there. The tents are set up one next to the other, following international criteria, the same ones that were applied in Aceh, that was applied in other places, that is applied in Sudan. Camps are supposed to be so many meters away from each other and it was done the proper way. Except that Haitians felt totally estranged in those camps. I said, why instead than having tents lined like this, why don't you make them face each other? Because Haitians live in communities, they talk to each other, they need *lakou*, which is the traditional Haitian dwelling, you have several houses around one central area which is a common area. You raise kids together, the village raises the kids. Everything is in that *lakou*.

The one-size-fits-all international response failed to recognize or plan in accordance with these effective, and uniquely Haitian, forms of social order and cooperation. This failure surely stems, in part, from the overwhelming magnitude of the disaster. But it is also due to institutional ignorance of Haitian culture, kinship, and social patterns, and to the stereotyped expectations of how disaster-affected communities in general function, and how Haitian communities in particular function: that they are unable to help themselves, that they more likely to resort to violence and disorder than to acts of solidarity, and that social bonds are inevitably broken by disaster. Yet even in those camps — especially, inevitably in those camps, those symbols of post-quake aid failure, of poverty and misery, of disease and homelessness, instability and threat

---

international aid community has repeatedly extolled the “resilience of the Haitian people” in its rhetoric. In January 2010, in his first statement on the earthquake, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon pronounced, “Haitians have proven their resilience many times. They are showing that same, extraordinary resilience and sense of solidarity today.” At the end of February the same year, The International Committee of the Red Cross published on their website that “the Haitian people are demonstrating remarkable resilience in the face of overwhelming destruction and personal tragedy.” This use of the term resilience in this context risks reviving another trope of racism, suggesting that Haitians are hardier and more able to endure hardship than people from other lands. The Haitian-American novelist Edwidge Danticat quotes a young woman in the Champ-de-Mars camp who told her, “If being resilient means that we're able to suffer much more than other people, it's not really a compliment.” (Danticat 2011)

— people have created *homes* as best they can, however scarce their resources; they attempt to create places of comfort and beauty.

## ***Two Case Histories of Displacement***

I will present two extended case studies to show the ways that experiences of displacement and migration have played out, over time, in two Haitian families. They demonstrate how the interconnecting forces of rural to urban migration (in both cases, from Grand-Anse to Port-au-Prince), international mobility and *diaspora*, and the event of the earthquake and the uprooting that followed it, have shaped the lives of these particular families. The case studies also touch, in various ways, on spiritual and emotional displacement and disconnectedness from home.

One of these families I personally knew before the earthquake; the other I knew only from 2010 onward. While I will outline at length their respective experiences and transitions in the years after the quake, during which time I knew them, I will also draw on their own accounts of their lives before the earthquake, in some cases, over decades. For me — as a narrator, and as an individual — these two stories are special and personally important. They are two of the stories I know best, but also about which I am least objective, and in which I am most implicated. I rented a room in the house where Melise Rivien lived, worked, and died, and I was buried in the rubble along with her and her employer, Madame Joseph, on January 12. After Melise's death, I felt responsible for and tied to certain members of her family both financially and emotionally; in those thirty-five seconds, my survival was as much an accident of fate as was her death.

I met the teenaged Kerlange and her mother Celita after the earthquake, and spent time with them at the hospital while Kerlange underwent therapy for grave injuries. Because I knew them, spoke Haitian Creole, was already established in North Carolina, and possessed a US expat's mobility, I accompanied them late in 2010 when a small US charity brought Kerlange to



North Carolina for nerve surgery and prostheses that were not available in Haiti. For Kerlange and Celita, I was a friend, patron, interpreter of language and context (in clinical settings, but everywhere else, as well), driver, and — it often felt like — auxiliary parent.

But if these two stories are personal to me in their particularities, they are hardly unique. They represent the macro forces that shape and constrain the lives of poor Haitians — forces that existed since long before January 12, 2010, and which continued to exist after the disaster, often in all the more extreme forms. The stories of Melise's family and Kerlange and Celita share several characteristics: gender dynamics and motherhood, rural to urban migration from Jérémie to Port-au-Prince, household servitude, death and loss, shifting family relationships and living situations, motherhood, institutionally recognized and unrecognized victims, and international mobility.

It is not coincidental that the mothers in both of these families worked as household servants. First, household servitude is incredibly common in urban Haiti, in a land where labor is cheap and labor-saving devices are scarce and costly. It is one of the main economic activities for poor people from the countryside who come to the city. It is also a gendered form of labor, in a country in which, prior to the earthquake, 44% of households had a female head (UN CEDAW 2008). Second, household servitude was the topic of my original dissertation research, before the earthquake. The class, power and patronage relations, human rights considerations, and diversity of experiences were a salient and telling way, I believed, to understand Haitian society writ large. It also meant that many of my first, and most enduring, fieldwork relationships were with household servants and their families. Finally, examining the life trajectories of household servants and their families is a particularly revealing — and often poignant and devastating — way to look at post-earthquake displacement. Even among the Haitian urban poor, household

servants are often particularly dispossessed. While it is possible to make a fair living and be treated with dignity working in the home of a particularly enlightened or progressive employer, this is completely dependent on the employer's values: nothing is mandated by law. Most household workers are paid little and treated poorly, and many do not have inhabitable homes of their own. Those people, who live and work in other people's houses, were particularly vulnerable at the moment of the earthquake.

The first of these life stories is that of the family of Melise Rivien. While I am discussing Melise's story at length, it is not an exceptional one. It exemplifies the long-term effects that a single sudden loss — particularly of someone who acted as the breadwinner of an extended family and a liaison for a rural community — could have far beyond the epicenter of the disaster. The extended first-hand narratives will include members of her biological family — her niece, her older brother, her younger brother, her young cousin — as well as members of her fictive kin, both in Port-au-Prince and in the community of her birth. The story will also include perspectives of other relatives and key figures in her life. Mostly silent, however, will be Melise herself. Aside from the memory of her words in the minds of those who loved her, and a few scribblings in my old field notebooks — dusty, gouged and torn after being dug out from the rubble — there are no records of Melise's life in her own words. What follows is an attempt to piece together her life, and her death, and the effects of her death, by her extended family in Haiti and beyond. The story of Melise's life is not simply that of one individual, but rather a wide-ranging account of migration, displacement and loss, connection and separation with the many people intertwined with her experience. Her story — their story — however complicated and at times convoluted, illustrates the permeability of households, rural to urban flow, the bonds and limits of kinship, and the far-reaching effects that a death from the earthquake can have on

the social landscape, far beyond the epicenter of the disaster. The story of her life, death, and absence involves the experiences and trajectories of the people she left behind: her daughter and niece, her siblings, her cousins, other people from the rural community from which she hailed, the other domestic workers she worked with, and her pre-earthquake employer. And it is the story of two houses, and two households: the house that Melise lived and worked in, which collapsed in the earthquake, and her own house, which was unfinished in her lifetime and remained unfinished after her death, but which nonetheless served and continues to serve as a place of coming-together, a bridge between her family's rural home and Port-au-Prince.

### ***Melise Rivien: Migration, Household Work, and Loss***

Melise was the third of twelve children, of whom ten survived to adulthood, born to a peasant family in a place called Degerme. Degerme is in the commune of Abricots, about twenty mountainous kilometers from the city of Jérémie. It is a spread-out community of coconut palms, red dirt, and narrow, rocky paths, where people traditionally lived off the land — growing yams, plantains, breadfruit, and manioc — as well as the sea — catching fish and shellfish and the occasional unlucky dolphin. Melise spoke often of how beautiful it was there, how lovely the sea. Degèrme is astonishingly picturesque. It is verdant and mountainous, with warm ocean beaches and warmer freshwater inlets.



Figure 9 and Figure 10: Degerme, August 2010

Fishermen in dugout canoes fish for bonito and jofi, and dive for conch and a marine snail called brigo. Farmers pull up human-sized yams and hairy taro roots from the reddish earth, and grow coffee, cacao, and sugar cane, which they make into kleren and molasses. There are so many fragrant pink-fleshed guavas and purple milky kayimit (star-apples) in the summer that children eat them by the handful, or just let them fall to the ground for pigs to eat. But Melise did not want to go back. "What would I do there?" she would ask, brusquely. "My mother and father are already dead. There's nothing for me there." What Melise meant by "do" was "work," and

what she meant by "nothing" was "no economic opportunity." The emotional weight of nostalgia — of the beauty and fruitfulness of that place, the fact and notion of home and belonging — came into conflict with Melise's modest economic ambitions. Living and struggling in Port-au-Prince meant that she might earn enough money to send her child to school and to help her extended family in the provinces — for, nostalgia and natural beauty notwithstanding, life is precarious in Degerme. (In the summer of 2012, as we nervously waited for Hurricane Isaac to make landfall, Claudine recalled that when Hurricane Georges swept the Caribbean in 1998, it knocked the breadfruit crop in Grand-Anse from the trees, and people were forced to eat the unripe, barely-edible breadfruit so they wouldn't starve.) Food is only free and abundant until suddenly it is not, and when it is not, one of the few things standing between its inhabitants and starvation are remittances and supplies from family and countrymen in the capital. Basic educational and health infrastructure is scarce and distant; schoolchildren must go to Abricots or beyond for school, and very ill people unable to walk must be carried down the mountain on a pallet or a donkey to reach the nearest clinic.

The story of Melise's cousin Isaac's life is one of loss, adversity, extended kinship, and relocation. Though he acknowledged that Port-au-Prince was the place that could afford him opportunities for a different kind of life, he could not love it, and had a deep and abiding nostalgia for his true home. Port-au-Prince was the place he was required to be, but it also could exert a corrupting influence on people from the countryside. So he explained to me, while we sat drinking soursop juice at my apartment and he gazed, pragmatically and longingly, into a neighboring plot of land fallow and overgrown with vines, and enumerated all the things he would plant on it if it were his. For Isaac, my initial question about his own history — his early life and his home — elicited a long meditation on Haiti's landscape, past, and future, as though

there was no way to understand his story without knowing the story of the places that had shaped him.

It's a long long story, and that's the story that makes me sadder than anything in life. As long as I can remember, I grew up without a mother, without a father, without a godmother, without a godfather, without a grandma, without a grandfather. Since I was one and a half years old, I never knew those people. I don't even know their faces. It's an aunt of mine who took me. She didn't have a son of her own, so she took me. She had three girls, and she took me, and I grew up with her. It's my aunt who I called manman, it was the man who stayed with her I called papa too.

This was my luck too, it was God at work, because they never sent any of those three girls to school. It was only me they chose to send to school. I don't know if it's because I'm a boy, or if because they saw I was somewhat clever, that made them send me to school. So then I went to school. As soon as I got to the fourth grade, I started being like a little adult, churning water to make butter [*bat dlo pou fè bè*], working hard in the face of impossibility, to pay for school. At that time, school was fifteen gourdes a year. But it was hard for me to get fifteen gourdes, because I was a child. But I got by somehow, and there was a little thing we used to do – we would go work in the garden of an old person, and we could make a little money. That old person would give you one gourde. And we would put it together, ten people, and we did what was called “atribisyon,” and that's how – each year, I managed to get money for school. It was a very difficult thing.

I've seen Haiti change. Here's how it's changed: it's like it started up high and it's coming down. It's not starting low and rising. It's starting high and falling. Why is this? Imagine. Long ago, when I grew up, every season, you would see the lam veritab giving fruit, when I was in Jérémie. You'd see mangoes giving fruit, you'd see everything you'd planted in the earth, it gave fruit. But that that time, there were trees, too. It rained often. Now, rain doesn't fall often. The trees, the poor who would like their children to have a little scrap of knowledge and awareness, what do they do? They cut those trees down to make charcoal. And with those trees they've cut down to make charcoal, all the earth that could have been used to produce, that earth, the rain falls, the wilderness washes away... There are places you get to in Jérémie, you see a lot of trees. But there are mountaintops, too, you can see that are all white and eroded. Not even grass can sprout. Because the earth that was on it, that would allow the grass to grow, water has washed it away. And when you look at Haiti now in comparison with Haiti long ago, it's not the same Haiti. It's not the same Haiti. Long ago, you used to be able to walk comfortably in this country. Now, no matter where you are, you're tense.

Everything has been degraded. Everything is degraded, degraded, degraded. Even people's minds are degraded. That means everyone – that means everyone

is just taking care of their own affairs. That means the way they – what could take the country somewhere, for it to be useful to everyone – it's not like that they see it. Like a lot of people know, they have shoved the country into a hole, and that's how it's in this *tchouboum* [deep abyss]. It's like that.

## ***Second Displacement: Provinces to Port-au-Prince***

Perhaps three million people live in Port-au-Prince in 2013, but the majority are not *moun Pòtoprens*, "people of Port-au-Prince." Most of them — especially the urban poor but many of the middle and upper classes, as well — either were born in or are the descendants of people who left the rural countryside or the smaller provincial cities. These areas are referred to collectively as the *pwovens* (provinces) or *andeyò* (outside, beyond). Present-day Haiti is overwhelmingly centralized. When someone from the countryside tries to *chèche lavi* (seek a better life), he or she comes to Port-au-Prince: economic opportunity and resources are concentrated in the capital.

It was not always so. In the immediate aftermath of Haitian independence, Haiti was broken up by regions, both geographically, but also by skin color (Anglade 1982) — social and racial fragmentation begot regionalization. Through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Haiti's coastal towns flourished as ports, and were all relatively autonomous. Their independence, coupled with relative geographic isolation, resulted in regionalism within Haiti and decentralization of both the population and political power (Trouillot 1990).

The centralization of Haiti is often said to have begun in 1915 with the arrival of the US marine occupation; however, other scholars have questioned this demarcation and claimed that the processes began some twenty-five years before that, that most economic and cultural exchange had long flowed from and to Port-au-Prince, and that the Americans merely imported the technologies that hastened the trend that turned Haiti into a "centralized space" (Anglade 1982). In any event, political, military, and economic centralization became more pronounced during the US occupation with the creation of infrastructure in the capital as part of the marines' soft power technique (Schmidt 1970, Trouillot 1990). Meanwhile, the hurricane of 1928 and the Great Depression forced regional elites to come to Port-au-Prince (Anglade 1982), thus creating



a centralized merchant class in the capital.

Under the successive presidencies of Magloire and Estimé (1946-1956), the city of Port-au-Prince was “modernized” and celebrated. The Haitian government constructed the grand and resplendent Bicentenaire in the seaside neighborhood of Martissant. Full of fountains, sidewalk cafés, restaurants, kiosks, and cinemas, it debuted in 1950 as the centerpiece of a world's fair celebrating Haiti’s bicentennial, a symbol of modernity, progress, and culture. These were the days in which Haiti was a tourist destination for North American on cruises. But underneath the public gloss of progress and modernity lurked the continued centralization of the Haitian state and economy, and the continued suffocation of the provinces. Little real infrastructure was being built nationwide, and the rural interior of the country — which comprised 80% of economic activity — was suffocating, and agricultural productivity dropped to 19<sup>th</sup> century levels (Trouillot 1990). Today, Martissant and its once-vaunted Bicentenaire are known for crime and poverty — and, consequently, NGO intervention — than for the dreams it represented under the Estimé presidency, though some of the physical ruins remain.

Urban planning in Port-au-Prince began in earnest in the in 1950s under Magloire. The idea was to build urban housing projects known as “worker cities” for people who would work in the factories. The history of Cité Soleil — in recent years, one of the most vilified and precarious urban slums in Haiti and indeed the world – demonstrates the causes and effects of rural to urban migration, and centralization, and multiple displacements throughout the twentieth century. It demonstrates the legacy of literal, political, and structural violence. Although now it is reviled as a symbol of lawlessness, poverty, poor urban planning and urban decay, Cité Soleil was not an accident, or an "informal settlement" spontaneously formed by landless migrants. It was — once upon a time — planned as one of the heralded new worker cities that were initiated under

Magloire. It was part of Haiti's modernization, development, and urbanization. Construction of Cité Soleil began in the late 1950s, under François Duvalier — only it was not called Cité Soleil but rather Cité Simone, named after First Lady Simone Duvalier herself. It was originally intended to house sugar workers, and the decaying, defunct Haytian-American Sugar Company (HASCO) factory still stands against the skyline, visible throughout the cité. As neoliberal reforms in the 1970s and 1980s (under Duvalier *fils*) attempted to turn Haiti into the "Taiwan of the Caribbean," Cité Soleil was meant to house manual laborers for the Export Processing Zone (EPZ). At present Cité Soleil is primarily inhabited by landless migrants from rural Haiti and their descendants — a population described as "highly migratory" as they frequently travel between the capital and their places of origin in the countryside to make ends meet. They are also displaced from within Port-au-Prince. In the 1950s, wealthy Arab-Haitian businessmen wanted to convert the low-income residential neighborhood of La Saline into an industrial zone. When the residents of La Saline refused to relocate willingly, a series of mysterious fires broke out in the area, commonly (if not officially) attributed to Duvalier's Tontons Macoutes (Maternowska 2006).

Development projects, as much a part of the neoliberal economic agenda as the EPZ, have hastened Haiti's violent rural to urban migration. Paul Farmer's 1992 famous *AIDS and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame* begins, not in the 1980s with the appearance of HIV, but more than thirty years earlier, with the story of the "water refugees" — a small community of people from a valley in Haiti's rural Central Plateau, who were displaced in 1956 when, in the name of development, a dam was constructed and their home submerged under a man-made lake. Farmer traces this displacement, which drove those peasants from their agricultural land and ancestral home up into the dry, barren hills to the place he calls Do Kay but

which is now widely known to be the town of Cange. (Those hillsides were deforested, eroded, and rendered infertile as a result of plantation agriculture and generations of poverty and deprivation, as previously discussed.) For Farmer, the construction of the dam was an instance of structural violence, ultimately leading the water refugees and their descendants to *chèche lavi* (look for life, and work) in Port-au-Prince and smaller regional cities. In those cities, working in poorly-paid positions as household servants and truck drivers, they fell victim to new social patterns and further manifestations of structural violence. Some of them contracted HIV/AIDS, and then brought it home, to rural Cange. It is a story of displacement, migration, poverty, and disease. It is also a story of international intervention.

In 1949, the ODVA (Organisme de Développement de la Vallée de l'Artibonite - the Organization for the Development of the Artibonite Valley) was created from an agreement between the Haitian government and the Export-Import Bank of the United States (Farmer 22). The Haitian government received the loans to begin the construction of the dam in 1951 — but according to the residents of the valley, they were informed of the plans only a month before the valley was flooded, in February 1956.

The dam was built to create electricity for Port-au-Prince, and was built amid a general push for “modernization” that took place under President Magloire. Now, nearly sixty years after the dam's construction, on the rare occasions that it is discussed at all, people in Port-au-Prince speak favorably of it. No one is particularly shocked or dismayed to hear the story of the flooded valley. Most people — and certainly most poor people — in Port-au-Prince are themselves migrants from the countryside, or the children of those migrants. They are accustomed to development projects that do not serve them. In general, people seemed to feel that the ends justified the means. When EDH (Electricité d'Haïti) turns on the power, the

bidonvilles and the tent camps light up. Everyone charges in their cell phones. They catch up on the French-dubbed Mexican and Brazilian telenovelas, and give themselves a few minutes of intrigue, romance, and escape from tedium, drudgery, uncertainty, and pain. Haitian konpa and rap in Kreyòl, Dominican bachata, and American R&B blare from storefronts, front doors, and tent flaps, and up into the night. This is not to claim that people are indifferent to the plight of those rural displaced whom Farmer termed the "water refugees," or unmoved by suffering in general. But they are unsurprised by it; it is *de rigueur* to expect that "progress" will be violent.

Farmer's story of the Péligre dam, and the displacements (first to the hillsides of the Central Plateau, then to the cities) that followed, is not unique or extraordinary in twentieth century Haiti, and it is not the story of the unlucky few suffering for the greater good. It is a particularly salient example, because the disaster and displacement occurred suddenly, all at once, with a literal flood, rather than incrementally. In other places, the environmental, political, and economic factors that drove people from their homes took place more gradually. But the general patterns remain the same.

The centralization of Haiti was both completed and embodied by the totalitarian regime of François Duvalier. Geographic regionalism — and therefore fragmentation of the dominant economic classes — had prevented previous authoritarian regimes from attaining total political power in Haiti. According to Trouillot (1990), the US marine occupation made possible a totalitarian regime, by concentrating political, economic, and military power in the capital. Under Duvalier, all the state power was concentrated in the hands of a single, omnipotent "president-for-life" who, via his dreaded Tontons Macoutes, used total, systematized repressive violence against opponents, and perceived opponents, of the state. In the Haitian countryside, peasant lands were undemocratically seized by the Duvalierists, further impoverishing the rural

population. In the 1960s, Duvalier closed all the provincial ports to international trade; henceforth, all trade had to go through Port-au-Prince.

In 1990, anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot described his own hometown with palpable heartbreak. The city of Port-au-Prince did not have the space or infrastructure to support its burgeoning population, and the countryside languished.

With its dirty slums and ostentatious suburbs, Port-au-Prince is a monstrous capital imprisoned in its own contradictions. In it live or work the most powerful and most desperate of Haitians... [T]he provincial towns wither, patches of dust guarded by the middle-aged: the old have left for the cemeteries, the young are packing for a better future elsewhere. Those who remain do so without will or intent... No one can even recall past splendors (Trouillot 183-184).

In 1997, an estimated sixty-seven percent of Port-au-Prince's population lived in densely populated informal settlements: slums, bidonvils, shantytowns (Institut Haïtien des Statistiques et Informatique). This compounded over the ensuing years; the urban slum population of Port-au-Prince increases 7.3 percent per year, and as of 2004, rural migrants comprised fifty percent of the population of the capital (UNDP 2004). Even before the quake, Haiti had an estimated national housing deficit of 700,000 units (GOH 2012).

Port-au-Prince is a strange city, a constantly transforming and shifting city, in a sliding land. Between the haste of informal construction in overcrowded *katyè popilè* and the suddenness of post-earthquake construction projects sponsored by the Haitian government, or foreign governments, or non-governmental organizations, the physical landscape of Port-au-Prince metamorphoses quickly. Leave the city for a month or two, and come back to find old buildings destroyed, new buildings rising, a camp suddenly, surprisingly gone. Familiar roads and familiar neighborhoods are rendered unrecognizable rapidly, and landmarks disappear, as though time itself were set on fast-forward. To live in the midst of it is to live in a state of perpetual mild disorientation.

But this constant change is not a post-quake phenomenon. Port-au-Prince had long been an ever-transforming city. It is a city of ruined grandeur, where great monuments, institutions, and infrastructure once existed alongside poverty, even a few short decades ago (Corvington 1991). It is a city of walls (Caldeira 2000), of cement-block barriers topped with broken bottles and barbed wire and bougainvillea – walls that reorganize the city, creating spaces of exclusion based on class and perceived potential for criminality. It is a city of secret gardens and secluded wonderlands, invisible worlds hidden behind those walls: accessible, visible, and known only to people who possess the literal and symbolic capital to enter. It is a city trying to forget and trying to remember at the same time. Unlike some other areas in Haiti, where historical forts and buildings stand and are designated UNESCO sites, Port-au-Prince is a congested, choked, dusty, concrete, vastly overpopulated urban space. But the past is everywhere, and it is not so much disappearing as it is transforming. People still give directions based on landmarks that have not stood in years or decades. Croix-des-Bossales, the old slave market in Port-au-Prince, is still a bustling open-air market, and it and the area surrounding it still bear the term *bossales* – people born in and stolen from Africa and sold in Saint-Domingue. Even before the quake, Port-au-Prince's Grand-Rue, frozen in black-and-white and sepia prints as the commercial and social downtown it was decades ago, had become like a coral reef — the skeleton of a once-living thing, half ghost-town, with life teeming around its bones, the rusted balconies, metal double-doors in the French colonial style that bolt like fortresses, decaying facades overtaken by tropical vines.



Figure 11: The past in the present

Grand-Rue, 2011

Even before the quake, the present resided visibly amid the shell of the past. Even before the quake, cement bidonvilles with damp, serpentine alleyways bloomed up the mountains, to Port-au-Prince's ragged horizons, overtaking those formerly ostentatious suburbs, as new waves of foreign migrants searched for life and a future in the only place that might provide one.

### **To Grand-Anse and Back Again: Looking for Life**

Many people from Grand-Anse say they are from Jérémie, the department capital, but this is only because "Jérémie" is the name most likely to be recognized elsewhere; in most cases they are not from the city at all, but rather from small rural communities scattered throughout Grand-Anse.

Grand-Anse is as far as you can be from Port-au-Prince and still be in Haiti, more than 220 miles. This distance is both a geographical fact and a lived reality; it takes a long time to reach Grand Anse, and the last stretch of road into Jérémie is unpaved and perilous and slow. Grand-Anse is mountainous and rugged, and (beyond Jérémie and a few other towns) has little infrastructure compared to some other parts of the country. Paradoxically, this is somewhat Grand-Anse's advantage, as it has more remaining tree cover than anywhere else in largely-denuded and arid Haiti.

You get to Jérémie either on the ferry or the bus. The ferry leaves from Wharf Jérémie, down in the old La Saline slum that was cleared to make way for Cité Soleil. The ferry ride takes perhaps twelve or fifteen hours, overnight, and is made up of *madan sara* (market women and sometimes men) traveling home to get more harvest, salted fish, coffee or charcoal to sell, and other rural to urban migrants who are going to visit family and home. The ferry is often perilously overloaded with people and goods.

The 1993 Neptune disaster, in which perhaps fifteen hundred people perished and three hundred people survived when the ferry between Port-au-Prince and Jérémie capsized (French 1993), continues to be a significant event in the memories and recollections of people in Grand-Anse. Most of those people were *madan sara* from Grand-Anse who travel between Jérémie and the capital. The ferry — which had no lifeboats or lifejackets — sank at night. According to reports, the terrified passengers flocked to the top deck when the boat began to take on water, and it capsized. It was one of countless many examples of the grim and accurate Haitian proverb *chèche lavi, detri lavi*, literally "look for life, destroy life" — used when, in an attempt to escape one's circumstances or better oneself, one instead meets with destruction or death. Paul Farmer, in an exegesis on structural violence, explains that *chèche lavi, detri lavi* could be invoked to explain the deaths of a rural woman who moves to the capital to work as a servant and contracts HIV, or the deaths of "boat people" who drown while trying to reach a better life in the United States (1992). The proverb — too sadly serviceable and adaptable — applies as well to the victims of the Neptune, or, for that matter, to many thousands of people who sought a better life in Port-au-Prince and died on January 12. Precarity is a constant in Haiti, but disaster occurs perhaps most frequently amid fluidity, between places or between conditions, amid even this most modest of striving.



In Degerme, an older *madan sara* named Babe is called upon to regularly recount the story of the disaster and her rescue, which she does willingly but with little embellishment. She spent three days at sea, floating on a sack of charcoal. She did not know how to swim; she grabbed hold of the charcoal sack as a plastic barrel fell and lacerated her side, and she never let go. By the time she was found, everyone in Degerme thought she was dead. Those were in the days before cell phones and electricity, so to find out anything, they had to hike to the nearest town, Abricots, to use a telephone.

Babe was found by fishermen in the sea outside of Léogâne. She was unconscious. The story is so familiar now that other Degerme residents chime in and help her narrate. When the story is narrated by the people of her community, it is always mentioned that her small change purse was still around her neck, and her money was still inside it.

"Charcoal never sinks?" someone asks. "Did you watch people you knew die all around you?" asks one young woman, in wonder. "That's what would kill me. I couldn't stand seeing that." Babe said that yes, she saw all the people she knew fall into the sea and drown.

Disasters make preexisting social patterns and phenomena startlingly visible. The Neptune disaster was a pivotal event in the memory of people in Jérémie and the small rural communities of Grand-Anse. Like the earthquake, it lay bare the ways in which Grand-Anse, however seemingly remote, is connected to the rest of Haiti, and how the centralization of the economy in Port-au-Prince affects the inhabitants of the most rural corners of the country. As in the case of the earthquake, much of the tragedy can be attributed to lack of State oversight and regulation — nonexistent or unenforced building standards, or an overcrowded ferry with no lifeboats or life jackets. As in the case of the earthquake, the poor and dispossessed ultimately suffered the most – not in the moment in which the tectonic plates shifted and the earth shook,

but in the long ongoing aftermath, in the years of displacement and amid the failure of aid.

The bus can be dangerous, too, especially on the narrow mountain roads. The buses are converted Blue Bird schoolbuses, with unintentionally disconcerting names like “Fidélité” and “Dieu Qui Decide.” People bring all kinds of things on the bus — often gifts and clothes, for the family back home. The seats are repositioned to squeeze as many people as possible onto the bus, so everyone’s knees jut into the vinyl of the seatback in front of them. Sometimes it is a slat of wood that is not attached to the frame underneath. With each curve or bump, you slide off and into the aisle. This makes it hard to sleep, or think about anything other than the bumpy ride.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Interlude; Jérémie at the Crossroads: August 2012*

*The bus to Jérémie travels down the crumbled remains of the Grand-Rue, stopping to fill up with gas. Vendors selling sodas, bottles of water, mints, plantain chips, and Dominican Guarina crackers jostle at the windows, trying to sell provisions to the passengers. As we pass the Bicentenaire, through the sprawl of Martissant, I smell marijuana and comment on it to Melise’s niece Claudine. “Oh?” she says. “I never knew what it smelled like.” She pauses for a moment, thoughtfully. “I’d like to know what cocaine is like, though. I’d just like to know what it looks like.”*

*“Like a white powder...” I said, cautiously.*

*“And how do you take it?”*

*“You snort it,” I pantomime. “Why do you need to know this?”*

*“Let me tell you why,” she said. “You know they used to find it all the time at home?*

*They used to find it in the sea.”*

*“No.”*

*"Yes," she nods. "The fishermen would catch it in their nets, big boxes with DANGER written across them. Nobody knew what it was. They used to lay it out in the sun to dry," much in the way that people in that part of the country dry manioc flour. "Or they'd try to use it as detergent. People from Port-au-Prince figured it out after a while, and they'd give the fishermen a little money and then they'd go to the capital with it." Grand-Anse lies between Colombia and Miami, and it is possible that drug-runners, suddenly finding themselves pursued by helicopters, would jettison their precious cargo.*

*Although people pointed to the fattest fisherman in Degerme and slyly whispered, "He found four of those boxes," I cannot present proof of the literal truth of these stories. As a social fact, however, it is intriguing and telling. It seems a metaphor for the tensions and connections between rural Haiti, urban Haiti, and the world beyond. Seemingly remote villages where people bathe in the rivers, children run around barefoot, and men fish in dugout canoes and women pull up manioc with their hands are not remote at all: they are at the crossroads of Port-au-Prince, Colombia, South Florida, and the War on Drugs. Economic and population flows to and from the capital, US policy toward Haiti specifically and to Latin America and the Caribbean in general, and foreign capital have shaped the lives and fortunes — and more often misfortunes — of people in rural Haiti, frequently in ways that they scarcely know or comprehend.*

\* \* \* \* \*

The term "rural to urban migration" sets up a false dichotomy, implying that the shift is unidirectional and permanent. It is not. There is fluidity; people who live most of the time in the capital return to the countryside for social, familial or economic obligations — to visit, to recover, to retrieve food or charcoal to eat or sell in Port-au-Prince, to bring food, goods, or

money for their dependents in the countryside, to attend marriages, to visit the sick, to bury the dead. In addition, while people may *live* in Port-au-Prince nearly full-time, many of them do not consider themselves *of* it. They are there out of necessity. They remain rooted, nonetheless, in their place of origin.

Manoucheka, a young woman in her mid-twenties, goes back and forth between Degerme and Port-au-Prince. Her life illustrates the fluidity of so-called rural to urban migration. "I travel here, but I live in Port-au-Prince," she told me as we sat on plastic chairs in the *lakou* of her mother's house in Degerme. She balanced her baby boy on her lap, and he kept taking chunks of breadfruit out of her hand and eating it. "I don't really live here. I can come and go. Then I come and see the kids, I bring them some things, and then I go back, to my home, to work. So that I can make some money, to send and give to them."

When she is in Port-au-Prince, she lives in a displacement camp in Carrefour, in the area called Dikini, with her common-law husband, the father of her baby. She describes Port-au-Prince as "*Yon jou byen, yon jou mal*. One day is good, the next is bad. One day you wake up like this, you've got nothing in your hands, you'll live badly. You have no money, you're suffering. If you don't work, you won't eat. And you can't ask a friend — if you have a good friend, they can give to you, it's all luck! You can spend the day like that, you don't find anything to eat, or you'll pray to Bondye to provide for you." Living in tents in the camp, she said, people faced the possibility of theft or rape. Manoucheka compared life in Port-au-Prince to life in Grand-Anse. "It's not like that here. Here, you can find a lot of coconuts, you can drink a coconut and eat from the trees of your mother and father, and you can't go to bed without eating. They can send for something easily to give you to eat. You can't just go to bed any which way. *Grangou nan vant pa dous*. Hunger in the belly isn't sweet." Still, one of the things she

brought back to the countryside, when she could, were the foodstuffs that aid groups give out in the camps — dry beans or a bit of white flour, with which her mother makes chewy dumplings called *doumbwèy*. The emergency assistance for Port-au-Prince's camp dwellers became part of the flows of money and goods within Haiti, ultimately reaching people far beyond the camps, far beyond Port-au-Prince.

Manoucheka's differentiation between life in Port-au-Prince and life in the countryside is in keeping with the nostalgic trope of the countryside. According to Manoucheka, stinginess — being *chich* — is common in Port-au-Prince, and the city is full of nasty, hateful, devious people (*rayisab*), which is why she won't borrow anything or ask anything of her neighbors in the capital. "Even if they have enough, they won't lend you. Me, I'm someone who doesn't go up to people. I always keep apart because — because where I'm living, there are a lot of *rayisab*. Like, if my husband makes a little money and then he goes to *lavil* to buy a sack of rice, a gallon of water and some charcoal, the neighbors hate you. They can even kill you. They can arrange something for you without your even knowing. That can happen." In Haiti, jealousy (*jalouzi*) is not merely an emotion, but an act of ill intent. *Jalouzi* at a friend or neighbor's perceived success — even something as seemingly mundane as Manoucheka's example of making enough money to buy basic foodstuffs — can cause someone to send a curse onto another person. This is what Manoucheka means by "arrang[ing] something for you" — she is referring to black magic, which could result in illness or death.

Manoucheka travels back and forth to Jérémie from Port-au-Prince, buffeted by opportunity, draws of kinship, and misfortune. She went to Port-au-Prince to "chèche lavi," as have millions of other people from rural Haiti. While she was there, she mostly worked on-and-off as a household worker or doing *ti komès*. (She worked, for precisely one day, in a clothing

factory.) She would return to Jérémie to bring money and goods to her family. She was in the countryside when the earthquake hit; she returned to Port-au-Prince soon after to discover that the building she had worked in as a household worker had collapsed, and that her foreign employer had died within it. After the earthquake, Manoucheka was again jobless. It was only after she told me about the death of her *blan* employer — how she had treated her kindly and compensated her well — that Manoucheka revealed other ways in which she and her family had been affected by the earthquake, and only after I asked, "But your own house, it was okay?"

"No, my house collapsed," she replied. "I had a cousin who died in the house. It collapsed. We were renting the house and it collapsed. The father of my little boy, he spent three days under rubble. His *this* was split, split down the middle," she said, pointing to her little boy's scrotum. "*This*." After that, Manoucheka went back to Jérémie, then, after some months, returned to Port-au-Prince, to the camp in Dikini, to her common-law husband. When she got cholera in Port-au-Prince in May 2012, she returned to Jérémie again to recover her strength, which is where we met that summer.

Manoucheka's back-and-forth trajectory shows how so-called "rural to urban migrants" actually live in two places at once, and travel between the city and the countryside amid economic possibilities and expectations, family ties, illness, disaster, and other vicissitudes. Still, in her own telling, the travel was not central; it was merely incidental to the events she spoke of. Startlingly, the death of Manoucheka's foreign employer occupied a huge portion of her narrative; she returned to it again and again, and it was far more prominent than the death of her own blood kin and the loss of her own living space in Port-au-Prince. Life in the capital might bring relative economic stability, and working for a *blan* was seen as a good job, often better compensated and with a higher measure of respect than working for a Haitian. But, like so

many other things in a sliding land, that economic stability was precarious. It could be shaken to its core and lost in a matter of seconds. And so Manoucheka shifted back and forth, between the rural homeland that could not perennially sustain her, to the camp in the bustling capital that might bring ruin, but might, through some means or another, contain the possibility for a better life.

### ***Life in Port-au-Prince in Other People's Houses***

When she was twelve years old, Melise was sent with an aunt from Degerme to Port-au-Prince, where she began working in other people's houses. "My mother and father were *malere*," she said, by way of explanation. "Malere" means poor, but its connotation is even sadder and more affective: the Creole rendering of the French word "malhereux", meaning unhappy or unfortunate. An old story: poor rural parents, unable to take care of their children, send them to the city to work as unpaid servants, looking for a better life. Through the years, she became a paid servant and passed through a series of households. She fell in love with a man who talked sweet to her, and got pregnant, but they never stayed together. She was perhaps twenty-two years old when she had her daughter, Julienne. Eventually she found a place working for Madame Joseph's sister<sup>5</sup> and then, a couple of years later, for Madame Joseph herself.

Melise lived and worked in Madame Joseph's house, and shared a basement room with her daughter Julienne and niece Claudine, aged twenty and nineteen. Also in the basement, in a separate small room, was Prenel, the *jeran lakou* (groundskeeper), who mopped the floors and did some physical labor for Madame Joseph and who was, everyone said, the only person who

---

<sup>5</sup> The gossip among the household staff was that Madame Joseph's sister, who was somewhat unstable, had murdered her previous servant and buried her in the yard. "They said she was sick, and then no one ever saw her again." While this seems unlikely, it demonstrates power relations and the mundane menace and uncertainty of life as perceived by household servants — how little their lives are valued, how they might be killed and made to disappear with impunity.

wasn't afraid of her. Bòs John was Madame Joseph's driver and did other odd jobs for her. He lived in a small cement house in the *bidonvil* beyond the gate — a house that was broken and sinking, even before the earthquake. When he wasn't working, he often spent the day in the kitchen with Melise, telling jokes and stories.

The labor of a domestic servant in Haiti is very physical: walking up and down the hills of Port-au-Prince to market every day, in the rain or the hot sun, hauling vegetables, heavy tubers and plantains, meat, cooking oil, and charcoal in their arms and on their heads; scrubbing clothes by hand in wide basins of water, hands calloused particularly from towels and jeans; sweeping and mopping. Cooking itself is labor-intensive. All meat must be cleaned, scrubbed with salt and sour orange before it is prepared and cooked; beans are shelled by hand; husks, damaged grains, and pebbles are painstakingly removed from rice before it is cooked. When possible, this labor is made more pleasant by telling jokes or gossiping with other people, or listening to the radio (Melise liked romantic songs in French, Céline Dion and so on), or singing to oneself. But it remains physically grinding. Melise detested ironing in particular, which she did hunched awkwardly over a bed, because there was no ironing board; it made her back ache. Being a household worker also means constant exposure to the most intimate details of their employer's life: household workers hear secrets and arguments, they know when people are having affairs. They are witnesses to dirty laundry, both figuratively and literally. They scrub the sweat stains out of blouses, the gum off the bottoms of sneakers, the menstrual blood out of underwear.

As the first person from her family to come to the capital, Melise acted as the liaison or conduit through which other people from Degerme — mostly, but not all, her relatives — followed her to the capital. With her meager salary, she sent money back to the countryside, and helped support newcomers to Port-au-Prince. Melise's cousin Isaac, orphaned before he was two



years old, moved to Port-au-Prince to seek employment and education. Three of Melise's younger sisters would eventually follow her to Port-au-Prince, where they would also work as domestic servants. The siblings helped their youngest brother, Jean, get trained as an electrician, and he, too, came to and lived in Port-au-Prince. Prenel also came from Degerme, though a bit higher up the mountain. She got him the job as the groundskeeper (*jeran lakou*) in Madame Joseph's house. Melise's oldest brother's son moved to Port-au-Prince and lived in Melise's unfinished house while he attended high school and then college.

Melise's niece Claudine — her sister Marie-Lourdes's daughter — first moved to Port-au-Prince in 2003, to attend school. Claudine was the oldest child of subsistence farmers, and was sent from rural Degerme to live with a paternal aunt in a bidonvil near the Port-au-Prince neighborhood of Nazon. "But she treated me badly," said Claudine. "*Li tap malviv avè m.*" The paternal aunt treated Claudine not like a family member but a servant; she had to do all the cooking and cleaning. After some time, she left that aunt and went to live with Melise and Julienne in the basement of Madame Joseph's house. After Claudine's own mother — Melise's younger sister — died in childbirth in 2006, Claudine began to consider Melise her "second mother."

### ***“Living With”***

*And cruelty is contagious: kneeling on coarse salt, forcing a victim to count the blows tearing at his skin, his mouth stuffed with hot potatoes, these are a few of the minor punishments some of us inflict upon our child-servants. Upon those turned slaves by hunger, who must suffer our spite and rage in all its voluptuousness.*

Marie Vieux-Chauvet, *Love Anger Madness*

One night, Melise mentioned offhand that she had come to Port-au-Prince and started working as a domestic so young. She was eating her dinner, after she had served everyone else,

eating the burnt bottom of the bulgur wheat with beans from the cooking pot with her hand. Bòs John clapped his hands and exclaimed to me, "She was a Ti Sentaniz! You should write about it."

He was referring to the famous 1960s radio play by Maurice Sixto, which uses humor and keen social observation to depict the misery of unpaid Haitian child servants (*restavèks*) and the hypocrisy of the people who keep them. At the time, writing and producing a radio play in Haitian Creole was itself an uncommon act of social justice. This particular play is the story of a young motherless girl from the countryside — Ti Sentaniz, or Little Saint-Anise — whose father cannot take care of her and her siblings; she goes to Port-au-Prince to work for a middle-class family. "Ti Sentaniz" is full of memorable turns of phrase and characters — particularly Chantoutou, the fat, spoiled daughter of the house, and her mother, who issues syrupy compliments to dim Chantoutou while screaming shrill abuses at poor Sentaniz. Bòs John had heard the play so many times on the radio that he could practically perform it from memory, and when I bought a copy of the book, we'd stand in the downstairs kitchen, reading aloud and making Melise laugh. She would jump in at some of the better-known parts. When I would come across a word I didn't know — old or rural terms from Creole, many of them somewhat barbed — Bòs John would teach me what they meant. Words like "aloufa," which means someone who eats everything in sight. "Like me, with sweet potatoes!" John said. "You give me a pile of sweet potatoes *this tall*, I'll eat all of them myself!"

"Ti Sentaniz" is very funny, particularly in its exaggerated depictions of nasty, hypocritical middle-class people. It is also, of course, a sad and unflinching depiction of child abuse. The name of the title character is no longer a proper name; it has become a synonym for "restavèk." Both terms are jarring and insulting. No middle-class or poor urban family will

openly say that they have a *restavèk* or a *ti sentaniz* - they will say, instead, "we have a child living with us." Likewise, few people will say that they are, or once were, a *restavèk* or a *ti sentaniz*, though many adult paid servants began in Port-au-Prince as unpaid child servants. The very idea of "staying with" someone outside of your family (*rete avèk*, from the French *rester avec*, the origin of the term *restavèk*) is humiliating and degrading. To say that someone treated you like you "stayed with" them is to say that that person treated you like a servant, a slave, an animal.

So when Bòs John said of Melise, "You should interview her! She used to be a *ti sentaniz*!" it was discomfiting. It was as striking as the day that Melise claimed the term. It was October 2009, and I was attending the "Yon Ayiti San Restavèk" (A Haiti Without Restavèks) conference at the Hotel Montana, at which representatives of the UN, various foreign and Haitian NGOs and a handful of academics presented on and discussed the issue of mistreated child servants. When I came home in the evening, I sat in the *lakou* with Melise, Julienne, and Claudine, and told them about what had happened during the day. I showed them the glossy brochures, the T-shirts, the DVD, and the tiny wallet-sized Universal Declaration of Human Rights that had come with the conference folder.

"What about me? Aren't I a *restavèk*?" asked Melise.

"They're only talking about minors," I replied.

"But I don't have my own house," said Melise. "I *stay with* [*rete avèk*] other people. Aren't I a *restavèk*?"

According to definition, Melise was, in her early forties, not a *restavèk*, though thirty years earlier, as a child from the countryside, she had been. In those thirty years, how had she changed? She had long ago turned eighteen and crossed the invisible threshold to become a legal

adult. She had been seduced, and had a child of her own. She had aged, become middle-aged, become sick with diabetes. She had learned to cook a wider variety of dishes, and to iron using an electric iron and to make juice using an electric blender. She could operate a microwave (though she tended to press the buttons at random, and then check on the food after she decided an appropriate amount of time had passed). She had become savvier to the ways of the big city, and helped other people from Degerme *chèche lavi* in the capital. But in some ways, she had not changed at all since her childhood. She had worked for no pay, and then for exploitatively low pay as a domestic servant for nearly thirty years. She had no more formal education than she had when she came to Port-au-Prince at age twelve; she still did not know how to read or write. She was no more aware of her rights, or able to defend them, than she was as a child. She was still very poor.

"Aren't I a restavèk?"

\* \* \* \* \*

According to Madame Joseph, the woman for whom Melise worked and in whose house she lived for sixteen years, restavèks were "a thing that practically doesn't exist anymore. Children, forced to carry buckets of water..." For her, there was a clear difference between the practice of keeping unpaid child servants, and having a live-in adult servant. Melise was "the blood of my blood. If something hurts her, it is as though it hurts me. I have no sisters, I have no brothers. Melise is my sister."

In fact, Madame Joseph did have several biological siblings, so this was meant metaphorically rather than literally. But Melise had, in the process of working for Madame Joseph and her family for sixteen years, entered into a kind of intimacy that extended far beyond

the economics of labor.<sup>6</sup> The relationships between household workers and their employers are deeply personal and intimate; their lives are intertwined. Domestic work is a situation in which the ostensibly public and formal (labor and the economic relationship between employer and employee) and the private (household and familial relationships) overlap and collide. Whatever the power relations, these are people who are sharing their lives.

The rather scant existing anthropological research on this topic focuses processes of identity, hegemony, and power as they play out in relationships of domestic servitude, emphasizing the interpersonal and intimate nature of these forms of labor (Kidder 2000); class-dependent conceptions of domestic servitude and morality (Dickey 2000, Goldstein 2003); “multiple class processes,” internal hierarchies, and fluidity of status that underscore domestic servitude relationships (Dumont 2000, Gibson et al. 2001); and the multiple, complicated links between kinship and domestic servitude (Moran 1992, Weix 2000). In the case of Haiti, *restavèks* are often biological relatives of the families for whom they work — desperately poor children from the countryside, living with and toiling for somewhat less poor urban cousins. For other *restavèks*, and most paid servants, the kinship is fictive — yet it is also foregrounded. Employers, for example, are often addressed using respectful kin terms like “*matant*” (“auntie”) even when there is no actual biological relationship, and regardless of the employer’s and employee’s respective ages. (So a servant in her forties might address an employer in her twenties as “*matant*.”) Many employers also act as their servants’ patrons — taking care of their medical expenses and their children’s school fees, for example. In a country with a serious lack of social services, this common form of patronage is one way of replacing the state.

---

<sup>6</sup> In fact, there was gossip around the neighborhood, among some of the *madan sara* in the market, that Melise and Madame Joseph were in fact blood relations, and that Madame Joseph’s property was rightfully Melise’s. This was untrue — Melise and Madame Joseph hailed from different corners of Haiti and were not biologically related. But as a social fact — as something that is believed to be true — it evidences both a cynical distrust of middle-class employers, and a naïve hope for simple role reversal and fortune. The rumor reminded me of nothing so much as the plot of one of the dubbed Mexican telenovelas the Haitian poor watch, when they can.

The paradoxes and differing perceptions of servitude relations in Haiti are apparent in the relationship between Madame Joseph and Melise: Madame Joseph perceived herself to be Melise's family's kind patron, while Melise's family perceived Madame Joseph to be their oppressor. Madame Joseph spoke often of the closeness between herself and Melise, that she was Melise's patron, and that Melise could anticipate her needs. "I would never ask her for a glass of water. As soon as I say I'm thirsty, she goes and gets it!" Madame Joseph once said. She was proud to report that she never asked Julienne, Melise's daughter, for anything. "I never order her to do anything." Julienne, for her part, tried her hardest to be invisible. If Madame Joseph was home, Julienne stayed shut up in the basement bedroom she shared with her mother and Claudine. She would tiptoe upstairs after Madame Joseph had gone to bed, to watch French-dubbed Mexican telenovelas in the living room (sitting on the floor, never on the furniture, with her mother and Claudine), but if she heard Madame Joseph stir, she would slip quickly downstairs, like a ghost. Madame Joseph seemed unaware of Julienne's disdain. Referring to Julienne's desire to go to university and become a pediatrician, Madame Joseph said that if it weren't for all the "*dezòd*"<sup>7</sup> in the Faculté de Médecine, she would pay for Julienne to go there and become a doctor.<sup>8</sup> Madame Joseph said she had offered Julienne a bedroom room of her own, upstairs in the main house, so she could study, but that Julienne had preferred to remain downstairs with her Manman. Julienne said this was not true. Sometimes Julienne would sit on the furniture, only to slide quickly down to the cold tile floor when she heard Madame Joseph's key in the lock.

While Melise was alive, and even more after her death, her family disparaged Madame

---

<sup>7</sup> Literally disorder, meaning rioting and other forms of political action and civil disobedience

<sup>8</sup> In fact, all of the facultés of the Université d'État d'Haïti are free of charge, provided that student pass a difficult and highly selective entrance exam.

Joseph for her treatment of Melise. And it is true that amid countless individual tales of suffering and deprivation in Haiti, Madame Joseph's is not the most sympathetic. But she, too, was constrained by her structural position. Madame Joseph was a *once-diaspora* who had returned to Haiti. She had lived for several years in Brooklyn, where she had worked as a hairdresser and beautician; she spoke of her time in New York in a worldly way that made her seem less worldly. Now, back in Haiti she was, in ways, very alone. She was divorced, and her grown children had left Haiti and lived in Miami and in New York. She had few liquid assets; all her wealth was in her house in Haiti, and she made a small income renting a room out to foreign NGO workers and researchers like me. She also owned property in South Florida, for which she could not pay the mortgage. This was a source of fear and anxiety for Madame Joseph who would sometimes cry and keen all night into the early morning hours.

When she felt anxious and lonely, Madame Joseph would call for Melise, who would climb the stairs from the basement up to Madame Joseph's bedroom, and sit on the tile floor in her threadbare nightgown to keep Madame Joseph company and console her. This particularly upset Julienne and Claudine, who dismissed Madame Joseph as a "rechinya" - a crybaby. "Sometimes my auntie will come downstairs so late that we don't even hear her come in," Claudine would say. "Sometimes she doesn't come down at all. Don't they know she's sick?"

I never had the chance to interview Melise formally about her life, or her experiences as a household worker. It was some months into our relationship that she, her family, and the other household staff decided I was not *konplekse* (stuck-up). By then, I had begun to eat my meals in the "downstairs kitchen" with Melise and her family, and chatting and telling jokes, and listening to Bòs John tell drawn-out versions of Haitian folktales. One cool morning, as I huddled next to the cooking fire in the dark downstairs kitchen, Melise said, "You're like the prince and the

pauper [*ti prens ak ti pòv*]! If your mother could see where I've got you sitting, she'd have me thrown in prison, wouldn't she?"

Looking back, three unplanned events hastened their acceptance of me. The first was that I became friends with Natacha, the outspoken, deeply gregarious daughter of one of the market women from whom Melise bought vegetables almost daily. I would sometimes buy soap or toilet paper or a bag of pigeon peas from Natacha's mother, and Natacha started inviting me into their home to eat and visit whenever I walked by. One day, Natacha came up the hill to visit me, and knocked loudly on the gate. Madame Joseph screamed at her: *Who's that? Who's knocking on my gate?* Many people of Natacha's background would have been humiliated by Madame Joseph's reaction, but Natacha was defiant: "What's wrong with her? She's a *dyab*, a *lougawou*."<sup>9</sup> Melise was pleased with my choice of friend: "I know Natacha and her mother. They're good people. They're honest people."

The second event was when Madame Joseph snapped at me, and I (my defenses lowered, in the early stages of dengue fever, though I did not yet know this) began to cry and wonder aloud why she was so mean, and Melise and Bòs John consoled me by telling me "don't pay any attention to her, she's *degoutan*, she's rotten." Yet even they acknowledged that she had not been born rotten, that she had been rendered rotten by life, by the things she had endured. "Have you seen the portrait of her in the living room?" Claudine asked me one day. "She wasn't always so ugly. Her face wasn't always that way. She was pretty when she was young."

The third was when Claudine was helping Melise do her work more quickly, and she sat on the tile floor in the living room, painstakingly polishing the details of an ornate carved heirloom credenza with Q-tips and vegetable oil. I came and joined her, helping polish the

---

<sup>9</sup> In Haiti, calling someone a devil or a demon is often more than a figure of speech, but rather reveals real suspicions that the person is doing tangible evil and has the power and desire to curse others.



wooden curlicues and scrolls.

After these events, Melise, Bòs John, Julienne, and Claudine started to tell me more about their lives and their problems with Madame Joseph. Hers was a middle-class household, a term with particular resonance in the Haitian context. Many household workers told me it is easier to work in a truly wealthy household than for a middle-class household. Partly this is for practical reasons: a wealthier household will often be able to pay more staff and spread the work around, may have more time-saving devices (like a washing machine), and may be both able *and* willing to pay their servants a better wage. The matter of willingness leads us to the more symbolic reasons that working in a wealthier household is viewed as preferable by many household workers: the truly upper-class are often described less "*degoutan*" (nasty or cruel) and "*konplekse*" (snobby) than the middle-class. In addition, the middle-class are often those that are most nostalgic for the "order" of the Duvalier dictatorship. But "middle-class," in this case, is an only sort-of-useful, US-centric heuristic for a household that is neither desperately poor nor very rich. It is not a very meaningful term. So I will describe in some detail the household in which Melise was living and working at the time of her death.

There were two kitchens. The upstairs kitchen, which was largely for show, had a gas stove, but there was rarely money to buy gas to use it. It also had a refrigerator, but only the freezer worked, so it was used either to store food at room temperature or to freeze it. There was an elderly microwave, but the display didn't work. This kitchen was clean, shiny, and well-lit. Then there was the dark, damp, smoky downstairs basement kitchen, where Melise did all the actual cooking over charcoal. Charcoal — cheaper than cooking gas, but the cause of deforestation and environmental degradation — is the only cooking option for most poor Haitians. There was an inverter that worked most of the time, to provide electricity to the

upstairs main house, but not the basement. In the basement, where Melise, Julienne, and Claudine slept, there was only electricity when EDH provided it. The house employed the methods of the poor, with its half-functioning appliances and charcoal fire, while projecting the outward appearance of the wealthy and modern.

Despite what her family considered mistreatment, Melise did not complain to Madame Joseph. When she expressed despair, it was in more universal terms. On January 7, 2010, Melise was crying, keening, and praying, as she peeled yams in the downstairs kitchen. "Please, Bondye! Please, Letènel!"

"What's wrong?" I asked her.

"It's normal," she told me, "to cry from pain." And then she said, "It's prayer that's keeping Haiti. If we didn't pray, Haiti wouldn't even be here. There is too much evil in this world. If we didn't pray, we wouldn't even have Haiti anymore."

It was five days before the earthquake.

### ***Household Work and Notions of Rights***

*"Who is naïve enough to believe that you can win a servant's heart with kindness?  
Inferiors only fear and respect you if you dominate them."*

Marie Vieux-Chauvet, *Love, Anger, Madness*

Melise's elder brother Dieubon described the life of a domestic servant. "It's hard! But they [servants] have no finances, so they have to. It's not something that's easy. There's disappointment in it. Because you're an adult, but the person, they... you're an adult but they treat you like a child. If they tell you to do something and you haven't done it yet, they scream at you. Even though you're an adult, they scream at you for what they told you to do, you haven't done it yet. And you, you don't feel like you can go on in that way. But misery makes

caterpillars eat tobacco. Misery makes caterpillars eat tobacco. Eh."

Her cousin Isaac was less philosophical about it. "To me, *sa se yon mizè total kapital*. That is complete and utter misery. It is they who are most disrespected. When you imagine, this is the person who is washing clothes, the person passing a damp cloth over everything, the person who is giving you food — everything is her responsibility. But it's those people who are most disrespected. That is to say: they don't earn, they don't sleep on time, and sometimes it happens that the place they're sleeping isn't a good place. It's as though the person, the person that carries the name "bourgeois," a dog would have more importance in his house than the person who is giving him food. I find that something that's completely ugly. That is a thing of *mizè total kapital*. It's not good. That situation isn't good. If they were to stage a revolution against that thing — that's one of the main things that's keeping Haiti in misery."

Claudine, Melise's niece, did not cry when she spoke of the earthquake and her aunt's death. She cried only when she spoke of how her aunt had been treated as a household servant — silent, angry tears that she wiped away with her hands, giving her words a pained, hard staccato quality. Her fury was not only about how her aunt Melise had lived, and died, but that for all her years of service, she had never truly been treated like a member of the family. For Claudine, what hurt was the dischordant mixture of intimacy and unfairness. By her reckoning, her aunt Melise had been a longstanding and constant part of Mme. Joseph's household, and so should have been considered, and treated as, part of the family. It disturbed Claudine that Melise had remained — in spite of her closeness to Mme. Joseph and her continual presence in the house — primarily a source of labor, rather than a true member of the household or (whatever Mme. Joseph might claim to to contrary) fictive kin. Claudine's ideal notion of household and family involves a disappearance, or at least a softening, of patron-employee power relations, to

the point of no longer being what Claudine terms "mistreatment" or exploitation. Her notion of what it meant to belong in a household was, it seems, incommensurate with the labor and power relations that had existed between her aunt and Mme. Joseph – though it also might represent a retroactive claim, hardened and intensified by the irrevocable fact of Melise's death.

Hm. The situation for people who are living in other people's houses.... that's not merely something I have thought about, that's something I've lived. I've never worked in people's houses, but I have witnessed it. Because of my aunt, who was working in someone's house for 15 years... If you have someone working in your house, who has spent fifteen years there with them, that person — you aren't supposed to consider them like someone who's working for you. Because she sleeps there, she gets up, she never goes out — like a member of the family. That's how they should be treated. But that's not how it is. People — hmm! — who are working in people's houses in Haiti. They don't consider them to be the same as other people. There might be some places that are better than others. I haven't lived in all those places, so I don't know. But the majority of people, they more often than not mistreat people who work in their houses. They always mistreat them. They never give them their rights. They never listen to them when they speak. Anything they do, they treat them as though they were marionettes, they program them, so that at any given moment they have to do whatever they are told to do.

Claudine's crying grew heavier.

Myself, you know — if I talk about people who work in people's houses, how they treat them — it's like they see them as tools. They use them. If we take the example of my aunt, Laura. And we look at Mme Joseph, with my aunt. You'd never say she had to treat her like a biological sister. But... she could have treated her like a sister.... like my aunt used to say, her mother had never put her in school, because they didn't have the opportunity. But what they did, they showed her how to wash, they showed her how to cook, so she could cook, so she could wash the clothes of Mme Joseph. But Mme. Joseph never appreciated that, because her own mother put her in school, she did everything for her, so that she in turn could take someone else and turn her into a tool, turn her into a marionette, so she could do whatever she wanted with her. To use her like that. Because my aunt didn't have — you'd think that a person working somewhere should have a certain time that she is permitted to sleep, a certain time that she can eat her food, just like anybody else. Because... she had a body, she had a body like anyone else. If you are person whose body sometimes feels hungry, who sometimes feels sleepy, and you've got someone working for you, wouldn't she feel those things, too? If Madame Joseph had seen her as a person like any other person, my aunt never would have died in that house. She is a devil, not a person. Yes, if I run into her I will tell her that to her face, I will stand in front of her and tell her, "you

are a devil, not a person."

She isn't the one who made my aunt die, but she is the cause of my aunt dying. How is she the cause of her dying? Because it's a habit that she had: every time my aunt finished making food, she was supposed to go up to Madame Joseph's "chateau", to bring her food up to her, and sit with her, and whenever she finished eating she had to go get the dishes and take them back down. As though she were a slave. She'd go up there and never come down. And that's how it was, the same habit, from day to day to day to day to day. It had turned into a habit, and so that day, when she brought the food up, Mme Joseph gestured for her to sit down, because when she was on the phone talking to her children, she'd make Melise sit there to listen to everything, she'd say to the children, "Oh, don't you lie to me, if you lie to me I'm going to pass the phone to Melise so she can hear it." She would always be gesturing, and Madame would gesture for her to sit down, even if she'd already given her work to do in another room, she'd still use her time to make her stay with her. I knew that's what she was doing. And that's why she was upstairs when it happened. You see what I'm saying? That's what happened. You know — upstairs — even myself, sometimes I'd bring the food up to her. And she'd start talking to me, such-and-such and such-and-such, she'd make me talk to her. I don't need to explain to you that my aunt was a slave, how she was used.

Claudine's position is complex. Like Melise, she hails from rural Degerme and grew up poor, in a setting where it is expected that people who cannot make a living as smallholder farmers will migrate to the capital for underpaid exploitative work. But Claudine is of a different generation and has different life experiences. Her aunt's labor as a household worker in Port-au-Prince and her father's labor as a cultivator in Grand-Anse have made it possible for her to graduate from high school at the age of twenty-two. She enjoys reading, writing, and learning, and one of the things she has learned is Haitian history and ideas of human rights. Her youngest uncle, Jean, possesses a keen intellect and loves to debate politics for hours at a time. She spent her formative teenaged years in Port-au-Prince, in the belly of political upheaval, international aid and intervention. She also has a naturally outgoing and social personality, and when she doesn't have other obligations, she spends her days going out and visiting friends throughout different neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince, many of whom hail from all over the country.

Claudine perceives her aunt's position partly as an insider and partly as an outsider: she is enough of an insider to be hurt and enraged, and enough of an outsider to believe that it is not normal, acceptable, or expected. She is criticizing Madame Joseph's treatment of Melise at once as a poor Haitian who perceives a violation of the relationship between servant and patron and the role of a "good employer", and as a more educated and literate person acquainted with universal notions of justice. For Claudine, the violation is as much about the labor itself as about the distortion of intimacy between her aunt and Madame Joseph. She is angry not only because Melise was, underpaid and mistreated as a *worker*, but because she was mistreated as a member of the household, a member of the fictive kin group. To Claudine, Madame Joseph relied on Melise emotionally as well as for her labor, and in that way Madame Joseph abused not only Melise's labor, but her friendship and her kindness, leaving Melise no time for her own life. The violation occurs both at the level of economy and the level of sentiment and identity. It was one facet of Melise's displacement: she was removed, however unconsciously, from the possibility of having her own independent life and home.

In making the comparison to slavery, Claudine draws on particularly Haitian notions of freedom and justice. So much of Haitian identity and pride hinges on self-emancipation from slavery and colonization, so to accuse a Haitian of enslaving another Haitian, as Claudine does to Madame Joseph, is to point out the injustice and also the hypocrisy and betrayal of the emancipatory mandate. But the comparison to slavery, in conjunction with the specific objections to Madame Joseph's invasion of Melise's private time and Melise's lack of a private life, resonates with the notion of slavery as social death. It would be going far too far to say that Melise was a socially dead person in the way that chattel slaves were rendered socially dead, for she kept her own name and she maintained relationships with her kin. Still, Claudine's

comparison to slavery is not only because her aunt worked hard and wore her body down for little pay. It is also because the conditions of her employment in Madame Joseph's household – where she lived, which she did not have the means to leave, where her extended family could only come and see her sporadically and even then with unease, and where she was on call at all times – prevented Melise from having a full biographical life.

Melise was paid two thousand Haitian gourdes a month — about \$50 US. In October 2009, the Haitian government mandated a minimum wage of three times her wage, 200 gourdes per day, but, as Melise said, "that's for people working in factories, not houses." The minimum wage law did not cover domestic workers, partly because it would be impossible to enforce, and partly because domestic workers were supposed to receive additional benefits beyond wages, such as meals, as stipulated by the Code de Travail. Consequently Melise's dream was to be doing something else. She thought that when she'd made a little more money, she'd start doing *ti komès* instead — participating in the informal sector, selling sundries on the street.

Why, then, did she not leave? There were a few reasons: the house was near Julienne's school, and though Julienne had graduated from high school the year before, it was still a better neighborhood than she could afford to live in on her own. Her concern over security was not so much for herself as for her young daughter — although Julienne was in her early twenties, Melise and the rest of the family still treated her somewhat like a child. "Li pa gen lespri pou sa" Melise would say when she thought about raising Julienne in a neighborhood where men could talk to her, court her and seduce her. "She's not yet aware enough for that." In Madame Joseph's house, she could protect her and shelter her.

In fact, while Melise half-jokingly called herself a *restavèk* because she lived in someone else's house, she did have her own house — but the house was not finished. While several of

Melise's relatives from the countryside lived a transitional life in the house she had been building for years in the bidonville deep in Delmas 75, the house was not done. It had two rooms, but no kitchen, no latrine, and only half a roof and no back wall. The money she had saved to finish building the house ended up going toward Melise's health expenses when she was diagnosed with diabetes.

### *January 12, 2010*

Melise had broken an incisor around Christmas, and for a couple weeks she went around covering her mouth shyly with her hand whenever she laughed or smiled. "I'm too ugly!"

I came to the downstairs kitchen the morning of January 12, still in my pajamas, and we all heated up leftover rice from the night before. It was unseasonably cold, it had been unseasonably cold all that January. "Sit on my feet, Lau!" Claudine said to me. "It's so cold!" Melise, as always, gave Claudine, and Julienne and me our food in bowls, and scraped her own breakfast out of the bottom of the pot. She was supposed to go to the dentist that afternoon, but decided that she should make sure her blood sugar was stable before going. Julienne and Claudine pricked Melise's finger and measured her blood sugar, using the diabetes testing kit that one of Mme. Joseph's foreign tenants had brought Melise as a gift from abroad, which she used only when she felt ill, or if she had a medical appointment, because she could not get replacement paper testing strips in Port-au-Prince. "I'll go to the dentist tomorrow, God-willing," she decided, and wiped her hands on her faded flowered housecoat.

At 4:53 in the afternoon, the earth growled like thunder; it trembled then bucked. Port-au-Prince seemed to collapse in a gulp of white dust. The house collapsed. The first-floor bathroom broke off and flew down the slope into the garden. The second floor flattened the first floor, and the roof fell onto the second floor. The only part of the house to remain intact, barely



even cracked, was the basement where Melise lived and cooked and spent much of her day. But that afternoon, she was folding clothes up on the second-floor balcony, where she had hung them out to dry. After they pulled Madame Joseph alive and barely scathed from the rubble later that night, she would say that Melise had cried out, "Letènel, letènel!" as the house fell.

Claudine was in the garden in the back, washing her clothes by hand. Her cousin Lala, age nine, was visiting, and had just gone into the toilet. Prenel was nearby. Claudine remembers the earthquake and its aftermath way, her voice halting with emotion. She recalled how biblically apocalyptic it all felt, how rumors of a tsunami caused everyone to run, and what they finally did afterward.

Me, I thought it was the end of the world. I couldn't express it — I couldn't feel what it could be, because I'd never lived through something like that. Prenel just said, "Oh, it's an earthquake, wi!" And Lala was with me, but she had gone to the toilet. I ran and left Lala, it's Prenel who went back to get her. When I got down the hill I saw everyone, they said "Don't stay, don't stay in the house, run, run!" It was still shaking, it was still trembling. I thought we wouldn't live through the night. Yes, I ran before Prenel did. I ran under the yellow coconut palm, I got down on my knees to pray. And then Prenel got down on his knees too, and he saw your room collapse into the garden, and he ran down. He flew. You know I'm smaller than he is, so when I fled I arrived before he did, I got out before he did. And when I got to the bottom I ran into Msyè John, and he was running, we were all running, and he cried that he couldn't find his children, and I said, "Msyè John, you are the only person I have left. I don't see any of my people, I don't see my aunt, I don't see Julienne." Then Prenel went back to get Lala, and we were at the bottom. And then I asked Prenel, "Where is everyone? Where are my aunt, Laura, Madame Joseph?" He said, "I can't hear your aunt. But I hear Laura, I hear Madame Joseph." After that, they went up to look for a hammer, so they could break through, so they could go in. And I kept saying, "Where is she? Where is she?" Prenel didn't want to tell me.

And finally when my other aunt came to find me and we all went down [to Delmas 24] together, we saw John and Prenel, and that was when I knew that my aunt had died. Because they said they had found you and Madame Joseph, but they hadn't found Melise.

In Degerme, far from the epicenter, people were at first confused by the earthquake, unsure of what it was. Confusion turned quickly to fear and anxiety, as people tried to call their

relatives and friends in Port-au-Prince and met with only dead air. Melise's cousin Isaac, a native of Degerme who had gone home from Port-au-Prince for the holidays, remembered those first hours and days. The earthquake, and the possibility of loss and death, brought kin relationships into relief and imbued past events and interactions with additional importance. Kinship and connection matter most when one is faced with disaster, acute uncertainty, and death.

There's no reason I shouldn't have died, too. But — I was halfway through philo [the final year of high school], and I was kind of tired. I felt tired. I don't know what it was, but I was tired, and when I'd go to study, I'd fall asleep and only wake up later. So I said, "Why don't I go home to Jérémie during the vacation?" So I went to Jérémie. And then the time came for me to come back to Port-au-Prince, on January 11th, I was supposed to come back to Port-au-Prince. But the sea was bad. And the guy — the one who lived with my aunt, who raised me, who I called Papa — my papa said, "Ah, the sea is bad, you're not going anywhere, no." And the mother of a friend of mine, too, my friend's mother said, "Oh, Isaac, careful not to make me cry no!" Because she thought the sea was bad, so maybe the boat would... you know. And I said, "Okay, I'm listening." I'm not a bad listener. I listened and I stayed. So the next day I was playing dominoes with one of my brothers, hanging out with my brother, and we while we were sitting there like that — I'm sitting there on the porch of my brother's house, near the kenèp tree. We're playing dominoes, and I realize I'm about to beat him. And suddenly he looks at me and — he has a little girl, and he thought his little girl had put her feet on his chair and was shaking his chair. But then he turns around and he doesn't see anybody. And we see the children up ahead, and they start running.

And so that's what why nothing happened to me. Because the school I was going to in Port-au-Prince — it collapsed. There's no reason I shouldn't have died, too. And there were a lot of students who died in that school.

I took out my phone, I said "let me find out what happened in Port-au-Prince, because Port-au-Prince is more crowded than anywhere." But I said to myself, "Matant Melise can't have died." Then I called Julienne, the phone just rang and rang and no one picked up. I called the Digicel, it wouldn't go through. Only Voila. Then I tried calling other people, and I couldn't reach anyone.

So that was it. The phone was ringing, and no one responded. And that was when we really started to panic. And then in the evening, I was calling — everyone was calling and we couldn't reach anyone at all. I kept calling Julienne, I couldn't reach her. It's a brother of mine, who stays in Route Frères. He's

someone practically who is estranged from the family, because he left Jérémie when he was eight, now he's forty-three years old, he's never once gone back to Jérémie. That's the guy I finally reached. And I said "Oh, what's happened? An earthquake happened! How is Port-au-Prince?" This guy told me "*Monchè*, Port-au-Prince is collapsed. It's flattened. *Li kraze plat*." I said "Oh! It's flattened!?" And after that he said "You don't have to ask me about your family, because I don't know where they are."

Then I was with my cousins Guigui and Robenson<sup>10</sup>, we were climbing and climbing everywhere we knew there was a cellular signal, and there was no signal. And everywhere we went, where there was supposed to be a signal, we couldn't get through. And finally it was Thursday [two days after the earthquake], Guigui and his papa went up the mountain to St. Victor, and when he came back he said to me, "Monchè, come here, I need to talk to you."

And the way he called me and said, "Come here, I need to talk to you," I thought, "Oh. Something bad has happened."

My brother is someone who is very sensitive, if you tell him bad news, he can fall down in a *kriz* and beat his body against the ground yelling *anmwèy*. So I went away from him, I went over to Guigui and he said "I can't believe Matant Melise could have died." he called Christelle, Claudine's cousin, Christelle told him, she can't believe it, but Matant Melise, a wall fell on her. I said "Oh." As soon as you hear "a wall fell on her" you know she's really dead. *Se mouri li mouri*. So we took our bags, we didn't know, we didn't know what we were doing. And that's how we came. And when we arrived down at the wharf, on Friday, the wharf itself was split, broken...

So we started at the wharf, we went up, and we saw Port-au-Prince collapsed. Flattened. Flattened. And at that moment, too... I thought everyone who was in Port-au-Prince was going to leave it, leave Port-au-Prince to go back where they're from. But in the end they returned. And myself too, I did that.

Bòs John and Prenel found Melise's body on Thursday. Her body had hardly a mark on it, they said. It looked as though the wrought-iron gate on the upstairs balcony had fallen on her neck and broken it, when she got on her knees and lowered her head to pray.

They buried her swiftly on a plot of land in a neighbor's lakou, along with the other earthquake dead from the neighborhood. They marked the spot, to remember it. Melise's family had vague hopes of bringing her body home to Grand-Anse and burying her there, with the

---

<sup>10</sup>Two of Melise's nephews, both in their twenties.

proper rites — her "denyè priyè," or final prayer. This ritual would have meant different things to different people; Melise's family, like many Haitian families, is religiously diverse. Many of her younger urban relatives have embraced the Jehovah's Witnesses, while in the countryside, most of her relatives are katolik and vodouyizan, with some evangelicals and Adventists as well. Many among them — including Melise herself — draw from multiple traditions and see no contradiction between them. For the Christians, the final prayer would have been a commemoration, an act of respect. For the vodouyizan, it would have meant the liberation of her soul from anba dlo, its passage back to Ginen. Whatever the ritual would have meant is, in the end, irrelevant. By early 2011, an NGO had paved over the plot of land where the earthquake dead were buried, and built a basketball court.

### *Absence*

*Se lè koulèv mouri wap konn longè l.*

It is only after the snake has died that you will know its length.

Haitian proverb

It is only in the aftermath — both short-term and long-term — of a loss that the meanings and repercussions of that loss will become apparent. This was true for Melise's family, as it was true for everyone who lost family, friends, community members or their place in the world in the earthquake.

Claudine and Julienne began to walk. They walked down Route Delmas, one of Port-au-Prince's main roads, to the house of one of their aunts. The scene on the street was surreal and nightmarish yet eerily calm. Few people shouted or cried. People, dazed and alive, many of them bloodied, nearly all covered in white dust, walked or limped the streets, looking for shelter, looking for assistance, looking for friends and loved ones. There were almost no vehicles on the

streets; nearly all the roads in Port-au-Prince were blocked with rubble. Buildings all around had disintegrated, and people were still trapped inside, pressed under the concrete. People had begun to stack the dead on the sidewalks and on the sides of the roads, wrapped in sheets whenever possible, whatever sheets were available, blood congealing on flowers, on polka-dots, on Scooby-Doo. On an ordinary day, that walk would not have taken an hour. That night, it took hours.

Claudine remembers that night, and how rumors of a coming tsunami made everyone run. The word “tsunami” was on the radio and on people's lips, and in those surreal and apocalyptic feeling days, absolutely anything seemed possible.

And then we went down to Delmas 24, that's when I thought it was the end of the world, because they said the water was rising, there were people who got all the way to Petionville, Kenscoff, who came from downtown because they said the water was rising. They went up on foot because they said the water was rising. Imagine. It was the 12th, at midnight, they said that. Ha! If a tsunami had happened in Haiti, that same day! There wouldn't be a single person left in Haiti, no! I don't know about Haiti, but at least in Port-au-Prince. You know Wharf Jérémie? If that water rises there, it'll go past Carrefour, it'll go past Cité Soleil, all the way up and everyone will drown in it. It's only the people up high who will survive. Imagine. So we were down on the terrain and we didn't know what to do. We...we just stood. No one was sleeping. Everyone was praying. Finally, the day came. And we built a little tent, and we stayed. That's where my aunt was. It was by a school, that school had totally collapsed. We couldn't stay because they were taking out all the dead children, laying them out, so we went up and found another piece of land.

In Port-au-Prince — generally — the communities closest to sea level are the poorest. The "people up high" to whom Claudine refers are high both in terms of elevation and in terms of socioeconomic class.

Claudine and Julienne slept a few nights on that piece of land with their aunt and her family. But they could not stay forever; they were young women, not children, and they could not impose on their aunt and her husband and their own children. Their youngest uncle, Jean —

Melise's youngest brother, the one who had the most education in the family — came and got them, and that is how they came to live in Melise's half-finished house in Delmas 75. It had been Melise's goal to finish her house, to have a finished roof, a proper latrine and a functional kitchen, and then move her family there, and leave Madame Joseph's house for good. *Nèg fè lide'l, bondye ba'l dwa*. A person makes her plans, but God authorizes them.

Claudine initially thought she would go home to Degerme after the catastrophe — temporarily, if not permanently. Her father, siblings, stepmother and community are there, and Degerme was not physically hit. In Degerme, she would not have experienced the food shortages, uncertainty, and smell of rot. Within a week, there was free transport back to the provinces. Claudine could have left the site of trauma, but she chose not to, for the sake of her cousin Julienne.

After January 12, I... I didn't think life had ended for me, but I thought automatically that I would go back to my country. Because when I was here, I was with my aunt, and on January 12 she died, and I didn't have anyone else here who could be responsible for me here, because I didn't have anyone else. I had other people, but as far as someone who could be like a mother to me, I didn't have that. I thought I would automatically go back to my country. But... what you expect is never what happens. I was going to go to Jérémie because... you know by Wednesday [eight days after the quake] there was a boat available, for everyone who wanted to go to the provinces for free, because at that point no one had any money. But because of Julienne, her papa didn't accept it, because you know a lot of people here who have relatives *lòt bò* who are helping them, people who have residence. And her father was going to make an inquiry for her or come and get her. So it was because of Julienne, because you know it was the two of us who were together. Her manman had just died. I didn't want to leave her alone. That's why I didn't go to Jérémie in January. Julienne's father didn't want her going to Jeremie. I didn't want to leave her alone. I stayed with her.

Claudine and Julienne did not sleep inside the house until May, four months after the disaster. Even though the roof was sheet metal, not cement, they were afraid of another earthquake. They kept their clothes and possessions in the unfinished house, but they slept in a tent out on a nearby narrow unpaved street, near where the market women sold spices and Maggi

cubes. On that street and throughout the city, other people and families were doing the same. The streets were lined with tents and makeshift shelters. These were not camps, but rather sleeping spots for people who were afraid to sleep under buildings. Eventually, they began incrementally to sleep inside again, always sleeping "with one eye open."

Melise's relatives slept in one of the two rooms: Claudine and Julienne in the bed, their cousins Isaac and Frantzly and their uncle Jean on sheets laid out on the floor. The second room they rented to a young man, his exceptionally cute and motherless toddler daughter (whom everyone called Bebe), and the young woman whom he paid a pittance to help him take care of her. Claudine and especially Julienne doted on Bebe, although they had no biological or prior relationship with her, having been thrown into a relationship with her by chance. They dressed her, fed her, took naps with her, walked her to school, and braided her hair. In the coming years, this second room would be a fluid space, occupied at different times by different people, some of them biological relatives, some not.

These people lived together — not without conflict — in the small unfinished house that had been Melise's, and now belonged legally to Julienne. Their major source of income was now gone, and their lives were transformed and their social relations broken and glued back together again badly.

Melise's unfinished house is in the sprawling bidonvil deep within Delmas 75. To get there from the main Route Delmas, you would walk through paved middle and upper-class neighborhoods of unappealing cement houses and bougainvillea, to where the road becomes unpaved and the homes grow denser. Melise's house was squeezed between two others, with no more than three inches between them. When you bathed at Melise's house, you hung your towel on the neighbor's window; when the neighbor beat her teenaged daughter for being a whore, you

heard everything. People were in and out of each other's homes all day, to chat, share food, watch soccer or Digicel Stars (the Haitian version of American Idol), tell jokes, borrow detergent, or style hair. There was little personal space, and little expectation of personal space.

Madame Joseph came to visit Melise's family only once after the earthquake, which they viewed as an affront. Madame Joseph, with her green card, was able to leave Haiti for New York in the weeks after the earthquake, but returned in March 2010: "This is my land. I can't leave my land." She was planning to rebuild. She slept in a tent amid the rubble of her property, with her elderly aunt, and cooked over a camp stove. When I visited her one day that spring, she was wearing jeans and gold earrings. Her nails were manicured.

Madame Joseph's aunt greeted me curtly and asked, "What have you brought me?" and began to rifle through my bag, only to find an extra pair of underwear and my toothbrush.

"Panties? What am I going to do with your panties, child?"

Madame Joseph called me "pitit mwen," "my child" and kept embracing me fiercely and kissing me, and then told me that they had never found her safe in the ruins of the house. "All my jewelry, they stole it." She sat on a rickety hard chair, next to a jagged piece of mirror, propped against a palm tree, and her reflection looked older, angry, sour, and sad.

"Those girls never come to see me," she said, speaking of Julienne and Claudine. "I did so much for them. I treated them like my own family. They never come see me."

"But that's not right," Melise's brother Jean would say, later. "We're the ones who lost somebody. She's supposed to come to us, because we're the ones who lost somebody."

While both Melise's family and Madame Joseph expressed their pain and anger in terms of individual choice and personality, fundamental differences in understandings about responsibility and accountability underlay their claims and counterclaims. According to



Madame Joseph, she had always done the best she could do as a patron for Melise and her family. When they pulled away from her, after the earthquake, after the house fell and the household broke apart, she was hurt and offended by what she perceived to be their ingratitude. In short, Madame Joseph believed that Melise's family owed her their loyalty and perhaps even their affection. According to Melise's family, Melise had been mistreated and underpaid by Madame Joseph for sixteen years, and the fact that she died there, crushed by the house where she had long labored and which she had dreamed of leaving behind, was to them a particularly bitter irony. In short, Melise's family believed that Madame Joseph owed them compassion and financial help.

Madame Joseph was apparently angry with me for what she saw as picking sides — for not thinking of her and her loss, while I brought tents and money for her servants and their families. Madame Joseph's losses were considerable. She lost her house, which was both her home and her primary source of income. She lost thousands of dollars of possessions — her jewelry, her antique furniture, her flat-screen TV. And she lost Melise. When she spoke of Melise, her sense of grief was sincere. Yet she seemed to think of it primarily as *her* loss — that she had lost her maid, her best friend, the "blood of my blood." She said nothing of the loss that Julienne, Claudine, or the rest of Melise's family had endured.

\* \* \* \* \*

Grief takes many shapes.

Claudine externalized it. She has bumpy scars on her knees from the crisis, the *kriz* she suffered when her own mother died in 2006. That was her first *kriz*; after that, she began to have *kriz* at all funerals and burials, and in other situations of stress and bereavement. She had a *kriz* when they heard, the Thursday after the quake, that Melise's body had been found. She lost

consciousness, fell to the ground, thrashed around, and came to only later, bruised and exhausted. In the months and years that followed, she spoke often of her aunt, and of what the loss had meant to her life. "I have resigned myself, it's my destiny not to have a mama," she texted me one night in late 2010.

Melise's daughter, Julienne, retreated into herself. She rarely spoke of her mother, and only in passing. Once in spring 2010 she explained that she had a big dark birthmark under her arm because "my manman craved liver when she was pregnant, and couldn't get any." It was the first time I had heard her mention Melise since the quake. She did not speak of sadness or grief — only of anemia, dizziness, the inability to get up, headaches. She went to the pharmacy for liquid B-complex vitamins to because she "had no strength" — a physical embodiment of emotional pain (James 2008).

In May 2010, Julienne took my notebook and wrote a message in it, in the slightly Frenchified Creole of high-school-educated Port-au-Princiens. Even as she tried to describe her own life and dreams, she retreated to the more comfortable generalities of talking about the country of Haiti instead. Even in her distance, she seems conflicted, torn between the heavenly and apocalyptic promises of the Jehovah's Witnesses and the desperation of her own experience.

It's the end of the world, the end of this system, *fen sistèm*. All these things were foreseen and written so that Jehovah can prove Satan wrong, because Satan claimed that when people have problems they can't serve faithfully. Bondye is going to show Satan that he was a liar. It's not Bondye that's giving people problems, it's Satan. Ever since Adam and Eve's disobedience, we became sinners, and even though Jesus came and died for our sins, there's still conflict. There are people who are for Jehovah and people who are for Satan. The people who are for Jehovah are always fewer than the people who are for Satan, on Satan's side, but Jehovah is trying to pull more people over to his side, that's why he hasn't destroyed the world yet.

Everyone alive has a goal, somewhere they'd like to be or something they'd like to achieve for the future. My goal was to become a doctor, a pediatrician. You notice I said *was* rather than *is*. That is simply because I can't hold onto that goal

anymore. When we look at the situation in Haiti, becoming a doctor isn't a small feat. The country didn't offer people anything before, and things have become worse still after the earthquake that happened on January 12. Many things in the country collapsed, and perhaps the people who could best help us realize our goals have lost their lives in the earthquake. So it has become more difficult for our goals to be realized. When we see these disasters, we ask ourselves: where is this world going? Is the end of the world at hand? Are projects and goals even important to people's lives anymore? All those questions have a single response, and a single person who knows the answers: only Jesus, who will establish a new world. But realistically, we are not yet in Jesus's reign, so let's reflect on my future and the future of the country. Yes, I would still like to become a pediatrician, to help everyone in need, if I can. I would like for the governments that are concerned to take responsibility for reconstructing the country, offering young people more means to live, taking children off the street. For our country to become beautiful, for tourists to come invest in our country. For us not to die on boats and rafts, looking for life in other countries. But that's just a dream, a project for the future.

Melise's death affected not only these two young women who were closest to her, her niece and daughter who slept with her in the same bed, but her extended family — biological and nonbiological — in Port-au-Prince and in the countryside as well.

"We weren't hit, but we were hit," explained Melise's older brother Dieubon. He sat eating cornmeal porridge and avocado out of a metal bowl on the scrubby ground outside his neat whitewashed home on a mountain in Degerme, while his goats grazed nearby. Grand-Anse was too far from the epicenter for there to be physical damage from the earthquake, but psychologically, emotionally, materially, and economically, the effects of the quake were far-reaching.

Dieubon described what Melise's death meant to her family in Degerme. He began by describing how the ground had quivered, and how he had called to his wife, "Did you feel that?" They did not know what it was, but soon they heard that it had been an earthquake, and that the shaking and destruction in the capital had been catastrophic.

I heard it on the radio, and people in Port-au-Prince were calling on the telephone,

"this is what happened, this is what happened," what a marvel (mevèy) it had been in Haiti, and what a mevèy it been in the countryside, and they explained what a mevèy it did in Port-au-Prince... It had done grave things. And then myself, at that time, I was in a crisis. I only had one sister in Port-au-Prince, and that sister used to help me a lot. Thanks to that sister, I had my son, it was she who got him where he is now. But because of the earthquake, I lost her. And at that moment, I didn't know how many days God would let her live. I didn't know how many days God would let her live. And then, we had to accept, the earthquake got her. After that, I can say that it broke our arms too, rendered us powerless. (*Mwen met di w li kase ponyèt nou tou*). Because she is the one who had taken the place of our mother. It was she who used to give us aid from time to time. But now she's not there anymore. That's why — if I used to spend 2 hours working, now I spend 3 hours working, because I don't have anyone to help me anymore. I don't have anyone who can say, "Let me send this for so-and-so." because everything there is, it's me who is left to do it. The wellspring, the source of life, the Great Power, she took off from His hands. (*Tèt sous la, gran pwisans lan, li dekole sot nan men l*). Now, we are forced to drag on, we endure tribulations as we can to survive. Because she's not there.

What she would earn, she never kept it for herself.. If she earned fifty gourdes, or a hundred gourdes, or fifty dola, or a hundred dola, she had to share it. She shared it. You understand? If this week, someone goes to Port-au-Prince, she might send a little bag of rice. When she sends that bag of rice, everyone would get a portion. Sometimes it was only two cans' worth, sometimes only three cans' worth, but it was aid. You understand? Now, we don't get that anymore. Since that time, we don't have hope (eskwa). Is there eskwa anymore? The person who used to send us provisions isn't there anymore. Since she's not there, there is no eskwa anymore. That's how things are, sister Laura.

I don't know if it was just in her blood, in the blood of her mother she got that, *monchè*, she took the place of our mother. Because she gave us all the aid. And at the same time, she was the one who brought our children to Port-au-Prince, she built, she got our children to Port-au-Prince... When we couldn't send the foods we had harvested to them, the children still ate. We didn't have money, she knew how the situation in the countryside was, she looked for the means to pay for school for our children. As long as she was there, she would help us. But now, today, she's not there anymore. We are cut loose, our hands open, not knowing what to do. (*Nou lage de men lage.*) *Nou lage ak ti kolye*<sup>11</sup>, but... We'll survive as we can. We will wait and see if we — as God places us here, if we can help ourselves, however we can help ourselves.

When Melise got to Port-au-Prince, she was looking for a better life for herself, and she was looking for a better life for the rest of us, too. Look. She's died, but

---

<sup>11</sup> I did not understand this expression, which translates literally to something like, "We are set loose with a little collar." When I asked Claudine later, she explained it like this: "It's like when a little dog is set loose on its own, it has no one. Or else a person who has no family. Everyone throws the whip against its back."

my child is still in her hands. Until this day, that child is in her hands, because he's at her house. Isn't he still in her hands? He's at her house. As long as he's there, he's not in anyone else's house, he's in her home. As long as he's there, she's still helping him.

After a few days, they called us on the phone and they told us that they found her. They told us, they went into the rubble, and in that moment, they found her. And when they said that — I'm andeyò, I'm in the countryside. People are looking for her. They find her. And even though they told me that, that the way they found her, it was in the lakou they had to... they had to figure out where to put her body. They put her somewhere, they just buried her there! And we have to accept that! Because this is how it happened.

Much has been made of the role of the *diaspora* abroad in contributing to the economy of Haiti through remittances. The role of rural to urban migrants has been less explored and less analyzed, though they, too, participate in the remittances economy by sending money back to their relatives back in their home communities. Melise was a particularly kind, generous, and patient woman, but in this respect, her actions were not exceptional: helping one's rural relatives is the standard expectation of the migrant to the Haitian capital.

In Degerme, the effects of Melise's death were felt beyond her biological family. Manoucheka referred to Melise as "matant" — auntie — though they were not related by blood. Manoucheka and Claudine — Melise's niece — share a godfather, and the families are knit together by affinity and proximity. Unlike members of Melise's family, Manoucheka was not financially dependent on Melise. Her grief was based on having lost someone who, in Port-au-Prince, far from Manoucheka's own biological family, would protect her and offer her advice, the way a mother would.

What made the earthquake? The earthquake, I don't know. It's the first time I'd seen such a thing in Haiti. The earthquake, we lost a *lot* of people that day. Like my aunt Melise, she was a person I loved a lot. She would always call me on the telephone, protect me, like when I was pregnant she said "Don't eat too much salt, no!" She was someone I appreciated a lot, a lot a lot, *wi?* She loved me, and I loved her too. She was a good person. But I don't know where that thing came from. If it was Jesus that did it, I

don't know, I don't know what country that thing came from.

### ***Diaspora: Mobility, Possibility, and Rupture***

Almost immediately after the earthquake, Melise's daughter Julienne's father, Constant, began looking for an immigration attorney to help bring his daughter to Miami. The months that followed were a flurry of repeated visits to the US consulate, DNA tests to prove paternity, and medical tests. Meanwhile, arguing that they had no idea how long the visa process would take (and not so secretly doubting Constant's honesty and capability), Melise's relatives urged Julienne to go to school, take English classes, and make use of her time. She quietly refused, and spent her days inside the half-finished house, occasionally sweeping or mopping the floor, shaking out the sheets, but mostly sleeping. She rarely spoke of her mother. Her uncle worried that she was depressed, or that she might have another crisis like she had had after the earthquake, but also chided her for her lack of motivation.

Julienne had only met her father a handful of times. Though Constant was far from wealthy, his family had more means than Melise's family. Though they were from the provinces (in his case, an area outside of Jacmel), it was not as remote or rural an area as Melise hailed from. "They always looked down on my manman," Julienne explains, without bitterness. Melise had loved Constant, but he probably hadn't loved her back.

In December 2010, Julienne received a thick manila envelope with a stamp across the seal from the US consulate. "TO BE OPENED AT US IMMIGRATION ONLY." On the front, it contained the things that were relevant for immigration purposes: Julienne's name and date of birth, Melise's name and date of death, and her father's name and residency status.

A week later, she went to a dim beauty studio in Delmas (EDH hadn't turned on the

power) and got a manicure and pedicure, and her hair relaxed and put in rollers. Julienne dashed around the neighborhood that evening, trying to see everyone, to say a quick goodbye. Claudine and I walked through the backstreets of Delmas 65 and bought some fritay (fried sweet potatoes, fried pork, fried patties) and sodas at a popular kerosene-lit place along one of the medium-sized IDP camps. We sat on a wooden bench and told jokes with the other clients — almost all of whom seemed to be from places around Jérémie — and kids from the camp who were hanging out. And Claudine said, "Oh, I remember how much my aunt Melise loved to tell jokes!" She never said such things in front of Julienne.

The next morning, Julienne brushed her hair out while gazing into a hand mirror, put on a new pair of jeans with rhinestones on the back pockets, a white blouse, and a tortoiseshell scarf with matching sandals, and rolled out her new suitcase. Constant had sent her money for these things, and, amid everyday fears of the thieves (*bandi*) that work *lavil*, her male cousins on Melise's side had gone to downtown Port-au-Prince with her to buy them.

Jean had to leave early, to go to his new job cleaning up cholera patients at MSF Holland, for which he was paid \$60 a week, so he could not accompany her to the airport. He is not a demonstrative person; it is easier for him to express frustration and impatience than sentiment. Jean worries that Julienne wastes opportunities. He hugged her quickly. "You're going to a better place now," he told her. "But don't forget us. Don't forget your obligation to Haiti. You're leaving, but someday you can come back and do something great here, *yon gran kanpay*, a great campaign." Julienne did not say anything, she just sniffled.

Claudine cooked chicken and boiled plantains for breakfast, on the ground outside the never-finished kitchen, but Julienne was too anxious to eat more than a couple small bites. Prenel wanted to come say goodbye, but he didn't get there in time. Julienne wanted to say

goodbye to Bebe, but knew it would just make them both cry, so she approached the sleeping child, nudged her, woke her only a little, and whispered *orevwa* before Bebe fell back asleep.

The ride to the airport was silent. Down by the airport, over the vast roadside camp at Maïs Gaté, a billboard soared over the sea of tarps and tents, the image of a huge disembodied hand with palm outstretched. It asked, "Are you in desolation? Jesus is your hope." There was no time for more than a few quick embraces. So much — almost everything — goes unsaid. Julienne blended into the departure crowd at American Airlines, wheeling her rollerboard suitcase behind her, looking small, then invisible. She disappeared into the airport. She was thrust then into a new space, as one of many people at the departure gate: dressed-up Haitian families, cool aid workers tapping into their BlackBerrys, eager chatty missionaries clutching their pillows from home. She boarded a plane for the first time in her life, leaving Haiti for the first time in her life, to join her father in Miami and join the *diaspora*.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I don't know if Julienne will return," Claudine muses now. "I think if she were to return, she would just come to visit. But then she'll leave again."

Claudine accepts that she will remain in Haiti while Julienne has left, and that however she may have felt that Melise was her "second manman," she did not have that biological tie.

"I can't be jealous because Julienne's not the one who made it this way," Claudine continues. "I am not jealous for that. Because it's her papa, and he's got only one child, he should take her, because her mother died, he's supposed to take her to be with him. I can't be jealous for that. No. And I'm not a jealous person. You could be jealous, perhaps, if it weren't someone in the family, who came and chose her of the two of us. Perhaps in that situation I'd be a little jealous. But that's not the case. It's her father, he's her blood. He's supposed to do that."



This is a story of kinship and household mobility. It is also, like the story of Kerlange and Celita, a story about women: of mothers, surrogate mothers, female breadwinners, female caretakers. This remains so, until the extraordinary conditions of the earthquake and international immigration law suddenly made Julienne's father more important than her ever had been before.

After Julienne left for Miami, her uncle Jean became increasingly paranoid that Julienne would give ownership and control of the house to her paternal relatives, who would turn Melise's relatives out on the street. Meanwhile, Jean's common-law wife Nadège — who, at eighteen years old, was younger than his niece — moved from Jérémie with their new daughter, and she became increasingly nasty to Claudine. The resentment flowed both ways. Claudine, for her part, thought Nadège was not only uneducated and illiterate (for which Claudine did not judge her, as illiteracy was common in rural Grand-Anse), but genuinely stupid. "*Li sòt, li pa gen lespri,*" Claudine often explained. "She's dumb, she has no awareness." She compared Nadège to Melise. "My auntie couldn't read or write, but she had her intelligence." Nadège would cook food and not share it with Claudine and Isaac — a serious breach of social norms in Haiti. At one point, she threatened Claudine with a knife, and Claudine clawed her with her fingernails. But, beyond such immediate reactions, Claudine felt she couldn't do anything about her relationship with Nadège. "She's Jean's wife," she shrugged. "She's become a *gwo fanm* [a big woman]."

One day, Claudine got a tiny brown kitten, which she adored. "Sometimes I go hungry so I can buy hot dog for it," she said. She named the kitten Santana (for the character from the television show *Glee*, not for the musician Carlos), and posted photos of it on Facebook. But, one night, hotheaded young Nadège kicked the kitten so hard that Isaac left in the middle of the night to take it to his older sister's house across town. "If I'd left it there, she would have killed

it," he said.

This seemingly small anecdote is in fact fraught with significance. There is the striking poignancy, this unexpected display of care: that Claudine, a poor young woman who struggles to feed herself, would not think twice about taking in and caring for a small animal, an act that might appear frivolous, gratuitous, unnecessary. But the meaning that I want to extract from this is about shifting household roles and hierarchy, in the aftermath of social and familial upheaval. Claudine was older and more educated than Nadège, had lived far longer in Port-au-Prince, and was a blood relative to Melise and Julienne, the former of whom had built the house, and the latter of whom now legally owned it. It might seem, for these reasons, that Claudine would have a more legitimate claim to the house than Nadège did. But Jean — older than his nieces, and male — had become the de facto head of household, and so his wife became the lady of the house, and displaced Claudine in the hierarchy. When Julienne had received her visa and went to join her father in Miami, Claudine lost an ally. Julienne could claim that the house was hers, but Claudine could not, and she became more and more powerless, more and more someone who was "staying with" other people, in other people's houses, yet again.

### *Third Displacement: Diaspora and Exile*

*Dèy, o, map rele dèy o,  
Ayiti, woy...  
Dèy, o, map chante dèy o,  
Ayiti, woy...  
Ayiti cheri, men pitit ou mouri  
Men lòt yo toutouni  
Sa ka pòte dèy la pou ou? O!...  
Ayiti toma, men san ou nan  
dyaspora,  
Men peyi ap kaba  
Sa ka pòte dèy la pou ou? O!*

Grief, oh, I cry out in grief,  
Haiti, woy...  
Grief, oh, I sing out in grief,  
Haiti, woy...  
Haiti, beloved, your children have  
died  
The others are naked  
Whoever will grieve for you? Oh!  
*Ayiti toma*, your blood in the  
*dyaspora*,  
The country is finished,  
Whoever will grieve for you? Oh!  
— Toto Bissainthe, "Dèy" 1977

*Sa fè de zan'm pa wèl  
Peyi mwen chanje koulè  
Sa fè dezan'm kite'l  
Figi li make mizè  
Nou pito fèmen de je'n  
Fè samblan sa va chanje  
Nou pito fèmen de je'n  
Di pitit pa nou pap tounen*

It's been some years since I've seen  
it  
My country has changed so  
It's been some years since I left it  
Its face is scarred with misery  
We'd rather shut our eyes  
And pretend that things will change  
We'd rather shut our eyes  
And say our children will never  
return

— Carimi, "Ayiti (Bang Bang)"  
2004

The term "lòt bò dlo" - the other side of the water - is, for vodouyizan, a designation once geographic and spiritual, signifying at once the ancestral homeland of Africa and the other side of life, the afterlife. But the term has been appropriated, often enough, for the *dyaspora*.

Relatives are said to be "lòt bò dlo" — not in otherworldly Ginen, but in this-worldly Miami, New York, or Boston, which have, in the words of Michel Laguerre, "literally displaced Cap-Haitien, the second major city in Haiti," in terms of economic activity and Haitian population.

The second, third, and fourth largest Haitian settlements are outside the territory of Haiti, made up of people who have fled their homeland to *chèche lavi*, because of violence, insecurity,

poverty, and lack of opportunity. One cannot talk about displacement and uprooting without talking about the *dyaspora*.

While the story of the *dyaspora* begins in the 1960s, there have been population flows to and from Haiti since the time of the Revolution (Laguerre 1998), and through the twentieth century, people of diverse backgrounds left the country, from intellectuals traveling abroad to cane-cutters traveling back and forth across the Haitian-Dominican border. However, the second half of the twentieth century has seen mass emigration from Haiti, in multiple waves. During the 1950s and early 1960s, intellectuals and political dissidents and their families fled the violence and menace of the Duvalier regime for the United States, Canada and France, among other places. They were generally educated and relatively wealthy — possessing both the economic and symbolic capital that allowed their mobility, and sufficient reason to leave — but the demographic composition of the *dyaspora* soon shifted. In the 1970s and 1980s, poverty, state violence and desperation, produced and worsened by the continuing, ever-dire suffocation of the Haitian countryside and, later, by externally-imposed structural adjustment reforms, led tens of thousands of poor people from Haiti to *chèche lavi* abroad. Many of these were the so-called "boat people," as they were termed somewhat derogatorily in the US press — poor Haitian people who risked their lives on boats and rafts (often small, rickety, and overpacked) in an attempt to cross six-hundred miles to Miami. Many died en route; many others were intercepted by the US Coast Guard and swiftly incarcerated at detention centers and eventually repatriated. The racialized politics of this policy produced a double standard that endured from the early 1970s through the 1980s, through changes of administration in both Haiti and the US: the United States granted amnesty to largely white Cubans fleeing a left-wing regime, declaring them legal refugees, while deporting largely-black Haitians fleeing a notoriously dictatorial right-wing

regime, declaring them "illegal aliens" (Laguerre 1998). US immigration policy toward Haiti remained essentially unchanged into the 1990s, as ever more people attempted to flee Haiti under threat of political violence by the military junta that overthrew Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1991: between 1991 and 1992 alone, at least 37,000 Haitians attempted the dangerous sea voyage (Mitchell 1994).

In his poem "Boat People," renowned Haitian poet Félix Morisseau-Leroy drew explicit parallels between the so-called "boat people" and their enslaved ancestors borne across the sea on *négriers*. He described the repeating patterns of fleeing, of moving, of displacement.

We are all in a drowning boat  
Happened before at St. Domingue  
We are the ones called boat people  
We all died long ago  
What else can frighten us  
Let them call us boat people  
We fight a long time with poverty  
On our islands, the sea, everywhere  
We never say we are not boat people

In Africa they chase us with dogs  
Chained our feet, embark us  
Who then called us boat people?  
Half the cargo perished  
The rest sold at Bossal Market  
It's them who call us boat people

We stamp our feet down, the earth shakes  
Up to Louisiana, down to Venezuela  
Who would come and call us boat people?  
A bad season in our country  
The hungry dog eats thorns  
They didn't call us boat people yet  
We looked for jobs and freedom  
And they piled us on again: Cargo—Direct to Miami  
They start to call us boat people  
We run from the rain at Fort Dimanche  
But land in the river at Krome  
It's them who call us boat people

Miami heat eats away our hearts  
Chicago cold explodes our stomach  
Boat people boat people boat people  
Except for the Indians—  
All Americans are immigrants

But it's us they call boat people  
We don't bring drugs in our bags  
But courage and strength to work  
Boat people—Yes, that's all right, boat people  
We don't come to make trouble  
We come with all respect  
It's them who call us boat people

We have no need to yell or scream  
But all boat people are equal, the same  
All boat people are boat people

One day we'll stand up, put down our feet  
As we did at St. Domingue  
They'll know who are boat people  
That day, be it Christopher Columbus  
Or Henry Kissinger—They will know  
Whom we ourselves call people

US policy toward the so-called "boat people" was unjust, inflexible, and incognizant of Haitian patterns of life, family, and mobility. Karen McCarthy Brown writes poignantly of a visit to supposedly unaccompanied Haitian refugee children in a detention facility in the 1980s, and how the US Immigration and Naturalization Service not only treated them subhumanly, but lacked the cultural background or bureaucratic category to recognize the fluidity of the non-biological kin networks in which the children were situated. "The visit confirmed my suspicion that many of these children had not been traveling alone but in fact had been accompanied by adults, adults who may even had raised them but were not necessarily blood kin. Many children in Haiti are raised by 'aunts' or godparents, but the INS did not recognize such ad hoc parenting, and agency bureaucrats had separated the children from their traveling companions and confined them in a minimum-security camp in upstate New York" (252).

Though Haitian "boat people" no longer dominate the US news cycle, Haitians continue to leave Haiti. As I write this, in late 2013, the crowd of people waiting outside the Dominican visa office in Pétionville spills into the streets, every single day, and they will stand there, all day, hoping to get their papers. The older lady who sells fresh shrimp and conch door-to-door tells me about her sons, one of whom is in the Dominican Republic and one of whom is illegally in Brazil. "He was in a *batèy*," a poor, rural work camp, "but now he is well." For the *diaspora* is expanding, beyond those traditional centers of Haitian expatriate life (Miami, New York, Boston, Montréal). Now Haitian people, particularly poor Haitians, are "looking for life" in the Butterball poultry plants of Mount Olive, North Carolina, and in the jungles of Brazil.

The *diaspora* has produced transnational families and kinship networks, "connected to one another through a flow of mutual financial help, periodic visits and telephone communications" (Laguerre 1998) and now email, Facebook, Skype, and other forms of increasingly accessible and affordable electronic communication. Particularly among poorer Haitians in the *diaspora*, there are several "subsidiary households" tied together through dependence and obligation to the "headquarters household" in Haiti (Laguerre 1998). Within this seeming flux, in other words, there exist traditional forms of continuity and cohesiveness, producing what Haitian academic Charlene Désir terms a "diasporic lakou" (2011). Such familial fluidity is, I would argue, also reflected in kin relations *within* Haiti, in the ways in which individual people, finances and other material resources such as clothes and food, and information flow from the provinces to Port-au-Prince and back, or from household to household among the extended kin group within Port-au-Prince itself — as we will see illustrated in the case studies I will provide later in this chapter. *Kiltivatè* (peasant farmers) in the countryside not only bring their harvest to provincial towns and Port-au-Prince to sell, they also (whenever they

have enough to feed themselves) send food and raw materials to their relatives in the capital. Claudine's father, for example, would send yams, breadfruit, dried fish, and a chicken for Claudine; this made her happy not only because it temporarily gave her plenty to eat, but also because it meant that her father and the rest of her family in Degerme, too, had enough. Meanwhile, rural migrants living in Port-au-Prince always tried to bring home gifts, often clothing or processed foods, for their relatives in the countryside.

While Laguerre focuses on the economic and logistical patterns of kinship within the *dyaspora*, both Karen McCarthy Brown (2001) and Karen Richman (2005) unravel the complex interplay of spirituality, family ties and geography, showing some of the ways in which vodouyizan carry their gods and their ancestors with them, across the sea not to Africa but to America, and recreate what was. Some of the dispossessed, frightened children McCarthy Brown visited in the detention center called upon the spirits for help and were mounted by the *lwa* (to the shock, fear, and disapproval of the detention facility's staff), causing McCarthy Brown to muse that "there might be a parallel between what I had seen among the children of the boat people and the behavior of slaves newly arrived in Haiti. It is a universal instinct, I suppose, to turn to religion in times of crisis... [C]ut loose from their African base and institutional moorings, the spirits may well have burst into flower" (253).

### ***Julienne in Miami***

Julienne's father, Constant, is short and portly, with a mustache. He works unpredictable hours as a valet parking attendant at a condominium on South Beach. Like Julienne, he considers himself a Jehovah's Witness — though he was effectively banned from the church when it was revealed that he had gotten his US residency by fraudulently marrying an elderly Haitian woman — another manifestation of the complexities and exigencies that exist at the



crossroads of kinship, international law, and desperation. This is why Julienne now lives — with her father and sometimes her paternal grandmother — in a sterile one-bedroom apartment in an eight-storey senior citizens' complex in Little Haiti. It has a wheelchair-accessible shower, a fold-out foam couch, a bowl of plastic fruit on the table, and a huge flat-screen television, tuned to cable news or pro wrestling.

Julienne is enjoying a small, circumscribed version of the American dream. She and Constant live adequately, between his salary and government benefits. At the grocery and dollar stores Julienne frequents in Little Haiti, there is no stigma or shame attached to swiping an EBT card (the electronic replacement for food stamps for state welfare recipients) at the cash register. Their home is clean and comfortable; there is always electricity and hot running water. Julienne has gotten her driver's license, and she and Constant share his secondhand Mazda. She attends classes at a local community college, to which she takes the bus or drives. She has a job as a ticket-taker at the American Airlines arena in downtown Miami, and she hopes to save up enough money to buy a car of her own. She has begun to go by a new nickname at her college, one she never went by in Haiti. Her written English and comprehension have gotten very good, although because she is shy and lives in a Haitian enclave, she rarely speaks it. Over time, Julienne has become more and more distant from her maternal family, and more embedded in her father's family. Constant has recently learned that he fathered a son he did not previously know about in Haiti; he is now working on getting him a visa to come to Miami, too. Julienne talks to him on the phone sometimes. But she does not often speak to her maternal relatives. She scarcely speaks of Melise. When I visit Miami, often en route to or from Port-au-Prince, she asks me for news of Claudine, of Isaac, of the other relatives she left behind.

"Why don't you just call them?" I ask.

"Oh!" she'll say, and shake her head. She says she means to call, she will call, she promises. But this happens all the time, with the diaspora. They mean to get a phone card and call their relatives in Haiti once in a while. But it is hard. It's too emotional. It's painful or frustrating to call. The relatives in Haiti have too many needs — they always need money, they always have an emergency, and they don't realize how hard life really can be in the US. And so on. They mean to call. Not today, but soon. Julienne's relatives in Haiti are not surprised that they rarely hear from her, because they have seen it over and over with people who leave. Again, I become an intermediary. They ask how she is doing, if she speaks English now, if she has gained weight. Perhaps there is a sense of hurt or abandonment, but it is ordinary, not acute. They do not impugn Julienne. The outcomes of her life so far — her leaving her homeland, going to Miami, and achieving a less precarious life than her life in Haiti — are not determined by her own choice.

In Haiti, over time, Claudine's story became entwined with my own — a complicated exigency of living and doing research in a setting such as Haiti, in which material needs and emotional connections are so pronounced, in which objectivity and analytic distance ultimately cannot exist. In a sense, I became another kind of fictive relative: part sister, part godmother. When my own grandmother died in 2011, I used the small sum of money she left for me so Claudine could live a more comfortable life and attend nursing school. If she is sick or if she has a problem, she calls me or sends me a Facebook message. Like so many people in the Haitian *diaspora*, I have people who rely on me across the sea, I have inevitably become part of the remittances economy.

### ***Kerlange and Celita: Tragedy, Charity, Family, and Mobility***

I am from the area of Gomier [Grand-Anse]. Ever since I was born, I never knew my mother. They tell me she's still there, she's still alive, but I don't know her, I don't know where she is. I was with my godmother ever since I was small. Then my godmother died and I came with my uncle here, to Port-au-Prince. After that, I never went back to Jérémie because it was my godmother I was most used to. When my godmother died I was alone in that house. All her children had their own houses. And I had a sister but I didn't know it was my sister. I thought it was my godmother's child but she was my sister too. That is to say, my father, the one who baptized me as my father, wasn't my real father. It wasn't until I was twenty-three that I knew my real father.

So I spent some time living with my uncle. He didn't pay me, no! I just stayed with him [*mwèn rete avèk li*]. But he never paid me. I was giving him service. And then I got pregnant with Kerlange, and my uncle wanted to throw me out, and so on. He told me I had to give her to an orphanage, and I didn't want to. So I started working for another lady, but that lady died. Then I went back to my uncle's house, and I had to leave Kerlange with her aunt. He wanted me to give her to an orphanage so that I could still keep working at his house. You know, it was me working in that house, providing service. If I had Kerlange with me, I wouldn't be able to do everything I was supposed to do for him. But I didn't give her up. I didn't give her to the orphanage.

I couldn't take care of her, you understand? I was in so much misery with my uncle, it would have been better for me to let her go, into an orphanage. But there were people who told me not to give her up. I didn't give her up, finally. I didn't take good care of her, in the end, but I didn't give her up.

When Kerlange started to crawl and then walk, her aunt Emmanuella took her out of my hands. And she grew up with her aunt since she was small, and it was her aunt she always called "manman." But I always went to see her, I always brought her things. And then when I got pregnant again with Fabi, she grew up in the same house, too, and called her aunt "manman." And Josue called his aunt "manman" too. So that's how it was. The children were never in my hands, but I always took them to school in the mornings and I went and got them in the afternoons, and it was always me in the mornings who put talcum powder on them. And that's how it always was.

In this succinct way, Celita Louis narrates her story, from her own birth through her motherhood, up until the moment of the earthquake. The earthquake profoundly transformed the life of Kerlange Saintil and her biological mother, Celita, and added additional layers of mobility

and uncertainty to lives that were already fluid and uncertain. Theirs is a story that begins — like Melise's — in the rural countryside of Grand-Anse, but which is buffeted to the quartiers populaires and houses of others in Port-au-Prince, to a Pétionville hospital, to suburban North Carolina. Amid these shifts, people took on new roles and new relationships. Teenaged Kerlange went from being an ordinary Haitian schoolgirl to being an earthquake victim, media subject, charity recipient, and international traveler. Over a longer period of time, Celita went from a restavèk to a paid servant with no real home of her own, and from a peripheral figure in her children's lives to Kerlange's only mother.

Kerlange was fifteen years old when the earthquake happened. She had come home from school and was lying on her bed, reading, in the apartment she lived in with her two younger siblings and her paternal aunt, with whom she had grown up. The apartment was on the third floor of a narrow, hulking pinkish apartment building in downtown Port-au-Prince, near Place Kalbwa — a busy, dense katyè popilè. When the quake happened, the two younger children escaped. Kerlange and her aunt were inside when the apartment building collapsed.

Perhaps as important as the events of Kerlange's and Celita's experiences are the ways in which they were told and revealed, piecemeal, not linearly. And also, never together. Celita only spoke of the earthquake when Kerlange was out of earshot, for fear of upsetting her. Kerlange expressed herself more in writing — in handwritten notebooks or email or Facebook message — and since Celita cannot read or write, and does not know how to use a computer she could not know what her daughter was saying.

I first met Kerlange and Celita at the hospital in April 2010. Kerlange was a tall, thin teenager with profound injuries from the earthquake: her right leg was amputated just below the knee, her left leg had sustained serious tissue and nerve damage and she could not stand on it,

and her left arm and hand had such nerve damage that she screamed in pain any time anyone touched it. She spent the day lying in her hospital bed, with her left arm propped up in a weird position so that nothing could come in contact with it. It had become black and claw-like, and it was unclear whether the discoloration was because the tissue had died, or because she would not let anyone clean the dead skin off. Kerlange said little. Someone had given her a Discman, a small pink television, and a laptop computer, and she spent her time sleeping, or with her headphones in, listening to American pop and rap songs — Miley Cyrus's "Party in the USA" was so loud that I could hear it without the earbuds, though Kerlange offered to stick one of them in my ear.

Kerlange was a special patient at the hospital, for the Haitian staff, foreign volunteers, and media alike. When she had arrived, two days after the earthquake, grievously injured and sick with infection, her survival had not been guaranteed. But she lived, and became something of a darling. US journalists took photographs of her and wrote stories about her. Volunteers brought her gifts (like the devices mentioned above). The foreign physical therapy team took extra time to give her brightly-colored manicures on her uninjured hand. Kerlange often smiled or nodded, but she said little amid all of this, which people attributed to trauma and depression. Her voice was not present in the news stories about her, but it was not necessary for her to speak. The physical, apparently facts of her identity spoke for her: she was a photogenic, sympathetic, slim teenaged girl, with an amputation and other severe and visible injuries and pain.

Kerlange's mother, Celita, slept for months on a sheet on the hospital floor next to her daughter's bed. Celita projected an air of gentleness, sadness, and uncertainty. She often looked miserable and terrified, but her face was transformed when she laughed or smiled. She doted on Kerlange and was obedient, even deferential, to the Haitian nurses and doctors and foreign

volunteer physical and occupational therapists who suddenly filled their daily routine. Kerlange refused to eat the then-standard hospital meal: USAID rice with black beans and sauce made from canned fish, all of it donated after the quake. With whatever money she had, Celita would go to the ladies who sold fritay in the bidonvil behind the hospital, and buy fried hot dogs and plantains with pikliz so that Kerlange would eat. Kerlange addressed her mother as "Celie," never as "manman."

The next bed was occupied by a young woman named Bernise, who, like Celita, was from the countryside around Jérémie and had come to Port-au-Prince to *chèche lavi*. Bernise was deeply religious - evangelical - and had a lovely, serene face. Her pelvis had been shattered in the earthquake, and she had metal pins and an external stabilizer. She was often visited by her sister Youseline, who resembled a thinner, more anxious version of Bernise. Bernise had a digital camera, and showed me photographs of the collapsed building she had been living in. "This is where I was," she said, pointing. She'd had another sister who died in the quake.

Every day, Kerlange and several other earthquake victims (both inpatient and outpatient) would have physical therapy and hand therapy with the US volunteers. Kerlange would be placed in a wheelchair and taken to the hospital's patio, where she would do strengthening and flexibility exercises, and made to take a few supported steps on a generic prosthesis, either leaning on the volunteers or on a walker. Her energy and motivation were low, and the volunteers thought she was depressed.

At one of these therapy sessions, I sat to the side with Celita, watching Kerlange inch forward on the prosthetic right leg and her stiff, braced left leg, and she began to tell me a little about the earthquake. She explained that she had never lived with Kerlange before this — that Kerlange had grown up with her aunt, and it was this aunt that she called "manman." Kerlange's

aunt had died in the earthquake, when the house collapsed on them both. Celita had lied to Kerlange about this and told her that her aunt/manman had been injured and taken to the Dominican Republic for more treatment. I asked Celita when she was going to tell Kerlange the truth. She gazed for a while at Kerlange, across the patio, taking small steps. "I don't know," she said, quietly.

#### ***Fourth Displacement: Earthquake***

*Plis pase 250 000 moun mouri  
nan kapital la mwaye detwi  
anpil moun ap rele jezi  
tout moun domi nan lari  
separe fanmi, elwanye zanmi  
anpil san zabri  
opotinis ap fe plis manni  
yon lot epòk komanse!!*

*More than 250,000 people dead  
The capital half-destroyed  
Lots of people crying out for Jesus  
Everyone sleeping in the street  
Families torn apart, friends driven away  
Lots without shelter  
Opportunists making more money  
Another era has begun!!*

Barikad Crew, Yon lòt epòk (2012)

Thirty-five seconds of the afternoon of January 12, 2010 leveled Port-au-Prince, Léogane, Petit-Goâve, Grand-Goâve, Jacmel. For the people who lived through it, the earthquake was an event of almost indescribable enormity, and they sought to ascribe meaning to it and understand it in various ways.

Many people say that they thought it was the end of the world. This was the case even for many non-religious people, including this anthropologist, during the quake and in the immediate aftermath, and it is a nearly universal reaction to sudden calamity of this scale — just as Voltaire’s hero Candide cried out "*Voici le dernier jour du monde!*" (“Behold the end of the world!”) at the moment of the Lisbon earthquake. But in the long term, many people (particularly non-Catholic Christians) interpreted the earthquake as a sequence of events in the End of Days. Geraldine, an evangelical woman in her mid-twenties explained:

Like the Bible says, all these things are prophecies. Understand? The things in Matthew 24. This isn't anything yet, compared with what is coming. The Bible says there will be *many* earthquakes. Several, right? Those are the prophecies. The prophecies that will come to pass. That means, God just tapped his foot a little bit, the way the earth trembled, that was just God tapping his foot. That's the prophecy. All this — kingdom versus kingdom, mother against children, children will turn against their mothers, you understand? And when you see those things, you don't need



to be afraid. It's been foretold. This isn't anything, compared to what is going to happen. That's what the Bible says. This isn't anything yet.

Other people explained that the earthquake was the consequence of people's sins, placing the culpability on the Haitian people. Unlike the people of Voltaire's Lisbon, who executed outsiders as heretics in an auto-da-fé to appease God, the people of Haiti blamed themselves. Beginning in French, as a priest might, and then switching into Creole, Natacha explained that the earthquake happened

...because Haitians are so evil. *Parce que les haïtiens sont tellement mechants.* Not only Haitians. People are so evil. It's God who sometimes... you see the catastrophe of January 12, the cholera disease, hurricanes, people dying — that is all God's work because people are so evil. We are very evil. We are very evil. It's God. Sometimes something happens, and it's God that is acting in anger — and pride — and he does something very simple. Don't you see, in thirty-five seconds how many people died? That means we must be very evil. It is our fault, it is our own fault.

Still another way of looking at the earthquake — and all calamities and suffering, for that matter — and the divine implications of those calamities is expressed in the Haitian proverb *ki mele Bondye nan grangou chen?* Why should God care about a dog's hunger? In this formulation, if there is a God at all, he isn't punishing the sinners or rewarding the righteous. He doesn't care at all, and why should he?

Not all explanations tend toward the otherworldly. Other people described the earthquake as a natural disaster, or as a natural disaster that had been compounded by poverty and the government's negligence. Even if they have never heard the term "structural violence," they know exactly what it is, because they have lived it their whole lives. "Houses are not well-built, because the state doesn't do its job," one woman explained. "And people are just trying to build their houses with whatever little bit of money they can find."

Still other people believed that the earthquake had been caused by "*gwo pwisans yo*" —

international superpowers, particularly the United States, but sometimes France. Person-to-person gossip (*teledjòl*, basically "through the grapevine") and talk radio spread the belief that the earthquake had been caused by a missile from France, or (most commonly) the construction of an underwater road from Miami to Haiti that the US was building to "steal Haiti's resources." These beliefs were espoused by rich and poor, educated and uneducated alike: I personally heard the theory about the underwater road from an older, illiterate houngan in Léogâne, and a young political activist in Port-au-Prince who had gone to university in Montreal. The widespread persistence of these theories shows the degree to which Haitians' perceptions and experiences of the international community are defined by distrust.

\* \* \* \* \*

Regardless of their understandings of the disaster's origins — natural or supernatural, divine or mundane, act of God or act of conspiracy — everyone who lived through the earthquake was affected profoundly by it. For all that Haiti has long been represented in the foreign media as a land of unknowable and inevitable suffering — a place synonymous with terrible things — it must be remembered that, in magnitude and in experience, the January 12 earthquake was an unprecedented event for Haitians.

These are two important ways in which the earthquake must be understood: both as a continuation and result of what came before it, and as a particularly violent and unique event. When placed into a historical context, the earthquake is simply a more dramatic, sudden, and startling manifestation of the patterns of inequality that underlay Haiti's sad and infuriating catalogue of pre-earthquake problems. Many foreign representations of Haiti dehistoricize and naturalize these problems, as though they were intrinsic to a poor, backwards, Black land. When we look at the earthquake analytically, we must see it as a particularly abrupt and terrible

expression of the decades and centuries of structural violence that facilitated the spread of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and the 2008 flood in Gonaïves. But when we look at the earthquake *experientially*, in terms of the lived experience of people who survived it, we must acknowledge that the earthquake was qualitatively different. In this country, where people have endured hurricanes, dictatorships, political violence, food shortages all within the last few decades, the earthquake was a singular and unparalleled event. This is due primarily to the massive scale of the quake, to the utter devastation it caused and the sheer physical and emotional impact, the feeling of apocalyptic powerlessness it left with the people who experienced it. “Natural” disasters had happened in Haiti before (even major earthquakes, though not in the memory of anyone now living), but never had they been this tremendous, this sudden and completely unforeseeable, and never before had they taken place in the largest metropolitan area of the country. In addition, the earthquake was, as I have said, an equalizer. Most other tragedies and injustices in Haiti take specific groups of people as their victims: anti-Duvalierists, anti-Lavalassiens, poor people living in flood zones, poor people living in slums. The earthquake, though not its aftermath, did not know social class nor politics.

One of the first lengthy emails I received from friends in Haiti after the earthquake was from Alex, a teacher in his early thirties from Cité Soleil. He lived through the most violent years of "war" in the Cité, during the MINUSTAH intervention of 2004-2006, and had lost a brother to gang warfare; he has endured some of the most deplorable things that a resident of Port-au-Prince can endure. For him, the earthquake was different. It was such a staggering moment that, after verifying that his family had survived, Alex borrowed a camera and took to the streets, capturing startling images of death and rescue before most of the international rescue groups or media had arrived. He wrote, hurried, with typos, little punctuation, missing all its

accent marks. It was clear that he had written it in a rush, but it seemed poignant that amid so many other pressing exigencies, he felt compelled to share his experience. I imagined Alex at an Internet café, typing as quickly as he could (for he did not have much experience with computers), trying to get his words down before the electricity was cut off or the signal went down or his money ran out.

eksperyans mwen pandan tranbleman te a se te yon bagay encrayab paske se pou la premye fwa mwen tap viv yon bagay konsa kote tout moun etone,tout ap kouri peson paka sove lot vi tap pedi moun ap mouri leta pat ka fe anyen pou moun se pi move eksperyans mwen te fe nan vi m.

my experience during the earthquake was an incredible thing because it was the first time i lived through something like that where everyone was astonished,everyone was running no one could save each other lives were being lost the state couldnt do anything for anyone it was the worst experience ive had in my life.

Variations on "it was the worst day of my life" were echoed, over and over. The term "douz janvyè" (January 12) became a universal synonym for the earthquake, much in the way that, throughout the United States, "September 11" has become synonymous with the 2001 World Trade Center attacks. For months after the earthquake — and even today — people talk about "where I was when..." and ask "where were you when...?" In the immediate aftermath, it felt as though an immense sea change was inevitable, for Port-au-Prince and for Haiti — the change both was, and wasn't.

Many people described themselves, or other Haitians, as having been *lage* — let go, cut loose, adrift. It was a rift or rupture, as real as the cracked fault line visible on the road between Carrefour and Léogâne. But being *lage* is also an emotional or psychological state, as well as a material one — of hopelessness, powerlessness. Many, many people were literally displaced by the earthquake — both the hundreds of thousands who moved into camps, and the unknowable number who were buffeted into other forms of new living situations, with extended family or

friends or patrons. But Port-au-Prince also became, in those thirty-five seconds on January 12, a city unrecognizable to itself, a city adrift, and all of its residents — be they native Port-au-Princiens, migrants from the countryside, or even foreigners there for one mission or another — were displaced from the memory of the place they had once known. Because Haiti is so very centralized, in terms of population and infrastructure, Port-au-Prince is not only the capital but also *the* city — like London, New York, or Paris, only more so. The earthquake devastated Port-au-Prince and the area around it, but, as so many people said in the weeks and months that followed, "All of Haiti is broken."

\* \* \* \* \*

Estimated death counts range from 60,000 (USAID 2011) to 300,000 (GOH). The true number is unknowable. Exaggerating death counts is standard strategy; death counts, no matter how inadequate a measure of tragedy, and however imprecise by nature, are an institutionally-approved way of quantifying catastrophe. In these situations, ironically, the "bad" becomes the "good" — the more deaths and suffering, the more justified are the claims for attention and intervention: the more newspapers sell, the more money can be raised, the more projects can be funded, and the greater the moral imperative to do the work. A high death count, like a high infection rate, is a kind of currency in the aid world. Soon it represents something other than how many real, individual lives were lost. The figure of 250,000-300,000 deaths allowed organizations and news sources to list the Haitian earthquake among the worst natural disasters in the history of humankind. Death counts are supposed to allow people to comprehend the earthquake as objectively horrible, and even, strangely, to compare it to other catastrophes, creating absurd situations in which one can say that one disaster was "worse" than another, as though such things could be placed cleanly on a spectrum or measured in absolutes.

For those who lived through the January 12, 2010 Haiti earthquake and its aftermath — those who lost family, friends, and coworkers or who worried and wondered for days about the people we could not reach; those who lost their homes and their private histories and the landscape of a once-familiar city; those who endured the days when that city smelled like decay and death — a lower death count does not diminish, alleviate, or delegitimize the impact of the experience. A death count is a manipulable and political thing. Its uses are limited and it is not an objective measure of anything — not even of the numbers of the dead, and certainly not of the suffering or the loss. The extent of the loss is not confined to the deaths alone; it expands into the ongoing, long-term ramifications of those absences, which can only be known over time.

In addition to the unknowable numbers of dead, untold people were injured, many critically. The night of January 12, those who were not buried under rubble congregated in the streets, as far from buildings as they could, fearful of aftershocks. What initially began as people sleeping in open spaces out of fear turned into the camps that endured for years after the quake.

According to Amnesty International, 105,000 homes were destroyed in the earthquake, and another 208,164 homes were otherwise damaged to the point of being uninhabitable. Amid the scarcity of structures that remained, rents skyrocketed. Perhaps 2.3 million people were rendered homeless, and at its peak in July 2010, an estimated 1.5 million people lived in 1,555 camps (Amnesty International 2013).

More than three years after the devastating January 12, 2010 earthquake, Port-au-Prince's internally displaced persons' camps are perhaps the most visible, obvious, and potent symbol of the enduring social rupture and suffering wrought by the catastrophe. For affected Haitians and engaged foreigners alike, the continued existence of the camps represents, most obviously, the failure of the Haitian state, and of the international community's efforts at humanitarian

intervention and reconstruction. For some foreign journalists and activists, and anyone with an eye for injustice and scandal, the ongoing crisis of people living in tents exemplifies the failure of the post-quake response, while the NGO apparatus is termed "trickle-down imperialism" (Schuller 2012). The recent campaign for housing rights in Haiti is called, simply, *Under Tents*. It was conceived by foreign housing rights activists, in collaboration with Haitian grassroots groups. *Under Tents* states:

Today nearly 400,000 Haitians continue to live in tent camps in and around Port-au-Prince. Living under shredded plastic tarps and tattered tents, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence and face high rates of rape in the camps. Many lack access to adequate food, clean water, and toilets. Now, in yet another rainy season, all displaced persons face flooding and a surge in cholera. One in five is also at risk of imminent forced eviction. These are people fighting to hold onto hope.

Apart from the occasional strategic claim or turn of phrase (not all tarps and tents are in tatters, for instance; despite the name of the campaign, many camp dwellers don't live in tents at all, but in self-constructed shanties), this critique is basically accurate. The camps remain the biggest and most recognizable symbol of the failure of post-quake relief and reconstruction efforts. What goes unstated is that many poor people who don't live in camps also lack access to adequate food, clean water, and toilets, and are threatened by sexual violence, flooding and cholera. At present, neither the Haitian state nor the international community is in the position to create humane, livable housing for the hundreds of thousands of people displaced by the earthquake — and the hundreds of thousands of more who lived in inhumane conditions since long before the earthquake — who in fact had less access clean water and toilets and health care than people living in some of the camps. And what goes unstated, as well, is that many people who were displaced by the earthquake are not, in fact under tents or in camps at all. "The camp" is the quintessential state of exception — a transitory space. But in Haiti, people have long been

in flux. This is not to say that the camps were normal or something that Haitians were particularly able to bear – one must be careful not to fall into that moral and rhetorical trap of speaking of “Haitian resilience.” There is nothing natural or inherent about that so-called “resilience” – it is the product of centuries of dispossession, poverty, and uprooting. But it does mean that, because of their history, Haitian people did possess strategies and mechanisms for coping with the precarity of the post-earthquake situation.

\* \* \* \* \*

Despite Haitian people's many misgivings about the international community, there exists a perception, both within Haiti and beyond Haiti, that Haitians are dependent on aid, complacently waiting for handouts. On a macro scale, this assessment is true: Haiti is deeply in debt, reliant on loans and food aid. The country that was once the "pearl of the Antilles" and the source of much of colonial France's great wealth cannot produce nearly enough food to feed its people and must instead import from the United States and the Dominican Republic. Amid Haitian people's strong desire for respect and self-determination, and their enduring connection to their emancipatory history, Haiti remains, as one journalist put it paradoxically, "the most dependent independent nation in the world" (O'Connor 2011). But let us examine what ordinary people's reactions were, in a moment in which there was no institutional aid or foreign savior, when no one could be reliant on anyone except themselves and the people around them: the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, when the aid economy, along with the known world, temporarily came apart.

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster — the night of January 12, and the few days after – when the international humanitarian response was not yet organized (and in fact, many existing international organizations in Haiti, including the United Nations, were incapacitated or



destroyed by the quake), ordinary Haitian people responded with courage, decency, ingenuity, and generosity. This was not predicted by the international media, or by institutional powers or influential spokespeople, such as UN special envoy and former US president Bill Clinton, who warned, "You may see a lot of very angry people, you may see some people looting, you may see some people doing and saying some things you don't like." Four days after the earthquake, the UK *Telegraph* thrilled, "as anger and fears of violence grew amid desperate shortages of food, water and medical supplies, bands of machete-wielding earthquake survivors yesterday roamed through the ruins of Port-au-Prince" (Sherwell and Sawyer 2010). The view from the ground, however, looked very different. "I slept in an abandoned bus with Haitians, my media gear resting on the ground, *san pwoblem*. No violence and no chaos," recalled US journalist Chris about that night. Despite the media's racist and deterministic salivating over the possibility of disorder, pillaging, and violence, ordinary people reacted by saving and taking care of the people around them (Wagner 2010, Katz 2013). Most people who were buried in the rubble, including myself, were rescued not by technologically sophisticated foreign search-and-rescue teams — though those were the rescues that were covered by international media — but by their friends, family, and neighbors, by previously unknown bystanders. They were rescued, in other words, by ordinary people — most of them, in fact, very poor — who had few tools and no disaster training, but who were compelled by the emergency to do whatever they could to save the people around them.

In fact, the solidarity demonstrated by ordinary people after the earthquake is the rule rather than the exception in moments of crisis. Rebecca Solnit, in her studies of community and cooperation in the wake of disasters such as Hurricane Katrina and the 1980 Mexico City earthquake, uses research across these contexts to counter the Hobbesian fantasy of human

lawlessness and violence in the absence of an iron fist: “Many fear that in disaster we become something other than what we normally are – helpless or bestial and savage in the most common myths – or that is who we really are when the superstructure of society crumbles. We remain ourselves for the most part, but freed to act on, most often, not the worst but the best within. The ruts and routines of ordinary life hide more beauty than brutality.” This is, overwhelmingly, what happened after the Haitian earthquake. In that case, the "superstructure of society" that crumbled was not so much the Haitian state as the existing international apparatus from humanitarian NGOs to UN peacekeeping operations, which, like everything else, were devastated and unable to respond immediately to the crisis.

There is a long and inspiring tradition of cooperation and solidarity in Haiti — one that is not often represented in standard apocalyptic accounts. For that matter, few Haitians talk about it, either — they are often the quickest to impugn the character of their own compatriots, particularly in Port-au-Prince. As we saw in the first chapter, people in the capital speak nostalgically of the goodness of rural people, claiming that life in the city corrupts and degrades them, turning them into thieves and beggars. Indeed, Haiti's traditional forms of cooperation and solidarity are rural in origin — but then, most Haitian people are rural in origin. The most famous example of this is the *konbit*, a form of collaborative collective agricultural labor exemplified by the oft-quoted proverb *men anpil, chay pa lou* — many hands make the load lighter. Rural Haiti, has admirable forms of participatory democracy and resistance which have arisen in spite of and even because of systematic exploitation of the Haitian peasantry (Smith 2001, Clérismé 2006). In urban contexts, as well, the Haitian poor (largely displaced rural Haitians and their descendants) engage in extraordinary acts of resistance as well as more quotidian, informal forms of generosity and sharing of resources — the division of food among

whomever happens to be around, for example. Generosity in the Haitian countryside is pronounced and explicit, even aggressive — if you are walking past someone's lakou, and they are serving food, it would be very rude indeed not to offer you some. While Haitian people — particularly rural migrants exhausted by life and the more dispersed forms of community in the capital — often speak as though those formal and informal acts of kindness and solidarity are a feature of rural life *only*, they in fact do persist in the capital. It is more subtle, more hidden, and confined to a degree to the smaller enclaves and sub-communities that form in the big city. It is limited by the constraints of *lavichè* — the fact that in the city, unlike in the countryside, nearly everything must be bought with money and nearly everything is prohibitively expensive. But it still exists, in ways that I noticed constantly during my years in Port-au-Prince. Even in Port-au-Prince — which so many rural Haitians speak of as though it were a hotbed of sin, a modern Gomorrah — people are generous with their time, their food, their homes, their lives, and their words. And this is what we saw during the earthquake, and immediately after: a surge of decency, solidarity, cooperation, kindness, and sharing. On January 12, and in the days that followed, people created new communities and shared whatever they had.

In April 2012, as we sat in the heat of her sheet metal and tarp shack with a soccer game on mute on the fuzzy TV, twenty-four-year-old Chrismène explained how she ended up living on the Champ-de-Mars, in the area known as the Place des Artistes. She began by explaining how she and her new neighbors — many of whom were old neighbors or friends from before the earthquake — turned the derelict plaza into a habitable space.

There are people [here] I've known since before. There are a lot of people I've known since before. This plaza was closest to us. On January 12, we all spread out, everywhere. Then we were all calling to each other, calling to each other, to come to a single place. I knew these people, I knew them, I used to go to their houses. *Makomè m*<sup>12</sup>. Friends.

---

<sup>12</sup> A term that refers to one's relations to the mother of one's godchild, or the godmother of one's child. But in

There are a lot who were on Place Pétion [a different area of the Champ-de-Mars] on January 12. Because this plaza wasn't yet a place you could live... There were a bunch of things on this plaza, a bunch of garbage and crap [*vyè bagay*] on this plaza. It's us who cleaned it up here. It was like a wilderness. The other plazas were cleaner than this plaza. On Jan 12, everyone spread out. On January 13, during the day, everyone went looking for each other. Then we came here, we cleaned it up here. We all came together, we became one. *Nou tout te vin fè yon sèl.*

I asked Chrismène what she ate in those first days after the disaster.

We ate — the makomè I was telling you about, she had all kinds of stuff to make food (*bagay manje*) at her house. Her house wasn't destroyed. So we made food on the plaza. We went to her house, got things, rice. We made food on the plaza. When a single person made food, everyone but everyone ate! *Tout moun nèt manje!* You'd give everyone a little bit.

Why did we do that? Because we are a single soul. [*Se yon sèl lam nou ye*] Because we are a single soul. We had to come together, to help one another. [*Nou te oblije met tèt nou ansanm, pou yon ede lòt*].

But, according to Chrismène, the change was temporary. "We'd have to have another earthquake for people to do it again," she laughed.

They'll never just do it like that. Everyone has already changed. Since after the earthquake... I don't know why they've gone back the way they were. Myself, I thought things were going to change. They wouldn't stay the way they were before the earthquake. I saw a change. After January 12, you saw everyone put their heads together. You didn't have to know someone — if you were making food there, someone came and asked you for food, you'd give them food. But now there isn't that anymore.

Chrismène's attitude was similar to that of many Port-au-Prince residents: they identified the post-quake moment as a time of solidarity, generosity, and community, but said that those things had not lasted beyond the immediate emergency. Yet as we sat and talked, one of Chrismène's neighbors came into her tent, and handed her boiled plantains in sauce in a metal bowl. "She

---

general can refer to a friend or a countrywoman, like "comrade."

brings you food?" I asked.

"Yes, when they have food." To Chrismène, this appeared completely unremarkable.

"What is she to you?" I asked, which means, "How is she related to you?"

"She isn't anything to me, *non*? But the way things are now, we're like family."

To me, this seemed remarkable, and poignant – a sort of urban, post-disaster permutation of the traditional rural *lakou*. It was as though these ordinary acts of sharing were so obvious and expected to Chrismène that they did not even register as being part of the same tradition of community that was amplified in the minutes and days after the quake. More than that, it fit into the sort of negative, heartbreaking fatalism that other people had expressed: we Haitians are bad, we Haitians are sinners, we Haitians are cruel to one another, we Haitians deserve this.

In February 2011, an American journalist wrote rather grandiosely and inaccurately that “social networks and family unity have been destroyed by death and flight” after the earthquake (Wilkinson). The dominant discourse among Haitian beneficiaries themselves was that post-quake solidarity was fleeting and irrecoverable, and that things quickly reverted to their standard state of competition to survive. But ordinary moments of kindness and generosity like these — Chrismène's neighbor in the camp sharing the food she had — were common and unremarked upon, even invisible. If the international media ignored the countless acts of dramatic heroism by ordinary Haitians in the immediate aftermath of the quake, Haitians denounced their own people for selfishness even as they continued to share and pool resources. I wish to suggest something else: that while certain social networks and family units were transformed or even destroyed by the earthquake, not all were destroyed, and some new communities came into being. The ongoing story of Kerlange and Celita is one small example of how communities and families form, break apart, and change.

### ***October 2010 - North Carolina***

It was not swift or easy for Kerlange and Celita to get their passports and visas. While the Americans attributed the delays to "Haitian time," Kerlange's upper-class Haitian allies pronounced it "magouy", corruption. Marc, a light-skinned Haitian *dyaspora* living in Montreal, called upon his contacts in the immigration bureau and in visa offices — other members of the bourgeoisie with recognizable and influential surnames — to expedite the process. The hospital administration was not helpful in producing the documents necessary for humanitarian parole, and it fell to prominent Haitians and audacious interested blans (including me) to make sure things happened.

After months of machinations, Kerlange and Celita came to the United States, on a combination of private missionary and commercial flights. Their American benefactors photographed the entire experience: Kerlange asleep on the plane, leaning on Celita's shoulder; Kerlange in her wheelchair, alighting in America. Kerlange was designated the "Girl of the Year" for a private North Carolina-based charity. Representatives of the charity greeted her at the small airport in Asheville, well-dressed ladies in pantsuits with brass buttons, pearl necklaces, immaculate hairstyles. Kerlange's American hand surgeon, Dr. Miller, whom she knew from Haiti, and his family were there. Her host family came too, a vegetarian couple with two small boys. Everyone went back to the Millers' house for Pizza Hut pizza and Coca-Cola to celebrate her arrival. Their bedroom was filled with new and used clothes, stuffed animals, and other gifts. Several people wrote them greeting cards in English (with a few attempts at French), welcoming them to the US and offering prayers for Kerlange's recovery and platitudes about hope and faith.

Kerlange would have surgery and receive a more specialized leg prosthesis. I came for a

couple weeks to translate and help them (and their host family) adjust. We were in western North Carolina, and we soon enough found ourselves at the homecoming football game for West Henderson High School, huddled under a red and black checked blanket.

Their host family parked on the sidewalk, and we took a shortcut through a wooded area, Kerlange leaning on Celita on the uneven ground. It was Kerlange's first time using her prosthesis on anything other than flat terrain. The host family was very excited to see her walking, but Celita was too distracted by her unfamiliar surroundings to appreciate Kerlange's progress. "Is this path for motorcycles?" she asked. "Are there snakes and insects? Do goats pass through here? What if there are thieves?"

We were swarmed by small harmless insects, under the bright stadium lights. "Bèt zèl. Little bugs," pronounced Celita, smiling a little, satisfied to recognize one small thing in these strange surroundings. The ROTC got into formation, and the Homecoming Queen and King, and their court of princes and princesses, joined a procession under their bayonets. The girls wore sleeveless gowns, and Kerlange wondered aloud, "Aren't they cold?" The announcer read off the accomplishments and affiliations of the Homecoming Court. Baptist Church, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Key Club...

The marching band wore blue epaulets, glow bands around their foreheads, and black polyester pants; they played "Eye of the Tiger." The flag corps wore a shiny fabric that looked like nothing so much as fish skin. Their hair spray-painted, they twirled pink shimmering flags. The opposing team's marching band played a tuba-heavy rendition of the Rolling Stones' "Paint It Black," unfathomably. They wore hats with chin straps and black and silver streaming feather poofs on top. A person dressed as the school's mascot, the Falcon, wandered around, in fuzzy costume, and Kerlange asked, "a rooster?" I could not tell, when the announcer called the names

of the homecoming court, whether many of the names belonged to young men or women:  
Madison, Kennedy, Merrit.

As I sat there, I felt more like Geertz at the Balinese cockfight than I ever did conducting fieldwork in Haiti. What are these strange rituals? Celita and Kerlange wanted me to explain things to them, but I was barely more knowledgeable in this cultural setting than they were. I did not know how to explain American football. "Why are they just standing around?" asked Celita. Driving back to their host family's house, we passed a church with that black moveable type, like on a movie theatre marquee. "GOD DOES RETAKES," it said.

\* \* \* \* \*

On their second or third morning in the US, Kerlange and Celita told me they could not sleep at night because they were so cold. "Kerlange keeps shaking and shivering all night," Celita reported, laughing.

"Why are you cold?" I asked. I followed them into their bedroom.

"There's nothing to cover with," said Kerlange.

"Of course there is!" I lifted the corner of the comforter and blankets and sheet off the bed. "You have to get *in* the bed," I said.

"Oh!"

They had been trying to *dòmi dous*, literally to "sleep softly," which is what people do in Haiti when they layer their blankets and quilts on the floor, or on a hard bed frame, to create a soft mattress. In Haiti, a hard floor or lumpy bed is a more common problem than cold weather. Celita and Kerlange had been trying to sleep on top of their comforter, instead of under it.

\* \* \* \* \*

Celita would not sit on the furniture at the host family's house at first, and when she finally did,



after much cajoling, she perched nervously on the edge, her back straight.

“Please tell her to relax,” implored the host family.

She could not shake the mentality of being a servant. In Haiti, she would have sat on the floor, never on the furniture.

When she was finally persuaded to sit back and relax, she fell asleep almost instantly in the cushions, exhausted by the travel and change. Since Kerlange was injured, she had slept in the street, in the hospital courtyard, and then for months on a blanket on the tile hospital floor. Now her tiredness seemed to descend on her, all at once.

Kerlange, meanwhile, happily downloaded music onto her new iPod and cultivated an immediate love of processed American foods.

“Celie, go get me some Doritos!” she commanded her mother, whose eyes snapped open, and she jumped up from the couch.

“*Non, mamzèl!* No, missy!” I admonished Kerlange. “You can go get them yourself.” Kerlange glared at me; Celita sank hesitantly back into the sofa. For ten months, racked by guilt, Celita had been indulging her oldest daughter. She was incapable of disciplining or scolding her. When she tried, it came out like a parody of sternness, and everyone laughed, Celita most of all.

Kerlange hoisted herself up unsteadily on her prosthesis and slowly made her way over to the pantry and retrieved the bag of Doritos. She was still giving me a spiteful teenaged look.

“*Mezanmi,*” says Celita. “I didn’t know she could walk like that.”

“Now open them,” I said.

Kerlange delicately grasped the bag of chips at a strange angle in her damaged left hand, and pulled it apart with her uninjured right hand.

“Bravo,” we clapped.

“Are you happy?” she asked.

For Celita, on the other hand, American food presented less of a thrill. She had cooked for herself and for others since she was practically a child, and she had strong preferences. The next morning, she was particularly horrified by the watery bitter tastelessness of American coffee. She tasted it, made a face, swirled it in her cup.

“What is this, Lolo?”

“It’s coffee.”

“But what’s wrong with it?”

“It’s American coffee.”

Celita looked conflicted, brow furrowed. She wanted to be a good guest and understood that she was a recipient of charity and could not complain. But she loved strong, black Haitian coffee with evaporated milk and sugar in the mornings.

\* \* \* \* \*

They gave Kerlange a tranquilizer before her EMG test, in case it hurt or made her nervous. She gets dopey. “Why do I feel gaga?” she asked again and again. On the exam table, she stared intently at the middle-aged neurologist’s bald head. “It’s all shiny,” she cooed, and kept trying to pet it. “Why is it so shiny?”

“Stop touching the doctor’s head,” Celita told her.

The results of the tests were mixed. Her left arm had more nerve response than they had anticipated: while all three nerves were damaged, they all showed some signs of repair and functionality. The main nerve of her left leg, however, showed no response at all. She will never be able to flex her ankle, and there is no point in doing more surgery on it. This means that she will never be able to have an "athletic" prosthesis, as they put it. Her eventual prosthetic

leg will be bulky, more than two sizes larger than her natural foot, and inflexible, designed for stability rather than movement.

"But will it be skin-colored?" Kerlange asked, every time. This was the most important thing to her: that when the cuffs of her jeans come up, when the area between her pants and her socks is exposed, that people think it is skin.

Whenever we went anywhere, people smiled at us. We were not inconspicuous, speaking a language that no one around us understood, with Kerlange in a wheelchair, or using a walker, or leaning on me or Celita. After the EMG and a session with the hand therapist, a local TV reporter came to interview Kerlange, and I translated. Kerlange isn't a particularly talkative person, especially with people she does not know or in situations that she does not see the point of. She was not telegenic. She replied in bored monosyllables.

"Do you like America?" the reporter asked.

"Yes."

"What's your favorite thing about America?"

She looked at me, then back at him as though the question made no sense, which it didn't, really.

"I hear you like to draw," he tried again.

"Yes?" she replied.

"Have you seen anything in America you'd like to draw?"

Kerlange's experience of "America" so far was of several clinical settings, a couple of pleasant suburban homes, the grocery store, a bowling alley. "No," she said.

"I hear you tried pizza," the reporter said with a smile. "Did you like pizza?"

“Yes,” said Kerlange.

The anthropologist, turned interpreter, turned friend, now turned narrator and snarly intervener, was irritated by the assumption that pizza is some exotic delicacy unimaginable in the savage land from which Kerlange hails. It is not an everyday food, but for a child like Kerlange, who grew up poor but not desperately so, in urban Port-au-Prince, it is a recognizable special occasion food. “And did you like pizza... when you were in Haiti?” I added, trying not to roll my eyes.

“Yes.”

In her hospital bed in Port-au-Prince, Kerlange's injured and amputated body spoke volumes about her pain and experience, without her having to say a word. Now, all these months later, in North Carolina, expected to speak under the camera's gaze, Kerlange was not good at performing the roles that the reporter expected or hoped she would play as he tried to shape a human interest story: the traumatized, injured Haitian child, the grateful aid recipient. It did not come obviously or easily to Kerlange to narrate, in detail, her earthquake experience, her physical or emotional pain, or her gratitude to her patrons or the community. Partly it was simply her reserved disposition, and partly she was, for all her suffering and loss, a sheltered girl in some ways, protected first by her aunt, and then by Celita who still had not told her about her aunt's death. Kerlange, unlike many poor people in Port-au-Prince, had never learned to perform or narrate her suffering. Her case was no less valid or deserving because of these things, but she was not a mediagenic personality, the young spokeswoman for the suffering and beholden Haitian people.

On the way home, Kerlange asked, “Why do people keep looking at me and smiling?”

Why do they keep doing that?” She imitated them, smiling and nodding, a goofy caricature of eager Americanness.

“They’re like the *blan*, when they come to Haiti...” said Celita.

“They’re trying to be polite,” I told them.

They cackled like schoolgirls.

I gave Kerlange a manicure while she considered going on a hunger strike against her host family, who wanted her to eat healthy and kept trying to feed her beet-and-kale smoothies and macaroni and cheese made with nutritional yeast instead of cheese.

“Aren’t you lonely, sleeping alone?” asked Celita. The host family had installed me on a futon in the basement, while Celita and Kerlange share the extra bedroom upstairs. “Why don’t you sleep with us?”

“But Celie sleeps ugly,” Kerlange cautioned me, and throws her limbs around, in imitation of her mother.

\* \* \* \* \*

One evening, as Kerlange sat with her headphones in, watching music videos in her armchair by the television, Celita began to talk in detail about the earthquake. It was the first time I had heard her narrate the story in such detail. We were standing with Dr Miller and his wife, Beth, at the granite kitchen island in their lovely nineteenth century Asheville home, and something inspired Celita to talk. I translated. Her narrative was not linear, and it wavered in its precision, focusing on certain small details and remembrances while glossing over seemingly more important logistical details.

On January 12, 2010 Celita was at a friend's house, waiting to watch a popular Mexican telenovela when she felt what she thought was a "strong wind." She looked outside and saw the

devastation. She began to run toward her sister-in-law's house, where the children were. On her way, she said, she met a neighbor who had been showering at 4:53 pm and ran naked into the street, rocking back and forth, shouting, "*Mezanmi! Mezanmi!*" (roughly, "Oh my god, oh my god!") with all his "stuff" hanging out. Celita started to laugh as she remembered this part of the story, and it surprised the doctor and his wife that this narrative had a funny part at all.

Celita got to the house and it had collapsed. She learned that her two younger children had escaped, and that Kerlange and her aunt were still trapped inside. Celita frantically searched for someone to help her, as night fell, but could find no one. People were afraid. The earth shook all night, and Kerlange and her aunt were living on the third floor; it was perilous. "I couldn't find anyone. No one would help me. No one would help me."

In the end, people did help. But Kerlange was trapped. They passed her water to drink. By the next morning, men from the neighborhood had extracted Kerlange's aunt from the rubble. The chatodo (water reservoir) had fallen onto her. "Celie," she said, "give me a little water," she said, and died in Celita's arms.

Soon after, they removed Kerlange, too. She had never lost consciousness during any of it. They laid Kerlange on a door and used it like a stretcher, and somehow Celita made her way to the Champ-de-Mars, amid hundreds of other people displaced, lost and unsure where to go. Amid the chaos, a cousin took the younger children, only ten and thirteen years old, and transported them on a crowded bus to the north of Haiti, where Kerlange's father and now-dead aunt were from; Celita would not see those children again for nearly a year.

It was January 13 or 14. Kerlange was injured, ill, and feverish, and vomited any water she was given. Celita did not know what to do. "You have to get that girl to a hospital or she'll die," said a stranger on the Champ-de-Mars. Then there was a truck. It took them up the hill to a

hospital. Celita does not know why they were taken to this particular hospital, or who chose it. The courtyard was filled with the injured and their families. It was chaos, a *melée* of injured people (some gravely, some less so), overwhelmed Haitian providers, and sudden crops of foreign volunteers. Kerlange, amid the triage, lay on the ground in the courtyard for several days, Celita beside her. Amid countless emergencies, Kerlange's injuries, however severe, were not the most urgent. Celita, poor, frightened, unfamiliar with medical settings, and submissive after spending her childhood and adulthood living in other people's homes as a domestic servant, fretted quietly over her daughter and tried to keep her clean and keep the flies away, but could not be an assertive advocate for her care. They gave her "sewòm", according to Celita — IV fluids, which might mean electrolytes and might mean antibiotics. By the time Kerlange was finally seen, her leg was gangrenous and had to be amputated.

"So — so her leg might have been saved," said Beth.

They would scarcely leave the hospital for the next nine months. Even when Kerlange's medical condition had stabilized and she did not require constant hospitalization, they had nowhere to go. Kerlange's previous home had been destroyed, and her aunt was dead. Celita had never had a home of her own.

By October 2010, Celita had still not told Kerlange that the aunt she called her mother was dead. Though many of their upper-class Haitian allies disapproved of this, saying that the hope and possibility would only make it more shattering for Kerlange when she learned the truth, they were not in the position to tell Kerlange themselves. And so it went unspoken, just as, among poor Haitians, family members sometimes hide a terminal diagnosis from the sick person, figuring that nothing but pain and distress can come from knowing the truth.

\* \* \* \* \*

One of the things that distinguishes Kerlange's story is the role that personal, non-institutional forms of aid played in her treatment, recovery, and post-earthquake life. Kerlange had become something of a project for many people. For someone of her family and class background, she had a lot of relatively powerful friends, both Haitian and foreign. This is largely because Kerlange, more or less by accident, ended up at a well-connected (though also troubled) hospital after the earthquake. This hospital was founded and is partly supported by some of Haiti's most prominent families, many of whom also volunteered at the hospital in the aftermath of the earthquake and were moved by Kerlange's plight. She was also befriended by some of the US medical volunteers who came to offer their services. Kerlange's new upper-class Haitian friends and contacts in the US pulled a lot of strings, making it possible for her to get a visa and travel abroad for treatment.

Kerlange's youth, the severity of her injuries, and the fact that she and Celita had nowhere else to go made her an attractive earthquake victim. Several foreign journalists, including photojournalists, covered her story. People wanted to help her — and many people contributed not only to her physical recovery, but also to her long-term care and future. The earthquake made Kerlange special. But the special treatment had unintended effects, as well.

In October 2010, the American hosts and friends tried to create a normal middle-class US life for Kerlange and Celita, full of activities and experiences beyond Kerlange's medical appointments, surgeries, and physical therapy. They took them on field trips, ate fast food, went bowling. Kerlange was even enrolled in the local high school for a time, where the other students were extremely kind and solicitous to her. But this new middle-class US life was only a pretense, only a temporary mobility and a temporary fame. Two months later, when it was time



for Kerlange and Celita to leave, the charity threw a ball for her. She was given a fancy new dress, a perm, a makeover, a teddy bear, and a tiara. In the years that come, she would take those photographs out and look at them. The tiara is in a small velvet box, somewhere.

***Port-au-Prince – December 2010/January 2011***

In December 2010, Celita and Kerlange returned to Port-au-Prince. But they did not return to the life they had lived before, or anything close to it. This would have been impossible, of course, for the building Kerlange had lived in before the quake had collapsed, and her "manman" had died. But most people from her old neighborhood had remained within it — living in a vast camp on Place Carl Brouard, or in sheet metal shacks along the street, or in pre-earthquake homes that were not much better. Their community, though irrevocably altered, was still intact.

Kerlange, however, would not be part of it. Celita and Kerlange's wealthy Haitian friends and US sponsors knew that taking care of Kerlange's medical needs alone would not put her on the path to a better life. Kerlange and Celita now live in a two-bedroom apartment above Bernise and Youseline, their old roommates from the hospital. The house is being rented for them indefinitely by one of their US sponsors. It is an odd set of circumstances, that they have formed this sort of vertical lakou, based on affinities created by the disaster. Though Celita dotes on Youseline's two little boys (often comparing them to the little boys of their host family in North Carolina), and they regularly come and go to and from one another's apartments, the two families are not that close. Bernise spends nearly all her time at church, at all-night prayer services; she is rarely home. Celita thinks that Youseline is a gossip. The home has been furnished by one of Kerlange's upper-class Haitian sponsors. It is a pleasant, middle-class

apartment in a quiet part of town, near Pétionville, far from downtown, where they used to live before the quake. Though there are two bedrooms, they do not use the larger one of them at all, except in the summers when Celita's two younger children come to visit from the provinces. Otherwise, the door to that room remains closed. Kerlange sleeps in the bed in the smaller room, with the television angled toward her. Celita sleeps on a cot next to her.

Kerlange now attends a fancy upper-class high school — chosen by her wealthy Haitian contacts, and funded by the US charity that paid for her treatment. Though the educational standards are excellent, she hates it and misses her old, pre-earthquake school, where the other students came from a background like hers. At this new school, there are cliques. They make fun of Kerlange and her halting, ungraceful walk. They call her "*egare*" - retarded. She says she has no friends there, though she has a silent crush on one boy. "He's half-Haitian, half-Swiss," she says.

On January 12, on the one-year anniversary of the earthquake, one of Kerlange's upper-class Haitian friends takes her back to her old neighborhood near Place Carl Brouard for the first time since the earthquake. Her former neighbors, many of them living in shanties and tents in the camp on the plaza, are astonished to see her alive, robust, wearing tight jeans and walking on her prosthesis. "*Rete. Rete. Rete,*" they said, shaking their heads in amazement. "Mezanmi! My God!" They embrace her, and Kerlange smiles distantly and says little but lets them coo over her, as though she were a visitor. She betrays far less emotion than they do.

A short, shirtless man approaches her smiling and puts his arm awkwardly around her shoulders. "Lolo, this is my papa," Kerlange says. He hasn't seen her in months, and only came to visit her once during the nearly nine months she was in the hospital. She doesn't spend very long speaking with him. "I'm happy to see you," he says.

Kerlange meets the four men who risked their own lives to save her the morning of January 13. They are all thin and poor. One wears a red Digicel vest; he makes his living selling papadap on the street. They are emotional, overjoyed to see her. The last time they saw her was a year ago; she had been crushed, bloody, sick, delirious. They had doubted she would survive. "Look at you!" her former neighbors exclaim, as they peer out their tarp flaps and sheet metal doors. "How are you, cheri?"

"I'm good," says Kerlange, and little more than that.

### ***Port-au-Prince: April 2011***

Celita and I take the taptap up to the street market in Pétionville to buy the ingredients for tonmtom. She complains, in passing, at how expensive things are now. Before the earthquake, she would buy ingredients downtown on the Grand-Rue, where things are less expensive. But now it is too far to travel, and she never felt safe there, anyway. We wend our way through the crowds, past the huge pile of garbage and rotting fruit and vegetable peelings, taller than a person, that the city still hasn't removed. Celita haggles over the prices, and we buy handfuls of short, fat okra; six heavy lam veritab, green and scaly and oozing sticky milk from their cut stems; chunks of beef; a piece of white coconut flesh; several Scotch bonnet peppers; and a few small sirik crabs, still alive and bubbling from their mouths, their pincers poking through the plastic bag and catching on our skirts.

Celita lives far from where she used to live. Before the earthquake, she only knew a few neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince — poorer, denser neighborhoods, near downtown. The earthquake and its aftermath have widened her world, expanding her experience not only to hospitals and US suburbs, but even in the very city where she has lived for more than thirty

years. She does not seem to feel totally comfortable within the change; she is ill-at-ease, out-of-place. They have become strangers to their old life.

Now, on the taptap down the hill, Celita runs into a young man in black slacks and a button-down shirt who recognizes her. His mother died of breast cancer in the same hospital room that Kerlange was in for months after the earthquake. They laugh and catch up. Celita admonishes him: “You never call me!” but then remembers that, in fact, her old phone was stolen, so there’s no way he could have. They exchange phone numbers, again. Another example of small communities formed amid loss.

Back at the house, while Celita cleans the meat and crabs with sour orange, Kerlange and I look through an American fashion magazine, at severe-looking stiletto heels. “I want to wear those, and those,” she tells me. “Those are pretty.” Her prosthetic ankle, however, cannot bend, and her other leg is still weak and minimally flexible, with unfixable nerve damage and scarring. “No one should wear shoes like that in Port-au-Prince,” I say. “The terrain’s no good for it.”

Kerlange puts on the portable DVD player to watch *Twilight*, yet again. She has a crush on Jacob, the dark and brooding werewolf. Youseline and her two little boys come up from downstairs. The little one (age two) comes over and lightly kicks me in the shins, then scampers away giggling, and the big one (age four) parrots everything I say. They spend a lot of their time terrorizing their poor little dog, Ti Fanm (Little Lady), pulling her tail and chasing her under furniture. Ti Fanm has a jagged scar on her head, and one of her eyes is cloudy and pale. “She was a viktim, too,” laughs Youseline. “We found her under the rubble after three days. Ti Fanm climbs up on the couch and starts humping my forearm vigorously. “She doesn’t normally do that to people,” Youseline says. “She’s got a stuffed bear she likes.” Youseline seems less fragile — funnier and bossier — than when I first met her, a year ago, at the hospital.

She is still thin, thinner than her sister Bernise, but she smiles more than she used to. She watches the movie on the DVD player for a few moments.

“I don’t remember the name of the last movie I saw in the theatre,” she says, suddenly. “It was something with Angelina Jolie. That was at the Imperial in Delmas 19, before it closed. I went with my husband.” The Imperial closed in 2004, amid the political upheaval and ensekirite that made people not go out anymore for fear of kidnapping. It is still there, cracked and abandoned. Youseline’s husband died suddenly in December 2009. (“You can die without being sick,” Celita told me, once.) He was maybe thirty. Every little passing anecdote is filled with ghosts.

The power goes out, then, so we have to stop watching Twilight.

Later, after dusk, Kerlange wants to go look at photos of our mutual friend Marc’s new baby on Facebook. Marc is a spirited, impulsive and boyish light-skinned bourgeois Haitian in his early fifties, who delights in flouting social mores and making friends across social classes. Though he lives primarily in Montreal, he came to Haiti to help after the quake, and became friends with Kerlange, and was one of the people who helped her secure her visa to travel to the US for treatment. He still calls her regularly to tease her and nag her about her homework. He worries about her, and her future.

So in the waning light of day, we make our way down the hill toward the cybercafé. Kerlange leans on Celita because the path is rocky; her stump gets sore where it rubs against the top of the prosthesis. I walk right behind them, shining the flashlight of my phone onto the rocks and potholes on the way. We finally get to the cybercafé, but it takes several minutes to get set up because there’s no electricity, and the young men running the café have to turn on their generator. Celita and I yawn. A black dog with no tail skulks in the doorway. “Maybe it got cut

off!” said Kerlange. “Earthquake viktim!” She laughs.

Finally we check Facebook and email, and look at photos of Marc’s fat new baby boy. “He’s not little!” says Celita. Then, there is extra time, so Kerlange decides to Google herself. She finds a few other people with her name, and then she comes across herself. “I’m famous,” she says.

It is a series of photographs taken of her at the hospital, by a Texas-based photojournalist. Kerlange is a different girl in the photos: thin and depressed, unable to walk or stand, unwilling to get out of bed. In the photos, her hand is still dead-seeming and black. Now Kerlange clicks through the online slideshow, giggling. She comes across one image of herself, in which she’s crying in pain as the physical therapists try to manipulate her injured arm. Looking at it now, she laughs and laughs. “Look at that picture of me, like a baby crying for bread and coffee!” she says, using the Haitian idiom. Celita looks away.

Kerlange looks at it for another moment. “Can I erase this one?” she asks.

“No. It’s not like Facebook.”

“Oh.”

Celita doesn’t like looking at these photos, and neither do I, so we step next door and buy some sodas, while Kerlange clicks through the slideshow again, and remembers her moments of fame — the days when her broken body could narrate everything that journalists, missionaries, and medical volunteers need to know, and she didn’t have to say a word. It is impossible to remain in the spotlight, at least, not without effort and savvy, of which Kerlange has neither.

Heading back up the hill, Kerlange is obviously tired, and salvation comes in the form of a white pick-up truck with RadioOne insignia on it. The driver, a young Haitian man with

glasses, leans out the window, and, correctly assessing me to be an Anglophone foreigner, calls in English in a thick accent, “Where are you going to bounce?”

“Huh?” I respond.

“Oh, you don’t speak slang?”

He gives us a ride up the hill. Kerlange sits in the passenger seat, and Celita and I climb in the back of the pick-up.

When we get back a few minutes later, Kerlange gets out, giggling. “He was staring at my leg and kept saying, ‘Oh, all the beautiful women of this country, all the *bout patate* women and the *zopope* women alike,” meaning thick-like-a-chunk-of-sweet-potato women and skin-and-bones women alike, “are cut up, from that earthquake. A nice, thick girl like you...’ Anything I said, he would just shake his head and say in English, ‘Shit, man. Shit, man.’ I think he was high. I had to turn my face so he wouldn’t see me laughing.”

But Celita was touched. “He was very nice. There are still nice people in Haiti.” She keeps saying this, for the rest of the evening. She is not used to such random acts of kindness here, whereas I see them all the time.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next morning, Kerlange sleeps late, as she usually does on weekends, and I get up early to drink coffee and make spaghetti with Celita. I remember how weak and disgusting she found American coffee, and how afraid she was of seeming ungrateful for it.

“Kerlange’s papa called me early this morning and woke me up,” she mutters. He is, in her words, a vagabond, a good-for-nothing. He always says he is going to come visit, but he never does. He only visited Kerlange once during her eight months in the hospital, and he never sends money.

“What’s he like?” I ask.

“Ah!” Celita replies, with a dismissive cluck. “Ah!” and that is enough.

“Did you love him?”

“Not really. But I was working in another house nearby, and his way went with my way...”

She tells me that Kerlange's father was one of the men who was too afraid to climb up into the building amid the aftershocks to rescue Kerlange and her aunt, who was his sister. All night, she says, she was running up and down, trying to find someone to help her.

It's hard to predict when grief will rise to the surface.

Celita begins to recount the night of the earthquake. She spoons tomato paste into the hot oil, slices onions, begins to fry the spaghetti. I’ve heard this story before, but I feel as though she’s not really telling me. She’s not talking to my face; she’s talking into space, in my presence. She tells me again about how they pulled Kerlange’s aunt whom she had always called “manman,” from the rubble where she had been crushed by the chatodo, and she died in Celita’s arms. “Give me a little water, Celita. I can’t breathe,” she said, and that was all. “If there had been medical care then, if we had gotten her out sooner...” wonders Celita. “Maybe,” I say, softly. “But sometimes people are just really badly hurt, and there’s nothing you can do for them.”

Celita starts crying silently. Her nose gets pink and her eyes water. She wipes the tears away with the back of her hand.

*Fall 2012-Summer 2013*



My name is Kerlange Saintil. I was born in a little country that was formerly known as the Pearl of the Antilles, or Haïti Cheri. I have a brother and a sister. We had a good life with our family. We didn't grow up with our mother, we grew up with my father's sister who we used to call manman. My father is a negligent guy [*nèg vag*]!! Well, if I am to tell the truth, my birth was an accident.

I lost my right leg in a *goudougoudou*, I thought my life was over. I lived through a catastrophic event on January 12 and I wouldn't like to live it again. But even if I still think about it somewhat, I am obliged to keep living with it until I die. I found people and friends who love me and who appreciate me the way I am and who give me advice. And I hate men, I should say, a little bit. Even if I've never had one of my own, and I have never had that experience — but they're always pretending that they are a big deal!!!!

Nowadays, I see Celita as my manman.

I can't claim that I am happy because I am still living this way. Because I'd like to live the same way that other young people like me live, without them looking at me or judging me based on my appearance. They like to do that a lot.

I like to watch a lot of films, and listen to music. And I like to go out and have fun, but sadly I can never go out because there's no one to take me. I only go out when I go to school. I can't say that I have friends at school. But I talk to people.

I'd like to become a surgeon like Dr. Miller, and I'd like to help my country someday. Like, people who don't have means. And my own family, too.

I don't know what happened to my aunt. I don't know, they never tell me. Nobody tells me. Whenever I ask about her, they don't want to respond, or else they change the subject. But I don't believe she's alive. If she were alive, she would have come to see me.

*Kerlange, email to me, December 2012*

Kerlange and Celita continue to live in the apartment above Youseline and Bernise. Until October 2013, Kerlange's younger siblings remained in the provinces with their paternal grandmother, sometimes unable to pay for school at all. Then Kerlange's sister returned to Port-au-Prince, while the brother remains in the countryside. She and Kerlange seem happy, living together after nearly four years apart, bickering as they brush, grease, and braid one another's hair: "Why are you pulling it so hard? Are you doing that on purpose?" "I have been sitting here

in this chair for an *eternity*."

Kerlange continues to attend the bourgeois school, but it is not going well. While she is reasonably good at languages and social science, she hates math and claims not to understand it, saying that the numbers just swim in her head. She is failing math and physics, and for that reason, she will not pass the school year, and worse still, she does not seem to care. This is a problem for her US sponsors and her upper-class Haitian patrons. When, in the summer of 2013, I met up with him for a glass of chilled rosé on his back porch in suburban Montreal, Marc — who had put so much effort and energy into helping Kerlange and who had worried so much about her future — vented about Kerlange's failure to succeed. Indeed, he seemed far more concerned about Kerlange's uncertain future than Kerlange does. Marc was disappointed that she had "flunked" at her bourgeois school. He was horrified that she has gained so much weight, and kept urging her to diet. He blamed her poor diet, her affection for fried snacks and her disdain for vegetables. "Can you talk to her about it?" he asked me. When it comes down to it, Marc says, she is "lazy." Her upper-class Haitian supporters are upset that she has not taken advantage of the opportunities with which they presented her.

It is true that she has gained a lot of weight; she is nearly unrecognizable from the slim young girl she was three years ago in the hospital. She has gotten so much bigger that her prosthesis no longer fits right and has to be cut and loosened to accommodate her. But there is little she can do to lose weight, because it is so hard for her to burn more calories than she takes in. She can walk, unsteadily, with the prosthesis and her other injured leg, but not on the uneven terrain of Port-au-Prince. She cannot go to a gym or have a personal trainer who specializes in the needs of the physically handicapped; she cannot belong to a swim club. Celita, meanwhile, has never learned to discipline her child — who is, by now, no longer a child but a young

woman. Celita does not know how to tell her to eat more leafy greens and less rice with sauce and hot dogs and fried plantains. For that matter, Celita herself is a product of food scarcity, of a context in which starvation, rather than obesity, was the threat; a context in which heavy caloric meals (if you could get them) would quickly get burned off through constant physical labor. Celita never had to be a mother or run her own household before the earthquake. She has been a domestic servant since she was seven years old, and has always lived in other people's houses. Overcome with guilt and concern, her only response to Kerlange is to spoil her in whatever way she can. When she looks at her daughter sometimes, her face fills with fear, with the potential to lose her all over again — not only to the earthquake that nearly took Kerlange's life, but to the life circumstances, the poverty, family situation, housing situation, powerlessness and marginality that kept her from being a mother for the first fifteen years of Kerlange's life. As Kerlange grows chubbier, Celita grows thinner. When I ask her why, she shrugs. "Stress. You know."

Kerlange reads, over and over, the same wrinkled fashion magazines that she brought back from the US in 2010; she listens to the songs on her iPod; she watches TV when they turn the power on. She circles the advertisements for ProActiv solutions and wonders if it will get rid of her teenaged acne - though she is becoming a young woman now, no longer a girl. She daydreams, puts off studying, and fails trigonometry. She has amassed a large collection of cosmetics and enjoys giving makeovers. Celita giggles when her daughter offers to apply foundation and eyeliner and says "Oh, why do I need such things?" Kerlange rarely takes out her earphones until the battery dies. She still calls Celita "Celie," never "Manman."

\* \* \* \* \*

As we sipped our wine on that pleasant Montreal evening, I asked Marc, "What were you hoping for? That she'd grow up and become a doctor? That she'd grow up and become president and save Haiti?"

"No!" he exclaimed, exasperated. "I want her to be able to make a living, okay? What's she going to do? She's got an illiterate mother. She has to be able to make a living!"

The hope of Kerlange's sponsors — both the Americans and the privileged Haitians — was that this girl, after so much suffering and disadvantage, might grow up to have a comfortable middle-class life, to take care of herself and Celita. They, collectively, had given her a remarkable gift: a more mobile and functional body, a trip to the United States, a decent place to live, a source of income, a place in a well-to-do high school. They had given of their money, their time, their energy, their affect: they had opened their lives, their homes, their hearts to someone who ordinarily would not have access to any of those things. But there were expectations built into the gift: that she succeed, that she be economically functional and productive. They wanted her to be an outstanding, autonomous liberal individual, a person who overcomes her circumstances. They wanted her to transform one displacement into another, moving from charity to self-empowerment. But the factors that shaped Kerlange and constrained her life were as much structural as individual. While perhaps the occasional extraordinary individual could, with luck, overcome those structural limitations, an ordinary person could not. Kerlange was presented with extraordinary opportunities because her story was so moving, but she was in fact just an ordinary girl whose life was turned upside-down by the earthquake. They put her in a fancy school and she did not thrive. She had not been particularly intellectual or ambitious before the earthquake, and the earthquake did not change that. Nor did the opportunities she was presented with after the earthquake make her properly grateful,

hardworking, or inspired, and they could not change the poverty of her upbringing. Among many of the Haitian poor, there is a sense of resignation and powerlessness. The mentality of *demen-si-dye-vle* — there is no "tomorrow" in Haitian Creole, only "tomorrow-God-willing" -- for a “lack of certainty disrupts a sense of the future” (Nordstrom 2004: 66). Kerlange lost her place in the world on January 12, 2010 — her home, the woman she called her mother, her existing family unit.

Whatever the good intentions of Kerlange's relatively powerful friends and sponsors, their individualized charitable interventions could not be a shortcut out of the structural conditions of her life. For that matter, even if their efforts had succeeded — even if Kerlange had succeeded in her new school and become the "right kind" of story — those interventions still would not have addressed the economy or structure of her life, or the life of people like her, of the Haitian poor.

Yet all the actors in this story engage in these highly individualized charitable interventions. Upper class Haitians like Marc and Haitians in the *dyaspora*, drawn into the remittances economy and close or distant relations of patronage. Good-hearted medical volunteers like Dr. Miller and his wife Beth, or the small charity that brought Kerlange to America and gave her a princess crown. Even the anthropologist, who long ago gave up the illusion of objectivity. We all participate, all of us who are connected by blood or choice or obligation to Haiti.

But this has long been the case in Haiti; the pervasiveness of individualized charity is not a product of the earthquake, although the earthquake, and the disintegration of so many households and networks, brought it into starker relief. Still, for the commonness of personalized intervention, no one can help everyone; few could fully help even those they

personally knew or cared about. This was not a matter of the suffering stranger. I chose to help Melise's family, and that choice was shaped by my personal relationship with them, a sense of obligation, a sense that "there but for the grace of whatever go I," and the knowledge that they were truly poor and that Melise's death had compounded their poverty. I did not choose to help Mme. Joseph — a choice that seemed rational to me, but which to her seemed like an ungrateful affront. These questions — whom can I help? whom do I choose to help? for whom can I spare my limited economic, emotional, temporal, and social resources? — are part of our very engagement, part of what ties us (however ambivalently, however conflictedly) together.

### *Displacement, redux*

In order to understand experiences of and reactions to post-earthquake displacement, one must understand the other displacements that have constituted the lives of individual Haitians, and of the Haitian people collectively and historically. This history suggests that household and geographic fluidity and shifts are the norm rather than the exception, and that all of those shifts — be they involuntary or ostensibly voluntary — are the result of oppression, rightlessness, direct violence or structural violence. The earthquake itself, as I have said, was an extraordinary event; the social fallout of the earthquake was exceptional on the level of scale, but was far from unprecedented. Rather than being moments of exceptional or isolated rupture, these ongoing shifts in household and community are one of the central characteristics of life for Haitian people.

The two case histories I presented pivot around the earthquake as a moment of loss, rupture, change, new opportunity, physical displacement and new living circumstances, as well as international mobility. But they demonstrate the fluidity of home and geography for people

before the earthquake, particularly poor people originally from rural areas who work and live in marginalized positions in other people's homes (as both Melise and Celita did). Working — particularly both working and living — as domestic servants in other people's homes is a place in which these various forces of displacement intersect; they are not "homeless" but they do not have their own homes. And so these were some of the people who were most vulnerable after the earthquake.

The story of Melise and her family and the story of Celita and Kerlange are alike in that they both demonstrate the particular problems and vulnerabilities faced by women and mothers from Grand-Anse who are household workers in Port-au-Prince. However, their stories also differ in key ways. One of these is the relationship with the larger kin network. Melise was socially, financially, and emotionally embedded in her larger family and community — and remains an important figure for them, even after her death. In her life, she was responsible for many of her relatives, both as a breadwinner and as a parent or surrogate parent.

Celita, by contrast, is distant from both her biological family and the family of her children's father — she is neither dependent on them, nor do they depend on her. It was not until the earthquake that she was forced to become a parent to Kerlange — at least, a parent in an official sense, though one lacking the experience and confidence to discipline or set limits for her child, and lacking the means to provide for her. Until the earthquake reshuffled the social order and family relations, Celita had always lived in other people's houses in a position of relative powerlessness. After the quake, her abilities and knowledge had changed little, but others' expectations of her had changed greatly. Before the quake, she was an impoverished and illiterate woman from rural Grand-Anse working as a servant in a low-income Port-au-Prince household, who cherished her biological offspring but who could be no more than a loving

auxiliary caretaker to them, who had long relinquished them to the care of their father's family. After the quake, she was expected to be a parent and a legal custodian to a seriously injured and often recalcitrant teenager, to make decisions about her future and her care, and to navigate new and unknown terrains where she felt uncomfortable and unprepared: hospital wards in Port-au-Prince filled with amputees and foreign volunteers; interactions with elite Haitians, US media, and aid workers who sought to help and represent her daughter; the wide, manicured streets of suburban North Carolina in winter.

The second key difference is in the two families' experiences of aid. Melise's relatives received little institutionally-funded aid, apart from a few high-calorie biscuits and water when they briefly lived in a camp in the days after the quake. What help they received was in the form of remittances, mostly from Julienne's father and other relatives in Miami, and from myself. Julienne's father, Constant, and her paternal aunts and other relatives, though relatively poor by US standards, immediately sent what they could to Julienne via Western Union and CAM transfers. (Such was the humanitarian sentiment that Western Union waived its transfer fees to Haiti for some weeks after the quake, and AT&T waived long-distance charges for people calling Haiti from the US.) This was overwhelmingly the case for the Haitian *dyaspora*: Haitian people living abroad, from working-class and lower-income people like Constant to middle- and upper-class Haitian professionals, mobilized to send funds and resources to their relatives (in the form of remittances) and compatriots (in the form of aid). It was a moment of both helping one's own loved ones, and serving the greater Haiti nation. As for me, I engaged in grassroots fundraising – for in those days, I was overwhelmed with queries from friends, acquaintances, neighbors, and people who had seen me on the news, about how they could “help Haiti” – and combined those funds with my own savings to send \$1500 US directly to Claudine and Julienne



within two weeks of the earthquake – about thirty months’ worth of Melise’s salary. My feeling was simply that if I had happened to be standing where Melise was standing and Melise had happened to be standing where I was standing, I would be dead and she would not. I, like other people in this story, had come to favor certain relations over others; I felt as though it was my responsibility to help the people she had suddenly left behind. It felt not as an act of patronage so much as an act of surrogacy, but I remain a relatively privileged white American, and the boundaries and power relations of the patron-client relationship can be altered and blurred, but not erased. The remittances economy illustrates the complexity and intersection of kin and patron-client relationships, which better describes reality than the simplified aid world vision of beneficiary individuals in a discrete community. Communities and families, in fact, are transnational, vast, and diverse, and consist of biological and fictive kin both in Haiti and abroad, of friends and patrons. Much aid is informal.

Though Melise's family had suffered the loss of a beloved family member and breadwinner, they were not visible victims: they did not live long-term in a camp, and their only seriously injured relative had not survived and so could not serve as visible evidence of ongoing suffering. Celita and Kerlange, by contrast, were visible: they were living in a hospital with a nearly constant influx of foreign medical volunteers and foreign journalists, and Kerlange was severely injured. Kerlange's injuries made possible not only the initial medical help they received both in Haiti and ultimately abroad, but also payment for their long-term housing, care, and Kerlange's education. All of this long-term assistance was carried out through personal charity and small US-run organizations.

Still, despite the differences in these two families’ experiences of aid, they are alike in that neither family received significant aid from major international organizations. Kerlange's

hospital received some funding from international organizations immediately after the earthquake, but it was relatively minor because the hospital administration did not want to cede control to foreigners (at one point, they refused to let MSF set up operations there). Until May 2010, the hospital received food assistance from USAID (in the form of massive sacks of white rice, large cans of oil, and cans of salty mackerel in sauce, all of which were emblazoned with the American flag and the slogan “Gift from the American People”, and which the patients ate every day until they were thoroughly sick of it). But all of the extraordinary effort that went into Kerlange's care took place through small-scale charity, carried out by people who had met her.

Any discussion of the earthquake and post-earthquake displacement must also be a discussion of aid — how humanitarian and development aid have been proposed as a solution to the displacement crisis, as well as Haitian experiences and perceptions of those efforts to offer assistance. In fact, much post-quake aid was personal, even that which was administered through large organizations. The personal dynamics of aid are often invisible to outside observers (i.e., North Americans, Europeans, and others who have never lived in an aid economy) who assume that things happen institutionally and on a large scale. Many Haitians would refer directly to the personal side of aid — to nepotism, favoritism, and the need for personal connections. These experiences will be explored at greater length in the next section.

**PART TWO: A HISTORY OF INTERVENTION AND AID**

*A Timeline of Selected Events and International Interventions in Haiti*

1804 - Haitian independence

1825-1947 - Haiti pays indemnity to France for revolution/independence

1862 - United States formally recognizes Haiti

1912 - Haytian-American Sugar Company founded by American businessmen (though constructed and developed during Occupation)

1915-1934 — US Marine Occupation of Haiti

1915 — Corvée system instituted

1915 — Dartiguenave installed as President

1919 — Assassination of Charlemagne Péralte

1929 - Aux Cayes massacre

1934 - US Marines withdraw from Haiti

1956 - Construction begins on Péligre dam

1958 - Cité Simone created

1959-1961 US sends nearly \$30 in foreign aid to François Duvalier

1961-1969 — Notorious massacres of anti-Duvalier militants, intellectuals and their families

1971 — Death of François Duvalier, accession of Jean-Claude Duvalier

early 1980s - advent of PVOs (forerunners of NGOs)

1983 — USAID eradication of the Creole pigs

1985 — USAID unsuccessfully replaces Creole pigs with "*kochon blan*"

1986 - Jean-Claude Duvalier flees Haiti on US plane

1991 - Jean-Bertrand Aristide elected president

1991 — Aristide overthrown by coup d'état (SOA-trained Cédras)

1994-1995 - Aristide restored by multinational (US-run) Operation Uphold Democracy

1995 — United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH)

2004 - Aristide removed from power on US plane, goes into exile

2004 - present - United Nations Haiti Stabilization Mission (MINUSTAH)

2005-2009 — NGO budget exceeds Haitian national budget

2009 — World Bank estimates 10,000 NGOs working in Haiti

2010 January-June - US Marines sent to Haiti after earthquake

late October 2010 – Cholera epidemic begins

2012 - MINUSTAH mandate extended

*Interlude: April 2010, Pétionville*

*Joy, a physical therapist in her fifties, came to Haiti two months after the earthquake to work as a volunteer. She is from Texas, a mother of five. She was a former USO girl and remains a Republican, with honey-colored hair and skin damaged by too many years in the sun. She has a tendency to use inspirational platitudes in moments when they do not obviously fit. Joy's relationship with Haiti and Haitians vacillates quickly between pity and confused disdain. She weeps in the evenings for the children she treats during the day, but in other moments, she disparages Haitians for their "laziness."*

*One day, Joy asks me in frustration, "Why does nothing work in Haiti? What's wrong with Haiti? How come no one here wants to collaborate? How come they haven't moved forward?"*

*"The rest of the world never forgave Haiti for 1804," I reply.*

*"What's 1804?" asked Joy.*

*"The revolution. Independence."*

*"Oh. Right."*

*"If you take a nation of people who are almost all former slaves, and expect them to successfully govern themselves and create a functional democracy while the rest of the world intentionally fucks them over—"*

*"But 1804, that was more than two hundred years ago!" Joy exclaims. Then she lowers her voice. "They've got such a sense of entitlement," she said, quietly, darkly. Her mascara had sweated into the creases under her eyes. "I just feel like if you work for something, you deserve it, but you don't deserve it if you just sit there. And sometimes here I just feel like people expect me to feel guilty for being American! I could have been born a Haitian and been just as happy!"*

## ***The Past in the Present: Historical and Economic Macro Context***

*A country wracked by more than a decade of invasion and revolution, then faced with financial punishment and isolation for scores of years, could not build the internal framework a strong civil society requires. This new, impoverished nation, endowed with a deeply divided class structure and seeking to survive with only the feeblest of institutions, was befriended by no one. Over time, that comfortable phrase—"misrule, poverty, and political strife"—now used to explain everything in Haiti, became more and more applicable.*

Sidney Mintz, Boston Review, January 2010

Why was the January 12 earthquake the catastrophe it was? Why did so many people die? Why was the destruction so complete? Why have relief and reconstruction been so challenging? And why is Haiti so intractably poor?

Social scientists who study disasters are fond of saying "there is no such thing as a natural disaster." That is to say that social, economic, and historical factors — rather than the movement of tectonic plates — produce the real damage. The Haiti earthquake is, as historian Laurent Dubois put it, an "aftershock of history." The earthquake was the massive catastrophe it was because of more than three hundred years of political, ecological, and social history that preceded it. To the question "Why was the earthquake the disaster it was?" the short response would be "extreme geographic, political, and economic centralization" and "lack of government oversight." Below, I sketch briefly how these processes came to be.

What follows is absolutely not a comprehensive history of Haiti — Haitian and non-Haitian historians have done more thorough and creative work on this than I can. Rather, I hope to provide the background necessary to understand how Haiti came to be the way it was by the time the earthquake occurred, why the earthquake was a disaster on a massive scale, and why people reacted to the earthquake the ways they did. I have selected certain moments and eras of Haitian political and economic history that directly suggest an answer to the questions above. This is a strategy employed by Paul Farmer in the first section of his 1994 book, *The Uses of*

*Haiti*, in which he endeavors to present "a view of history as a dynamic and interconnected process, and, accordingly, a view of Haiti as enmeshed in a larger social and economic system" and to "privilege a 'Haitian version' of the country's history" (50). The following differs from Farmer's work in two principal ways. First, it is simply longer — where Farmer's selected history serves as a lead-up to the overthrow and return of Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1994, mine leads up to the earthquake of early 2010. Second, my politics are less transparent than Farmer's, who, in 1994, was a well-known Lavalas partisan. I have come to Haiti at a very different moment in time — one that is sadly without the seeming political clarity that Farmer enjoyed — a moment in which social justice is no less desirable, but perhaps less imaginable.

The January 12, 2010 earthquake was the disaster it was because of preexisting poverty, extreme overpopulation in the capital, and lack of building codes due to the absence of state oversight. Many contemporary representations of Haiti in foreign media naturalize the fact of Haitian poverty: Haiti is poor, Haitian people are poor (materially, economically, as well intellectually, culturally and morally). Haiti is backward, primitive, atavistic, violent, diseased. Haiti is starving children eating mud, people dying of AIDS, ragged people. Haitian poverty is described, exaggerated, even luxuriated over, but it is not always explained as having its roots in identifiable historical events and trends. These include the post-independence indemnity Haiti was made to pay to France, centuries of environmental degradation, and the policies of structural adjustment that Haiti was made to adhere to by foreign powers.

### ***A History of International Intervention in Haiti***

*"I don't want to listen; your words sound like the truth but the truth is probably a sin."  
Jacques Roumain, *Masters of the Dew**

In order to understand the implications of the post-quake foreign aid response and the



way that Haitian people perceived it, one must know Haiti's long, complicated, and often brutal history with foreign interventions. These include a variety of projects: some military, some focused on agricultural development, some focused on economic development, some humanitarian and focused on saving lives and medical intervention.

I have intentionally lumped many sorts of things into an overarching category of "international interventions." This is for two primary reasons. First, most Haitians do not differentiate between the different kinds of interventions they witness and experience as "military," "development," or "humanitarian." The various agendas and strategies become conflated, and people talk about "the international community" or "the NGOs" or "the blans" [foreigners] as a collective. As this research focuses on how people perceive and experience post-quake interventions, rather on objective truth, I have elected to describe the phenomena as the beneficiaries see them. This lack of differentiation has very real consequences: an unpopular or failed project by one entity may be blamed on "the international community." Habitat for Humanity or MSF may run into problems because of something MINUSTAH or Samaritan's Purse did (or was thought to have done).

But this lack of differentiation cannot be ascribed to mere "ignorance." However discrete their purposes claim to be, it is impossible to neatly delineate among military, development, and humanitarian projects. They overlap — sometimes intentionally, and sometimes in more unexpected ways. From the US Marine occupation of 1915-1934 to today's MINUSTAH, military interventions have been strategically "softened" with economic and infrastructural development. Short-term, emergency humanitarian interventions stretch into long-term, sustainable development projects. The agendas and goals of seemingly different forms of intervention are surprisingly fluid, and subject to politics, donors' wishes, and fashion.

I have selected moments in Haiti's history that illustrate the effects of foreign politics and foreign interventions on Haiti. This is not, again, a comprehensive history. Rather, it is intended as an answer to the question: "What are some of the things that Haitian people think about when they think of the international community?"

### ***Slavery and Revolution***

*"My decision to destroy the authority of the blacks in Saint Domingue is not so much based on considerations of commerce and money, as on the need to block forever the march of the blacks in the world."*

Napoleon Bonaparte

The extractive colony of Saint-Domingue was famously "la perle des Antilles" (the pearl of the Antilles) because of its lush and fertile land. Sugar, the rum derived from it, and other cash crops (such as indigo, coffee, and cotton) grown in Saint-Domingue and sold in Europe made France extremely wealthy. By the late eighteenth century, the small colony of Saint-Domingue generated more revenue than all thirteen of the American colonies combined, and by 1789, it produced three-quarters of the world's sugar (Farmer 1994).

But the cultivation of sugar damaged and depleted the land. Land degradation and deforestation — and the resulting landslides, low agricultural productivity, reliance on foreign aid and imports, and rural-to-urban migration — are often presented as problems of late-20<sup>th</sup> century Haiti and the "fault" of peasants who are unable or unwilling to invest their time, labor, and (generally nonexistent) money into sustainable cultivation, and instead cut down trees to make charcoal. However, deforestation began in Saint-Domingue in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when trees were cleared to make room for sugar plantations to satiate Europe's growing taste for sweetness (Mintz 1985).

Whatever the ecological effects of sugar production were, the greatest damage inflicted by the plantation economy was human, as was discussed in the previous section on displacement. The chattel slavery of Africans and their descendants in the Americas in the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries was universally harsh, but perhaps nowhere was it more brutal than in sugar plantations in French colonies (Mintz 1974). The Baron de Vastey, one of the first eminent Haitian writers and intellectuals, gave this chilling and unflinching 1814 account of the punishments slaves endured in colonial Saint-Domingue.

Have they not hung up men with heads downward, drowned them in sacks, crucified them on planks, buried them alive, crushed them in mortars? Have they not forced them to eat shit? And, after having flayed them with the lash, have they not cast them alive to be devoured by worms, or onto anthills, or lashed them to stakes in the swamp to be devoured by mosquitoes? Have they not thrown them into boiling cauldrons of cane syrup? Have they not put men and women inside barrels studded with spikes and rolled them down mountainsides into the abyss? Have they not consigned these miserable blacks to man-eating dogs until the latter, sated by human flesh, left the victims to be finished off with bayonet and poniard? (De Vastey, cited in Heinl and Heinl, 23, footnote on 780)

In Saint-Domingue, between five and ten percent of the slave population perished each year due to overwork, violence, and disease (Dubois 2010), so that the only thing that kept the colony “efficient” was the steady importation of new slaves from Africa. From the cargo ships to the plantations, some Africans chose suicide over the abominations and horrors of slavery, as in the case of a slave woman in the Artibonite who poisoned or killed more than seventy children in order to spare them the suffering of slavery (Fick 48), or the old tale (more recently turned into the novel *Rosalie l'Infâme* by Haitian writer Evelyne Trouillot) of a midwife in colonial Saint-Domingue who killed babies rather than have them grow up as slaves. However tragic, however pitiful, however inconceivable these acts may sound to readers today, they were a small, personal form of resistance in a system of terror and violence.

Small acts of resistance begot one of the most remarkable sagas of revolt in history. In

1791, the slaves of Saint-Domingue rose up against their colonial masters. It began in the north, with the vodou ceremony at Bois Caïman, and over the days and months that followed, it spread through the colony. That the revolution began with a vodou ceremony is far more than a mere historical footnote. Many of these slaves-turned-rebels had been born in Africa, or their parents had been born in Africa, and their beliefs, values, politics, and sense of identity had been shaped by their experiences in their homelands and the loss of those homelands, and by the Middle Passage, as well as by slavery itself (Dubois 2010). Many of them had once been free, many of them had lived not only the violence of slavery but also the violence of kidnapping and displacement. Vodou was resistance, and it was also a way (as I discussed in the previous chapter) for enslaved people in Saint-Domingue to reconnect experientially and symbolically with the homes, families, and identities they had lost. Without vodou, Jean Price-Mars (1928) argues, there would not have been a revolution: “1804 est issue du Vaudou.”

The history of the Haitian Revolution is complicated. A meaningful discussion of those years would include (among other things) global politics and policies, the competing strategies, priorities, and goals of several Haitian military leaders-cum-political leaders, and the emergence of modern human rights discourse. For our purposes here – and with apologies to many excellent Haitian and non-Haitian historians who have done innovative and incisive research on the Revolution and its aftermath – we are less concerned with the intricacies of the Revolution than its enduring mythicohistory (Malkki 1996) and what it represents to Haitians, and others, alive today. The Haitian Revolution and Haitian independence were, at a time when black slavery in the Caribbean was at the center of the world economic system, unthinkable (MR Trouillot 1995).

On January 1, 1804, Haiti officially became the world's first independent Black republic,

and the only country ever to be born of a widespread slave rebellion. One of Jean-Jacques Dessalines's first acts as the ruler of independent was to declare all Haitians "black" by law, and then to order the massacre of all the remaining whites.<sup>13</sup> The massacre of the remaining white colonists was, according to historical accounts, extremely bloody, and involved the slaughter of entire families. Dessalines then issued a proclamation: "*Never again shall colonist or European set foot on this soil as master or landowner. This shall henceforward be the foundation of our constitution.*" From Haiti's inception, race and the unacceptability of foreign control were central to Haitian identity and policy. Meanwhile, the new country of Haiti was immediately ignored, embargoed, and made to pay for throwing off its colonial masters. The events of the early nineteenth century demonstrate the ways in which Haiti's early years were shaped (generally, for the worse) by the machinations and policies of other countries, and are central to understanding Haitian people's distrust of and complicated history with encroachment by foreign powers. It is a wonder and a testament to the organizational and military capabilities of the slaves-turned-revolutionaries of colonial Saint-Domingue that, from plantation to plantation divided by mountainous terrain, they managed to seize independence from France. But the descendants of those slaves-turned-revolutionaries have never stopped paying for their independence.

---

<sup>13</sup>While "black" was largely a signifier of skin color, it was not absolutely so. The Polish soldiers who had defected from Napoleon's army and joined the Haitian revolutionary cause were deemed legally "black" by the Haitian constitution. It will remain important to recall that at other moments in Haitian history, "blackness" speaks more to national identity and allegiance than to skin color.

## ***Post-Independence***

*"Never again shall colonist or European set foot on this soil as master."*  
Jean-Jacques Dessalines

From the beginning, Haiti was at many disadvantages, owing both to the circumstances of its independence, and to the attitude of the rest of the world. The Haitian military leaders who had succeeded in organizing and carrying out the revolution did not have the political training or experience to govern the new country, especially a country of just-liberated, mostly illiterate and uneducated former slaves, where the recent conflict (not to mention the centuries of brutal plantation slavery) had led to widespread death, human casualties and physical devastation of the existing urban infrastructure and much of the agricultural land.

From 1825 all the way to 1947, Haiti was forced (with French warships stationed along the coast) to pay France 90 million francs in indemnity — which France termed "independence debt" for claims over property that France had "lost" in the Revolution. In return, France granted Haiti diplomatic recognition. The total disbursed over more than one hundred and twenty years was estimated by the Haitian government in 2003 to be equivalent to more than \$20 billion in today's currency.<sup>14</sup>

France formally recognized Haiti in 1834; the United States did not recognize Haiti as an independent nation until 1862, owing to American laws and attitudes regarding the institution of slavery and the status of free Black people. In fact, this was only possible in 1862 because it occurred after the secession of the southern US states had removed the slaveholding votes from Congress. In turn, the nascent Haitian state regarded the United States — so very close, and still

---

<sup>14</sup> This episode of Haitian-French relations was recalled uncomfortably in July 2010, six months after the earthquake, when a group called the Committee for the Reimbursement of the Indemnity Money Extorted from Haiti (C.R.I.M.E.) staged an elaborate hoax designed to raise awareness, in which an actor, playing a French government official, announced that France would be repaying Haiti its independence debt. Adjusted for inflation, the amount of money paid by Haiti to its former colonizers dwarfs the amount of aid disbursed to Haiti after the earthquake.

deeply dependent on slave labor — as a threat and potential colonizer. They viewed it as "an expansionist power bent on spreading slavery and racism into the tropics" (Plummer 1992: 1).

### **US Marine Occupation - 1915-1934**

*Now you know what's in the belly of misery, and you know that all the marvels that our land can yield are not for black people like you and me. You know why white Americans are the masters and why there are new tears in people's eyes each day, why people don't know how to read, why men leave their native land, why sickness ravages our people, and how little girls become whores.*

Jacques Stephen Alexis, *General Sun, My Brother*

*That so many good intentions and, for that matter, good works should have ignited such hostility, so deepened divisions and, in the end, left so little behind was not least among the tragedies of intervention - and of Haiti.*

Col. Robert D. Heintz, *Written in Blood*

The political situation in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Haiti — particularly between 1911 and 1915 — was characterized by instability, upheaval, insurgency and assassination. By the turn of the twentieth century, US marines had landed on Haitian soil eight times, ostensibly to "preserve American lives and property", and over the next fourteen years, US gunboats entered Haitian waters on several occasions when US interests were on the line (Renda 2001). These interests were economic: for Haiti to become a profitable banana republic for the United States, it first had to be safe and controlled, and conducive to foreign investors, which meant a military occupation (Schmidt 1970).

The use of force was further justified by the outbreak of World War I. Stability and American control in the Caribbean was necessary, the United States claimed, in order to thwart or prevent German influence in the region, so close to our own borders. In 1915, the US installed a puppet government in the presidency of Philippe Sudre Dartiguenave. When the unfortunate Dartiguenave's government — which had never been democratically elected by the

Haitian people — was unable to control the social unrest, the US declared martial law.

Underlying the United States' conviction of the economic, strategic, and moral good of military intervention in Haiti was a fundamental and completely racialized belief that Haitians were ruthless, sub-intelligent savages incapable of governing themselves (Schmidt 1970, Dubois 2010). For its part, the United States in the early twentieth century was hardly a beacon of enlightenment or tolerance; the occupation of Haiti began a mere fifty years after the abolition of slavery in the US. Many of the Marines hailed from the southern United States, where segregation and Jim Crow would remain the rule until well into the 1960s. The Marines possessed attitudes toward race that were fundamentally antithetical to respecting and bolstering an independent Black state.

The history of the US occupation abounds with jarring and pitiful anecdotes about the attitudes of the Marines toward the Haitian people. Major Smedley Butler, then the commandant of the gendarmerie (and therefore, nominally at least, of lower rank than the head of the Haitian state) once grabbed President Dartiguenave by the collar to prevent him from getting into a limousine ahead of then Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin Roosevelt. When Butler and Dartiguenave traveled together in Haiti, Butler slept on the bed while the Haitian president slept on the floor, and Butler claimed first use of their shared bathwater (Schmidt). Another chilling and deeply uncomfortable anecdote finds a high-ranking US civilian gushing to Roosevelt that the Haitian secretary of agriculture would have "brought \$1500 at auction in New Orleans in 1860 for stud purposes." (Schmidt 1971: 111).

The Haitian constitution of 1889 had forbidden foreign ownership of Haitian land; foreign powers and experts declared this refusal to be an impediment to investment and therefore to Haiti's development. The Haitian parliament refused to ratify a revised constitution drafted by



the US State Department in 1917 that would allow for foreign land ownership; in response, parliament was suspended for twelve years, and a new constitution was approved by the puppet government. "I wrote Haiti's Constitution myself, and if I do say it, it was a pretty good little Constitution," boasted Franklin Delano Roosevelt, then Secretary of State under Woodrow Wilson.

Meanwhile, Haitian government funds for development projects (infrastructure in health, agriculture, and education) were limited by US policy. US private investment was ostensibly to finance Haiti's development by creating wealth – which never came to be, as the people growing wealthy were not Haitian.

The occupation was rife with "unabashed racism" which contributed to the "outright brutality of the forced labor system" (Renda 2001). In the name of "development," the Americans reinstated the *corvée* system of forced labor, requiring Haitians peasants to work on roads projects far from their own homes, under armed supervision, with minimal compensation and inadequate food and lodging (Plummer 1992). The *corvée* resembled nothing so much as slavery under new colonial, white masters. The US occupation eliminated the Haitian small-holding system that had been in place since the Revolution, and effectively forced Haitians to work for meager pay on US-owned plantations (Schmidt 178). American attempts to reinstitute plantation agriculture — via large-scale foreign land acquisition and consolidation — were met with resistance and hostility from Haitian peasant smallholders. The holding of small, independent plots of land was one of the cornerstones of post-Independence Haiti. In Haiti — a country whose foundations, identity, and legacy are based on being the first independent Black republic and the only country to locate its origins in a widespread slave rebellion — the American occupation and policies were met with hostility. For these descendants of slaves,

ownership of their own land and habitation of their lakous meant liberty, autonomy, self-sufficiency, and even (as we saw in the previous section) ancestral connection.

### *Resistance to the Marine Occupation*

The Marine occupation took place in a Haiti that geographically and demographically differed starkly from the highly centralized, Port-au-Prince-centric Haiti of today. In the beginning of the twentieth century, provincial cities flourished along the coast and in the Central Plateau, and sparse road coverage meant that these provincial enclaves remained relatively discrete, if not isolated. Regionalism and geographic barriers contributed to the rise of the Cacos — the armed guerrilla units that resisted the occupation — throughout pockets of the countryside. A prominent figure among the Cacos was Charlemagne Péralte. In USMC and American media accounts, Péralte and the Cacos were described as "outlaws" and uncivilized "bandits", though in fact many of them were highly trained military officers, and the most vilified Péralte was an educated member of the provincial bourgeoisie (Gaillard 1982). For the Cacos, resisting the Marine occupation was a matter of national identity, for the occupation was not only a threat to present Haitian sovereignty but an affront to Haiti's history of emancipation from slavery and its existence as an independent Black republic. "I will not stay under the domination of the whites," said Péralte. Another Caco drew on the memory of revolutionary hero Jean-Jacques Dessalines "who, in giving us our country, has not given us the right to give it to the whites" (Gaillard 1981, in Dubois 2010).

Haitian resistance to the US occupation was not due only to economic policies or symbolic defenses of liberty and sovereignty, but also to the violence and brutality of the Americans' methods. The aforementioned Smedley Butler — he who insisted on using the

bathwater first — received his second congressional medal of honor for his service in Haiti, for his valor at Fort Rivière — a battle in which all forty-something Haitians within the fort were killed, against just one American injury. He recalled in later years that they had "hunted the *cacos* like pigs."

In 1920, the NAACP's James Weldon Johnson went on a fact-finding mission to Haiti for *The Nation*. He testified to the unnecessarily brutal methods of the US Marines.

...it has now become the duty and sport of American marines to hunt these 'cacos' with rifles and machine guns. I was seated at a table one day in company with an American captain of marines and I heard him describe a 'caco' hunt. He told how they finally came upon a crowd of natives having a cock fight and how they let them have it with machine guns.

I learned from the lips of American marines, themselves, of a number of cases of rape on Haitian women by marines.

Just before I left Port-au-Prince, an American marine caught a Haitian boy stealing sugar on the wharf, and instead of arresting him, he battered his brains out with the butt of his rifle.

Charlemagne Péralte was executed by the United States Marines on November 1, 1919.

The Marine who shot and killed him, Colonel Herman Hanneken, was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor in 1920.

For extraordinary heroism and conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in actual conflict with the enemy near GRANDE RIVIERE, Republic of Haiti, on the night of October 31st-November 1st, 1919, resulting in the death of Charlemange Peralte, the supreme bandit chief in the Republic of Haiti, and the killing and capture and dispersal of about 1200 of his outlaw followers. Second Lieutenant Hanneken not only distinguished himself by his excellent judgement and leadership, but unhesitatingly exposed himself to great personal danger, and the slightest error would have forfeited not only his life but the lives of the detachments of Gendarmerie under his command. The successful termination of his mission will undoubtedly prove of untold value to the Republic of Haiti.

Péralte's nearly-naked body, clad only in a ragged loincloth, was tied to a wooden door and publicly displayed. The Marines took a now-famous photograph of Péralte's corpse, and

distributed it throughout the countryside to warn, intimidate, and demoralize anyone else who might resist the occupation. The distribution of the photograph had, perhaps unsurprisingly, the opposite reaction. The death of the freedom fighter, and the image of him in death so reminiscent of Christ on the cross, turned Péralte into a martyr.

Estimates of the casualties of the US occupation of Haiti vary greatly — and according to the nationality of the person composing the account. Haitian historian Roger Gaillard suggests that some 15,000 Haitians were killed during the US occupation — versus ninety-eight Americans killed (Gaillard 1983).

### *Effects, Representations and Memory of the Occupation*

The 1915-1934 occupation was heralded by the US Marines as a success, and, in fact, was used as a template for the counterinsurgency manual for the US invasion of Iraq (Greenburg 2013). Following the brutal early years of the occupation, which were characterized by outright combat, the US switched to soft-power tactics by creating infrastructure.

The US marines implemented and oversaw a series of public works projects during the occupation, including the construction of roads, airstrips, and the training of the gendarmerie. One of the best-known programs created during the US occupation was the Service Technique de l'Agriculture et de l'Enseignement Professionnel (Technical Service for Agriculture and Professional Training). Today, the attractive, tree-filled grounds of the national agriculture school at Damien, on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince, are an enduring souvenir of the occupation. But this apparent progress came about by curtailing the liberty of Haitians, by using the *corvée* system, which was widely hated and considered a reinstatement of slavery by many of the conscripted Haitians. Mary Renda suggests that Haiti was not only resistant to the occupation

itself but to what she terms the "American idea": one of international capitalism and paternalism. For the Haitian peasantry, whose subsistence agriculture methods were at odds with this American idea, it was akin to slavery.

On October 31, 1929, the students and Haitian instructors from the agricultural school at Damien held a strike and marched into town. The other *facultés* in Port-au-Prince — law, medicine, applied sciences, and the *école normale* — followed. In November, student strikes took place throughout the country in Cap Haïtien in the north, Jacmel in the south, Gonaïves and St. Marc in the center. As November wore on, general strikes followed throughout Port-au-Prince, and ultimately through the country.

Caperton reacted by calling for reinforcements from the US, though he did not ultimately receive them. He did, however, reinstate martial law, enact a nationwide curfew, and ban the opposition press. The conflict between the Americans and the Haitian strikers reached its bloody apex on December 6, 1929, with the massacre in Les Cayes, when the marines opened fire on some fifteen hundred peasant marchers. Over the next few years, the violence and resistance made for negative press in the US, which in turn made it hard for the US to continue the occupation as a matter of foreign policy. The gradual withdrawal of US troops began, culminating with the American flag being lowered and the Haitian flag being raised in Cap Haïtien in 1934. Haitian politicians declared this a "second independence." Soon after the Americans withdrew, Charlemagne Péralte's body was disinterred. Buried in an unmarked grave as a "bandit" in 1919, he was given a hero's funeral.

Rhetoric around the "second independence" of Haiti notwithstanding, the actual events and the symbolism of the US occupation were a heavy blow to the Haitian economy, society, and identity. How could Haiti — proudly emancipated and independent — rationalize this long

military occupation by a powerful foreign nation?

In 1918, a Navy officer published a pamphlet that presented Haiti to US investors as an "island of opportunity" (Renda 120). Haiti during the US occupation — with its fertile land, great potential low-wage labor force, and obviously US investment-friendly regime — was indeed an island of opportunity, just not to Haitians. The Standard Fruit Company tried to make Haiti into another banana republic in the 1930, establishing irrigation systems and banana plantations in the Artibonite Valley. However, this scheme failed in the 1940s. The centerpiece of US investment was the Haytian-American Sugar Company, or HASCO.

American-owned HASCO was the largest enterprise under the occupation. By the mid-1930s, HASCO employed more than one thousand men, and had a series of railroads throughout the countryside that brought sugar cane into the capital for processing. But while US investment ostensibly was supposed to stimulate the Haitian economy, the owners of HASCO abdicated responsibility for its workers' treatment and payment, by subhiring through what Schmidt terms "native gang bosses." In that time, there were rumors of the HASCO workers being zombified, so that middlemen could steal their wages (Ramsey 2011). While someone unfamiliar with the context might dismiss rumors of zombification as mere superstition, the cosmology of the uneducated and backward Haitian poor, it in fact makes a great deal of ontological sense. A *zombi* in Haiti is very like a slave — only, unlike the slaves of Saint-Domingue, they cannot revolt. A *zombi* is a person who, through magic, has been stripped of personhood, of free will and spirit. A *zombi* is obedient, and will work ceaselessly. Therefore, the rumors of zombification of HASCO workers was a way for people to make sense of the sudden appearance of this factory whose labor practices so resembled the plantation — a virtual plantation run by white foreigners in the midst of nominally free and nominally independent Haiti.

## *Fear and Foreign Intervention Under Duvalier*

*Un cauchemar d'autant plus résistant que la légitimité et l'aide des "grands amis" étrangers paraissait convertir la dictature en un phénomène naturel, un horreur taillée à la mesure de notre pays d'illettrés, de chômeurs et de soi-disant inconscients.*

Gérard Pierre-Charles, *Radiographie d'une dictature*

The nightmare grew even stronger from the legitimacy and aid bestowed upon in by our "great friends" abroad, seeming to turn the dictatorship into a natural phenomenon, a horror perfectly tailored to our country of illiterates, of the unemployed, of the so-called unaware.

*Gérard Pierre-Charles, Radiograph of a dictatorship*

In the 1940s and 1950s, under presidents Magloire and Estimé, Haiti went through a period of “modernization” and “development,” which in many cases (such as the construction of the dam at Péligre) further impoverished the countryside and its inhabitants while promoting urban growth and centralization of Port-au-Prince. Many of these development programs were financed by the US and designed to promote US interests. Port-au-Prince became, for a period of time, a tropical and exotic yet refined wonderland for North American tourists. Despite what appears, at least in hindsight, to be the further weakening of the Haitian state and the consolidation of infrastructure in the capital, many older residents of Port-au-Prince today recall that era fondly, perhaps because of the political crises that followed.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the United States government was partly responsible for the rise and consolidation of power of the notorious dictator, François Duvalier. Duvalier, a physician by training who had participated in campaigns against infectious disease in the Haitian countryside, used the political rhetoric of *noirisme* to gain support of the rural Black masses against the mixed-race elite (Hurbon 1979, Trouillot 1990). However, despite his professed populism, Duvalier grew increasingly autocratic, paranoid, and repressive, and in 1964, forced a constitutional referendum that declared him “President for Life.” By providing financial support

to both Duvalier *père* and, decades later, his son Jean-Claude, the US participated in a bloody dictatorship in order to further its own regional security and economic interests. The US's relationship with Haiti in the early 1960s proved complicated: François Duvalier had revealed himself to be a dictator, but Haiti was uncomfortably close, geographically, to Castro's Cuba. In the end, Cold War fears about the spread of communism won out over the US's concerns about enabling a despot. Duvalier was, in the words of US Secretary of State Rusk, a "disgrace to the hemisphere," on account of the poverty, human rights abuses, and lack of public services in the nation under his presidency — but he was also a useful tool for excluding Cuba from the Organization of American States. For his part, François Duvalier played Haiti's communists and the US against each other, essentially threatening to lend his support to the communists if the US did not provide his government with funds. Duvalier cracked down on Haiti's communist (or ostensibly communist) youth. A series of massacres of anti-Duvalierist dissidents, particularly leftist intellectuals, and their families followed.

Throughout his presidency, Duvalier cultivated advantageous relationships with the US government and US interests. Shortly after coming into office, Duvalier hired a US-based public relations firm headed by John Roosevelt, the son of FDR, to glorify his presidency and make it palatable to the United States (Dubois 2010: 334). The effort seems to have borne fruit. In 1959, the US gave \$7 million to Haiti. In 1960, the US gave more than \$9 million to Haiti — or 30% of the Haitian state budget for that year. By 1961, the US was giving \$13.5 million, which comprised 50% of the Haitian state budget (Diederich and Burt 2005 [1970]).

The US provided not only economic aid, but also the training and equipment necessary to "modernize" Haiti's military. In doing so, it supported a regime of terror. The weapons were nominally the property of a small US marine mission that had come to train the Haitian army; in



practice, they were stockpiled by both the Haitian military and the infamous Tontons Macoutes — Duvalier's extra-state militia, which committed an untold amount of violence (including assassinations, extrajudicial killings of civilians, including entire families with children, and disappearances) over the decades of the regime. Between 20,000 and 50,000 Haitians were killed by the government under the Duvaliers (Bellegarde-Smith 2004), mostly under Duvalier *père*. In the fall of 1964, in the Jérémie Vespers massacre, twenty-seven people were executed because they were related to members of Jeune Haïti, a group of young men that had unsuccessfully tried to overthrow the regime earlier that year. Journalists critical of the dictatorship were targeted, such as Yvonne Hakim Rimpel, who in 1958 was abducted from her home by masked men, raped, and left for dead in the street. She survived, but never wrote again. (Pierre-Charles 2013 [1973]). Perhaps three thousand Haitian dissidents (or suspected dissidents) died and countless others were interrogated and tortured at the notorious prison Fort Dimanche, which had originally been built in the 1920s by the US Marines. It was during the first Duvalier regime that the area known as Titanyen on the road north out of Port-au-Prince (to which we will return, in the final section of this monograph) began to be used as a dumping ground for the bodies of political prisoners executed by the Haitian army and militias (Bragg 1994).

As Duvalier's power became more absolute and his and his supporters' methods more bloody, he drew on nationalist rhetoric that likened himself to Haiti's much-lionized revolutionary heroes and disparaged the intervention of foreign powers — even while filling state coffers with leveraged US aid money. "Those who seek to destroy Duvalier seek to destroy our fatherland," he declared in an invective-filled speech in 1964. "I am here to continue to tradition of Toussaint Louverture and Dessalines. No foreigner is going to tell me what to do"

(Diederich and Burt 2005, Danner 2009, Dubois 2010).

*Interlude: Old Scars, New Meanings  
December 2010*

*One evening, I am invited to dinner at a little restaurant halfway up Turgeau. It used to be an old gingerbread house, but it cracked in the quake, so now the restaurant consists of tables under a tarp in the garden. The food is mediocre at best: rubbery chicken, rubbery pork, spaghetti. But they have beer, and people really come here for the conversation. This is where the remains of the old leftist intellectuals — mostly men in their 60s and 70s — come to hang out, joke and argue about politics.*

*I am there with my neighbor, Marguerite, herself a Haitian intellectual in her 60s. As we sit, and Marguerite picks disconsolately at her rubbery sausage, we chat with Daniel, an old friend and flame from Marguerite's youth. He is a handsome, amiable communist-leaning Haitian man with blue eyes and a stutter. We are approached by another man. He is small, thin and dark-skinned, in a ripped, oversized orange T-shirt that announces some family reunion in Alabama; it is a pèpè, a second-hand cast-off from the United States. He has a white cast in one eye, and he leans on crutches. He is very, very drunk. He slurs his words, and reeks of beer. I assume he is a homeless person from the street.*

*Then Marguerite makes him sit down. "It hurts me to see you like this, Robert," she says.*

*"I am HAPPY," he repeats, over and over.*

*"I don't believe you. I don't believe you," says Marguerite. "What's happened to you? What happened to your leg?"*

*"Je suis... han-di-cap-pé," he slurs, in French. His speech is halting.*

*"Yes, but what made you handicapped?"*

*"J'ai un problem au niveau de mon haunche," he replies vaguely. "I have a problem*

*related to my hip."*

*Marguerite keeps trying to engage with him. "I love you very much, Robert" she tells him. "I am going to come back and talk with you one on one. It hurts me to see you like this."*

*Robert rolls his eyes. "Je suis HEUREUX." Each time Marguerite tries to draw him back, he gets angrier and angrier.*

*As we return home later, I ask Marguerite about Robert.*

*"He used to be a doctor," she said, sadly. He had grown up with all those other guys, those other members of the Haitian intelligentsia, and used to be part of their crowd. Then he turned to alcohol.*

*Daniel tells me a rumor about what drove Robert to drink: that Robert was from Cazale, a village north of Port-au-Prince that was a communist (and anti-Duvalierist) stronghold. In 1969, Robert's father denounced the villagers to the regime, resulting in the death or disappearance of not only his comrades, but of hundreds of peasant villagers, at the hands of the Macoutes. It is the largest single disappearance under the Duvalier regime. According to Daniel, Robert never recovered from the guilt and the betrayal, and he turned to alcohol.*

*But later I would hear another version of this story, from a right-wing politician and old friend of Jean-Claude Duvalier's. "That's not true," he would say, about Robert's connection to the Casale massacre. "Ti Robert, he's an alcoholic and a drug addict. He likes drugs. That's all it is."*

*Such stories flicker to life only in rumor and hushed conversation, now, as though the ghosts might still be listening. Perhaps no one, not even Robert himself, knows the objective truth anymore, and there may be no single objective truth about what drives an individual man to abuse himself. The people around him, who knew him then and who see what he has become,*

*ascribe meaning to his affliction in accordance with their own politics and biases and alliances, according to the social facts that fit the way they see the world. The emotional wound they are probing, whose cause they are diagnosing, is, in the end, not Robert's alone.*

### ***Duvalier fils***

"The United States will always find Haiti on its side against communism." So spoke Jean-Claude Duvalier in his first speech, after succeeding his father in 1971. Under Jean-Claude Duvalier, Haiti was, in the words that would be used without irony forty years later in post-earthquake development, "open for business." On the advice of USAID, the World Bank, and the IMF, foreign investment increased, eager to take advantage of the euphemistic "low labor cost" in Haiti. Industrial parks were built to produce clothing and baseballs. By 1984, some thirty thousand people were working in factories around Port-au-Prince, and there was glowing talk in the international press of Haiti being the "Taiwan of the Caribbean."

This surge in foreign investment did little to change the lives of most Haitian people, who still lived in grinding poverty. Meanwhile, Jean-Claude Duvalier, who was a coddled, chunky teenaged playboy (nicknamed "Basket-head" by his classmates for his impressive girth and supposed dimness), was not the calculating despot his father had been. While state-sponsored violence endured, most of the victims were poor (with the exception of particularly outspoken opponents of the regime, such as Bobby Duval, who has repeatedly testified to the abuses he suffered as a political prisoner during the reign of Duvalier *fils*, and the radio journalist Liliane Pierre-Paul, who continues to testify publicly to the violence she experienced during those years and advocate for other victims). Jean-Claude's regime, in contrast to his father's, relied less on fear and the suppression of the intellectual classes and more on general corruption. Duvalier

*père* had embraced populist, nationalist and *noiriste* rhetoric (even while accepting and maneuvering for foreign aid and squeezing and suffocating the economies of the Haitian provinces); Jean-Claude, on the other hand, was an unrepentant member the nouveaux-riches, who lacked the pedigree of the true aristocracy but eagerly adopted their more opulent habits. He married a light-skinned woman from a wealthy *milat* family, Michèle Bennet, in a costly and lavish wedding, and generally ingratiated himself to the upper classes. Many members of the Haitian bourgeoisie (even those whose families had been personally victimized under Duvalier *père*) remember the 1970s as a time of fun and freedom, of sex and cocaine at dance clubs in Pétionville. (The westernized Haitian elite, after all, was not immune to larger cultural trends of the decade of disco and drugs.) With so many of the dissident intellectuals killed, exiled, or silenced, the Haitian upper classes experienced relief, mixed with residual fear of speaking out or expressing a political consciousness; this expressed itself as a sort of complacency or resignation toward the suffering of the masses. These class divisions, enmity, and distrust would only grow deeper in the decades that followed, setting the stage for *dechoukaj* — the 'uprooting', first of the Duvalieristes, and later of the Haitian elites.

Under the watch of the "foreign and decadent" (Danner 2009) heir to the Haitian presidency, disease, illiteracy, and poverty continued to rage among the majority of the country's people. Meanwhile, Haiti was receiving a massive amount of foreign aid. Between 1972 and 1981, Haiti received \$584 million (the equivalent of around \$2 billion today), of which 80% came from the United States (Dubois 2010). In 1980 alone, a year in which Haiti's entire operating budget barely topped \$150 million, Haiti received over \$100 million in foreign aid. In 1985, the Haitian government received \$150 million in foreign aid, of which \$54 million came from the United States. Total US aid to the consecutive Duvalier dictatorships may have come

to as much as \$900 million (Bellegarde-Smith 2004).

However, foreign donors had concerns about corruption and misappropriation of funds by the Haitian government. In order to address Haiti's social problems while bypassing the untrustworthy government, they began to send their money instead to private voluntary organizations (PVOs), which are now known by the UN designation NGOs. By 1984, there were at least four hundred of these PVOs/NGOs working in Haiti, and their numbers swelled exponentially in the coming decades. In this moment, we can locate the perpetuation of the weak Haitian state and the beginnings of the aid economy, and of Haiti's status as the infamous "republic of NGOs."

\* \* \* \* \*

Most recently, the violence, corruption, and despotism of the Duvalier regime have been subsumed into a kind of eerie nostalgia by many young Haitians who did not live through those years, and by other Haitians who lived through those years but who were not personally victimized. This is because the end of the Duvalier regime led not to peace and democracy, but to decades of political upheaval, new forms of insecurity, and growing poverty, hunger, and unrest. The Duvalier years have entered myth as the era when the streets were clean, and people were clean and respectful of one another. "The Haitian people need an iron fist," a Haitian cab driver in Montreal once explained to me, with little prompting. "They need someone to hurl the whip against their back. Duvalier was *mean*, but he was *good*. *Li ti mechan, men li te bon.*"

At a panel discussion at FOKAL (Fondasyon Konesans ak Libète) in April 2011, a dreadlocked young man in the audience stood and announced that he believed that under Duvalier, people "respected one another. Not like today." Another audience member rose to answer him, a mixed-race woman in her fifties. "You are confusing respect with *fear*," she said,

voice shaking. "Fear is not the same as respect." Other people, while acknowledging the violence of the Duvalier era, said it was preferable to the *ensekirite* of the coup and Aristide year. "At least under Duvalier, you knew who was a Macoute. You knew who to be scared of, when to keep your head down. Now, it could be anybody."

### ***USAID Slaughters Creole Pigs: 1983-1985***

As Haiti began its quick evolution toward NGO rule in the early nineteen-eighties, the United States government undertook one of the most devastating and infamous episodes of foreign intervention in contemporary Haiti. In 1983, amid fears that African swine flu from the neighboring Dominican Republic would infect Haiti's pigs and ultimately spread to the United States, USAID slaughtered the entire population of Haiti's indigenous Creole pigs — some 400,000 pigs — in a campaign that cost \$23 million.

The consequences for the Haitian peasantry were devastating. Creole pigs (*kochon kreyòl*) were, in the words of the Washington Post, "savings account, loan collateral, and meat locker." Raising pigs was one of the few reliable ways for the rural poor to make money. The Creole pigs — small and dark — were hardy, selected for their environment, and able to forage for food and thrive in Haiti's difficult conditions. In the year after the pigs' eradication, school enrollments dropped between 30 and 50%, because poor families could no longer pay.

In 1985, the Organization of American States' Inter-American Agricultural Cooperation Institute, with \$8.5 million of US aid, imported 3,000 Midwestern pigs with the expectation that they would reproduce and replace the Creole pig. These attempts — known as the Interim Swine Repopulation Program — were vaunted in the US press, which described the peasants greeting the pigs' arrival with "singing and dancing" and "admir[ing] the fat new pigs the way American



youths used to visit car lots" (Washington Post).

The American media were wrong. The imported pigs, fat and pink, were known as *kochon blan* (foreign pigs) or even "four-legged princes." They required more care and more expensive feeding than the Creole pigs, and were ill-suited to their environment. The Haitian Ministry of Agriculture tried to encourage peasants to completely change their way of life, constructing wooden or concrete pig pens and providing "scientifically formulated feed" (WP) imported from the United States (Dubois 2012) — this, in a country where most people lacked adequate housing and suffered from malnutrition. Unsurprisingly, the project was a failure. The foreign pigs got sick; they did not reproduce; they did not survive.

The story of the slaughter of the *kochon kreyòl* remains a touchstone and a salient symbol of the failure of international intervention in Haiti. It engendered distrust and suspicion on the part of the Haitian poor, who viewed the destruction of the *kochon kreyòl* not as a legitimate disease control measure, but as a (successful) attempt to further oppress the Haitian masses. The symbolism is heavy: the black pigs slaughtered and replaced by white foreigners.

### ***Jean-Claude: The End***

According to journalist Mark Danner, the single event that unleashed popular resistance to Jean-Claude Duvalier's regime was the killing of four schoolchildren by Duvalier's security forces during a protest in Gonaïves in late 1985. In addition to catalyzing resistance throughout Haiti, these deaths made it impossible for the United States government to continue to deny that the Haitian president, so comfortably dependent on US aid, was committing human rights abuses against his people. The American officials in Haiti cautioned Duvalier that the continuation of aid was contingent upon his respect for human rights, and then in January 1986, the Reagan

administration refused to certify that Duvalier had improved his record on human rights: American aid was cut off.

By the time Jean-Claude Duvalier fled Haiti on a US military plane in 1986, the US claimed that Haiti was poised on the brink of "democratization." Ultimately, this was more of a buzzword than a reality, as Haiti entered yet another phase of "*parenthèse*," the period of instability and uncertainty that follows the end of a regime. The military junta headed by General Henri Namphy that came into power after Duvalier's departure was bloody and decidedly undemocratic, violently opposing the any resistance. Namphy, like the Duvaliers before him, had the corpses of his opponents interred in mass graves at St. Christophe. Throughout this time, Haiti was becoming increasingly enmeshed with and financed by the United States, which largely financed the 1987 election (Danner 2009: 19).

### ***Aristide: The Beginning***

*A wind of revolt was blowing over the city. Hunger and need were stirring up people's guts. In the outskirts, people suffered at night and became irritable. Up higher, in the perfumed villas, the sharks of the black market sipped their iced cocktails in fine crystal glasses, snored, and counted their huge profits. In the clubs, the Cercle Bellevue and the Cercle Portauprincien, exporters, industrialists, ministers, and senators grew tired of their card games. At the Cabane Choucounne, women, with their shoulder bared to their breasts, languorous doe eyes, and voluptuously half-open, painted mouths, twisted their bottoms in frenetic dances, beneath a royal blue sky sparkling with stars and jewels.*

Jacques Stéphen Alexis, *General Sun, My Brother*

Jean-Bertrand Aristide, former priest and enduring prophet to the masses, rose to power on the rhetoric of *tout moun se moun* (all people are people). After nearly two hundred years of poverty and great inequality, capped by the corruption and violence of the Duvalier era and the instability of the period following the Duvaliers, the populist and charismatic Aristide seemed to many to be the kind of change that Haiti needed. He called on domestic workers to "reclaim

your rights!" and drew on populist edicts like "the people's pencil has no eraser!" — meaning that the sins and crimes committed against the poor in the past could not be forgotten.

Aristide, then still a priest at St Jean Bosco, was a proponent of the post-Duvalier *dechoukaj*, which he unironically termed an "unarmed revolution." (While it may have been largely gunless, it was far from nonviolent — the weapons were rocks, gasoline, and tires.) He considered it the "justice of the people" and that the "justice" — however violent — was morally right, as "these Macoutes were Satan, Satan incarnate" (Danner 1999: 9). Aristide's early sermons contained the rhetoric of dignity and liberation of the poor, and suggested, too, the necessity of violence.

We are poor, it is true, but we have pride. We are poor, it is true, but we are courageous. We are poor, it is true, but we are people nonetheless. We now that the Lord created us in his image, and we the poor, who are abused, who are mistrusted, we are proud to be made in God's image. That pride will make us fight like the armies of God until the light of deliverance appears. (Jean-Bertrand Aristide, sermon at St. Jean Bosco, August 23, 1988)

Certainly Aristide's early speeches, both as priest and president, called for restitution, retribution and revolutionary tactics, though it is not always clear how much he intended. This is clearly true in the (in)famous "Père Lebrun" speech of 1991. Père Lebrun was a former tire manufacturer in Haiti, whose advertising image was a man's head thrust through a tire; it later became the slang term for the tactic, used in mob violence, of killing someone by necklacing him with a burning tire. In fact, Aristide never used the term "Père Lebrun" directly, nor did he say anything directly about tires. What he did say, in a larger context of calling on the Haitian bourgeoisie to divest themselves of their criminally, unjustly earned fortunes, and for the former Duvalierists to be given their comeuppance, was the following, delivered in the fiery, rising-and-mounting staccato style of Haitian preachers:

Now, whenever you are hungry, turn your eyes in the direction of those people who aren't hungry. Whenever you are out of work, turn your eyes in the direction of those who can put people to work. Ask them why not? What are you waiting for?...

Whenever you feel the heat of unemployment, whenever the heat of the pavement begins to make you feel awful, whenever you feel revolt inside you, turn your eyes to the direction of those with the means. Ask them why not? What are you waiting for?...

Your tool in hand, your instrument in hand, your constitution in hand! Don't he - si-tate - to - give - him - what - he - deserves.

Your equipment in hand, your trowel in hand, your pencil in hand, your Constitution in hand, don't he-si-tate - to - give - him - what - he - deserves.

Everywhere, in the four corners, we are watching, we are praying, we are watching, we are praying, when you catch one, don't he-si-tate - to - give - him - what - he - de-serves.

What a beautiful tool! What a beautiful instrument! What a beautiful piece of equipment! It's beautiful, yes it's beautiful, it's cute, it's pretty, it has a good smell, wherever you go you want to inhale it...

If Aristide rose to power on a groundswell of populist support within Haiti, this was far from the situation worldwide, and his ascendance was met with opposition and suspicion by the global order. By the end of the twentieth century, the United States did not have any particular interest in Haiti. Rather, the entire world was supposed to be globalized, integrated and subject to world capitalism — and Haiti could be no exception (Dupuy 2007). It was in this global context that Aristide was elected president of Haiti.

### ***1991 Coup, the US Embargo of Haiti, and the first UN Peacekeeping Mission***

In September 1991, not eight months after Aristide was first elected, General Raoul Cédras overthrew the Aristide's government in a coup d'état. Widespread rumors that CIA was involved in supporting Cédras and the junta cannot be substantiated; however, it is true that

Cédras, like so many Latin American military strongmen, was an alumnus of the US-run military training facility School of the Americas.

In an attempt to weaken Cédras and promote democracy, the Organization of American States undertook a policy of sanctions and embargo toward Haiti. However, the embargo had deleterious effects on the economy, environment, and human rights, further impoverishing the people of Haiti while enriching the regime and further weakening the state (Fatton 2002).

In July 1994, the United Nations authorized Operation Uphold Democracy to remove Cédras's military junta. Aristide was thus reinstated, and disbanded the Haitian army upon his return. Operation Uphold Democracy nearly began as a multinational invasion led by US forces. US Navy and Air Force staged to South Florida and Puerto Rico to begin the airborne invasion. However, the junta was persuaded to step down before the US invasion began. The operation officially ended in May 1995, and was replaced by the UN Mission in Haiti (UNMIH), which undertook some of the responsibilities of the now-disbanded Haitian military.

The reasons for the US's intense involvement in Operation Uphold Democracy are manifold. One is the international context in which the invasion took place. It was 1994: the US was "frustrated" by the UN's involvement in the Balkan war, and had just suffered its own humiliating failure in Somalia. The intervention in Haiti was an opportunity for the United States to reestablish its authority and power in matters of international diplomacy. The domestic political context is another consideration. The Congressional Black Caucus pressured Clinton heavily to use the US's weight to reinstate Aristide.

Operation Uphold Democracy was also a way to "help" Aristide return to power while at the same time deradicalizing him (Fatton 2002, Dupuy 2007). Aristide, who had for so long spoken out against the colonial agendas of foreign powers, would now be wholly dependent on

and beholden to the United States for his return to power. Moreover, Aristide was forced to accept a neoliberal economic agenda for his country, removing all protectionist tariffs and opening the Haitian market to subsidized products from abroad. Haiti — once the Pearl of the Antilles, whose legendarily fertile soil had enriched an empire — was now dependent on imported food (and food aid). Haiti's rice farmers were devastated, while great sacks of US rice (labeled Tchako and Mega... and USAID...) became ubiquitous.

For the Haitian masses, the coup years were ones of terrible violence and instability. Rape and other forms of gendered violence were a common torture tactic, aimed at oppressing the pro-democracy movement, particularly in the poor and marginalized urban bidonvils like Bel-Air and Cité Soleil (Maternowska 2006, James 2010). They were also years of worsening poverty, due to the embargo, followed by the neoliberal agenda that the US had set in place as a condition of Aristide's return.

### ***The Presidencies and Removal of Jean-Bertrand Aristide***

In Haitian experience, there were, in effect, two Jean-Bertrand Aristides — the charismatic, promising, yet complicated Aristide of 1991 — torn between democratic justice and revolutionary violence — and the increasingly power-hungry and perhaps megalomaniacal Aristide who was restored to power in 1995.

Even as I write these words in 2013, Aristide remains a divisive figure in Haitian political history. Haitians and foreigners alike have staked high moral claims in the man and what he represents, and there is often little space for dissent or nuance. For those who were anti-Lavalas, Aristide had become a violent criminal, an autocrat, and a madman. For the pro-Lavalas, Aristide remained a populist hero, the embodiment of hope, terribly abused by foreign powers and their

supporters. Aristide was popular — and continues to be popular — among many left-leaning American politicians, activists, and intellectuals and other public figures, such as Randall Robinson, Danny Glover, Maxine Waters, Noam Chomsky and Amy Goodman: Aristide was democratically elected, preached liberation theology, and was extremely charismatic. Chomsky drew on the rhetoric of revolutionary mythicohistory when he created a parallel between Aristide's promise and Toussaint Louverture's famous dying words ("In overthrowing me, you have cut down in Saint-Domingue only the tree of liberty. It will spring up again by the roots for they are numerous and deep") and reduces the complexity of Haitian history to a Marxist class war.

The tree of liberty broke through the soil again in 1985, as the population revolted against the murderous Duvalier dictatorship. After many bitter struggles, the popular revolution led to the overwhelming victory of Haiti's first freely elected president, the populist priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Seven months after his February 1991 inauguration he was driven from office by the military and commercial elite who had ruled for 200 years, and would not tolerate loss of their traditional rights of terror and exploitation. (Chomsky 1999)

Even as many former Lavalas supporters in Haiti began to distance themselves from or criticize Aristide, some progressive Americans continued to rally around him as the people's president. Some anti-Lavalas Haitians espouse the belief that these Americans must be profiting financially from their enduring allegiance to Aristide. Colette — who spoke so movingly about her yearning for homeland in the previous chapter — says, "I'd like to know what interest they have. I'd like to know who pays them. My mother used to say: *tout madigra ki egzese sòti. Fè tenten lakay w, wap danse nan lari yon jou.*" Translated literally, it means "All your ugliness will come out. Do that bullshit at home, and you'll dance on the street one day." This is basically to say, everything you do in secret will some day come to light, sooner or later. "We'll find out who's paying them, with whom they're spending their vacations." If Aristide's

supporters were not receiving kickbacks, as Colette suggests here, their commitment constitutes at least a kind of unshakable moral investment.

After Aristide was restored to power by the US-led intervention in 1995, he found it difficult to maintain power and popularity. His political party, Lavalas, was increasingly fractured and divided. By the turn of the twenty-first century, Aristide himself became increasingly authoritarian, and his rhetoric increasingly violent and inflammatory. According to his many opponents, Aristide's hold on power depended on harnessing the discontent of the "chimères" and "zinglendos" — dissatisfied, unemployed youth (primarily young men) from the *katyè popilè* of Port-au-Prince. These young people, who had grown up in a climate of violence and desperation, proved easily manipulated by the political machine. Aristide "took a generation of desperately poor slum children whose heads were filled with idealistic notions about changing their country, put weapons in their hands and turned them into killers" writes Michael Deibert. According to Aristide's opponents, he grew to rely on these armed street gangs to terrorize his opponents and create an atmosphere of fear (Beckett 2010). Aristide also used Haiti's history with intervening foreign powers as part of his call for political justice; in 2003, he demanded that France repay Haiti the indemnity — now adjusted for inflation to more than \$21 billion US — that Haiti had been forced to pay after independence.

Aristide remained popular among many of the poor. Still, quite a few former supporters pulled away from Aristide as his rule grew more authoritarian and his tactics more violent. Jean Dominique was a charismatic and fiery Haitian radio journalist and human rights activist. Born into an upper-class mixed-race family, Dominique founded Radio Haïti Inter, one of the first political stations to broadcast in Haitian Creole. Having spent the earlier part of his career speaking out against the abuses of the Duvalier regime and championing the rights of the rural



poor, Dominique was forced into exile in 1980 and only returned to Haiti (to a huge and cheering crowd) in 1986, after Jean-Claude Duvalier's ouster. He supported Lavalas in the early 1990s, but grew critical of the brutal tactics employed by Aristide and some of his allies after Aristide was restored to power in 1995. Dominique was particularly critical of Dany Toussaint, former police chief and Aristide's bodyguard, whom Dominique accused of having assassinated his opponent. When Dominique was himself gunned down in the early morning hours as he left his radio station one day in April 2000, suspicion fell upon Toussaint. However, Dominique's murder remained unsolved, and Reporters Without Borders accused the Aristide government of impeding the investigation.

In February 2004, Jean-Bertrand Aristide was (depending on one's politics and perspective) either kidnapped by the United States, or overthrown in a popular coup and helped to safety by the United States. The truth is somewhere in between. Following a month of violence, a well armed and highly organized rebel insurgency— which enjoyed support from both the Aristide's opponents and the United States government (Dupuy 2007) – approached Port-au-Prince from the north of Haiti with the intent to overthrow the president. In the face of this military pressure Aristide left the country on a US military plane, escorted by US troops and officials. The United States would claim that it was simply helping Aristide flee to safety; Aristide and his supporters (such as Robinson and Waters) would claim that the president had been kidnapped by the US. Aristide told CNN, "I was told that to avoid bloodshed I'd better leave." This insurrection formally tipped Haiti into the category of “failed state” and justified the international military response that followed, for “a weak state, even a chronically weak and poor one, does not demand the same kind of response from the international community as do failed or collapsed states” (Beckett 2010: 45).



Figure 12: “Titid Nap Tann Ou”  
During a protest on December 16, 2009, the nineteenth anniversary of Aristide’s first election, a man bears a photograph of Aristide (affectionately nicknamed Titid) with the slogan “*TITID ap tann ou*” (Titid we’ll wait for you.)

Delmas, Port-au-Prince

### ***MINUSTAH***

After Aristide left or was removed from Haiti in February 2004, the US dispatched 1000 marines to Haiti as part of Operation Secure Tomorrow; they were shortly joined by Canadian, Chilean, and French forces. In the summer of 2004, this interim peacekeeping force was replaced by the United Nations Haiti Stabilization Mission, known commonly by its French acronym, MINUSTAH. MINUSTAH, in the words of Greg Beckett, “fits uneasily within the ideal-typical categories of the 'Blue' and the 'Green,’” referring to civilian vs. military categories. “On the one hand, it represents the peaceful order of a civil-legal force staffed by highly visible and accountable agents; on the other hand, its operatives dress in fatigues, patrol foreign national territory, and carry heavy firepower” (2010: 40).



Figure 13: “Together for Peace”

Promotional billboard outside Brazilian Battalion, showing MINUSTAH peacekeepers in cooperation with Haitian civilians

MINUSTAH's original 2004 mandate focused on supporting the post-Aristide transitional government in "ensuring a secure and stable environment." The phrasing of the mandate is interesting, as every clause begins with "assisting" or "supporting" or "helping" — MINUSTAH's role, at least officially or symbolically, was clearly intended to be auxiliary:

...to assist in monitoring, restructuring and reforming the Haitian National Police; to help with comprehensive and sustainable Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programmes; to assist with the restoration and maintenance of the rule of law, public safety and public order in Haiti... to support the constitutional and political processes; to assist in organizing, monitoring, and carrying out free and fair municipal, parliamentary and presidential elections; to support the Transitional Government as well as Haitian human rights institutions and groups in their efforts to promote and protect human rights; and to monitor and report on the human rights situation in the country.

It is something of a strange assignment, especially when one has seen the MINUSTAH presence from the ground, the way an ordinary Haitian might: at worst, as a direct threat to human rights and security, and at best, an often laughable and irrelevant presence, in tanks, wielding machine guns. When the Security Council extended MINUSTAH's mandate in 2009, it rather optimistically "further tasked MINUSTAH with supporting the Haitian political process, promoting an all-inclusive political dialogue and national reconciliation, and providing logistical and security assistance for elections anticipated for 2010" (UN 2012). That was before the earthquake shattered Haiti — and shattered MINUSTAH, too — not two weeks after the New

Year, and changed MINUSTAH's mandate again.

After the initial years of violent intervention (2004-2006), MINUSTAH shifted from peacekeeping to include other domains — a form of soft power. In practice, MINUSTAH's pre-earthquake actions extended far beyond peacekeeping and into state-building, human rights work, and economic development. This is due in part to institutional trends, as the UN began to recognize the need to address root causes of conflict, such as poverty, inequality, and human rights violations, (Howland 2006), and to prioritize "democratization" and "good governance" as key to successful peacekeeping missions (Zanotti 2008).

This rankled development, human rights, and humanitarian workers. Many employees of other UN agencies believe civilian responsibilities should not be undertaken by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations. MINUSTAH's "efforts to integrate human rights in peace operations are at best marginal and at worst a violation of UN members' human rights obligations" (Howland 2006). In addition, MINUSTAH's entree into providing social programs and undertaking development projects meant, among other things, that MINUSTAH's mandate became all the more ambiguous, and its agenda all the more indistinguishable from development and humanitarian agencies. Therefore, MINUSTAH's wrongdoings (real or perceived) caused other agencies to be tarred with the same brush.

The armed MINUSTAH offensive of 2004 to 2006 was justified as necessary to remove a dangerous criminal element — the *chimères* and gangsters. However, for many people in Port-au-Prince's *katyè popilè*, such as Cité Soleil and Bel-Air, the violence of the MINUSTAH years was worse than the violence they had experienced during the years of gang rule (INURED 2008, Kivland 2012). Many people died; the buildings and the people of these communities still bear the scars of those years. In 2005, peacekeepers were firing as many as 2000 rounds of

ammunition per day (Greenburg 2014). There is also a widespread belief among both Haitian and foreign observers that Brazil's role as the leader of MINUSTAH was a feather in its cap as it lobbied to take its place on the UN Security Council. Meanwhile, Brazilian MINUSTAH exported their "successful" strategies learned in the *bidonvils* of Port-au-Prince to root out the gangsters and drug dealers in Rio de Janeiro's *favelas*: Brazil's Pacifying Police Units (UPPs) are modeled on the lessons learned by MINUSTAH blue helmets that battled the *chimères* in Cité Soleil (Norheim-Martinsen 2012, Greenburg 2014).

Public opinion of MINUSTAH among Haitians was further diminished by the detrimental, unethical actions of some peacekeepers. There were significant problems with sexual exploitation and abuse by MINUSTAH peacekeepers, particularly coerced or transactional sex with Haitian women and sometimes children. The most notorious of the pre-earthquake incidents was when, in 2007, one hundred seventeen members of a Sri Lankan contingent were repatriated after it was revealed that they had engaged in transactional sex with children. The rape and emotional abuse of a teenaged boy by Uruguayan peacekeepers in Cayes in 2011 — which was captured on camera phone and circulated over the Internet — created new anti-MINUSTAH furor among Haitians and non-Haitians. To be sure, not all peacekeepers committed acts of sexual violence, and the peacekeepers, who hailed from diverse countries and cultures, evinced a variety of attitudes toward not just sex but also the Haitian people, and the UN mission. However, due to the well-publicized inhumane and reckless actions of perhaps a minority of peacekeepers, and due to Haiti's long ugly history of rape as a tactic of political force, Haitians became increasingly distrustful of MINUSTAH in general. Meanwhile, MINUSTAH peacekeepers possessed little knowledge or awareness of Haitian culture and context, to a degree that was sometimes merely ignorant and sometimes clearly detrimental.

MINUSTAH conducted training sessions that presented Haiti as a superstitious, lascivious, and violent place (Lutz et al. 2009).

The fact that the recent cholera epidemic in Haiti— which began in late October 2010 and which continues to wax and wane to this day – almost certainly arrived with Nepali blue helmets substantiates the rumors and distrust toward MINUSTAH. It may be unfair to impugn the individual peacekeepers (who unwittingly carried in their bodies the bacilli from another poor and structurally violent nation) and fairer to condemn the UN as an institution (for outsourcing the policing of poor countries to people from other poor countries), as well as the Haitian-run sanitation company whose negligent construction allowed peacekeeper sewage to seep into the Artibonite river. But in the popular imagination, it is simply "MINUSTAH" that is at fault. "MINUSTAH came to give people cholera. They put something in the water." "MINUSTAH brought cholera to kill Haitians, because they hate Haitians." This rhetoric allowed businessman Eric Jean-Baptiste to successfully run for mayor of the Carrefour neighborhood of Port-au-Prince with the slogan "MINISTA AK KOLERA SE MARASA" (MINUSTAH AND CHOLERA ARE TWINS). It gave MINUSTAH's many opponents further grounds on which to denounce the "occupation."



Figure 14: "MINUSTAH and Cholera are Twins: No to occupation!"

Eric Jean-Baptiste billboard, downtown Port-au-Prince, 2011

In decrying MINUSTAH as an occupation, Haitian people are directly invoking the memory of the 1915-1934 US Marine occupation (Greenburg 2014). In a technical and historical sense, the current UN operation differs from the first US occupation as it is not an explicitly imperial undertaking with direct and visible displays of military and economic hegemony; nonetheless, the indirect power and “democratizing” goals of the United States and its participation in a global police force are part of what Beckett terms “phantom power” (Beckett 2010). From the perspective of Haitian people, it all looks like occupation of a supposedly sovereign land.



Figure 15: MINUSTAH tank in front of destroyed National Palace

Port-au-Prince, 2010

### **Cité Soleil, Microcosm**

From November 2004 to December 2006, MINUSTAH waged an offensive in the Port-au-Prince bidonville of Cité Soleil in order to root out and apprehend *chimères*, local gang leaders believed to be supported by ex-President Aristide. This MINUSTAH "war" alienated much of the community. Some Cité residents felt loyalty to particular gang leaders, who at least provided a semblance of local governance in the absence of state-sponsored infrastructure. Moreover, while the community had suffered violence under gang rule, it suffered even more in

the years of the MINUSTAH offensive. Building facades remain scarred with bullet holes; houses are still in ruins. Civilians were killed, others still bear injuries such as bullets lodged in their bodies. The young people who grew up in this setting of war and insecurity associate the UN with violence and suffering – an association that now taints MINUSTAH's more recent non-peacekeeping activities (i.e., economic and community development).

Cité Soleil – like much of Haiti — is a soup of NGOs and international organizations, and was so even before the quake; it is no wonder that residents cannot keep them straight. Signs and murals throughout the community advertise projects funded by several acronyms in collaboration. Humanitarian, development, and peacekeeping agendas become intertwined and, at least from a ground-up point-of-view, largely indistinguishable. For this reason, and because of several particularly deleterious interventions, "the NGOs" and the "international community" have all become painted with the same brush. This is a common phenomenon in settings of crisis and humanitarian intervention, in which different actors may appear superficially similar or identical to one another from the local population's perspective (for example, UN peacekeepers and humanitarian organizations such as MSF use similar-looking white Land Cruisers, which in turn threatens the latter's efficacy and neutrality – see Abu Sada 2012).

Cité Soleil was said, in those years, to be "the most dangerous place on earth." Within Port-au-Prince, and throughout Haiti and beyond, it is vilified and held to be exceptional: exceptionally violent (in a violent land), exceptionally precarious (in a precarious land), exceptionally poor (in a poor land). The history of Cité Soleil demonstrates the causes and effects of rural to urban migration, and centralization, and multiple sedimented displacements. It demonstrates the legacy of literal, political, and structural violence. It exemplifies class bias and prejudice within Port-au-Prince, and among Haitians. Cité Soleil has been the particular site of



military interventions, development interventions, and humanitarian interventions. It has also been one of the places whose residents have been more represented, in lurid journalism and in humanitarian agitprop, as quintessential criminals or victims — trends that extend to the larger nation.

In 2007, after the most intense violence had ceased, the Department of State with support from Department of Defense launched the Haiti Stabilization Initiative, and USAID undertook a project of paving roads in Cité Soleil in an attempt to stimulate job and rehabilitate the community. Most of these projects (road and small projects) were executed by IOM. The program encompasses a security component including re-training of local police and active dismantlement gang groups. The Embassy, with USAID, produced posters celebrating these roads, showing before-and-after pictures: in muted sepia tones, the old muddy roads, followed by a bright and sunny image of clean, paved thoroughfares. However, in several areas these roads were built higher than the homes that surrounded them, slightly convex, without adequate drainage. Cité Soleil, which is built at sea level and marshy, has always been prone to flooding; the USAID-built roads worsened this situation, so that now, when it rains, people's homes (and the abandoned lots) flood with run-off and garbage. Trash accrues and mosquitoes breed.

This kind of ostentatious yet ultimately unhelpful development convinced residents of Cité Soleil that these roads were "not built for us" (Maternowska 2006: 3) but rather to enable to international organizations (with their Land Cruisers, trucks, and tanks) to penetrate the Cité.

In 2008, with the funds from USAID/HSI, IOM built a public market in Cité Soleil to replace the main public market that had been destroyed during the years of violence. However, with no community input, IOM placed it on a vacant tract of land directly between two zones known as Boston and Brooklyn, which were competing gang territories with a history of enmity.

At that time, the area was a kind of no man's land, shunned by most people because of its bad memories and the threat of ongoing violence. Also, unlike the old market, the new market was located far from the main road (Route Nationale #1) which runs by Cité Soleil (at the time, there was no Boulevard des Américains, which now cuts through the Cité), so no one from other areas of Port-au-Prince would come to the market. Apart from issues of location, the market was poorly constructed. The roof was so high that the merchants could not hang sheets to protect their wares from the sun and the rain. In the summer of 2008, the first time I visited, the public market was completely empty except for two or three people sleeping inside. A month later, the Haitian National Police ordered the merchants to use the market against their will.

In light of situations like these, Cité Soleil residents' misgivings about international organizations begin to look less like unwarranted paranoia and more like reasonable wariness, heightened by poverty and desperation. People in Cité Soleil know full well the place that they occupy in the agendas of international organizations, as a community especially in need of aid, development, and redemption. They know that a lot of money is supposedly directed toward projects in the Cité, and yet — amid IOM-constructed basketball courts, which are not used by the local youth, a few public plazas now turned into camps, and a sea of tarps and tents from countless organizations — they see little enduring, positive change. This was the case long before the earthquake, and it is thrown into sharper relief now. They know these facts: that international organizations raise money to work in Cité Soleil; little change comes to Cité Soleil; NGO workers boast a quality of life, and a per diem, that they will never enjoy. And then they put those facts together.

If residents of Cité Soleil distrust and sometimes hate NGOs, the feelings and gossip cut both ways. Rumors and jokes about Cité Soleil's killers and cannibals routinely surface in casual

conversation with NGO workers. One evening in late 2010, a Swiss-German NGO employee lightheartedly recommended that I leave some foreign visitors in Cité Soleil overnight, "then come back in the morning and pick up what's left of them."

"That was fucking mean and obnoxious," I retorted indelicately, before I could catch the words escaping my mouth. After an extended awkward silence, he responded sheepishly, "It's a red zone. I'm not even allowed to go there."

In the eyes of the international community – and many Haitians – the whole of Cité Soleil is considered violent and criminal because of the presence and dominance of a few violent criminals. In turn, this delegitimizes Cité Soleil's residents, so that their opinions and perspectives can be discredited or ignored. Interventions are designed based on the idea that Cité Soleil residents are criminals to be feared or victims to be pitied – but rarely collaborators or legitimate speakers about their own situation or community. Most residents of Cité Soleil are simply trying to carve out a life for themselves amid considerable hardship – and often unable to do so. And when we look at the criminal elements in the Cité – the *chimères* and *zinglendos*, the young men who turn to guns, who turn to stealing, who turn to those who offer them a bit of power and a sense of belonging – we should remember this proverb, which people from Cité Soleil told me the first time I went there: *Chen grangou pa jwe*. The hungry dog doesn't play. If you are desperate enough, poor enough, you may do anything.

*January 9, 2010*

*I find myself at a casual evening party hosted by a babyfaced twenty-six year old Brazilian man who tells me he is in charge of the "development and humanitarian program" for his country's embassy. I observe the party with an ethnographer's eye. It is a modern, spotless air-conditioned apartment in Pétionville, the walls covered tastefully in masks with cowry shells, the floor covered in soft furniture and plush ottomans, all in earth tones. An iPod plugged into its speakers plays samba music. There's a zombie game on the Wii – not Haitian zombi, but the Hollywood kind that eat brains.*

*The guests represent a wide swath of the expat community. There are people from Brazil, the US, France, Poland, Spain, Italy. There are people working for embassies, UNDP, MINUSTAH, the European Commission. There are aid workers. There are journalists. I quickly fixate on a married Brazilian couple, both of them as round as Botero figures. They have two small dogs with them. One is white, fluffy and yappy — a Bichon Frisé, the woman tells me. The other dog is tan-colored and apparently less neurotic. "We brought him from Brazil," the woman says, gesturing to the white fluffy dog. "But the move was very traumatic for him. He was very traumatized, so we got him a new playmate here to make it easier for him." She stares at me intensely, as though daring me to judge her for this act of extravagance, or for drawing on the rhetoric of trauma.*

*I talk a little with young Italian woman with a pierced eyebrow, who works in communication for MINUSTAH, and who has previously worked for NGOs in Indonesia and Afghanistan. "People only look at the bad of MINUSTAH," she tells me, "but Haiti wouldn't be as safe as it is now without them. In five years, that's a lot of progress."*

*There is almost no food at this party. A couple small bowls of peanuts and green*

*pimiento olives, and some stale tortilla chips. There is lots of marijuana and alcohol, however. Feeling hungry and out of place, I wander away from the patio, through the sliding glass doors, and over to the bookcase. The books on the shelf feel uncomfortably familiar. Works by Eric Hobsbawm. The poetry and essays of Eduardo Galeano. On the Road, by Jack Kerouac. The Comedians, by Graham Greene. A book on microfinance. Por uma outra globalização, by the Afro-Brazilian geographer Milton Santos. Several of the Harry Potter series.*

*I pick up the Galeano volume and find his poem, "The Nobodies", which Paul Farmer quotes as an epigraph to one of the chapters of Pathologies of Power. Part of it reads:*

The nobodies: nobody's children, owners of nothing.  
The nobodies: the no ones, the nobodied, running like rabbits, dying through life,  
screwed every which way.  
Who don't speak languages, but dialects.  
Who don't have religions, but superstitions.  
Who don't create art, but handicrafts.  
Who don't have culture, but folklore.  
Who are not human beings, but human resources.  
Who do not have names, but numbers.  
Who do not appear in the history of the world, but in the police blotter of the local paper.  
The nobodies, who are not worth the bullet that kills them.

*I end up sitting on the patio with a skinny, pale young man with a narrow face who balances, sitting, in the hammock. He is from Spain, he works for ECHO. He wears black-rimmed glasses and an ironic T-shirt like a hipster anywhere in the world.*

*"So, why are you here?" I ask chattily.*

*"Travel and money," he replies.*

*"Um. Pardon?"*

*"I'm a cynic. Soy cínico." He lisps, the Castilian way.*

*"You're an opportunist!"*

*Apparently the shock and dismay on my face registered, because he began to laugh.*

*"What?" he asked. "And you? ¿Vas a arreglar el país? Are you going to fix this country?"*

*"No, but..." I demur, then mumble something vague about solidarity.*

*He keeps laughing. "I'm in solidarity, too. With the people who want to work, to collaborate with us. The ones who don't expect us to just give them things." He looks at me.*

*"You're an opportunist too, you know. You'll just use and leave this country like the rest of us."*

*His words make me bristle, evoking images of parasites and profiteering careerists. But we foreigners are all opportunists – we nomads, writers, explorers and interveners -- using circumstances to our immediate advantage, rather than being guided by consistent unswerving principles. Even the most devout revolutionary or humanitarian must be an opportunist in practice, for nothing could be accomplished by every day sacrificing advantage on the altar of idealism. Poor Haitians, surely, are opportunists. Why, then, do this man's words seem so callous and so sad?*

It was less than three days until the earthquake, though we did not know that then that a clock was ticking down. The surreal memory of that evening is burnished by temporal association. I do not entirely know who among the attendees survived and who did not.

## **After January 12**

While much of the focus in international media has been on the failure of post-quake aid effort, it is crucial to bear in mind that foreign aid and interventions were widespread in Haiti even before the earthquake. Some sources estimate that *before* the earthquake, Haiti already had the highest per capita concentration of NGOs of anywhere in the world. Before January 12, 2010 directed the world's attention to Haitian suffering (and subsequently to the failure of international interventions to alleviate that suffering), there was a large presence of aid in Haiti and long

history of mixed results and distrust. In short, this is the situation as it was right before the earthquake hit.

It is unknown how many NGOs existed in Haiti and in Port-au-Prince before the earthquake — or, for that matter, how many descended upon Haiti in the aftermath. (The Haitian government is supposed to keep track of NGO activity, but lacks the capacity to do so, and most NGOs do not register with the government and are not penalized for this oversight.) However, over the period stretching from the advent of PVOs in the early 1980s to the present, the influence of NGOs in Haiti has exploded. In 1995, the Republican-controlled US Congress ordered USAID to stop funding the Haitian government directly in favor of funding NGOs (Schuller 2012). By 2009, the World Bank estimated that some ten thousand NGOs were working within Haiti's borders, while then-Prime Minister Max Bellerive claimed that there were three thousand (Klarreich and Polman 2012). The total budget of these NGOs has long exceeded the internal revenue of the Haitian government (between 2005 and 2009, their collective budget was between 113 and 130 percent of the total revenue available to the government) — and swelled to more than four times the government's internal revenue after the earthquake (Klarreich and Polman 2012). Meanwhile, those ostensibly Haitian organizations that received support from foreign donors (particularly USAID) were so constrained by the agendas of those donors that they were unable to achieve their goals or even adequately interact with their supposed beneficiaries (Schuller 2012). And so, while the role of NGOs in Haiti perhaps only came acutely to the world's attention after the earthquake, Haiti had long been the so-called "Republic of NGOs," and foreign organizations had long set the nation's agenda.

The NGOs operating in Haiti varied widely in terms of size, mission, agenda, donors and motivation; it would be unfair and imprecise of the writer to generalize. Some worked in the

countryside and some in the city. Some were faith-based, some ecumenical, some strictly secular. Some were well-known, comparatively flush INGOs, and others were smaller and worked only in Haiti. Some provided medical care; others worked in human rights; others worked in agricultural development; others worked in microfinance; some ran orphanages. Some were American; some were French; some were South American; some were local and Haitian. Some were well-liked, some were distrusted. Some were generally honest; some were corrupt. Some relied on the rhetoric of pity, others on the rhetoric of empowerment.

But they had this in common: they were numerous, functioned mostly outside the state apparatus, and were the product (direct or indirect) of the long history of foreign intervention. And the foreign aid system, regardless of the intentions of the individual actors within it, had long been an unequivocal failure (Buss and Gardner 2008, Katz 2013).

### **Dependence and the Legacy of Aid**

*Kanari pa sous.*

A water vessel isn't a well. (*Temporary things are not permanent.*)

Haitian proverb

However critical I sound, the purpose here is not to impugn all interventions, and certainly not all of the foreigners who participated in those interventions. I hope that the ethnographic portions of this book will present a nuanced and even compassionate perspective on humanitarian and development workers, UN blue helmets, and even defense contractors. It is comfortably easy, with the benefit of hindsight, to identify the hypocrisies and brutalities of foreign intervention in Haiti — and easier, too, to critique the dead. If the Marines who participated in the occupation could be raised from the dead, might we not be able to find in some of them a sincere desire to "help"? Amid long-term concerns about sovereignty and



governance and the politics of charity, and amid grounded critiques about the way that particular humanitarian and development interventions have played out in practice, the fact remains that interventions in Haiti have had successes, particularly in moments of large- or small-scale emergency. Lives have been saved.

The flipside of success is, of course, dependence. As foreign NGOs have in effect become "the system" in Haiti, people have become more and more dependent on them and their presence has become all the more intractable. People may or may not like the presence of *blan* in their country, but they are, regardless, dependent upon them for their very lives.

Mireille, a warm woman in her fifties with a contagious, deep laugh, comes from a relatively privileged background, studied education in the US, and now runs a school for children with intellectual disabilities in Port-au-Prince. Many of her family members find her vocation strange: "They don't understand how I can work here, without being depressed all the time. But I'm not depressed, because the children are fun, and we do all the same things. They learn to read, they learn to write, they play, they laugh, they get mad — the same as other kids. So I don't see why I should be sad." As we spoke, at her desk at the school, a little boy I had never met before came up to me and hugged me and told me I was pretty. "Okay, thank you, cheri," Mireille told him with firm, amused patience. "Go back to your classroom, now."

Apart from individual students' fees, NGOs are the main source of funding for programs like Mireille's, and, amid the competition for foreign donor funds, it is a constant struggle for Haitian-run programs to keep themselves afloat. Mireille has appealed many times for funding and support from NGOs, but she feels as though — perhaps paradoxically — her program is too functional and well-run for the NGOs to fund them. "It's not people like me I have the impression they're looking for. Perhaps think that I've got enough, myself, I see that they'd

rather do it for others that aren't so... whatever." Mireille believes that the NGOs are looking for schools or programs in more obvious need than her own. "But I would ask if the other people they help, what qualifications they have. I won't say they don't do good work, but, but at the same time, I don't know, do they truly have a good framework for those children? Is it a good thing they are doing, or are they just making money? You're always hearing the *blan* will give money, and they just take a few children, they gather them together, they put them there, and there's nothing real done — it's money that's thrown away."

Whatever Mireille's complaints or misgivings about NGOs, professionally, or her concerns that they are wasting their funds on poorly-run programs, she does not discount their necessity after the disaster.

Bon. If the NGOs hadn't come after the earthquake, I am sure that the problems would have been worse, even more grave. Because they gave water. As far as toilets, you see what it would have been? If there hadn't been those portable toilets, you understand... And food, too! If you ask me, it was they who kept us alive. In the food they gave, in cash for work, all the things they created. I can't say they didn't do that — you can't say that they didn't do that. The way things are here, you give a helping hand, you give food, you give toilets, you give water. If they hadn't given them, truly, our situation would have been grave. If we got sick, they gave us health. Look, if you have nothing at all, you're not in the position to criticize, to say that anything's wrong. But... maybe if there had been more structure, things would have gone better, they would have been able to let go of our hand, and we'd get along on our own. But if they let go now, there will be nothing at all.

As Mireille continued, she seemed to be blaming Haitians for allowing the foreigners to have free reign over Haiti, and resigned to Haiti's powerlessness.

It's ourselves, always, it's ourselves, *lakay nou*, in Haiti. As long as there is no follow-up on our part, it's normal to have chaos. People do whatever they want, and there's no one to hold them accountable. All those things that [the NGOs did] didn't have an organized structure — because people did whatever they wanted to do (*moun fè sa yo pito*). There's no State, no one to coordinate, to say "this is what's needed. Here is how we're going to distribute vouchers, here is how we are going to give them so everybody can get some." You understand? If we had a structure in our country, *lakay nou*, that was already in place, there wouldn't have

been in disorder like that. Because when a country is structured, there isn't this kind of disorder when they come into their homelands to do things. When you're in a time of weakness, it's normal — you need someone to tell you what to do.

Mireille's comments point to several of the long-term causes/effects of living in an aid economy: justified dependence in times of urgent crisis; chronic and intractable dependence in times of ordinary deprivation; a feeble State, mocked and distrusted by its own citizens; and, heartbreakingly, Haitian belief in Haitian weakness and incompetence.

In short, on the eve of the earthquake, Haiti had been subject to more than two hundred years of sporadic military intervention and soft power. A country weakened by neoliberal policies, a government and a people dependent on and in thrall to foreign aid. An environment and agricultural production destroyed by sugar cultivation under the colony, structural adjustment policies, and the quiet politics of subsidized food aid from the US. Repeated stabs at promoting foreign investment, which repeatedly fail to enrich anyone besides those foreign investors — least of all the laborers. The seeds of PVOs sprouted into innumerable NGOs — in spite of which, the masses remain largely impoverished, largely without access to medical care, largely dependent.

**PART THREE: STAGING AN INTERVENTION: PERFORMANCE AND TRAGEDY IN A  
HUMANITARIAN CRISIS**

## **Yon monn kè kase**

*Patou sou latè se kè sote  
Chak jou ki mete se evenman  
K'ap frape nan lemonn antye  
Pou elimine kretyen vivan*

*Sida kanpe lage de pye kole  
Nan kolèt tout nasyon  
Kraze biskèt lezòm san presize  
Okenn koulè ras ni pozisyon*

*Menm jan ak tranblemanditè tache  
Nan festiwèl peyi Japon  
Yon chabrak ki byen pwoteje  
Se Ayiti ki pa menm gen yon bon pon*

*Gen kote grangou ap fè moun jape  
Pandan gran pwisans ap prepare gwo zam  
Pou kraze tipeyi ki pa menm ka manje  
Gade sa Tonton Sam fè Adam*

*Toupatou se lagè k'ap simaye  
Nan chèche pwòp enterè  
Ki fè chak jou san ap koule  
Lèzòm pa itilize fòmil lapè*

*Mezanmi kote bagay sa yo prale  
Lezòm inyore prensip lanati  
Nan mete syans devan pou fè sa yo vle  
Ki toujou lage yo nan kouri*

*Lamizè fin anraje  
Nan yon monn lanfè  
Kote tout moun ap rele amwe  
Kilè k'ap fout gen lapè sou latè*

*Tande yon pati sinyati  
Ayiti kapital fatra  
Nepalè machann kolera  
Somali peyi bacha*

*Lemonn kowonpi  
Gran pwisans piyajè  
ONG farouchè*

*Gade! Mwen gen poum di toujou.*

## **A Fearful World**

Throughout the world, all are anxious  
Every day brings another catastrophe  
Striking the world entire  
And eliminating the souls who dwell upon it.

AIDS arrived and trampled upon  
The chests of all its opposition  
Indiscriminately shattering breastbones  
Regardless of color, race, or position

Just as an earthquake gripped  
Relentlessly the country of Japan.  
So what of Haiti, poorly built,  
If this can happen to a powerful and well-protected land?

There are places where hunger makes people bark like dogs  
As the great powers take up great arms  
To break those little countries that can't even eat  
Look what Uncle Sam has done to Adam.

Everywhere, war is spreading  
Pursuing its own interests  
And making blood run every day  
Man does not use the formula for peace.

My god, what are we coming to?  
Man ignores the principles of nature  
Disregarding science to do as they please  
Leaving us in danger, to fend for ourselves

Misery turns to rage  
In a hellish world  
Where everyone cries "amwey!"  
When the hell will we have peace on earth?

Here are their names:  
Haiti, Capital of Garbage  
Nepalis, Traders of Cholera  
Somalia, Country of Hunger-Swollen Bellies.

World of corruption,  
The great powers are looters  
NGOs, ferocious jokers.  
Look! There's still more for me to say

*Bazelet St. Louis, 2011 (Konbit des Jeunes Penseurs)*

## **The Performance and Tragedy of Humanitarian Intervention**

Writing about the earthquake and the aid response that followed is intellectually and emotionally difficult. It is a complex story, full of people and institutions. There are multiple voices, many of them emotional and urgent, that must be heard: Haitians people with various experiences, perceptions, opinions, and backgrounds, aid workers and other foreigners with different nationalities, politics, goals, and beliefs. It takes place over a relatively extensive period of time – three years – which feels longer because it was a three year-period in which so much changed so quickly. Hopes and sentiments, policies and power, rhetoric and ideas, and the very landscape of the city and the country changed over and over during this time. It takes place at many levels – from the macro levels of international and domestic politics and institutions, to the intimate micro levels of interpersonal relationships, individual households and families, and personal experiences.

It has been written about a lot. The earthquake and the post-aid effort have been written about or otherwise represented by journalists, academics, literary writers, photographers, documentary filmmakers, survivors, aid workers and ex-aid workers, policy wonks, politicians, missionaries, economists, medical providers, and activists (and people who play more than one of those roles, including myself).

How, then, should I represent the complexity, the multiplicity of voices and experiences and actors, the complicated temporality – and do it in a way that contributes something new and

meaningful to the many, many existing analyses and representations of the Haiti earthquake?

I am structuring it as though it were a drama – not literally, by using dialogue and stage directions – but rather as a framework and a motif. Lest this seem frivolously cute and postmodern, there are reasons for it. A literary format – sequences of scenes, bound into acts – allows for a linear structure to be applied to a story that is not always linear, and allows for the many voices to coexist. And it points to the ways in which the aid response *was* staged and was performed – which is not to say that it was false, insincere, or contrived, but rather that there were multiple actors and multiple roles, and that there were public expectations of how those roles would be played and carried out. Fassin (2012) outlines the fundamental paradox of humanitarian relationships: that while humanitarianism depends on a recognition of shared humanity, a politics of compassion is necessarily based on profound inequality between the givers and the receivers. Because of this inequality, the receivers know that they are supposed to display humility, rather than demand rights. Owing to the long presence of NGOs and other humanitarian actors in Haiti, and the degree to which these organizations have supplanted the state, people have learned to articulate their lives and suffering in institutionally-approved ways (often in terms of trauma and victimhood) in order to be seen as deserving aid recipients (James 2008). This phenomenon preceded the earthquake, and became all the more pronounced in the aftermath: telling the story of one's loss, injury, suffering, and displacement during the sudden and unfolding disaster – in the right ways, and to the right people – was one way to live in an aid economy ruled by humanitarian governance. But this form of governance produces what Fassin terms “precarious lives”: “Lives that are not guaranteed but bestowed in answer to prayer” (2010: 4).

This framing also allows us to examine the temporality of post-disaster intervention,



which in official terms are presented consisting of a “relief” phase (the more immediate post-disaster period in which the focus is primarily humanitarian) and a “recovery” phase (the longer-term period in which the focus is primarily development). In practice, I argue, it was more complicated than that, given both the scale of the disaster, Haiti's preexisting poverty and social history, and the long presence of an aid regime in that country long before this particular disaster.

Moreover, the conceit of “staging an intervention” allows us to think about rehearsal and preparedness. The 2010 Haiti earthquake was an unprecedented and unexpected event – indeed, any disaster of that scale can be considered an unprecedented and unexpected event, but the particularities of the earthquake and its being located primarily in a major urban center were unusual. Still, the international community and the media had in a sense been rehearsing for an event like this, both within Haiti (in moments of sudden crisis, such as the 2008 floods in Gonaïves, as well as the chronic crisis of the everyday) and outside of Haiti (in other major [un]natural humanitarian disasters, such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami). There are procedures and materials that are standardly deployed in massive disasters such as these, “best practices” deduced from responses to previous catastrophes, and expectations about how they will and will not succeed. Haitian people, too, in a way had been rehearsing for this crisis. Again, this is not to say that they were used to suffering, or prepared for the shock; the earthquake was as devastating and staggering for Haitians as it would be for any other population. But, as I have said, many of them had been born and raised in a country with a weak state and an aid economy. It is in part the habitual, historical absence of state services and authorities that made Haitian civil society respond so immediately and effectively to the disaster without any kind of official oversight; amid the overwhelming loss, it is what allowed so many of us to survive. At the same, owing to the decades-long presence of international NGOs and

other types of organizations, Haitian people were also highly accustomed to the patterns and machinations of an aid economy – for example, how one should represent oneself and speak about one's life in order to be seen as a deserving recipient of aid (James 2010), or how the aid economy might be best exploited to one's benefit, or how helpful it can be to have a “*moun pa w*” (literally, “your own person,” but referring to an inside contact) within an organization. To speak of “rehearsal” is to speak of a sequence of expected steps and events that followed the disaster, according to a particular kind of script.

The metaphor of theatre and staging lends itself to a discussion of props: the various objects and technologies that come into circulation in moments of humanitarian crisis, how they are used functionally and symbolically, and what they mean to different kinds of people and groups. The immediate post-quake moment involved the rapid deployment of various standard forms of mobile infrastructure and “humanitarian kits” (Redfield 2008) such as inflatable hospitals. As the relief phase settled into a more routinized emergency, we saw food rations, water distribution trucks, huge rubber “bladders” filled with potable water, buckets, and of course tarps upon tarps – more often than not all emblazoned with the logo of the organization, combining aid with publicity. With the sudden appearance of a new crisis, cholera, several organizations quickly unrolled standard Cholera Treatment Centers (CTCs), themselves comprising several standard low-tech and effective components. In Haiti, NGOs and the UN publicized the existence of material intervention and used the distribution of such items as a tangible measure of efficacy and success, while so-called beneficiaries dismissed them as insufficient and regarded them as evidence of failure. For example, several organizations distributed specialized “hygiene kits” in the camps after the emergence of cholera in late 2010. These kits generally contained soap, oral rehydration salts, and water treatment such as bleach

drops or dissolvable Aquatabs. People used the soap and the water treatments, willingly but not gratefully or enthusiastically; they recognized the hygiene kits as a stopgap measure, and wondered when and if their circumstances would ever really change. The same was largely true of the transitional plywood dwellings known as “T-shelters.” The public line in the aid world was that the building of T-shelters was a positive, concrete step toward moving people out of camps. (Many aid workers privately disagreed.) Beneficiaries, meanwhile, viewed T-shelters as impractical, hot, uncomfortable, and vulnerable to storms and hurricanes. In short, the practical value and meaning assigned to such humanitarian props differed by who was using them, and for what purpose.

In thinking about props, we might also consider those objects, especially papers and documents (Tickin 2011) that confer a particular status or legitimacy upon an individual. For example, people living in particular camps possessed cards formally identifying them as members of that camp community and as beneficiaries of the organization administering that camp. In order to access aid and particularly relocation funds, people had to present their “IOM card” or “Red Cross” card.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, the symbolic trappings of formal employment and institutional belonging are incredibly, poignantly important: badges, business cards, and acronyms are everywhere, including and especially among small grassroots Haitian groups, which emulate the practices of large NGOs in order to perform their own legitimacy.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, people queue up in front of aid organizations and potential employers, each with the requisite prop – a curriculum vitae in a manila envelope – even as they claim that an inside

---

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps ironically, some of those cardholders had lost their previous forms of identification, such as birth certificates and electoral cards, in the earthquake, rendering them literal *sans-papiers* within their own country. For the thousands of people who had lost their papers, particularly the poor, the process of recovering those documents could be extremely difficult and time-consuming, not in the least because the government and the office of public records had been devastated by the quake.

<sup>16</sup> Another rather bittersweet example of this is the founding of the KOJEPENS writing group. The members, all of them poor young Haitian people from Port-au-Prince’s *bidonvils*, insisted that we would not be a legitimate organization unless we had laminated badges and official recognition from the Ministry of Culture.

person always gets the job, anyway. These objects – badges, cards, and documents -- and the processes attached to them, lay bare the politics and the bureaucracy of humanitarianism,

The conceit of performance also allows us to consider what happens “onstage” (visibly, in the public eye, as part of the official or widely accepted record) and what happens “offstage” or behind-the-scenes (privately, unofficially, beyond the gaze of most). Of course, there are different stages and different audiences: what is onstage for international spectators is not the same is what is onstage for various categories of people living in Port-au-Prince. For example, the marked differences between foreign aid workers’ daily experiences and most Haitians’ lives were obvious and clearly visible to poor residents of Port-au-Prince, while the dissatisfaction, demoralization, and self-hatred of many of those foreign aid workers remained invisible and unchronicled to most resident of Port-au-Prince. Onstage and offstage actions also change over time. For example, in the first days and weeks after the earthquake, the standard media narrative in the US was of tragedy, terrible need, and the possibility of meaningful intervention. Within months, the most common, expected, and accepted story had become one of failure. The question was no longer how to raise money for Haiti, but where all the money that had been collected and promised had gone. Offstage concerns had gone center stage.

The line between action and performance at times blurred to the point of being indistinguishable; for so many kinds of actors (pun intended), their success and even their survival hinged on playing their roles correctly and strategically, to the right audiences. Haitians performed their need for foreign aid workers and foreign journalists, because those who could not demonstrate their suffering satisfactorily, or in recognizable terms, were less likely to receive aid. Foreign aid workers, in turn, performed their duties and paraded their difficulties for the international media, however ambivalently at times, for their programs’ funding depended on

portraying the right balance of success and competence (everyone wants to donate to an organization that does its job well) and continued need (no one wants to donate if they think everything is fine). The media rely on NGOs as gatekeepers, while NGOs rely on the media for publicity (Benthall 1993).

At times, the conceit of aid as “performance” ceased to be a metaphor and became straightforward description. Celebrities became some of the most visible and written-about humanitarians and spokespeople for the ongoing Haitian tragedy, of whom perhaps the best-known and certainly the most outspoken was Sean Penn. Journalist Jonathan Katz suggests that cinematic performance was, consciously or unconsciously, part of Penn’s persona as a humanitarian aid worker, advocate, and, most bafflingly to Katz, influencer of policy. According to Katz, Penn was

...demonstrative, vivid, intense.... As Penn explained the details of camp life, he seemed to draw from his recent portrayal of Willie Stark, the charismatic but vindictive governor of Louisiana in Steven Zaillian’s *All the King’s Men* – though where that doomed character seethed with 1930s southern populism, Penn in Haiti went for the argot of the modern NGO. (Katz, 116)

Penn was far from the only celebrity or performer to intervene in post-quake Haiti. 2010, 2011 and 2012 saw a strange procession of movie stars, singers, politicians, and reality shows embarking in Haiti. Oprah Winfrey dropped in to interview Penn and visit orphanages. Donna Karan created a fashion line that “infuses the vibrant spirit of Haiti into a sexy New York sophistication” and founded a charity focused on “creative business development.” Shakira, in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank, restored a school in Port-au-Prince. Television personality and chef Anthony Bourdain hosted an episode of his reality show, “No Reservations,” showcasing Haitian food. Haitian-born music star Wyclef Jean returned to the country of his childhood for an unsuccessful and sometimes risible 2010 presidential campaign;

his charity, Yele, dissolved amid accusations of corruption and scandal (Sontag 2012). The ultimate winner of that presidential election, Michel Martelly, was a famous Kanaval singer better known as Sweet Micky, who, before donning business suits, had worn women’s clothing and sung vulgarities. The explicit collision of politics and the carnivalesque was complete.

In December 2011, on the occasion of Kim Kardashian’s visit to Port-au-Prince, the Haitian newspaper *Le Nouvelliste* published an article about the recent influx of international stars, including Kardashian, Maria Bello, and Patricia Arquette. (The article was accompanied by a halfway-amusing cartoon of Kardashian – famous for her tumultuous personal life -- receiving a ritual bath from an *oungan*; standing in the basin, surrounded by money and candles and offerings, she remarks, “After this bath, my second marriage is assured!”) When famous performers went to Haiti, the US media tended to focus on their charitable and humanitarian deeds. In contrast, while the *Nouvelliste* article makes vague reference to the stars’ “philanthropic activities,” the focus is on their Hollywood bona fides (including a touching reference to Bello having starred with “Johnny Deep” in *Secret Window*) and the possibility that they will bring money and investment in their wake. It ends hopefully, yet conclusively: “This avalanche of stars will put Haiti on the ‘people pages’ of magazines and will be good publicity for Haiti as a destination” (*Nouvelliste* 2011). It was a poignant contrast, these two takes on publicity stunts: beyond Haiti, the media and consumers of media continued to see Haiti as a stage on which beneficence and generosity might be performed, while within Haiti, the media hoped that Haiti itself might become a player, desirable in its own right and not merely as an object of pity and performance.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Over a few days in May 2010, the American television show Extreme Makeover: Home*

*Edition came to a hospital in Port-au-Prince. This is a reality program that remodels houses for US families that have undergone some kind of significant hardship and displayed inspirational qualities. While the family is on an all-expenses-paid holiday, the design team remodels and often enlarges the home. In the final scene of each episode, a van is parked in front of the family, obscuring their view of their remodeled home, and the hosts shout, “Move that van!” for the reveal. The family standardly reacts with grateful amazement and tears. It is unabashedly sentimental, “feel-good” US entertainment, predicated on individual charity and individualized solutions..*

*“Are they building people houses?” I asked a hospital administrator.*

*“No.”*

*On the ground of the outdoor area where the physical therapists work lay a collection of used, slightly grimy-looking below-the-knee prosthetic legs. The joints were brightly-colored. The calves had been decorated — one with an image of Disney’s Cinderella, two with the children’s character Strawberry Shortcake. The toenails of the prosthetic feet were painted pink. They were all made with white people in mind.*



Figure 16 and Figure 17: Used prostheses



*“The little girl in the American family has a congenital condition,” explained one of the volunteer PTs. “She donated the legs she outgrew.”*

*“So it’s her family who’s getting the house?”*

*Two young girls were the recipients. One was a very healthy-looking, bubbly eight-year-old in a tank-top and jean skirt, her hair in short braids, who bounded around the courtyard on her primary-colored crutches. She was investigating everything, asking questions. “We’re not worried about her,” said the administrator. “She’s an athletic kid.” She is the girl who, even in the days immediately after the earthquake, was quickly dubbed “Miss Sunshine” by the Haitian volunteers.*

*The other girl, dressed in a fancy ruffled dress — probably the one she wore to church — was quieter. She sat on a mat on the ground, wide-eyed and silent, while her stump was measured. One of the young Haitian men who volunteers as an interpreter was assisting her.*

*The producer, a young white man who looked to be in his teens, but who was certainly older. He dashed about with nervous energy, using his laptop and his iPhone to show the girls and their mothers and the various volunteers photos of the American child who had donated the prostheses. The Haitian families looked at the photos and nodded, but did not react much.*

*“They want the mothers to cry,” said the administrator. “They want to get an emotional reaction. I don’t think they’ll cry. I hope they don’t.”*

*Later, I heard they had taken the families back to the sites of their pre-earthquake homes so they could film them in front of the rubble of the buildings that had devastated their families and caused their children to have their limbs amputated.*

*One should not begrudge the American kid her kindness — she is just a child and an amputee who felt sympathy and solidarity for other child amputees, and everyone wanted to help in whatever way they could in the post-quake moment. But prostheses are not interchangeable; they should be made for the wearer. At its core, this was a cheap, inadequate solution for Haitian children, dressed up as a televisable, moving act of personal, individualized kindness.*



*It's the performance and the act of donation that matters -- in this case, almost as intimate as an organ donation, or maybe even more intimate, because the donated limb is external, visible, a constant physical reminder of the loss and of the giver, and in this case, personalized with the doodles and flourishes of the previous owner. The ultimate usefulness of the gift for the receiver was not the bottom line, or else they would have skipped the production crews and instead paid for custom-made prostheses.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Finally, framing this story as one would a play allows me to argue that the aid response took the shape of a classical tragedy (Taylor 2003): one in which the devastating outcome was in a sense predetermined, one in which the moral *raison d'être* of aid – the salvation narrative – was also its tragic flaw and its downfall. For, filled with hope and promise for change though those initial moments and days after the earthquake were, salvation was, from the beginning, an impossibility, yet – however elusive and ultimately imaginary it might be – it was the moral center around which the aid response orbited.

***Dramatis Personae.***

*Haitian Residents of Port-au-Prince*

EVENS – Middle-aged man, community leader and lifelong resident of Cité Soleil

GINA – Young woman from a Port-au-Prince katyè popilè who volunteered at a hospital for months after the earthquake

NADIA – Young woman, originally from Grand-Anse, living with her toddler son and a boyfriend in a tent on the Maïs Gaté camp in Port-au-Prince, across the street from the Red Cross headquarters

GUERLINE – Young woman from a Port-au-Prince bidonvil who tried unsuccessfully for more than two years to get a job within the Red Cross headquarters

MIRLANDE – Woman in her early 40s, originally from Grand-Anse, working as a household servant and living in a remote camp on a hillside in Port-au-Prince

JEAN – Man in his late 30s, originally from Grand-Anse, who worked on-and-off at a MSF-Holland cholera treatment center

ALEX – Man in his mid-30s from Cité Soleil.

CHRISMÈNE – Woman in her mid-20s, living in a shared tent in the Champ-de-Mars camp

DOMINIQUE – Upper-class Haitian woman in her early 60s

*Foreign Aid Workers*

MATHIEU – French humanitarian in his late 30s, working as a delegate for the Red Cross. Arrived in Port-au-Prince in January 2010.

SARAH – Australian development worker in her mid 30s, working for an ecumenical international development organization. Arrived in Port-au-Prince in June 2010.

ANAÏS – French woman in her mid-20s, working for UNDP before, during, and in the immediate aftermath of the quake

NEJMA – French-Algerian development worker in her late 30s, working for UNOPS.

*Journalists and Others*

MAYA – US journalist based in Port-au-Prince

CHRIS – US freelance advocacy journalist in Port-au-Prince

***Prelude: The Immediate Aftermath.***

*Scene: January 12, 2010. 4:53 pm. In thirty-five seconds, Port-au-Prince and the towns and communities around it — Léogâne, Jacmel, Petit-Goâve, Grand-Goâve — are devastated.*

It felt as though there was no way that things wouldn't change.

The surreal, cold night of January 12, 2010 as people huddled together in the broken streets, as thousands of people alive and dead lay under rubble, our views were mostly narrow and few people had moved far: we saw the small dusty islands of destruction only just before our eyes, but we imagined what lay beyond. The sounds of cries and prayers both near and distant assured us that the city and its inhabitants still existed. It felt apocalyptic. And it felt as though from that night forward, things must change for Haiti, there was no conceivable way that things couldn't change in a fundamental way.

Everyone felt that way. Poor Haitians, privileged Haitians, foreigners. Inexpressible fear during the earthquake, grief in the aftermath, and the certainty that such a cataclysm would change everything: these were three feelings that seemed to unite everyone, in a country usually so divided by status, class, and perception. “After January 12, everyone mobilized, the international community mobilized. Myself, I believed that things were going to change, to get better,” said Evens, from Cité Soleil. American journalist Maya remembered thinking, “This is Haiti’s big chance.”

It was a moment of terrible fear and loss, but it was also a time of courage, decency, and the extraordinary heroism of ordinary people. There was no formal earthquake response yet. The preexisting humanitarian apparatus in Port-au-Prince was shaken and crippled by the disaster, and any relief it offered was piecemeal, by individuals with whatever meager supplies they had at hand. Most of the people who were rescued from under the rubble and provided with

first aid in the first hours and days after the earthquake were saved by ordinary Haitian people using whatever materials they could find: hammers, pickaxes, shovels, flashlights, their hands. In the absence of the state, in the absence of NGOs, Haitian people did the opposite of what the international media expected them to do. Haitian society did not collapse into anarchy and chaos. In the midst of what truly felt like hell, people risked their lives to save their families, friends, acquaintances, and strangers. We will never know how many people were saved by those acts of instinctive, immediate acts of bravery, for they went largely unrecorded and unrecognized. But I am one of those saved people, and I am one of a countless many.

From the perspective of ordinary Haitian people, the earthquake itself was confusion and chaos. Many people did not know what it was. The disjointed way in which Mirlande remembers the event, large-scale destruction and her single-minded drive to go to her child, interspersed with small, seemingly irrelevant details (the money in her hand, the sandals on her feet) give some idea of what the earthquake felt like to people like her.

January 12, I was in the street in Babiole. Then the thing took me over (kounye a bagay la te pran mwen), then I ran back here for Dayana. Dayana was in the lakou here, with the other kids. When I heard the thing, goudougoudougoudou it was like it was a wave. So I felt I was moving, it was like someone was lifting me up and putting me there. People were rising up and getting put down — plop, lifted and put down — plop. But I wasn't — when I came here, I saw people had fallen, cars, but in spite of that I was walking, I was strong and I was walking. Then I saw an electrical pole that had fallen in front of me. People were screaming. Cars. Everything was totally dark. It was dark, dark, dark. I don't know what pushed me to come up here. It was like I was walking and it wasn't me who was walking. But I knew that Dayana was here. So then I ran into Marie-Lourdes and I said "Marie-Lourdes, where are the children?" I don't remember what Marie-Lourdes told me. I had gone to buy gas. I didn't have time to buy the gas. I still had the money in my hand. I looked and saw the money was in my hand. I had sandals on my feet; I took off my sandals; I was walking barefoot. I couldn't stand having sandals on my feet anymore. I came up here. Everyone was whiiiiite! I thought they'd had flour poured over them. I couldn't see anything at all. It was dark. I don't know who it was who pushed me to come up here. I got here, I saw the children, I saw Elsie, and they fell down crying [tonbe rele]. Elsie tonbe rele, everyone was crying. They said "It's Mirlande, it's Mirlande!" And Elsie said "Here are the children,

nothing's happened to them!" We were yelling anmwèy.

For that night, perhaps, there was no such thing as social class. It took an earthquake of that magnitude to tear down the literal and figurative walls that kept people apart in Port-au-Prince – so long a city of fear and suspicion, of concrete divisions, of bogeymen and beggars beyond heavy metal gates, and security guards, and cement barriers crowned with broken glass bottles. That night, amid the dust, rubble, crumbled cement blocks and twisted rebar, it was impossible to tell who was who. For that night, the poor and the rich, the masters and the servants alike were frightened, broken, cold, hungry, and penniless in the street. For that night, there was so much to fear that nobody could fear each other.

The walls would come back up before anything else would, but for that night, at least, they were down.

## ACT ONE

### *Scene One: Enter Aid*

#### *Emergency, Excitement, and Hope*

There was hope, a sense that after a disaster so completely devastating, the slate might be wiped clean. It felt as though the world had ended and perhaps a new world would rise from the ashes. Donors had pledged billions of dollars in aid: \$5.6 billion from bilateral and multilateral donors, and another \$3.1 billion from individuals and private companies (UN Office of the Special Envoy 2011).

Suddenly Haiti was everything and everywhere, and the entire world had descended upon Haiti. The post-disaster machine clicked into motion: a vast troop of aid workers arrived. It resembled a moment of global cohesion. It also resembled a circus. The day after the quake, Médecins Sans Frontières flew in an extensive inflatable hospital and set it up on the grounds of their own damaged buildings. The Israeli military set up an emergency field hospital in Port-au-Prince less than three days after the quake. Search and rescue teams with trained dogs from Europe, South America, and North America were at the airport in Port-au-Prince in under two days. Journalists, aid workers and volunteers who couldn't get directly to Haiti flew to the Dominican Republic and crossed the border however they could. Dominican medical teams were some of the first on the scene, and there was talk that this disaster might be a step toward healing the long-troubled relationship between the two neighboring countries. Partners in Health, already working in the Central Plateau, made it to Port-au-Prince by the afternoon of January 13. Two thousand US Marines arrived on January 14, as part of (the tellingly-named) Operation Unified Response – supposedly to assist with relief efforts, but also to impose order.

“Chaos lurks around the corner,” says the Marines' webpage about Operation Unified Response. “And where there is chaos there are Marines nearby; ready and able to silence it.”)



Figure 18:  
US troops, part of Operation Unified Response, on an armed patrol of Route Delmas in Port-au-Prince with their Haitian translators.

April 2010.

A massive 70,000 ton US Navy ship, the Comfort, docked in the Port-au-Prince harbor, a floating hospital for some of the most seriously injured people. With little fanfare or media coverage, Cuban doctors, who have been working in Haiti for decades, arrived in greater numbers and stayed longer than most foreign volunteers. Missionaries arrived. By mid-January, John Travolta had personally flown his private plane of rations and supplies into Port-au-Prince (to the frustration of many aid organizations that could not land), and by the end of the month Scientologists in yellow T-shirts had fanned through the devastated city, using the power of “touch” to heal earthquake victims (Carroll 2010). Of course, beyond the bloom of humanitarian morality, each of these early interveners had its own political agenda – some more than others. No serious in-depth discussion of the US Navy and the IDF's roles in post-quake Haiti could be done without talking about militarization of medicine and soft-power tactics, the desire of global hegemony to soften their public images – but this is not the topic at hand. We are talking about those first days, when complicated political analysis was the furthest thing from most people's minds, when the focus was simply on saving lives. Sanjay Gupta and Anderson Cooper, as well

as other stars of the news media, were on the ground – the former mostly as a doctor, the latter mostly as a journalist (who also memorably dropped his camera to rescue a bloody Haitian child). Sean Penn arrived days after the quake, moved into a tent camp, created an NGO, and mostly remains there today. The ghost of Michael Jackson was resurrected, and he sang a bilingual “We Are the World” with Wyclef Jean and a group of other music stars. “It’s a choice we’re making,” they sang. “We’re saving our own lives.” The January 22 Hope for Haiti telethon was the most watched telethon in history, and it raised \$58 million, a record amount in private donations for relief NGOs (McAlister 2012). The disruption of the ordinary was so complete, so absolute, that for some time, none of this – the celebrities, the massive interventions, the inflatable hospitals, the tactile Scientologists, the inconceivable sums of money — seemed particularly strange. Port-au-Prince had reached a saturation point when it came to the unexpected. Money and sentiment and action were flowing. The world wanted to save Haiti.



***Interlude: In Dominique Durand's garden***

*Cela est bien dit, répondit Candide, mais il faut cultiver notre jardin.*

“All that is very well,” answered Candide, “but let us cultivate our garden.”

Voltaire

*The sudden goodwill was not just coming from outside. Among Haitians, too, as I have said, there was a surge of solidarity in the near aftermath of the earthquake – both among the masses and among many members of the middle class and elite. This is remarkable because it is not consistently the rule: while cooperation and goodwill among the poor is common after disasters, so is elite panic. As I have said, the earthquake brought down, however temporarily, some of the socioeconomic divides as well as the literal walls that divided people. And perhaps the reason some privileged Haitians felt compelled to act after the earthquake was that their families and social circles had been profoundly affected. Unlike many disasters, which disproportionately affect the poor, the January 12, 2010 earthquake – the thirty-five seconds of seismic activity and sudden destruction, not the long, drawn-out aftermath – hit the Haitian bourgeoisie and middle class hard. Stately homes, elite supermarkets, lavish hotels and restaurants crumbled, and many influential Haitian people were killed or injured. I would argue that this shock shook some members of the Haitian bourgeoisie – a group that feels a great sense of fear mixed with their privilege, a group that is not collectively known for their solidarity with or political or moral commitment to the poor of their own land, though there are interesting exceptions among them – out of their apathy.*

*Dominique Durand's garden is a small paradise in Pétienville. Beyond its walls lie the noise, dust, and poverty of the capital – the traffic clogged with the white Land Cruisers and overfilled taptaps and motorcycle taxis and water trucks, the young men promenading bags of*

*chewy white bread and buckets of water, women selling mangoes, the servants in plastic sandals walking to work – but inside Dominique's garden, all is verdant and serene. Those walls themselves provide a stratigraphy of recent decades of Haitian politics: with each coup or period of instability, the wall grew higher, and each stratum is a slightly different color. Here is the layer they built in 1991, in 1994, in 2004... A section of the wall collapsed in the earthquake. Fortunately, it did not fall on any of the street vendors who stand alongside the road.*

*After drinking her morning coffee, Dominique goes into her garden and works, generally wearing old cotton shorts and one of the many brightly-colored oversized T-shirts that her husband gets for free, in the course of his import-export business, from a variety of Haitian companies: Ti Malice brand cooking butter, Tortug'Air airlines. There are ferns, and fruit trees, and flowers, an expansive lawn, and two small ponds filled with water lilies. There is a swimming pool, which fills every day with bougainvillea petals, which Dominique or her jeran lakou has to fish out with the net. An ever-expanding population of cats has decimated the garden's anole population, and Dominique admonishes them as they chase one another energetically up the trees. "They are ruining my trees with their claws!" she exclaims. But she loves the kittens. She loves her garden.*

*Dominique is a soft, motherly woman in her early sixties, with light brown skin and soft curly hair. (Other Haitians whisper that she "looks Dominican.") She can be warm and nurturing; she can also be quick-tempered. She hails from a prominent family, though she herself vehemently eschews politics. She is a tremendous cook, and nearly every evening finds her in the kitchen, arguing with her "personnel" (as she calls her household workers), making dinner and often an elaborate dessert. This is unusual among upper-class women, most of whom relegate the kitchen duties to the servants — but Dominique loves to cook, and eat, and feed her family (and*

*often a large group of guests – other members of Haiti's economic and political elite, or troops of European or American volunteers). She cooks rare, bloody roasts, and cassoulet, and choucroute, and potatoes au gratin, and salads, and blancmange for dessert — French-style dishes that most poor Haitians would not recognize. But she also has a soft spot for Haitian street food. She loves the deep-dried meat-filled pate sold by the street merchants around Place Boyer, even though they sometimes give her diarrhea. She laughs, “I eat them even if I spend the rest of the afternoon running to the toilet!”*

*In the mornings, Dominique wakes up early, before the rest of her family, and puts the coffeemaker on the stove. Sometimes it's as early as 5 am. She often cannot sleep. She worries that she has made the wrong choice, in keeping her family in Haiti. Many of her relatives live in the United States, Canada, and the Dominican Republic. She thinks that her children — and her young grandson — would have had an easier life in another country. No insecurity. No threat of kidnapping. No missing months of school because of strikes. Her cousins in the Dominican Republic have a “normal life,” she says — their children go to school, go to sports practice, hang out downtown, go get ice cream and go to the movies. She thinks of her young grandson, who, in his squeaky voice, calls her “ma vieille petite grandmère que j'aime a l'infini.” Was it worth the sense of homeland to stay in Haiti? Of course, it was not only out of a sense of identity that they remained in Haiti. This is where her husband's business is, where their money is. But they could have left, like so many others did, and yet decided not to.*

*I, like other left-leaning foreign observers, sometimes find myself judging the Haitian upper classes. I marveled at parties that featured actual pink champagne on ice and huge spreads of hors d'oeuvres and catered Lebanese food. One night, as her younger brother holed up in his room with a pretty girl and his Nintendo PlayStation, Dominique's daughter Nathalie*

*casually mentioned her plans to go to Miami for the weekend. “I have to get out of here, go to a civilized country where you can get sushi and watch new movies.”*

*Soon after the earthquake, once she had determined that her own immediate family was safe, Dominique volunteered at a nearby hospital within walking distance of her house. It was chaos, and Dominique has no medical background – but she is practical and warm, and speaks fluent English in addition to French and Creole, so she was useful translating for foreign medical volunteers, soothing patients, and helping to keep some semblance of order. After those first weeks, it was no longer clear how to be useful. The response had become more routinized, and Dominique's skills were no longer relevant. What she had were resources, and land.*

*For more than a year after the earthquake, Dominique's once-green lawn, in the middle of her garden, had wide square bare yellowish patches. These were the spots where foreign volunteers had pitched their tents. For those months, Dominique busied herself cooking elaborate meals for the volunteers. “It's how I can help,” she would say. “I think I would go crazy if I didn't have all these people in the house. If I didn't have these volunteers here, I don't think I'd get out of bed.”*

*After the first couple months of emergency, things became still more routinized. The tents were gone; a smaller group of foreign NGO workers and physical therapists had moved into a building on Dominique's family's property, where the organization paid rent (Dominique's grown children, who had lived in that building, moved back into their parents' house, in yet another small upheaval of household order). Still, Dominique continued to orchestrate multi-course meals for the foreigners every night. “It is what I can do.” She could no longer provide care or be of direct assistance, but she wanted, in her small way, in a way that did not fundamentally threaten the social order, to help the people who had come to help.*

## *Scene 2: Unpreparedness*

Amid this immense burst of goodwill and motivation, and despite my initial discussion of “rehearsal,” we must also acknowledge that the international community and the Haitian government, not to mention Haitian people themselves, were completely unprepared for a disaster of this scale. “Unpreparedness” refers both to personal, emotional reactions and to institutional preparedness; in the first hours and days after the earthquake, it is difficult to distinguish between the two.

Anaïs, a young Frenchwoman working for UNDP, had been in Haiti for only a month when the earthquake hit (as she Skyped from the office with her boyfriend back in France). In a March 2011 email about her experiences, she wrote first about her personal reaction.

We [in the UNDP building] were in our secure bubble, the building did not collapse and it was not long before reality hit us – harder than the earthquake. News came quickly that MINUSTAH HQ and a UNDP annex collapsed. But this was all abstract to me. Then I looked down our fence and saw a bus that crashed into our compound. I could hear the trapped voices inside. Now, this became real. The flow of wounded people never stopped, each time carrying horrifying sights I thought I would never come across. At a very personal level, I was lost. Calm, rational, but with a feeling of not knowing what would happen next and this terrified me. I wanted to help but did not know how... The worst part was probably the morning after in the UN bus driving us to the MINUSTAH Logistical Base, sitting at the front and watching all the horror Port au Prince became. It was all real and none of us I believe was any kind of ready for THIS.

She went on to describe the institutional response, but this, too, was filled with the human.

It took some time for UNDP to organise itself – maybe 1 or 2 days. The Country Director was out of the country and was only able to come back two days after the catastrophe. The Deputy Country Director was faced with personal distress as he was also seeking for his loved ones stuck under the rubble. The Humanitarian Coordinator had to organise the entire UN Country Team and was also acting SRSG [Special Representative of the Secretary General] in place of Annabi and before Mulet [the replacement Head of Mission] arrived two days after.

I was at Log Base by then, too, and I remember the Deputy Country Director of UNDP: a young French-Canadian man, pacing back and forth in the harsh and dissonant sun, face flushed, barking orders into his cell phone, sobbing the whole time. He had just heard that his fiancée had been killed. He was in charge and he could not stop working to fully grieve. It gave me goosebumps to watch him.

As UNDP struggled to find its footing in the coming weeks and months, “it was a daily nightmare. No structure was in place, I did not know who does what – and for what. New faces changing all the time due to the SURGE mechanism (UNDP short-deployment staff for crises). This person from Panama, this person from Lebanon, this person from Somalia etc. A few people only stayed for one week only. This caused incredible disruption in our work, at least for me since I needed guidance from someone.”

As Anaïs continued, her tone became less personal, more in keeping with the programmatic “official line” of her former organization. Her ambivalence runs just under the surface of her words, as she at once defends and explains UNDP's actions, tries to evoke both the chaos and the possibility of that time.

As far as UNDP is concerned, only experienced staff were tasked during the immediate aftermath. UNDP is the lead agency for the Early Recovery cluster, therefore colleagues who already had experience in previous disasters started being active. UNDP started the initial “Cash for Work” programme, however it was only later on that I knew about it (early February). I became involved in this project as well as the “Renforcement des Capacités Nationales pour la Coordination de l’Aide” – a project we already have before the earthquake but the circumstances changed its entire scope. We all had tremendous hope as this could not have been a better time to launch it. Only two main projects were active as it was still very unclear how the humanitarian emergency would shape our programmatic activities. After a few weeks (maybe 6?), other projects were reactivated and/or launched...but these were minor compared to Cash for Work which became the UNDP flagship.

Anaïs's reference to “tremendous hope” for a coherent national strategy for aid

coordination, and that the post-earthquake moment “could not have been a better time to launch it,” is striking, and, in hindsight, absurd. But that was the feeling, however naïve, for a while: that the disaster had leveled problems centuries in the making, flattening the landscape and allowing Haiti to begin anew. As Anaïs said, “One thing we discussed a lot during the immediate days was how a catastrophe could be turned into an opportunity. For Haiti, it would be an opportunity to build back better.”

*Scene Three: Unraveling*

*I prefer... emergency, the first days after, you know? The feel of it. You see really the solidarity and people really different, helping each other. Before everything is coming back to all the gray... the gray stuff.*

French humanitarian, March 2011, one week before leaving

The aid response began to unravel before it even came together. The facade of an effective aid response began to chip away before it was even fully built. But looking back, this seems like an inevitability, part of the tragedy: aid could never fulfill all the desires projected upon it. The desire is for salvation – salvation of the affected individuals, of the country of Haiti, but also “salvation” in a redemptive sense, the sense in which humanitarianism (embedded as it is in an Enlightenment conception of human morality based in reason rather than religion) has come to be a secular solution to the problem of suffering, and a seemingly unequivocal morality, and the opportunity to save and be saved (Redfield and Bornstein 2010).

Of course, no one thought the recovery would be easy or quick. A major, incalculable disaster had hit an already-poor, already-precarious, perpetually mismanaged country with a weak government. In thirty-five seconds, hundreds of thousands of people were killed, an untold number were injured, more than a million were displaced. The Haitian government was in a shambles: the presidential palace and seven out of eleven government ministries and several other buildings had collapsed. The UN headquarters had collapsed, killing the head of mission, Hédi Annabi, among one hundred and one other Haitian and international employees – the largest single-day death toll in the UN’s history (MacFarquhar 2010). Several international NGOs were also seriously compromised. Several hospitals were destroyed, killing and injuring medical staff and patients alike.



As is the nature of such interventions, everything was fragmented: medical relief was separate from food distribution was separate from shelter, and, necessarily, each organization or section or project focused on its own relatively narrow objective. Mathieu, the French Red Cross delegate, arrived in Haiti on January 19, 2010, one week after the earthquake. He told a story about the early days after the quake — the days, perhaps, when humanitarianism would seemingly be at its purest and least complicated. It was January 20, the day after Mathieu’s arrival in Port-au-Prince, and the IFRC was working at the General Hospital, amid the horror of the post-quake amputations and other major surgeries. After the surgeries, the patients were sent outside to the hospital’s courtyard, as there was nowhere else for them to go. There was no food for them. “We were curing people but sending them to die. We’d let them die,” Mathieu remembered. According to Mathieu patients were only saved by the Missionaries of Charity, who gave them food. “They were looking like angels, in their white and blue,” Mathieu recalled, softly. “It was just fantastic.” He fell silent.

I paused. “Why didn’t you leave and join them, then?”

“Maybe I don’t have the courage,” he replied. “I don’t have the bollocks. I’m too coward [*sic*]. I’m too happy with my luxury. That’s why I’m less forgiving than you. I know that greed is part of it.”

This was part of my ongoing conversation with Mathieu – one in which, paradoxically, I, the researcher, defended the moral intentions of the aid workers while Mathieu, the aid worker, denounced aid workers. My general position was that the international aid response should be criticized on a level of policy, action, and organization, but that most individual aid workers truly wanted to do good (even if they couldn't do much in practice). Mathieu's general position was that they were “all bastards.”

Indeed, the Red Cross's evolving role in post-quake Haiti was extremely complex. Historically and fundamentally a humanitarian organization focused on the alleviation of suffering, the Federation had become central to camp administration and camp removals – increasingly bureaucratized and removed from the moment of crisis, salvation, and morally unambiguous intervention. As humanitarian organizations, development organizations, the UN, and intergovernmental organizations like IOM all participated and became implicated in the unfolding drama of the camps, the line between different forms of intervention became increasingly blurred.

As for Mathieu, he maintained his solidarity with the poor, with the oppressed, with the formerly colonized, and was horrified every day that his position within an international organization had caused him to take on the role of an occupier. The first time we met, in his air-conditioned shipping container of an office at the Red Cross base camp, he untacked a piece of paper from the wall and gave it to me to keep. It was an excerpt of Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, the masterpiece of postcolonial poetry. It read:

*And my special geography too; the world map made for my own use,  
not tinted with the arbitrary colors of scholars,  
but with the geometry of my spilled blood, I accept  
and the determination of my biology, not a prisoner to a facial angle,  
to a type of hair, to a well-flattened nose,  
to a clearly Melanian coloring, and negritude,  
no longer a cephalic index, or plasma, or soma,  
but measured by the compass of suffering  
and the Negro every day more base, more cowardly, more sterile,  
less profound, more spilled out of himself,  
more separated from himself, more wily with himself,  
less immediate to himself,  
I accept, I accept it all  
and far from the palatial sea that foams beneath the suppurating  
syzygy of blisters, miraculously lying in the despair  
of my arms the body of my country,  
its bones shocked and, in its veins,  
the blood hesitating like a drop of vegetal milk at the*

*injured point of a bulb ...  
Suddenly now strength and life assail me like a bull and  
the water of life overwhelms the papilla of the morne,  
now all the veins and veinlets are bustling with new blood  
and the enormous breathing lung of cyclones and the fire  
hoarded in volcanoes and the gigantic seismic pulse  
which now beats the measure of a living body  
in my firm conflagration.  
And we are standing now, my country and I, hair in the wind,  
my hand puny in its enormous fist and now the strength  
is not in us but above us,  
in a voice that drills the night and the hearing like  
the penetrance of an apocalyptic wasp.  
And the voice complains that for centuries Europe  
has force-fed us with lies and bloated us with pestilence,  
for it is not true that the work of man is done  
that we have no business being on earth  
that we parasite the world  
that it is enough for us to heel to the world whereas the work  
of man has only begun  
and man still must overcome all the interdictions wedged in  
the recesses of his fervor  
and no race has a monopoly on beauty, on intelligence, on strength  
and there is room for everyone at the convocation of conquest  
and we know now that the sun turns around our earth lighting  
the parcel designated by our will alone and that every star falls  
from sky to earth at our omnipotent command.*

\* \* \* \* \*

The general perception of the international community by Haitian people is negative, marked by distrust and skepticism. This is the case both of "beneficiaries" (or people who might have been beneficiaries but were not) — i.e., poor Haitians — and middle- and upper-class Haitians. The glossy brochures and colorful websites of humanitarian and development organizations, replete with glowing stories and positive blurbs by happy beneficiaries, belie a reality in which most people dislike and distrust much of the aid apparatus — even as they sometimes, if sporadically, benefit from it — but have no choice but to live within it.

Distrust and skepticism, and the assumption of corruption and malfeasance by

international organizations, is, like so many of the phenomena I discuss, not a new, post-earthquake phenomenon. It existed long before the earthquake, for Haiti was, long before the earthquake, the infamous "republic of NGOs." For years before the disaster, I was immediately asked "what organization are you with?" — the assumption being that all *blan* must work for NGOs. When I said that I wasn't with any organization, people would tell me stories and rumors about how the international community was profiting off Haitian misery, and keeping Haiti and Haitians poor so it could continue to profit. Such critiques of corruption, bureaucratic ineffectiveness, and the "aidworker lifestyle" are hardly new or unique to Haiti, or to the perspective of aid recipients (see Hancock 1989), but in Haiti they take particular shapes due to both the long history of international intervention and the scale of the humanitarian crisis.

Here is a story from before the quake, related to me by an upper-class, highly educated Haitian man over several small cups of strong dark coffee. As he told it, there once was a Port-au-Prince orphanage run by a Haitian priest. It was apparently a good, clean, well-run orphanage (unlike so many orphanages, or so-called orphanages, in Haiti). UNICEF saw how successful this orphanage was, and they wanted to be able to advertise it as one of their own successes. So they approached the priest, and asked if he would like his orphanage to be supported by UNICEF. The priest refused — he had other sources of funding, and he didn't want to get into that NGO business. UNICEF was angry that he had refused their offer and that they couldn't claim the orphanage as one of their success stories, so they paid one of the orphans — a little girl — to claim that the priest had sexually abused her. Ultimately, there was no proof and the priest was vindicated. "But," the teller of the story said, "this is just to show you that these organizations aren't afraid to *mete gwo ponyèt* [strong-arm] people when they have to!"

My purpose here is not to claim that this story is true — I have no way of verifying if this

story is true, and besides, I am not an investigative journalist. Rather, that the story or rumor circulates at all, and has become part of the imagination of even upper class Haitians is what interests me. In this tale, the international organization is so concerned with superficial self-promotion, with owning and advertising a successful charitable project, that it tries to harm the project when the person running it refuses to accept their support and ownership. Not only does the organization try to harm the Haitian project and its Haitian director, but it does so in a terribly disreputable and underhanded way, through bribery and false accusations of sexual abuse. As a social fact, as an artifact, the story exemplifies how little Haitian people trust the intentions of the international community.

And that was *before* the earthquake, *before* the massive humanitarian crisis, *before* the international community promised eleven billion dollars that never materialized. After the earthquake, the preexisting suspicions, cynicism, and distrust were intensified by the scale of the crisis and the surge in the international presence.

### ***Rumors.***

Foreigners in Haiti – and middle- and upper-class Haitians, as well – often lament the superstitious nature of poor Haitians. In this formulation, poor Haitians are ignorant; they subscribe to wrongheaded conspiracy theories; they believe untrue things and disbelieve true things. The tendency of Haitians to reproduce and believe rumors is a great frustration to foreign and Haitian interventionists alike. But Haitians live in a constant state of suspicion and distrust when it comes to the international community. There is a precarious and shifting reality, in which anything can happen, in which anything can be true.

Some of these examples are charming. One morning in rural Degerme, as we waited for the coffee to boil over the three-stone fire, a man in his forties asked me, apropos of nothing: “Is

it true that herring don't have heads?"

"Huh?"

"When they come here, they don't have heads on their bodies. People say they're born without heads."

Salt herring is popular in Haiti. Imported from Norway and Canada, it is a vestige of the slave diet, high in salted fish and starch. In a rural Haitian fishing community, where people catch fresh fish every day, the sight of headless fish was odd.

"No," I replied. "They just cut off the heads before they ship them."

This anecdote is rather enchanting, but it belies a larger distrust about foreign sources of food, the potential risks that one might incur from putting tainted or strange things into one's body. In 2012 – the same year that I was asked about the headless herring – there was a scandal when it was revealed that imported Dominican salami (pink, spongy, salty and cheap, popular fried or in spaghetti) contained high levels of animal feces. For Haitian consumers – no matter how poor and desperate – this was revolting and shocking, but it also fit into a larger cosmology of general abuse by profit-seeking foreign powers, and of Dominican filth and untrustworthiness specifically. Other rumors and stories about international interventions were likewise insidious. The teenaged daughter of the same man who asked me about the herring reported a story she had heard. "I heard a helicopter pass over there somewhere," she gestured toward the mountains. "They say the helicopter dropped a huge sack of killer ants, and they will eat people and livestock and everything." I asked her where she heard it. She heard it from her neighbor who heard it from so-and-so who heard it from so-and-so. Helicopters, in Haiti, generally mean foreign powers of one kind or another: most often the UN, but also other foreign military forces. The anonymous "helicopter" to which the teenager referred represented no international power in

particular – no particular government or organization or nation — but rather *all* of the international powers, the unknowable outside forces that threaten Haitians in unpredictable and absurd ways. Bags of killer ants dropped from the sky might seem preposterous and unimaginable – but life in Haiti contains so much uncertainty, and people are so systematically disempowered, and so much of the true history is seemingly unimaginable that the fabric of reality and its possibilities starts to loosen.

Rumors and conspiracy theories are often a barometer of social power — the more powerless you are, the more likely you are to believe such things. Meanwhile, the definitional line between “conspiracy theories” and other kinds of theories is constructed by powerful individuals or institutions, based on how rational or legitimate they consider the theory in question to be (Pelkmans and Machold 2011). Slavery and colonialism – the exploitation and destruction of Black bodies and lives and the exploitation of landscapes and resources by Europeans -- contributed to an understanding of the world in which terrifying rumors, particularly about foreign interveners, could be and often were true (White 2000). In Haiti, centuries of horrifying abuses alongside of international intervention with shadowy motives made most things seem believable. A clear example of this is the relationship between MINUSTAH and cholera. Most studies and authorities, with the exception of the United Nations itself, have confirmed that the 2010 cholera epidemic originated with peacekeepers from Nepal. This is not to say that the peacekeepers themselves infected Haitians with cholera intentionally. If anything, it was the importation of Nepali structural violence to Haiti, in the bodies of unwitting peacekeepers. On the streets and in people's homes, however, the rumor was that MINUSTAH — or simply "the international community" — "put something in the water" to give Haitians cholera because "they hate Haitians. They want to kill Haitians." The internal power

dynamics of the UN peacekeeping structure were, understandably, erased in this telling, and the meaning of the cholera epidemic became clear and one-sided: they are against us, and wish to do us harm. This makes even more sense in the context of existing apprehensions about the water that international organizations were distributing in the months after the earthquake. In trucks or in great rubber *blad*, the water was said to be potable but few Haitians drank it. They bathed with it, they washed their clothes with it, but they continued to buy water to drink.



Figure 19: Distribution of potable water in a rubber *blad*

Champ-de-Mars, April 2010

They did not trust the flavor, they said it was *lou* (heavy, having a strange or chemical taste). In Cité Soleil, people believed that they were receiving water that was both unusable and worse than what other aid recipients were receiving elsewhere in Port-au-Prince. “The Red Cross is giving out water everywhere, potable water. They're giving out potable water everywhere. But in Cité Soleil, they are giving water from trucks. This truck water, it's just water they get somewhere, it's heavy water, it's *saltwater*. When you bathe with it, it makes your body itch. Women, girls, can get infections from it.” Into this cosmology, this suspicion and belief that the “international community” was distributing substandard water, entered cholera. There was something deadly in the water, and foreigners put it there.

The earthquake itself was rumored to have been caused by international malfeasance: by



the US building a tunnel between Miami and Haiti in order to extract gold or bauxite, or by a US or French missile. It is a logic justifiably born of centuries of exploitation, invasion, occupation, and oppression – one in which disasters are not acts of god, but acts of powerful people and institutions.

***“Beneficiaries” Perceiving Aid (Perceiving “Beneficiaries”)***

*It is astonishing how much money can be made out of the poorest of the poor with a little ingenuity.*

--Graham Greene, *The Comedians*

*I never knew a man who had better motives for all the trouble he caused.*

– Graham Greene, *The Quiet American*

Anaïs, the young UNDP employee, explained, “Compared to MINUSTAH, UNDP used to be well perceived by Haitians and benefited from a long established presence and relationship.” But after the earthquake, “it is fair to say that it reached a near catastrophe state. With the cash-for-work ‘hiccups’, there were daily demonstrations taking place from unpaid Haitians who were still waiting for their two-months worth of pay...” Anaïs's use of the word “hiccups”, and her use of quotation marks, is both ironic – she is aware that it is far more than a mere hiccup – and an interesting bit of defensive, euphemistic bureaucrat-speak. She is both mocking the sorts of people who would casually dismiss the failure to pay laboring aid recipients, while at the same time reinforcing the idea that this is a sort of inevitable, par for the course glitch. In such a case, one need not dig deep into the history of intervention for the cause of people's discontent and distrust: if the program is called “cash for work” but people do not receive cash for their work, they will understandably feel deceived and exploited. There is nothing uniquely Haitian about that.

Like Mathieu above, and other aid workers who were “on the ground” in Port-au-Prince in January 2010, Anaïs draws a sharp line between the “immediate response” to the earthquake – the initial moment of chaos, emergency, and seeming moral clarity – and the drawn-out and far more ambiguous “recovery” period.

In general, [Haitian perceptions of international organizations] vary. Some have better reputations than others, or are perceived more neutral than others. Medical-health NGOs or institutions are always the most well regarded, as their work is human, clear, tangible... It is difficult to see this from a Haitian perspective – I would be inclined to say they all despised us and with many valid reasons. But it depends... in some areas some were good while other neighbourhoods were relatively neglected. All in all, it was way too much, way too chaotic, and way too inefficient compared to the urgent needs. I really cannot believe our presence received a very warm welcome when the immediate response was over and, by that time, it became clear that Haitians were better-off only depending on themselves and family/friends abroad.

This resonates with my earlier discussion of remittances and informal aid – the huge degree to which ordinary Haitian people depend on money sent from people outside of Haiti. In contrast to formal international aid, remittances are basically money with no overhead and no conditions, and the recipients may do with it what they need and wish. While “international aid” writ large may (at least publicly) define “Haitian beneficiaries” as a clear and designated group living within Haiti and possessing few resources, individuals such as Anaïs recognize that remittances exist and can often accomplish more than formal aid can.

For all the critiques that international aid and development workers are ignorant about the Haitian context, Anaïs appears very aware of how Haitian people view the presence of the international community. Medical humanitarian NGOs like Doctors Without Borders and Partners in Health are viewed more favorably, while those whose work is less visible, tangible, and comprehensible to beneficiaries (such as IOM, which was once memorably described to me as “a cancer, a cancer!” by a woman living in a tent camp in Cité Soleil) are viewed less

favorably. And, as Anaïs rightly observes, people's perceptions were very much shaped by what they themselves had received or observed, which was in turn determined by where they lived (and who they knew). But it is really Anaïs's final words that are striking; they straddle the confessional and the blasphemous. She suggests that in the long term, the aid response was a failure when it came to the fundamental goal of helping disaster-struck Haitians, and that most people ultimately relied more on their communities in Haiti and by remittances from the *diaspora* than on the international community.

\* \* \* \* \*

The deep equivocation of Haitian people toward the international community — hovering between distrust, dependence, and desire — is well established. What is perhaps less obvious, or expected, is the degree to which aid workers themselves also perceive the efforts of the international community negatively, or at least critically. Ambivalence and uncertainty are central to the practice and perception of aid work in Haiti.

In the course of my fieldwork, I met, spent time with, interviewed, and occasionally collaborated with expat aid workers of various stripes: those who were there long-term and those who were there short-term, those who had extensive experience and careers in international aid and those who did not, those who spoke Haitian Creole and those who did not, those who focused on humanitarian relief and those who worked on sustainable development, those who were filled with excitement and hope and those who were exhausted and demoralized. They hailed from many countries, from the Global North and the Global South. They were, in short, diverse. Nearly all had come for idealistic reasons: a desire to help, and a belief that they could. Many had grown sad, frustrated, and jaded; many used humor to cope. ("You know the joke," one humanitarian worker told me. "The pessimist says 'It cannot get worse' and the optimist says

'Yes, it can!')

\* \* \* \* \*

"I got here in June 2010, so it was five months later," begins Sarah, as she stirs a wok of vegetarian Thai curry at her spacious apartment in Pétienville. By the time Sarah came to Haiti, the humanitarian crisis phase had supposedly passed, and the development phase had begun. But Sarah immediately points out the ambiguity between these two supposed phases. "When it's in the immediate post-disaster phase, everyone's just going, doing everything they can. I don't think we've had an opportunity to relax into the long-term development phase yet, because Haiti is essentially always in a relief and recovery mode."

Sarah was working for a well-known international non-profit organization focused on affordable housing. Her professional background and job focused on long-term development. She had a practical, unromantic view of her role in Haiti, in contrast to several of the humanitarians I met, whose sense of compassion, vocation, and outrage underlay both their commitment to their work and their disgust with their positions.

The way Sarah tells it, going into international development work was almost inevitable. The way she begins her personal story — with a mix of deep respect for the historical tradition and the intent of aid worker, and self-deprecating awareness of the realities of being a privileged, educated professional "expat aid worker."

My family had been involved in lots of different kinds of social justice work. My grandparents on my dad's side were born and brought up in South Africa until the sixties when they were kicked out for supporting the ANC, and, you know, we always went to anti-war protests and women's rights protests and indigenous people's protests, so it seemed normal to go into an aid profession. And it was something I came to by taking a couple of international politics classes and it got me interested. And then I did the classic aid worker thing, which is, you know... the expat aid worker thing, where I financed myself as a volunteer in Cambodia and sort of got a little field cred on my CV, which then made it possible for me to get other work, and get into a master's program. It's a well-worn path.

As she discussed the international aid response, Sarah was both critical yet defensive. She sometimes disparaged other expat aid workers — particularly for their attitudes and seeming wholesale embrace of "aid worker culture" — even as she also participated in their pool parties. She openly discussed the aspects of development and reconstruction that she thought were unsatisfactory. At the same time, she felt that aid work and aid workers had been misrepresented by the media, and that the difficulty and delicacy of her position was overlooked by those trying to make a moral claim about the failure of post-quake aid. She was often unhappy and alienated — feeling wholly comfortable with neither the other international staff nor her Haitian colleagues. Shortly after we spoke, she left Haiti for a new posting.

\* \* \* \* \*

From the perspective of Haitian residents of Port-au-Prince, the earliest aid efforts were fraught with inefficiency and corruption. For poor Haitians, corruption seems to be everywhere. They distrust the international community — writ large, not only NGOs but also journalists and researchers — and they distrust their own people, too, and are quick to disparage certain kinds of *magouyè* (corrupt people, cheaters) in their midst. A couple months after the earthquake, a friend of mine from Cité Soleil asked to borrow my digital recorder and began to do interviews within her community. She asked a middle-aged community leader, Evens — whom she termed a *gran gran gran sitwayen*, a great great great citizen of Cité Soleil — what he had observed after the earthquake.

Before January 12, the population was already in extreme misery. After January 12, it got even worse. In the Cité, that's where everyone comes to make money. NGOs, this is where they come to make money. They take people's misery and they make capital with it. I've been living in Cité Soleil since '77, I know all the problems the Cité has gone through since then. Since that time, Cité Soleil has been a bastion where a ton of money is spent but we never see anything achieved. It's a zone where everyone comes to make their money, to get rich. After January

12, what we were just talking about, it got even worse after January 12... I've seen things getting harder, getting worse. I've seen a lot of food distribution happening here, I've seen it. At the beginning, it started very well, but after a while things fell apart, and it turned into business. What upsets me the most about this is that the people of Cité Soleil worked hard to elect their representatives, people who can represent them at the state level. But when we look at how things have turned out, they are just doing business. Imagine, really imagine, when someone is a leader, there are a series of things you aren't supposed to do. But when I look at some of these people, the population is coming to them to *buy*, they are *buying* food vouchers from them. There are people who take the vouchers, they make a fortune with them. They buy cars with that fortune, they buy motorcycles, and the people... they are buying a single voucher for 500 gourdes, 750 gourdes [between \$12 and \$19 US]. Something that was given for free to the population – au contraire, now they have to buy it. I think that deserves to be fixed. And it deserves to be spoken about. And it is not something that deserves to be hidden.

Evens begins with a general critique of the “international community,” specifically NGOs, which he elsewhere described as “sprouting like mushrooms in the Cité.” This is in keeping with the wide and visible presence of international projects in Cité Soleil – the preponderance of water pumps and basketball courts and fleeting medical missions and acronyms upon acronyms – in spite of which, there is little meaningful, lasting change for the inhabitants of the community. But then, almost without a pause to differentiate, Evens begins to criticize the elected community leaders of Cité Soleil, who are selling food vouchers (*kat*) rather than distributing them for free. The *kat* were distributed by a variety of NGOs after the earthquake until perhaps May or June of 2010, and they entitled the holder to a certain quantity of food staples, such as rice and oil. This was intended to be a more efficient and less chaotic system than simply distributing the food itself. However, the NGOs relied on local leaders to do the actual distribution. According to Evens, the community leaders, like the foreign NGOs, are making money off the misery of the people of Cité Soleil.

From almost the first days of the post-earthquake humanitarian intervention, Haitian beneficiaries (or would-be beneficiaries) claimed that the aid was distributed unfairly by both the

NGOs and the local authorities — according not to need, but to who you knew or your ability to pay for aid that was supposed to be free. In February 2010, my friend Alex (who had taken to the streets with a borrowed camera on January 13) began to do informal research among the inhabitants of the newly-formed camps on Place de la Fierté and Tapis Vert in Cité Soleil. He emailed:

The government doesn't do anything for them [the victims]. As for the NGOs, they're just working with their own clan [*se avèk klan y'ap travay*]. When they've got something to do, they just look for their little buddies to give it to. That's why nothing is reaching the population.

There is an NGO called Samaritan's Purse that sometimes comes and distributes rice, tarps, and buckets but most people never have the chance to get anything. Because, it's the mayor's office that has the power to give us aid vouchers [*kat*], and when those vouchers get into their hands, they give them to other people, and they sell those vouchers for 250 gourdes apiece, and the population doesn't have the money to buy them.

The ironic postscript to this story – happy for Alex, but unsettling when taken as emblematic – is that by the end of 2010, Alex himself had gotten a job with Samaritan's Purse. He still did not endorse their mission, but it was a job with a salary, which is what he needed.

\* \* \* \* \*

After the earthquake – back in Scene One — the Red Cross put out a huge call for volunteers. In that time of chaos and uncertainty, according to Mathieu, the Red Cross never fully explained to the volunteers what a volunteer really was, and this vagueness endured, beyond the initial moment of emergency. “They receive per diems; they aren't really volunteers,” explained Mathieu. The volunteers were paid a total of 450 Haitian gourdes a day (250 as a stipend, and 200 for food), a little more than \$10 US. This is more than twice the state-

mandated minimum wage in Haiti.

“Sometimes it’s acceptable [to pay the volunteers],” said Mathieu. “It’s okay for a while. But not too much, and not too long. But after the earthquake, when they were working seven days a week, all day, they became cheap labor. They were cheap labor, really! We [the Red Cross] take voluntarism, which is a very very good idea, and we distort it into cheap labor.” In Mathieu’s opinion, payment “kills the voluntary spirit. This is where we fail, as the Red Cross. We don’t want to hire people for real. We pay volunteers and kill the voluntary spirit.”

I asked him to explain what he meant by the “voluntary spirit.”

“That means that people are willing to do something for their community.”

When I asked Mathieu about his relationship with the volunteers, he responded by sending me, via Skype chat, a photo. It is an image of himself and perhaps fifteen young Haitian volunteers, men and women, all wearing matching Red Cross T-shirts. They are in a tent at the field hospital in Carrefour. They all have their arms around one another affectionately, like cherished friends, and beam happily for the camera.

“I sent you this photo because the four weeks I spent with them after the earthquake was one of the most meaningful and intense of my life. We were really lifted from the ground, all of us, and driven by something that was true, and deep, and thorough.

“We have given each and every moment for the people around us,” Mathieu went on, his English grammar becoming more idiosyncratic as he became more emotional. “It’s been just fantastic. I would have difficulty to explain. Everything we have dreamed of in this period we have done. The team was making a difference. They were like angels. They were bringing hope. They were bringing true care beyond health care. Taking care of the soul of the people.



We were even singing in the wards together at night.”

He paused. “And then... and then everything started to change because everyone expected a job. In the beginning” — in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, in the emergency — “there was not a word about money. There was nothing about that. But by July, things had shifted. It was [for them] just another one of those programs, those development programs they had seen for years in Haiti, and they wanted their share of the cake.”

In January 2010, Mathieu and his team had been in charge of twenty volunteers. About half of those were what he called “old volunteers,” meaning pre-quake volunteers. By the middle of 2010, that number had swollen to two hundred.

“They wanted a job,” he said. “And not only have I not given them a job — and it is not just me, it is the Haitian Red Cross — but we reduced the amount of money they got. We wanted to bring it back to voluntarism. It wasn’t *because* of money. That wasn’t the reason why. The Red Cross has money. The reason why was to serve the community because you *want to serve the community*. We didn’t want to kill the spirit of voluntarism.

“And they could not understand that,” he said softly, “because of their situation. Because they are trying to survive. They have a thing inside them, they feel like I have betrayed them. They felt betrayed and I felt betrayed.”

In this anecdote, we see the thin line between aid organizations-as-relief and aid organizations-as-potential employers – and how for many Haitians, the designations are basically blurred into “aid organizations-as-sources-of-money.” At first, Mathieu's expectation of the Haitian volunteers may seem unreasonable: who is he, a white man from France with a robust Red Cross salary, to criticize poor Haitian people for their hopes and expectations that they could

parlay their work as volunteers into paid employment? How could they have hoped any differently?

Taking a step back, however, Mathieu's sense of “betrayal” (to use his word) resonates with larger arguments around the role and actions of civil society in the wake of disaster. In the immediate aftermath – back at what we might call Act One, Scene One – people act decently and even heroically. They save one another, they share resources, they create community and act in solidarity. It is only when the superstructure of society is (re)imposed, be it by a state or by non-governmental organizations, that people again become individualistic, territorial, and motivated by profit. According to this schema, it makes sense that young Haitian people would have a genuine desire to volunteer and help the people around them in January 2010, but then to develop expectations that their labor would be remunerated. Did the Red Cross “kill the spirit of voluntarism” as Mathieu claims? Yes and no. The Red Cross is part of the superstructure, and part of the perhaps inevitable progression of insitutionalizing the disaster. But the Red Cross did not create the phenomenon. What Mathieu terms the “spirit of voluntarism” cannot endure in the form in which he perceives it; it cannot remain pristine amid an NGO-ified economy that is one of few options for formal aid and employment. And yet, solidarity and cooperation did and do continue to exist in smaller-scale, less spectacular ways, beyond the gaze of Mathieu and people like him, who are “prisoners” within their organizations, for they are not permitted to interact with ordinary Haitians in ordinary ways, and to witness the countless, tiny acts of generosity and community that people commit every day.

### ***Interlude: A Day on the Inside***

*From May 2010 to August 2011, I was not an enrolled doctoral student in anthropology. I was living in Haiti, trying to find a niche, wanting to have a positive impact in the aid world, wanting in some undefined way, to help Haiti. So when a Haitian-American acquaintance named Fabienne suggested that I take a temporary assignment for the international humanitarian NGO she was working for, I thought it seemed like a reasonable thing to do. This story illustrates some of the superficial frustrations of trying to work within the aid apparatus, and clearly shows the impossible situations in which I sometimes found myself, as a perceived intermediary between ordinary Haitian people and the international community.*

*They needed someone fast and desperately. Five days before Christmas, I found myself at their organization's holiday party at their headquarters, in one of the sprawling, ugly concrete mansions deep in Delmas that can only be afforded by INGOs or drug dealers. "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" plays on someone's iPod and I spoon out a custardy trifle while around me people raise blue plastic cups of champagne and toast the new year in several different languages - Czech, English, French, Creole, Tagalog. This is, in effect, my job interview. It is strange to see how casually nepotistic it all is, how dependent on personal connections and hearsay.*

*The funding sources in a European capital allotted \$75,000, all of which had to be used before January 1 2011, or else it would disappear. The donors wanted the money used for water projects, though this organization does not normally work in water. The head of mission, a frank Swiss-German named Martin, admitted that this is both stupid and bad. "We should do no harm," he said to me, as we swatted mosquitoes and swirled our warm drops of champagne in*

*the fading daylight. “But this kind of program, it can do harm. This is a waste of money. I might as well build myself a swimming pool.” He continued, “This organization is very hierarchical and top-down. You have to follow orders. It’s like the church.”*

*This particular organization is, in fact, run by the Catholic Church, and is made up of a group of mostly autonomous constituent organizations based out of individual countries acting as a network. Its website promotes “dignity” and “equality,” among other guiding principles, and speaks of sustainable change (“We seek to make the poor not objects of pity but subjects of their own development and agents of change, best placed to develop their own solutions in global partnership”) and social justice (“Any economic, social, political and cultural structure which opposes or oppresses change toward justice is wrong and we challenge it.”). But there is a gulf between rhetoric and practice; from everything I see, this organization is based on a charity model.*

*I asked Martin what kinds of projects they are planning in order to spend this money before the year is out. They included Christmas presents for children and the distribution of treated water in two IDP camps. Martin said that the water distribution was already taken care of: he had made contact with a Swiss businessman who has a state-of-the-art silver ion water treatment system.*

*“Do you have descriptions of the projects, any documents about these things?” I asked. Martin assured me that they had something, although it might be a little sketchy. One problem, he told me up front, is that Júlia, the young Czech woman who was coordinating the projects, suffered from what he calls “burn-out syndrome.” She was overworked and overwhelmed; she had been asked to take on too much and often seemed close to tears. She barely took a break between 7 am and 7 pm, not even leaving her desk for lunch. I felt sorry for her. While both*

*Júlia and Martin had experience as international aid workers, neither of them had spent significant time in Haiti or was familiar with the Haitian context. Though they had been here since September 2010, they spent most of their days in the office and in chauffeured cars. Júlia spoke excellent French, but Martin did not; neither of them spoke Haitian Creole.*

*The next morning, I came to the office. Martin warned me that things may be “chaotic” at first, but actually it was just dull. For all the urgency of my appointment, I had nothing to do.*

*“Sometimes,” Fabienne told me, “you get paid to wait.” This statement contained a lot: her smirking acknowledgement not only that nothing is getting done, but that as employees of the organization, we are getting paid for every moment we are doing nothing.*

*With no direction, I spent the morning reading the organization's website and doing research on water distribution. At around 10 am someone gave me a jump drive on which there are a few Word and Excel documents. The only document that discussed the water distribution and Christmas presents projects was informal – a collection of emails between Júlia and headquarters in the European capital. It was strange to read about the city from the perspective of an NGO. I read of Carrefour-Feuilles, a neighborhood that is a ten-minute walk from where I live:*

*Please, the only activity we could do is the Christmas and only if our local [Haitian] staff could go... It is not safe, but the local staff could go if they do not wear any sign indicating they work for an NGO.*

*It was a sad little communiqué, self-aware to the point of paranoia. Júlia's fear of insecurity and the possibility of threat — and her awareness, almost certainly exaggerated, of Haitians' distrust of white, foreign NGO workers was both revealing and alarmist: she feared Haitians, and thought that Haitians hated her and wished her harm. The whole tone of the email made me think of another of the organization's guiding principles – solidarity, which purports to*

*"create a genuine sense of solidarity, of putting oneself in the shoes of the poor and seeing the world from their perspective."*

\* \* \* \* \*

*The previous week, I had spent the afternoon in Cité Soleil. A friend of mine had invited me over for lunch to meet her fiancé, whom she married the following March. Her mother, a nice lady who always wears long skirts to conceal her legs, swollen and disfigured by the parasitic disease filiarisis, was busy with a group of women making food for their church's Action de Grâce. She put some aside for us, and we ate chicken, fried plantains, and mayonnaise-drenched beet salad while my friend's fiancé, a psychologist, typed on his laptop. We joked and gossiped about people we know in common, mused about the recent presidential election, and discussed her upcoming wedding. She showed me photos of their recent visit to the beach out near Carrefour. We tossed bits of chicken to her insistent unmannerly cat. Then we stepped outside, past the curtain over their front door, through the damp alleyway and saw a crowd gathering. An elderly man crouched on the narrow sidewalk. Haitian employees of Médecins du Monde were already there, and IV fluid flowed into the man's arm. Clear, watery, cholera-filled diarrhea flowed through his corduroy pants, running down into the street. The scene was quiet and without drama or panic. The sun shone on uniformed children coming home from school, the mundane existing side-by-side with the terrible and the seemingly surreal.*

*After lunch I wound up chatting with a group of middle-aged men from Cité Soleil, members of a grassroots community organization, and they asked me – as so many people ask me because of my skin color and nationality – if I don't have any connections with NGOs. I replied that while I know some people who work with NGOs, I hardly have influence over their*

*decisions – but what kinds of projects are they talking about?*

*They said that they need latrines in the lower part of Cité Soleil – the areas called the Wharf, and Nowèy, and others. While all of Cité Soleil has long been painted as a monolith by both foreigners and Haitians (portrayed as uniformly impoverished and, even more insidiously, uniformly criminal), it is itself a heterogeneous and unequal community. The upper part of Cité Soleil, while poor and troubled, has better infrastructure and access to resources (for example, public latrines, water sources) than the lower part. It has been this way for years. Residents have been talking about this for years. In late 2010, as cholera spread through Cité Soleil, those long-standing calls for adequate sanitation were all the more chilling. It seemed odd, for all the amply-funded NGOs and other international institutions that work in Cité Soleil, that a large segment of its population doesn't have anywhere to shit.*

*"I'm sorry," I told the men. "I think the NGOs already have their agendas and budgets and there's no changing them. You should try to talk to some of the NGOs already working on water and sanitation in Cité Soleil," I offered feebly. "Maybe the Red Cross."*

*They shrugged, as if they had heard it all before.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Fast-forward a few days and I was working for an international NGO, scrambling to find a way to spend \$75,000 in ten days before it evaporated into thin air.*

*On my first day of work, I rode in with Fabienne, whose professional background is human rights. She was complaining, again, about her maid, a young pregnant woman.*

*Fabienne called her "the cleaning lady" or, more often, "that woman" or "what's-her-name,"*

*although she knows her name. “That woman needs to learn to just shut up and say ‘I’m sorry,’ rather than talking back,” Fabienne declared.*

*Fabienne’s Haitian driver, who worked for the NGO, took her to her tennis lessons before heading to the office, and I hitched a ride. As the great metal gates swung open to let the SUV into the tennis club, I mentioned those men in Cité Soleil and asked how they might find support for a latrine project.*

*“You could start an NGO and apply for funding that way,” she suggested, bouncing out of the car with her racket.*

*“Couldn’t the community organization apply for funds to do it?” I asked. “I don’t want to start an NGO.” Haiti did not need another NGO. It had more NGOs, per capita, than anywhere else in the world.*

*“No, we really only fund NGOs, not communities,” she replied. “You’ve got to do it yourself.”*

*At one in the afternoon, Martin invited me on a site visit to the two camps to which they hoped to provide clean drinking water. I was surprised that we rode not in one of the NGO’s vehicles, but in the private truck of Rolf, the Swiss-German businessman whose water purification system Martin had already told me about. I climbed into the backseat, which smelled strongly of WD-40, and rode to the camps while up front Martin and Rolf talked the whole way in Swiss German. The only word I could pick out was in English: “burn-out syndrome.”*

*As we drove, it became apparent that Martin had never been to these camps before. We had to call the office for directions. “How did you decide to work in these particular camps?” I asked.*



*“Júlia met someone at IOM who said we should work there,” replied Martin.*

*“Which other NGOs are working in these camps? How have you divided up responsibility with them?” I wondered.*

*“We don’t know,” Martin replied. “We haven’t had time to go to the WASH cluster meetings.” He said this with sheepish honesty. The UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) cluster meetings, however imperfect, exist so that NGOs and other organizations, agencies and individuals can discuss and coordinate activities.*

*We – Rolf the businessman, Martin the head of mission, and I – first went to Acra 2 camp on Rue Juvenat, just outside Pétionville. We asked where the camp leaders were, and were shown to a young man who introduced himself as the camp committee’s vice president.*

*“We are here to do water,” Rolf said.*

*“I’m Laura,” I said.*

*“I’m Herby,” said the vice-president. He wrote down his cell phone number, and the numbers of the camp committee’s president and its technical adviser.*

*“Ask him if anyone other than IOM is running the camp,” said Martin, who didn’t speak Creole.*

*“I think he and the other camp leaders run the camp,” I replied. This went beyond simple misunderstanding or word choice – Martin and I had fundamentally different conceptions of what it meant to “run the camp,” whose responsibility it was, and who should be treated as a person in charge. For me, that meant the people living in the camp, involved in its day-to-day administration. For him, that meant the foreigners.*

*Martin didn’t take offense at my flip response. “Ask which NGOs are working in the*

*camp.”*

*As we stood in the shade cast by a beauty salon run out of one of the tents, Herby told us that IOM and the American Red Cross had been providing Aquatabs to treat water and soap to wash their hands, but there was no water distribution. They were still buying water in buckets from vendors. Rolf told him about the proposed water plan for the camp. At no point did they clarify that Rolf is a private businessman rather than an NGO representative.*

*“We’ll call you by Friday,” Martin told me to tell Herby. “If you don’t hear from us by then, call us.”*

*Then we headed up the road to the camp at Acra 1. We asked to meet with the camp’s leaders, and we were led into the camp, under a huge Save the Children banner. While we waited for the leader to arrive, Rolf helped a group of men using a power saw to cut a plywood door, and I played hopscotch with two little girls. We could barely hear each other over the noise of the power saw, but took a stone and tried to trace hopscotch squares into the rocky wet dirt between two of the tents. In the end we couldn’t see the lines but jumped anyway, wobbling on one leg and adhering to the invisible grid, the little girls in plastic flip-flops and me in my purple office flats.*

*Then Claude, the camp’s president, arrived. He had a shy smile and a linebacker’s build. Claude reported that Save the Children was already providing water to the camp, but that it wasn’t enough. They provided 20,000 liters a day for 10,000 people.*

*“How do they deliver it?” asked Martin via me.*

*“Every day they come and fill the blad,” referring to the ochre-colored rubber bags or bladders that various NGOs had set up throughout the city.*

*“Blad?” asked Martin. Despite their omnipresence, he had never seen one. He asked to*

*see the existing water distribution system. As Claude led us to the blad, the hopscotch-playing girls follow us. The smaller of the two said, "My mama will give me to you."*

*"I can't do that, chérie," I replied.*

*We stood in front of the two huge rubber bags of water provided by Save the Children. One was flat and depleted; the other was mostly full.*

*"He said there's not enough water for everyone," said Martin. "Then why is that one still full?"*

*I put the question to Claude, who paused for a moment with a raised eyebrow before responding. "We close the spigot during the day. We have two distribution times, once in the morning and once in the evening, to make sure everyone gets some."*

*"Oh, so they are organized!" said Martin, surprised but approving.*

*As Rolf backed out onto Juvenat, he announced that now we will go buy wine that he would be bringing with him on his trip to the Dominican Republic the following week. "Is it cheaper here?" Martin asked, with surprise. "Oh, yes," Rolf replied. "Far cheaper. There is a French guy who imports everything you can think of." We drove to the upper part of Pétienville, to one of those streets that on weekend nights grows silent yet lined with white Land Cruisers and the occasional prostitute. We stopped at an unmarked building where two armed security guards with big guns stand in the parking garage. On the second floor, through an unprepossessing door, lay a sunless room that was three parts warehouse and one part medieval castle. The floor was occupied by boxes upon boxes upon boxes of imported alcohol. Red wine, white wine, champagne, liqueurs. Various Chateaus, Veuve Clicquot, Moët, Chivas Regal. Nothing was marked with a price. The French importer had straight, lank hair combed far to one side, and paced about drinking from a bottle. His Haitian employees unloaded and carried*

*boxes, rang up customers, and stood vigilantly near the door. I wandered up and down the aisles formed by the boxes, trying not to knock anything over. Rolf bought wine by the case. Martin came up to me.*

*“I don’t really know anything about this stuff,” he whispered.*

*“Me either,” I said. My shoes clicked on the ground, still flecked in mud from the camp we had been standing in not ten minutes ago.*

*\* \* \* \* \**

*“What if we use the money to build a permanent water purification system instead of temporary water distribution?” I proposed to Martin. “It would create jobs in construction and maintenance and allow the communities to govern themselves.” There were other things to consider, like negotiating the installation of a water purification system with the owners of the land where the camps are built. But I thought it worth exploring.*

*Yes, sustainable projects are good in theory, but no, it wouldn’t be possible. “A permanent system would require maintenance,” Martin said. He worried that the communities would not maintain a water system and that if anything went wrong – if the system malfunctioned — the NGO would be found at fault. “This way, with this Swiss guy, I know it’s good water.”*

*Fabienne had another take when I put the question of a permanent water purification system to her. “If we do that, they’ll never leave the camps!” The message seemed to be that a certain level of discomfort in the camps is necessary and good to stop people from preferring to live in them. But “prefer” them to what? People wanted to leave the camps. No one wants to spend the rest of their lives living in a tent or under a tarp, but as long as no decent, humane housing alternative existed, in the camps they stayed, until they were pushed out.*

*If a permanent water purification system was not a possibility for these particular,*

*ostensibly temporary camps, why not install one in one of the camps on public land that are supposedly being turned into new permanent settlements – for example, out in Canaan? Because the IOM said to work in the Acra camps, and because this organization knew no other camps in which to work. The argument circles around tautologically, justifying itself.*

*After we returned from the camps and the secret wine shop, Martin and Rolf sat together in a glass-paned conference room to discuss, in Swiss German, how to proceed. Then Martin came and talked to me. He wanted to look at comparative prices to make sure Rolf's proposal fit with the going rate for purified water. "I can't trust him just because we're from the same country. But," he continued, "I think he's an honest businessman."*

*I had to agree. Rolf was not looking to benefit from the poverty of the camps in an underhanded or devious way. Nonetheless, he was benefiting from the poverty of the camps. Deals are made not in smoke-filled shady back-rooms but with the full approval of the organization. Exploitation and profit-making are part of the system, conducted out in the open. He is an honest businessman.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*I came home from my first and only day of work feeling false and disoriented. Ethically I could not stay; I knew I would inevitably write about the experience. And so I emailed Martin and I told him I wouldn't be coming in again, and wished him luck.*

*For the last two years I have heard Haitians voicing condemnations and suspicions of NGOs and the international community. At moments during my day at that organization I thought, "How true it all is!" The institution was absurdly out of touch with the lived experience*

*of most Haitians. The emphasis was on spending money and slavish adherence to a distant and predetermined agenda, rather than developing lasting solutions to problems. Yet the individual people I met were, for the most part, hardworking and likeable, often putting in twelve-hour days. I believe that Júlia was burned out and exhausted because of her sense of commitment and her desire to be of use. Martin was a straightforward supervisor who saw through many, though not all, of the contradictions and hypocrisies of his position. They were not there for cynical or self-serving reasons. They were decent people caught up in and habituated to a flawed institutional structure and culture, learning to swallow the dissonance until they didn't even taste it anymore.*

*The wasteful bureaucracy, ineffectiveness, and profit-making I witnessed and took part in during my one day in the NGO world were not extraordinary. What is remarkable – and deserving of notice – is now unremarkable they were. This is not an exposé of shocking malfeasance or corruption, but rather of how truly banal these small acts of misuse, incompetence, and exploitation are. They are de rigueur and self-evident, so much part of the seemingly natural landscape of the NGO day-to-day that they go unnoticed and unquestioned and, ultimately, unchanged. These things, as Bourdieu put it, “go without saying because they come without saying” (1977: 167).*

### *Scene Four: Failure*

In the beginning, the standard story about the Haiti earthquake was the urgent need for relief. It did not take long for a different narrative to become standard: the failure of the aid response.

Recall again that Haiti is the infamous "republic of NGOs", in which nongovernmental organizations have supplanted the role of the State (Farmer 1994, Maternowska 2006). Since at least the 1990s — long before the earthquake — it has been cited as having the highest per capita concentration of NGOs anywhere in the world. Though the source and truth of that claim is difficult to ascertain, it is fair to say that Haiti does possess one of the world's densest concentrations of NGOs. The Haitian economy is "*ONGisée*" — "NGOified."

The critics and detractors of international aid in Haiti are many and they are ardent, including Haitians (both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, poor and rich); foreign and Haitian journalists, activists, and scholars; and (often behind closed doors), the international aid providers themselves. But the perceptions of many ordinary Haitian people — including the majority of the people I spoke to over my three years of fieldwork — are often more nuanced and ambivalent than is represented in the media. People are sometimes confused by the aid apparatus, sometimes infuriated, sometimes hopeful, sometimes grateful, sometimes resigned. Some people say that "organizations" are mafia at worst, mismanaged at best — and others say that if it weren't for the organizations, Haiti wouldn't exist anymore, for even as distrust of the international community runs deep, distrust of the Haitian state can run as deep or even deeper. People want to benefit from the NGOified economy — either by becoming aid recipients, or becoming employees of an NGO, or both — but suspect that they don't know the right people.

They wish to live in a sovereign country with a functional state that takes care of its citizens, but they also say that if all the NGOs and other organizations were to disappear tomorrow, basic services and infrastructure would disappear with them.

For the typical Haitian who does not work within the aid apparatus, everyday life in the "republic of NGOs" can be inscrutable, and the diversity of aid organizations and aid workers, and aid goals and methods, makes for an indistinguishable blur known to most as simply "the international community." Port-au-Prince's winding, muddy streets and the parking lots of posh supermarkets are packed with white Land Cruisers with logos emblazoned on the sides: Red Cross and Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) and Concern and Caritas and Action Contre la Faim (ACF) and Médecins du Monde (MDM) and Habitat for Humanity and World Vision and Samaritan's Purse and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Pan-American Development Foundation — not to mention all the UN agencies, from the peacekeeping force MINUSTAH to UNICEF to UNDP to UNAIDS to UNIFEM to UNHCR. The ubiquity and visibility of these organizations — particularly the MINUSTAH tanks and rifle-carrying convoys — give the impression that this is a conflict zone or a place in an acute, present state of emergency, which in fact it is not. Yet the concept of "emergency" pervades everyday life in Port-au-Prince, and shapes the ways that both Haitians and foreigners view the situation (Calhoun 2010).

Meanwhile, international humanitarian relief, economic development, and peacekeeping and rhetoric get mushily conflated in people's minds into a catchall category: "the international community." From the perspective of many Haitians, it all begins to turn into a sort of alphabet soup of acronyms. The practices and strategies of this so-called international community — most starkly in the immediate post-quake emergency, but preceded by decades of intervention



with little positive change – have engendered distrust and misunderstanding. For example, humanitarian "cluster" meetings, in which various organizations and actors would meet to discuss specific issues, such as Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) and Housing, were held at the MINUSTAH Logistics Base, a militarized space that became the headquarters of post-quake operations. Not only was it more difficult for Haitians than for non-Haitians to enter Log Base, but most cluster meetings were conducted in English (which most Haitians do not speak), or, less often, in French (which only educated Haitians speak). "I never go to these cluster meetings," declared the director of a women's rights organization in Port-au-Prince, laughing. "I have *clusterphobie*." Her wordplay on the cluster system and claustrophobia suggested not only disdain, but also a degree of fear and repulsion.

Many residents of Port-au-Prince – aid beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, rich and poor — are suspicious and skeptical of the motives of aid organizations, which are mostly seen as having resoundingly failed (Buss 2008, Schuller 2010, Katz 2013). The Haitian state itself, which cannot or will not do its job, is derided by many Haitians as a "restavèk state" — a childlike and powerless state with no will of its own, a virtual slave, forced to do the bidding of foreign powers. One of the eeriest depictions of this relationship was a small sculpture I saw in a streetside gallery in Jacmel, in 2012: an ominous figure cloaked in the flags of foreign countries, head covered in a black hat, drives a bound and tied Haiti. It is reminiscent of slave driver and slave, or *bòkò* and *zonbi*.



Figure 20: The international community bòkò drives the Haitian zombi.

Jacmel, 2011

Meanwhile, according to many people with whom I spoke — both the poor and the relatively privileged — NGO employees are there to make money, capitalize on Haitian suffering, and justify and reinforce their own existence. Upper-class Colette denounced the NGOs as "poison, poison, violent poison ... Every time we Haitians try to do anything right, they come along and rot it." The same women's rights activist who suffered from *clusterphobie* described the system as a "humanitarian market" (*marché humanitaire*) and refused to accept funds from international organizations: "Thanks but no thanks for that poisoned money!" Alex from Cité Soleil explained it this way in April 2010, just three months after the quake.

There are a lot of NGOs that know the reality here, but they can't intervene in the way they are supposed to intervene. Because they think that if they intervene in the way they are supposed to intervene, there won't be NGOs anymore! NGOs exist because of the problems they are supposed to solve. If they solve them, they won't exist anymore. That's what's broken this country. They're like a doctor who doesn't cure you; they just keep giving you the wrong medicine in order to keep you sick.

\* \* \* \* \*

In April 2013, Haitian filmmaker Raoul Peck released a documentary called “Assistance mortelle”, a two-year exploration of the post-quake aid and reconstruction effort. The film in many ways functions as an exposé – it is critical of the NGO apparatus and particularly of the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission (IHRC, headed by Bill Clinton). But I found it surprisingly kind and understanding toward foreign aid workers and their intentions – depicting them not as vultures, but as rather powerless cogs in a larger system of mismanagement and miscommunication.

Soon after the film came out, Mathieu and I met up on Skype. By then, he was back in France, and I was in the United States. He was writing up his final report on the Haiti mission, and he was agonizing over how to write it. He couldn’t decide whether or not to write about a high-ranking, older foreign IFRC officer consorting with and texting “poor poetry” to a younger Haitian woman. “It is against the rules to have any relations with a potential beneficiary,” Mathieu told me.

“How do you define ‘potential beneficiary’?” I wondered.

“Hold on just one second, let me get some wine,” he said. He disappeared, then returned.

“This way of acting, it creates... addiction,” said Mathieu, as he sat down.

“Is that like dependency?” I asked.

“Yes — no,” he replied. “It’s more like it has become part of their — how do you say *ADN?*”

“DNA.”

“Yes. It’s part of their DNA. It’s like it’s part of the same body now.”

“People ask me all the time if I think that all the NGOs should just pull out...” I began.

“If we’re not there, they’ll find a way to cope,” Mathieu replied. “It might turn into Somalia. It might lead to death and violence. Do I think it will be worse? Maybe. But they would cope.” He paused. “We are not making any difference. That is clear. We are not making any difference.”

I told Mathieu that I was surprised at how sympathetic “Assistance mortelle” was to individual aid workers — in particular to a beleaguered, fresh-faced young American named Bryan Castro, who is accused of lying by inhabitants of one of the camps at Corail. The documentary implies that the young man is trying to do his best in an impossible situation – that while the people at Corail believe that he is powerful and corrupt, he is actually powerless to really help them or change the system. Mathieu disagreed. “We are not just victims of this system. We are the system. And we are paid to do this. And when we don’t like it, we still stay.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Forty-year-old Mirlande works as a household servant in Port-au-Prince. At the time we spoke, in March 2011, she was living in a camp up the mountain from Turgeau, in an area called Kano, perhaps a forty-five minute walk from the households where she works. After the paved road ends, it becomes steeper, slippery and unpaved as you walk through the winding grey bidonville, and then, past the bidonville, there is what was once an empty cliffside, which is no longer empty. It is covered with a rumpled patchwork of tarps and rusted tin roofs. Most people there, like Mirlande, are from the area around Jérémie. Before the quake, they never owned their own homes in Port-au-Prince. Mirlande was renting a small room for herself and her nine-year-old daughter Dayana. It was cracked in the quake, but not destroyed. But, afraid to sleep inside, and having nowhere else to go, they took to the mountainside and never left.

The camp is located on privately owned land, and — because it is relatively small, and relatively invisible — it has received practically no aid. There are no toilets. There has been no water delivery. Hygiene kits did appear once, with soap, from an organization whose name no one can recall. Compared to well-known and highly visible camps, such as the Champ-de-Mars camp, or the camps on Pétionville's plazas, residents of this camp have been largely unrecognized and unaided. "I never participated," Mirlande puts it, — as though she had chosen not to, as though it had been a matter of volition. Mirlande and Dayana used to shower almost daily at my apartment, before trekking back up the hill to their camp.

At the time we spoke, Mirlande — kind, brusque, and a little naive — was working part-time, among other jobs, for a young Haitian woman named Darlène, for about \$30 US per month. Darlène, who is about 30 years old, has worked in middle-ranking "national staff" positions in a variety of nongovernmental organizations and UN agencies, including UNDP and MINUSTAH, bouncing from acronym to acronym. She is a new arrival to the NGO employee *petit-bourgeoisie* — she is dark-skinned and of lower middle class background (Mirlande shook her head and said, "I know where she's from. I know who her mother is"). Very pretty, with a flirtatious manner, Darlène talks openly about finding a rich foreigner to marry, and speaks French whenever possible, rather than Haitian Creole, which she speaks only when she must. ("I'd like to stick her in the ass with a pin and see if she doesn't yelp in Creole," other Haitians sometimes muttered.) Whenever she was promoted to a higher position in one of the organizations she worked for, Darlène would throw herself a party with thick creamy cakes filled with guava or prune confiture. Her own Haitian landlord — himself lighter skinned and of greater means than she — mocks Darlène's vacuous insincerity and her airs, calling her "la précieuse ridicule," after the Molière play.

In late 2010, in the course of her employment, Darlène had to write a report on the conditions in the camps, and she came to her servant, Mirlande.

Darlène made me talk. She said she was writing a book. So I talked to her, I spoke the truth. She said that someone would come, someone from an organization, I didn't know if... maybe they would do something by the house. She said she'd tell me when the person was going to come to the house. Every time she'd tell me the person would come, but they never came. Then she said they were waiting for the *blan* to come, and when the *blan* came they'd go with her, so by then I had already talked with everyone in the camp, I told them "There's going to be someone coming to visit us here, I don't know if it's true, but they say they're coming." I told everyone that. Everyone was sitting and waiting for them, but they never came. So I'd told everyone that, and they were waiting, but the people never came.

"You don't know what organization it was?" I asked.

"No, I don't know what organization," Mirlande replied.

They did go make the book for real, she was making everyone talk and she was writing. She made us talk. She did do the book for real. But she never said anything to us at all. She had us explaining how we're living, how I am living and getting by when I have no money, and so on... I gave her all that explanation. When the earthquake happened, how I felt, how it was, all that. She made us talk. And now she hasn't said anything to me at all. She said the *blan* that were going to come, they might start a project near us, but that it wasn't she herself that was going to help us. She needed to make her money, to write her book. She wrote her book. But perhaps she never was going to do anything for us, in truth. I don't know if the *blan*, the person that was going to come, if they still put in some project. But if the person came in the end, they went somewhere else.

Mirlande wasn't so much angry as embarrassed. She had told all her neighbors on the mountainside that an NGO was coming to do something for them. When the project never materialized, she felt as though she were to blame for giving them false hope. Puzzled and disappointed, Mirlande began to realize that her words, life experience, and identity as a person in a camp were, like her labor as a domestic servant, a commodity — something that other people could exploit, without giving her anything in return.

\* \* \* \* \*

Now we will come back to the story of Melise's family, this time from the perspective of her youngest brother, Jean, and his experience as both an aid beneficiary and as a low-ranking member of MSF's national staff.

Like his sister, Jean grew up in the rural area outside of Abricots in the Grand-Anse department. He was the youngest of twelve children, in a poor peasant family of farmers and fishermen, but from an early age, he was ambitious.

I was the last born in my family. In order for me to go to school, I used to fish. I didn't have anything, but I knew how to drive a motorboat. With that, I caught everything that can be in the sea.... People weren't talking about school, the way you hear people talking about school now. If your father was a farmer, you were born a farmer, and it was normal for you to have goats, cows, livestock — and that's what you did, from morning on. If you learn to fish, you just learn it from other people who are fishing. It's not something you have to go to school to learn. You see other people fishing, and you fish. You see other people swimming in the sea — and ever since I was small, and so from the age of five, I knew how to swim, I already knew lots about the sea, because my brothers knew the sea well.

Jean earned enough money from fishing to pay his fees at the Adventist primary school in Abricots. When Jean finished primary school, the director, recognizing his intelligence, encouraged him to take the *certificat* examination to attend high school in Port-au-Prince. His mother objected. "Because I was the youngest child, I was, in good Creole, they'd say the *baton veyès*," the walking stick upon which the elderly lean, "if my mother needed anything at home, I was supposed to provide it for her." But Jean went to the capital anyway, in search of opportunity. His older sisters — Melise, and by then, two others — were working as household servants in Port-au-Prince, supported and encouraged him, and gave him material help and helped him adjust to life in the city. When he arrived in Port-au-Prince, he lived at first with a cousin in the bidonville of Bel-Air — but Melise did not like the way he was living, and had him move into her unfinished home. "Melise was very happy. She said we have to have someone in

the family who can, who can say a little something for himself, as well (*ki ka di yon bagay tou!*)!" That was how Jean became the only one of his siblings to learn to read and write. "And Melise asked me what I would most like to study. And I said, 'I'd like to study law. I'd become a lawyer.'"

This remains Jean's unrealized dream. He never did make it into law school. He did study to be an electrician, though he did not have the funds to complete the course, and has made an unstable living fixing old radios, televisions, and other appliances. As he works, he listens all day to political talk radio, and argues politics for hours with anyone who happens by (including the ethnographer). He has a quick mind and a quick tongue, and might have been a fine lawyer in another world.

After the earthquake, Jean's life became more difficult. Melise died, and Jean — who had for so long depended on her, economically and socially — became largely responsible for the people she had left behind: Claudine, Julienne, and to a lesser degree, Isaac. They got minimal formal aid — some biscuits and rice shortly after the quake, when they still lived in a tent — but nothing long-term. Jean briefly made a little money doing cash-for-work breaking up rubble, but it was poorly-paid, unpredictable — and, ironically — highly coveted and competitive work. When he got a job administering to patients at a Cholera Treatment Center run by MSF-Holland in November 2010, he was apprehensive and frightened of the disease, but also hopeful. The MSF job paid 60 gourdes — about \$1.50 — per hour. In a country where the minimum wage is 200 gourdes per day, that wasn't bad at all.

Jean, by the time we spoke, had been laid off from MSF-Holland and was trying to *degaje* in the informal sector as an electrician. He spent his days listening to political talk radio while fixing pèpè televisions and radios in his "workshop" — which was the unfinished kitchen



of Melise's unfinished house — as spiders spun their webs under old discarded panels and circuit boards.

I don't believe that the NGOs *came* to destroy Haiti, no? I believe that the NGOs came with the mission of helping Haiti. But their rules are not defined, and more than their rules not being defined — like do this with this, do this with this, this is how such-and-such should be done — but the way that investment is being done, from the get-go, is that aid has become broken. According to me, that's what's happened. The aid leaves, and what's happened is they've broken the country [*se kraze yo kraze peyi a*].

\* \* \* \* \*

Up the hill in Pétionville, where cooler breezes blew, Sarah's perception of the success and failure of international aid was complicated, and she wavered, trapped somewhere between her own disappointments and cautious optimism, and donor-targeted polemic. She seemed as though she wanted to blame the Haitian government and Haitians in general for a degree of the failure, but kept catching herself, as though she were afraid of saying something politically incorrect. "The government was obviously ill equipped to cope, even before the quake, and then afterward when they lost twenty percent of people – the twenty percent who were still working after 4 o'clock!" She laughed a bitter laugh, there, a chuckling nod to what many foreigners, and Haitians too, consider Haitians' deplorable work ethic in general and government incompetence specifically.

It was devastated. And the greatest need – what the government needed to do more than anything else – at that point was to figure out what to do around urban planning housing issues. So our program was – I guess it wasn't really capacity-building, it was capacity-support, bringing in people who had the skills the government was lacking, you know, urban planning, engineering, all that, to do their training.

I asked Sarah if she thought her organization's program had been successful. She paused, then replied hesitantly.

I think it was successful...? I think it was about 50% as successful as we wrote in

our final reports. Um. There are lots and lots of different ways to, umm, to say any one thing. So I think that, if of everything we did, 50% of it was awesome, and I have to say I think that's a really great strike rate. But, you know, that's never how you actually speak to the donor.

The initial post-quake period saw heroic portrayals of foreign aid workers in the international media. These were search-and-rescue teams, doctors, hardworking humanitarians who had come to save lives in a moment of hellish loss and catastrophe. But as time wore on, and the emergency slowly but intractably morphed into an unending and uncertain "recovery," media portrayals of foreign organizations and intervention grew less rosy and more critical. Accountability ("where has the money gone?"), the continued existence of IDP camps, the persistence of rubble and collapsed buildings, and the sometimes-lavish lifestyles enjoyed by expatriates in Haiti were all called into question.

Sarah, who came to Haiti a few months after the earthquake (and therefore, a few months after the initial emergency period had ended) and was involved in long-term housing development operations, felt that much media coverage was intolerable, inaccurate, and sensationalistic, and willfully unsympathetic to development workers like her. As she spoke, her anger and pain were evident.

I think a lot of the time the criticism has been from people who have absolutely no idea how difficult this work is. I think there has been a real lack of knowledgeable journalistic coverage of reconstruction in Haiti. And you get articles like that one that was in Rolling Stone. The woman who wrote the Rolling Stone article wanted to come hang out with us at our house. And we didn't let her. I remember my coworker said, "there's this woman, a friend of a friend who works for Rolling Stone, and she's here writing an article, she wants to hang out. Can I invite her over for dinner?" And I said, "don't invite her over for dinner, what the fuck are you thinking? You know the article's just going to be about the NGO workers with the house with the pool." But the journos have bloody pools at their houses too, they stay at the Montana.

In Sarah's telling, the US journalist becomes something like a spy: using the pretense of

casual friendship and expatriate solidarity to infiltrate the private lives of foreign NGO workers in order to write an exposé. The August 2011 Rolling Stone piece to which Sarah referred, titled “Beyond Relief: How The World Failed Haiti,” focused on lack of monetary accountability and the hasty, poorly-planned relocation of IDPs from Port-au-Prince into the vast desert north of the city, known as Corail and now rechristened Canaan. An Oxfam employee is quoted as saying, not inaccurately, “What is this? It looks like Chad.” Sarah's objections to the article were not only about how aid workers themselves were represented — although she kept returning to that theme — but also to fundamental inaccuracies that she felt were disseminated in order to make the situation seem worse than it really was and to further discredit NGOs as operations and institutions.

... There were lots of factual errors [in the Rolling Stone piece]. Like they said that there weren't T-shelters built at Corail. You know, that there still were not T-shelters at Corail. And there were T-shelters built in Corail when I went in. July or August of 2010. I mean there are a lot of T-shelters out there! Not enough – it's not good but... but that's the thing, that everyone wants to talk about how absolutely terrible it is. When the truth is that it's terrible, but it's not... I mean, it could have been worse. There are lots of things that are going quite well.

Sarah took a step back. "And I say this at the same time that I am *extreemely* critical of the way that funding has happened, the slow of rate of work, a lack of building skills in Haitian staff and doing knowledge transfer across the board. I'm just... and maybe it's that I should be writing these articles and I should be complaining about it but... it just seems like no one... very few people are asking people like me 'what's your job like, and what makes it hard?'"

"What's your job like, and what makes it hard?" I asked.

Sarah's response came in a deluge, and pointed to the singularity of the earthquake as an unprecedented urban disaster in a country with a historically weak, undermined state apparatus.

It's really frustrating. It's really really frustrating. Dealing with a complete lack of

guidance and oversight from the government. In other disasters, governments have given strict parameters to organizations working in relief. They've given – they've had things like building codes in place, so that when you're reconstructing, "building back," you'll be able to, you know what the codes are. And they don't have that here. We waited more than a year to get repair guidelines. People started doing house repair programs before the government had signed off on guidelines for these repairs, and it's just because Haiti lacks a functioning institutional environment. It's a... it's a mess, in that regard. So that's the first thing. The second thing is that reconstruction is really difficult wherever you are, but this is the first time we've had an urban disaster on this scale. And we really are charting new territory. It really does suck that the lessons have to be learned in Haiti. We all had an idea of what needed to be done and how to do it, but on this scale... on this *scale*, it's really difficult. And then the other thing is, following up on the scale issues – that scale leads to incredibly drawn-out timelines. If you're working with one neighborhood, and you're doing the kind of – you're working on the best practices in that community – then that's nine months of work before you even get started on any construction. You multiply that by how many communities there are and how many people are skilled in this kind of work, and the number of people who are willing to live *here* for the nine months before you start any construction??

Sarah laughed mirthlessly at that. I admit I was taken aback by her incredulity, by her apparent disregard for the place. Nine months did not seem like such a long time to me, and her living situation, while far from ideal (she was far from home, living and working with colleagues with whom things could sometimes get tense), were, as she very well knew, more materially comfortable than the vast majority of Haitians would ever experience. But then, she was tired by then, and frustrated.

It's really difficult! And a lot of people have been doing the best they can and it's *not good enough*. It's *not good enough*. But it's also really short-sighted to cast a blanket blame, throw all the blame at the international community, all of the international NGOs, when there are a whole lot of other actors, including the Haitian government, that should be forced to take some responsibility for what's not happened.

She took a breath. "Why – I don't understand why the journos aren't trying to get us to talk about this stuff. Is it that they think we won't talk? Or is it because they don't actually want to hear our points of view? Because it'll fuck with the narrative they've already decided?" Her words signaled, again, the demise of immediate post-disaster "NGOs as saviors" representations

and the adoption of a new narrative and a new set of expectations.

"Which is what?"

"That NGOs and the international community are absolutely terrible! Mean nasty people who would eat Haitian children if given half the chance! It is very clear that that's what they want to tell. And they're not writing about any of the difficulties that we experience. They're not writing – they're not sympathetic at all to how difficult it is to run an organization here."

For all of this, Sarah remained understanding toward Haitians who misunderstood or mischaracterized the role and lifestyles of aid workers. Her bile was reserved for the media. "The amount of blame or the amount of responsibility you place on someone has to take into account that person's relative privilege, you know, the information they have available to them. And I do think that a foreign journalist who has worked all over the world and has first-class education should be more accountable than a Haitian beneficiary. You know, our beneficiaries, I couldn't expect someone who never went to school to be able to understand why we have to have such stringent beneficiary selection procedures and why all the numbers have to add up and all that. But yeah, I would just be so angry if I were Haitian right now, I would be so angry if I were living in a tent."

Sarah considered herself a realist about the possibilities and limitations of aid, and perhaps this is why she remained positive about the work she was doing, and the eventual future of Haiti, when so many other aid workers grew disillusioned. She was deeply aware that this made her an outlier and an oddity among the jaded foreigners with whom she kept company, and whose views dominate the media. The media emphasis was on the failure of the aid response, and the continued suffering of those displaced by the earthquake. Sarah felt that no one was noticing the progress that had been made.

I feel horrible for being optimistic. [An American activist] posted the Rolling Stone article on Facebook, and he said “this is a really good summary of what’s going on here.” And I said, “well, it’s full of factual errors, and they don’t mention the biggest issue facing reconstruction, which is *land* – like how are you supposed to build any fucking houses if no one will give us the right title to the land?” Anyway, I can rant about land for a very long time. And then the new AP guy wrote a comment underneath: “Why is it so pessimistic? Why is it taking such a sad tone?” or something like that. And I told him, “I thought your comment was spot-on!” It’s talking about how all this bad shit is happening, but no one is talking about how 40,000 families – forty THOUUUSAND families – have been removed into safe if transitional shelters. And I’d imagine at least 30,000 of them have a better shelter than before. No one talks about that. And that’s actually pretty impressive. So anyway, turns out he was being facetious. And then it’s like – “oh, you don’t really know, how can you possibly feel any hope.” And it’s like: for one thing, you don’t do this kind of work. You just – you DO NOT do this work. And unless you’re a complete asshole, you have some kind of hope or belief that what you’re doing is helping in some way or that there is light at the end of the tunnel. Or just that you want to be there at the point where things do turn around, or that someone decides that yes, they are going to do the right thing.

Sarah's definition of “success” is what makes her words stand out from the dominant narratives of disillusioned aid workers, cynical journalists, and disappointed Haitians. It stands in contrast to the salvation narrative, in which saving Haiti – or perhaps fundamentally changing, or undoing the existing power structures of Haiti – is the only successful outcome. If salvation, deliverance, and a new egalitarian social order are the only way to measure success, then the aid effort was doomed before it began. If success can be measured, as Sarah does, in terms of how many families were moved out of tents and into mediocre transitional shelters, then success becomes thinkable – and altogether less impressive and morally sure. From Sarah's perspective as a development expert whose work focused on housing, the recovery and reconstruction "is going about as well as anyone with any kind of knowledge or background in this kind of work could hope for" given the complexity of the situation. "Reconstruction is really difficult wherever you are, but this is the first time we’ve had an urban disaster on this scale. And we really are

charting new territory. It really does suck that the lessons have to be learned in Haiti. We all had an idea of what needed to be done and how to do it, but on this scale... on this *scale*, it's really difficult." As we floated in her apartment complex's pool, she continued.

To be honest, I am not even sure that I, after a year, more than a year of being here and working in this sector, that I can... I'm not even sure that I know enough about it to understand, to make pronouncements about it. Because it is so complex and there are so many different perspectives. Now, on the one hand, there are people who are saying that putting people in T-shelters was a really really bad idea, that because now – that's not a permanent home, and they've turned into permanent homes, and now we've just got a bunch of people living in T-shelters. At the same time, well, for most of our beneficiaries, those T-shelters are the best homes they've ever had. And a lot of them – when you think about the ways that Haitians – poor Haitians — like other poor people in the rest of the world – tend to build their homes, they do incrementally. So giving someone a solid frame and a foundation of a house, it's... I can see arguments for why you would do it that way, and then give them support and information for how to build onto it safely, just because that's the way it's done here. Giving someone a ready-made house doesn't make sense in most poor communities. It's not in line with people's lifestyles and local culture. So even just on that one issue – “to T-shelter or not to T-shelter” – it's really complicated.

T-shelters – aid worker shorthand for “transitional shelters” – are precarious places of ambiguous utility, small, hot plywood constructions meant to last perhaps six months in post-disaster conditions. Everyone suspected rightly that people would still be living in them years after the earthquake – that, contrary to their very name, they would not be transitional at all.



Figure 21: Plywood “T-shelters” under construction in Cité Militaire, Port-au-Prince

November 2010



Figure 22: T-shelters, amid existing concrete structures

Christ-Roi/Nazon, Port-au-Prince, April 2012

In addition to questions of the T-shelters’ livability, they were also surprisingly expensive to construct. Still, for many organizations, T-shelters became an accepted way to measure and talk about success in addressing the housing crisis.

Mathieu, the French humanitarian working for the Red Cross, was particularly horrified



and disgusted when his organization hired an advertising expert who previously had marketed yogurt to market the success of their T-shelters, which Mathieu himself considered a colossal and inhumane failure and a waste of funds. He wrote me a furious email, dripping with sarcasm, in which he described how he confronted the erstwhile yogurt marketer.

And yes, there has been so much boasting over this past year about shelters — one can almost forget that the IFRC has not built more than 5000 shelters with a budget of \$300 million (supposedly for 30,000 shelters) and that the rest was subcontracted out. One can almost forget that no one can quantify the exact price of a shelter — which is to say, 16 square meters of plywood — but it is known to be, at least, \$10,000 to \$15,000 per unit. Some price for a garden shed.

But then someone had the great idea of hiring a former advertising executive, and the least one can say is that he knows how to sell his product. And admittedly, if the [Red Cross] Movement specialized in yogurt, there is no doubt that we would have put Dannon and Mamie Nova out of business, relegating them to the prehistory of pasteurized dairy products.

The thing that no one wants to acknowledge is that our specialty is not yogurt, it is humanity. Our target audience is not housewives under fifty years of age, it is the young deaf-mute woman who was gang-raped amid the pink and blue bungalows that we feature as prominently as the special displays at the heads of the supermarket aisles: the charming and colorful La Piste camp. One cannot say that. One is not strong enough.

Mathieu is referring here to a rape that occurred in what Haitians termed the "kann bèbè" — the deaf-mute camp at La Piste. After the earthquake, a small community of deaf-mutes set up a small community on the Champ-de-Mars. As an identified vulnerable population, they were some of the first people who were relocated to the Red Cross-administered camp at La Piste in June 2010. At first they were provided with large white tents that had DEAF printed on them, but soon thereafter, they received some of the first plywood T-shelters in Port-au-Prince. These are the overpriced "garden shacks" and "pink and blue bungalows" of which Mathieu speaks.

In the summer of 2011, a young deaf-mute woman was gang-raped in the kann bèbè. Mathieu was infuriated by the Red Cross's response to this event. In his opinion, as the

organization administering the camp, the Red Cross should have been responsible for the woman's security and for her psychosocial well-being, but instead the Movement “turned a blind eye” and refused to take action. The hypocrisy of this – publicly vaunting the T-shelters as a success while failing the people who lived in them – was unpardonable.

So on we go, full throttle, eyes fixed on the market share. And whatever the pros or cons, [the marketer] sells his product. And it works well and clearly. And he declared with some pride: "Others look to us because we show what we're doing." To which I replied that I would prefer that "others look to us because what we are doing is good."

This was in a public meeting, and that day, I did not make a new friend. The worst part of it, according to them, is that I have been offensive.

For Sarah, conducting aid work in Haiti without hope was unthinkable. For Mathieu, the French humanitarian, hopelessness was the central characteristic of conducting aid work in Haiti. “Of all the places I’ve been, Haiti and India have touched me the most. It’s the level of poverty and social distress — it stays in my heart the most. But even in India, you find much more hope than in Haiti. More hope for the future. It makes me cry. In other places, you look to the countryside and you see hope. Here, in the riverbeds, there’s no soil, there’s no lime. It’s just stones.”

Mathieu went on, his voice growing quiet. “That makes the situation even more unbearable — the acuteness of the needs and the suffering is so huge that it makes it more unacceptable, what we have done and what we have not done. In Haiti we cannot fail. But... we did. We did fail.”

Mathieu's definition of success and failure was more absolute and Manichaeian than many people's; he was uncompromising when it came to his organization's efforts and his own motivations. Despite years within the system, he was still enraged by its inefficiencies and injustices. Part idealist and part cynic, Mathieu's desire to save the world – or to save Haiti – had

never gone away, but now he knew salvation could not be achieved.

“Someday I will tell you my whole story with the Red Cross,” Mathieu said wistfully, when I asked him how he began his career as a humanitarian. “Because it’s a love story. I love it, despite all my problems with it.”

“Why did you become a humanitarian?” I asked him once.

“I thought... I wanted to save the world.” His voice contained, it seemed, self-deprecation mixed with sad wonderment.

By the time Mathieu and I met, in the summer of 2011, the initial phase of humanitarian emergency was long over, and the appearance of moral clarity along with it. Mathieu was deeply unhappy. His unwillingness to compromise, intolerance of what he considered the IFRC self-serving internal politics, eschewing of expat social activities (be they sojourns to the discothèques of Pétienville, or casual rendezvous over Dominican beer or Heineken at the base camp Bar de Croix), and general unapproachability had rendered him nearly friendless within the Red Cross base camp. When he wasn't working, he stayed in his container (for the Red Cross delegates inhabited an unearthly landscape, working and living in air-conditioned shipping containers). He reverted to being nearly ascetic at times, refusing to eat the expensive imported cheese and other delicacies in the cafeteria because he believed it was a stupid use of money. He once remarked, of sitting in traffic in his air-conditioned Land Cruiser, “We are so separate here. We don't even breathe the same air they breathe.” He felt like a prisoner of the Red Cross. He secretly flouted the rules of the IFRC when he could, taking taptaps and motorcycle taxis around Port-au-Prince, particularly to visit the family of a little girl with whom he had developed a particular bond in the days immediately after the quake.

But if he was at times excessively critical toward his colleagues and the organization for

which he worked, he was equally so toward himself for willfully being a part of it all. Mathieu was, above all, immoderate, both in his passions and his disavowals. For him, being a true humanitarian while also making a middle-class income was impossible, even though he did it, himself. His own salary was 6000 Euros per month — a sizable sum, especially when one remembers that he did not have to pay for his own lodging, food, transportation, or R&R. “So you can tell them,” Mathieu told me, factoring in all the other expenses he was not paying for himself, “tell them that a delegate makes between \$12,000 and \$14,000 US a month. Don’t ask me what the rationale is.” His voice was full of self-recrimination. “Don’t ask me what the rationale is. I don’t know it. I would have committed suicide if I weren’t doing this for my family.”

### *Interlude: Representing the Disaster, Representing Aid, Representing Failure*

Sensationalism vis-à-vis Haiti in popular media was one of my own personal bêtes noires, as it was for Sarah, though it generally ran more toward vividly racist, disempowering, criminalizing, and exoticizing portrayals of Haitian than toward compassionless portrayals of aid workers. They are part of the same phenomenon, however: what sometimes appears to be a single-minded desire to represent Haiti in the most bleak and hopeless terms imaginable. Within such portrayals, there is always some truth. Haiti is certainly a poor country, many Haitians remain desperately poor, and the post-earthquake aid response has not alleviated the problems that Haitians faced before the quake and that were created or exacerbated by the quake. Still, neither Haitians nor foreign aid workers are monolithic groups. The complexities, and the compromises, and the ambivalence of people on both "sides" of the aid recipient/aid worker divide, are rarely represented in media accounts, because such complexities make for untidy, unsatisfying, unsellable narratives.

I asked journalist Maya about her own motivations in writing about Haiti.

"There is justice. There is a justice aspect. I feel like for so long – all the time, Haitians are misrepresented. I don't even know if it's that they're misrepresented, but they're not really given... There are articles written by people like me, like when I went to Haiti for the first time, by people who decide that they can understand a place by, like, the facial expressions of the people they see on the street. There's a lot of that. And I think that it does a bunch of things. One is that it – it's inaccurate. A lot of the depictions are inaccurate. And if you actually care about representing things as truthfully as possible, then, I mean, that's annoying. Even though I would never claim to ever ever ever say that I know the true Haiti. Never, never ever. And in fact, that's another reason, that's another thing that motivates me – or that did motivate me until I

just got fed up – it's a desire to understand. It's a desire for understanding."

"Do you think other journalists here share your motivations?"

"The ones that live here, that have lived here, they do. I think less the ones who – well, the parachuters. I think much less. Because they don't – there's all this knowledge and understanding that you accumulate in the interstices, you know."

Foreign news production – the ways in which North American journalists cover international affairs – has increasingly shifted toward so-called “parachute journalism”, in which correspondents are dispatched temporarily to cover major stories. This means that many of the people writing the news stories have little or no background on the context or the situation, and may lack the linguistic expertise to conduct the research themselves. They rely on translators, fixers, and people who possess the cultural and linguistic capital to communicate with foreigners (Pedelty 1995). Historically, in Haiti, this reliance, coupled with increasing time and economic pressures placed on journalists to compete with Internet sources and the wire services, means that foreign correspondents have increasingly relied on official sources that support the social or political status quo (Macdonald 2008). They also rely heavily on existing stories, notions and representations, which can lead to the replication of clichés and assumptions.

"Why do parachuters exist?" I asked. "Like why wouldn't you, if you had a story, if you're an editor, and you need someone to write about it, why wouldn't you ask someone who's already there and has some knowledge and credibility?"

"Well, some of it has to do with—for example, at the Times, you have to keep in mind that people who are on staff are feeling pressure, too, and they're very proprietary, even though at the Times for instance they have two people covering all of Latin America, and Mexico, which means Mexico – which is crazy – and they have the southern part of the border as well – they

have all of Central America, they have Cuba, they have Haiti. They have two guys doing this. I mean, that's a lot of terrain for two guys, right! But even then, they're pretty proprietary. I mean, they're all jockeying for as many clips as they can get, as many spectacular stories as they can get, and so it's not in their interest particularly to have a freelancer do reporting. Keep in mind that print journalism is... it's a place where everybody feels insecure."

Maya related an experience. A well-known US newspaper sent a parachuter to Haiti to write an article about the cholera epidemic and the cholera vaccine, and asked Maya to contribute to the piece and "see if it made sense." Since Maya had been in Haiti for several years by then, she was well placed to work on the article and already had existing contacts. "And I'm like, 'Okay, whatever, sure.' And I did a day's worth of reporting, I talked to some people at PIH that I know, and the people at MSF that I know, and went to the CTC, and, you know, just gave them a pretty comprehensive 3000 word memo, which – they used barely any of it. Like, barely any of it. And when the draft of the story came out, it didn't seem particularly well informed. It seemed like they hadn't even read the memo, you know? They had this idea – that's the other thing, I guess. They have an idea of the story that they want to do, they have an idea of what Haiti is, and – yeah. I think that's the way it works.... People come – they start – the way the industry works is that people start with an idea of a story, and they don't necessarily do their homework."

Though Maya does not express it in as scathing language as did Sarah, she suggests much the same thing: that a lot of reporting on Haiti, particularly by people who have not spent significant time in the country, do not speak Creole, and do not have preexisting professional and social networks, is preconceived and based on assumptions and bias.

Chris, a young freelancer and "advocacy journalist," was less diplomatic about the so-

called “parachuters”, describing them as “disaster capitalist journalists who flock to Haiti during a crisis to do their jobs, make money, and are generally ignorant and disrespectful.” His indictment went straight to the top: “Among them are Anderson Cooper, who professed his commitment to Haiti, made his own heroics a focus of his coverage, and accepted an award from President Préval. He has hardly covered Haiti on his primetime news show since the quake, much less interrogated his own government's role in Haiti's stalled recovery. For them, 'responsibilities and duties' are a distant second to 'getting the story' and producing attention-grabbing reports.”

If Chris dismissed the short-term correspondents as being self-promoting and sensationalistic, he was equally or even more critical of long-term foreign journalists, viewing them as morally negligent even as they claimed neutrality and professional objectivity.

I tried not to spend much time with them. It seemed like an insular social network based around beer-drinking at expensive hotels. Not my thing... They're generally reluctant to admit the significance of negligent journalism in prolonging Haiti's travails or admit personal errors. It seems to me self-serving, arrogant, and foolish to pretend that you are above being biased towards one perspective or another. Yet the Haiti reporters who work for big-name agencies cling to the standard pretense that they are 'objective.' Their strained efforts to appear 'neutral' often manifests itself in their reporting as deference to their own government. I believe if you're an American journalist in Haiti, from a moral perspective, you should strive to report in ways that do not aid and abet other Westerners - whether in government, NGOs, or corporations - who are harming the Haitian people. Especially those who, quite clearly, undermine the country's sovereignty. You should be careful not to propagandize. You should seek to elevate Haitian voices, including women and the most vulnerable. And you should be humble and upfront about your inevitable mistakes. 'Advocacy journalism' is often derided by mainstream journalists. But Jean Dominique was an advocacy journalist. He was loyal to Haiti. He relentlessly challenged authority. His example should inspire the media community in Haiti, both Haitians and foreigners.

Jean Dominique was a Haitian journalist, agronomist, and founder of Radio Haïti Inter. Energetic, charismatic, and outspoken, he began his career by criticizing the Duvalier dictatorship (for which he was sent into exile) and promoting the rights of the peasantry. Upper-



class and mixed-race by birth, he cast his lot with and was beloved by the masses. Dominique was assuredly an advocacy journalist – perhaps even a radical — who said, a few months before his assassination, “I have no weapon other than my journalist's profession, my microphone and my unshakable faith as a militant for change.” His life's objective was to expose corruption and speak truth to power in his homeland, and for that he died. Should, as Chris insists, anyone else – Haiti reporters and foreign commentators alike – be held to that standard and expected to possess that capacity for sacrifice and love?

\* \* \* \* \*

Inaccurate representations of Haiti are more than a matter of art. These exploitative "stolen images" (to borrow a term from Haitian filmmaker Raoul Peck) reinforce stereotypes and harmful policies. They have done so from the Revolution, to the years of the Marine occupation (during which US newspapers abounded with accounts of bloodthirsty Caco "bandits"), to accounts of the invasions of "boat people" in the 1980s and 1990s, to now. Maya related the phenomenon to Haitians getting deported from the US. "This is a huge human rights issue. The United States is sending people who have no criminal convictions in the United States to basically prolonged detention in, like, conditions – these are people who are legal permanent residents of the United States, and they're sending them to prolonged unwarranted, um, unjustified detention in Haiti's prisons? You know? I have to think that some of – some of that comes from the way that Haiti is represented, you know? That it doesn't matter, that they are in some way subhuman or something. I mean, I can't help but think that's connected. That if you represent Haiti as a place filled with subhumans, or something, then does it matter as much if they're..." Maya trailed off, looking thoughtful. "I don't know. I think it definitely has effects on whether donors actually commit and what they commit to in terms of money."

The multiple relationships between the media and the aid apparatus are complicated and shifting. Media represent the NGOs, sometimes favorably, sometimes unfavorably. Donors use the media accounts to decide how and what to provide to the relief effort. Particularly in wartime or in times of disaster or crisis, journalists (especially but not exclusively so-called “parachuters”) sometimes rely on NGOs for access to places, people, and stories. In turn, NGOs rely on the media (implicitly) and their own public relations machines (explicitly) to raise awareness and funds for their missions (Benthall 1993). Some of these public relations experts, or “flacks,” were former journalists who traded in the insecurity of freelancing for the steadier position of representing the successes and needs of NGOs to potential donors. At the same time, in a context like post-quake Haiti, where the failure of international aid became the main story, many journalists sought to cover (or uncover) stories of NGO incompetence and corruption. It was an odd mix of mutual reliance and vague or outright distrust, in a relatively small expat sphere where most people knew one another and went to the same restaurants and bars, in a country where they had come to help or to report the truth.

\* \* \* \* \*

In my more idealistic moments, I imagined that this was all a matter of access, of language, of communication — that if only ordinary Haitians and ordinary foreign aid workers could somehow sit in a room together and speak the same language, maybe over some rum or a few cold Prestiges, they might understand each other, stop mistrusting one another, and stop yielding to rumor. After all, that access, that ability to slip through and into different worlds and spheres, was what made me sympathetic to individual people on all sides, however critical I remained about the macro forces and power relations that underlay their positions. And after all,

so many of the easiest criticisms of the aid apparatus had to do with access and language: the ostensibly open cluster meetings conducted at the MINUSTAH Log Base in English, the many "red zones" in which poor Haitians lived and into which expat aid workers could not enter, the Pétionville discothèques and restaurants that only foreigners and the Haitian elite could afford to frequent. As I learned quickly, individual perception and awareness was not the answer to all. Many aid workers were acutely, painfully aware that they were perceived negatively by many the people they had come to help, yet remained largely unable to change the systems in which they were embedded.

"How do you imagine Haitians view the international community?" I asked Sarah.

Her answer was thoughtful. She appeared knowledgeable both about the socioeconomic diversity of the "Haitian poor" and the role of small-scale corruption and power relations among so-called beneficiaries. "If we are talking about the most vulnerable, the ones that are really targeted by most organizations, um, I think the aid community is seen as – I don't think many of them understand it. I think it probably makes them feel very, very powerless, not to understand it. I think it's also seen as a bit of a cash cow. I think it's seen as easily manipulable, by some. Perhaps not the most vulnerable, but perhaps the next step up. And there you get the people who form a committee to decide who the beneficiaries are, and take a few thousand gourdes from each of them. Which happens in *every* project, I'm sure. I think it's probably just really, really, really confusing. And it must be just bizarre to see us driving around in our shiny vehicles and walk around a bit and then get back in and drive away."

Sarah paused, and continued more softly. "And I wonder, I wonder how they feel about the fairness of it all, the unfairness of it all. Of the accident of birth stuff."

When it came to her Haitian colleagues — the national staff of the NGO — Sarah had

harsher words. Yet she remained ambivalent. On one hand, she excoriated them for their laziness. On the other, she was considerate of how threatened and resentful the national staff must have been of the sudden deluge of non-Creole-speaking, highly paid white foreigners. "The relationship between international and national staff? Fraught. They refer to it as 'the invasion.' And it's two-sided. And it's negativity coming from the Haitian staff much more than it is ill will from foreigners even though there are just some [Haitians] who are absolutely horrid at their jobs... Anyone coming to work in Haiti should have known that race was going to be an issue. And we didn't have the leadership that would have been necessary to deal with it properly, to build relationships between national and international staff. Um, there's a great religious divide, and national staff having to deal with our housing and stuff, it's just appalling, and – imagine, I have no idea what kind of house the woman who deals with our housing lives in, but I'm sure it's not as nice as the ones we complain about all the time!" She was referring to the Haitian staff member tasked with taking care of rent and other logistics of expatriate staff housing. Sarah believed that having national staff sort out the payments for the international staff's luxury apartments in Pétionville was a serious faux pas on the organization's part.

Of the national staff, Sarah said, "I don't know what they were doing before the quake. They were just happily plodding along, making nice salaries, building very little and doing very little, and then the quake hit and all of a sudden, not only are we taking over, but we were expecting them to work! And work to our schedules, work in line with what we knew needed to be done, and how we thought it should be done, or how we thought it should be done. And that was really horrible for them. And then, I could run through lists of things that we haven't done. I am one of – we had two staffers who already spoke Creole before they came to work for us – three, sorry, who already spoke Creole – I'm one of two who've made an effort to learn Creole.

And that's just a blatant lack of respect. So that's one thing we've done really bad with. We haven't provided training and space to the people who are really quite good at their jobs, so they can learn more, and learn what they need to do in order to be, in order to have stronger capacities to take over from international staff. That's really difficult at the beginning [in the time of immediate emergency] because it's very go-go-go-go-go, but after a while, it's just – yeah, I think it's embarrassing not to be handing over to the Haitian staff. And there are a few interpersonal things that have happened. We've also – we've carried out affirmative action, basically. We've hired people because they are Haitian or Haitian diaspora, when we really shouldn't have, and then they failed at their jobs, which has led to an increasing sense that Haitians in general are not capable of doing those sorts of jobs. So they think that foreign staff have done badly." Even as she identified what she considered the mistakes of the administration and the international staff, Sarah remained hurt that the national staff had not been more welcoming to her, and felt snubbed by their apparent ingratitude.

On the other side, I've not been invited out. We've never been asked to have so much as a cup of coffee by any of the Haitian staff. They haven't made any effort to be inclusive toward us, or thank us for spending all this time away from our families. There's been instances of sabotage and refusal to do work and things like this that have made our lives really difficult. It's all just turning into a really combative situation, which is really sad. They. Don't. Give. A. Shit. None of them have asked me about my family. The exception? The drivers. And I think it's because the drivers spend more time with us day-to-day, and they actually kind of get to know us as human beings as opposed to just this sort of conglomerate of nasty foreigners. So they see that we get dragged home at 10:30 for curfew. And they see that someone gets malaria and someone gets cholera and we have to go to the hospital, and they see that we're really tired when we get home after flying 15 hours to see our families.

Sarah had almost reached the end of her assignment, and would soon be returning to Australia. She grew reflective, and a little longing. "I know that it's not actually about me. And that... both comforts me and saddens me because I guess it's my first experience being

judged by the color of my skin." She laughed. "You know? It's the first time I've felt discriminated against. And that's probably really good for me! But I... I've never been prejudged like this before. And I've never felt... I've felt unwelcome before. I want to leave. I don't feel welcome here. I don't feel appreciated. And I definitely am not saying that Haitians should be thanking me – because Haitians certainly have more reasons than almost anyone else to be wary or unhappy or judgmental, but it's just a question of whether I want to be part of this community. And... I think I'm getting closer and closer to 'no.' Maybe it doesn't have to be this way for every foreigner here, but for me – in the role I'm in – I think this is the way it is. My will to use my institutional power, if you want to call it that, has just been sapped by the lack of relationships that I've been able to develop with people here."

Sarah's candor was surprising, even as her words were disquieting. I do not think she truly meant that she was willfully or actively withholding aid because of the chilly and hostile reception she had received by Haitian people. She was speaking more generally to a sense of defeat and demoralization. It was so far from the images of beaming, grateful aid recipients in her organization's brochures. Sarah knew perfectly well that those types of images were marketing gimmicks. She knew that development work was always complicated. Yet she still sounded heartbroken that night by the ugliness of interpersonal relations, and suggested that the problems with aid were not only macro and institutional — at the levels of organizations and governments — but at a very small and personal level, as well.

Sarah had a question for me, which startled me and struck me as very poignant. "What do you *talk* about when you're talking with these people, these Haitian friends of yours?"

"You know! I don't know, gossip, sometimes politics, sometimes just gossip about people we know, um, jokes... there's a lot of jokes, a lot of telling jokes, you know, just normal

stuff, whatever's like going on. Personal neuroses. Pretty normal stuff," I babbled.

Sarah shook her head. "I never know what to say, when I'm chatting with Haitians."

### *Scene Five: “Aid Effectiveness”*

In November 2011, I attended a two-day conference at the Plaza Hotel on aid effectiveness and civil society. It had been organized by a European INGO, and it was supposed to present an opportunity for Haitian civil society organizations and international organizations to communicate with one another. The setting itself was strange, as so many settings in Port-au-Prince were in those days. The Plaza Hotel is located right across the street from the Champ-de-Mars, a literal stone's throw away from the sprawling downtown IDP camp. There were two entrances to the hotel: on the Champ-de-Mars side, there was a single unprepossessing door, watched over by an armed security guard, and on the back side, there was an unremarkable sliding metal door leading to the parking lot. Inside the compound, and unseen from the street, the hotel's courtyard resembled a verdant oasis, full of plants and flowers, with a swimming pool and a pleasant patio restaurant with a bar. Among Port-au-Prince hotels, the Plaza is far from the fanciest. Still, the contrast between the hotel and the camp no more than a few feet away, and yet a world away, was always striking.

The conference had been convened because members of the hosting INGO were set to travel to Busan, South Korea for the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness at the end of the month, and they wanted to present the perspective of international organizations, donors, and civil society organizations working in Haiti. In attendance were representatives from Oxfam, Caritas, the World Bank, the IHRC, and a variety of urban and rural Haitian civil society organizations.

It was a strange meeting, in which the different actors were speaking different languages, in more ways than one. In a literal sense, of course, they were speaking three different languages: the Haitian and foreign representatives of major organizations spoke English or



French, and the representatives of Haitian civil society spoke Creole. This struck me as a political decision, a claim staked, for many of them were highly educated lawyers, economists, and sociologists who were able to speak excellent French, but who largely chose not to. Understandably, this multilingualism led to delays, translation needs, misunderstandings, and large spans in which several participants in the conference did not know what the others were saying, during which many of them availed themselves of the hotel's free wifi. But even beyond these literal considerations of language, the participants were drawing on different sets of jargon and rhetoric, different beliefs and different regimes of truth, and talking past one another. The questions posed by the audience had more to do with their own politics and positions than with the content of the presentations, while the responses to those questions had more to do with the politics and positions of the presenters than with the content of the questions. Memorably, one man representing a small organization from somewhere in the Central Plateau presented every single speaker with the same comment, regardless of their position or the content: "There is no credit available in the rural sector. Small local NGOs can't get any money." No one addressed this comment.

Camille Chalmers, the Haitian economist and leader of the civil society organization PAPDA (Plateforme Haïtienne de Plaidoyer pour un Développement Alternatif), spoke with the rehearsed, articulate, and slightly tired passion of someone who has been fighting the same fight and saying the same words for many many years. He began by stating, clearly, "Development is a failure."

"Despite decades of development, relations between nations remain the same. In fact, there is more global polarization. There are more 'underdeveloped' countries now, a term which

had not even been invented in the 1950s.<sup>17</sup> There are more people suffering from hunger today, even while the planet has the capacity to feed 12 billion people.” Chalmers disparaged the conditionality of the international aid regime, said it was neoliberal and destructive.

It seemed, to me, to be the most obvious set of observations of the day. But Chalmers' words had a sort of a vacuum around them. Not only did the other speakers not echo his sentiment or logic, they did not even engage or argue with it. Whether the representatives of international organizations agreed or disagreed with Chalmers, they were talking about something else, using a different set of terms and a different logic altogether.

The focus of the presentations was overwhelmingly on economic development – a vision of the Haitian future that hinged on investment and job creation. The standards and models were ones established and approved by the international development community: the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action. A balding Frenchman with straw-colored hair who worked for the World Bank gave a presentation that began with an enumeration of the “social and cultural obstacles” to the success of aid in Haiti. These included “clientelism, favoritism, and inequality”; that “imported technological and organizational models are favored”; that Haiti is more “top-down than participatory”; and that “passivity is more common than entrepreneurship.”

One of the main issues at hand was the role of the IHRC (Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission) which had been created and headed by former US President Bill Clinton and Haitian Prime Minister Max Bellerive in March 2010. In theory, it was to be, in Bellerive's words, “a space of coherence” that would allow the Haitian government to express its needs and priorities to the international community. In truth, it was an entity independent of the Haitian

---

<sup>17</sup> Technically, the term “underdevelopment” is a relic of the Truman era, in which contemporary Western ideas of international development and progress in the global South were emerging (Rist 2003).

government, created to “convince donors it was safe to give money” (Katz 2013). Haitian civil society organizations, as well as many ordinary Haitians, suspected that the IHRC was still another mechanism of foreign domination and neocolonialism. A young Haitian lawyer, a light-skinned and immaculately-attired member of the bourgeoisie, spoke on behalf of the IHRC. She seemed flustered, and I got the impression that she was a last-minute understudy for the person who was originally going to give the presentation. She began with a quote from Durkheim in order to define “cooperation” as “*partager une tâche commune.*” Her presentation focused on how the IHRC had and should continue to cooperate with and support the administrative capacity of the Haitian government, particularly as it tried to monitor and verify the expanding presence of NGOs (many of which were not officially registered by the government). She ended with a miniature flow chart.

*L'équité → le respect*  
*transparence → la confiance*  
*bénéfice mutuel → durabilité*

Her presentation was very much the company line, and the response from the audience was one of unconcealed hostility. The first question from the audience was not a question at all, but a statement, in Creole: “Ou woule nou nan farin.” Literally, it means “you're rolling us in flour” but it means “you're messing with us, you're mocking us, you're trying to deceive us.” The young lawyer responded in French, and her words contained all the tensions and contradictions of her professional and class position and the fact that, those designations aside, she remained proudly and painfully Haitian.

As a Haitian, I wish that the IHRC weren't necessary. But I chose to work within it because I believed that it would give results. Look, Japan had an earthquake<sup>18</sup>, and they didn't need an IHRC. My dream would be for us not to be in this situation.

The audience was not placated by her ambivalence. A series of questions and comments

---

<sup>18</sup>The March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

followed, most of which had little to do with the content of the presentation and more to do with people's existing beliefs about the IHRC.

“Why does the IHRC not talk to the government? The IHRC has come to replace the government. The government doesn't know what the IHRC is doing.”

“Does the IHRC have a public service division? If no, why not?”

“The Americans are controlling the IHRC. President Clinton is controlling the IHRC. And meanwhile, the poor are getting poorer.”

“The IHRC is a big boss [*patwon gwo*] and we know full well that it is not working for us. It is run by big foreigners [*gwo blan*]. They should stop the IHRC, and hold a conference about the IHRC, to see if people really want there to be a IHRC!” This was met with enormous applause from the audience.

The moderator then asked the audience to please stop attacking the young lawyer. They replied that they were not attacking anybody. She left then, in a flurry and seemingly near tears, without answering or addressing any of their questions.

Lesley Voltaire, architect and former presidential candidate, gave a presentation that bordered on the quixotic. He presented a reforested and decentralized Port-au-Prince, a reforested and decentralized country with major agricultural projects in the provincial capitals. There would be water treatment, sustainable charcoal production, aquaculture, eco-tourism, solar power, and Haiti would be able to stop importing Dominican eggs. The highlight was a tree-lined computer model of Port-au-Prince with “universal access to health centers, sanitation and education services within a fifteen minute walk for everyone in the city.” His vision was gorgeous and completely utopian and unrealistic; the audience started to giggle.

**Q: Fatra se wa vil la. Trash is the king of the city.**

Voltaire: Trash is a problem of governance. It is a lack of laws, a lack of expertise.

**Q: This all sounds like a dream. How will they be achieved, concretely? How will they be financed? What is its relation to aid? And will overpopulation decrease on its own as conditions improve?**

Voltaire: No government could have dealt with the earthquake! Just look at Bush with Hurricane Katrina!

**Q: Is the IHRC selling impossible dreams?**

*[Audience: applauds overwhelmingly]*

Voltaire: I cannot say because I do not work for the IHRC. But the IHRC is supposed to exist in order to promote the government's plans. The IHRC authorizes the government to coordinate with NGOs. Haiti now knows better what NGOs do.

The conversation quickly devolved into an argument when it was announced that there could be no more questions, that there was no more time for comments. One of the men from a civil society organization stood and declared loudly, in Creole-inflected French: “We are the ones living in this situation, living under tents, and now the NGOs won't even let us talk!” He was angry.

The *diaspora* woman working for the INGO replied, in New York-inflected French, “We are not going to fix Haiti today! We are just sitting together to talk!”

This, it seemed, was everyone's criticism of everything and everyone: too much talk, not enough action. It is one thing that everyone had in common. It was the criticism that many foreign development workers levied against Haitians – they complain about everything, they spend their days complaining, but they never take action. It was the criticism that many Haitians levied against the international community – they claim they are helping us, but they're just talking and promoting themselves and nothing ever changes for us. All the talk about cooperation and communication is part of the performance, part of the staging. That the INGO had created a space for Haitian civil society organizations to sit and speak candidly with major

international institutions was admirable, but it was not going to fix Haiti. A remarkable assemblage of firsthand and professional knowledge and institutional power sat together in the Plaza Hotel over those two days. – talking with one another sometimes, talking past one another at others. At the end of it all, Camille Chalmers presented an eighteen-page manifesto of recommendations from Haitian civil society to those traveling to Busan, which the assemblage approved, tiredly. In the end, it all felt like a lot of words. Everyone in the room wanted *action*, at least in theory – to stop talking and start doing. But doing what? Action remained, and remains, more difficult to realize, more dubious, more divisive.

## ACT TWO

### *Scene One: Routinization of Failure*

To speak of “ordinary life” amid crisis is not to deny the reality of suffering, or to normalize it, or to claim that people who live in conditions of chronic crisis are innately more able to endure suffering than are “the rest of us.” Instead, it is a rethinking of what “crisis” is – that while “crisis” is often imagined to be a state of exception and a sudden event, in reality, “crisis” and “the everyday” are not mutually exclusive.

As I have already explained, the international media focused on the most miserable aspects of life in Port-au-Prince's IDP camps, while ignoring the routines of everyday life and small acts of everyday solidarity and cooperation. Journalistic accounts focused on sexual violence, crime, lack of sanitation, and disease in the camps. This is not to deny that these phenomena did and do occur in the camps, but they are not the only story of the camps. Such accounts – often written by “parachuters” who know relatively little about Haitian history of context – reproduce negative and sometimes racist stereotypes of black Haitian people as aggressive, criminal, hypersexed, dirty, and powerless. They also imply that these social problems are uniquely part of “camp life” or that they were created by the earthquake, when in fact all of these phenomena existed before the earthquake, continue to exist in poor neighborhoods, and are the result of a weak government, poverty, structural violence, and lack of infrastructure. The media focus on sexual violence, crime, and diseases like cholera and HIV/AIDS both ignores the structural factors that contribute to these problems, and gives the reader or viewer the impression that *all* poor Haitians are rapists, criminals, and unsanitary citizens (Briggs 2003), when in fact most poor Haitians place a strong emphasis on cleanliness, hygiene, presentability, politeness, and proper social conduct.

Another stereotyped depiction of the camps is that their inhabitants are passive victims, doing nothing, waiting for aid and assistance and perhaps dying in its absence. This form of depiction reached its apogee in a book of photographs grandly and encompassingly titled *Tent Life* by Wyatt Gallery. His photographs present Haitians sitting in their tents, surrounded by their (often meager) possessions. They are still, unmoving, waiting. In an editorial critique, Haiti-based journalist Pooja Bhatia (2011) wrote, “Rather than names or actions, what defines the Haitians in *Tent Life* is their victimhood: They are the impoverished displaced, trapped in tents, doing nothing, possessed of little.” Bhatia’s critique resonates with Liisa Malkki’s argument (1996) that standard media representations of refugees, displaced people, and victims of humanitarian crisis dehistoricize their subjects and render them symbols rather than individuals. In fact, Haitians living in IDP camps – like poor Haitians in general – are busy and industrious. Many are not part of a formal salaried economy, but nearly all adults are engaged in some kind of economic activity: selling sundries, cooking and selling food, selling water, fixing cars, restoring electronics, buying and selling used *pèpè* clothes. When not working for money, they are still working: cleaning their homes (including those homes that are tents or shacks), washing their clothes, taking care of children, braiding a friend's hair, going to market, cooking food, or studying. When not working, they are still doing and acting: telling jokes, socializing with friends and family, singing, watching television, going to church, attending a ceremony, arguing about politics. In Gallery's photographs, people are doing none of those things. They are staring beseechingly and silently into the camera. These forms of representations, Bhatia argues, help explain why the effectiveness of the post-earthquake aid response appears so incommensurate with foreigners' overwhelming desire to “help Haiti.” She writes that “...few [parachuter journalists] will delve into the underlying causes of Haiti’s post-quake stagnation.



These are political, involving highly charged issues such as land rights, aid allocations and administrative control over NGOs. Understanding them requires looking at Haitians as political actors—as voters, as abstainers, as protesters and as government officials. If you’re used to thinking about Haiti, even subconsciously, as a passive recipient of aid or sympathy or disaster, it’s a difficult paradigm shift.” Not only difficult, but also uncomfortable for the consumers (readers and viewers) at the other end of the news chain. And consumers they are, and the parachuters Bhatia criticizes here are not acting purely of their own individual volition, but in response to a news model and a market in which certain images and stories sell while others do not.

Haitian people – even the poorest, most seemingly powerless Haitian people – are political actors. Living – not only the act of survival in a system of suffering and deprivation, but the everyday routines of life, as well — is a political act, particularly when forces and individuals with far more institutional power and far more authority as “legitimate speakers” are invested in representing you as a passive victim. These routines do not exist separate from the inadequacy of the aid response and the precarity and fragility of life itself in Haiti: the inadequacy, precarity, and fragility are themselves routinized. And so are the quiet grassroots strategies – acts of cooperation and community — for overcoming them.

*Chrismène, March 21, 2011 -  
Place des Artistes, Champ-de-Mars, Port-au-Prince*

The day after the presidential election, school is cancelled in anticipation of political disorder. But since there isn’t any *dezòd*, Mirlande’s ten-year-old daughter Dayana and I just go for a walk. We pass Sacre-Coeur — which is really to say where l’Église Sacre-Coeur once stood. It is another landmark, another place that exists in conversation and in people’s

geographical imaginations, but the building collapsed on January 12, and services take place under wide white tarps. Now Christ on the cross remains on the corner of the intersection, one of the few physical remnants of the old church that was not destroyed that day. He gazes dolefully into the heavens as he bleeds alone. The sheet metal fence behind him, blocking the church's dusty razed foundation from view, looks like a backdrop of prison bars.

I hold Dayana's hand in mine, sweating against one another, as we cross the street, and she chatters cheerfully. We pass a high mound of garbage, soda bottles, Styrofoam containers, discarded mango pits and vegetable peels, oozing a milky gray liquid into the road.

"Nina says Haitians are dirty," she reports. She's speaking of one of her playmates, the seven-year-old daughter of Nejma, the French-Algerian development worker.

"Why does Nina say that?" I ask her. I feel immediately defensive of Dayana, who is kind and obedient and guileless, who never says a cruel word about anybody.

"Because they throw their garbage in the street."

"Nina doesn't know what she's talking about. Ask her where she thinks people should throw their garbage if the city doesn't pick it up or give them anywhere to throw it."

"Okay."

"Do you see what I mean?"

"*Wi.*"

"Do you think Haitians are dirty?" I ask.

"No."

"So. Stop listening to Nina."

Down Avenue Charles Sumner, a group of young men in knit caps pulled down to the tops of their eyes hang out in the street, washing cars when they can, shouting catcalls at women,

teasing and calling loudly to one another in bredjenn slang. They are street kids, slightly grown up.

“How do you say *kokorat* in English?” Dayana asks me quietly, glancing at them.

I am embarrassed to say that we do not really have them. A *kokorat* is many things. In the slang way that Dayana is using it, it’s a pejorative term for a street kid who wipes down cars. It is also a small jumping insect that lives under mattresses, in the dust and the dark. It also happens to be a compound of the Creole words for “rat” and “pussy.”

We make our way down the Champ-de-Mars, where Dayana’s cousins live on the Place des Artistes, across from the fire station, kitty-corner from the peach-and-purple central Fonkoze office, a national organization that provides microcredit for women. (The women I talk to on the Champ-de-Mars don’t know what Fonkoze is or does.) The camp is also directly across the street from Port-au-Prince's fire station, and occasionally the sound of sirens splits the air.

Mirlande's cousin Rosemonde is petite, strong, and unself-consciously beautiful, in her early forties, with a pointed chin and a wide smile. Before the earthquake, 2010, Rosemonde and her family lived in downtown Port-au-Prince, on Rue de l’Enterrement, which terminates on its south end in the sprawling National Cemetery, and which blooms with morgues and *enterprises funèbres*. Now, post-quake, Rosemonde’s immediate family lives in several places, and two of those are on the Champ-de-Mars. One is their sheet metal and tarp shack on the Place des Artistes. Then, across the street from the Place des Artistes, three of her sons sleep in a room on the bottom floor of a dilapidated wooden house that perhaps a hundred years ago was a graceful and elegant dark-red gingerbread. The chipped mosaic floor, high doorways, and cobweb-muddled engraved wooden eaves give hints of how lovely the house must once have been. Rosemonde’s youngest daughter, seven years old, is currently living in Cayes with her father’s

relatives, and at other points in time the children go to Grand-Anse. At the moment, her teenaged daughter Jamima (nicknamed Mama) and her three teenaged sons live with her on the Champ-de-Mars.

When I first meet Chrismène, I take her to be part of Rosemonde's family, though she doesn't resemble them. She is part of the crowd of women and children collecting water spurting out of the ground from a broken plastic pipe — broken illegally — across the street from the camp, and when the water is on, everyone runs to fill their buckets and gallon bottles.

Chrismène is tall and a little chubby, with a pretty face and a sweet smile. She wears red short shorts over her thick thighs and a tight pastel-colored tank-top, over which a bit of tummy hangs. Her rosy-brown skin is speckled with bright red dots, perhaps hundreds of them. I ask her about them.

“Mosquitoes,” she shrugs.

“All of those?” I ask in horror.

“Yes, there are a lot of mosquitoes on the Champ-de-Mars.”

She has a soft brown and white puppy with oversized paws tied up outside her tent. “Her name is Miley,” says Chrismène softly, as she sits on her heels and scrubs out a plastic bucket, the soap frothing up her forearms. “Like Miley Cyrus.”

Chrismène is not part of Rosemonde's family; they were neighbors before the earthquake, and reunited here, and with other former neighbors, on the Champ-de-Mars, and came to live near one another and sometimes to share resources. Chrismène is twenty-four years old, and originally hails from the Artibonite department (unlike Rosemonde and her family, who, like their cousin Mirlande, are from Grand-Anse). She came to Port-au-Prince in 2002, when her mother died (of a disease that was sent upon her, she says, by people who were jealous of her for

doing commerce) and her aunt brought her to the capital. She doesn't know much about her family that remains in the Artibonite — she never knew her mother's family well, though she doesn't know why. Chrismène lived first on Rue de l'Enterrement, near Rosemonde. She is not “good” at narrating her story in the institutionally-approved ways that some camp residents are. Shy, sweet, and resigned by nature, she is not practiced at performing her suffering, or in talking about how international aid has failed her. Her answers are sometimes short, and she seems unwilling to complain. Chrismène's story, though it emerges gradually, demonstrates many things: the fluidity and dynamics of home and kinship, community solidarity, the logistics of living in a camp and leaving the camp, and perceptions of international aid and foreigners.

“Do you like Port-au-Prince?” I ask.

“*Wi*,” replies Chrismène, immediately.

“Do you like it more than your home?” I ask.

“I don't like it more than my home, no.”

I worry about Chrismène, a lone young woman on the Champ-de-Mars.

“Why don't you return to the provinces instead?” I ask her.

“Ah! I won't go back,” she says immediately.

“In the provinces, there wouldn't be all this insecurity.”

“Yes, but I won't go back,” she insisted. “If I had a mother over there, if I had a father over there, I would return. But I won't return. I have aunts, I have uncles over there — if I were to go back there, they would be responsible for me.” For Chrismène, that was unthinkable. She hadn't worked since the earthquake, because she lacked the capital to begin. She said that if she could, she would go to Malpasse, on the Dominican border, and buy cosmetics to sell in Port-au-Prince. Having lost her own mother, she had grown distant from her biological family. The

people to whom she was now closest, on whom she depended, were friends and neighbors, who took on the role of fictive kin.

Dayana, Mama, Chrismène and I watch a movie on a portable DVD player, and eat some *fritay* I bought from Rosemonde, lounging on white sheets spread on a swath of greyish industrial carpeting; along the edges peeks through that old mosaic floor. The sheets have little blotches of dried blood on them, here and there — the kinds of stains that happen when you roll over and squish a mosquito in your sleep. There’s a variety of phone chargers plugged into the wall, and as we watch the movie, many people come to pick up their phones or plug them in. It is not just for the family - it’s a communal charging spot. On the floor, Rosemonde's son's school notebook lies open to a page of chemistry notes, and next to it is a DVD of pornography, bought on the street, the title scrawled on the disk in black permanent marker.

Later, I ask Chrismène about the daily routines of her life.

“I bathe here inside, in a *kivèt* [plastic basin]. I pee in a *kivèt*. I go to the toilet in the *lakou*, across the street.” She gestures across the street “I cook food here.”

“The toilet, is it a plastic latrine?” I ask, confused. I thought she was referring to the portable toilets that had been placed on the Champ-de-Mars for the camp residents, run by the sanitation company Jedco. They are notoriously foul and rarely cleaned — the sidewalks around them are always suspiciously damp and malodorous, and people try to give them a wide berth if they don’t have to use one.

“No. It's not a plastic thing. It's wood.”

“It's clean?”

“Mmhmm, it's clean.”

“Who cleans it?”

“The people who live in that *lakou*. The people who live over there.”

“So they let you go there, they don't have any problem?”

“No. They don't have a problem,” Chrismène explains. “It's not a portable toilet — one of the Jedco ones.”

“And the Jedco ones?”

“I've never gone inside one one.”

“But there are people who use them?” I ask.

“*Wi!* Everyone else on the plaza, that's what they use.”

Friendship and connection allows Chrismène to bypass one of the nastier parts of camp life: the poorly-maintained community toilets. Chrismène was far from the only camp inhabitant to do this. Many other people reported bathing or defecating at the homes of nearby friends, family members, or *peyizan* (people from the same part of the countryside). As far as gestures of solidarity go, it may seem like a relatively small or inconsequential one. But the ability to bathe or to relieve oneself in relative privacy, security and sanitation – especially as NGOs stopped paying camp residents to clean the toilets, and as solitary women who used these communal facilities became common targets of sexual violence – should not be underestimated, as a matter of social rights or politics. Indeed, matters that were previously held to be deeply intimate and part of the private domain, such as defecation, have become explicitly political because of the concomitant effects on health, safety, and well-being (Robins 2014), even as public health campaigns by the Haitian government and NGOs focused on individual behaviors and culture (as Charles Briggs (2003) wrote in another context, “culture equals cholera”) rather than the politics of cholera and UN accountability.



Figure 23: Public toilets

Christ-Roi, Port-au-Prince  
Summer 2010



Figure 24: Water collection near public  
toilets in a public plaza destroyed by the  
earthquake

Photo taken the week cholera was first  
identified in Haiti

Cité Soleil, October 2010



Figure 25: Public toilets during camp  
removal  
Champ-de-Mars, April 2012





Figure 26: “Awareness message: Don’t forget to wash your hands after using the bathroom and before eating. Put Clorox and other treatments in the water you use. Don’t eat food that isn’t well-cooked, and wash raw foods well. That is how we will combat the disease of cholera.”

Léogâne, November 2011

“What do you do all day?” I ask Chrismène.

“I used to go to school... but I'm not in school anymore. There's no possibility for me to go to school. So I just stay and sit. All day, I sit. I was in *philo* [the final year of high school]. When I have money to do it, I'll go take the exam [to graduate]. Every day I wake up, I watch TV. When I'm sick of watching TV, I talk to people. I'm unhappy sometimes because — I wake up, and nothing ever happens for me. I get up, I sit. I don't have anyone to help me. I think about all those things.”

“How do you get by?” I ask.

“Friends.”

“They lend to you, they give to you?”

“They give to me.”

“And you don't give them anything back?”

Chrismène laughed. “No! I don't give them anything back.”

“So it's just because they're good people,” I said.

“*Wi*, it's because they know I don't have a mother, I don't have a father. And they say it's

the first time they've seen a young woman who doesn't have a mama, who doesn't have a papa, who doesn't have children, *li pa lage tet li nan sa k' pa sa* [she doesn't let herself fall into things she shouldn't do] — you understand? You know, going around taking guys, sleeping around, sleeping here and there, for money.”

“What made you not do that, yourself?”

“What made me not do it?” Chrismène repeats. “I don't like it. And too, I didn't grow up that way. And besides, I'm not afraid of suffering. I'm not afraid of suffering. Because I already know — I don't have a mother to provide for me, I don't have a father to provide for me. I'm not afraid.”

Out on the Champ-de-Mars, somebody is playing Bob Marley. His voice flows everywhere, through the tarps and the plywood doors. *Don't you worry about a thing, 'cause every little thing is gonna be all right...*

I ask Chrismène for her perspective on NGOs and camp management. Her narration demonstrates how opaque and corrupt the process appears to ordinary camp inhabitants.

“After January 12, did you get food aid, things like that, after?” I ask. “Did you get any *kat* — the vouchers they were giving for food?”

“No. There were people who got them, there were people on the plaza who got them, but I didn't get them, myself. The people they gave them to, it was people on the committee the organizations gave vouchers to,” Chrismène explains. “That wasn't IOM. It was ACF, a whole bunch of them. Those people on the committee, *se moun pa yo bay*. It's their own people they give to. If you're not friends with them, they're not cool with you, they won't give you anything.”

“You weren't friends with the people on the committee?”

“I don't talk with them. It's a bunch of young guys from up there,” she said, gesturing

vaguely toward the upper section of the Place des Artistes. “I recognize them, but I don't know their names.”

“Was it ACF and other organizations that chose those guys?”

“No,” she says, “it was them who chose themselves.”

“They chose themselves?” I repeat, confused.

“They were the ones that chose, because the organizations asked every plaza to have its own committee.”

“So they had everyone vote?” I ask, still confused.

“People didn't vote. Only people who live up where they live voted. It wasn't everyone who voted.”

A taptap honked, as it rumbled down the street outside.

“Which of the organizations gave water?” I ask.

“It was ACF who gave water.”

“And you got it?”

“I used to go get the water. But I don't get it anymore, I go buy water instead.”

“Why do you buy it?” I ask.

“Because the water over there has too many people. There are a lot of people getting water. You stand there forever. Tomorrow I'll go buy water, I won't get a lot of water. And besides, I never drank it, no. I used to wash with it. Cooked food.” This is common, as I have explained: many people did not trust the taste or the purity of distributed water – even before the cholera outbreak – and so they continued to buy water for drinking.

As for where Chrismène gets the money to buy water, and how and why she receives support from neighbors – this remains unclear. Though official unemployment in Port-au-Prince

is high, and many people claim they are “doing nothing” and “have no [economic] activity,” they participate in informal economies and small side business (*ti komès*), selling sundries such small bags of detergent, Maggi cubes, individual cigarettes, candies, or chewing gum out of their houses or tents. Many people are circumspect about their sources of money (be it through participating in informal markets or through a patron of some kind), because they believe that having any kind of income will render them less credible aid recipients. For young women like Chrismène, living in camps or in *bidonvils*, patronage can also take the form of transactional sex (UNHCR 2011) – a tragically contemporary and urban manifestation of the Haitian proverb “*chak fanm fèt ak yon kawo tè nan mitan janm li*” -- every woman is born with an acre of land between her legs – which is to say that a woman’s body and sexuality is an innate economic resource (Lowenthal 1987). As for Chrismène herself, she claims that the reason her friends and neighbors help her is precisely because she does not engage in transactional sex, which she phrases euphemistically and vaguely as “what’s not right” (*sa k pa la*).

“Why do you think these NGOs — why did they come?” I ask Chrismène.

“I think — I think they came to help, so they can give aid to Haiti, that’s all,” says Chrismène. “It’s not all Haitians that believe that,” she replied, “but there are Haitians who can understand.”

“Do you think the work was well done?”

“Yes! Even if not everyone got aid, it’s not the NGOs’ fault.”

“Whose fault is it?”

“The fault of the committee. If we’re talking about aid after the earthquake, the organizations gave a lot of aid.”

“Why — why is Haiti this way?” I ask. “Why does Haiti have all these problems?”

“I don't know why,” Chrismène laughs. “I don't know.”

Out on the street, Bob Marley turns into rap in Kreyòl.

“Why did the earthquake happen?”

“Oh!” she exclaims. “People say it's not — they say — there are people who say it is God doing his miracles. There are people who say it's not true, it's Americans who did it. I don't know what I believe.”

“Why would the Americans do that?”

“Mm. I don't know why,” she replies. “That's what they say, but I don't know. There are a lot of Haitians who say it's Americans.”

Chrismène pauses, and looks at me. “Do you love Haiti a lot, Laura?”

I am taken aback, and I babble. “Love? There are a lot of things I don't love. There are things I love, and things I don't love. I don't like earthquakes. I don't like inequality. I don't like injustice. I don't like violence. I don't like — those things.”

“You don't like all those things, and yet you came to live in it?” Chrismène wonders.

“Because I thought... maybe I could help change them. But now I don't think I can. I don't think so.” I pause. “What would you tell *blan* who want to help Haiti? How can they help Haiti?”

“How can they help Haiti?” she repeats. “I don't know how they can help Haiti,”

“Me either,” I confess.

“Would you like to help Haiti?” she asked.

“I wanted to.”

“Do you think things will get better in Haiti?” I ask.

“I don't really believe that, no.”

I think for a moment. “If you spoke all their languages, if you could talk to all the *blan* in

Haiti, what questions would you have for them? What questions would you ask the *blan* who are here?”

“I'd ask them why they love Haiti. That's the question I'd ask them. Why they love Haiti. That's what I'd ask them.”

“Do you love Haiti, yourself?” I ask.

“*Wi!* It's my country, how could I not love it?”

“What do you love most?”

“What do I love most? I love everything in Haiti. Everything. I love Haiti.” She laughs. “What do I love most in Haiti? Kanaval! That's what I love most in Haiti. It's a pleasure. I like to dance. That's what I like. And I like it when people parade. The culture of my country.”

What does love mean, in this context? Is it Christian care, pastoral stewardship, friendship, affection, passion, desire? I smack a mosquito as it bites my leg, leaving a streak of bright red blood. “Do you think the *blan* that come, that they love Haiti?”

There is a long pause. “If they didn't love it, I don't think they'd come here,” *Chriismène* says finally.

Rain begins to patter against the sheet metal, against the tarp.

### *"Culture"*

If we are to talk about the routinization of “failure” in post-earthquake Haiti, then we should talk about how that failure is explained and spoken of. Culturist explanations for the failure of aid in Haiti — or the failure of Haiti in general — abound in journalism and punditry (see journalist David Brooks' obtuse editorial on Haiti's "progress-resistant culture" quoted extensively in my introduction). Some foreign aid workers did in fact cite "Haitian culture" —

which referred to a perceived low work ethic, lack of punctuality, a tendency to place blame elsewhere, and a tradition of corruption and favors — as an obstacle to successful aid delivery. In the end, however, their recriminations about "culture" tended, in the end, not to be about "culture" at all, but rather about historical legacies of power, both within Haiti and in relation to foreigners. They did not speak about culture as though it were separate from history or political economy. Considerations of power, poverty, and exploitation figured into most of their analyses.

Sarah began to explain the challenges her organization faced in instructing Haitians in earthquake-resistant home construction. She cited the role of "culture" to explain why Haitian builders would not challenge their supervisors and apply the lessons that Sarah's organization had taught them. But although she called it "culture," Sarah was not talking about "culture" so much as about power — the power dynamics between poor laboring Haitians and their overseers, and their origins in the historical and current power dynamics between foreigners and Haitians.

There's the Haitian cultural stuff that gets in the way. We taught a bunch of homeowners and builders how to build properly. We taught all these builders how to build properly. And I bet if we went to the building sites, there's no way that more than twenty percent are actually using the skills we taught them. And the reason why is that if I was in Australia building something, and I knew that the way we were putting a window in, or the way we were designing a structure around a window, was not seismically resistant, if Australia had fault lines, I would say to my supervisor, "Dude, this house is going to fall down. We should do it this way." And the supervisor would probably listen to me. Here, there's no *way* a Haitian builder's laborer is going to tell the boss what to do. There's just no way. And there's no way that the owners are going to demand it on a rental property. Because there's no one looking over their shoulder. So these things play into it as well. I find it very very difficult to talk about this sort of thing because... there are all sorts of reasons why Haitian culture is not conducive to quality building or conducive to long-term development or looking out for the sorts of infrastructure projects that Western donors would really like to put in place. It's really hard to talk about why, because there are reasons for it that implicate you and me and others — even if we're not French! So that's really touchy, and I shy away from talking about that, because I don't want to be offensive. The line between saying "oh, the poor dears, they have real reasons for their anger" which is really really true, but balancing that with the fact that people still have free will — and yeah, it's

not that easy. Because people really don't have free will, especially not here. When you're poor you don't have free will. But there is – the amount of foreign corruption that goes on here doesn't really help! And the lack of expectations that we as an international community have of what Haitians should do, or can do, or have a responsibility to do – that doesn't help either.

This last statement confused me. Sarah seemed to be giving every reason in the world for Haitians not to be receptive to the kind of assistance her organization was offering. "Do you think the expectations are lower than they should be?" I asked.

"Ye-e-eah! God, yeah," she replied.

Because the barriers are there, and it's really really hard to fight through stuff, but if you keep someone on and keep paying them when they're doing a shit job, then you're responsible for them doing a shit job. The expectations, though, are set because people don't exceed your expectations, right, so? They've got to be there. And you *will* find good stuff, because although you can talk about it being an overall lazy culture or whatever, it's not like it's everybody. It's not like it's everybody.

Nejma, a French-Algerian development worker working for UNOPS, drank fresh mango juice mixed with Barbancourt rum and smoked cigarette after cigarette as we sat on her terrace and talked about her experiences in Haiti. In her mid-thirties, slim and striking, with a preference for high-heeled sandals, tight jeans, and low-cut backless blouses, Nejma was unusual among aid workers. She openly flouted curfews, and rode motorcycle taxis around Port-au-Prince, her long, highlighted hair blowing in the wind. Nejma was confident and opinionated, sometimes brash, with a curious tendency to overuse the word "actually" in a way that did not make much sense in English or in French (where "*actuellement*" means "currently" rather than "really"). Nejma was also exceptional among expat aid workers because she was thoroughly unself-hating. While nearly all the aid workers I met were conflicted, demoralized, ambivalent, or downright miserable, Nejma enjoyed living in Haiti and did not apologize for her position or privilege. She called the women who cleaned and cooked for her "the girls" even though they were older than



she was; her driver muttered “she is not a *colon* and I am not slave.”

"There's so much to explain behind its '*pa fòt mwen*.' Nejma began. She was referring to a common Haitian term, "*se pa fòt mwen*," which literally means "it's not my fault" but which people generally use to mean, "I didn't do it on purpose."

The term, and mentality, of *se pa fòt mwen* was a source of frustration to both privileged Haitians and to expatriates living in Haiti. "Your cook can be standing in front of you and drop a glass and break it, right in front of your eyes, and she'll say *se pa fòt mwen*!" a relatively well-off Haitian woman in her sixties once explained to me. "And I always say, 'no, it *is* your fault! You didn't do it on purpose, but it *is* your fault.'" Foreign aid workers found the term singularly aggravating, as it suggested Haitians' unwillingness to take responsibility or accountability, both of which are central values to aid workers. So Nejma's acknowledgement that there was "so much to explain" the mentality of *se pa fòt mwen* suggested her readiness to examine the social processes that produced the mentality. "Everyday occasion that you have with a Haitian when you discuss with them or when you see them actually — everybody have their own way of making decision or being responsible for what they do or implement."

Nejma explained that the precariousness of everyday life in Haiti — rather than the culture — makes sustainable development work and community engagement difficult, even unthinkable.

I think that because of the level of survival that there is – and that brings a lot of luggage with that. The insecurity, everybody clings to their property, to their own, to what is good for them. Because they live in a surrounding environment which they feel like has no rules, basically. I'll give you an example. I saw some people actually – when they want something, they just break it. For example, *dans la rue, beton*. Cement. They will break it because they need to use a piece to do something. Or they want to have free water. There's a lot of that change, rapidly, in terms of sense of ownership or what is yours and what is collective, ours, how do we take care of it, how do we share it. You don't have that much mechanism. Actually everything was – it's not that Haitians are born, or it's in their culture per

se, but because of the different kinds of government that succeeded themselves, and what they brought with them, there's no level of "this is ours, as a community, and we're going to take care of it."

I do not agree with Nejma's analysis that statelessness, lack of infrastructure, and lack of faith in institutional power have produced chaos and a total free-for-all. For all that life sometimes appears to be summed up by the expression "*chak koukouy klere pou je l*" ("every firefly lights the way for its own eyes," loosely "every man for himself"), Nejma overlooks several traditional and longstanding forms of solidarity, collectivity, and cooperation in Haiti — and downplays the role of the international community and aid in destroying or at least threatening those forms of cooperation. But her perspective still demonstrates that some development workers refuse to rely on pat culturalist explanations for the patterns of social behavior that are obstacles to their goals.

But Haitians are not the only ones who possess culture. Expatriate aid worker culture is increasingly a topic of mockery and criticism, or at least acknowledgement, among aid workers themselves. At the same time beneficiaries observe and draw conclusions about the foreigners in their midst by observing their lifeways (even if they do not use the word "culture" to describe it).

### *Aid Worker Culture*

In May 2013, former development worker (turned anthropology graduate student) Nora Schenkel published an op ed in the *New York Times*, in which she wrote:

Most Haitians only ever meet Westerners in our capacity as self-appointed helpers. We are never just here because we want to be in Haiti; we claim we are here to better Haitians' lives. But they have seen us come and go for decades, and they are poorer than ever before.

Meanwhile, they see us leaving the grocery store with bags of food that cost more than what they make in a month. They watch us get into large air-conditioned cars and drive by them, always by them. They see us going home to nice, big houses,

shielded by high walls.

And here is what they don't know: These houses? We could never afford them back home. These houses we have because they don't. We have a job because they are poor. And because their poverty is extreme, because the country they were born in is hot, dusty, stormy, messy and perilous, we are paid well (Schenkel 2013).

Schenkel's article was shared and commented upon widely in social media by aid workers and journalists working in Haiti, for her words rang true and she was brave enough to issue them publicly—and by then, she was not beholden to the aid apparatus. She had eloquently put into writing what a lot of people knew, but were unable to say. This is not a piece about aid policy. As Schenkel observes, lifestyle and the seemingly superficial trappings of so-called “aid culture” matter deeply, perhaps as much as formal aid policy. The everyday details of how expat aid workers live – what they eat, how they get around the city, where and how they spend their free time – demonstrates their priorities and ethics, and solidifies the already stark divisions in class, income, and power between aid workers and ordinary Haitians. But this is not simply to impugn international aid workers, as much of their lifestyle was not within their control. Doing otherwise – for example, by taking public transportation, going into “red zone” neighborhoods, eating street food, eschewing expensive Pétionville restaurants and dance clubs, and so on – would not only have distanced them from their coworkers and peers, it would also have taken a concerted effort and perhaps have resulted in censure or even punitive measures by their organizations. Some individuals, like Mathieu, did try to violate the official and unofficial rules of expat aid worker culture, but it was logistically and socially difficult for them to do so.

At the same time, social expectations came from many directions; Haitians viewed expats as potential employers not only within the aid apparatus but in the private domain, as well. Expats who hailed from places where household servitude is considered demeaning tried to practice egalitarian ethics by not hiring servants to cook for them or wash their clothes. This

ethical stand often had the opposite effect from what was intended. Haitians found this behavior inscrutable and stingy (*chich*), for if someone had the means to give another person a job, why wouldn't he do it? Many poor Haitians state that they would rather work in the homes of expats than for middle- or upper-class Haitians – expats were believed to pay better and treat their employees more humanely. For expats not to fulfill the obligations of patronage, when they had the means to do so, was confusing.

Sarah, for her part, was as critical, or perhaps more critical, of "aid culture" as she was of "Haitian culture" — and, in her critique of aid culture, she could afford to be funnier, more candid, and less politically correct. Indeed, for some aid workers, being aware of and making fun of aid worker culture became sort of a central feature of aid worker culture. Sarah lightened her long workday by reading self-mocking blogs like "Stuff Expat Aid Workers Like" (“#12: Establishing Field Cred”; “#4: Drivers”; “#17: Pretending Not to See Each Other”; “#7: Describing Themselves as Nomads”; “#29: Destroying Idealism”). She also confessed to another guilty pleasure: reading a web-based piece of serialized fiction called *Disastrous Passion*. Part aid worker exposé, part Harlequin novel, and part corny self-referential parody, it told the story of a naive young American woman and first-time aid worker named Mary-Anne, who works for the evangelical Christian NGO Samaritan's Purse, and a brooding French career humanitarian named Jean-Philippe, who works for Médecins Sans Frontières.<sup>19</sup> In *Disastrous Passion*, Port-

---

<sup>19</sup> Despite Mary-Anne's guilelessness and Jean-Philippe's damaged bitterness, they fall in love amid the vicissitudes of post-quake Haiti. The description of the novel, available online, reads in part: “*They sacrificed everything for the poor... but was there enough left for their love? Mary-Anne and Jean-Philippe come from different worlds. She's a simple girl from America's conservative deep south, trying to break free of the societal bonds that hold her back. He's a hardened, cynical man of the world haunted by a dark past. Both are thrown together in the chaos of a disaster response after a massive earthquake in Haiti. Can Mary-Anne ever love a man like him? Can Jean-Philippe ever find a soul-mate in a woman like her? Will stress and the danger of a disaster zone ultimately keep them apart? Or will their love smolder into a white-hot flame of passion? Follow the journeys of Mary-Anne and Jean-Philippe, along with those of their other aid worker friends and colleagues. Laugh, cry, and question all you've ever known about humanitarian aid.*”

au-Prince, its disaster and its inhabitants were the setting for the expat action; there were few Haitian characters represented with any depth. Other aid worker parodies abounded, meant primarily for internal consumption (who else would get the jokes?), like an only slightly funny YouTube video called "Shit Expats in Haiti Say" ("Karibe has the best rum sour" "My driver was so late picking me up the other day" "The maid hasn't come yet" "How long have *you* been in Haiti?") that toes the line between irony and unironic offense. For expat aid worker readers and viewers, there was comfort and a thrill of recognition in these blogs and fictional representations. Most of them did not — indeed, were not permitted to — walk around Port-au-Prince, take public transportation, socialize with Haitian people beyond specific work-related contexts, and so on. Their social lives (and for many, their sex lives) revolved around the expat community: the same NGO house parties, the same expensive Pétionville restaurants, and a lot of alcohol. Expat aid workers knew that this was a strange way to live, and a strange way to help, but often felt powerless to change their institutional culture, amid the other things they were largely powerless to change. "I mean, driving past the excavation of a falling building and seeing bits of someone's skull, or the grinding poverty... those things affected me, I'm not a heartless bitch," explained Sarah. "But sometimes it felt like the overwhelming issue was social and the expat stuff." Amid the extreme suffering and need that Sarah witnessed in Port-au-Prince, it was, perhaps counterintuitively, her identity as a foreigner and her day-to-day interactions with national staff that caused her the most frustration and pain. She found camaraderie in web-based offerings such as expat aid worker blogs, which reflected the banal, exasperating, and distressing realities of her experience while also mocking it. They captured, and parodied, the less-glamorous side of aid worker life which rarely appears in official accounts. This suggests that for expat employees of aid organizations, as well as for so-called aid beneficiaries, "fictional

accounts of development can sometimes reveal different sides to the experience of development and may sometimes even do a ‘better’ job of conveying the complexities of development than research-based accounts” (Lewis et al. 2005: 7).

At the same time, as with any group or tribe, criticism from outside is less easy to bear than criticism from within. While deeply conflicted about her own role, both professionally and personally, in Haiti, and critical of the aid apparatus and aid culture, Sarah was defensive when the criticism came from outside that world.

It sucks, but you know what? It’s like, what would they rather we do? Okay, so: you do it better. You know? Okay, if it’s fucked the way it is, well, do it better! Run an organization better! Run an organization and find funding! And manage to run the organization, not lose millions of dollars to fraud, not have these huge issues with staffing, be able to get yourself from one place to another without using a big white SUV – these things are challenges that lots of NGOs are not doing well in addressing. But there are reasons why they aren’t doing very well. And... I am certainly one of the most critical of aid culture. But also from within, it’s very different when you’re in there and you’re aware of the pressures and the difficulties.

No one in aid thinks it’s all fabulous. None of us thinks that it’s this brilliant... that development and everything is going really fabulously here and that there’s nothing to criticize. We all know that’s not the case. It’s just that... like any other industry – and it is an industry – we’re doing the best we can with what we’ve got. That doesn’t mean at all that we don’t have a responsibility to do it better, and I’m extremely angry about just the basic lack of common sense around a lot of the work that we do, and a lot of the work that I see other people doing, but I sort of think that comes to – it really comes down to individuals. These organizations are made up of individuals.

Haitians are deeply aware of the existence and patterns of foreign aid worker culture — the perceived luxury and privilege in which aid workers live contributes to Haitians’ suspicion and skepticism about the international community's intent. Widely and for years, they have jokingly referred to MINUSTAH as TOURISTAH, a reference to the luxury in which members of the UN mission are perceived to live. At Kanaval in 2012 in Jacmel, some people dressed mockingly as papier-mâché peacekeepers: white-skinned with blue eyes, with wide grins on their

faces, Hawaiian shirts, and "TOURISTA" emblazed on their blue helmets.



Figure 27: TOURISTA, Jacmel, February 2012  
Photograph © Alexis Erkert (used with permission)

The earthquake was a largely urban disaster – perhaps the most massive and devastating disaster to strike a major city, and indeed, its severity, from staggering death counts to the physical destruction of the city and its infrastructure, was due to the combination of a high population and unchecked, unregulated urban growth. As such, it engendered a particularly urban form of aid and aidworker lifestyle. While expat aidworkers across contexts live a privileged existence relative to their “beneficiaries” in terms of amenities and security, aid workers in rural settings (in Haiti and elsewhere) do not have regular access to the restaurants, swimming pools, fancy grocery stores, and discothèques that those in Port-au-Prince enjoy. In a setting like Port-au-Prince, the social, economic, and experiential difference between aid provider and aid recipient was all the more pronounced. The earthquake hit a city that was already highly stratified (both between the Haitian elite and the majority of Haitian people and between expatriates and the majority of Haitian people), which already had a large number of foreign organizations and aid workers, and which therefore already had the kinds of exclusive

establishments and services to which only the relatively wealthy can gain entry. In other words, the economic inequality, poverty, deep social divisions, and legacy of foreign intervention that have long characterized Port-au-Prince – those very social and historical factors which made the January 12 earthquake the terrible disaster it was – also gave rise to the ambience in which a comparatively extravagant expatriate lifestyle was possible.

Jean explains that the Haitian fixation on foreign aid workers' daily lifeways is not merely a matter of aesthetics, envy, or humor, but of priorities and accountability. The privileged ways in which foreigners live in Port-au-Prince give Haitian people the impression that they have not come to offer true aid, but to enrich themselves.

Now, if you're taking people to work in an NGO, you can't say they are volunteers, they deserve to be paid. But these people, the vast majority of them, when they come, they lead a life of luxury! You start thinking that these are people who have come to be tourists! They are people who have come to be tourists, they are not people who have come to help people. Because the people who come to help, they have a sense of responsibility that they have come to help you. When they come to help you and they see you haven't eaten, they bring food for you, they'll give you food. When they come to help you and they see you don't have anywhere to sleep, or that where you're sleeping isn't any good, well, they'll give you a place to sleep, or they'll improve the place you're sleeping. And even if they can't give you everything you need, they'll give you a little something anyway, so you can sleep. But for me, I see that this is the contrary. It's the contrary.

*Nadia, Maïs Gaté 2: February 2012*

Nadia's life, like that of so many young, poor Haitian people, was characterized by fluidity and impermanence. "I was born — I was born here," she began, as she sprawled on her stomach on a sheet on the floor of her tent, doodling blue ballpoint lips on President Martelly and former President Aristide. "I was born in Delmas 30. My mama lived in Delmas 30, but I was born at the General Hospital. I was baptized at l'Eglise St Yves. When I was five years old, my mother took me to go live *andeyò*, in the countryside." Nadia's family — like Melise's and



Celita's, from the previous section — hailed from rural Grand-Anse.

I came back here when I was sixteen years old. At sixteen years old, I was living with my papa. I came to live with my papa. After that, in 2008, I left my father's house and went to live at the house of an aunt, and while I was living at my aunt's house I met a guy, and I had a child. My child was little. So I went to go live with my mama. My mama came to get me, and so I went andeyò. I spent eleven months andeyò. So at the time of January 12, I was andeyò. Samuel, my boyfriend, was here. But I didn't know him yet. I didn't know him. At that time I was still with the father of my child. Nothing happened in my presence. Because when January 12 happened, I wasn't here. I didn't see anything. I watched it on television. After I came back, I saw how the buildings were broken. But I didn't see anyone who died. It's just on television that I saw them. It's just when I came back, there was a bad scent, a bad odor.

While I was andeyò, my mother got sick. I came back here with her. That was in December 2010. I came back here with her, she spent ten months here with me. They said it was tuberculosis. After ten months, she left, I took her home, and after that I came back here. I went to the house of a cousin of mine. She stays in Cité Soleil. I didn't spend long there, no. I didn't spend long in Cité Soleil. I just got here, I spent two days, and after that I went up and lived in Delmas 31. While I was in Delmas 31 at another cousin's house, I met Samuel, who had me come stay with him here. I met him in 2011. And when I met him, he had me come stay here with him. That's what made me come stay around here, in the camp.

Where I was, with my cousin, I was kay moun [in someone else's house]. I wasn't comfortable. When you're in someone else's house, it's like you're staying with [*rete ak*] that person [like a restavèk]. And Samuel, he was here in the camp by himself. His house was destroyed on January 12. They took him to Saint-Domingue, he was too broken himself. All his things are still under the rubble. Anyway, sometimes when the Red Cross comes by, he's not here. That's why he's still here, in the camp, because he wasn't here when they were doing, coming by to remove the people, he wasn't here, because he comes back from work good and late, and people tell him afterward the Red Cross came by. And so at the time I was kay moun, and Samuel told me as he doesn't yet have money to rent a place, I should come here and stay here with him, so that when the Red Cross comes by, for them to find me here so they don't find it empty.

I met Nadia the first day I went to observe the Red Cross's removal of the camp at Maïs Gaté 2. In fact, Mathieu had encouraged me to go. "Go and find out what message they are telling people," he had said. "Are they threatening them?"

In February 2012, the Red Cross began to “decongest” the camps it administered in the

area of Port-au-Prince called Maïs Gaté (Spoiled Corn). Past the brasserie where Prestige beer and Couronne soda are produced, the roundabout dominated by Aristide's Trois Mains statue (which features three enormous hands supporting a globe, on which Haiti is almost comically outsized), onto the dusty industrial thoroughfare that leads to Toussaint Louverture International Airport, lie the camps: Maïs Gaté 1 and Maïs Gaté 2. Maïs Gaté 2 is more on the main road, and parallel to the airport's runway. An eerie assemblage of billboards floats above the tents: Fluorescent-colored Tampico "juice." CAM money transfers, with the sweet clean faces of children receiving money from their relatives *lòt bò dlo*. A public service billboard by the Ministry of Public Works featuring their imaginary spokesman, *Bòs Pyè*, showing people not to use crumbling, breakable cement blocks to build their anti-seismic homes. A Delta Airlines advertisement, with an aerial view of the Statue of Liberty reigning majestically over New York City.



Figure 28 and Figure 29: Maïs Gaté 2, December 2010

For two years, Maïs Gaté 2 was densely packed. The tents came right up to the road, and it appeared impenetrable, like a sea of blue, white, and grey plastic. The Red Cross administered the removals in stages; the camp is decongested incrementally and thins out. Patches of dry, grassless dirt appeared between the tents, and grew wider, so that by mid-February 2012, Maïs

Gaté 2 resembled not so much a camp as a scattering of tents on a barren field. It was clear where the tents had been – square-shaped outlines in the dirt, discarded prelas and bits of things, trash and the remnants of the materiality of everyday life.



Figure 30: Where a tent once was  
Maïs Gaté 2, February 2012



Figure 31: One of few remaining  
ShelterBoxes at Maïs Gaté 2,  
surrounded by empty spots where tents  
had stood prior to “decongestion.”  
February 2012.

Closer to the airport, at Maïs Gaté 1, the government planted flowers in time for a three-hour visit from the Brazilian president, Dilma Roussef. There were posters through the city, in Creole and Portuguese: “Welcome, Dilma! This is Your Home!” The soil where they planted the flowers looks dark, soft, and recent.

A man named Dany picked through the broken remains of others' tents, scavenging for bits of tarp. He appeared to be in his fifties, with graying hair and nostril hair, with an intelligent and kind face, but his body was hard and muscular — at once aged and honed by hard work and difficulty. He didn't live at Maïs Gaté, he said; he had just come here to pick through the

remnants of the camp removal. Originally from the countryside, he lived in a camp in Cité Soleil — which he automatically refers to as "Simone." That meant he had been there a long time — since the days when it was a worker city named after Duvalier's wife. His house was destroyed in the earthquake. "Yes, I lost a little girl, *yon demwazèl*, fourteen years old."

He was scavenging for materials he might use to build his new home out in Titanyen. "They haven't come to move us yet," he said, "so they money isn't in my hands yet, for me to move out of the camp." But he said he's already got the deed to the land, that he laid claim to it early on. "I got it for free from the state, and paid 250 gourdes for the title."

"But what are you going to do out there in the desert, without a single tree?"

"I'll plant corn and peas," he replied. "Maybe get a few goats."

"But there's no water..."

"Maybe they'll provide us with water," Dany said, hopefully.

I liked Dany instantly; he was a kind, dignified, thoughtful man and I wanted to talk with him more. But then, a thin, good-looking young man with distressed blue jeans, shiny red sneakers and a smug, ingratiating smile approached through the remains of the camp. "Hi. Do you know Katie?" he asked me.

"No."

"She's from Colorado," he stated.

"I don't know every *blan*," I replied.

"Do you know Anna?"

"No."

"She's from Canada. I thought you were Anna at first."

"I don't know her. I'm Laura," I said, extending a hand.

“Oh, I have a very beautiful name,” the young man informed me. “It's a name from the Bible. It's the guy who brought all the bones back to life. Who was that?”

I said I didn't know.

“Ezekiel,” he said confidently.

“And can you raise the dead?” I asked, trying to play along.

“And bring back everyone from the earthquake!” said Dany, and they laughed in a way that wasn't funny at all, but just absurd.

Ezekiel invited us back to his tent, talking almost nonstop as we walk. “This is a diamond-studded day, the day I met you,” he said. He tells us his dream is to become a singer or to form an “organization.”

“Can you sing?” I asked.

He was noncommittal about that, and instead talked about his imaginary organization. He never stopped smiling. “My organization is not going to be like the other organizations and NGOs. We're not going to out asking for funds. When people see what we're doing, they'll *give* us funds! We'll make a network of all the different organizations, so they can all work together!”

Ezekiel said all of this with unflappable cheer, as though he were the first person ever to think of it, as though there were no way his idea could fail. But his vision revealed a lack of creativity. Ezekiel's professed dream of forming an NGO – whether that was what he really wanted, or simply what he assumed a *blan* like me wants to hear – shows how limited, how bound by development lingo and the structures and expectations of the aid economy, the imagination of ordinary Haitians has become. It was as predictable and implausible a dream as wanting to be a singer when you cannot sing.

Dany rolled his eyes. “I know Haitians,” he said. “And nobody does this unless they're

hoping to get something for themselves.”

“No, no, this is different!” Ezekiel assured us. He showed us scars on his right hand, from the quake. “And when I was under the cement,” he intoned, “I told God, if you get me out of here, I will dedicate my life to something! I will start an organization!”

We arrived at Ezekiel's tent. It was a ShelterBox, a relatively spacious white tent created for post-disaster situations and distributed by relief groups.



Figure 32: Nadia and Ezekiel's ShelterBox, with stick figure. February 2012

Like all the still-standing tents, it had a stick figure with a smiley face spray-painted on it by the Red Cross agents, who had come by to verify that the tents are occupied. Ezekiel introduced us to his girlfriend, Nadia, and told us to sit down. I sat, but Dany hesitated, and it became clear that this was one of those moments that distinguishes the poor from the very poor.

“You too,” Ezekiel told Dany, and he sat gratefully.

Nadia sold hardboiled eggs with hot sauce over by one of the factories, the industrial park, in the mornings, where the workers bought their breakfast. She sat outside the gates with her big bowl. Now it was later in the day, so these were the leftovers. There were yellow-yolked

*ze peyi*, Haitian eggs, which are more expensive and better tasting, and paler Dominican eggs as well. They taste good with spicy, salty, acidic sauce. Nadia and Ezekiel bought some bags of water for us to drink. I tried offering her a little money, but she wouldn't accept it. Her little boy, two and a half, lay in her lap, asleep, while she braided his hair into cornrows.

Dany left then, to continue picking through the remains of the uprooted camp. "You've made me so happy, you don't understand. I'm going to be happy all day," he told me. He is a gentleman. His words were meant to be a compliment but instead it just felt depressing, that having a normal, friendly interaction with a foreigner was such an exceptional event. He thanked Nadia, then left with his scavenged prela.

Ezekiel and Nadia had only been together for less than a month; she only moved into the camp in January 2012. Before that, Ezekiel was with another woman. "She was jealous. She wouldn't even let me talk to other women. And I told her no other woman could interest me. I told her I don't even see other women when I'm with her. The only thing that could make me see another woman is if she had something extra. Like all women have two eyes, two nostrils, two breasts. But if a woman had three breasts, that would be something!" Then he spoke of seeing something on TV – a woman with "two heads and one pussy."

Ezekiel talked and talked, posturing and boasting. Nadia sat silently.

"Do you know Nicholas?" asked Ezekiel, trying again. "Nicholas, who works for the Red Cross? He might give me a job."

"I've heard of him, yes," I replied, vaguely.

I kept in touch with Nadia, and returned one day when Ezekiel wasn't there, to this camp directly across the street from the Red Cross headquarters. As I washed my dusty feet with soap

and water at the flap of their ShelterBox, Nadia told me Ezekiel had bought that ShelterBox for about \$50 US from someone who had managed to get two from an NGO. Later, as we peeled green plantains and boiled them outside the tent flap, Nadia explained in greater detail the informal economy of tents, and how she believed relocation programs could be manipulated by the supposed beneficiaries.

Nadia said that people had been setting up extra, unnecessary tents — phantom tents, Potemkin tents — in order to make more money during camp removal. "The Red Cross came and found *magouj* [corruption]. Like, people who have several tents — all the money is just going to one person, and then there are people who don't get anything. So the Red Cross pressured people to leave the camp. They finished eliminating those people. And when the people left and went to the Red Cross, the Red Cross said no, a single person can't make everyone lose the money, when people don't even have the means to go rent a house. And the people who were doing *magouj*, the Red Cross broke those tents. People who had two tents, they broke one. And then they agreed to give the rest of the people money."

I asked Nadia, "Is the Red Cross keeping tabs on the *magouj*?"

"Yes, they keep track of it, *wi*," Nadia replied. "That's why they've marked the tents, so they can count them. They keep track of how many tents there are. If they come by and find more, they'll break down the extra ones. When they come they talk to you, they say if you put up another tent, they'll eliminate the rest of the people, right? They won't give everyone else their money."

"Are there people in this camp who have houses?" I asked.

"Bon, I think if there were people who had houses, among these people who remain, they wouldn't still be here. They would have left already, They would have rented their tent to



someone else. They wouldn't have stayed. The ones who have stayed, they don't have houses."

This was a whole new aspect of the tent economy for me. "Wait," I said, "there are people who rent tents?"

"Yes, that's what I told you, right?" said Nadia. "If they had another house, they would rent out this tent to other people, and they would get money from that person, and they would go to their house. But if they're here every day, they sleep here — they don't have another house."

"But," I protested, "if they're giving money — if the Red Cross is giving money — who will get it? The person who's the owner of the tent, or the person renting it?"

Nadia looked at me as though what I was asking was rather foolish. "The owner of the tent," she said patiently, "because he's the one who put it up."

"But that person has a house."

Nadia explained. "The owner knows the day — he'll still know, he'll still be in the area, to know when the Red Cross comes by. He'll know. It's he who'll get the money. It's only if he's sold the tent. If he sells it to you, then you'll get the money that the Red Cross is giving. But if he doesn't sell it, he's renting it, he can still take the money."

Discussing these dimensions of the housing situation is politically incorrect; it has been called "toxic rhetoric." Someone on a listserv I subscribe to called it "the myth of lazy Haitians waiting around for stuff." The purpose of telling Nadia's story is not to blame the savvy poor, to impugn those clever camp residents who are profiting where they can. They are simply participating strategically in the aid economy that they are forced to live in. In fact, they are innovative and ingenious in how they function within the aid economy— not lazy at all. They are the embodiment of that ubiquitous Haitian word *degaje* — they are *getting by*.

For all that camp residents like Nadia observe, report or believe that other Port-au-Prince

residents are manipulating the aid system for their benefit, the Camp Coordination and Camp Management cluster itself reported that as of the third anniversary of the earthquake, only one quarter of people who left the camps had done so because of formal, compensated relocation programs (CCCM 2013). This disconnect says much about the conditions of the camps (often deplorable and ultimately intolerable and untenable), conditions of relocation (sometimes via forced eviction, sometimes voluntarily but without assistance from state and non-governmental authorities), and local strategies of survival and community formation that fall outside the macro purview and vision of the so-called international community (the ways in which people rely upon family, nonbiological family, neighbors, countrymen and women originally from the same rural areas, patrons, and employers for money, resources, shelter, and counsel). It says as much, however, about how Haitians view themselves. As I observed, time and time again, over my three years of fieldwork, Haitian people were often merciless, accusatory, and unforgiving of Haitian people, far more likely than foreigners to deride them as cheaters, criminals, and sinners.

In March 2012, I was on a small Tortug'Air flight from Port-au-Prince to Cap-Haïtien. As we ascended, I happened to look out the airplane window and was astonished to see Maïs Gaté from above: a patchwork of bare dirt, each square the place where a tent, a home, a makeshift household had stood, in some cases for more than two years.



Figure 33: An image of absence: Maïs Gaté 2, seen from above, March 2012, less than two weeks after final “decongestion” of the camp. Each bare square represents the place a tent once stood.

It had been less than two weeks since I had sat in Nadia’s ShelterBox as she braided her little boy’s hair and doodled in her old schoolbooks. From the air, the terrain looked dry and small and unimportant. I later sent the image to Anaïs, the French UNDP worker who had, by then, been gone from Haiti for two years. She replied with a series of astonished exclamation points, and then elaborated. The grammatical errors in her usually superb English underscore Anaïs’s emotions. “I wonder what’s more disturbing. That they were there but are no more as if only these barren patches of land can now testify from a common disaster (“did it really or ever happened?”) or the other questions the picture generates (“where are they?” “are they in a better place now?”)... Surreal. The grass will grow back...”

### *Everyday Life in an Aid Economy*

For many poor Haitians, the NGOs *are* the system, they *are* the economy: a source of money, a source of employment, a source of possibility. Providing both aid and jobs (from high-ranking to menial), they not only replace the state and undermine its sovereignty, as many

scholars, writers and researchers have written (Buss 2008, Schuller 2010, Katz 2013), they also replace more traditional forms of employment. For Guerline, waiting for nearly two years at the gate of the Red Cross headquarters, hoping to get a job, the line between receiving aid and receiving employment was thin. When I asked Guerline how she viewed the presence of NGOs — a term she was not familiar with, so I rephrased it as "organizations" and "the international community" — she was even-handed, citing both the work she's observed, and the corruption she hears about. "I see the NGOs working. They do what they can do. You understand? They do what they can do. The proverb says, "extend your hand, as far as it can go, no further" [*lonje men w kote w ka rive*]. They do good work. But, there's a thing, there's a thing. You see when they send things, it's not everyone that participates. They give it to their own people instead [*se ak moun pa l yo fèt*]. You understand what I am telling you? Like — the example of the Red Cross. It's a huge organization. It's a huge NGO<sup>20</sup>, money is coming in, coming in, coming in. And there are a lot of people inside the Red Cross who know that those of us outside need work. But there is not a single person inside who intervenes on our behalf!"

Guerline explained how she tried, over and over, to get a job inside the ICRC base. "I called the Red Cross's number, I called them, I talked with them, I told them I needed work and so on, I said 'in case you can't give me work, just give me a little money, so I can get by [*degaje m*].' They said they'd call me, but they didn't. And they have the ability to help a lot of people. There's money that comes in for that. You understand, Lolo? There's money that comes in for that, they say the money's in their hands."

Guerline's story is an illustration of the official and unofficial ways things work in Port-au-Prince's aid economy – or, perhaps more accurately, the way things are supposed to work, the way things actually work, and the way things are rumored to work. These categories are not

---

<sup>20</sup>Technically the Red Cross is not an NGO, but Guerline did not differentiate.

always clear-cut. According to someone like the Red Cross security officer, the official way to get a job was to submit one's c.v. for a posted position and to be selected fairly from among all the applicants. People like Guerline, those who stood for months or years in hopes of getting employment on the base, knew this ritual very well: they all held manila envelopes containing their vitae, certificates, diplomas, and other relevant or irrelevant personal documents. But they also believed that this was just part of the performance, for the Red Cross, like any other organization or business, was more likely to choose a “*moun pa*” – an insider, someone already connected.

Reflecting on the years she spent queued up in front the Red Cross office, Guerline passed me the thermos of macaroni and leaned her chin into her hand.

If I were in a camp, I never would have wasted time like this. I would have already gotten far in my business. You understand? The money would already be in my hands. Not only would I be in business, but there are other things I need to do, and I would have done them. They help people in that sense a lot, NGOs, the ones that engaged in that. Because they gave people money. You understand? There are a lot of people who would come to the meetings; they say that that money did a lot for them. That money did a lot. You'd be waiting, and then they call you and tell you to go to the bank...and they give you your money. There are a lot of people — If they had known it would be that way, they would have lived in a camp. They would have been in a camp, so they could participate. In the end, I regret it. If I'd known it would be that way, I would have found a way to be in a camp.

Guerline's imagined choice — to live in a camp for the sake of financial gain – did not seem unethical to her. Her need and desperation were real, and she considered herself no less deserving than the people in the camps who were getting \$500 to relocate. In a country where foreign activists and small, politically-minded activist groups build their positions on the declaration *Nou Bouke Viv Anba Tant!* [We Are Sick and Tired of Living Under Tents!], people like Guerline wonder if they wouldn't have been better off living in the right kind of camp: her suffering and deprivation public, visible, and compensated (James 2004, 2010), instead of lived

out in mundane fashion in a small cement house on this dusty hillside above the city, hidden from humanitarian view.

*Jean: The Possibilities and Dismay of “National Staff”*

The story of Jean's sporadic employment with MSF-Holland demonstrates the uneasy relationships between national and international staff, and between middle-ranking and lower-ranking national staff, and the uncertainty that comes with achieving a humble job within an NGO. Jean — who never achieved his youthful dream of becoming a lawyer, who never made a stable living as an electrician, and who now, after his sister Melise's death, found himself partly responsible for his nieces — worked cleaning up cholera patients at one of the Cholera Treatment Centers (CTC). The work was intense, both emotionally and physically, and potentially dangerous. It involved daily, intimate contact with massive quantities of cholera-laden watery diarrhea. At first, Jean was hesitant about taking the job, and frightened — as was the whole family. He spent the day disinfecting cholera patients and the treatment center. "When he'd blow his nose, it would come out Clorox," Claudine remembered. She refused to wash his clothes if he went to work at the CTC, because she was afraid of catching the disease. She became paranoid, and bent over with her head between her knees every time she went to the latrine to make sure that "rice water" diarrhea wasn't coming out. But MSF paid sixty-seven gourdes an hour — a substantial wage in a country where the newly-mandated minimum wage was only 200 gourdes a day. Jean took the job, in November 2010, and came home exhausted in the evening (or in the morning, when he worked overnight), smelling strongly of bleach. He worked at a job that was dangerous, difficult, and demeaning, until one day in February 2011, they told him not to come back.

We spent three months, working — we worked for three months — with a disease that is extremely strange. We worked — but they never called to tell us they'd give us employment for a week or even two days, no? That means you might come to work today, and then tomorrow they can decide not to call you to come work anymore. They'd take someone else to work instead. Whenever they do that, they'll call you at home and tell you you don't need to come in. One day you can go work and make 67 gourdes per hour, and then you go home, and nothing is done for you at home — like if for example you are coming from the CTC, you could bring that disease home on your clothes, and then those people in your home are supposed to go lie down in that same center if they get sick, just like anyone else who gets cholera in the street. Nothing was done for them. If you were to ask me why I kept on doing it, I would say, "Well, after January 12 there was nothing else to do." Finally, you accept it. You end up living in a condition, and you accept it.

They finally laid me off. I suspect that they saw that if we spent three months working there, and they never give us a contract, perhaps one day we can claim it wasn't fair, and so they laid us off [*mete nou atè*] as they wished to. That means, they decided not to put us to work anymore. They took other people instead. They decided it was time for us to go.

One day, I went to work, and — I was working on Tuesday, all day, I spent the day there. And they announced there was a meeting, When we arrived at the meeting, they told us this meeting was for people who had not yet been [at MSF] for three months, and they suspected that the number of cholera cases was going to go down, and so the people who had been there a long time would stay, but the people who haven't been there for three months yet... they said "people who have been here for 90 days, you've been here for 3 months, this meeting isn't for you. But people who don't yet have three months here, you have to stay and attend the meeting." At the meeting, they said there were too many people now, they didn't need all those people. They were going to remove some of them. And so on Tuesday I was at the meeting, and on Thursday I went to work, and I went to work on Friday evening. Friday evening, when I went to work, they told me that there was a meeting that had happened on Wednesday, and even if people had been there for three months, they had to stay and attend that meeting. If you didn't attend that meeting, when they call you to come sign, and you aren't there, they'll remove you. And whenever they need you again, they can call you again. And I said "How can that be, that whenever they need you, they can call you again?" and they said, "Yes! Whenever they need you, they can call you, because, there are too many employees."

And I said, "But don't forget, we've been here a long time! We're already employees. We are the ones who opened these doors, for the cholera centers to start working. You can't just kick us out like that!" They said, "No, that's how it is. It's a rule. It's a rule, that's how they do it."

I said, "Well."

It was the blans who held the meetings, but the blans gave the Haitians the job of kicking the Haitians out. When they came to kick you out, it wasn't a blan who came and told you you were being kicked out. It was some Haitian they sent to tell you you'd been kicked out. The blan won't come to you and kick you out. When you go looking for a blan, the blan will tell you, "No, no, we don't know anything about that. Go talk to the Haitian who is in charge of you." That's how things are. The blan are always passing the buck....

After that, when cholera went back up, I was sitting here waiting for them to call me to work. They didn't call me. They didn't call us. The people who are the supervisors, the *Haitians* [on that word, he sneered ], they decided to call their little brothers, their little sisters. They called their little family. But us, the people who used to work there, they didn't call us.

For Jean, nothing is as it seems, and the NGO should not be trusted. The MSF administration claims that the lay-offs are due to the fact that they do not need as many CTC workers now that the number of cholera cases are decreasing — but the employees suspect that it's because they do not want any of them to acquire seniority. More damningly, when cholera rates increase, and MSF needs employees again, their Haitian middlemen do not call the former workers, as they were supposed to, but rather gave jobs to their own friends and relatives.

In the more than two years that Guerline spent waiting outside the Red Cross base camp for the job that never came, she saw a lot. She was there on the days that the residents of the Red Cross-administered camps came to demand their relocation money. And she was there when the people like her, who queued up every day in hopes of getting jobs but never received them, began to grow discontented. One day in the summer of 2012, an email circulated among the international Red Cross delegates, from the head of security – Nicholas, the very man who Nadia's boyfriend, Ezekiel, had believed might give him a job.

Be aware that again tensions are running very high with the population of avenue Mais Gate. Today's complaints are that RC/RC vehicles are making all the dust, Jobs are applied for, but never a [*sic*] offer. Jobs are all pre-arranged with HRC



staff. Again, signs and placards have been made, with quotes such as corruption HRC, Corruption Red Cross. Threats of stone throwing and more have been made 30 minutes ago at the gate. Be aware at the gate, make sure your vehicle windows are closed (possibility of urine being thrown)

He got some things right: the frustration that the Red Cross wasn't giving jobs to people who needed them, the widespread belief that jobs could only be gotten through nepotism and personal connections. He got some things wrong: these weren't just the "population of avenue Mais Gate." He did not account for people like Guerline, who took two taptaps every day just to wait in the sun. And ultimately, the focus of the email was on the security and comfort of the delegates, rather than addressing the root causes of the dissatisfaction. If Haitians largely viewed foreign NGO workers as profiting off their misery without giving much back, foreign NGO workers largely viewed Haitians as an unruly, ungrateful, and unpredictable mass. Rumors and misperception cut both ways, and are exacerbated by distance. And the distance through the bulletproof window of an SUV is more than it seems.

I asked Guerline about what it was like, standing in front of the Red Cross for months and months.

It was a hard situation. You wake up early — you see how far away I live — I'd wake up early. You wake up early, to look for life. You wake up early, go in front of the Red Cross. You spend the day without eating, you don't eat, the dust beats you — there was a dust in front of that gate, in the sun — until [the head of security] thought of us and built a little shelter of sheet metal.

This was the same head of security who had sent the email about the rocks and the urine-throwing, the email that had made so many of the international delegates giggle and roll their eyes. I was surprised that Guerline thought highly of him, but as it turns out, he was the only *blan* on the inside with whom she had any contact at all. And if it wasn't in his power to give her a job, he apparently did what he could in building a little shelter for her and the other regulars — a small if inadequate human act.

The situation was very hard. Spending the day without eating, you go like that, you spend the whole day, you leave at 4 or 5, and tomorrow morning, you're back in the same place, the same thing again. The situation was really hard. Impossible. They say that Haitians — Haitians know how to suffer. It's true — Haitians are suffering.

Guerline laughed humorlessly.

It was always the same people, waiting for jobs. There were twenty, twenty-something. Sometimes they'd get discouraged, come one day, but not come the next. But me, I would *kenbe kif-kif* [hold on tight-tight, keep coming no matter what]. I would *kenbe kif-kif*, because the day I don't come, it might be the day something would happen. That's what made me always *kenbe kif-kif*. There were people who knew I was outside, they'd pass by and encourage me, they'd say "you don't need to be sad, you always come, Bondyè will do something for you."

Despite her diligence and her faith, and the faith of her friends and acquaintances who stopped to support her, Guerline never did get that job. Neither did a lot of other people, as time went on. If anything, jobs became scarcer, as people who worked in low-ranking jobs (such as cleaning staff) were laid off after a few months. I asked if she ever saw *dezòd* — unrest — among the people waiting for jobs. Guerline confirmed. "There was a lot of *dezòd*, even the deaf-mutes came to ask for jobs, they'd write in English on a sign, stand there, and when the cars would come by, they'd stand like this." She pantomimed a deaf-mute shoving a placard aggressively in my face. "Yes. Lots of *dezòd*, demonstrations, put out burning tires, so that when the cars were passing through, they would threaten the Red Cross cars. They threw some rocks. They'd break the windows, everything. There was a big fat guy (*yon gwo fat*) who used to ask for a job. One time one the cars was coming through, he sat in front of the cars, in front of the street, so the cars couldn't get through."

But the most intriguing thing was Guerline's description of the Red Cross's response to this unrest — that same unrest that had compelled the head of security to send his email. According to Guerline, this was the reaction.

Then they'd call out human resources to speak to us outside, to tell us they'd give us jobs. Lies! They never did anything for us. They said that so we wouldn't make trouble. They said "Ask for jobs in silence" [*mande djòb an silans*]. As long as we were silent... They said we were making so much trouble, the Red Cross went ahead and called the police. They beat up several of the guys outside.

Despite the violent institutional response to their discontentment — which manifested after almost two years of hungry, hot, dusty jobless waiting — Guerline reserved most of her criticism not for the Red Cross itself, but for the Haitians within it. According to Guerline, the biggest problems were nepotism and corruption, for which she blamed her compatriots. "What's most broken inside the Red Cross is that it's Haitians in charge. It's Haitians that are passing along everything to the blan." She gave an example she had heard, of a Haitian in the Red Cross who had removed a job applicant's c.v. and put in his friend's instead. It's all about who you know. It's all about who you know."

Guerline explained that it was the perception of corruption [*magouj*] and favoritism, mixed with desperation, that drove people to demonstrate. "It's exactly because of the *magouj* that they know exists they were riled up. They've got all these problems up their asses, they have wives, they have children, they aren't working. There are some who say they get up early, they leave, they go out, and when they get home their wives are waiting for them with their children, waiting for them to bring something home, and they've got nothing. That's what most riles them up. When you see they've spent all that time outside, they can't work, and then the Red Cross calls someone else right in their faces, let them go in to go work, that's what most riles them up to make trouble, to start protesting. That's what riles them up.

"When I saw that that's how it was, I saw I was wasting my time, I wasn't getting anywhere." Guerline sighed. It was then, after more than two years, that she finally stopped waiting in front of the Red Cross.

The speakers do not directly blame the foreigners who work for the NGOs (the Samaritan's Purse volunteers who are giving out the rations, the *blans* working for MSF for a few months at a time, the people inside the Red Cross base making the hiring decisions). The foreigners are the source of the aid or the employment, but that aid or employment is mediated by, or impeded by, avaricious Haitian intermediaries who are (in the speakers' estimation) out to make a little extra money or get jobs for their friends and family.

*Chrismène, April 2012*

The spring of 2012 saw the most dramatic camp “decongestions.” By April, IOM had already cleared the upper part of the Champ-de-Mars, and the lower part, including the Place des Artistes where Chrismène was living, was slated to be evicted soon.

“The tents over there, on the other side of the Champ-de-Mars, who broke them down?” I asked.

“The other tents? Themselves — people in the camp!” Chrismène replied. “When they've finished paying for houses for them, IOM gives them money to leave the plaza and break down the house. They give you two days to break it down. If you don't break it down, the IOM agents come and break it.

Time had passed since we'd last spoken at length. Miley the puppy had grown bigger and less cute, and started snapping at strangers — until one day someone stole her. One day I was there, sitting on the bed and chatting with Chrismène and her neighbors and eating some boiled plantains cooked with small bits of fish when gunshots rang out close by. I dropped to the dirt floor instinctively, my heart pounding, but everyone else ran out of the tent to see what was going on, more curious than afraid.

“Just a thief,” they reported back, and laughed at me. “The police shot after him but didn’t get him.”

When Chrismène and I sat down to talk, she asked several of her neighbors to leave her tent, where they had gathered to watch a blurry soccer game on her pèpè TV. One of the last to leave is a huge bear of a man, who also lives on the Champ-de-Mars camp and who works as a security guard for JP/HRO, the organization that Sean Penn founded after the earthquake. He has a kind, dimpled smile and massive arms and hands. In the twilight of the lace curtain hanging over Chrismène's sheet metal door, he picks up a one-year-old girl seated securely in one of his palms, and lifts her up to the ceiling, pumping her up and down. She squeals and claps her chubby hands with delight. Another neighbor woman comes in: “Ti sè!” she exclaims to Chrismène. “Little sister!”

“*Cheri!*” Lovely greets her.

“Where are my sandals? Have you seen them?”

The baby’s aunt comes to get her. “Bye! Bye!” she says. “Give them a little kiss,” her aunt instructs her, and she toddles over to Chrismène and me to give us each a loud, sloppy wet kiss on the cheek.

Chrismène was living with three friends together in the shack on the Champ-de-Mars. By the time the decongestion began, Rosemonde and her family had already moved out of the camp, but they retained their tent near Chrismène's place, and one or more of Rosemonde's sons would sleep there, so that they would still get their relocation money if the IOM agents checked. It was \$500 for a year's rent – the standard relocation sum that the various organizations were disbursing.

“When you leave this house, will you go with your friends?” I asked Chrismène.

“Nnn...no. Everyone will go their way. I'll be alone. When I leave the Champ-de-Mars? Alone.”

“And... where would you like to go, when you leave the Chanmas?”

“No — well, you know, IOM is going to rent houses for us?” she asked. “I went to look for a house in Carrefour-Feuilles. I didn't find any. Now I'm going to go look for one in Christ-Roi.”

Outside, as ever, music was playing on the Champ-de-Mars. Rihanna was singing: *Want you to make me feel like I'm the only girl in the world, like I'm the only one that you'll ever love...*

“Since when has IOM been telling you to leave the camp?” I asked.

“They came by and told us that... that must have been two weeks ago, since they came to tell us that. They came and held a meeting for us, after that — they had a meeting for us a Monday, and on Wednesday they came by and told everyone to look for houses.”

“And those were... agents?”

“Yes, IOM agents. Haitian agents. They explained that everyone should go look for houses, and once we've found a house, we should go register at the IOM office. There's an IOM office on the Chanmas. They say once you've found a house, you go register. Because we already have IOM cards. With that IOM card, we go and register, we say we've found a house, and then they'll give us an appointment, for them to go meet the owner of the house with them. When they arrive at the owner of the house, they'll take the electoral card of the owner of the house, for the owner of the house to sign that they will give us the house one day, and they'll give them a check to change at Sogebank.”

“So — yesterday, how did you find the house? The house you found in Christ-Roi?”

“I went to look for the house — I found a house, and I went to register at IOM. Once I'd finished registering, they said they'd go look at the house with me on the 11th. They had a bus, that was going to drop us off, it went to pick up people, lots of people - - it wasn't just one person, no — a lot of people in the bus, and in each zone, people would say which zone they were going to, and they went with us.”

Just then, one of Chrismène's neighbors moved the lace curtain aside and stepped in. “What, you turned off the TV?”

“Because we're talking,” Chrismène told him.

The neighbor sat down heavily on the bed. “Man, I'm so discouraged.”

“Because of the housing stuff?” she asked.

“Oh, man. Man. This motherfucker just wrote me a text, said to come to an IOM thing on Rue Chavannes.”

“On Chavannes?” asked Chrismène.

“Oh, I don't know if it's true!” he said. “We'll see!” So much of the re-housing system seemed subject to rumors and hearsay.

“Okay!” said Chrismène. “Let me know!” Her neighbor departed.

One he had left, Chrismène continued to describe her experience looking for a new home. “So then we went to go look at the house. If the house has red paint, that the MTPTC wrote, they won't take it. If it has yellow, too, they won't take it. The house I found had red paint that the MTPTC wrote, so they didn't take it. They told me to look for another house, and they gave me an appointment for the 20th, to go look at the other house.” Houses that had been spray-painted with red by the Ministry of Public Works were those slated for demolition. Yellow paint meant that the house had structural damage but could be repaired. Green paint meant that the

house was undamaged or only had superficial damage.

“Did you know that they wouldn't accept a house with red paint?”

“Yes, they told us that, *wi*?” replied Chrismène.

“So why, why did you...?”

“Because I didn't see it! It's them, the IOM agents, who asked the owner of the house about it, the owner said it was red.”

“Was it very cracked?”

“No, the house is a house that was repaired,” replied Chrismène, trustingly. “They repaired it.”

“Do you think \$500 will be enough?”

“*Wi*...?” replied Chrismène uncertainly. “People won't look for houses that are more than that.”

“What kind of houses can people get for \$500?”

“A single room, *wi*? A single little room, they'll find. Everyone will just find a single room in a house.” She went on. “I have an IOM card. The IOM card, it's with that you go register, with the card...” She took out her IOM identification card and handed it to me. “If IOM comes here and asks — this number you see here, that's on the tent? It's the same one that's on the card.”

“What do you think of IOM's work?”

“I see they're doing good work, but... what I don't like — I don't like how we have to go looking for houses. To go look for houses, because it's not all owners who agree to rent to us. When you go look for a house, you tell the owner that it's IOM that's going to come pay, they don't agree. It's not all who agree. There are some among them who are okay with it, but not all.



They say they're not *nan afè OIM* [into that IOM business]. As soon as you get there and you tell the person, the person has already accepted, they give you the price of the house, you negotiate with them, you give them a price and they accept it, but as soon as you say it's IOM that's going to come pay, they say no.”

“And after one year, after that \$500, what will you do?” I asked Chrismène.

“How will I pay after one year?” she clapped the back of her hand to her palm, the universal Haitian gesture for *I don't know*. Then she smiled: “I'll find a boyfriend to pay!”

“Other people — people who don't have a boyfriend who will pay for them — after one year, after the money gone, what do you imagine they will do?”

“I don't know,” Chrismène said. “There are people talking about that. There are people who don't have anything. There were people, when they went to the IOM meeting, they asked that question. The IOM people — the IOM agents — they said, 'Before the earthquake, was it IOM who was paying for houses for you?’”

“But,” I said, verbalizing a truth that Chrismène already knew, “houses got more expensive after January 12.”

“Yes, houses got more expensive,” she agreed. “And besides that, there are people who used to do business before January 12, but their businesses were destroyed. They don't have money. In the meeting,” Chrismène went on, “they asked what they should do if the owner of the house doesn't want it to be IOM paying. And the agents said they should look for another house. But finding a house isn't easy. You've got to walk all day in the sun, after a house. You can spend however many days looking. As soon as you find a house, you go and tell IOM that, and when they go, they say they don't like that house for you.” Chrismène was exasperated.

“Do you have a document with the rules for looking for a house?” I asked.

“No.”

“Do they give you advice, how to look for a house?” I asked.

“No, they don't give us advice for how to look for a house. They just say, ‘Be careful not to take just any house. These are the houses to take, these are the houses not to take.’”

“If people don't find houses, what will IOM do?” I asked.

“They asked the agents that question. They said, ‘Oh, you'll find one.’” Chrismène laughed.

“They asked the IOM people in the meeting, ‘If someone doesn't find a house, what will IOM do?’ and they said ‘You'll find one.’”

“And if you don't find one?” I asked.

“When it happens, we'll see?” she half-asked, half-mused. “Here's the question I'd like to ask IOM,” Chrismène went on. “If someone never finds a house, what will they do with them? Will that person still remain in the camp? I'd like to know what they'll do.”

“Do you fear that you won't find a house?” I asked.

“No...?” she half-asked. “But I know I've been looking for a house for two weeks, since they told us that.”

## *Scene Two: Beyond the Narrative of “Failure”*

In the past four years, it has become standard and expected to be critical of the post-earthquake aid response. Back at Act One, Scene One – immediately after the earthquake — the discourse was around salvation, the images were of devastation and heroism, the hope was for redemption and fundamental, enduring change. As I have shown, this did not last long. Now, the standard discourse in academia, journalism, and activism is that post-earthquake aid failed absolutely: that billions of dollars were wasted while Haitian people continue to suffer. Indeed, there is much of which to be critical: inefficiency; lack of fiscal accountability; the sidelining of the Haitian government; an ever-shifting population of international aid workers largely separated and out of touch with the people they are supposed to help; the cholera epidemic; the continued evictions of IDP camps; the sheer fact that years after the disaster, Haiti is still far from “recovery.” But amid these critiques, it is important to acknowledge aid's successes.

To begin: it is not fair, as some Haitians and foreigners alike have hyperbolically put it, to say that “the international community did nothing” or that no one was helped. In the immediate humanitarian relief phase, many desperately injured people received needed medical care from a variety of actors and institutions, from military forces like the US Navy and the Israeli Defense Forces, to international NGOs like MSF to smaller, local NGOs like PIH and Medishare to teams of medical professionals from large US research universities to Cuban doctors to individual medical volunteers from many, many countries. If this was a success and story of redemption and salvation (untold lives were saved), it was a bitter one (untold lives were lost). The scale of the disaster and the extent and number of injuries outstripped resources, personnel, and time. Triage was necessary and difficult, even for emergency medical personnel who conduct triage

regularly. An existential sensibility courses just beneath the dry, factual report of doctors from the Israeli field hospital explaining their triage considerations in the *New England Journal of Medicine*:

Patients who had just been rescued presented another dilemma. We believed it would be inappropriate to deny treatment to a patient who had survived days under the rubble before a heroic rescue, even though this policy meant potentially diverting resources from other patients with a better chance of a positive outcome. Indeed, one patient who was rescued a week after the quake was brought to us in dire condition. She was admitted, was intubated, and underwent surgery but ultimately did not survive (Merin et al. 2010).

The immediate goal was to save as many people as possible; other considerations were secondary. Many of the survivors had to have limbs amputated due to gangrene or crush injuries, simply because time and resources did not allow for more complex limb-saving procedures. While medically necessary and life-saving in this moment of overwhelming catastrophe and need, amputation also created a need for follow-up treatment, long-term care and therapy, prostheses and related technologies – none of which, except in particular cases, were available to most injured people and amputees. To Haitian people who experienced the emergency response not as a matter of triage but as the facts of their lives, the large number of amputations seemed excessive, questionable, even brutal.

\* \* \* \* \*

Many of these successes took place at a micro rather than macro level – between individuals, or between small groups of people, rather than between formal institutions and large populations.

In some respects, this is unsurprising. It is why fundraising advertisements for aid organizations feature images of sympathetic individuals (injured children, school children, smiling young women, mothers with babies) to add a human element to balance out the pie

charts and the statistics: it is easier to feel connected to a person than to a population. But the power of personal connection is as strong for the aid worker or the beneficiary as it is for the distant observer and donor. How many international aid workers – ostensibly performing important, life-saving work as part of their everyday lives – feel disconnected from the people they are there to help? How many of them forge a particular relationship or charity and patronage with an individual?

It goes the other way, too. Those Haitians who viewed the aid response most favorably were those who had themselves had a positive personal interaction with foreigners, generally in one of the few contexts that allowed for personal connection across the divide. One of these contexts was the hospital or clinic. In a sense, this is ironic or unexpected: patient-clinician encounters are of course fraught with stark power dynamics: differences in status, prestige, and knowledge. It would also be reasonable to assume that these dynamics would be even more striking in the case of foreign medical volunteers working among the Haitian poor, as medical humanitarianism remains haunted by the ghosts of colonial history and intervention: medicine not only for altruism's sake, but for the sake of conquest, power, or God. Yet in the case of post-disaster Haiti, medical contexts were one of the most intimate places that Haitians and foreigners could interact and connect, and breach the social and spatial divides. The clinical encounter became a personal encounter, a space where, amid so many zones of exclusion, people could speak to one another and touch one another, and breathe the same air, and see one another as individuals: individualized enclaves of humanity in a city of walls.

Gina, the young Haitian woman who volunteered to make and serve coffee and peanut butter sandwiches to foreign medical volunteers at a hospital for six months after the earthquake, viewed these foreigners with gratitude and appreciation. Though she herself had received little

aid after the earthquake, her interactions with the medical volunteers allowed her to see them as human: to Gina, they were not “the international community” but individuals. In fact, her attitude was more than appreciative; it was worshipful. “The foreigners were truly good,” she began.

It was as though God had sent those foreigners. Americans, Canadians, French — the foreigners who came to help Haiti, it's God who sent them. If it weren't for them, things would have been truly grave, right? The Haitian doctors, the next day, because it happened on the 12th, then on the 13th, if it wasn't for all the people who came, the international doctors, the majority of people would have died in Haiti. Because the [Haitian] doctors themselves, they were afraid for their own families, because there were those among them who couldn't find their families, who couldn't find their friends, they couldn't give care. They couldn't help a single person. It was the people who came from outside who helped Haitians. Who helped Haitians. Who did a lot of good. Those people — God should always give them security, whatever nationality they are, if they came to Haiti, they came to give help. The earth was still shaking, but they risked their lives, they came to help, they came to help Haitians. God should always bless those nations. There are some who left — and I don't have how to reach them, I don't have their email — but I always pray for them, because they came to help us in our suffering, in our need. After God, it was international aid that made Haiti still here now.

Let me tell you, monchè, let me tell you, it was God truly who sent those foreigners. There are a bunch of people that even if I don't see them, I don't have their contact information, I don't have their numbers, I don't have anything to remember them by, but I still tell God, each person who came to Haiti, who came to give us help, in whatever field, I tell God to bless them. I always tell God, “Those people came to Haiti. Always keep them. Always hide them. Even if something happens in their countries, never let anything bad happen to them, because they came to be useful. Even if the person doesn't speak the language, myself particularly, I was comfortable with those people. They don't judge you on your appearance. They look at you like a person. They do what they have to do. They didn't really even have time to eat or do a bunch of other things, no? But they wouldn't leave the sick. They would look after the sick. God should always bless them. God should always accompany them in everything they do. In everything.

In general, Haitians viewed foreigners most favorably in medical contexts, as the young UNDP worker Anaïs observed earlier. Medical humanitarians' and volunteers' work was clear, straightforward, and visible compared to many other forms of aid, and its results were tangible and profound: saving lives or at least alleviating suffering. Given that Gina – though herself

uninjured and relatively spared by the earthquake – primarily interacted with foreigners at a hospital during the time of greatest need and raw emergency, it is unsurprising that her perceptions are positive. She saw people exhausted, struggling to save lives, often living in tents themselves. During that time, she saw little bureaucracy and little luxe. She only saw the elemental thing that she wanted to see, the thing that the volunteers themselves wanted to be: people doing good, giving their time, helping one another.

### ***Scene Three: “Building Back Better” and Other Sadsurdity***

On January 12, 2014, the fourth anniversary of the earthquake, a friend of mine in Port-au-Prince posted a photo to Facebook. It shows the Pétionville *bidonvil* called Jalousie, which, like so many Port-au-Prince neighborhoods, was a vast hillside of winding dingy grey-beige cinderblock, until March 2013, when, for some \$1.4 million US (Daniel 2013) the government painted it a garish and thrilling assortment of bright colors.



Figure 34: Jalousie, as glimpsed through Pétionville’s web of infrastructure.

According to the Haitian government, the painting and beautification of Jalousie was a major concrete step in making Port-au-Prince's low-income neighborhoods more livable and appealing and encouraging people to leave the camps. The director of the government's housing relocation program was quoted rather grandly as saying "People are sitting on the balcony, having a beer, smoking a cigarette – whatever – and you have all of Port-au-Prince at your feet, and you're living in colors" (Daniel 2013). In truth, Jalousie *is* arresting from outside, a geometric patchwork of vibrant colors. Still, critics, both influential and ordinary, predictably dismissed the project as a superficial waste of money. Jalousie remains a poor community of some 45,000 people that lacks basic infrastructure, such as running water and electricity; bright



colors do not change those things. But the most jarring and mordant irony lies in the nature of the disaster that is the proximal cause of the housing crisis and of such civil improvement projects: painting the cinderblock buildings teetering on the hillside will not stop them from falling when the next earthquake hits. Hence the sarcasm of my friend's Facebook post on the fourth anniversary: "Haitian be like: Rekonstriksyon Dayiti" followed by a yellow smiley icon, laughing until it cries.

"Laughing until it cries" is a fitting way to make sense of a situation that is seemingly so replete with irony and so devoid of historical memory. And the anniversary is a meaningful time to think about this. On the first anniversary, in 2011, Port-au-Prince was eerie, heavy, solemn. Traffic moved slowly. People went to church and to public commemorations, or stayed home and remembered on their own. The grief, panic, and loss were still real and raw. Four years on, people still remember and grieve, but the grief and remembrance has something of the ritualized about it. The way people commemorate and even talk about the earthquake is ritualized. There are words and phrases that Haitian people utter or write when they think about this date: *nou pap janm bliye sa yo ki ale. We will never forget the ones who have gone. Fòk Ayiti chanje. Haiti must change.* Haitians are not the only ones with their January 12 rituals. There are words and phrases that the international news media trot out every year, when this date rolls around, and it tends to go one of two ways: the way of condemnation (*four years later, and things are still a damn mess, people are still under tents, people are still poor, and where did the money go?*) or the way of imposed willful hope (the Miami Herald's January 11, 2014 headline: "Four years after the earthquake, Haiti looks to turn disaster into promise"). And by now, our wounds sealed up with tender glossy scars, mockery has become part of the ritual. The joke isn't about the earthquake itself; the earthquake will never be funny. The joke is about recovery. The joke is

about reconstruction. The joke is about hope. The joke is on us – on everyone who believed that an event of such total devastation would inevitably force a fundamental change.

There is a point at which tragedy and comedy intersect in absurdity, what journalist Maya once christened “sadsurdity”. The Haitian government's nauseating refrain “Haiti is Open for Business!” is an example of sadsurdity – the hopeful call for increased foreign investment in Haiti, the assertion that capitalist development, in the form of industrial parks and sweatshops, will lead to prosperity. This is one of the central tenets of post-earthquake “development” and reconstruction: foreign investment will create needed jobs in a country with astronomical levels of unemployment in the formal sector, which will allow poor Haitians to make money and have a better standard of living and become consumers themselves. The reality, of course, is less rosy: low wages, a near absence of workers' rights, and the dispossession of farmers from their land (Haiti Grassroots Watch 2013). The irony is that Haiti has been “open for business” before. This was the logic of 1915, when the Marines invaded and occupied Haiti to promote US business interests by creating opportunities for foreign investment and exploiting cheap Haitian agricultural labor. This was the logic of the 1970s and 1980s export processing zone, in which the inhabitants of Cité Soleil and other Port-au-Prince “worker cities” were expected to provide the manual labor to turn Haiti into the “Taiwan of the Caribbean.” This was the logic of slavery and colonization, in which Haitian labor and Haitian land and Haitian resources were used to enrich foreign countries and corporations. This is what “foreign investment” means, in practice. Haiti is Open for Business! *Plus ça change...* Haiti has *always* been open for business.

### ***Responsibility***

*We have been practicing at cutting each other's throats since Independence. The claws of our people have been growing sharper and sharper. Hatred has hatched among us,*

*and torturers have crawled out of the nest. They torture you before cutting your throat.  
It's a colonial legacy to which we cling, just as we cling to French.*

- Marie Vieux-Chauvet, *Love, Anger, Madness*

Who is responsible for the earthquake? Who is responsible for the shape that post-quake aid took? Who is responsible for Haiti? There are many answers to this question: the Haitian government, international governments, international non-governmental organizations, other international organizations and bodies. “The international community” writ large. “The Haitian people” writ large. These were the entities that Haitians and non-Haitians invoked, to varying degrees.

The sense immediately after the earthquake was that, morally if not politically, *we are all responsible for Haiti*. “We” - the world, the international community, everyone with a heart. Here it becomes helpful to parse the meaning of the word “responsible.” It can mean accountable, answerable for one's actions. It can also imply a simple moral duty and obligation. In the first definition, to be responsible is to admit blame: Haiti is the way it is because of these things that we did, and so we must try to fix it. In the second definition, to be responsible is simply to assume the duty out of compassion or righteousness: we must try to fix Haiti because the suffering is immediate and it is the right thing to do.

Naturally, as the initial phase of morally unambiguous emergency (act one, scene one) gracelessly transitioned into the long, drawn-out “recovery” phase, the second definition of responsibility was overtaken by the first. It was time not merely to act, but to assign blame. Questions of Haitian sovereignty – rendered largely moot years after Haiti was officially labeled a “failed state”, and consistently ironic given Haiti's national mythicohistory of liberation, emancipation, and independence – became relevant again. Contemporary questions of state power and sovereignty in Haiti – of what it means to be an independent and self-governing

nation – cannot be extricated from considerations of the past, and Haiti's (mythic-) history of self-emancipation, revolution, and decolonization. The ongoing dependence of both Haitian individuals and the Haitian state itself on international programs, power, and funds stands as a contradiction to Haiti's emancipatory and autonomous mandate. As Assephie, one of the poets in the *Konbit*, wrote, “*Nou se premyè pèp nwa ki libere/kounye a nou tankou yon tibebe nan tete*” (“we were the first black people to be liberated/now we're like little babies at the breast”). As the fact of aid's failure becomes doxic among foreign writers, journalists, and activists working in and about Haiti – a critique so standard and commonplace by now as to go virtually without saying – the solution is to say that however difficult and potentially destabilizing such a process would be, it is time for the Haitian government to truly be in control of Haiti (Katz 2013). At the same time, foreign powers and donors put little faith in the Haitian government. And while a great many ordinary Haitian people remain biting critical of the “international community” and international intervention, they have still less faith in the Haitian government.

Melise's youngest brother Jean – speaking as household head, lover of political talk radio and aspiring lawyer now, rather than a low-ranking and discharged member of MSF-Holland's national staff — condemned the Haitian government for not doing more to control the activities of international NGOs on its land. He implicates assorted NGOs and “blan” as well, but to him, the real blame lies with the Haitian government (for not taking charge and legislating the NGOs' roles) and powerful or striving Haitian people, who would rather emulate the foreigners than defend their country.

I can't say that [the NGOs] should leave Haiti today, just like that, no? But the law that was created for them to come, it's the same law that should be audited to make rules about what they can do. For them to say, "Here is what we are here to do." For IOM to say "This is what we are doing." For the Red Cross to say, "Here is what we are doing." For Médecins Sans Frontières to say "Here is what we are doing." And for them to see what they're doing, and what can stay can stay, and

what should go, go, so they can make an account of the money they have used so we can know how they used that money and *who* they spent it on, what they did with it, and to give something palpable! Because Haitians are intelligent! When the *blan* come to this country, they try to put themselves in the same place as the *blan*, so that they can destroy the country, too. Like when the *blan* say "we're going to do such-and-such!" the Haitians will say "*oh* yes, we're going to do such-and-such!" But they don't realize, what they're really doing is destroying the country [*se detri yap detri peyi a*]. They're always putting in their heads that what they're doing is for the country. And that's because Haitians don't know what they need, either. Because if they knew what they needed, they'd ask the NGOs for it... and the four billion dollars that have been spent, they would have spent it, if they knew what to do with it. The biggest problem we have is that we Haitians are not *one people*, because if we were one people, we would stand up to kick them out. Because we don't have a state to define anything for us, we have to begin to define things here.

For Jean, the ultimate responsibility lies neither with the international community nor the Haitian government, but with ordinary Haitian people. For a foreigner or an elite Haitian to say what Jean says – to criticize the Haitian masses for being fragmented and disorganized on one hand, and selfish, *blan*-imitating self-deceiving opportunists on the other hand – would be politically incorrect. His words are harsh and unflinching, pitiless, even resonant with the sentiment that the Haitian people were to blame for the earthquake itself, being sinners, being bad. But Jean is an atheist and a pragmatist who derides his complacent countrymen for believing in their own sinfulness, for believing in the God the *blan* evangelicals brought, that “*Bondye mizè*”, that God of misery. His words are powerful, too, and fundamentally populist, suggesting that while the Haitian masses are capable of destruction, they are capable of organization and creation, too. His last statement, “we don't have a state to define anything for us, we have to begin to define things,” points again to what we saw after the earthquake: that in a moment of absolute despair, in which the superstructure of not only the Haitian state but the international apparatus and every other source of formal authority was shattered, in which the exigency of the crisis superseded, however temporarily, divisions of politics and class, ordinary

Haitian people, Haitian civil society, were their own salvation.

**PART FOUR: CODA**

**DEATH, LOSS  
MEMORY, RETURN**

*Fèt Gede, 2011*  
*Léogane*

*Port-au-Prince. Il regardait cette ville qu'il aimait il ne savait trop pourquoi. Qui lui avait toujours semblé, plus que n'importe quelle autre ville, à égale distance de la vie et de la mort. Ville Gede par excellence.*

Port-au-Prince. He looked out over that city that he loved, little knowing why he loved it. It had always seemed to him, more than any other city, halfway between life and death. A City of Gede *par excellence*.

Yanick Lahens, "*Guillaume et Nathalie*"

November 2011. The cemetery in Léogâne lies half on its side. So many of the tombs, in powdery whites, blues, pinks, and grays, collapsed on douz janvyè, in this seaside town twenty-nine kilometers from the capital, the epicenter of the quake. The master of the cemetery is a man in his forties, wearing a button-down shirt in a florid print. It's a little bit of a pun, "master of the cemetery" — he is the man who maintains the tombs and the land, but the true *mèt simityè* is Bawòn Samdi, the provocative *lwa* and father of all the Gede spirits. The man in the print shirt shows me the vast, unmarked land where he buried the countless dead. It is now green and overgrown, swallowed up, and I murmur somewhat meaninglessly that the tropics have a short memory. Just beyond the mass grave, there are fields of sugarcane, without which there would not have been Saint-Domingue, there would not have been slavery, there would not have been Haiti. A silver-white coffin, open and splintered, lies atop one of the cement tombs in the middle of the cemetery. A pelvic bone is visible within, with vines curling around it. Someone tells me that that coffin has been there since January 12, 2010, when the earthquake struck in the middle of the burial, and everybody ran. A few goats amble about, grazing and watching, perhaps inquisitive, perhaps indifferent.





Figure 35 and Figure 36: Cemetery in Léogâne. November 2011

I am in Léogâne for Fèt Gede, the Haitian Day of the Dead celebration, celebrating the Gede spirits who serve as intermediaries between life and death, and indeed preside "over all aspects of life's beginning and end, from ancestors and future progeny to sex and death" (Smith 2010). Gede spirits are explicitly sexual. They speak in a nasal voice that can be hard to understand, cake their faces vainly with white talcum powder, wear sunglasses and a top hat (or several), drink and bathe their genitals and bodies with *kleren* with hot peppers soaking in it, dance provocatively (and entice you to dance, too), and shout and sing obscenities (*betiz*).

Gede's vulgarity is not incidental; it is what enables him to straddle worlds, to be the *met kalfou*, the master of the crossroads. "Gede acts as an intermediary between life and death, but can only do so by going outside the prescribed role of respectability" (Smith 15). Gede talks in that nasal voice because he comes from the grave and his nose is plugged with cotton, and he sometimes wears sunglasses with one lens missing so he can see both underground and above it. The Gede spirits are not feared, but beloved for their ribaldry, warmth, and approachability. They are not frightening or particularly morbid; in the words of Patrick Bellegarde-Smith (2006), the Gede *lwa* "cherish life and adore children" (21). This love of children demonstrates the Gede spirits' commitment not only to the ancestors and the past, but to future generations – to the

living and yet-unborn descendants of those ancestors.

Gede is more than the spirit of death, more than an opportunity for carnivalesque and risqué ceremony that challenges everyday notions of decency. The evolving manifestations, representations, and role of the Gede spirits are related to ongoing processes of displacement and loss. "...Gede's popularity and ubiquity have grown as a direct result of population shifts to the city — and beyond to the diaspora — where he surrogates the presence and proximity of the ancestral dead of the rural familial compound" (Smith 2010a: 3), the lakou. As people come to Port-au-Prince from rural Haiti and lose physical contact with their own ancestral land and departed relatives, the Fèt Gede and the entire cemetery come to replace what has been lost, to allow people to cope with the tragedies of life in a sliding land, and to form new spiritual communities amid displacement. "The collective imagining of the dead, then, happens not just as a family but as a city" (Smith 2010b: 62).

In any cemetery, the Kwa Bawòn, charred black with years of worship, is the oldest cross in any Haitian cemetery, and it is the central place of worship on Fèt Gede. Today, in Léogâne, it is covered in offerings: still-burning candles and consumed candles melted into stumps of wax, fried fish, sweet bananas, bread, coffee, rum, kleren. Someone has left small strips of paper with lottery numbers written in blue ballpoint; the ink runs in the sprinkled rum. The air smells sweet and burnt, like liquor, caramel, and fire.



Figure 37: Offerings at the Kwa Bawòn

Léogâne, November 2011

Two worshippers approach the cross, two women, both mounted by Gede spirits. One wears a white T-shirt with black shorts, and her shirt bulges with the coins and small bills she's received as offerings today. Her face is white with talcum, and she leans on a long, heavy wooden walking stick that she positions like a penis. The other woman wears a marvelous purple satin outfit with gold trim and a foppish black hat, and one-eyed black sunglasses. Her neck is dusty with talcum, and a cigarette hangs out of the corner of her mouth. She has a sweet, shy smile. Both women's feet are wrapped bulkily in plastic bags: when people die, they are said to go *anba dlo* (underwater), and so Gede spirits fear water; they are afraid of getting their feet wet.



Figure 38: Waterproof Gede Feet

Léogâne, November 2011

As the two Gedes dance and gyrate, and *gouye*, onlookers laugh and provoke them in teasing conversation, and snap pictures with their cell phones.

*Beniswa tèt zozo!* intones the Gede in the white T-shirt. *Blessed be the head of the dick!*

*Beniswa tèt langèt!* replies the master of the cemetery. *Blessed be the head of the clit!*

In nasal voices, with lit candles in their hands, the Gedes sing songs of increasing explicitness. One song borrows the solemn melody of church litany to sing in dirge-like fashion of *mompyon* — pubic lice — and the onlookers chuckle, and join in with the singing. The faces of the Gedes are unyieldingly serious, as they sing about homosexuals making love and taking turns being on top and on the bottom, but everyone else laughs and laughs.

People offer me swigs of Barbancourt rum, and of homemade *tranpe* (klerin, with herbs or fruit soaked in it), and I pour a little onto the ground around the cross before I drink. I look around, at the faces surrounding me. The vodouyizan dressed for the celebration, leaving offerings for the Bawòn and for his wife, Gran Brijit. The older men who hang around the cemetery. The teenagers with their cell phones who have come out to watch the spectacle. Some organizations estimate that eighty to ninety percent of the buildings in Léogâne were destroyed or damaged on January 12, in this devastated epicenter, where the crack of the fault line snakes visibly down the middle of the road. I wonder how many of the people laughing and pouring klerin onto the soggy ground have someone buried in the mass grave behind us. I wonder how many were buried in the rubble. I wonder how many are living in camps. I wonder how many of them don't believe that anything will ever change. The bitter, potent *tranpe asòsi* swims in my blood, and I think about how nothing feels more carnivalesque than dressing up as Death himself, huge phallus aloft, and mocking him to his face.

***Fèt Gede 2010***  
***Port-au-Prince***

*“If even the dead refused to hear God’s voice and come to our aid,” the grandfather*

*replied, "then what would become of us, my child?"*  
- Marie Vieux -Chauvet, *Love, Anger, Madness*

It was a relief to have the embodiment of death so close, and so real – to talk to him, to look him in the sunglasses-covered eye, to be able to laugh with him, and dance. It made sense, then, however incongruously, that the Gede *lwa* — spirits of death, embodiments of explicit impropriety — could sometimes serve as healers (Brown 2001). Port-au-Prince's National Cemetery — massive as a village, what Katherine Smith terms a "mega-necropolis" — teemed with white-clad believers, the poor with cups outstretched to receive *charité*, and foreign journalists and photographers with huge lenses hanging to their hips. Around us the mud ran rust-colored with coffee poured out for the *lwa*. We gathered around the Universal Tomb, we knocked on it three times with our palms open. As the priest began to chant and there was a call and answer; the *ounsi* sang about the possibilities and impossibilities of resurrection and I felt tears running down my face. I didn't know why. We entered the cemetery under a stone archway that said, in French: “Souviens-toi que tu es poussiere” – Remember that you are but dust. And as we left, we passed under the same archway, and from the inside it said in Creole, “Kounye a panse ak pwòp tèt paw” – Now that you have seen these things, think of yourself.

### *Death as Displacement and Return*

I would suggest – if we indulge some poetics and definitional looseness – that death itself can be thought of as the final form, or at least the final cause, of displacement. For people left behind, death of a family member (or member of the fictive family) can mean losing one's place in a social order, one's expectations about life's trajectory, and, even more literally, one's home. This is illustrated poignantly by the life story of Melise's niece Claudine, which I have already discussed in detail. The death of her mother when she was thirteen led her to be sent permanently from rural Grand-Anse to Port-au-Prince, where she bounced among family members (some of whom treated her badly) before she at last landed with her aunt Melise, in Madame Joseph's household. Melise acted as a surrogate mother to Claudine, and when Melise died in the earthquake, Claudine was again set adrift, first to an informal streetside camp, then unhappily to her uncle's household, and finally to a new home she shared with her cousin Isaac and some post-earthquake friends. With each of these losses, Claudine was not only physically displaced from her previous home, but her expectations and goals for life transformed, with the sudden disappearance of emotional security and economic support. This was, in fact, the situation not only for Claudine, but for Melise's entire family, so many of whom had relied on her for remittances from the capital. They were unmoored. As her older brother said, “*Nou lage de men lage*. We are cut loose, our hands open and empty.”

But death can also be a homecoming. In vodou cosmology, the dead go *anba dlo* (underwater, under the sea) and, if the rituals are done properly, they return to Ginen. Death is also a return — not only to one's departed loved ones (as in various forms of Christianity), but to the spirits, to one's ancestors, to Ginen, passing underwater to the land on the other side of the sea (Richman 124). After all of those displacements – after kidnapping and slavery, after being

driven from the mountains to the cities, after moving from household to household in the capital, after the earthquake, after leaving Haiti for the skyscrapers of New York or Miami – death is the symbolic repatriation.

For Melise and her family, there could be no repatriation — neither the spiritual return to Ginen (and Melise was not a practicing vodouyizan, though several of her surviving siblings are), nor, in a more earthbound sense, to the land of her birth in the mountains of Degerme. Her family had wanted to disinter her bones from the shallow place she was buried when they found her body in the rubble two days after the quake, bring her remains back to Grand-Anse, and perform the *denyè priyè*, the final prayer, to complete the ritual one year after her death. Before the year was up, before the first year of the earthquake anniversary came around, an NGO had paved over the place Melise was buried and built a basketball court.

***The Promised Land***  
***Titanyen, 2012***

*And yet, devastated as they are by erosion, the mountains are heartbreakingly beautiful. From a distance, the dried-up branches of the coffee bushes take on soothing pastel tones, and the shore is embroidered with foam.*

*- Marie Vieux-Chauvet, Love Anger Madness*

I met Herold Ulysse because I got lost trying to get to the memorial for January 12.

I had come with friends from Port-au-Prince up the dusty road north, Route Nationale #1, past the smoky bustle of Cité Soleil, toward the town of Arcahaie, where more than two hundred years before, a woman named Catherine Flon had created the first Haitian flag by symbolically cutting the white out of the French flag and sewing the red and blue halves together. On the left side of the road, the bay sparkles blue in the sun. On the right side of the road, a series of massive camps sprawl up the dry, treeless hillside. Just outside the boundaries of the capital, this is free, unclaimed land, where some people went shortly after the earthquake, and where many more were forced to relocate when they left or were removed — or evicted, or displaced — from their camps in the city. By June 2013, the Haitian government estimated that perhaps 30,000 people were living in on these hillsides, living as homesteaders, clearing the dry land with pickaxes and imagining a new community – people like the man named Dany I met picking through the remains of the camp at Maïs Gaté 2. In April 2010, President Préval declared this long stretch of land north of the city to be available for public use (Ferreira 2012). It was virtually free, unclaimed land because no one wanted to live in this denuded desert, where there is no shade from the relentless tropical sun, where little can grow in the desiccated soil, where every rainstorm and hurricane threatens a landslide. Now the thousands of people who live on these hills — in communities called things like Canaan, the Promised Land — are becoming more rooted. Tents give way to shacks and little homes with fences and goats. There are schools



and churches and development projects, set up by a variety of NGOs and missions. There is no running water, only sporadic water pumps, and no shade beyond the tarps and roofs that people erect themselves.



Figure 39 and Figure 40: Hills of Titanyen

For a long time, this place — known as Titanyen — was not for the living but for the dead. Now it houses both. The area called St. Christophe — named, for whatever reason, for the patron saint of travel and travelers — is a vast burial ground for the victims of the earthquake, whose bodies were hastily deposited into pits by the truckload, amid fears that a city of rotting corpses would spread disease. Some ten thousand earthquake victims are thought to be buried here (Kraft 2010).

But St. Christophe was a dumping ground for the anonymous and forgotten dead since long before the earthquake, first for victims of the Duvalier regime — killed at the infamous and feared Fort Dimanche political prison or elsewhere and disposed of outside the city. Under the Duvaliers, perhaps three thousand people disappeared into Fort-Dimanche, where they were not only killed but tortured: "beaten, electrocuted, dismembered, blinded and castrated" (Bragg 1994). The discarded skulls of those political opponents are said to still litter the crumbling

ground (Kraft 2010). For those people, there is no memorial, and little accountability or justice: unlike in other post-dictatorship nations in the Americas, there has to date been little formal prosecution of political leaders or torturers, and no work by forensic anthropologists or archaeologists to identify or recover the dead (Funari et al. 2009).

In April 2011, four months before he died, Haitian scholar and human rights activist Jean-Claude Bajeux, whose family was one of the many educated, politically-engaged families massacred and disappeared under François Duvalier, gave a public talk at which he said, “There are a lot of ghosts wandering through this country who have no statue” (*Gen anpil fantòm kap sikile nan peyi a ki pa gen stati*). He was referring to the nameless, disappeared victims of the Duvalier dictatorship, but it made me think of the nameless, disappeared dead of the earthquake. For earthquake dead, too, are victims of a slower variety of human rights abuses — of systematic and intentional poverty and inequality, structural violence, centralization, and state neglect that produced the conditions that made the earthquake the vast tragedy it was. Bajeux’s point was not only that we don’t know how many people died under Duvalier — though this was certainly part of his theme — but also that those phantoms are still unrecognized, unremembered, and lost to history.

There are key differences between the unrecorded, unmemorialized victims of state violence and terror, and the victims of January 12; I do not mean to suggest that they are the same thing. State-sponsored disappearance creates a climate of terror, uncertainty, and distrust. It is an intentional tactic to debilitate people politically and socially. The ease of the disappearances is part of the violence — the bodies were discarded, abandoned, and destroyed. No one could be held accountable, no memory could be held intact, when there was no body to bury, mourn, or commemorate. Writing of the *desaparecidos* of Latin American dictatorships,

Funari et al. draw on Eric Wolf to show that victims of political violence are erased both from life and from the historical record: “‘Disappeared people’ [are] people without history, whose lives were sadly interrupted by kidnapping and disappearance. From that moment on, they were neither alive nor dead. They simply had gone missing” (2009: xvii). That the ground in which the victims of the Duvalier regime were dumped was so unhallowed as to be easily repurposed for the earthquake dead suggests even more how slippery memory is in this sliding land.

For the dead of *douz janvye*, there is a memorial — though one that most residents of Port-au-Prince have never visited as it is far away, hard to reach. For practical purposes, though not symbolic ones, they too are in a sense disappeared. It is also hard to face this haunted place. When I finally went, I went not with Haitian friends but with visiting American friends; none of my Haitian friends wanted to go. We went up and down Route Nationale #1, looking for the memorial, looking for a sign, but we couldn't find it. And so we stopped to ask for directions at a roadside restaurant under a tent, where Herold's wife Natalia — called Grimelle by everyone, because of her lighter, caramel-colored skin — and their teenaged son were cooking and serving rice and beans (American rice, not Haitian), the savory, delicious vegetable stew called *legim*, and lemonade. On a few plastic lawn chairs and rough wooden benches lounged a few guys, probably ranging in age from their twenties to their fifties, one of whom was napping on the wooden bench when we came in. He was a big guy, dark-skinned with dreadlocks, so his nickname was Afriken. I asked them where I could find St. Christophe, and they all started talking about Duvalier.

Herold, Grimelle and their family live in a neat little house further up the hill from the road. It has the now-familiar look of a house that began as an informal construction and grew more formal over time — a combination of plywood, USAID tarps, old green tents, and sheet

metal, sturdy enough for everyday, not nearly sturdy enough for a hurricane or landslide. They've cut six small square windows out of the tarp wall. Inside it is tidy, with a single bed with a single mosquito net and a blue office chair on wheels. Their little girl Naïka's plastic doll, white-skinned with blond hair, lies on top of the plastic basins, which are filled with clean folded clothes. In one corner lies a stack of circuit boards and bits of TVs and VCRs — Herold, like many Haitian men in the informal economy, fixes electronics some of the time. In front of their house, there is a little garden, cordoned off with a fence made of discarded rebar. The fence seems mostly ceremonial; anyone could walk through. It's got a plywood door, on which Naïka has been scribbling arithmetic problems in chalk. The sun blares down, and shiny thick *mabouya* lizards skitter as we walk through. It feels kind of like the countryside here, only there is so much broken glass on the ground that no one goes barefoot.

\* \* \* \* \*

I want to ask Herold and Grimelle about the earthquake and their experience of post-quake aid, for Canaan (the promised land so named by the people who fled there after the earthquake) has become emblematic of the failure of international assistance.

Of the non-governmental organizations, Grimelle explained, "I can't hate them. When the earthquake happened, there were lots of NGOs giving care. So I can't say I don't like them. Myself, I didn't get aid because I wasn't hurt, I didn't have anyone who died. I had a few people I was friends with who died, but — the way one is supposed to get aid, I wasn't in that kind of situation. The aid they were giving, they might come by giving away a sack of rice, things like that. But the stuff they were giving out, it wasn't enough for the people. You just felt like you couldn't do it, because people had to fight for things. If someone can't fight, they'll remain with nothing."

Halfway between Herold and Grimelle's house and the Route Nationale stands an incongruously large cement building, with a bright-blue tarp over half of it. I ask little Naïka what it is, and she says, "It's the chickens." The man standing outside calls to Naïka, "bring your pretty foreigner friend to come see me!" so we go. As we enter, the chirping grows louder and louder. The man officiously has me sign in, then pulls back the blue tarp to reveal a swarm of tiny fluffy yellow chicks, eating cornmeal out of wide round dishes and busily dusting themselves with sawdust. The man proudly tells me that there are a thousand chicks, and shrugs that they are *poul blan* (foreign chickens), not *poul peyi* (Haitian chickens).

"Who did this project?" I ask.

"I did it!" the man replies.

"You did it alone? There was no organization helping you?"

"Well, I had a few friends... *Mwen te gen de twa zanmi...*"

"Haitian friends?"

"No... Well, there was World Vision..."

It's a strange origin story, one in which the role of the international aid organization is minimized. It makes me think of a journalist acquaintance who ranted to me, "I wish Haitians would stop lying. I've interviewed literally hundreds of Haitians, and maybe two have told me they've received any aid. There's no way that *none* of them have received anything. They'll have a tarp that says Samaritan's Purse, and a sack of rice with USAID on it right in front of them, but they still say they haven't received anything. Say you haven't received enough, say life is hard, but don't lie." Here this minimization, though, this elimination of World Vision from the frame, is done not to highlight the man's need, but his accomplishment.

\* \* \* \* \*

As much as I want to talk about foreign aid — for Canaan is, to many critics, the symbol of the intractability of the displacement crisis and the failure of sustainable aid — Herold and Grimelle keep directing the conversation toward religion and belief and salvation, and the end of the world. They are former vodouizans in the process of converting. Herold had formerly served Ogoun Feray, the warrior spirit, but soon he will devote himself to Jesus. As cars and motos speed by on the Route Nationale, the wind blows over the dry treeless hillside, and their teenaged son pounds herbs and garlic in a big wooden pilon with a rhythm as regular as hoofbeats.

"Just before Jesus returns, there's a bunch of signs you're going to see. It has been written. These things will happen. Earthquakes will happen. Life will be hard. You won't be able to eat. You'll see children cursing their own mothers. All these things will happen," Herold explains. "There will be two camps, the camp for Jesus and the camp for Satan. All the people who haven't accepted Jesus will go to hell, they will be *lage* [let go] and burned in the fire."

I asked him where it was written.

"Well, myself, I don't know where it's written. I lack experience, I don't really read the Bible," Herold replies, and I presume this means he cannot read or write at all. "But what I'm telling you, it's what people are saying. When the evangelicals come by, they preach, they say this. And everything they say, you truly see those things happening! It has been announced that Jesus Christ is getting ready to return." For Herold, the events he had witnessed — the earthquake, the mass burials, the advent of cholera — had lent believability to the words that the evangelicals preached and made them seem like prophecy. "What they said, it came to pass."

Herold has not yet converted, but he says he will. "I am going to convert."

"When?"

"Whenever I want. I could do it right now, as I speak with you."

"How do you convert?"

"You just change your heart."

Grimelle sits on her heels, scrubbing and scratching at the burnt bottom of her cooking pots. She has already converted, herself. "But I will convert, again. I will continue to convert, when I confess my sins." She went on, "I will sing for them," speaking of the unconverted, "because myself, I fear suffering." She begins to recount the story of Noah and the flood, how all the sinners and unbelievers perished. "And they begged Noah, 'Noah, Noah, open the door!' and Noah said, 'the door cannot be opened.' Because he had orders — once he closed the door, he couldn't open it again." For Grimelle, conversion and salvation was a choice. "We all have *volonte*," she explained. "We all have free will, we all have a choice. But we have to choose the one right path." She would like for her father, a practicing vodouizan, to convert too. She would like him to have everlasting life.

I wondered what *volonte* — free will — might look like to someone in Grimelle's position: poor, displaced by the earthquake, living under a tarp, exiled to the living community alongside the potter's field at the far margins of the city. However she might not conceive of herself as the "right" kind of beneficiary of NGO aid, Grimelle was no doubt a victim of structural violence. Her life was shaped and buffeted by macro forces far beyond her control. Free will was, to her, not the ability to effect any kind of change to her trajectory in this material life, but only the ultimate choice between spiritual salvation and damnation in the afterlife.

Grimelle and I keep talking, over the sizzle of chicken frying. Fat Dominican chicken, sold in frozen slabs in wet cardboard boxes downtown — poor Haitians can rarely afford Haitian chicken. "How long will you stay here, at Canaan?" I ask.

"Only God knows," she replies.

The vast, vast majority of the uncountable victims of January 12 had no funeral rites, of course. There was no time, the scale was far too massive. This was a matter of public health, not of ritual. The looming threat of disease and contagion in a city of decomposing flesh could barely be managed. Everywhere the air was putrescent and fat blue flies (nicknamed *kask blè*, blue helmets, after the UN peacekeepers) swarmed and buzzed. Some bodies were irretrievable and remained where they were buried in the rubble, until eventually the rubble was cleared, with their bones. Untold others — like Melise — were retrieved and buried in hasty, shallow graves by their friends or families. Thousands and thousands of others were carted, by bulldozer, to Titanyen, and dumped into mass graves. It was a mingling unlikely in ordinary life or ordinary death — people mixed together, irrespective of religion or faith, or sex, or politics, or age, or place of origin. The living people they left behind did grieve, of course, but no one could grieve in the formal, ritualized ways they normally would. Everyone was trying to survive, in the most fundamental way, in a transformed landscape.



***Death, Mourning, and Celebration***

*Lè m'mouri, fè bèl vèy pou mwen  
M'pa pral ni nan paradi ni nan lanfè  
Pinga pè pale laten nan tèt mwen.*

*Lè m'mouri, antere mwen nan lakou-a  
Rasanble tout zanmi-m fè bèl fèt  
Pinga pase legliz ak kadav mwen*

*Lè m'mouri, se pou tout moun byen ge  
Ri, chante, danse, bay blag  
Pinga kriye, rele nan zòrèy mwen*

*Lè m'mouri, m'pa p'fin ale nèt  
tout kote k'ganyen bèl banbòch  
Kote nèg lib, fò yo nonmen non mwen.*

*Testaman, Feliks Moriso-Lewa*

When I die, hold a good wake for me  
I'm neither going to heaven nor to hell  
Don't you dare talk Latin over my head

When I die, bury me in the lakou  
Bring all my friends together, have a great party  
Make sure you don't go by the church with my body

When I die, everyone should be good and happy  
Laugh, sing, dance, tell jokes  
Don't you cry or scream in grief in my ears

When I die, I'm not really gone for good  
Everywhere there is a great party  
Wherever people are free, they shall cite my name.

*Testament, Félix Morisseau-Leroy (translation mine)*

The laughter and vulgarity of Fèt Gede should not be confused with cavalier carelessness, and death rituals are important, notwithstanding media portrayals of Haitian suffering and death as commonplace and inevitable. In circumstances outside the massive disaster, the dead are treated with care, and the emotional need for mourning is as crucial in Haiti as anywhere else. Funerals in Haiti are important, elaborate affairs. Traditionally, the burial is accompanied by several days of celebration, in which friends, neighbors, and more distant family come to the home of the bereaved. The burial is a time of formality, even vanity, particularly among the poor: people wear their nicest, pressed suited and ironed dresses, and women go to the salon to get their hair done, their makeup applied, their fingernails manicured. At the party after the burial, people eat, drink kleren, and stay up all night telling jokes and singing songs. It is a time of grief, and also a time of fear (for people fear the ghosts of the dead, even people they loved in life) and of joy and humor — it is a time of togetherness.

Funerals are also events of heartbreaking emotion. At the scene of a death, and particularly at a burial, and particularly among the poor, loved ones scream and cry publicly: this is the accepted performance of grief (*dèy*) and loss. Others may experience a *kriz*, or crisis, in which they lose consciousness, fall to the ground, and experience muscle contractions, shake violently like someone having an epileptic seizure, sometimes breaking the furniture around them, sometimes injuring themselves in the process. Kriz are "unmediated bodily responses to loss" (Brodwin 1996). While a *kriz* bears superficial similarities to spirit possession in vodou, in that it is an "emotive-kinetic" form of expression that generally (though not always) occurs in a large group (Mars 1946), it is not the same phenomenon, and is not confined to a particular set of religious beliefs or practice. It is more contingent on socioeconomic class than on religion. It is, moreover, an expression of ontological insecurity — a rupture or breaking of the body's normal

functioning, reflecting a rupture in social life, that leaves the individual vulnerable to other forms of illness, suffering, and even death (Beckett 2013).

### *An Urban Funeral*

The first time I witnessed people having *kriz* en masse was at Claudine's aunt Guerda's funeral, in Port-au-Prince in 2012. She was a kind and humble woman, who had helped her nieces with laundry and other household tasks after Melise had died, and she had suffered horribly from a metastatic cancer that left her both shriveled and swollen. Several of Guerda's relatives — who just minutes before had been applying makeup, curling their hair, and munching on flaky savory pastries and drinking Coca-Cola — screamed and collapsed in grief almost instantly upon crossing the threshold of the funeral home. The deafening noise and the degree of pain and emotion of the collective *kriz* were overwhelming, and though I barely knew the deceased myself, I fled the funeral home in tears before the service ended.

Strangely perhaps, amid my shock at seeing such naked displays of public emotion, I felt envious of the mourners, of their ability to express their feelings in a way that seemed at least somewhat commensurate with the loss. I felt paralyzed by comparison, as though any feeling of grief I might possess — for the earthquake, for everyone else I had ever loved and lost, for the ongoing and intractable injustice and undeserved suffering of this country — was stopped up in my throat with cotton. The closest description for what I felt was the Creole expression *kè m sere m* — my heart is tight.

"Are you crazy?" Claudine asked me. "You don't want to have *kriz*. It's an illness. You don't want it."

Claudine has herself suffered from *kriz* since she was a young teenager and her mother

died, and she has the scars on her knees to prove it. Her mother had *kriz* at funerals, too, and when she died, Claudine started to manifest it, too. "It's something in my race," she explains. Claudine cannot attend funerals, or even come too close to them, and after she heard that Melise had died in the earthquake, she suffered a *kriz*. She also — to her great embarrassment — has *kriz* at other, less socially acceptable moments of stress or anxiety, such as when taking tests in school. "My heart starts to pound and then I'm on the ground and I don't remember anything."

For Claudine, *kriz* is an illness and an inconvenience. From my perspective, it looked like a liberation. Then I began to wonder if perhaps long, drawn-out periods of mourning could only be a luxury for people who, like me, do not have to worry about how to feed themselves and their families on any given day. Maybe that is why the Haitian poor have *kriz*, and the Haitian wealthy do not. Perhaps they have no choice but to express all their grief in one violent, explosive act, because they have no choice but to compartmentalize, and then continue to struggle under the burden of ordinary life.

### ***A Rural Funeral.***

*We sing the funeral, as goes the custom, with the hymn of the Dead. But Manuel, he chose a hymn for the living: the song of the coumbite, the song of the earth, of the water, the plants, of fellowship between peasants because he wanted, as I now understand it, that his death for you be the renewal of life.*

Jacques Roumain, *Masters of the Dew*

When I was in Degerme in the summer of 2012, I asked Manoucheka (the young woman who travelled back and forth from the countryside to a camp in Carrefour) what the most serious problem in Haiti was, according to her. Manoucheka balanced her naked baby boy on her lap, as he squirmed and tried to take the yellow chunk of boiled *lam veritab* from her hand.

"Death." Manoucheka laughed — a laugh, an exhale. "It's death I see that's the most

serious. There's nothing else that's serious after that. It's death that's most serious. Someone can dress up nice, someone can be a philosopher, someone can be whatever they are — it's only death that's serious. After that, there's nothing else that's serious. You can speak Latin, you can speak seventeen languages — nothing is serious.” She laughed again. “Only death.”

“And what's the greatest hope in Haiti?”

“The greatest hope?” Manoucheka laughed again. “I can't answer that question. I can't answer. What's the greatest hope.” She paused. “I can't answer. I can't say anything about that.”

A day later, we heard that a man named Kolibri died suddenly in a village called Douga, in the second administrative section of Abricots. I had never met Kolibri, but I heard from others that he had been a "moun fou" (a crazy person) and that "tèt li pat dwat" (his head wasn't right), perhaps due to a curse, a "sent" illness, or "bagay mistik" (mystical stuff).

"He wasn't crazy-crazy," explained his daughter Emmanuella, a stunningly beautiful young woman of twenty. "He could talk well, talk right, just like you and me. But he was afraid to sleep in his own house because he was afraid of a *lamprensez*."

"A what?" I asked. "La princesse? What princess?"

Emmanuella laughed. "Who knows? It's a word he made up."

She had learned of her father's death when her cousin from Douga arrived in the lakou early in the morning, moaning "*mezanmi wooyooy, mezanmi wooyooy...*" Emmanuella told me that Kolibri had died when "a dead person beat him."

"A *zonbi*?" I asked.

She nodded.

Kolibri was the father of Claudine's stepsiblings. Claudine's mother (Melise's sister) had

died in childbirth, several years ago, and after some time, a woman named Anacilia — whom Claudine's father, Dieuseul, had met as she sold homemade molasses in the market in Abricots — and her five children had moved into Claudine's father's home. ("I like Anacilia, but she has too many children," Claudine would say; it was that many more mouths to feed.) This was *plasaj*, a form of common-law marriage widespread among the Haitian poor, many of whom do not have the resources to have a ceremonial or legal marriage.

The families became one; the many stepsisters shared their clothes and household responsibilities, walking to the river together and carrying back buckets of water, cooking food over the fire. When Anacilia's twenty-year-old daughter Emmanuella got cholera in 2011, it was her stepsister — Claudine's sister Lovely — who slept with her at the Cholera Treatment Center in Abricots and took care of her. Lovely's recounting of this event was striking in its humor and lack of sentimentality — another example of how people face suffering and the possibility of loss with humor rather than reverence. "She couldn't even talk, when she had cholera," Lovely giggled, speaking of her stepsister Emmanuella. "*Bounda ap pale, bouch ap reponn*. Her ass was talking and her mouth responded. She was just pooping, pooping, pooping, and then she'd vomit. They forgot to put a bucket under one of the patients, and the diarrhea reached all four corners of the room." When I remarked later to Claudine how Lovely had laughed through that whole story, Claudine shook her head. "That child! She'll grin and show her teeth [*lap griyen dan li*] for any old thing. You can cuss her out, and she'll still laugh."

In 2011, Anacilia and Dieuseul had another child, a precocious little girl somewhat extravagantly named Woodeline Bidechâina by her older half-siblings. Anacilia had previously been *plase* with Kolibri, and he was the father of her children, and though he had left her years before, it was still her responsibility to do the funeral rites and receive the people who had come

to mourn him.

Anacilia and her children left Degerme for Douga immediately upon hearing of Kolibri's death. Claudine, her father, her siblings and I followed two days later, after the burial had occurred: Claudine still experiences *kriz* at funerals and cannot attend them. We were going for the *vèy*, the week-long wake. It was a long hike, up and down mountains, through the town of Abricots, across a river and up another mountain, made harder by the fact that we were bringing food and clothes, and also taking turns carrying two-year-old Bidechaïna in our arms or on our backs. When we arrived — exhausted and sweating — at the small mud house that had once been Kolibri's, we found Anacilia sitting on her heels in the outdoor kitchen, peeling mounds of breadfruit so that everyone who came could eat tonmtonm. Toddler Bidechaïna was overjoyed to see her mother and half-siblings after not having seen them in days, and wrapped her arms around her sister's neck while her brother teased her and goaded her into saying things like "Don't touch my pussy!" She ran after the goats and sheep: "Baaa! Baaa!" Dieuseul marveled, in wary wonder, at his youngest daughter. "But this Bidechaïna is too much! She's too smart! I don't know where she got that!"

They have already washed all the clothes in the house — the women took all the clothes to the river and did a huge laundry together — and given away or thrown away all the food that was inside it. You can't eat anything that was in the home where someone you know died. Sometimes, people tell me, when someone is very sick and they suspect they are about to die, they take all the food out of the house so it won't be contaminated. "It's bad air," they tell me, and you have to get rid of it.

Kolibri had already been buried by the time we arrived – Claudine refused to be present for the burial because of her tendency to have *kriz*. We participated only in the prayers and the

wake. It is all ritualized: the family must pay a vodou priest to do the burial mass and liberate the soul of the dead person from the house. A year or more after the burial, the family holds a *dènyè priyè* – the last prayer – that liberates the soul from *anba dlo*, under water, and allows it to return to the spiritual homeland of Ginen.

This weeklong wake is a collective, collaborative affair. Everyone close to the dead or his family gives what they can to make the feast possible, generally from their own gardens: kleren, a bunch of plantains, a goat, some lam veritab, coffee, money (less often). Everyone who comes eats, and enjoys.

As the sun went down, Claudine and several of her sisters and stepsisters sat outside at a little wooden table, playing dominos — men sometimes clip clothespins up the skin of their forearms to serve as "punishment" for losing, but the girls put palm leaves tied into makeshift wreaths around their necks instead.



Figure 41: Losing at dominos at the wake.

Douga, Grand-Anse, 2012

Two old men came that night, and I realized quickly that they must be regulars at every funeral party in the village, partly to pay their respects, and partly to serve as entertainment. They were both skilled storytellers, and both took frequent sips of kleren as they told long,



drawn-out jokes, folktales, and stories that everyone seemed to have heard before, but that everyone wanted to hear again. "Krik!" they would call, to announce that they were about to tell a riddle or a tale, and the audience would respond, "Kraak!" When someone told a joke, they'd call "Tintin!" and the listeners called back, "Bwa sèch!"

Many of the jokes were vulgar, and as the night grew darker and more kleren was swallowed, they became more vulgar still. This is part of the ritual — the confluence of the solemn and the pornographic, the sacred and the profane, the spiritual and the carnal, the tragic and the hilarious. It is the ethos of Gede without the explicit invocation of the spirit, without the ceremony. It brings to mind the words of Karen McCarthy Brown: “Through his randy, playful, and childlike personality Gede raises life energy and redefines the most painful situation—even death itself—as one worth a good laugh” (331). In my favorite joke from the wake, a comely young woman named Dezina is courted by a persistent and ruttish sentient turkey. The old man did the voices of all the characters, and sang as the turkey, in a warm voice burnished by age and kleren, a series of increasingly explicit exhortations.

*Dezina, Dezina, I won't sleep tied up under this table  
Eeey, Dezina!*

When sweet-tempered Dezina finally brings the turkey into the house, he sings to her again:

*Dezina, Dezina, I won't sleep if I'm not in your bed  
Eeey, Dezina!*

Reluctantly, Dezina brings the turkey into her bed, whereupon he sings:

*Dezina, Dezina, I won't sleep if I'm not inside you!  
Eeey, Dezina!*

Yet the *betiz* - the vulgarity - of the jokes is not only a defense mechanism against grief and suffering, but also an act of insubordination. As McAlister (2002) explains, performances of

vulgarity and explicitness have long served as a state-sanctioned way for the Haitian masses (*mas pèp la*) to express their opinions and politics — particularly under the Duvalier dictatorship, but under other political regimes as well. "When you are not permitted to say anything else, at least you can swear, drink, and sing vulgar songs" (McAlister 61). It is an ambivalent phenomenon, which allows the subaltern to ridicule those in power and the status quo, while it is also tolerated and supported by those in economic, social, and political power, as it serves as a "'safety valve' against real revolution" (61).

What does this have to do with death, an inevitable event that everyone must someday endure? In Haiti, as in many places and contexts of great injustice and inequality, in which people's lives are bound by macro forces far beyond their control, *death is political*. The reasons that people get sick from treatable or preventable diseases and die, or do not have access to health care, or work themselves to the bone with so little to show for it, or are crushed en masse under crumbled cinder blocks in thirty-five seconds — these are deaths due to structural violence. People die because they are poor, or because they are living in a poor country, and the reasons for those poverty are historical and the opposite of incidental. Death is deeply political. The thousands of earthquake dead now mingled with the bones of the victims of the Duvalier regime out at Titanyen — it is not a coincidence that they should be buried together. They are all victims of human rights violations, and the memorial notwithstanding, they are removed from view.

For all that the international media represents Haiti in racially stereotyped terms of violence and chaos, the reality is that resignation and acceptance are pervasive. This resignation is met with confusion by outsiders, who wonder why the Haitian poor are not visibly angrier and more reactive than they are. "I would just be so angry if I were Haitian right now, I would be so

angry if I were living in a tent," remarked development worker Sarah, and wondered why her Haitian beneficiaries did not seem to feel the same way. The joking about death, the vulgarity in the face of death, is perhaps at once a form of resistance and a form of resignation -- a way of reacting in fury at the injustice of such deaths, and a way of coping with them.

*It's death that's the most serious*, Manoucheka had said, the day before Kolibri died.  
*Nothing is serious. Only death.*

Perhaps she was right. Manoucheka, like so many other people in Haiti, had been through a lot. She had lost her home and her employment in the earthquake, her husband had been gravely wounded and rendered impotent by the earthquake, she was living in a camp, she was now regaining her strength after having had cholera. But she was alive, laughing and chubby, and dancing with the fishermen at the *bal anba tonèl*. As long as you survived, she seemed to be saying, it wasn't serious. In the end, it wasn't serious. Death *was* serious. And still, if little else could be in a person's control in this precarious life, there were all the rituals in place to laugh in Death's face.

### ***Disaster, Death and Humor***

*When we are suffering, we laugh and make jokes. When we are dying, that is, when we have finished suffering, we laugh, sing, and make jokes.*  
Jacques Stephen Alexis, *General Sun, My Brother*

Haitians are, on the whole, devoted to humor. They like to tease. They like jokes—silly, raunchy, or political. The observation that hardship and humor go hand-in-hand — that humor can be a way to cope with suffering — is hardly novel or original; it borders on cliché. Yet humor is something that doesn't come through in most mainstream media and humanitarian depictions of Haiti, which largely focus on those details of life that are deemed most immediate

and newsworthy: the earthquake; the spread of cholera; the ongoing plight of people living in the camps, coping with loss and deprivation and faced with eviction; unfolding political upheaval. All those things are important to know and to act upon, to be sad and enraged about. At the same time, collectively these kinds of news have a flattening effect, rendering individual Haitians exemplary victims who can represent the majority of victimized Haitians, but erasing the kinds of details that make them recognizable, relatable and human.

The first earthquake joke I heard goes like this:

Jesus and Satan run into each other on the street. Satan says to Jesus, “Look at that country there, Haiti. That’s mine. All the evil, the violence, the suffering – Haiti is *my* country.” Jesus looks at Satan and says, “Oh, really? Let’s see about that.” Then he picks up Haiti and begins to shake it and shake it, and everyone cries out, “*Oh, Jezi, Jezi, sove m Jezi!* Save me, Jesus!” Jesus puts Haiti down, turns to Satan and says, “You see? Haiti is *mine*.”

While Haitians find this joke hilarious (doubled-over laughing, gasping for breath), foreigners never do. I tried telling it to my mother, who found it, in her words, “creepy.” This joke shows the country wedged in a game of one-upmanship between cosmic “good” and “evil,” although the role of the “good” seems awfully tenuous. This humor is dark, absurd, and context-specific – but everyone gets it.

It struck me only much later how this joke mirrors the biblical tale of Job, only in reverse. At the beginning of the Book of Job, Job is a devout, innocent, and wealthy man. God boasts to Satan of Job's piety and devotion, and so Satan challenges Job's integrity, claiming that Job is loyal to God only because God protects and rewards him. Satan takes everything from Job except his life: his family, his wealth, his physical health. Still he does not lose his faith, still he does not curse God, and in the end he is redeemed and restored to a state even better than before Satan's intervention. In the joke, however, it's the other way around. Satan, not God, is doing the original boasting, and the boast does not hinge on Haitian people's goodness and devotion, as

it does with Job, but on the violence, suffering, and sin of Haiti – and its inhabitants. But when they are tested – when they have everything taken from them, their families and their homes and their limbs and their lives – they do not lose their trust in God, either. They cry out to Jesus. The theme of perseverance and faith amid suffering mirrors the story of Job – but the basic premise, the assumption of goodness, is reversed. Job is presumed to be an honest man who is lured into (and resists) sin, whereas Haitians are presumed to be sinners who profess their piety and cry out for redemption when brought to extremes. The real accusers are not Satan, but the tellers of the joke: Haitians themselves.

Another earthquake-related joke features traditional Haitian folk characters, dimwitted gullible Bouki and clever, tricky, charming Ti Malis:

Bouki and Ti Malis are looking up at the stars. Bouki says, “Look at all those stars, Malis. Look how many they are, how far away, how they glitter. What do you think it all means?” Malis responds, “Monchè, it means someone has stolen our tarp!”

In many traditional stories, Bouki and Ti Malis are peasants, and their situations, words, and actions are those of rural Haitians. They address one another as “Konpè” (comrade), they greet each other in the lakou, they play dominos, they climb fruit trees. Like the people who tell the tales Bouki and Malis are uprooted and displaced, from Africa to the Haitian countryside to the urban sprawl of Port-au-Prince. Now these familiar characters, whose stories people have heard since childhood, are transposed, like everyone else, to the transformed post-earthquake landscape of tents, camps, and tarps. Yet their predictable personalities – Bouki’s dreamy naïveté and Malis’s cruel pragmatism, key elements of the humor – remain intact and familiar.

Some jokes made their rounds through text messages. In late 2010, as news of cholera broke and the messages about handwashing and water treatment began to spread (through television, radio, billboards, and text message) and enter the popular lexicon, this joke began to

circulate via SMS. It relies equally on the listener's familiarity with ubiquitous public health warnings and on the absurdity of that familiar advice when twisted and applied to a piece of equipment:

*MSPP (Moun saj pap pran li) says:*<sup>21</sup> You can get cholera from your cell phone! To prevent this, scrub your phone well with soap and rinse it with water. If possible, let it soak in a bucket of treated water for at least one hour. If you can't hear anything after that, give it oral rehydration until it recovers. If it won't turn on, bury it so that it doesn't contaminate other phones.

It's a silly little joke. (If you do those things to your cell phone, of *course* it will die.) But its resonance, as well as the mode of the joke's transmission, demonstrates the increasing prevalence of cell phone technology among Haitian people. As in so many parts of the so-called "developing world", most Haitians don't have access to clean water or adequate sanitation infrastructure (which, in conjunction with MINUSTAH's presence and negligence, led to the cholera outbreak in the first place), but nearly everyone in Port-au-Prince has a cell phone, and increasingly many people in the countryside do as well. More than three years after this particular joke made the rounds, technology has taken off in this paradox of modernity: Haitian people don't have access to clean water or sanitation, food prices continue to escalate while formal employment remains low, people are still living *anba tant* in Port-au-Prince – but those same people (particularly those in their teens through their thirties) can update their Facebook statuses several times a day.

Still another joke played upon the fact that recent events in Haitian history, when condensed to a list, seem to take on biblical proportions. The particular calamities and the order in which they are listed depend on the speaker (I heard it first from a friend who lost her mother on January 12) but they are always a combination of political events, diseases, and so-called

---

21 MSPP is the Haitian Ministry of Public Health (Ministère de la Santé Publique et la Population), but here the acronym has been appropriated to spell Moun Saj Pap Pran li – Wise People Won't Catch It (it being cholera).

“natural” disasters (which are never entirely natural), and the punch line always remains the same:

Haiti has had nine plagues. The first was AIDS. The second was a coup d'état. The third was Préval. The fourth was another coup d'état. The fifth and sixth were hurricanes Jeanne and Gustav. The seventh was the *goudougoudou*. The eighth was hurricane Tomas. The ninth was cholera. If you don't want the tenth plague, don't vote for Célestin.

This particular joke was prescient and partisan. Jude Célestin's slick-smiling image was plastered all over Port-au-Prince that December; he was the candidate for the Unité party, and sitting president Préval's pick to succeed him in late 2010. When the electoral council declared Célestin the second-place finisher in the first-round election, which meant that he would go on to the second round and face off against first-place finisher Mirlande Manigat, disorder flared in Port-au-Prince. Célestin's advancement to the second round was widely believed to be electoral fraud<sup>22</sup>. A literal roar rose up from the city at the moment that Célestin's name was uttered over the radio, and for the next two days, Port-au-Prince was engulfed in smoke from burning cars, burning tires, the burning Unité headquarters. Many roads were blocked, and most people stayed inside, as they had done so many times before during coups and times of political upheaval. This was not possible for many people who were living in tents, however. In the Champ-de-Mars camp, men on motorcycles wearing Célestin T-shirts rode through and shot a reported five to seven people. No one could say whether they were real Célestin supporters, or people who were trying to harm the reputation of Célestin supporters. By the time a journalist friend of mine and I arrived at the Champ-de-Mars camp, there was blood on the ground, weirdly gelatinous, weirdly bright, and several of the portable toilets

---

<sup>22</sup> A complicated affair: electoral fraud ran both ways, the electoral committee was considered risibly incompetent and corrupt; the international committee was in up to its elbows. See Katz (2012) for a thorough discussion.

had been knocked over, leaking their fetid contents into the street. Journalists – both Haitian and non-Haitian – were among the few non-protestors out that day, and they rode their motorcycles through the smoke emblazoned with hot-pink posters of third-place finisher and music star Michel “Sweet Micky” Martelly to purport affinity with the protesters – and, by so doing, hopefully avoid becoming targets. After a few days of disorder, the electoral council announced a revote; Manigat and Martelly, not Célestin, ultimately advanced to the second-round election, and Martelly won.

Another joke focuses on the terrible moments of uncertainty and chaos, recognizable to everyone who lived through the earthquake, in which people tried to find out whether their loved ones had survived.

There once was a mother who had a teenaged daughter. The girl went off to school on January 12, and then the *goudougoudou* happened. The mother ran to the school, and saw it had collapsed, and she cried, "My child, my child, I've lost my child!" Then suddenly the girl came running up to her mother: "Manman, don't cry! I'm here! I skipped school today and went to my boyfriend's house!" The mother, in her relief, exclaims, "Oh, thank God you're a whore!"

The basic premise ("I was going to do *x*, but instead I was doing *y*, and that's why I survived the earthquake") is very familiar: so many people in Port-au-Prince have stories about where they would have been. "I was going to go to the bank, but I got there and the line was too long, so I decided to go another day. The bank collapsed and everyone died." "I was going to go downtown to Rue des Miracles for a pair of shoes, but my son had a fever, so I couldn't go, and then all those poor *machann* died downtown in the *goudougoudou*." The relatability of the joke lies in the randomness of being in the right (or wrong) place at the right (or wrong) time. The humor lies in the fact that that which is normally considered bad and socially unacceptable behavior (skipping school to have sex with one's boyfriend) becomes good — becomes, even, something that a mother would thank God for. This is the power of the disaster, to temporarily



turn established morals on their heads.

Jokes allow people to talk about topics that may be dangerous (politically or psychically or sometimes literally) to discuss directly. Imagining the earthquake as a competition between Jesus and Satan is a way for people, many of whom would never question God directly, to do so obliquely. Leavening stories of earthquake survival with these recognizable moments of humor (the sight of naked neighbors with their hands clasped strategically while the known world collapses, the idea that the cute kid from the telenovela is responsible for the mortality rate) brings the strangeness of the catastrophe back to earth and to reality. Talking about the perils of living under a tarp using Bouki and Ti Malis illustrates vulnerability without naming it aloud; it recognizes and shines a light on the precariousness of the lives of people who not only have to live in tents, but run the risk of losing even that minimal shelter (to thieves or, more likely, to poorly-planned state-sponsored relocation). The joke equating a Célestin presidency to a tenth and final plague is the most dangerous – at once an indictment and warning that Préval’s chosen candidate, Jude Célestin, could be the final straw that breaks this country that has already endured so many unthinkable things. The final joke shows how standard notions of propriety are suspended in a crisis, and causes the listener to remember that perhaps the things that they consider "problems" on an ordinary day are not problems at all, when the world seems to be ending and the possibility of staggering loss is real.

As Donna Goldstein (2003) writes, “Humor is one of the fugitive forms of insubordination” (5). Joking can be a way to cope. Joking can be the telling of uncomfortable or hard-to-articulate truths. Joking allows one to assert one’s humanity in what would seem to be impossibly dehumanizing conditions – of saying that despite everything, the speaker is still here, still a person, and still *telling* a story rather than being dissolved and absorbed into the story.

Joking can be an act of defiance and fury, a way of shaking your fist in the face of injustice, of momentarily wresting control from a world that threatens to bend and vanquish you. It is to subvert fate, to challenge the accidents of history – a way to laugh at earthquakes, to laugh at politics, to laugh at cholera, to laugh at God, to laugh at death.

*After the Wake.*

Humor also keeps away fear and sadness. As we got ready for bed the night of the vèy — with the sound of increasingly-dirty jokes, laughter, and the slap of dominos still drifting in from the fire outside — I noticed that Emmanuella had a red cord around her slim waist. I asked her about it.

"It's so I don't dream about my papa," she explained. "I'm afraid of him. He already appeared to me and made me afraid. In a dream."

"Why were you afraid?"

"He made me afraid. He wanted me to come with him, to where he is. The red cord will make it so he doesn't make me afraid. It will *mare* him [tie him up]."

"But... he's your papa."

"But it's not the same person anymore," Emmanuella explained patiently. "Don't you understand? They turn into a demon, they don't have the same feelings anymore. When they die, they forget everything they knew. You don't know that person anymore. You don't know if they have gone to Heaven to be God's messenger, or to Hell to be punished by fire." Her words revealed an unwitting syncretism of vodoun — the belief that the dead person would return as a demon no longer capable of human thought, feeling, or memory — and Protestant Christianity — the unquestioning acceptance of absolute Heaven and Hell. Yet instead of assigning any

notion of moral deservingness to one's fate in the afterlife (that the "good" will be rewarded and the "sinners" punished), Emmanuella's conception of the destiny of her father (or any other dead person) was seemingly random. It seemed sad, to have all the inflexibility and menace with none of the certainty.

Earlier that day, Anacilia's sister, Claire, a kind-faced, heavy woman with a goiter, had glanced over at Kolibri's twenty-year-old son, who sat alone under a mango tree, fiddling with his cell phone.

"He's not afraid to be alone," whispered Claire.

"Why should he be afraid?" I asked.

"Of Kolibri. Kolibri died."

"But why should he be afraid of his own father?"

"Because he's dead. Some people are afraid of the dead."

"Are you afraid of him?"

"Yes."

"Where you afraid of him when he was alive?"

"No."

"Then why are you afraid of him how that he's dead?" I asked.

"Because he's dead."

"And what if a lot of people die, like in the earthquake? Are people supposed to be afraid then, too?"

"No!" Claire exclaimed. "No. There are too many. You wouldn't be able to live."

Not only are the traditional rituals suspended in the moment of crisis and mass death, but even the standard ways of conceptualizing and feeling death are suspended, as well. A single

death is cause for grief and fear. But thousands of deaths would produce feelings of grief and fear so powerful and overwhelming as to be insupportable.

### *Death as Displacement*

Death can be thought of as a return or repatriation by some, but to others, death is another displacement, a permanent removal to a strange place beyond knowing or recovery. In 2012, Claudine wrote a wrenching poem, "Ma and Me" — Ma, for Manman, and Me, for Melise. In it, she compares the loss of her mother and her aunt to movement, migration, displacement, and *diaspora* — the dead are in another country, far away, a place she cannot reach, even by airplane, a place she cannot get the visa to reach. It suggests the centrality of geographic relocation in the Haitian imaginary, and the absoluteness of citizenship for those for whom, by accident of birth, the possibility of leaving Haiti is as remote and unthinkable as traveling to the hereafter — life beyond Haiti, like death, is an undiscovered country.

*Nou menm ki ale  
Nan yon peyi nèt ale  
Depi nan wout viza n' pran fen  
Defwa m santi m vle pran menm chimen  
Pou al wè si flanbo n toujou limen  
Paske kot lespwa fen kwen  
Se la nou toujou renmen  
Pou m' ta rive jwenn nou,  
Nou ki ale nan yon peyi san fwa  
San lwa, ki pa konn wa  
Nou lage m nan yon konba  
San zespwa, nan mitan yon fènwa  
San pèsonn pou ede m pot kwa  
Nou ki ale nan yon peyi san paspò ni viza  
San menm di m orevwa  
Defwa m santi m vle pran vòl pou al wè nou  
Pou l al pote pou nou  
Bèl ti kado, bo nou  
Di nou je t'èm  
Ak tout kè m.*

*Menm si se peyi ou pa ka al defwa  
Pa gen bonè ni pita  
Pa gen de pozisyon  
Yon sèl fason  
Sou do  
San chapo  
Pou m' a rive jwenn nou  
Konsa pou n' ta manifeste lanmou  
Sa t'ap yon vikwa  
Sou chagren ak dezespwa  
Men ak lafwa  
Yon jou n'a rankontre nou twa  
Lè sa m'a di n' ak yon gwo vwa  
JE VOUS AIME  
MA ET ME*

You, who have gone,  
To a country far away  
Your visa in hand, there's no turning back  
Sometimes I feel I'd like to take that same road,  
To see if the light of our torch burns still  
Because at the cornered limits of hope  
That's where we still love one another.  
If only I could find you,  
You, who have gone to a cold-blooded country  
Without law, that has no king,  
You've left me to struggle alone  
Without hope, in the midst of darkness,  
With no one to help me carry this cross  
You, who have gone to a country without passport nor visa  
Without even telling me goodbye  
Sometimes I feel like taking a flight to go see you  
So I could bring to you  
A pretty little gift, and kiss you  
Tell you *je t'aime*  
With all my heart.  
Even if it is a country you can't just visit from time to time  
There is no sooner or later,  
There is no easy way  
The only way:  
Lying flat  
Dead, to the hatless country, *san chapo*  
For me to at last reach you.  
And that is how we could manifest our love,  
That would be a victory  
Over grief and hopelessness.

But with faith  
One day, we will meet again, we three,  
That is when I will say with all of my voice,  
JE VOUS AIME  
MA ET ME.

But comforting religious notions of death and afterlife also include the possibility of reunification in the hereafter. This is what Claudine's poem suggests, perhaps disconcertingly, when she says that "with faith", she and her mother and her aunt will meet again. She implies that this will happen only in the event of her own death. Indeed, after Melise's death, Claudine became more drawn to the Jehovah's Witness belief to which her cousins Julienne and Isaac were devoted. The Jehovah's Witnesses believed that God promises eternal life for 144,000 "anointed" in a place called Paradise Earth, represented in their pamphlets as a verdant land of flowing streams in which people of all colors and creeds and ethnic garb peacefully hand-feed tigers and koalas. Claudine collected the pamphlets, and kept them under her mattress.

Secular humanitarian aid, with its focus on the here-and-now, with its focus on bodily salvation, has much to say about life but little to say about death. But beyond the drama of "staging an intervention" there was another drama – one that international aid, mobilized by massive disaster, did not know how to face. Death, to secular aid, is the adverse outcome, the thing to be opposed and resisted. A person who has died can no longer be subject to aid's priorities, can no longer be triaged, treated, or saved. That person has crossed the line into the unsalvageable, and is intervened upon no more.

To aid, the dead are of far less importance than the living. To the survivors, the fate of the dead and their souls may be of extreme importance. According to Métraux, "a dead person will only harass the living if they neglect him, if they omit to wear mourning, if they fail to withdraw the *loa* from his head and finally if they show themselves dilatory in giving him a

worthy burial-place” (1972: 258). In light of this, what becomes of the dead, and their souls, and their families when there is no ritual, no burial mass, no wake, no last prayer? What becomes of the dead buried in mass graves at St. Christophe, of the dead paved over with basketball courts, of the dead who were never recovered? What becomes of them, when the living cannot be liberated from their obligations to the dead, and the dead themselves cannot be liberated from their unfinished lives?

*Among the Living and the Dead*  
*Titanyen, 2012*

*"Oh Christ!" I cried. "Since they're going to tie us to a post like they nailed you to the cross and cover our bodies with wounds, let our deaths mean something and don't let our names be lost in oblivion."*

Marie Vieux-Chauvet, *Love, Anger, Madness*

*"We, the survivors, are not the true witnesses."*

Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*



Figure 42: Haiti nailed to the cross by unknown aggressors

Graffiti by Jerry Rosembert

Herold said that in the days after the quake, they brought in thousands of bodies, that they filled the land from the steep hillside where the crosses are planted, all the way to the side of the road. He said that we were walking on the dead.

"I took video of it," he explained. "But I can't get it to work. The camera's no good, or the battery, the battery's no good. The trucks kept coming, and they dumped thousands and thousands of dead bodies."

"Why did you take a video?" I asked. "Why would you ever want to see that again?"

"Because I had never seen anything like that before in my life. I just took the video for myself, a souvenir. I'd never seen that before in my life." Herold says nothing of bearing



witness, of recording those horrific events in order to tell the story of great suffering and injustice, of documenting a terrible truth so that it will never pass again. He does not speak of Western bourgeois conceptions of “awareness” and testimony and remembering, that naïve belief that if we unearth, set down, and transmit the fact and the experience of atrocity, of genocide, of injustice, we will stop it from occurring again.

The next hill over is dotted with prela houses. On the mountains behind us, Morne Cabrit, big trucks roll in, carrying sand: Haiti's mountains, cultivated and overcultivated and slowly sucked dry, are now being harvested for their bones. Before us, the bay is clear and beautiful blue-green, and beyond the curve of the bay, Port-au-Prince is just a mottled gray smudge.

The main memorial is a small tiled dais, on which is centered an ugly beige chunk of volcanic-looking rock. There is a small inscription: "12 JAN 2010. NOU PAP JANM BLIYEW." *We will never forget you.* It is what people often say after a death, when someone dies, particularly a young or especially mourned person, and the community has strung banners across the streets, between the buildings, or spray-painted on the walls: the name of the deceased, and *nou pap janm bliye w.* But the wording on the memorial confuses me; the "you" is singular, not plural. It doesn't sound as though the thousands of dead are the ones that we are promising not to forget; in that case, it would say *nou pap janm bliye nou.* The way it is written, it sounds as though it is addressing January 12, 2010 itself. January 12, not the dead, is the thing that we will never forget.

Most of the small black crosses that were planted for the one-year anniversary have by now been ripped up from the ground, by animals, by wind, by rain. There are not that many left still standing. Most lie on the dry ground, broken. There are some plastic flowers and wreathes.

*We will never forget* – but the landscape, already a desert from centuries of exploitation, already a burial ground, will not hold these fragile emblems of memorial. All around us is forgetting. In the city, people move back into the cement houses. In Titanyen, unchecked, unregulated construction begins.

On the stone monument for the Paroisse St. Louis, a church that collapsed, someone has graffitied, in fading blue spray paint: *ONG OPTIMIST* (NGO OPTIMIST). I don't know what this means—I've never seen the phrase before, amid more common graffitied sentiments about NGOs sprayed on walls throughout Port-au-Prince, such as *ONG VOLÈ* (NGO THIEVES) – except to know that it is an ironic commentary. I don't know who left the words, or what kind of offense he considered optimism to be.

There are long, long purple cloths, tangled on the dusty ground. Herold says it's from when they had an event here a few days ago, with President Martelly, and the place was decorated. This is what this place has become: a place to commemorate the anniversary once a year, a place for dignitaries to visit solemnly, a place for the occasional government or NGO photo op. I know no ordinary resident of Port-au-Prince who comes here. It is too remote, too expensive to get to, and too sad a memory to force to the surface. Can this really be a memorial, so far from daily life, so hidden from view, so scarcely visited?

Some of the larger crosses are hand-painted with words and designs. But most of them lie on the ground, uprooted and abandoned, growing bleached by the rain and sun. One of the sturdier crosses stands, taller than a person. Standing alone on this windswept hillside, it looks like Calvary. Painted with delicate purple hibiscus flowers, it bears a tiny metal plaque: "Let us remember those who have gone before us in the voyage of life."



Figure 43: “We Will Never Forget the Ones that Went Before Us”

Before we climb up to the top, Herold goes up first to make sure no one has done any *maji*, any black magic. I want to tease him, "I thought you were a Protestant now!" but by now I know that just because somebody doesn't practice vodoun doesn't mean they don't believe in it. He goes to check, then gestures for the rest of us to follow. There are so many fallen, uprooted crosses that they intersect, lying upon one another. Herold warns me not to step over the crosses that have fallen — out of fear of *maji*, not out of respect for the dead — so I have to play hopscotch in places. There are so many fallen crosses.

It is hot, dry and windy — the wind makes it feel less hot, but we're sweating. The hillside is covered in low scrubby plants that do little to keep the soil from eroding. We get thorns in our sandaled heels. There are lots of thorns, and the path is laden with dry crumbling poop from the donkeys and goats that use these paths more than people do.

We come across a swatch of something on the ground. At first I think it is some kind of strange purplish moss, but on closer inspection it looks like a discarded piece of carpet. "Don't touch it! Don't touch it!" cries Herold.

I withdraw my hand quickly, because of the urgency in his voice.

"It's the dead," Herold exclaims. "They're there. It's the clothes of someone who's dead."

I lean toward the object. "It is not," I said. "It's a piece of carpet."

He kept insisting it was the clothes of the dead, and then he leaned closer and conceded that it was, in fact, a piece of carpet. "But still, don't touch it. There are germs on the ground." It sounded a little as though he was trying to save face. "*Kolera*. And we don't have any alcohol to clean our hands."

For Herold, the dead are just at the surface, rising up through the dust, as close as if they had never been buried. They are not part of the past at all, and we do not have to struggle to remember them. They are just beyond us, in the invisible realm, and not so hard to reach. The dead are a discomfiting part of the present, threatening us with their proximity.



Figure 44: Uprooted Crosses at St. Christophe

Summer 2012

*Souviens-toi que tu es poussière*. It is easy to do here, in this permeable space, this liminal space. The dust is everywhere. The hills of Titanyen are stripped and dry, their bones bared shadeless to the glaring sun. Deep under our feet are tens of thousands of earthquake dead, deeper than Herold believes, turning to dust. The uprooted wooden crosses wash down the hillsides in the rain. Soon they will decompose and they will disappear, too. Somewhere in this earth are decades of bodies tortured and discarded, who disappeared long ago. *Souviens-toi que tu es poussière*. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Our bodies are not our own. Our lives are not our

own. Clusters of tents flap in the hot wind, to the right and to the left, are the opposite of a memento mori. They are a reminder not of death but of life – of the desperate urgency of life, of the chronic disaster and the perpetual will to survive and perhaps even love that accompanies the disaster. The urgency that grinds down the memory of death and loss, that unsanctifies this burial ground. For in this desert called Canaan, the Promised Land, the recent dead and the long-ago dead coexist quietly with the living subjects of the international aid apparatus, the displaced and re-displaced – between worlds, like the Gede spirits, at this most absurd crossroads of all.

## WORKS CITED

- Abu Sada, Caroline. "Origin of the Perception Project." *In the Eyes of Others: How People in Crisis Perceive Humanitarian Aid*. Ed. Caroline Abu Sada. New York: NYU Center on International Cooperation, 2012. 10-65.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. Tran. Daniel Heller-Roazen. New York: Zone Books, 1999.
- Alexis, Jacques Stéphen. *General Sun, My Brother*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999.
- Anglade, Georges. *Atlas Critique d'Haïti*. Montréal.: Groupe d'Études et de Recherches Critiques d'Espace Département de Géographie, Université du Québec à Montréal. Centre de Recherches Caraïbes de l'Université de Montréal, 1982.
- Anglade, Georges. *L'Espace Haïtien*. Montreal: Les Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1975.
- Aparicio, Juan Ricardo. "Mattresses, Folders and Internally Displaced Persons: Towards an Anthropology of "failure"." Master of Arts University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2007. Print.
- . *Rumors, Residues and Governance in the "Best Corner of South-America": A Grounded History of the 'Human' Limit in Colombia*. PhD University of North Carolina, 2009. Print.
- Ariès, Philippe, and Georges Duby eds. *A History of Private Life*. Eds. Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Aristide, Jean-Bertrand. *In the Parish of the Poor: Writings from Haiti*. Ed. Amy Wilentz. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990. Web.
- Bastien, Remy. "Haitian Rural Family Organization." *Social and Economic Studies* 10(4): 1961: 478-510.
- Beckett, Greg. "Phantom Power: Notes on Provisionality in Haiti." *Anthropology and Global Counterinsurgency*, Eds. John D. Kelly, et al. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010. 39-52.
- Bellegarde-Smith, Patrick. *Haiti: The Breached Citadel*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, Inc, 2004 (1990).
- Bellegarde-Smith, Patrick. "Broken Mirrors: Mythos, Memory, and National History." *Haitian Vodou: Spirit, Myth, and Reality*. Eds. Patrick Bellegarde-Smith and Claudine Michel, 2006. 19-31.

- Benthall, Jonathan. *Disasters, Relief, and the Media*. London: I.B. Tauris and Co Ltd, 1993.
- Bhatia, Pooja. "Still-Lives of Haiti, Much Too Still." *New York Observer*. Jan 12, 2011.
- Bornstein, Erica, and Peter Redfield, eds. *Forces of Compassion: Humanitarianism between Ethics and Politics*. Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research, 2010.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- Bragg, Rick. "The Auschwitz of Haiti for Three Decades Gives Up the Secrets of its Dark Past." *The New York Times* 1 October 1994.
- Briggs, Charles L., and Clara Mantini-Briggs. *Stories in the Time of Cholera: Racial Profiling during a Medical Nightmare*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Brodwin, Paul. *Medicine and Morality in Haiti: The Contest for Healing Power*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1996.
- Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement. *Under the Radar: Internally Displaced Persons in Non-Camp Settings*. Brookings Institute-LSE, 2013.
- Brooks, David. "The Underlying Tragedy"." *New York Times*. January 14, 2010.
- Brown, Karen McCarthy. "The Center and the Edges: God and Person in Haitian Society." *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 7 (Fall), 1979: 22-39.
- . *Mama Lola : A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. Web.
- Bulameh, Rodrigo Charafeddine. "O CULTIVO DOS COMUNS: Parentesco e Práticas Sociais Em Milot, Haiti." Master's thesis, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 2013.
- Buss, Terry, and Adam Gardner. *Haiti in the Balance; Why Foreign Aid has failed and what we can do about it*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2008.
- Butt, Leslie. "The Suffering Stranger: Medical Anthropology and International Morality." *Medical Anthropology: Cross-Cultural Studies in Health and Illness* 21(1), 2002: 1-24.
- Caldeira, Teresa P. R. *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo*. . Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- Carroll, Rory. "John Travolta Flies Scientologists' Aid to Haiti." *Guardian*. January 26, 2010 2010.
- Casimir, Jean. *Pa Bliye 1804/Souviens-Toi De 1804*. . Delmas, Haïti: Imprimerie Lakay, 2004.

- Chauvet-Vieux, Marie. *Love, Anger, Madness : A Haitian Trilogy*. Eds. Rose-Myriam Réjouis and Val Vinokur. New York: Modern Library, 2009.
- Chen, Kwan-Hwa, and Gerald Murray. "Truths and Untruths in Village Haiti: An Experiment in Third World Survey Research." *Culture, Natalty, and Family Planning*. Eds. John F. Marshall and Steven Polgar. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976. 241-262.
- Chomsky, Noam. *Year 501: The Conquest Continues*. New York: South End Press, 1999.
- Clérismé, Rénald. "Vodou, Peasant Songs, and Political Organizing." *Haitian Vodou: Spirit, Myth, and Reality*. Eds. Patrick Bellegarde-Smith and Claudine Michel. Bloomington: Indian University Press, 2006. 58-69.
- Collinson, Sarah. "The Emergent Status of 'Internally Displaced Person'." *Realising Protection: The Uncertain Benefits of Civilian, Refugee, and IDP Status*. Eds. Sarah Collinson, et al. Humanitarian Policy Group/Overseas Development Institute, 2009.
- Corvington, Georges. *Port-Au-Prince Au Cours Des Ans (1743-1950)*. Port-au-Prince: Maison Henri Deschamps, 1992.
- Daniel, Trenton. "Haiti Splashes Slum with Psychedelic Colors." *Associated Press*. March 25 2013 2013.
- Danner, Mark. *Stripping Bare the Body : Politics, Violence, War*. New York, NY: Nation Books, 2009.
- Danticat, Edwidge. "Lòt Bo Dlo, the Other Side of the Water"." *Haiti After the Earthquake*. Ed. Paul Farmer, 2011. 249-258.
- Das, Veena. *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.
- Dayan, Joan. *Haiti, History, and the Gods*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. Print.
- Deibert, Michael. *Notes from the Last Testament : The Struggle for Haiti*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005.
- Desir, Charlene. "Diasporic Lakou: A Haitian Academic Explores Her Path to Haiti Pre- and Post-Earthquake." *Harvard Educational Review* 81.2 (2011): 278-96. *ERIC*.
- Dickey, Sara. "Mutual Exclusions: Domestic Workers and Employers on Labor, Class, and Character in South India." In *Home and Hegemony: Domestic Service and Identity Politics in South and Southeast Asia*. Kathleen Adams and Sara Dickey, eds. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. 31-62.



- Diederich, Bernard and Al Burt. *Papa Doc & the Tontons Macoutes*. Princeton: M. Wiener Publishers, 2005 (1970).
- Dubois, Laurent. *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2012. Print.
- . *Avengers of the New World : The Story of the Haitian Revolution*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Dumont, Jean-Paul. "Always Home, Never Home: Visayan 'Helpers' and Identities." In *Home and Hegemony: Domestic Service and Identity Politics in South and Southeast Asia*. Kathleen Adams and Sara Dickey, eds. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000.119-136.
- El-Haddad, Laila, and Maggie Schmitt. *The Gaza Kitchen: A Palestinian Culinary Journey*. Charlottesville, VA.: Just World Books, 2012.
- Erikson, Kai. *Everything in its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976.
- Farmer, Paul. *AIDS and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, 2006.
- . *Infections and Inequalities: The Modern Plagues*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. Print.
- . *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Farmer, Paul. *The Uses of Haiti*. Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1994 (2005).
- Fassin, Didier. "The Humanitarian Politics of Testimony: Subjectification through Trauma in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict." *Cultural Anthropology* 23.3 (2008): 531-58.
- Fassin, Didier, and Mariella Pandolfi, eds. *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions*. New York: Zone Books, 2010.
- Fatton, Robert Jr. *Haiti's Predatory Republic: The Unending Transition to Democracy*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002.
- Feldman, Ilana. "Home as a Refrain: Remembering and Living Displacement in Gaza." *History and Memory* 18.2 (2006): 10-47.
- Ferreira, Susana. "Haiti's Earthquake, Two Years On: Where the Living Mingle with the Dead." *Time*. January 10 2012.

- Fick, Carolyn E. *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990.
- Fischer, Sibylle. "Haiti: Fantasies of Bare Life." *The Idea of Haiti: Rethinking Crisis and Development*. Ed. Millery Polyné. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013. 69-88.
- French, Howard. "Hundreds are Lost as Crowded Ferry Capsizes Off Haiti." *New York Times*. February 19 1993.
- Funari, Pedro, Andrés Zarankin, and Melisa Salerno, eds. *Memories from Darkness: Archaeology of Repression and Resistance in Latin America*. New York: Springer, 2009.
- Gaffield, Julia. "So Many Schemes in Agitation: The Haitian State and the Atlantic World." Dissertation Duke University, 2012.
- Gaillard, Roger. *Le Guerilla De Batrville*. Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie Le Natal, 1983.
- . *Premier Écrasement Du Cacoïsme*. Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie Le Natal, 1981.
- . *Charlemagne Péralte Le Caco*. Port-au-Prince, Haïti, 1982.
- Goldstein, Donna M. *Laughter Out of Place: Race, Class, Violence, and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Gouvernement de la Republique d'Haïti. *Plan Stratégique de développement d'haïti: pays Émergent En 2030. Tome I: Les Grands Chantiers Pour Le relèvement Et Le Développement d'Haïti*. Port-au-Prince.: Ministère de la Planification et de la Coopération externe, 2012.
- Greenburg, Jenny. " "We're an NGO with Guns": Haitian Geographies of Militarized Development and Humanitarianism " PhD University of California, 2014.
- Greene, Graham, 1904-1991. *The Comedians*. Ed. Paul Theroux. New York: Penguin Books, 2005.
- . *The Quiet American*. Ed. John Clark Pratt. New York: Penguin Books, 1996. Web.
- Haiti E-Shelter and Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster. "Fact Sheet – UCLBP & Shelter and CCCM Cluster Haiti – December 2012.
- Hancock, Graham. *Lords of Poverty: The Power, Prestige, and Corruption of the International Aid Business*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989.
- Hannerz, Ulf. *Foreign News: Exploring the World of Foreign Correspondents*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

- Heinl, Robert Debs, 1916-1979. *Written in Blood : The Story of the Haitian People, 1492-1995*. Eds. Michael Heinl and Nancy Gordon Heinl. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2005.
- Herz, Ansel. "How to Write about Haiti." *Huffington Post*. July 23 2010.
- Hoffman, Susanna M., and Anthony Oliver-Smith, eds. *Catastrophe and Culture: The Anthropology of Disaster*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2002.
- Howland, Todd. "Peacekeeping and Conformity with Human Rights Law: How MINUSTAH Falls Short in Haiti." *International Peacekeeping* 13.4 (Dec 2006): 462-76.
- Hurbon, Laënnec. *Culture et dictature En Haïti: L'Imaginaire sous contrôle*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1979.
- Hurbon, Laënnec. *Le barbare imaginaire*. Port-au-Prince: Éditions Henri Deschamps, 1987.
- Institut Haïtien des Statistiques et Informatique, Haïti. *Projection De La Population Totale par arrondissement Et Par Commune*. Port-au-Prince, 1997.
- International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). "Hoping for Change in Haiti's Cité Soleil." *Magazine of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*. 2006.
- International Organization for Migration (IOM). *Haiti: From Emergency to Sustainable Recovery. IOM Haiti Two-Year Report (2010-2011)*. MINUSTAH Log Base, Port-au-Prince, Haiti: International Organization for Migration, 2012.
- Interuniversity Institute for Research and Development (INURED). *"Voices from the Shanties: A Post-Earthquake Rapid Assessment of Cité Soleil, Port-Au-Prince."* Port-au-Prince: 2010.
- James, Erica. *Democratic Insecurities: Violence, Trauma, and Intervention in Haiti*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.
- James, Erica. "Haunting Ghosts: Madness, Gender, and Ensekirite in Haiti in the Democratic Era." In *Postcolonial Disorders*. Ed. Mary-Jo DelVecchio Good, Sandra Hyde, and Byron Good. 132-156, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008
- Johnson, James Wheldon. "The Truth about Haiti: An NAACP Investigation." *Crisis* 5 (1920): 217-24.
- Karan, Donna. "Donna's Journal: Haiti." 2014.  
<<http://www.donnakaran.com/editorial/detail/cb625e21-1b18-42a5-aae2-9e881f670e14/haiti>>.
- Katz, Jonathan M. *The Big Truck that Went by: How the World Came to Save Haiti and Left Behind a Disaster*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

- Kidder, Louise H. "Dependents in the Master's House: When Rock Dulls Scissors." In *Home and Hegemony: Domestic Service and Identity Politics in South and Southeast Asia*. Kathleen Adams and Sara Dickey, eds. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. 207-220.
- Kivland, Chelsey Louise. "We make the State?": Performance, Politick, and Respect in Urban Haiti." Doctor of Philosophy, Anthropology University of Chicago, 2012.
- Kivland, Chelsey L. "Unmaking the State in 'Occupied' Haiti." *PoLAR: Political & Legal Anthropology Review* 35.2 (2012): 248-70.
- Kleinman, Arthur, Veena Das, and Margaret Lock, eds. *Social Suffering*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Kraft, Scott. "Piles of the Dead Finally Buried in Titanyen, Haiti's Valley of Death." *Los Angeles Times*. Feb 1 2010.
- Laguette, Michel S. *Diasporic Citizenship: Haitian Americans in Transnational America*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.
- Lamaute, Emmanuel. *Le Vieux Port-Au-Prince*. Port-au-Prince]: Bèljwèt Publications, 1999.
- Lassiter, Luke Eric. *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Le Nouvelliste. "Des stars dans nos murs." 8 December 2011.
- Levi, Primo. *Survival in Auschwitz*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996.
- Lewis, David, Dennis Rodgers, and Michael Woolcock. *The Fiction of Development : Knowledge, Authority and Representation*. London: LSE Research Online. 2005.
- Lowenthal, Ira Paul. "'Marriage is 20, Children are 21': The Cultural Construction of Conjugal and the Family in Rural Haiti." Ph.D. The Johns Hopkins University, 1987. United States -- Maryland: *ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text*.
- Lutz, Catherine, Matthew Gutmann, and Keith Brown. *Conduct and Discipline in UN Peacekeeping Operations: Culture, Political Economy and Gender*. Providence, RI.: Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University, 2009.
- Macdonald, Isabel. "'Parachute Journalism' in Haiti: Media Sourcing in the 2003-2004 Political Crisis." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 33 (2008): 213-32.
- MacFarquhar, Neil. "U.N. Honors the 101 Who Served and Died in Haiti." *New York Times*. March 9 2010.

- Malkki, Liisa. "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization." *Cultural Anthropology* 11.3 (1996): 377-404.
- Malkki, Liisa. *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Maternowska, M. Catherine. *Reproducing Inequities*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006.
- McAlister, Elizabeth. "'Listening for Geographies: Music as Sonic Compass Pointing Towards African and Christian Diasporic Horizons in the Caribbean.'" *Geographies of the Haitian Diaspora*. Ed. Regine O. Jackson. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- . "Soundscapes of Disaster and Humanitarianism: Survival Singing, Relief Telethons, and the Haiti Earthquake." *Small Axe* 39 (2012): 22-38.
- . "From Slave Revolt to a Blood Pact with Satan: The Evangelical Rewriting of Haitian History." *The Idea of Haiti: Rethinking Crisis and Development*. Ed. Millery Polyné. 2013. 203-242.
- . "Possessing the Land for Jesus." *Spirited Things: The Work of "Possession" in Afro-Atlantic Religions*. Ed. Paul Christopher Johnson. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. 2014. 177-205
- . *Rara! Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and its Diaspora*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Ménard, Nadève. "The Myth of the Exiled Writer." *Transition: New Narratives of Haiti*. Eds. Laurent Dubois and Kaiama L. Glover. Harvard University: Hutchins Center, 2013.
- Merin, Ofer, Nachman Ash, and et al. "the Israeli Field Hospital in Haiti — Ethical Dilemmas in Early Disaster Response." *New England Journal of Medicine* 362(38), 2010: 362:e38.
- Métraux, Alfred. *Voodoo in Haiti*. Tran. Hugo Charteris. New York: Schocken Books, 1972 [1959].
- Miller, James P. "Redefining the Lakou: The Resilience of a Vernacular Settlement Pattern in Post-Disaster Haiti." Master of Arts, Architecture, University of Oregon, 2013.
- Minn, Pierre H. "Where they Need Me: The Moral Economy of International Medical Aid in Haiti." Doctor of Philosophy, Anthropology, McGill University, 2011.
- Mintz, Sidney W. "'Whitewashing Haiti's History.'" *Boston Review*. Jan 22, 2010.
- . *Caribbean Transformations*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1974. Print.
- . *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Penguin Books,

1985.

- Mintz, Sidney W., and Richard Price. *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1976.
- Mitchell, Christopher. "U.S. Policy Toward Haitian Boat People, 1972-93 ." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 534, Strategies for Immigration Control: An International Comparison (Jul. 1994): 69-80.
- Moran, Mary H. "Civilized Servants: Child Fosterage and Training for Status among the Glebo of Liberia." In Karen Tranberg Hansen, ed., *African Encounters with Domesticity*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992. 98-115
- Nordstrom, Carolyn. *Shadows of War : Violence, Power, and International Profiteering in the Twenty-First Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- Norheim-Martinsen, Per M. *Brazil: An Emerging Peacekeeping Actor*. Oslo: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Center, November 2012.
- O'Connor, Maura R. "Does International Aid Keep Haiti Poor?" *Slate.com*, 4 January 2011.
- Oliver-Smith, Anthony. "Peru's Five-Hundred-Year Earthquake: Vulnerability in Historical Context." *The Angry Earth: Disaster in Anthropological Perspective*. Eds. Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna M. Hoffman., 1999. 74-88.
- Oliver-Smith, Anthony, and Susanna M. Hoffman, eds. *The Angry Earth: Disaster in Anthropological Perspective*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Pedely, Mark. *War Stories: The Culture of Foreign Correspondents*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Pelkmans, Mathijs, and Rhys Machold. "Conspiracy Theories and their Truth Trajectories." *Focaal—Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 59 (2011): 66-80.
- Pierre-Charles, Gérard. *Radiographie d'Une Dictature: Haïti et Duvalier*. Editions de l'Université d'État d'Haïti, 2013 (1969, 1973).
- Plummer, Brenda Gayle. *Haiti and the United States: The Psychological Moment*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992.
- Pressley-Sanon, Toni. "Lucid Cameras: Imaging Haiti After the Earthquake of 2010." *Journal of Haitian Studies* 17.2 (2011): 6-32.
- Price-Mars, Jean. *So Spoke the Uncle/Ainsi Parla l'Oncle*. Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1983.

- Ramsey, Kate. *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- Redfield, Peter. "A Less Modest Witness: Collective Advocacy and Motivated Truth in a Medical Humanitarian Movement." *American Ethnologist* 33(1), 2006: 3-26.
- "Doctors, Borders, and Life in Crisis." *Cultural Anthropology* 20(3), 2005: 328-61.
- *Life in Crisis: The Ethical Journey of Doctors without Borders*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.
- "Vital Mobility and the Humanitarian Kit." *Biosecurity Interventions: Global Health and Security in Question*. Eds. Andrew Lakoff and Stephen J. Collier. 2008. 147-171.
- Renda, Mary A. *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.
- Richman, Karen E. *Migration and Vodou*. University Press of Florida: Gainesville, 2005.
- Rist, Gilbert. *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith*. London: Zed Books, 2003.
- Robins, Stephen. "Poo Wars as Matter Out of Place: 'Toilets for Africa' in Cape Town." *Anthropology Today* 30(1), 2014: 1-3.
- Roumain, Jacques. *Masters of the Dew*. New York, Reynal & Hitchcock 1947], 1947.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
- Schuller, Mark. *Unstable Foundations: Impact of NGOs on Human Rights for Port-Au-Prince's Internally Displaced People*, 2010.
- *Killing with Kindness: Haiti, International Aid, and NGOs*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012.
- Sherwell, Philip, and Patrick Sawyer. "Haiti Earthquake: Looting and Gun-Fights Break Out." *The Telegraph*. January 16 2010.
- Shevchenko, Olga. *Crisis and the Everyday in Postsocialist Moscow*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2010.
- Singer, Merrill, Freddie Valentín, Hans Baer, and Zhongke Jia. "Why Does Juan García Have a Drinking Problem? The Perspective of Critical Medical Anthropology." *Medical Anthropology: Cross-Cultural Studies in Health and Illness*. 14(1): 1992. 77-108.
- Singer, Merrill. *Introduction to Syndemics: A Systems Approach to Public and Community*

- Health*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009.
- Smith, Jennie M. *When the Hands are Many: Community Organization and Social Change in Rural Haiti* 201. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.
- Smith, Katherine Marie. "Gede Rising: Haiti in the Age of Vagabondaj." Ph.D. University of California, Los Angeles, 2010.
- Smith, Katherine. "Dialoging with the Urban Dead in Haiti." *Southern Quarterly*. 47(4), Summer 2010. 61-90.
- Solnit, Rebecca. *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities that Arise in Disaster*. New York: Viking, 2009.
- Sontag, Deborah. "In Haiti, Little can be found of a Hip-Hop Artist's Charity." *New York Times*. October 11 2012.
- Speri, Alice. "My Haiti: Interview with Michèle Montas." April 2010.  
<<http://www.alicesperi.com/my-haiti-interview-with-michele-montas-new-york-april-2010/>>.
- Taylor, Janelle S. "The Story Catches You and You Fall Down: Tragedy, Ethnography, and 'Cultural Competence'." *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 17(2), 2003: 159-81.
- Tickin, Miriam. *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Haiti: State Against Nation: Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990.
- . "The Odd and the Ordinary: Haiti, the Caribbean and the World," *Cimarrón. New Perspectives on the Caribbean*, 2(3), 1990: 3-12.
- . *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.
- Ulysse, Gina Athena. "Why Haiti Needs New Narratives Now More than Ever." *Tectonic Shifts: Haiti since the Earthquake*. Eds. Mark Schuller and Pablo Morales. Sterling, VA.: Kumarian Press, 2012. 240-244.
- United Nations Development Program (UNDP). *La Vulnérabilité En Haïti: Chemin Inévitable Vers La Pauvreté? Rapport National Sur Le Développement Humain – Haïti*, 2004.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). *Driven by Desperation: Transactional Sex as a Survival Strategy in Port-Au-Prince IDP Camps*, May 2011.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Global Study on Homicide*. 2011.



United Nations. *Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women: Haiti*. Combined Reports: 1982, 1986, 1990, 1994, 1998, 2002 and 2006. 2008.

---. "MINUSTAH Mandate." 2012. Web.

<<http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minustah/mandate.shtml>>.

Wagner, Laura. "Haiti: A Survivor's Story." *Salon*. Feb 1 2010.

Weix, G.G. "Inside the Home and Outside the Family: The Domestic Estrangement of Javanese Servants." In *Home and Hegemony: Domestic Service and Identity Politics in South and Southeast Asia*. Kathleen Adams and Sara Dickey, eds. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. 137-156.

White, Luise. *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

Zanotti, Laura. "Imagining Democracy, Building Unsustainable Institutions: The UN Peacekeeping Operation in Haiti ." *Security Dialogue* 39.5 (2008): 539-61.