

**What's Wrong with Haiti?  
Politics, Development, and Discourse in Port-au-Prince**

by

Alison C. Joersz

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Stuart Kirsch, Co-Chair  
Associate Professor Michael P. Lempert, Co-Chair  
Assistant Professor Robert S. Jansen  
Professor Alaina M. Lemon  
Professor Kristina S. Wirtz, Western Michigan University

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## Note on Language

The two major languages spoken in Haiti today are French and Haitian Kreyòl. Only about ten or fifteen percent of Haitians living in the country speak French while nearly all speak some form of Kreyòl.<sup>1</sup> Despite this, French retains an elevated status socially, particularly given its association with a level of class and education. Nearly all Haitians residing within Haiti refer to their primary language as “Kreyòl.” Although there exists a small movement by some, mostly in foreign, academic settings outside of Haiti, pushing to call the language “Haitian,” my observations have demonstrated that this name has not taken root within Haitian society. The name Kreyòl likely derives from, and is often confused with, linguistic and cultural category of “creole.”

During the early stages of the development of colonial, plantation cultures of the Caribbean region, “creole” or the Portuguese equivalent “*criollo*,” was used as a marker of the particularities of cultural development within those colonies, both among slave populations as well as European colonists. According to anthropologist Stephan Palmié (2006:443), “linguists were, in fact, the first scholars who plucked the term creole from New World vernaculars and aimed to operationalize it as the designation of an analytically identifiable class of phenomena.” Through research and theoretical elaboration, linguistic identification of a language as a “creole”

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<sup>1</sup> Much has been written about the language situation in Haiti, especially by linguists. See d’Ans (1968), Degraff (2009), Dejean (1993), Doucet (2003), Fontaine (1981), Jean-Charles (1987), Jean-François (2006), Lawless (1992), Romain (2007), Salmi (2000), Schieffelin & Doucet (1994), Valdman (1971, 1988), Youssef (2002), and Zéphir (1990).

has identified those languages as differing in development from other, non-creole languages. As a legacy of the slave trade and a result of French colonialism in the country, influence of the French language on the development of Kreyòl is clear. Although, to be sure, linguists remain considerably split on the question of Kreyòl's genesis and development. In similar ways, there is considerable disagreement within the field of linguistics regarding the question of what constitutes a creole language more generally and to what degree they differ from other languages. Some linguists, such as Michel Degraff (2003a, 2003b, 204, 2009), have condemned the linguistic category of creole as racist, arguing that it ultimately contributes to the "miseducation" of creole speakers by producing and reproducing particular stereotypes of creole languages as "exceptional" and "simplified."<sup>1</sup> In Haiti, the status of Kreyòl was subordinated in relation to assumptions as to the superior capabilities of the French language. Haitian linguist Jean Métellus (1998:122-3) illustrates the devalued status of Kreyòl in relation to French in arguing:

Creole does not enable any Haitian to legitimate his or her roots since it does not represent the Haitian's indigenous nature... creolophone Haitians should not claim a simplified system reduced to the simple needs of communication, orders, questions, and answers as their only linguistic universe.

Indeed, this evaluation of Kreyòl has long been tied to assumptions made about speakers themselves. As Kathryn Woolard (1998:17) argues, "ideas about what is or is not a 'real' language have contributed to profound decisions about civility and even the humanity of others, particularly subjects of colonial domination." In Haiti, negative associations with Kreyòl have also translated to negative assumptions about monolingual, rural speakers as uneducated peasants.

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<sup>1</sup> For readers interested in learning more about the different theoretical positions on the question of what is or is not a creole language – including the consequences of the categorization process itself – will find a more detailed treatment of this topic in Appendix 2.

Identification of Kreyòl as a distinct language, as opposed to a dialect or “bastardized French” (Degraff 2009:124), has its roots in François (Papa Doc) Duvalier’s efforts at promoting black nationalism through *noirisme* (Trouillot 1990a). Beginning in 1964, the Haitian constitution called for accommodations for monolingual Kreyòl speakers in specific domains where it was deemed necessary (Schieffelin & Doucet 1994:178). It was later elevated to the status of a national language in 1983 and since 1987 has sat alongside French as an official language. The process has been a politically contentious one.<sup>2</sup> Although its genesis and development remains hotly debated by linguists and Haitian scholars, Kreyòl has largely been recognized as differentiated from French in its sound system as well as its grammatical features. While, in some cases, Kreyòl words and phrases resemble those of French, differences still remain, particularly in terms of phonetics, or the sound systems from which pronunciations derive. As with most languages, there are also a number of variations of Kreyòl, some of which draw more on French lexicon, idioms, and phonetics (*Kreyòl fransize* / Frenchified Kreyòl), while others are considered more “rough” (*Kreyòl rèk*), departing more significantly from French.<sup>3</sup>

The orthographic choices of the language’s written form have also been rooted in political and ideological controversy (Schieffelin & Doucet 1994). Although there continues to be significant variation in actual orthographic choices made by individual Haitians, most

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<sup>2</sup> This aligns with the linguistic distinction between a language and a dialect. An oft cited linguistic joke queries: What’s the difference between a dialect and a language? The punchline is “an army,” referencing the political aspect of such a determination.

<sup>3</sup> Although it remains difficult to pinpoint a clear boundary between different varieties of Kreyòl, Doucet (2003:286-305) has attempted to understand the different categories used socially as associated with different varieties of the language. In her work, she outlines a continuum of language varieties ranging from what is considered a more “pure” form (*Kreyòl rèk/gwo Kreyòl/bon Kreyòl/Kreyòl swa* [rough/good/smooth Kreyòl]), to more frenchified variations (*Kreyòl fransize*) and Haitian French. The development of distinct varieties and corresponding ideologies represent marks of identification based on class, educational attainment and regional differences. In her work, Doucet “presents an analytic description of the metalinguistic terms used by...consultants to compare and describe Kreyòl and French. [The] terms also convey their appraisal of the sociolinguistic situation of Haiti and represent in a very condensed form their evaluation of linguistic practices and norms of usage regarding the two languages” (2003:286-7).

generally draw on an orthography that is significantly different from that of French, based more strongly on a phonetic alphabet than the French system.<sup>4</sup> The process of making official orthographic choices, however, has not been an easy one, with advocates pushing for more connection to French orthography and others pushing for less (Schieffelin & Doucet 1994). Despite the controversy, literate Haitians draw on a relatively consistent orthography, albeit one with a degree of variation that depends largely on where an individual went to school and the quality of education obtained.

In contemporary Haiti, French continues to be the dominant language of instruction, education, and high class.<sup>5</sup> This is the result of a legacy of ideological evaluations elevating French over Kreyòl as well as the result of the historic and continued dominance of the French language within all levels of educational institutions. As anthropologist Rachele Charlier Doucet (2003) has noted, there exists a degree of pride associated with the Kreyòl language among school children even despite continued resistance on the part of teachers and parents to allow Kreyòl to be the language of instruction in schools. Parents, particularly those from more impoverished or middle class backgrounds, view French as the more important language for children to learn given its association with social advancement and employability in a society dominated by foreign aid. The predominance of private schools in the country, making up about

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<sup>4</sup> While French orthography typically includes letters that make little or no difference in terms of pronunciation, a Kreyòl equivalent, resembling French in many ways but often differing subtly in pronunciation, orthographically represents only the sounds produced. In French, for instance, the word “*gros*” (the masculine form of “large/huge”), orthographically includes an [s] which is not represented phonetically. In Kreyòl, the term “*gwo*” has a similar meaning, with each letter graphically representing only the sounds produced.

<sup>5</sup> This index was clear to me, not only during formal events such as conferences, during which signaling a level of education remained important to participants, but was also indicated on a more informal, interpersonal level as well. Most notably, flirting between young men and women, particularly those with some university education, often took place in French. I was struck by this, especially since the dominant language of most other social settings was in Kreyòl. Here I draw on observations of State University students, both within campus locales and beyond. For instance, a young student could be seen arguing vigorously in Kreyòl with his friends one moment, but the next talking quietly in French with a female student. This was usually an indication of flirtatious behavior as opposed to a split between the sexes, such as men talking to women in French but to other men in Kreyòl. In this instance, flirtatious intentions often motivated the codeswitch.

85 percent of the country's total schools, and an inconsistent application of laws requiring instruction of written Kreyòl and the use of it as a language of instruction more generally, has resulted in a degree of diversity in how and whether Kreyòl instruction makes its way into school curriculums.

French continues to be the language used in more formal written communications, such as newspapers and formal correspondence. It is only very rarely that the daily newspaper, *Le Nouvelliste*, includes an article in Kreyòl. Despite the dominance of French in formal written texts, Kreyòl is preferred by most Haitians as an informal written language, particularly in terms of SMS messaging. Advertising and marketing throughout Port-au-Prince varies significantly between the two languages as both can be seen on billboards, graffiti, and product or store names. Government services and documents are required to be produced in both languages although in practice, this is not always the case. Regardless, Kreyòl has a place in government and politics, albeit one that continues to be looked down upon as uneducated. Most formal conference events also take place in French, although I observed, more often than not, a notable shift from French to Kreyòl at some point during most conference events. Panelists at a conference, for instance, would most often follow suit with the moderator's language choice, with some daring to utilize Kreyòl instead. At other times, the codeswitch happened during the question and answer (Q&A) portion of the conference, with an audience member initiating the shift. One participant's use of Kreyòl, whether the moderator, a panelist, or an audience member, was usually enough to encourage others to follow suit. At the same time, however, this shift was never absolute as some individuals would continue codeswitching between the two languages or, in many cases, speakers drew on both French and Kreyòl simultaneously given the inherent



overlap between languages. To some, their usage would be considered a frenchified form of Kreyòl.

The State University (*Université d'État d'Haïti*), for the most part, continues to operate in French, requiring students to write papers and theses in French instead of Kreyòl; however, there has been some movement toward the inclusion of Kreyòl, and a mix of Kreyòl and French are more likely than not used on an everyday basis in lectures and classroom discussions. Some university divisions tend to be more radically nationalist than others; however, even in those that have this reputation, there is strong pressure on the administrative end to continue to maintain French as the dominant language. Debates continue, sponsored by the State University each year, as to the status and development of a “Kreyòl Academy” (*Akademi Kreyòl*). This institution has been imagined, and to a degree established, as a government and academic body overseeing the development and use of Kreyòl in Haitian society more generally.

Despite the elevated status of French, Kreyòl dominates most interactional contexts, especially face-to-face interactions between Haitians. This is also primarily the case with most radio news and commentary programs. Most drew on Kreyòl, with individual guests and participants mobilizing French from time to time. In some areas of the city, where many foreigners and upper class Haitians live, such as Pétiyonville, French is heard more widely, although usually in circumscribed contexts such as formal business transactions and interactions. As a *blan* (white/foreigner), I was often confronted by assumptions as to my language abilities, with most interlocutors assuming I spoke only French. Although I have a background in French and understand it well, my ability to speak it was limited by my personal preference to learn and speak Kreyòl. My discomfort speaking French was rarely a problem, however, as Kreyòl responses, even in cases where interlocutors spoke French with me, were usually welcomed with

enthusiasm and compliments. Some speakers, particularly those of a higher social class, refused to speak Kreyòl with me, preferring instead to continue responses in French despite my continuing in Kreyòl. The only real problem came when I encountered foreign aid workers who spoke no Kreyòl or English. Given that most of my research focused on Haitian development organizations and activities, this was rarely a problem.

Although identifying speaker use of French versus Kreyòl can be an unambiguous process, at other times it remains less clearly identifiable. In her research focused on bilingual Catalan and Castilian speakers of Spain, Woolard has noted that what some sociolinguists previously identified as codeswitching, may in fact be another form of bilingual phenomena, what she terms as “bivalency.” Bivalency refers to “the use by a bilingual of words or segments that could ‘belong’ equally, descriptively and even prescriptively, to both codes” (1999:7). From this view, we can see how Haitian speakers at times codeswitch in clearly defined ways and, at other times, there is no definitive switch between French and Kreyòl. Indeed, there is also considerable disagreement, from one individual to the next, as to what words and phrases are identified as French and which are considered to be Kreyòl. Approaching this ambiguity as a form of bivalency allows attention to the manner in which speakers draw on both French and Kreyòl simultaneously (10). The bivalency enacted, Woolard argues, is productive in that “the opposition between linguistic codes is almost always socially and ideologically activated in these situations, even as it is challenged” (11). Identifying what precisely gets enacted through the use of bivalent elements, however, depends largely on the social context of the interaction in question.

Most of the transcripts and many of the quotes included in the chapters that follow are based on audio recordings, with other examples drawn from notes. While I relied on transcription

assistance from a number of Haitian students, I also personally worked closely with the recordings and transcriptions that appear here, listening and revising them many times over. In general, I found it very difficult to make decisions as to whether a speaker was using French or Kreyòl, given the significant overlap of vocabulary. Consulting with native speakers, I found, served only to confuse the issue as there are considerable differences of opinion on this issue from one individual to another. For the most part, I only indicated an utterance as French if the difference was clear enough to warrant such a distinction. This is most often the case in longer phrases with distinct French pronunciation or when speakers mobilized French words or idioms instead of more common Kreyòl alternatives. The choice of French over Kreyòl was also clear in cases where speakers utilized distinctly French grammatical features. At times, when there was clear overlap and the choice could go either way, I opted to utilize Kreyòl orthography in the transcript. In these cases, speakers were more likely using frenchified varieties of Kreyòl, as opposed to codeswitching between the languages. This is indicated by the occasional use of French phonetics and words more commonly attributed to French. In most transcripts, I highlight the use of French by underlying the words and phrases in question. If a speaker or interaction took place solely in French, I opted to indicate this by other means, such as footnotes or preceding comments.

Astute readers will also note that I shift, at times, between the use of English glosses or translations and direct Kreyòl or French quotes. At times this choice was made for me as I was forced to rely on fieldnotes as opposed to audio recordings.<sup>6</sup> In other cases, this choice was a literary one, as the gloss assisted in telling a story or describing interactions in ways I personally felt produced both an accurate reflection of what was stated while allowing a degree of creative

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<sup>6</sup> In some cases, it was not possible to record the interactions included in my notes. In others, audio recordings had previously existed but were lost due to the theft of my laptop and backup drive during the period of research, resulting in the loss of approximately two months worth of recordings.

license in constructing the flow of the story. In terms of interpreting and translating the transcripts provided here, I received assistance from native Kreyòl speakers by way of explanations for some of the references made that were unclear to me or by way of providing background regarding some of the political actors referenced by speakers. Otherwise, all translations are my own. Transcription conventions are provided in Appendix 1.

## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation examines the pragmatic effects of discourse about development in Haiti. It focuses on discussions within and beyond two development organizations operating in Port-au-Prince, revealing the ways in which politics and development are intimately entangled. Attention to the idea of development and its associated practices are a common feature of everyday interactions and often seek to address the question of “What’s wrong with Haiti?” Much as this question implies failure, discussions on the topic of development attempt to diagnose deficiencies, identify historical causes, and imagine solutions in the form of directed social change. Development serves as a temporal frame through which ideas about action, agency, and causality are embedded. Highlighting a need for social improvement, development also represents a moral obligation. Debates attending to past development failures and future efforts often work to allocate responsibility in particular ways.

I argue that discourses about development represent a form of political contestation. In contrast to research focused on “development discourse” as a dominant ideology, I draw on linguistic anthropological conceptions of language as a form of social action. By attending to language and discourse in specific social settings, I investigate the manner in which different sites of deliberation represent sites of the political. Through discussions and debates about development, participants actively negotiate social relations, taking part in establishing,

asserting, challenging and reinforcing power and status differences in relation to both their immediate interlocutors as well as the political power holders they seek to address.

Existing alongside, and entangled with, discourses of development is the antagonistic political environment characterizing contemporary Port-au-Prince. Within this environment, social actors lodge critiques in a combative manner, engaging in wars of interpretation regarding how specific actors, institutions, and practices are understood. Discourse about development, in this context, serves as a means to negotiate political commitments, ultimately working to configure or reconfigure political relations both at the individual level as well as the national political level. Through an analysis of the politics of everyday life, this dissertation reveals the politically productive role discourses about development play in relation to situated individuals and contexts.

## Introduction

Gathered in the cramped office space, members of the Youth Org, a self-proclaimed development organization, sat working on the text for a press conference. The conference was intended to be held three days later, on the second anniversary of the earthquake that devastated Port-au-Prince in 2010. The group hoped to gather various journalists from radio, television and print media in an effort to gain publicity and access a broader audience. The text focused on human rights issues, aiming to denounce what the group and many others understood as rights violations, specifically regarding the egregious conditions of various tent camps, where many displaced earthquake victims continued to live. As members negotiated what to include in the text, some veered away from a human rights-focused message, in the direction of political denunciations. Michel proposed a statement condemning two sitting senators who were widely believed to have dual nationality, which, at that time, was not constitutionally legal.<sup>1</sup> His suggestion echoed the hottest scandal of the moment, one that also implicated the president-in-office, Michel Martelly, as having dual, or possibly even triple, citizenship.<sup>2</sup> No definitive proof was offered publicly at that time but the circulating rumors on the radio and through word of mouth (*teledjol*) often assumed that the accusations were true. The statement and political stance

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<sup>1</sup> All names of individuals associated with the Youth Org and the HR Org have been changed in an effort to protect anonymity. The names and acronyms of the two organizations have also been changed although the names of other organizations and public figures have not.

<sup>2</sup> President Martelly was accused of having both US and Italian citizenship.

suggested by Michel in that moment was an attempt to stir up controversy, gain attention, and ultimately de-legitimize sitting government officials.

Taking up my appointed role as “adviser” to the group, I argued against adding this statement of denunciation to the text, stating that it was not relevant to the allegations of human rights abuses the text was intended to highlight. Michel agreed and we moved on. Not long after, Michel again returned to the political, dual nationality scandal, repeating his argument that it should be included in the text we were composing. Once again, I protested.

The discussion soon veered to the topic of development as Michel began with a lead-in I had heard often during my time in the country: “The two biggest problems with Haiti are...” His impromptu analysis of the country’s deficiencies primarily focused on a dysfunctional legal system. David, the ratified “president” of the organization, interjected, disagreeing. He argued instead that Haiti’s biggest problem was an inability to “*mete tèt ansanm*” (put heads together/work together). This reference too, I had heard often. It was a catch phrase stemming from Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s fiery speeches leading up to his first election as president in 1991. David continued: In the United States, he argued, Democrats and Republicans were able to work together to get things done, despite having significantly different viewpoints on the issues.

Given David’s use of the United States as a comparison point in his attempts to identify Haiti’s problems, I felt compelled to intercede. Drawing on recent announcements in the American press as to the historic lows of productivity and political gridlock taking place in Congress at the time (January 2012), I engaged David, disagreeing with his generalized assessment. I attempted to explain the increasingly polemical nature of American politics, pointing to politicized claims by some which, at that time, continued to assert that President Obama was not an American citizen. Accusations such as these represented an attempt to



invalidate Obama's presidency following his re-election in 2012. This, to me, seemed like a parallel case with the dual nationality scandal Michel cited. I argued that both were examples of strategies on the part of political opponents, ultimately working to distract people from other, more important issues. My lengthy explanation eventually brought the discussion to an end with David asserting simply that "well, things still work better there than in Haiti."

David's claim as to Haiti's "biggest problem" implied that a "Haitian mentality" prevented people from working together, leading to a lack of development or improvement in the country. His mobilization of a comparison country, the United States, and his generalized assessment of it was a common rhetorical move seeking to boost the assessment's credibility. Although it frustrated me at the time, in retrospect, I should not have been surprised that my attempts to reference political game-playing as a contributing factor to the problem David alluded to would ultimately fail rhetorically. Michel himself had already made this point clear given his attempt to enact a similar political maneuver for the sake of gaining visibility. Through the guise of denouncing human rights abuses, he hoped to challenge the legitimacy of sitting government officials based on a constitutional technicality. David's complaint about a so-called Haitian mentality preventing people from working together was ironic in light of the political move suggested by Michel.

This example, although in many ways prompted and steered by my status as a *blan* (white/foreign) outsider, reveals the entanglement of development and politics in Haiti as group members negotiated ideas about development alongside efforts at effective political contestation. Members, such as Michel, ultimately sought to directly challenge existing power relations and social hierarchies, drawing on development and human rights denunciations as a means through

which to enact pragmatic force, or have an effect on those relations. Discourse about development, in this way, represents both a form and a means of political contestation.

This research, in a broad sense, attempts to answer the question: What does development accomplish for those who engage in discourse about it as an idea and a set of practices? Through attention to the discursive and pragmatic engagements within, and beyond, two Haitian development organizations – which I refer to as the HR Org and the Youth Org – I analyze the politically productive role of discourses about development. Development, in this way, represents a “practice of politics” (Li 2007) or, a form of political contestation through which participants work to establish, assert, challenge or reinforce power and status differences (Lutz & Abu-Lughod 1990:14). Through discussions and debates on questions of development, participants engage politically, hoping to, but not necessarily succeeding at, having pragmatic force in challenging social and political hierarchies. While individual interests play a critical role in the manner in which interactions play out, the pragmatic effect of their deliberative practices also goes beyond the level of the individual, as it “provides a fundamental basis for the creation of social community and the social construction of reality” (Briggs 1996:5). In this way, the socially situated nature of the organizations and interactions analyzed here provide a glimpse at the fundamentally entangled nature of development and politics in contemporary Port-au-Prince.

Discussions and debates focused on the topic of identifying the various failures of Haiti are a common feature of everyday discourse in the country. Diagnosing deficiencies, identifying historical causes and imagining solutions are all encompassed within discourses or talk about development. Here I define “development” along similar lines as my Haitian interlocutors understood it: as ideas and practices aimed at bringing about social change. In this way, development is more broadly understood as not solely referencing economic improvement

schemes, a perspective that aligns with the Youth Org's attention to human rights as a legitimate activity to engage in as a development organization. Development represents a temporal frame through which ideas about action, agency, causality, and ethics are embedded. In their evaluations of the present, individuals simultaneously implicate the past along with possible futures. As an idea focused on social improvement or betterment, development also represents a moral obligation; indeed, debates about past development failures and future efforts often work to assign and allocate responsibility in particular ways.

Although discussions and debates on the topic of development appear most prominently in contexts where participants specifically aim to address social and economic deficiencies – such as within organizational settings, including nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) – discussions of this sort also regularly take place on the radio, television, in random discussions between strangers, and as casual conversation among friends and family. Discussing or debating conditions in the country, more often than not, attends to failures, focusing on where the problems lie and who, or what historical process, is ultimately to blame. While not always explicitly stated, I see these discussions as revolving around the question of “What’s wrong with Haiti?” Just as the question itself implies deficiency, indeed it unreflexively presupposes it, discussions of this sort were almost always permeated by similar assumptions. Although there is a general, unstated, consensus that change in some form or another is needed, there is little agreement as to which deficiencies are the most pressing and the manner in which they should be addressed in the future.

While many Haitians carry a strong sense of pride regarding their Haitian identity and culture, this nationalist fervor resides in tandem with an overwhelming sense of failure and disappointment in terms of the conditions within which many Haitians live on a daily basis. To

say that Haiti is the “poorest country in the Western hemisphere,” whether objectively true or not, is to point to the multitude of ways in which the country has failed to develop and improve, both economically and socially. While this catch-phrase is more commonly utilized in foreign media portrayals of the country, it is also recognized and embodied by most Haitians on a daily basis. At times, the phrase itself is mobilized; more often than not, however, the implied sense of Haiti as a development failure finds its way into everyday talk in a variety of forms. Many Haitians express comparable evaluations using phrases such as “*peyi kraze*” (collapsed/degraded country), “*peyi chò*” (“hot” or dangerous country) or a “*peyi tèt chaje*” (country full of problems/dangerous). In other instances, this sense of failure is vocalized through embedded comparisons with other countries. For instance, utilizing a common segue phrase, “*nan peyi seryè...*” (in serious countries...), speakers discuss various ways in which Haiti does not measure up in comparison with other countries. Rhetorically, the comparison country – or even the accuracy of the comparison itself – holds little importance as speakers mobilize it as a means to identify the deficiencies they see as significant within the country, using it also to hint at a desirable ideal. Everyday discussions dealing with ideas and practices of development, then, assume the country needs to be “fixed”; that is, participants imply, and explicitly identify, a variety of problems in need of effective solutions.

Hashing out ideas about Haiti’s development failures through discourse and debate is itself viewed as a path toward development or a necessary precursor to imagining and taking action toward positive social change. A prominent radio commentary program highlights this idea in its title: *Pale pou n vanse* (talk so that we can advance/develop). In addition, the title of Haiti’s most popular commentary program, *Ranmase* (to gather), implies a gathering of people, which is the trademark of the program as it brings together prominent actors to discuss current

events.<sup>3</sup> It also signals a gathering of information as a way to analyze and better understand unfolding events. Thus, through talk about Haiti's deficiencies, and identification of root problems contributing to them, meaningful social change, or development, appears as possible.

Existing alongside, and entangled with, discourses of development is the antagonistic political environment characterizing contemporary Port-au-Prince. Within this environment, social actors lodge critiques against one another in a combative manner, at times crossing over into degrees of hostility toward specific social and political actors, institutions, and practices. Much like discourses of development, political contestation takes place in a variety of settings. Practices of political contestation, although residing, to some degree, in tandem with state power and legitimacy, take place both in relation to formal political institutions, electoral processes, and political actors, while also going beyond the formal political realm. For this reason, it remains necessary to reflect on the multiple meanings of "politics" and "the political," clarifying my own usage in the process. On the one hand, "politics" carries an obvious reference to state institutions and electoral processes. Political actors and institutions are indeed implicated in many, if not most, acts of political contestation discussed throughout this dissertation. In this way, the politicization of development by groups with specific interests and agendas serves as a counterforce to state power, calling into question the legitimacy of formal political actors and institutions. Political contestation, in a variety of forms, can also serve to produce, transform, or reproduce particular understandings of the state, its social role, and those individuals associated with it. In spite of this, I find it useful to draw on a broader definition of politics as it pertains to sociability and power relations more generally, what Catherine Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod

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<sup>3</sup> *Ranmase* airs on the station Radio Caraïbes on Saturday mornings. Beginning at 8am, the show often runs until there is little left to say or other conflicting events preempt a shorter show, such as an important soccer match airing in the afternoon. More often than not, the show aired between 8am and 2pm. It featured guests holding a variety of different viewpoints and social positions – such as activists, organization heads, scholars, government officials, and others – and featured heated debates on hot-button current event topics.

(1990:2) refer to as the “politics of everyday life.” In this way, I focus on specific interactional contexts both within and outside of formal political arenas and the manner in which discourses come to represent plays of power in relation to specific social hierarchies, actors, and institutions. The social action produced, in the process, can implicate state institutions, formal political actors, and electoral processes; however, it can also remain limited to interpersonal power struggles between social actors that may or may not have formal political roles. Thus, my use of a more general definition of politics allows a nuanced understanding of the political productivity of discourses about development, one that includes interpersonal politics as well as formal political relations. The pragmatic force obtained remains tied to specific contexts within which discourses of this sort are employed rather than necessitating a connection to formal political structures and actors.

The chapters that follow analyze the political force of development as an idea and a set of practices. I do so through attention to language and discourse within specific social settings. That is, by attending to the interactional contexts within which ideas about development and its associated practices emerge, we can better understand the ways in which individual interests and political commitments are embedded and negotiated within those contexts. Indeed, the different sites of discourse or deliberation explored within each chapter represent sites of the political. For instance, in Chapters 2 and 3, I analyze how discussions and debates about development are used by speakers for politically motivated purposes. This is particularly evident in the human rights advocacy work of the HR Org, an institution purporting to be a self-appointed “watchdog” of Haitian society. Operating as a pro-social development organization that resides outside formal political domains, members boosted their moral credibility in relation to the political institutions and actors they regularly critiqued. Yet it was through their deliberative practices that members

effectively depoliticized their activities and messages as they worked to cloak the politically situated nature of their interpretations under moral discourses of human rights, development, and injustice. Debates about historical events and processes also represent a site of the political, one through which participants worked to publicly depoliticize their own interpretations. In Chapter 3, I trace the ways in which participants expressed political commitments through their debates about history while simultaneously obscuring the political nature of their interpretations by way of enacting expertise and expressing a desire to “accurately” understand history. Both chapters attend to the negotiation of ideas pertaining to development and the manner in which those ideas were mobilized as forms of political contestation. In the process, participants challenged power relations and social hierarchies from situated positions resting outside formal political arenas. Deliberative practices of this sort also worked to re-configure understandings, political commitments, and social relations on an interpersonal level.

Discourse about development practices can also be a means through which individuals work to gain access to social positions of power. In Chapters 4 and 5, I examine the deliberative practices of the Youth Org and the manner in which they strategized and performed various identities, observing and mimicking practices believed to be successful. Members employed interpersonal political maneuvers as a means of climbing the social ladder. In this way, they pragmatically engaged with development and politics as separate domains of practice. Issuing political challenges, such as the one suggested by Michel in the vignette presented previously, were not intended as ideological challenges to existing hierarchies – with the goal of social transformation – but rather as a means to gain access to power and status. For Youth Org members, the domains of development and electoral politics represented promising opportunities for social advancement. In this way, while the HR Org engaged in development for ideological

reasons – that is, their participation was largely based on strongly held beliefs or ideas – the Youth Org viewed it through a more pragmatic, or practical, lens, enlisting an approach that is more appropriately characterized as entrepreneurial. Yet this approach clashed with assumptions as to the pro-social and non-profit nature of development and politics. In Chapter 5, I highlight the ethical quandaries faced by members and the manner in which they recognized, and justified, their use of unethical strategies.

Political discourse, especially in the form of critiques of political institutions and actors, also represents a means through which discourses about development are utilized as a form of political contestation. As my examination of the *aloral* (all talk) critique against President Martelly demonstrates in Chapter 6, the circulation and uptake of critiques is a collaborative process carrying with it the potential to pragmatically affect understandings and interpretations of political actors and their behaviors. In this way, language does not simply reflect social reality “as it is” but acts on it, configuring, transforming, and reconfiguring understandings and social relations. The manner in which *aloral* transformed from a complex political critique to a pithy means for signaling a political stance, also highlights the pragmatic force of language and discourse in constructing taken-for-granted ideas about political actors, institutions, and social relations. In an environment where political antagonisms dominate, political critiques – especially through the mobilization of ideas about development and development practices – represent a hotly contentious discursive game with participants engaging in a “wars of interpretation” (Alvarez et al. 1998:7).

By focusing on discursive practices within specific social contexts – through attention to particular organizations and their members – this research provides a depth of understanding that can only be obtained through ethnographic observations of ordinary, day-to-day activities and



interactions. In this way, I focus on deliberative practices as a means for understanding social action, highlighting the role of development as intertwined with social hierarchies and power relations. Although the two organizations in question, the HR Org and the Youth Org, make up the bulk of the data analyzed in this dissertation, I also examine discursive events and contexts beyond the confines of each organization. I tie in observations of radio commentary – especially those programs cited or discussed by organization members – and those of other domains in which talk about development was engaged, including conferences or casual conversations. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate that although the politically productive role of discourse is highly specific to the characteristics of each organization and social situation, those contexts also provide a glimpse into broader social processes and the entanglement of development and politics more generally.

This analysis follows a more recent anthropological trend in relation to development as a “category of practice” (Mosse 2013). Through this approach, “development constitutes a set of ideas, meanings and practices, whose significance can only be grasped in relation to the people for whom they matter” (Yarrow 2011:9). It ultimately seeks to explore “the various meanings and practices that exist in the name of ‘development’” (Venkatesan & Yarrow 2012:9). I trace to the manner in which development is utilized in ideological and pragmatic ways as a form of political contestation. How, and to what end, does development get taken up within specific social situations and among situated individuals for political purposes? Discourses about development, and associated deliberative practices, take place both within and beyond development organizations. Indeed, the degree of boundedness of development as a domain of activity is brought into question by this research. This is made clear through an examination of the Youth Org’s simultaneous, yet separate, engagement of development objectives alongside

those aimed at electoral processes. In this way, this project falls in line with Soumya Venkatesan and Thomas Yarrow's description of their edited volume as "anthropologies with development in them" (Venkatesan & Yarrow 2012:16). By conceptualizing research in this way, I wish to frame it as not solely aligned with the "anthropology of development," "development anthropology," or NGO studies, but as more appropriately placed in direct relation to larger ethnographic and anthropological concerns pertaining to social practices in specific locales. While development undeniably remains my primary focal point, the manner in which it gets taken up, engaged with, and utilized in politically productive ways both within and beyond organizational contexts mirrors my desire for this research to resonate with scholars within and beyond the field of development studies.

In the sections that follow, I outline the theoretical lens through which I understand the discourses and practices encountered and analyzed throughout this dissertation. I present the theoretical underpinnings of this project in an attempt to place it within larger strands of research. I begin by presenting a brief overview of anthropological approaches to development, locating my own research within theoretical trends as one that couples attention to development with linguistic anthropological understandings pertaining to language as a form of social action. From this view, discourse refers to language in use, or moments of talk between situated individuals. Distinguishing my approach from that of "development discourse," which presents discourse as a form of ideology, I highlight the ways in which a definitional shift consequently results in more interactionally grounded understandings of political engagement. Approaching discourse in this way carries the potential to greatly contribute to research on development, lending empirical specificity to understandings of the relationship between power, development, and discourse. By focusing on the emergence of meaning within specific social contexts and

interactions, we are ultimately better positioned to more precisely identify the resultant social action, or pragmatic force, without making unwarranted assumptions as to the aspirations of individual participants and the manner in which they understand development and negotiate political relations.

### **Development, Politics, and Discourse**

The term development itself is an unstable one. As Marc Edelman and Angelique Haugerud (2005:1) note:

Conventionally ‘development’ may connote improvements in well-being, living standards, and opportunities. It may also refer to historical processes of commodification, industrialization, modernization, or globalization... A vision of development as improved well-being, especially in former colonies, has gradually replaced the unidimensional economic measures that neoclassical economists favor, such as GDP growth or economic rates of return in particular projects.

No longer limited to economic indicators, development has taken on a more expansive meaning, encompassing not only those short and long term economic or social improvement schemes, but also humanitarian objectives – aimed at meeting the immediate needs of suffering groups and populations – and human rights advocacy – focused on expanding and establishing rights as a necessary condition for democracy and development.<sup>4</sup> From this view, development itself is recognized as a right. Without economic development, other rights or “freedoms” – such as political, civil, social, and cultural ones – cannot be fully realized (Sen 1999). Development, in short, references efforts and ideas pertaining to directed social change. That is, the manner in

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<sup>4</sup> Despite a recognized connection between humanitarianism, human rights, and development, considerable specialization has arisen around each as a scholarly focus for research. See, especially, Bornstein & Redfield (2010) and Ticktin (2014) for an overview of research on humanitarianism. In a similar way, Goodale & Merry (2007) and Goodale (2009) offer introductions to research focused on human rights activities and theory. Given the HR Org’s explicit focus on human rights advocacy, I deal more specifically with the human rights literature in Chapter 2. I also point to an implied relationship between human rights and democracy, from the point of view of HR Org members, in Chapter 3.

which the “will to improve” (Li 2007) produces discourses and practices that seek to bring about tangible improvements. Embedded in the idea of development is an ethical mandate calling for improvement as a social good. It is a fundamentally pro-social endeavor as it seeks to affect positive change and benefit society as a whole.

Research and theory on development as an object of analysis has a long and expansive history as scholars have attempted to understand the multi-faceted ways in which global processes and discourses focused on development have affected populations around the world.<sup>5</sup> Although the idea of development itself has a powerful existence and history as tied to modernization and globalization, development as a loosely connected set of activities and institutions – a pro-social “industry” – has garnered the most research attention. Anthropologists and other scholars have analyzed development from a multitude of angles, including but not limited to: the historical trajectory of development practices, ideologies, and theories; a history of development schemes in relation to state projects; development as an institutionalized discourse; local knowledge and everyday practices or interactions in relation to development projects and schemes; local resistance to development projects; NGOs and donor institutional practices; and the moral economies of development, including corruption.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For general reviews of theory and research pertaining to development and the development industry, see especially: Cowen & Shenton (1996), Crewe & Axelby (2013), Edelman & Haugerud (2005), Olivier de Saardan (2005), and Mosse (2013).

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of development as a historically evolving ideology and form of practice, see Crush (1995), Edelman & Haugerud (2005), Escobar (1995), Ferguson (2006), Grillo & Stirrat (1997), Moore & Schmitz (1995), and Venkatesan & Yarrow (2012). Specific examples of research examining the role of the state in relationship to development projects include Abrahamsen (2000), Coronil (1997), Ferguson (1994), Gill (2000), Li (2007), Mitchell (2002), Moore (2005), Paley (2001), Shah (2010), and Subramanian (2009). Research that has attended to the role of local knowledge in relation to development schemes includes Arce & Long (2000), Hobart (1993), Pigg (1992, 1997), and Renne (1996). Examples of local resistance efforts in the face of development projects and ideas include Escobar (2008) and Kirsch (2006, 2014). Other research attending to NGOs, their cultures, and institutional discourses include Bornstein (2005), Cooley & Ron (2002), Crewe & Harrison (1998), Englund (2006), Ferguson (1994), Fisher (1997), Goldman (2006), Hanlon (2000, 2004), James (2012), Lewis & Mosse (2006), Mosse (2005, 2011), McAfee (1991), Reith (2010), Schuller (2007a, 2007b, 2009, 2012), Wallace et al. (2006), and Yarrow (2011). Finally, for examples of corruption within development projects and institutions, see James (2010), Maren (1997), Schwartz (2008), Shah (2010), and D. Smith (2007).

The development industry, or “Aidland” as Raymond Apthorpe (2011) identifies it, is largely understood as a network of institutions and practices interconnected by economic relationships, actors, and inter-state policies.<sup>7</sup> As the term industry denotes, development practices of this sort are supported and connected by economic ties and relationships. Although differing from business industries regarding its non-profit and pro-social nature, the development industry itself involves significant flows of money. Thus, development institutions, despite rhetoric aimed at alleviating poverty and obtaining economic development more generally, are necessarily embedded in a system of inter-state relations linked by the political and economic interests of those engaging within it, including local and national NGOs. By the early to mid-1990s, the growth and expansion of NGOs around the world revealed a significant shift in global practices away from direct financing of foreign governments for projects such as the development of infrastructure, and toward NGOs as an instrument of development. One significant justification for this shift includes the assertion that NGOs are less corrupt than the state governments of those countries often referred to as “developing,” “underdeveloped,” or “Third World.” This global shift also accompanied the on-going rise of neoliberal policies, implemented by international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), following the mandate that global markets function best via self-regulating mechanisms of supply and demand. Neoliberal policies took the form of structural adjustment programs and included conditions tied to much-needed loans offered to struggling governments around the world, conditions that include: the privatization of public enterprises, deregulation of the economy, liberalization of trade and industry, tax cuts, control of organized labor, reduction of public expenditures, down-sizing of government, expansion of international markets, and the removal of controls on global financial flows (Steger 2003:41).

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<sup>7</sup> David Mosse (2011, 2013) draws heavily on the term “Aidland,” borrowing it from Apthorpe.

Conditions such as these ultimately limit the capacity of recipient states to develop infrastructure and provide services for citizens (Black 2001; Stiglitz 2002). NGOs, and the growing availability of funds from national and international donors, came to replace states as the providers of social services in many countries around the world (Ferguson & Gupta 2002). At the same time, however, NGO projects and practices are necessarily circumscribed and limited within parameters set by national and international donor institutions (Reith 2010). As political scientist Alexander Cooley and international affairs scholar James Ron (2002:15) note, the political economy of funding within the development industry, an “NGO scramble,” encourages competition and opportunism: “when an organization’s survival depends on making strategic choices in a market environment characterized by uncertainty, its interests will be shaped, often unintentionally, by material incentives.”

Beginning in the 1980s, research focused on development – analyzed on a global scale, as well as within specific locales around the world – took a notable turn toward an approach to development as discourse, drawing on Foucault’s conceptions of discourse and power.<sup>8</sup> This approach is exemplified in Arturo Escobar’s (1995) “Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World” and James Ferguson’s (1994) “The Anti-Politics Machine: ‘Development,’ Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho.” Discourse, from this view, largely signals attention to the use and spread of development as a dominant ideology. Encompassing ideologies of progress and neoliberal economic policies as cornerstones of development, associated discourses are assumed to have a unidirectional flow, from Western to non-Western societies (Escobar 1995). This theoretical approach has come to be characterized as a “post-development” or “post-structuralist” critique (e.g., Mosse 2013; Venkatesan & Yarrow 2012; Yarrow 2011). Post-development research “has rejected outright the desirability of

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<sup>8</sup> Early works that incorporated this approach include Escobar (1984, 1988) and Mitchell (1988).

‘development,’” imagining a “post-development” era in which local alternatives dominate over externally imposed ones (Edelman & Haugerud 2005:2). As an intellectual trend, post-development critiques have revealed important insights to our understanding of development practices and ideologies, ranging from studies of particular NGOs and practices, to larger critiques regarding the flow of development ideas and institutional practices. Shifting the focus away from blaming local populations for a lack of social and economic development in their countries, critiques of this sort have shed much-needed light on the global politics and ideologies through which technocratic mechanisms – which purport to be “neutral” – work to maintain global inequities despite rhetoric claiming to alleviate them (Yarrow 2011). As has been revealed, the technocratic “expertise” offered to non-western societies in the name of development are not nearly as politically neutral as they often claim to be. According to Tania Murray Li (2007), the process of “rendering technical” is itself an inherently political process aligned with expert designs (Mosse 2013:229). James Ferguson’s (1994) analysis, in particular, inspired a generation of scholars to look more closely at the functions and failures of specific development projects and the resultant effects on local populations in relation to political institutions and policies. For Ferguson, the “anti-politics” work of development is itself always political.

In the context of Haiti, few would argue against the observation as to its current and historical status of being woefully underdeveloped.<sup>9</sup> Identified causes of this underdevelopment remain controversial and debated, with scholars differing significantly as to how the blame should be appropriately allocated. Indeed, there is no shortage of efforts taking up the task of

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<sup>9</sup> In many ways, attempts to “explain” Haiti’s status follows a tendency, as noted by Trouillot (1990b) of treating Haiti as “exceptional”; that is, differing significantly in terms of development in relation to other countries. As Trouillot points out, however, Haiti’s historical development is as much exceptional as it is ordinary. He argues that claims of Haitian exceptionism are themselves politically motivated.

explaining Haiti's underdevelopment, identifying various internal as well as external factors that seem to explain the country's current status, including: a historical legacy of international interventions, a predatory Haitian state, enduring social divisions such as an urban elite versus rural peasantry, unmitigated migration to urban centers, erosion and deforestation, politicization of the popular classes, and a history of discrimination based on skin color and class.<sup>10</sup>

Developmentalism and modernization have also been identified as shouldering a degree of responsibility. As Sidney Mintz (1972:7) once observed, "if ever there was a society that ought to have ended up totally annihilated, materially and spiritually, by the trials of 'modernization,' it is Haiti." Gregory Beckett (2013:6) explains that "in stark contrast to the myriad accounts that 'blame' Haiti for 'its own' problems, Mintz's statement suggests that Haiti is not crisis-ridden because of a lack of development or modernization, but rather precisely as an effect of those processes we call 'development' and 'modernization.'"

Anthropological attention to development activities in Haiti, and, in particular, those of NGOs, have identified the variety of ways in which such activities are embedded in and contribute to a lack of tangible improvements within the country. Paul Farmer (2003b), perhaps the most well-recognized anthropologist working in the country, has focused on the failures of humanitarian assistance, noting that the pervasive reality of "structural violence" works against alleviating suffering for the Haitian poor. More recent work on humanitarian medical interventions, as analyzed by Pierre Minn (2011), points to interactions between foreign and local actors as resulting in resentment and ambivalence regarding the role and effectiveness of those interventions. As Mark Schuller (2009) notes, NGOs in Haiti not only provide high-paying

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<sup>10</sup> Another enduring but more general social division identified by Trouillot (1990a) is that of the nation, or the population as a whole, versus state apparatuses, including the political class and state workers. For other examples of scholarly analyses seeking to identify and explain Haiti's underdeveloped status, see especially, Beckett (2013), Cantave (2006), Dupuy (1997, 2005, 2007), Étienne (1997), Farmer (1992, 2003a, 2003b), Faton (2002, 2007), Lundahl (1991, 1996), Schuller (2007a, 2009, 2012), and Schwartz (2012).



jobs to educated elites but they also undermine the capacity of the Haitian state to govern and provide services to the Haitian population. They create, as he notes, a “buffer” that works against local participation on the part of impoverished Haitians, the intended beneficiaries of many development projects. Schuller (2012) also identifies the ways in which NGO-donor relationships and funding sources severely limit the capacity of NGOs to provide effective services and projects to the populations they aim to help.<sup>11</sup> In a more exposé-style analysis, anthropologist Timothy Schwartz (2012) reveals the multitude of ways that international interventions aimed at development objectives have – at times deliberately, and at other times inadvertently – resulted in widespread corruption at every level of engagement. His analysis points to deliberate attempts on the part of the US government to subvert tangible improvements in favor of economic benefits for American industries, including the US manufacturing industry – by encouraging mass migration to Port-au-Prince to supply factories with workers – as well as the US grain industry – through the exportation and distribution of food aid during periods when Haitian harvests were bountiful.

Focusing on the trajectory of specific development and humanitarian interventions in Haiti, Erica Caple James (2010) and Catherine Maternowska (2006) highlight the manner in which efforts to intervene necessarily become embedded in local political struggles and, at times, fail as a result. Maternowska’s research, in particular, points to this failure as also attributable to inadequate considerations of Haitian cultural norms, such as gender relations and power dynamics. In contrast, James’ research emphasizes the politically motivated work of internationally conceived NGO activities – intervening in the interest of humanitarian objectives – and their clash with local political realities. She highlights the manner in which conflict of this

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<sup>11</sup> Haitian political scientist Saveur Pierre Étienne (1997) also recognized the role of NGOs as weakening the capacity of the Haitian state.

sort ultimately consumed and worked against any degree of success on the part of those humanitarian objectives. Beckett's (2013) work also focuses on the failures of development in the form of one particular project, a botanical garden. Attending to the history of the *Habitation Leclerc* site, one that predates Haitian independence, he argues that the failure to develop the site as planned represents a larger political struggle over space. He uses the environmental project, "as a vantage point from which to analyze the crisis of the nation-state" (4). Attempts to develop and re-develop the site, then, draw on contentious forces that work "to remake and unmake Haiti" (5). Development in Haiti, as can be seen, has a contradictory existence: it is both woefully needed and yet has done little to effect positive change. Indeed, many anthropological critiques highlight the ways in which development practices have hindered or worked against social improvement. This approach, in many ways, falls in line with post-development critiques, particularly those made by anthropologists working in a variety of settings around the world.

Despite the significant insights of post-development research, more recent theoretical trends in anthropology have urged a move away from development as an object of analysis, to an understanding of it as a "category of practice" (Mosse 2013:228). From this view, it remains important to understand the ways in which development "becomes produced and reproduced as a common sense part of people's understanding of the world and their place within" (Curtis & Spencer 2012:179). Mosse (2013:230) further explains this shift:

Treating development as a category of practice involves, for one thing, reflecting on critique itself as a kind of ethnocentric stance that unnecessarily ties insight to pessimism or takes the discursive centrality of development as self-evidently an orchestration of power with known effects... Here, development as a category of practice becomes more about connection than community.

Thomas Yarrow (2011:x) concurs, stating that this perspective shifts the definition of development to "the ideas, institutions and practices through which people have variously

pursued visions of a better world.” Instead of viewing development as a coherent and bounded global entity, we need to look more closely at the practices and relationships “through which understandings of development are produced,” resisting the urge to assign logic to those understandings as necessarily embedded in, or emanating from, “the west” (Yarrow 2011:x). Similarly, Soumya Venkatesan and Thomas Yarrow (2012) argue for a need to break with the post-development critique and its discursive focus, in the process avoiding outright condemnation and the imposition of presupposed logics in order to remain open to alternative understandings as to why and how people interact with ideas and practices loosely associated with development. “Development practice is underscored by forms of moral reasoning that cannot be understood from an analytic perspective that imposes its own normative standards” (Yarrow 2011:11). What is needed instead, is a shift to “more ethnographic understanding of the meanings and resonances that the term acquires in particular social contexts” (Venkatesan & Yarrow 2012:16).

This theoretical reflection offers a welcome shift in anthropological attention to development, allowing recognition of the manifold ways in which individuals engage with, understand, and mobilize ideas about development in their daily lives. At times, this engagement might take place within circumscribed institutions focusing on development activities and objectives; at other times, ideas and understandings of development arise in contexts less clearly tied to the development industry or development activities. For example, Jennie Smith’s (2001) work with peasants residing in the Grand’Anse region of Haiti reveals the manner in which local populations engage with and conceptualize ideas such as democracy and development as ideals resting on greater equality, social betterment, and respect for one another. These ideas are reflected in the manner in which they engage one another through verbal genres such as *chante*

*pwen*, and their local organizing and communal labor efforts. As she states, “they have based their understandings of democracy and development first and foremost on their own experiences in regulating community life, organizing work, engaging with the past, and grappling with their place in the world” (177-8).

Chelsey Kivland’s (2012) attention to street politics and local organizing efforts within the Port-au-Prince “zone” of Bel Air, is also indicative of the important, if somewhat tangential, role the development industry plays in the lives of Haitian street bands and local political relations. Development, in this sense, is one angle through which local groups engage politically in relation to the Haitian state. It is not the primary goal, nor the primary means through which local street bands seek out political roles for themselves in their neighborhoods: it represents one of many simultaneously engaged by local actors. Kivland states that:

The appeal of organizing among men in Bel Air was not that it made people free of misery or insecurity. Rather, it enabled those organized to link themselves with powerful actors, assert a degree of agency and leadership, claim moral entitlements, embody an icon of manliness, and cultivate reputation in the community. Amid a disordered and uncertain political world, these ‘activities’ provided a stage on which young men could perform the contours of power and secure a respected position in their zone. (225-6)

More research of this sort is needed, as it draws out the embedded and entangled role of development in relation to other social domains and fields in the Haitian context. This dissertation seeks to contribute to Haitian studies in precisely this way, by complicating understandings of the role and use of development as a form of political contestation that spans beyond the activities of domains formally recognized as residing squarely within that of development.

Approaching development as a category of practice aligns well with my own observations of the ubiquitous existence of development as a primary preoccupation of Haitians,

including those working within, as well as beyond, development organizations. In this way, ideas about development are not only widespread, but linked to other discourses such as democracy and modernization. As a temporal frame and ethical mandate, individuals of all social backgrounds are drawn to development as it encapsulates their embodied sense of social and economic insecurity while simultaneously feeding on understandings of declining conditions in the country and an overwhelming desire for positive change and improvement. Debates about development, then, tie in historical interpretations and ideas about who is or should be responsible for past failures and future efforts. In Chapters 2 and 3, I examine themes such as historical interpretation, ethics, responsibility, insecurity, modernization, and democracy, drawing out their resonances in relation to deliberative practices. In Chapters 4 and 5, I highlight the manner in which development practices are understood as a means through which access to positions of power and social advancement is possible. Rehearsing, performing, and mimicking the behaviors of others are mechanisms through which some individuals and groups believe access to the field of development and formal politics can be productively obtained. From this approach, questions of ethics and responsibility are also prominent concerns, as the ethical dimension of performative behaviors carry the potential to limit personal access and advancement within those fields.

Thus, this research rests squarely within the strand of development research attending to it as a category of practice. Yet, in contrast to Yarrow's claims that such an approach to development necessitates departure from attention to politics and discourse, I argue that both remain critically important. As Yarrow (2011:xv) explains, past attempts at political analyses of development practices have been "reductionist, imagining 'politics' as the 'reality' behind the

‘facade’ of ostensibly progressive ideologies and actions.” In this way, he concludes by calling for an analysis of “development beyond politics.”

As Yarrow indicates, the political dimension of development is one that has long been identified and analyzed by post-development scholars. Mosse (2013:230) concurs in stating that “the political engagement of postdevelopment critics is itself evidence that the meaning, direction, and control of development are at the heart of contentious politics, bound up with identity, place, and belonging.” Yet the manner in which many post-development scholars have approached politics has largely been in relation to the role of the state and democratic practices, pointing to politics as associated primarily with state institutions, policies, and actors. In some cases, scholars have identified the myriad ways in which development has been used by local elites as an instrument for upholding existing hierarchies and inequalities. This approach largely views politics – or “anti-politics” – from a top-down perspective, identifying the consolidation of power via development activities, such as control of state institutions or development resources, or approaching development as a means through which core countries gained access to, and control of, peripheral economies, restructuring global power relations in the process. Development, from this perspective, has been viewed as a mask of power, an understanding that necessarily obscures more than it reveals and denies reflexive intentionality and responsibility to those engaging with development activities (Mosse 2013:229). Shifting a focus to development as a category of practice also allows for a similar shift in how politics and the political are approached in relation to development ideas and practices. Without necessitating a rejection of attention to power relations and social hierarchies altogether, this approach emphasizes the need to ethnographically ground analyses in particular social locales and cultural logics. Indeed, ideas

about development and associated desires for modernization are embedded within particular social settings, normative orders, moral imperatives, and theories of social change (231).<sup>12</sup>

What is needed, then, is to further shift our approach to politics in such a way as to regain its analytical potential without falling into the trap of reductionism hinted at by Yarrow. Here I understand “politics” and “the political” as arising from, and actively negotiated, within social interactions. This approach necessitates close attention to discourse and interaction in order to effectively draw out the political implications in empirically specific ways as opposed to assigning political logics from a top-down perspective. In doing so, I draw on a definition of politics that rests more generally on power relations and social hierarchies as opposed to one limited to formal political institutions and processes. Before elaborating further on what this conceptualization of politics entails more precisely, I will first address the manner in which development scholars have previously understood and conceptualized “discourse,” as it weighs heavily on how politics and the political are operationalized.

In post-development research, the concepts of “discourse” and “politics” have both rested on an often unstated definition of discourse as aligned with Foucault’s theoretical reconfiguration of the terms “culture” and “ideology.” As Lutz and Abu-Lughod (1990:9) argue, Foucault’s use of discourse problematically approaches it as a “distinction between a realm of ideas...and material realities and social practices.” It also assumes a degree of “coherence, uniformity, and timelessness in the meaning systems of a given group,” groups which are themselves understood as “fundamentally different, essentialized, and homogeneous social units” (ibid.). If we shift the focus away from discourse as culture/ideology to one which understands it as “language as spoken and used rather than as a static code analyzable apart from social practice” (7), we can

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<sup>12</sup> Research by Li (2007), Moore (2005), Pandian (2008) and Subramanian (2009) attempt to integrate historical and ethnographic analyses of development in relation to politics although the attention to power relations involved continue to rest heavily on state and local political institutions and processes.

recognize the centrality of it to understanding how individuals mobilize and interact with ideas about development. No longer encumbered by a priori assumptions as to the ideological connotations of development, attending to discourse as moments of talk allows for a more grounded approach to development and the manner in which interlocutors understand, engage, and mobilize it. From this perspective, the meaning and importance of development emerges from within social interaction. For researchers, then, discursive practices become the primary focal point allowing for more empirical specificity through which analytical understandings can be productively identified.

What remains necessary, yet has been largely neglected within development research, is more attention to interaction and context, realigning discourse as moments of talk as opposed to static ideologies. Approaching development in this way, as a category of practice and discourse through which individuals engage one another, also allows us to more clearly and concretely situate development in relation to power struggles and social hierarchies. In this way, “it is...important to explore the possibility of developing theoretical positions and methodological strategies that permit us to broaden and deepen the social, political, and historical thrust of analyses without abandoning a concern with discourse structure” (Briggs 1996:18). Indeed, as linguistic anthropologists have shown, attention to discursive practices more generally has allowed scholars to identify the specific ways in which interactions have social consequences and pragmatic force. As many have noted, language and discourse are forms of social action, with relations of power emerging from within interactions and through discourse; from this view, relations of power and political struggles are not assumed a priori. This conceptual shift allows us to “explore discourse patterning without depoliticizing it and...study power and discourse without reifying them” (30).



Shifting our definition of discourse, then, results in a similar shift in how politics and political relations are understood. In order to distinguish my use of the term discourse, as focused on moments of talk anchored in specific sites of interaction (Silverstein 2005a) from post-development uses of “development discourse” as a form of ideology, I refer to “talk about development,” “discourse about development,” “discussions and debates about development” or similar phrasings. What gets revealed in approaching language as a form of social action, then, is that when we look at everyday, on-the-ground discursive engagements, we see that discourses about development have a politically productive component; that is, those engaging in discussions and debates of this sort do so through the lens of situated understandings and particular interests, interests that often include political commitments. In the Haitian context, I point to the various ways in which development is mobilized as a form of political contestation. In this way, different sites of deliberation are themselves sites of the political. In the following section, I outline in more detail the language as social action theoretical approach adopted by linguistic anthropologists. I examine the historical underpinnings of it and its theoretical contributions, most notably regarding attention to deliberative practices or moments of conversational conflict. In this way, I further highlight the analytical potential of coupling attention to language and discourse with an approach to development as a category of practice. Both approaches, I argue, are complementary and allow for more nuanced attention to politics and sites of political engagement.

### **Language as Social Action and Political Engagement**

Anthropological and sociolinguistic research has shown that language and interactional form, in conjunction with content, contribute to how individuals respond to and understand ideas

– a “dialogic emergence” (Bakhtin [1975] 1981; Voloshinov [1929] 1973) that ultimately affects social action.<sup>13</sup> An influential precursor to the current theoretical strand of “language as social action” is Speech Act theory as proposed originally by philosopher John Austin (1961), and later elaborated by John Searle (1983). As a theory explicitly attending to the performativity of language – that is, the manner in which language does something socially – Austin made a distinction between levels of analysis of a given speech act: “locutionary” “illocutionary” and “perlocutionary” acts. According to Austin, a locutionary act is the actual utterance and its agreed upon meaning, whereas an illocutionary act is the intended meaning by the speaker and the perlocutionary act is the effect the speech act itself has on the world, including the hearer(s).<sup>14</sup> In this sense, Austin was most concerned with the performative aspect of utterances rather than their descriptive function. That is, he understood language as having productive potential – doing something – as opposed to solely describing the world “as it is.” Austin and Searle were influential in the theoretical approach they took precisely because they recognized that language does, or accomplishes, something (Duranti 1997:15). Linguistic anthropologists have since critiqued, elaborated, and revised this theoretical approach, yet have retained an understanding of the productive potential of language and discourse. One significant critique of Austin was that of Michelle Rosaldo (1982), who argued that his taxonomy of speech acts was too restrictive and that cultural context needed to be taken into consideration in order to fully understand meaning in social interaction. As she argued, context cannot be separated from speech events.

More recent trends in linguistic anthropological theory draw inspiration from Russian philosopher and literary critic, Mikhail Bakhtin ([1975] 1981). In contrast to Austin and Searle’s

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<sup>13</sup> For more on language as social action, see Ahearn (2001), Tedlock & Mannheim (1995), and Wortham (2001).

<sup>14</sup> This, of course, is a simplification of his discussion of “locutionary” – he defines “locutions” as “full units of speech” (Austin 1961:94) and goes on to distinguish between phonetic, phatic and rhetic act (95-98).

approach, Bakhtin pointed to the necessity of attending to meaning in relation to the form of utterances and the social context within which they emerged (Bauman & Briggs 1990). He demonstrated that all language, whether written, circulated via mass media, or emerging through face-to-face interaction, is dialogic in nature. That is, all language has a dynamic and relational existence, carrying a “multi-voicedness” in which various factors come into play and interact with both the presentation or performance of utterances as well as how the utterance is interpreted. Contrary to a monologic approach to language, as taken up by some branches of disciplinary linguistics, a dialogic approach goes beyond attention to the structure and content of a speaker’s utterances but also the interactional context of the speech event when attempting to understand the meaning of those utterances (Wortham 2001). In other words, since most utterances are made in situations of dialogue, why would we treat an analysis of meaning as if only the content of the speaker’s utterance matters (Tedlock & Mannheim 1995)? While it remains undeniable that some portion of meaning is captured by, for instance, attending to dictionary definitions where words and phrases are not anchored in specific contexts of usage, this approach remains only partial. Participants in a given interaction also draw on interactional cues, such as the form of the utterance and interaction, framing, presentation, relationship to hearer(s) or other speaker(s), expectations, and presuppositions. Thus, meaning is necessarily negotiated by participants within a given interaction. While there is always a degree of indeterminacy to meaning, a dialogic approach necessarily contextualizes it through attention to structure, form, and social positions of speaker/hearer, in addition to the referential content of an utterance.

Approaching language in this manner reveals its productive potential as a form of social action. Language and discourse accomplish something, yet it is only through attention to the

unfolding interaction, language forms, and contextual cues, that we can understand precisely *what* it does socially for those involved. This approach, situating culture as emerging dialogically from social interactions contends that action is not primarily a reflection of existing social structures but that “cultures are continuously produced, reproduced, and revised in dialogues among their members” (Tedlock & Mannheim 1995:2). This is not to say that culture is produced anew in every interaction; rather, it recognizes the social situatedness of interactions as arising from specific social, historical, and institutional contexts. Context, then, shapes the interaction just as the interaction shapes context. Participants bring ideas, interests, and expectations to every interaction and also take something away from them. An action is accomplished, at least partially, through the dialogue that ensues. Language, in this way, is embedded in networks of sociocultural relations (Ahearn 2001) and does more than simply reflect or mediate cultural forms: it produces, transforms, and reproduces them as well.

In the context of discourses about development, then, we can see how presupposing meaning or assigning a static and coherent set of ideas to the concept of development does little to help us understand how individuals and groups themselves engage with it. In many ways, this mirrors the category of practice approach to development. Yet, even within this emerging trend, researchers continue to neglect the productive role of discourse (i.e. Yarrow 2011). Shifting away from development discourse as an ideology to a focus on language in use and unfolding interactions better allows us to ferret out the meanings and resonances to those involved. Attention to discourse in relation to interactional cues and context, then, is of the utmost importance to this task.

Approaching language as a form of social action is necessarily embedded in larger debates pertaining to the relationship between structure and agency, offshoots of which include

discussions of power (e.g., Foucault 1978) and resistance (e.g., Scott 1990). Indeed, I further elaborate a discussion of agency and resistance in relation to questions of ethics in Chapter 5. If agency is a “socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn 2001:112), then attention to dialogue remains important, as it is a site where sociocultural forms are negotiated, produced and reproduced, and through which both social norms (structure) and challenges to those norms (agency) have the potential for enactment. Indeed, as research has shown, both the establishment and rejection of social norms can be simultaneously obtained or enacted within interactions. Attention to language in use, then, focuses our understanding of agency by pointing to the social action produced via interactional moments within which meaning is contested and interpretations negotiated. According to Laura Ahearn (2001:111), “as meanings are co-constructed, social reality is also constructed... language does not merely reflect an already existing social reality; it also helps to create that reality.”

From this theoretical vantage point, this research attempts to combine a study of development, through attention to it as an idea as well as a category of practice, with an understanding of language as a form of social action. What, it asks, do discourses about development and development activities do for those engaging in them? What interests are reflected through those discourses and what pragmatic force do they have? In other words, what do they accomplish? In focusing on discourses about development and development practices, I attend to deliberative practices, or moments of conversational conflict, as important instances through which different ideas and interests come into conflict and are actively negotiated by participants. At times, these moments of conflict come in the form of debates about historical trajectories and allocations of responsibility in relation to development failures. At other times, conflict arises regarding the ethical implications of proposed action in relation to political

critiques, in particular, those that draw on interpretations of actor intentions and development efforts.

Moments of conversational conflict are important instances during which participants who are “attempting to construct shared interpretations of past, present, and future events – or contesting attempts to impose unanimity – can shape social memory and social organization as well as impose limits of perception” (Briggs 1996:5). Research on deliberation practices (Brenneis 1988) have been particularly productive in revealing how social norms and relations are negotiated and maintained and knowledge is constituted.<sup>15</sup> As Briggs (1996) notes, early analysts of social phenomena regarded forms of conflict as abnormal and detrimental to maintaining social equilibrium. This focus on social stability versus social change and/or conflict was also present in general trends in anthropology and sociology that attended to social structures and their maintenance (e.g. Durkheim). Ethnographic research, in some cases, also worked to erase instances of conflict in outlining how a given society functioned; in these cases, sketching an “ideal type,” following Max Weber, was seen as preferable when describing a coherent picture of a “culture” or “society” rather than recognizing how cultural forms are just as often contested as they are agreed upon.<sup>16</sup> Within linguistic research, early models of language also ignored inconsistencies, preferring to cleanly divide everyday language use (i.e. Saussure’s *parole*), including its necessary imperfections, disfluencies, and conflict, from the “ideal type” description of a language (Saussure’s *langue*).<sup>17</sup>

Moments of conversational conflict, as Donald Brenneis (1988) argues, represent a “critical juncture” at which sociocultural anthropology and linguistic anthropology come

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<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, Brenneis (1987), Duranti (1990), Graham (1993), Lempert (2005), Lindquist (2002), Matoesian (2002), White et al. (1990), and Wirtz (2007).

<sup>16</sup> Examples of early anthropological research favoring attention to social cohesion as opposed to conflict include work by Bronislaw Malinowski ([1922] 1984), Ruth Benedict ([1946] 2005), and Margaret Mead ([1935] 1963).

<sup>17</sup> See Saussure (1966) or more information regarding this division between *langue* and *parole*.

together; that is, disputes involve broader questions of social organization, political economy, ideologies, and power as participants draw on interactional strategies and grammatical structures in the negotiation of conflict. As Charles Briggs (1996) notes, conflict implies disagreement. Through interactions, certain assumptions, ideologies and norms have the potential to be called into question or brought to the level of conscious awareness and metapragmatic negotiation. Ultimately, attention to conversational conflict has the potential to shed light on how shared interpretations and meaning are co-constructed as well as how social relations and ideologies get reproduced, transformed, or challenged. In this way, conflict can be viewed “as a crucial part of the social construction of reality” (4). By attending to various discursive patterns and structures, research on deliberative practices has revealed the manner in which discourse of this sort has social consequences or pragmatic force for those involved. In some cases, research has shown that such practices result in constituting agreed-upon interpretations and meanings or upholding pre-existing social relations. Other research has shown the manner in which discursive conflict can result in establishing or shifting the social status of participants. It can also work to shape the outcomes of institutional mandates, such as legal proceedings.<sup>18</sup> Julie Lindquist (2002) demonstrates, for instance, that political debates engaged within familiar settings – in this case, a local bar in Chicago – are not necessarily intended as a means to persuade or otherwise convince opposing parties of the virtues of one political ideology over another. Instead, participants perform and ultimately manage their ideological differences through debates of this sort. In similar ways, Laura Graham (1993) notes how local deliberation practices among Xavante Indians in Brazil work to promote social cohesion while simultaneously reflecting and reinforcing existing social relations of dominance. Sites of deliberation, debate, and conflict can

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<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, Bentley (1984), Blommaert & Verschuere (1998), Brenneis (1996), Duranti (1990), Haviland (1996), Lindquist (2002), Lindstrom (1990), Matoesian (1999, 2001, 2008), Mertz (1994, 1998), and Philips (2000).

also reflect unequal relations of power and differential access and can lead to the construction of social identities through participant role-taking or assignment.<sup>19</sup> This is clearly demonstrated in the work of Stanton Wortham (1992) through his examination of US classroom debates and the pedagogical use of participant examples. He examines the manner in which participants not only take on and perform roles circumscribed in relation to the topic of debate itself, but they also draw on larger categories of social conflict – such as a class relations – unreflexively taking on roles within those larger conflicts in relation to other debate participants. Regarding deliberative practices, participants also draw on a number of discursive strategies that ultimately assist in boosting credibility for one interpretation over another. An important example, examined further in Chapter 3, is the enactment of expertise.<sup>20</sup> As will be shown, expertise is a status cultivated within interactions as opposed to something participants possess. It also requires discursive work to produce and maintain. Gregory Matoesian (1999, 2001), in particular, demonstrates how participants shift in and out of expert roles through discursive interactions in legal settings. The manner in which this is done, he shows, has a direct bearing on the outcome of the specific court case he analyzes. Thus, the deliberative practice of enacting expertise has pragmatic force in relation to specific situations and situated interactions.

In each of the examples presented above, analysts combined attention to discursive structures, interactional cues, and referential content as a means through which they elucidated the pragmatic effect of the discourses and interactions they attended to. Research of this sort, then, remains tightly focused on specific contexts and interactions, providing empirical specificity to our understanding of social phenomena. Despite the varied and important insights revealed through attention to moments of conversational conflict, what remains clear is that the

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<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, Briggs (1996), Goodwin (1990), Graham (1993), Shuman (1993), and Wortham (2005).

<sup>20</sup> For more information on the enactment of expertise, see Carr (2010) and French (2012).



social action produced primarily depends on the interaction, the context, and the participants involved. In other words, research of this sort necessarily avoids generalizations and a priori assumptions, choosing instead to remain anchored in specific social situations and interactions. In my exploration of deliberative practices within specific contexts, including the HR Org's "blame game," re-interpretations of history, and the Youth Org's backstage strategizing and "strategy rehearsals," this research points to various sites of the political in relation to development. Within those political sites, participants work to establish, assert, challenge or reinforce power and status differences.

Despite the necessity of close attention to specific moments of talk, however, this approach does not limit our analysis nor does it preclude drawing connections between interactions and discourses as a means through which broader connections can be made and analyzed. Indeed, as linguistic anthropologists have shown, attention to different settings and interactions can productively identify connections or links between interactions and ideas, demonstrating the manner in which social practices and interactions are necessarily embedded in "interdiscursive webs" connecting past and future speech events (Wirtz 2011). I take up this theme further in Chapter 6, where I explore the circulation of one specific political critique and the manner in which participants drew on, repeated, and recontextualized key ideas of the critique in a variety of different social interactions and contexts. The interdiscursive process – what I refer to as "slogonization," or the transformation of a single critique into a widely repeated and recontextualized slogan – was itself politically productive. In this way, research on discourse and interaction does not necessitate, nor benefit from, isolated attention to singular moments of talk. Rather, it remains necessary to draw connections between different interactions in order to gather a more complete picture of the manner in which participants engage with

various cultural ideas and forms, and identify the different discursive structures and contextual cues they use to do so.

As was previously stated, research on development has largely sidestepped attention to discourse, a product, in many ways, of the tendency to conceptualize discourse as ideology. As I have argued here, there is much to be gained from close attention to discourse as moments of talk, and the interactions within which discourses about development and development practices arise. By approaching language as a form of social action, research on development can more productively draw out the complex ways in which participants within and beyond development institutions engage with development ideas and practices. In doing so, we can more clearly identify the social consequences, or pragmatic effects arising from specific social contexts.

Regarding research focused on development in Haiti, there has also been a notable lack of attention to discourse and language use. James' (2010) research on the political interests and implications of those involved in humanitarian efforts to assist Haitian *viktim* (victims of political violence) brings welcome insight into the various contentious forces and interests involved, including not only international donor institutions but also NGO workers and aid recipients. As she demonstrates, each participant has particular, and at times, conflicting interests pertaining to their involvement. Yet, what remains to be examined further is focused attention to the interactions and discourse through which participation in those projects take place. How do speakers negotiate their own interests in relation to the interests of others? Maternowska's (2006) attention to medical encounters between elite doctors and impoverished clients in the Port-au-Prince slum of Cité Soleil, offers a brief glimpse at the impact moments of interaction have for development projects as a whole. She points to the manner in which the classist attitudes of Haitian doctors in relation to their clients prohibit meaningful medical engagement and actually

work to discourage participation in family planning programs available at the clinic she examines. This attention to discursive interaction, while explored only minimally in her research, highlights the importance of attending to such moments as they work to shape the ways in which individuals interact with and understand encounters with development institutions.

In my own research, I have found that attention to discourse and interaction in Haiti reveals the degree to which political interests are at play in the mobilization and negotiation of ideas about development and development practices. That is, development itself is a form of political engagement, a practice in politics. The deliberative practices associated with identifying key deficiencies, determining who is or is not responsible for such conditions, and analyzing the historical processes involved is to engage politically on an interpersonal level. This form of everyday politics deals with questions of sociability and power (Lutz & Abu-Lughod:2). The practice of politics, from Li's (2007:12) view, is "the expression, in word or deed, of a critical challenge" and "stands at the limit of the calculated attempt to direct conduct."<sup>21</sup> As this research demonstrates, political engagement through deliberative practices is a form of political contestation, asserting critical challenges in an effort to reconfigure power relations and social hierarchies. In many cases, those challenges are directly aimed at political actors and institutions. For instance, in Chapter 2, the manner in which HR Org members engage in debates about responsibility, a "blame game," coupled moralizing discourses regarding injustice and human

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<sup>21</sup> This relates to philosopher Jacques Rancière's (1999; Panagia 2000:116) understanding of politics as necessarily rooted in disagreement as a precondition. In similar ways, Chantal Mouffe (1995, 1999) views politics as inherently agonistic and antagonistic. This is in contrast to Habermas' (1984, 1987) discussion of deliberative democracy and the necessary conditions of comprehension and communicative rationality (Kapoor 2002:462). Drawing heavily on Rancière, Mustafa Dikeç (2005) notes that the political exists in moments during which power relations and competing interests erupt, as instances of interruption. This differs from an approach to politics as simply power relations, one which assumes that competing interests exist everywhere, all the time. Instead, it is the act, discourse, or form of disruption that signals something as political: "nothing is political in itself. But anything may become political" (Rancière 1999:32). In some ways, this is in contrast to the manner in which early Marxist Feminists understood politics: as existing relations in which "many work and few gain" (MacKinnon 1982:517). Although my analysis does not tie a definition of politics or the political to democratic practices as Rancière and others do, I find his approach to politics useful in a general sense, even if I do not remain committed to the intricacies of it.

rights with individual and group commitments in opposition to political power holders. Deliberative practices, then, served as political sites through which members worked to collectively co-construct interpretations of particular social actors and institutions. In Chapter 3, debates about the past also represent sites of the political as participants worked to reconfigure the political commitments of others by way of historical interpretations. As Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate, the deliberative practices among Youth Org members – namely their efforts at rehearsing for shifting performances – were also sites of the political, albeit aimed at personal and group advancement. While members occasionally targeted specific political actors, they also strategized maneuvers in relation to those individuals and groups they came into direct contact. The pragmatic and entrepreneurial approach to development and electoral politics utilized within the Youth Org was one aimed at gaining access to resources and positions of power as opposed to challenging existing power structures.

Political challenges, whether targeting formal political actors and institutions or not, also attempted to draw on cooperation and support from larger Haitian audiences. For instance, the HR Org used its advocacy objectives to legitimate the political nature of their deliberative practices as members sought to reach broader audiences as a means to more effectively challenge existing power relations. In this way, members sought support from broader audiences in their quest to radically transform existing social and political structures. The collective work of contestation is most clearly demonstrated in the final chapter, as I analyze the process by which participants repeated and recontextualized the *aloral* critique, thereby contributing to its solidification as an accurate interpretation of Martelly's presidency as ineffective. The critique, and its circulation, performed a critical challenge to power holders at the same time that it also

served as a call for solidarity and cooperation from the general population in repeating and recontextualizing it.

As this dissertation demonstrates, discourses about development and development practices are a form of political contestation, carrying the productive potential to reinforce or reconfigure social relations and understandings. In a general sense, this argument rests on the assertion that discourse has pragmatic force. To claim that discourse produces social action is to contradict a common ideology in Haiti that pits “talk” against “action.” That is, talk, or discourse, does not itself produce action and is therefore not highly valued within the domain of development and political discourse. Anyone can talk; yet it is only through concrete action that talk is ultimately legitimized. This talk/action ideology is a familiar one in Haitian society and is mobilized in a variety of forms, for example, “*nou pa sou pawòl, nou sou aksyon*” (we don’t just talk, we act). Even despite its varying forms, this ideology always valorizes action above talk. This follows Sasha Newell’s (2012:149) observations in Côte d’Ivoire regarding the manner in which talk contrasts with action in the case of performances of wealth: “If a man in Treichville were to brag about his wealth, people would tell him to his face that he was *blo* (bullshit). But to dress as though one were wealthy was another matter altogether.” What I demonstrate in the chapters that follow is that discourse itself is a form of social action in the Haitian context, one centered on political contestation, ultimately succeeding in producing, transforming, or reproducing social and political relations. Engaging politically, through the negotiation of ideas about development and development practices can, at times, represent efforts to conform, as will be demonstrated in the case of the Youth Org’s attempts to gain access to the domain of development and formal political arenas through replication of antagonistic political norms. In this way, members mimicked behaviors in an effort to “get started” as an organization. At other

times, participation can represent efforts to “reconfigure the dominant political culture” (Alvarez et al. 1998:8). As will be shown, even politically oppositional discourses – that is, oppositional in relation to state actors and institutions – such as those made by HR Org members, resulted in more of the same: they both reflected and contributed to an antagonistic political environment even as members sought to transform social and political relations by circulating their interpretations to broader audiences.

The preceding literature review serves to accomplish two things. First, by exploring the various literatures relevant to this project, I have attempted to provide a theoretical lens through which to understand the approach taken in the chapters that follow, namely one that draws on a linguistic anthropological approach and applies it to research on development. Second, it hints at three specific audiences for whom this research most directly targets, including: anthropological research on development, linguistic anthropology, and Haitian studies. In doing so, I have highlighted the various strands of theory and research relevant to the analyses that follow and the general contributions this research makes to each. To be sure, each chapter also draws on more specific bodies of research and theory, some of which I introduced briefly here and will elaborate more fully in subsequent chapters. I turn now to a brief discussion of the methodological engagements entailed in this research. I end this introductory chapter with an overview of the general argument of this dissertation, summarizing the chapters that follow.

### **Methodological Engagements**

This dissertation is based on nearly two years of fieldwork carried out in Haiti’s capital city of Port-au-Prince. While the majority of my time was spent observing and participating in the everyday activities of two Haitian-run organizations, the HR Org and the Youth Org, I also

engaged in related sites such as conferences, forums, and discussions. Some sites were frequented by members from one or both of the organizations with which I worked, while others were more loosely connected by a network of individuals and institutions interested in development issues. A brief introduction and comparison of the two organizations is provided in Chapter 1, where I also offer more information regarding methodological choices in relation to each organization.

Preliminary research for this project, carried out in July of 2009 and May-August of 2010, contributed greatly to my interest in debates and discussions about development. Most notably, I was struck by the extent and intensity of interest in development issues by many, if not most Haitians I came into contact with. During my first trip to Haiti in 2009, I was accompanied by other American university students, many of whom were themselves Haitian diasporans. During my time with the group exploring the country and its history, the question of “What’s wrong with Haiti?” was a recurring one as we continually assessed and reassessed many of the problems facing Haiti in search of effective solutions. While the context of this trip was academic in nature, and largely carried out in English among a group of university students, I found this obsession with deficiencies to also be one engaged by my Haitian interlocutors during a solo trip made to the country the following year, in the summer of 2010. Although still in the preliminary stages of research and seeking to immerse myself in the language and culture of the country, I was struck by the degree to which most of my interlocutors engaged discourses of development and the overwhelmingly negative impressions most had of their country. Even though these early interactions and observations did not make their way into this dissertation in any empirical way, they impressed on me the important role of development as a discourse even in everyday informal settings.

Once I returned to Haiti in May 2011, I initially sought out sites through which I could observe discourses about development. I attended conferences, forums, seminars and public debates in an effort to understand the landscape of development activities and discourses taking place in Port-au-Prince. By participating in such activities, I was able to collect observations on recurring themes, actors, and organizations. Once I had fully integrated at both the HR Org and the Youth Org, I continued to take part in a select number of recurring conferences, noting the ways in which those events included overlapping participation by members from either or both organizations. Whenever possible, I audio recorded the conferences I attended.

An additional source of information for this project came from more anecdotal observations and interactions such as impromptu discussions on the street or public transportation, informal conversations with friends, and frequent trips to various divisions of the State University (*Université d'État d'Haïti*), including the Department of Social Sciences (*Faculté des Sciences Humaines*), the Department of Ethnology (*Faculté d'Ethnologie*), and the National Institute for Administration, Business, and International Studies (*Institut National d'Administration, de Gestion et des Hautes Études Internationales*).<sup>47</sup> I attended conferences and other formal activities at those divisions of the State University, and also observed informal gatherings and discussions among students. Although these are not a significant source of information in the chapters that follow, they inform my interests and attention nonetheless.

Given that my interlocutors at both organizations, and beyond, closely monitored, discussed, and interpreted radio and television discourse, I also focused my research to attend to

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<sup>47</sup> The State University, it should be noted, is widely considered the most respectable university in the country, even in comparison with prominent private universities. Fees associated with attendance are minimal and admittance is a highly competitive process that includes national high school graduation exams (*baccalaureate*) as well as individual State University department entrance exams. I often encountered individuals who informed me, upon questioning them as to why they chose to study a particular subject, that they had taken the entrance exams at more than one division but only succeeded in passing one. Other students had spent several years attempting to gain admittance before finally passing the exams and successfully entering as a student.



a number of radio commentary programs. Radio broadcasts are an important means through which information is disseminated. Because it can also be site through which news is created, many listeners are avid followers of their favorite programs (for example, *Ranmase*). In addition to hosting debates between guest participants, many programs also set aside a small amount of time for audience members to call in and discuss issues on the air with the host. Most radio stations are privately owned, skirting the line between mass and small media. Following Debra Spitulnik (2003:179), radio media should be understood as “a crucial part of civil society and the public sphere, understood most broadly, as the arena where citizens and citizen-based associations discuss state authority, political accountability, and representation.” The programs I chose to record aligned with those I repeatedly heard referenced within one or both of the organizations. It was clear to me, early on, that radio discourse was not only an important source through which many of my interlocutors gained information about current events, but a political site where scandals erupted, played out, and sometimes resolved. Not listening to the radio, and particular programs, meant not knowing what everyone was talking about from one moment to the next. Thus, I maintained a regular schedule of programs I aimed to record, enlisting help from others when programs aired at times when I could not be home to record them myself.

### **Development as a Form of Political Contestation**

This dissertation attends to the ways in which discussions and debates about development and development practices in the context of Port-au-Prince are utilized as a form of political contestation. Focusing on differentially situated individuals, groups, and organizations, I examine the various ways in which individual and group interests were negotiated within the context of development institutions and practices and the pragmatic effect discursive practices

had on social and political relations. The different deliberative sites explored within this research represent sites of the political and highlight the manner in which development and politics are intimately entangled in the Haitian context.

In the first chapter, I provide a brief history of Haiti, outlining the political and social divisions that continue to impact everyday Haitian society as well as those historical events engaged by interlocutors in relation to understandings of development. Following this historical examination, I shift to an analysis focused on the contemporary role of the development industry and the material and ideological entanglement of development and politics in contemporary Haiti. I focus attention to the role of NGOs operating on behalf of the development industry and the aspirational draw such activities have for many Haitians. I also point to the various ways in which development ideas and activities intertwine with the political, including political institutions, actors, and electoral processes. I end this chapter with a more detailed examination and comparison of the two organizations analyzed throughout the remaining chapters.

Dealing more heavily with the HR Org, Chapters 2 and 3 focus on deliberative practices in relation to discourses about development; that is, the dynamics and consequences of discourses attending to deficiencies, solutions, and allocations of responsibility for identified problems. In Chapter 2, “Discursive Blame Game: The Political Engagements of a Human Rights Organization,” I examine the manner in which HR Org members engage politically through a discursive “blame game” regarding development and political failures. Under the banner of their self-appointed watchdog objective – which included monitoring and analyzing collected information pertaining to current events and unfolding scandals – participants interactionally negotiated interpretations and narratives through which they understood events and happenings. I analyze the interactional mechanisms through which the group debated those

events, as they worked to co-construct shared understandings of injustice, cause/effect, declining conditions, and blame. This discursive work of constructing a collective interpretation was in preparation for their advocacy efforts aimed at *sensibilizasyon*, or making the public aware. The organization's established and respected status allowed members a significant advantage in circulating the group's situated interpretations and narratives beyond the confines of the organization, ultimately reaching broader audiences. Despite their purportedly apolitical status and use of universal human rights discourses, the group's discursive efforts to attribute blame to particular government officials falls in line with their political leanings and interests. They not only reflected antagonistic political norms but also contributed to them, further entrenching anxieties and distrust of government officials and other power holders. In this way, they were, in fact, active political participants in a larger landscape of antagonistic and oppositional politics; yet, the situated location of the organization as residing outside of formal political arenas provided the group a moral high ground from which to lodge critiques at political actors and institutions in an attempt to reconfigure power relations.

Chapter 3, "Educating about the Past: The Politics of Historical Interpretation," also attends to discourses and debates within the HR Org, while simultaneously broadening the frame of analysis by way of attending to other sites where similar debates took place. Here I focus specifically on deliberation practices that temporally anchored discussions about development within the frame of Haiti's Duvalier past. I look specifically at how different individuals and groups understood Haiti's past under Duvalier in relation to present lived conditions as participants focused on the question of whether conditions in the country were better or worse under Duvalier. Discussions on this topic ultimately focused on questions of responsibility for current conditions, grappling with evaluations and comparisons with the recent past. I examine

the different factors influencing individual interpretations, and the manner in which disagreement arose. Different interpretations within the HR Org, I argue, align with different political and ideological commitments as well as different lived experiences. Focusing on the interactional dynamics of one particular conference debate within which similar disagreement arose – taking place at a different organization, the Dev Org – I point to the discursive mechanisms through which participants negotiated their own expertise regarding historical interpretations. I draw on examples that highlight the oft-repeated claim for a need to “educate” the public about the atrocities that took place under Duvalier. As I show, debates about the past were not solely about the past; rather, debate participants drew temporal links between the past and the present, interpreting the past through the lens of present experiences and political commitments. I also demonstrate how differential interpretations of the past worked to have a pragmatic effect in relation to understandings of the present. As debate participants discursively enacted expertise and attempted to align past conditions with present ones, they sought to reconfigure or otherwise affect the present political commitments of other conference attendees. Although the discussion was deeply political, participants actively worked to mask their politically situated contributions through claims to educate others regarding historical accuracy.

The next two chapters examine the deliberative practices engaged exclusively within the Youth Org. In Chapter 4, “Getting Started: The Political Pragmatics of Strategizing,” I offer a more general overview of the organization, arguing that the group’s strategizing and backstage discussions represent a pragmatic form of political engagement. In contrast to the HR Org, the Youth Org existed in a constant state of struggle in an effort to get started as both a development organization and a political party. The unreflexive manner in which members straddled the line between development and electoral objectives, drawing on entrepreneurial strategies in relation

to both, highlights the lack of boundedness regarding both domains. The group's "shape-shifting" tendencies allowed members a degree of flexibility and represented a means through which they believed they could reach their objectives. In many ways, the group's meetings, their strategizing sessions, were preparation for various performances: performances of competency, skill, guile, networking, connections, and all around success. Meetings represented a space within which members debated which actions might be most effective, drawing on observations of strategies they wished to mimic, and anticipating audience reactions. Performing and presenting their relationship to gender, through the strategic placement and visibility of women in the organization, represents one specific example of the manner in which members anticipated audience reactions and adapted their performances in different ways depending on the projected audience. As an important part of the group's discussion of possible strategies, I analyze how members mobilized intermittent performances – what I refer to as "strategy rehearsals" – not only voicing the projected speech they envisioned they would utter themselves but also voicing the reactions of projected audiences. How members imagined, debated, and rehearsed strategies during meetings reflected their desire to reach their end goal of gaining access to resources and social advancement. That is, by adequately preparing for various performances, members believed they could produce the reality they sought: to get started as a successful organization.

Chapter 5, "Going to Church or the Devil's House: The Ethics of Political Strategizing," also attends to the manner in which Youth Org members took a pragmatic and entrepreneurial approach to development and electoral politics. Here I focus on the various ways members understood and negotiated ethical concerns and responsibility. Although the HR Org's debates about responsibility were engaged in an effort to assign blame to others regarding development failures, the Youth Org's attention to it pertained to themselves and the degree to which they

would personally be held responsible for unethical actions. Given their desire to fully enter the pro-social domain of development and formal political arenas, and the entrepreneurial approach they engaged, the group's "ethical imagination," or the manner in which members understood the ethical dimension of their strategizing efforts, is significant. Indeed, members were wary that interpretations by non-members of the group's behaviors as ethical or unethical carried the potential to limit their access to, and advancement in, the domains of development and electoral politics. In this chapter, I follow one particular discussion during which the use of dissimulation was debated. Here I trace the objections of one member, David, as he expressed his concerns regarding a set of deceptive strategies suggested by other members. His objections point to concerns regarding the group's responsibility and the potential for future repercussions. While David's objections clearly drew on a moralizing dichotomy – questioning whether the group should "go to church" or "the devil's house" – by tracing his objections and the alternative strategy he suggested, I argue that what was initially presented as a moral choice, was actually a choice regarding responsibility the group would encounter down the line if the suggested strategies were adopted. Thus, for the group, going to church was less about doing what was ethical and more about choosing the path of least resistance, the path least likely to result in problems down the line. Indeed, the intention to deceive was less important than the potential for their performances to pragmatically transform a situation in their favor. Yet, as I will show, this pragmatic approach was not devoid of recognition as to the ethical or unethical dimension of proposed strategies. Instead, members marked recognition of such concerns through the use of objections and justifications, thereby focusing on questions of responsibility and working to shift it away from the group.

As both Youth Org chapters demonstrate, members' pragmatic strategizing was engaged in an effort to conform or gain access to the domains of interest to them. Their mimicry and attention to audience response, in particular, point to how group members worked to replicate politically antagonistic norms as a mechanism for shifting their own social and political status; in this way, they worked in concert with existing power relations as opposed to aiming to transform them.

The final chapter, "Slogonization and the Political Pragmatics of Interdiscursivity: The Social Life of a Political Critique," shifts yet again, focusing more broadly on the question of contentious and oppositional politics, attending to the politically productive circulation process of one critique lodged against President Martelly. Here I engage with culturally specific questions of language, linguistic genres, and political critiques. By tracing the example of the *aloral* (all talk) political critique, I highlight the manner in which it transformed from a single critique – condemning the president for development failures – to a creatively repeated and recontextualized text. In the process, it became a pithy means through which complex political interpretations, were simplified into a single text. I refer to this transformation process as "slogonization" and examine the ways in which individuals succeeded in taking up the resultant slogan as a powerful signal of political stance. I point to the ambiguity of information available to the general public and argue that political critiques represent one important way in which this ambiguity is dealt with in practical political terms; that is, through political critiques lodged via the Haitian-specific verbal genres of *pwen* and *slogan*, individuals seek to solidify interpretations of events and social actors. From this analysis, we see the "success" of a given critique depends less on the strength or validity of the critique itself and more on the form and reception of it. By tracing the social life of the *aloral* critique (Agha 2003), I demonstrate how interpretations of it

were publicly negotiated and communally mobilized across time and space. Political critiques of this sort work to simultaneously challenge power holders in an effort to transform power relations while also calling for solidarity from others, through repetition and recontextualization of those political critiques. In this way, political critiques not only reflect pre-existing political sentiments but also carry the potential to be politically productive, configuring and reconfiguring social and political relations.

As a form of political engagement, discourses about development and development activities in Haiti play a politically productive role for those involved in them. In this way, specific sites of deliberative practices focused on questions of development represent sites of the political. Attending to discourse and interaction within and beyond two specific Haitian organizations, this research brings together attention to development as a prominent domain of activity within Haiti with understandings as to the productive potential of language and discourse. Discourses about development, especially those arising during moments of deliberation, or conversational conflict, represent negotiations of political commitments that ultimately work to configure and reconfigure political relations both at the individual level as well as the national political level. The politically productive role of discourses of this sort challenges the prominent ideology in Haiti that elevates action above talk, as if talk itself does not, or cannot, result in social action. As will be shown, discourses about development and development activities do indeed have productive potential, working in concert with antagonistic norms and seeking to establish, assert, challenge or reinforce existing power and status differences.



## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Enduring Social Divisions: The Entanglement of Development and Politics**

#### **A Divided History**

Haiti was born within, and in response to, an era marked by significant transformations brought about by increasingly global flows of people, goods, and ideas. Indeed, Sidney Mintz and Eric Wolf long argued that “the Caribbean has been modern since its early incorporation into various North Atlantic empires” (Trouillot 2003:41; Mintz 1971, 1985). The ideas and values associated with modernization and development, then, are an embedded part of Haiti’s historical trajectory. In particular, they influenced the evolution of social and political divisions in the country, divisions that continue to play a role in how contemporary political relations unfold in the present. I begin this chapter with a historical examination of the various factors contributing to entrenched social and political divisions in the country. I then shift to an analysis of the contemporary role of development and its relationship to political institutions and actors. I conclude with ethnographic introductions to the two organizations analyzed in subsequent chapters and a brief comparison of them as development organizations and political actors.

Beginning as early as 1659, colonial control of the island known as “Hispanola” was split between French control of the western half – referred to by the French as Saint Domingue, what is now the Republic of Haiti – and Spanish control of the eastern side – today recognized as the

Dominican Republic.<sup>1</sup> As a plantation, export-based economy, Haiti “produced about 60 percent of the world’s coffee and about 40 percent of the sugar imported by France and Britain” in the years leading up to the beginning of the French Revolution in 1789 (Doucet 2003:81). The high demand for labor and the brutal conditions to which imported African slaves were subjected created a situation where high mortality rates resulted in the constant influx of slaves, heralding from a variety of different areas in Africa. When the Haitian revolution began, “two-thirds of the roughly half a million slaves in Saint Domingue were African-born” (Fick 1990:25). During the French Revolution, lasting from 1789-1799, Haitian slaves and *gens de couleur* (people of color) banded together calling for freedom and equality on the island.<sup>2</sup> The Haitian revolution began in 1791, resulting in the eventual abolition of slavery.<sup>3</sup> Although initial aims were not focused on independence, later efforts to reinstate slavery, led by Napoleon Bonaparte’s army, culminated in the defeat of the French and a declaration of independence in 1804. Often referenced as the first and only successful slave revolt, many Haitians continue to reflect on this history with a mixture of pride and shame; pride at what was accomplished against all odds, and shame regarding Haiti’s current state as the “poorest country in the Western hemisphere.”<sup>4</sup>

Following independence, social divisions based on class quickly became entrenched in the new republic and an economic hierarchy based on land ownership was put into place. Land was divvied up and awarded primarily to officers of high rank in the revolutionary military. This

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<sup>1</sup> Each country has a significantly different, if at times intertwined, history. For more information regarding the manner in which each country developed in relation to the other, see especially Martinez (2003), Turits (2002), and Wucker (2000).

<sup>2</sup> *Gens de couleur* generally refers to free individuals of mixed backgrounds, including those of African and European descent.

<sup>3</sup> See Dubois (2004) and Fick (1990) for more details regarding the Haitian revolution. For a history of events that followed the revolution, including most of the 19th century, see Dubois (2012). This period represents an oft-ignored portion of Haitian history.

<sup>4</sup> It remains unclear as to where this assessment comes from precisely as few cite a source. It likely derives from a World Bank or similar report on the country. Some have assessed Haiti’s current impoverished state as a form of punishment or retribution for the Haitian revolution. This idea, along with an explicit condemnation of Haiti’s popular religion, *vodou*, as a pact with the devil, circulated in the US media as a result of comments made by evangelist Pat Robertson following the 2010 earthquake.

preference, and the existing status of those who already owned and cultivated land, created distinct classes (Doucet 2003). Exclusion of peasants from economic and political status mirrored the stratification of distinct linguistic classes: a majority of poor, monolingual Kreyòl speakers versus a numerically small number of élite bilingual Kreyòl/French speakers. Following independence, all inhabitants spoke a variety of Kreyòl. In spite of this, French was informally deemed the language of the newly independent state, with the hopes of maintaining ties to former colonizers (James [1938] 2001). As linguist Albert Valdman (1988:72) observed, “one of the many ironies of the Haitian revolution is that national independence gained by the sacrifice of Creole-speaking liberated slaves was followed by the reestablishment of the linguistic symbol of white colonial rule.” Thus began the valorization of French and the stigmatization of Kreyòl, a situation in which Haitian identity was molded by conflicted and primarily negative perceptions of what had become an indigenous language of Haiti.<sup>5</sup>

Despite success in driving the French out – and thwarting subsequent English and Spanish attempts at invasion – the republic became politically divided. Separation of the north from the south and western portions of the country was the result of disagreements as to the manner in which the new republic should be governed. Henri Christophe retreated to the north, creating a separate government over which he declared himself King Henry I. In the south, Alexandre Pétion was elected president. The division was as much about forms of government control as it was based on differences of race and class. The northern portion was predominantly made up of former slaves, with the south representing the majority of *affranchi* and *gens de*

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<sup>5</sup> Although referring to Kreyòl as an indigenous language may seem misdirected, the fact that it had become the language in which all Haitians are socialized from birth makes it indigenous to Haiti, a situation which, of course, is not primordial but rather a modern development. See Mufwene (2001) for more information regarding the manner in which all “language births” can be identified as indigenous.

*couleurs*.<sup>6</sup> Following Christophe's death in 1820, Haiti was once again united under a single leadership, with *milat* (mulattos) controlling political and governmental institutions. In 1825, France demanded reparations from the newly sovereign republic, totaling 150 million francs. Although it was later reduced to 90 million in 1838, the debt had significant economic consequences for the country. In a similar fashion, the Vatican's refusal to recognize Haiti's independence until 1860 had consequences for the early development of social and educational institutions in the country. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1990a:51) states, "the contempt of Rome cost Haiti dearly, both in terms of its internal development and in the international arena... it crippled the Haitians' chances of building a solid and wide-ranging system of formal education."

Economic decisions within the country also resulted in further dividing the population, particularly in terms of divisions based on race and class. Indeed, Trouillot argues that the targeting of coffee exportation for taxation was "the first in a series of steps taken against the interests of the growing peasantry, and set the tone for Haiti's economic policy for the next two centuries" (60). What came after has largely been characterized as chronic political instability, with regular "political succession, numerous constitutional crises, and recurring armed feuds" (83). Trouillot attributes this political instability to three factors: (1) growing economic divisions between the peasantry, on the one hand, and the governmental and merchant classes on the other. This division was largely the result of a increasing unproductivity among the peasant classes due to the decreasing availability of fertile land and the systematic siphoning off of resources by merchants and state institutions through taxes and other mechanisms; (2) expanding role and size of state institutions as resulting from the "extraction of surplus and its monopoly of the labor market" (84); and (3) "political marginalization of the peasantry and the concentration of urban demands in the narrow sphere of governmental decisions" (85).

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<sup>6</sup> *Affranchi* is a term used to reference an emancipated slave in French. It was also used to reference mulattoes.

By 1915, this political instability culminated in six presidents holding office over the course of a four year period and included significant political violence. On July 28, 1915, American President Woodrow Wilson ordered the invasion of Haiti by the US Marines. Thus began the US occupation of Haiti, lasting from 1915-1934. Although the occupation resulted in a number of infrastructural developments, it also further entrenched divisions based on class and race, and worked to centralize government control. Resistance to the occupation, and the political activism that followed the period of occupation, drew on black nationalist movements such as *négritude* and *noirisme*. Indeed, many attribute François “Papa Doc” Duvalier’s rise to power to this growing resentment and its demands for the inclusion of black middle class Haitians in political and governmental affairs.<sup>7</sup>

A country doctor and ethnographer, Papa Doc appealed to the black nationalist movement by way of his modest background and his ethnographic interests.<sup>8</sup> As some have argued, he largely took advantage of this movement for his own self-serving interests: “this black nationalism was as fake as it was self-serving, for Papa Doc never shied away from privately enlisting the support of those foreign powers he denounced in public” (Girard 2005:99). Thus, his connection to the Haitian peasantry, both in terms of his medical experience as well as his ethnographic interests, aligned him with the black nationalist movement. He was elected president in the 1957 election.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For more information about the US occupation and the years leading up to Duvalier’s election as president, see: Bellegarde-Smith (2004), M.J. Smith (2009), and Renda (2001). Trouillot (1990a) also includes an informative analysis of the context within which Duvalier came to power. For a more detailed review of Haitian history prior to and leading up to the period of US occupation, see Dubois (2012).

<sup>8</sup> Duvalier was a student of Jean Price-Mars (1876-1969), a Haitian ethnographer well known for his examination of Haitian peasant culture, particularly folklore. Price-Mars is most widely known for his text, “Ainsi parla l’oncle” (So Spoke the Uncle) published in 1928.

<sup>9</sup> The election, however, was not necessarily unproblematic as irregularities were reported due to a lack of institutional mechanisms limiting voter fraud. Historical accounts vary, however, from those stating that the election was generally reflective of public opinion (Ferguson 1987) to those arguing US manipulation (Bellegarde-Smith 2004) or widespread and generalized fraud (Girard 2005).

Once in office, Papa Doc was a pragmatic strategist who quickly worked to consolidate power both through centralized and diffused control, eventually assigning himself the status of “president for life.” The process was as swift as it was effective. Well aware of the role the military historically played in making or breaking an administration, he quickly retired, or re-assigned and replaced, those top-ranking military officials he viewed as untrustworthy. While he centralized control of government institutions and resources – for instance, armaments were said to be stored within the National Palace – he simultaneously created a nationwide network of control through the creation of a paramilitary force, commonly referred to as the *Tonton Macoutes*.<sup>10</sup>

Papa Doc’s rise to power and subsequent centralization of it was the result of an unrelenting approach to political opposition and the formation of the *Tonton Macoutes* as an extra-legal force utilizing state-sanctioned violence as a means to maintain the status quo. “Recruiting from the ranks of Haiti’s impoverished black majority, the macoutes justified Papa Doc’s revolutionary agenda” (Girard 2005:97). By giving guns, power, and a degree of free reign to many who previously had little, Papa Doc was able to successfully stem oppositional political movements. According to international studies scholar Patrick Bellegarde-Smith (2004:129), “Duvalier’s ability to hold power was largely the result of weak state institutions, his uncanny intelligence, and intimate knowledge of Haitian culture, and the effectiveness and surprise tactics of his secret police and state apparatus.” Papa Doc’s success in maintaining his status as president for life also stemmed from his utilization of “folk” culture to instill fear and consolidate power.

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<sup>10</sup> Created in 1959, the *Tonton Macoutes* were officially named *Milice de Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale* (Militia of National Security Volunteers). The colloquial name draws on Haitian folklore in referencing a bogeyman named “*Tonton Makout*” (Uncle Gunnysack) known for kidnapping and punishing children for their misbehavior by placing them in his gunnysack for later consumption.

With roots dating back to the French colonial period, Haitian *vodou* is understood to be the popular religion of Haiti. Although followers of *vodou* believe in one supreme creator, *bondye*, they worship intermediary spirits known as *lwa* or *loa*. Each *lwa* has a dynamic personality and every practitioner is believed to have a personal relationship with a particular *lwa*. Religious ceremonies often focus on devotions and other offerings to individual *lwa*. Many *vodou* symbols draws on icons traditionally associated with Catholicism, the other historically dominant religion of Haiti. For instance, images of Catholic saints are often associated with individual *lwa*.<sup>11</sup> Some argue this to be evidence that *vodou* is a syncretic religion, drawing on both Catholicism and various African religions. Others, however, argue that the two religions interacted but were never fully fused in a syncretic manner (e.g. Desmangles 1992). In contemporary society, many Haitians practice both Catholicism and *vodou*. Indeed, even despite the growing number of conversions to Protestantism, most Haitians still retain cultural practices traditionally associated with *vodou*.<sup>12</sup> In some cases, individual Haitians practice both Protestantism and *vodou*, even in light of the strong stance many Protestant leaders take in opposition to *vodou*.<sup>13</sup>

With his extensive knowledge of Haitian peasantry, culture, and religion, Papa Doc was able to skillfully manipulate *vodou* iconicity in such a way as to maintain power through fear: “rumors swirled that he practiced nocturnal ceremonies on the bodies of his enemies, that he had mastered the art of ubiquity, and that he was an incarnation of the *loa* Baron Samedi, who shared

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<sup>11</sup> For more information regarding Haitian *vodou*, its history, beliefs, and contemporary existence, see Dayan (1994), Desmangles (1992), Dubois (2001), McAlister (2002), Richman (2005), and Vanhee (2002).

<sup>12</sup> Although no comprehensive research has taken place in recent years regarding religious affiliation and conversion to Protestantism, many cite growing numbers of Haitians turning to Protestantism. As Ménard-Saint Clair’s (2012:5) research hints at, religious conversion of this sort may be related to ideas about development: “In order for a country to develop and for its citizens to ameliorate their living conditions people have to work. In Haiti people are led to believe that converting to Protestantism and praying will automatically regenerate a productive lifestyle.”

<sup>13</sup> Following the 2010 earthquake, clashes between followers of *vodou* and those of Protestantism were especially common. In a number of cases, *vodou* practitioners were actively attacked. This stems, to some degree, from claims by some that *vodou* was to blame for the earthquake.

Papa Doc's taste for black suits and cemeteries" (Girard 2005:98). In this way, Papa Doc used rumors and fear to his advantage, dressing as the *lwa* Baron Samedi, the spirit of the dead. Some *macoutes* also had a connection to *vodou*, simultaneously serving as *vodou* priests.

Despite Papa Doc's success in centralizing control, he did little to improve conditions in the country in a manner that would have positively affected the lives of the majority of the population. Instead, social divisions of class and race persisted. US support for Papa Doc's leadership, came in the form of financial aid as well as abstaining from direct intervention. US aid increased throughout Papa Doc's reign: from US\$7 million in 1959 to US\$13.5 million by 1961, representing nearly 50 percent of the state budget for that year (Bellegarde-Smith 2004:129). This direct and indirect support of a dictatorship was publicly justified due to Papa Doc's vocalized stance against communism. Little of this foreign aid reached the population, however, as the many of the poorest and geographically marginalized – referred to as "*moun andeyò*," or people living in the countryside – were highly taxed both through formal and informal means (Bellegarde-Smith 2004).

Immediately prior to Papa Doc's death in 1971, his son, Jean-Claude, was named the next president for life. He was nineteen at the time, earning him the nickname of "Bébé Doc" (Baby Doc). Some historians report very few differences between the two regimes, with repression and institutionalized violence continuing under Baby Doc. And yet, differences do emerge, most notably Baby Doc's lifestyle and his kleptocratic tendencies in relation to state coffers. His relationship to foreign aid and foreign private investment also differed as the country under his leadership is often characterized as a period of "liberalization." Not only did he open the country to increasing amounts of foreign aid, but he also permitted an increasing number of foreign development institutions and initiatives to enter the country. Baby Doc actively courted foreign



aid, resulting in a boost in aid dollars to nearly 35.5 million by 1975 (Girard 2005:100).<sup>14</sup> The country's assembly sector expanded during this period as well along with an expansion of tourism.<sup>15</sup> Yet, as historian Philippe Girard (2005:101) notes, "Bébé Doc's liberalization was a clever ploy to increase foreign aid while changing nothing of substance, following the time-honored Haitian tradition of fooling powerful white outsiders by faking submissiveness." In this way, corruption was rampant while the country became "virtually dependent on international charity by the late 1970s," a level of aid that represented nearly 70 percent of the national treasury (ibid.). Baby Doc's marriage to Michèle Bennett, the daughter of an elite mulatto family, in 1980 was viewed by many black middle-class Haitians as a betrayal of his father's stated commitment to the *négritude* movement and its aims to uproot the historical racism of the Haitian political class. The marriage also exacerbated corruption and theft of state funds due to Michèle's lavish spending habits (Bellegarde-Smith 2004, Abbott 1988).

On the surface, Baby Doc's liberalization seemed to signal that things were changing in the country. However, foreign aid only served as a means through which a particular lifestyle and status could be maintained: "foreign funds financed his lifestyle and that of the thuggish *macoutes*; contraband sale of food and drug donations provided a secondary stream of income; meanwhile, Haitians blamed foreigners instead of the Duvaliers for the appalling poverty" (Girard 2005:108). Jimmy Carter's US presidency between 1977 and 1981, and his commitment to human rights globally, also forced Baby Doc's regime to "give its human rights record a facelift," although, most changes were merely cosmetic (101). For instance, officials worked to manipulate what foreign observers were able to document. Ronald Reagan's administration, between 1981 and 1989, brought a return to more overt forms of repressive violence in Haiti.

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<sup>14</sup> There were few generalized economic benefits that resulted from this boost in aid dollars, a consequence of the extensive tax holidays offered to foreign investors.

<sup>15</sup> The country was the Caribbean's sex tourism hotspot at the time.

This was largely the result of an agreement between the United States and Baby Doc regarding US patrol of Haiti's coasts. Under Reagan, mass migration out of Haiti largely stalled and thus, political repression was allowed to continue without international recognition (103).

Many attribute Baby Doc's downfall to his wife's exorbitant spending habits and her unabashed flaunting of it publicly. Girard, however, argues a combination of compounding factors, including: Baby Doc's fake liberalization policies and the lack of any real improvements, growing poverty, the country's dependence on foreign aid, the kleptocratic tendencies of Baby Doc and his administration, overpopulation in rural areas leading to mass migration and unmitigated population growth in Port-au-Prince, the AIDS epidemic and stigmatization of Haitians as carriers, significant out-migration and brain drain, deforestation problems that worsened conditions in rural areas, and a creole pig eradication program that left many without their only source of wealth, or their "piggy bank" (Girard 2005:102-6).<sup>16</sup> According to Bellegarde-Smith (2004:137), "neither Jean-Claude nor François Duvalier undertook any significant national projects to develop the nation's economy. Although the son allowed some private foreign initiatives to operate as part of a new technocratic image, the plight of most Haitians actually worsened under Jean-Claude's economic policies."

Whatever the direct cause of the 1986 ousting of Duvalier, grassroots mobilization swept the country and Baby Doc fled. He was aided by the United States and was said to have raided the state coffers on his way out.<sup>17</sup> A case against Duvalier in France, on behalf of the Haitian

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<sup>16</sup> When an outbreak of African swine fever hit the Dominican Republic in the early 1980s, US officials feared it would spread to Haiti, and then the United States. In response, they preemptively exterminated the vast majority of Haiti's creole pigs, a species well adapted to harsh conditions in the country. While the US government later attempted to replace those that were lost with imported American pigs, most died quickly due to the unsuitability of conditions and their requirements for survival, such as food and housing. In many cases, such requirements were more than many Haitians could afford for themselves. Given that so much of the population depended on the sale and slaughter of creole pigs as an important source of family wealth, the eradication program devastated many families.

<sup>17</sup> See Abbott (1988) for a detailed account of Baby Doc and Michèle's departure.

government, ruled “unfavorably on Haiti’s superbly prepared case documenting \$120 million that Jean-Claude Duvalier had stolen” (Abbot 1988:345). Yet because Duvalier utilized the bank system of Switzerland to maintain and store some of those funds, a Swiss court did eventually weigh in on the matter, ordering that the funds be released to charities in Haiti. Despite this ruling, another Swiss court later ruled against it, awarding four million to be released to Duvalier. The government of Switzerland, however, ultimately blocked the release of funds. Some argue that Duvalier’s return to Haiti following the 2010 earthquake was an effort to demonstrate to the Swiss government that the Haitian government would not pursue criminal charges against him; this, it was speculated, might trigger release of the funds to Duvalier. Days after his arrival in Haiti, however, he was taken into custody and charged with corruption and theft of state funds. The legal process was slow to proceed and a hearing was finally held in late February 2013 to consider human rights abuse charges alongside those of corruption. The case, however, never proceeded further as Duvalier died of a heart attack on October 4, 2014.

Upon Baby Doc’s departure from the country in 1986, both celebration and retribution followed. Those believed to be associated with the Duvalier terror machine were targeted, often brutally; *Tonton Macoutes*, Duvalier officials, and *vodou* priests were all victims of various violent acts of revenge during a period referred to as *dechoukaj* (uprooting). The military regime taking Duvalier’s place struggled to control the situation resulting in active repression and the utilization of explicit violence in an attempt to stem protests (Trouillot 1990a:222). The regime made a half-hearted, unsuccessful attempt to convict two former Duvalierists and ultimately, many well-known *macoutes* were released from charges for lack of evidence despite widespread public outcry (Abbott 1988:338). Most Haitians were left unsatisfied with the military regimes

lack of tangible improvements. It had become clear to many Haitians that Duvalierism, sometimes referred to as Macoutism, never truly ended with the ousting of Duvalier.

Transitioning to democracy was not easy and many comment today that it remains an incomplete project. A new constitution was drafted in 1987, instilling hope for many, particularly regarding Article 291, which “empowered the [electoral] council to disqualify from political office for ten years anyone accused by public clamor of having murdered, tortured, or embezzled under the former Duvalier presidents or of having supported their regimes ‘with excess zeal’” (Abbot 1988:343). Yet despite this, many Duvalierists still sought political roles, claiming the article did not apply to them. Neither the electoral council, mandated under the new constitution, nor the military government under President Namphy, had the willpower to actively block Duvalierists from participating in scheduled elections. The council and the government were locked in perpetual opposition. When the council finally did step in and ban Duvalierist candidates, the government did nothing to protect council members from violence and intimidation enacted against them (354-5).

Thus, the electoral process was hobbled by violence and a war between anti-Duvalierist vigilantes on one side and Duvalierists/Macoutes on the other (Girard 2005:108). It seemed clear to many where the military regime’s interests rested, as military interventions were more often dispatched against the vigilantes but not *macoutes* violence (Abbot 1988:356-7). The election that followed was also deeply marred by violence and the threat of international intervention. New election laws and procedures were hastily put into place by President Namphy and his regime, prompting boycotts by prominent anti-Duvalierist candidates. Election results were in favor of Leslie Manigat in 1988, who was promptly forced into exile by a *coup d’état*, followed

by a military counter-coup.<sup>18</sup> Following this series of coups, a former Duvalier officer, Prosper Avril, rose to the position of president (Trouillot 1990a:223-4).

Having begun the process of politicization under Duvalier, the *ti legliz* (little church) movement under the banner of Catholicism gained broad and growing support, particularly from those living in the most impoverished areas of Port-au-Prince. As part of his centralization efforts, Papa Doc had been able to strong arm the Catholic church into allowing a degree of indigenization of the church in Haiti, a process through which, by 1980, “a majority of the Catholic priests were Haitian, and a majority of these came from more modest backgrounds than their pre-Duvalier predecessors” (Trouillot 1990a:219). By 1986, the *ti legliz* movement was sufficiently politicized, drawing on liberation theology in its active promotion of social justice (Abbott 1988; Trouillot 1990a). It is within this context that Jean-Bertrand Aristide quickly gained popularity as a priest and political actor who sympathized with, and spoke on behalf of, the poor majority.

After a quick campaign, Aristide won the general election in 1990. Many recognize that particular election as the first successfully free and honest election in Haitian history. Once elected, Aristide launched his “*Opération Lavalas*,” a political and social movement that, at the time, lacked a formal political organizational structure. *Lavalas* refers to a “torrent that cleans everything in its path” and continues to be the name associated with Aristide’s political movement even today (cited in Dupuy 2007:91). Aristide’s presidency was short-lived, however, as he was ousted in a coup. Aristide was in office a mere eight months. “Because it envisioned the creation of a more egalitarian society, the Lavalas government threatened the most fundamental interests of the prebendary Duvalierist state” (Dupuy 2007:101). Not only was

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<sup>18</sup> Manigat’s wife, Mirlande Manigat, later ran for president in the 2010-11 election and was defeated by Michel Martelly in a run-off between the two candidates.

Aristide opposed by Duvalierists, but Haitian business elites also remained wary of his vision of change in the name of greater social equality and the manner in which it ultimately challenged the status quo. The coup was led by army general Raoul Cédras, who took over as de facto leader between 1991-1994. The military, and particular military leaders, are recognized as having notable ties to the business and political classes of the country. In addition, Cédras was reportedly trained in the United States, with rumors pointing to direct or indirect CIA connections. Once again, Haiti's government was in the hands of a repressive military regime. Those with *Lavalas* sympathies faced violence and retaliation for their political affiliations, particularly those living in the poorest slums of Port-au-Prince, such as Cité Soleil (James 2010).

Under President Bill Clinton, the US government finally stepped in and assisted in returning Aristide to presidency in 1994. The threat of a growing number of poor Haitians attempting to migrate to the United States – so-called “boat people” – had finally resulted in US action. Aristide was returned to Haiti, only months before the end of his term. Due to a constitutional mandate forbidding consecutive terms, he was unable to immediately run again for president. Before leaving office, Aristide disbanded the military (*Forces Armées d’Haiti*, FAd’H) in the hopes of avoiding future military-led political interventions.<sup>19</sup> René Préval, prime minister under Aristide, was elected and took office in 1996. He went on to successfully finish his term in 2001 after which Aristide was elected for a second term.<sup>20</sup>

International aid from lending institutions such as the World Bank, while having provided financial support for the Duvalier dictatorships, contributed to the downfall of Aristide. The Bank rationalized its support of the Duvaliers on the grounds of a stated commitment to free

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<sup>19</sup> He was assisted in this task by the UN, a mission that would later, following the 2004 coup, be formally organized and authorized under the name MINUSTAH (*Mission des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en Haiti* / United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti). To this day, Haiti still does not have a national military although Martelly, as president, did vocalize a desire to reinstate one.

<sup>20</sup> Préval was the first 20th century Haitian president to leave office on account of term expiration as opposed to being deposed by a coup.

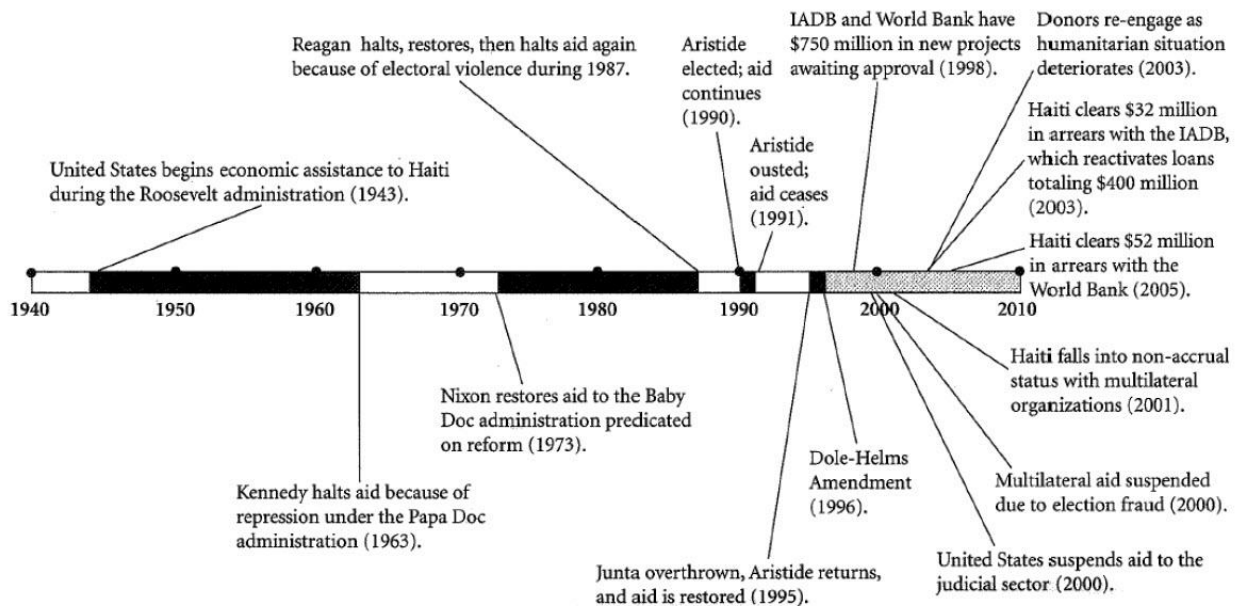
market policies and a generally “pro-United States” approach (Dupuy 2005:50). “Until 1990, and disregarding evidence to the contrary, the World Bank believed the Duvalier and post-Duvalier military dictatorships were capable of pursuing the ‘right’ policies and reforms that opened the Haitian economy to foreign investments and markets, stimulated the private sector, and led to real GDP growth, all without having to democratize” (56). Initially welcoming Aristide’s presidency, the World Bank continued a push for institutional reforms through structural adjustment programs. This approach, however, clashed with Aristide’s left-of-center political vision and anti-capitalist rhetoric (ibid.). Although willing to negotiate prior to the 1991 coup, upon return to office in 1994, the Bank and other lending institutions were more rigid in their expectations for institutional reform:

As one of the conditions of his return, Aristide was compelled to accept the Emergency Economic Recovery Program (EERP) devised in Washington by a multinational task force of the IDB [International Development Bank], the World Bank, the IMF and US AID [US Agency for International Development]. The stipulations of the EERP, which became incorporated in the Haitian Government’s Strategy of Social and Economic reconstruction (SSER), contained all the elements of the structural adjustment program. But the SSER went further than the Bank’s recommendations to the Haitian government in 1991 by emphasizing the immediate or partial sale of several public enterprises. (Dupuy 2005:57)

When Aristide failed to follow through on this agreement, international lending institutions suspended the delivery of aid. Pressure to implement reforms continued throughout Préval’s 1995-2001 administration, with funding restored and then suspended again in 1999 on account of political gridlock. When Aristide took office again in 2001, the aid embargo continued. As Dupuy (2005:61) argues, “the suspension of aid was political in the strict sense of the term, based as it was on those entities’ disapproval of the political party and president who came to power” following elections. The suspension of aid and political gridlock contributed to the lack of development in terms of infrastructure and social services available under both Aristide and

Préval. Indeed, as the chart below demonstrates, throughout the history of Haiti, foreign aid dollars have long been used as a political tool for influencing political regimes in Haiti by the US government:

**Figure 1: United States Foreign Assistance to Haiti<sup>21</sup>**



Having previously been the focal point of the democratic movement in Haiti and championed for his revolutionary vision of change, Aristide’s second term as president was viewed skeptically even by some of his previous supporters. Many Haitians cite a change, claiming that Aristide became power-hungry upon his return to office. The lack of international assistance throughout his term also played a key role in the waning of public support. By cutting aid, the World Bank and other lending institutions subsequently undermined “the ability of the government to deliver on its promises” and successfully alienated the government from voters (Dupuy 2005:46). Aristide was again ousted in a coup in 2004, although some claim it was a resignation as opposed to a coup. In particular, those opposing Aristide claimed he stepped down willingly. Aristide himself, and his supporters, argue otherwise, stating that he was forced to

<sup>21</sup> Buss & Gardner (2008:70).



leave the country (Chomsky et al. 2004).<sup>22</sup> Another military regime took control and resulted in a subsequent wave of violence, again aimed at sympathizers of Aristide's *Lavalas* party (James 2010). Following the 2004 coup, *Fanmi Lavalas* was banned from participating in Haitian elections, including the elections of 2006 and 2010-2011.<sup>23</sup>

In response to the violence and political crisis that followed the 2004 ousting of Aristide, a UN stabilization force (MINUSTAH) was dispatched, with its mandate renewed in 2010 and again in 2012. MINUSTAH was touted as an important force for maintaining peace given the military's absence; however, its tenure in Haiti has been a rocky one with several significant scandals tied to MINUSTAH personnel and bases.<sup>24</sup> Préval was once again elected in 2006, under the *Lespwa* (Hope) party, and peacefully left office upon the election of Michel Martelly in 2010-2011.<sup>25</sup>

Opposition to Martelly's presidency began even before officially taking office. As a popular *konpa* musician performing under the name "Sweet Micky," Martelly's political alliances have remained relatively ambiguous despite the claims made by political opponents and critics who unequivocally label him as a Duvalierist. The reasons cited for this association stem from his personal and professional ties prior to becoming president. While Martelly maintained

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<sup>22</sup> During the period of research for this project, Aristide returned to Haiti in 2011 from exile in South Africa, but did not take up an active role in politics. In fact, he shied away from the public eye as much as possible. Despite this, the *Lavalas* political party, under the name *Fanmi Lavalas* or Lavalas Family, was active and represents a split that took place in 1996 when Aristide disassociated with his original Lavalas political organization, *Organisation Politique Lavalas*, and formed a new one under the banner of *Fanmi Lavalas*. Alex Dupuy (2005) notes that this split erupted due to differences regarding structural adjustment policies and reform.

<sup>23</sup> Despite this, *Fanmi Lavalas* as a party continued to fight for participation in elections, as is seen in Chapter 6 where political leaders publicly expressed a desire to participate in the 2013 elections.

<sup>24</sup> The most significant was the cholera outbreak in 2010. While the UN continues to deny responsibility, all evidence points to MINUSTAH personnel hailing from Nepal having brought the disease into the country. Poor waste management practices are recognized as facilitating the outbreak as the particular base where the infected officer was located is believed to have regularly dumped sewage into a nearby tributary. This tributary flows directly into the Artibonite River, one of Haiti's major rivers, along which the cholera outbreak began. MINUSTAH personnel have also been implicated in a number of rape allegations, including one that went to court in Uruguay where the officers in question originated. MINUSTAH personnel are also ridiculed as goat thieves (*volè kabrit*) and as nothing more than tourists. Many Haitians refer to them as "tourista" instead of MINUSTAH.

<sup>25</sup> The election was postponed several times, with the most commonly cited justification being the devastation caused by the January 12th, 2010 earthquake.

that his music was never political, his public appearance in opposition to Aristide's return in 1994 and his musical critiques against Aristide via carnival-composed songs (*chan pwen*) served as fuel for the oppositional fire in associating Martelly with Duvalier.<sup>26</sup> In addition, Martelly is said to have catered to many of those directly involved in the 1991 coup against Aristide, particularly as clients of his popular club in Pétienville during the 1991-1994 period.<sup>27</sup> Following a threat to those associated with Duvalier and subsequent military regimes, Martelly remained in the United States during Aristide's second term, returning to Haiti on a more permanent basis in 2007.<sup>28</sup> According to ethnomusicologist Gage Averill, even Martelly's early rise to musical fame following Duvalier's departure signals a degree of alliance with Duvalier as his musical choices were notably "contrarian" to the growing movement of political critique through popular music.<sup>29</sup>

Martelly's presidency, lasting from 2011 to early 2016, was marked by significant contestation and political opposition. Although he willingly stepped down as president in February 2016, marred electoral processes resulted in no democratically elected predecessor taking his place. The bulk of this research took place during Martelly's president, between 2011-2013, thus I specifically attend to the political antagonisms and critiques that circulated during this period.

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<sup>26</sup> Chapter 6 includes a more detailed analysis of *pwen* and *chan pwen* as important forms of political critique.

<sup>27</sup> Pétienville is the *zòn* (zone/area) of Port-au-Prince where elites are said to reside, or at least frequent. It's a relatively wealthy area of the city, one where foreign aid workers also tend to live. It rests higher in elevation than the downtown area of the capital and the weather tends to be less glaringly hot. It is also situated on ascent to the mountains, en route to cooler temperatures and areas where many wealthy Haitians and foreigners have historically resided.

<sup>28</sup> A "hit list" was said to have circulated in 1995 on which Martelly's name appeared. It's unclear whether this was the reason he resided in Miami for such a long period of time or if, like many Haitian musicians and wealthy Haitians, this was his preferred residence.

<sup>29</sup> Cited in: Michael Miller. "Michel Martelly is Haiti's new president. But the former Palm Beach county resident has a dark side," *Broward/Palm Beach New Times*, June 9 2011. At the time, most musicians were focused on composing politically charged music. Martelly, however, went against this norm by singing slow merengue beats, harking back to the only music allowed under the Duvaliers.

As the preceding historical discussion demonstrates, Haitian history can be understood through a lens of enduring divisions, including social, political, and economic ones. This historical context provides a lens through which to understand contemporary social and political divisions in the country. The past, in many ways, continues to weigh heavily on the minds of many Haitians, particularly in terms of understanding current conditions in the country. Many consider Haiti's contemporary political state as one of transition: overcoming the legacies of the past, most notably the brutal dictatorships of Papa Doc (1957-1971) and Baby Doc (1971-1986) and the periods of violence that followed, in an attempt to build a stable and lasting democracy. Despite current democratic practices, antagonisms of the past continue to play a significant role in the present political landscape. I now turn to an analysis of development and forms of political engagement within contemporary Haitian society.

### **The Entanglement of Development and Politics in Haiti**

The context within which research for this project took place, between May 2011 and April 2013, was a relatively stable period in Haitian history, economically, politically, and socially. Set against a past punctuated by violence, political ruptures, and natural disasters, the Port-au-Prince I came to know throughout my time there did not lack in struggle and intermittent "crises" and yet did not face the same kind of periodic and seemingly indiscriminate violence of the past. Despite this, the past is very much alive in the present and plays a significant role in political relations and contestation. Indeed, those engaging in discourses about development often draw on specific events in Haitian history as a means through which they seek to understand Haiti's developmental status. Interpretations of historical actors and events can vary widely and serve as a focal point through which ideas about development are debated. As will be

seen in Chapter 3, Haiti's Duvalier past in relation to the present captured the attention of many during the period of Martelly's presidency, as participants worked to negotiate evaluations of the it in comparison with the present. In this way, it played a significant role in the discursive, economic, and political landscape of contemporary Port-au-Prince. Although other historical events and actors occasionally stirred up varied emotions and interpretations, debates on the topic of Duvalier served as a prominent developmental quandary at that time.

In this section, I turn to an examination of the material and ideological ways in which development and politics go hand-in-hand in contemporary Haiti. I begin with an examination of the various roles and types of NGOs operating on behalf of the development industry in Haiti, followed by an analysis of the aspirational draw development holds for many Haitians. I go on to demonstrate the manner in which state officials and institutions utilize and interact with the development industry, focusing on the role of the it in relation to the Haitian state. Shifting to a discussion of development as an idea and discourse, I complete this analysis by pointing to the ways in which discourses about development get mobilized as a form of political contestation aimed at challenging and reconfiguring power relations.

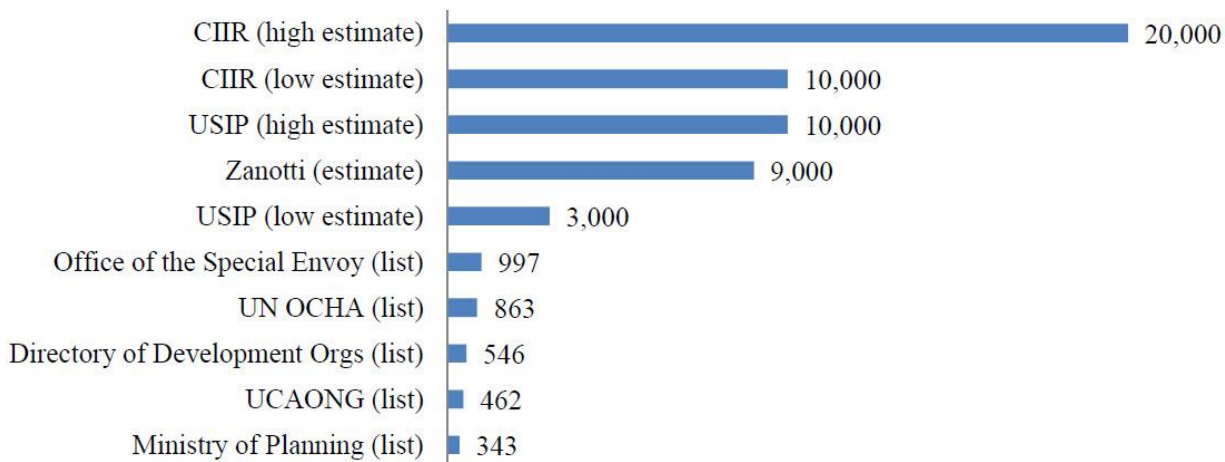
As is the case with many countries around the world, the development industry in Haiti is primarily made up of a variety of different NGOs, some working together and others working against, or in competition with, one another.<sup>30</sup> NGOs, in a broad sense, includes those organizations focused on economic development as well as those engaged in advocacy and humanitarian efforts. Religious and charitable organizations also have a prominent NGO presence in the country. No one really knows for certain the number of NGOs operating in the

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<sup>30</sup> Cooley & Ron (2002) examine how funding flows and competitions for donor funds necessarily create conditions in which NGOs are competitive with one another.

country, although some institutions and individuals have attempted an evaluation. As the chart below demonstrates, however, estimates vary significantly:

**Figure 2: Estimates of the Number of NGOs in Haiti<sup>31</sup>**



Distinguishing and categorizing the different types of NGOs in Haiti is an exercise many scholars have attempted, drawing on different criteria such as organizational differences in size, function, funding, structure, role, and purpose (Cantave 2006; Étienne 1997; Schuller 2007a). Despite efforts of this sort, there exists little consensus as to the most effective and appropriate method of categorization.

Many different sized organizations exist, from large-scale operations to small grassroots or community organizations. Some NGOs, usually internationally-based ones, serve as donor institutions, with their primary goal being the solicitation and management of recipient organizations and their projects. Different sources of funding often result in different structures through which organizations function and carry out their objectives. Some NGOs receive funding from national and foreign governments and others receive funding from non-profit

<sup>31</sup> Chart drawn from Ramachandran & Walz (2012:15). Sources include: Catholic Institute for International Relations, US Institute for Peace (USIP), Directory of Development Organizations, the Haitian Ministry of Planning (estimate from 2004) as cited in Schuller (2007a), Office of the Special Envoy, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Unité de Coordination des Activités des ONG (UCAONG), and Zanotti (2010).

organizations in Haiti or abroad. Indeed, many organizations receive funding from a variety of governmental and nongovernmental sources, even despite claims as to a “nongovernmental” status. As Schuller (2012) demonstrates, the degree of autonomy an NGO has often depends on its source(s) of funding. Another notable difference between organizational types is one based on structure. Some organizations integrate greater participatory structures, drawing on the involvement of recipient communities. Others structure their operations around established hierarchies, with decisions being made by one individual or a small group of individuals. Some scholars also point to differences in roles, purpose, and activity type in their categorization efforts.

Attempts to draw clean categorical lines between organization types, however, has largely had unsatisfactory results given the multifaceted and multifunctional role that many NGOs play. I find it most useful to conceive of development organizations through a lens of their purpose and dominant activities. Even so, it remains necessary to recognize the degree to which this categorization also fails to account for organizations that engage a variety of activity types. This slipperiness will be seen in both the HR Org and the Youth Org. While some organizations engage in economic development, imagining and implementing projects aimed at medium and long-term development, others remain focused on humanitarian assistance, providing short-term resources or services to populations in need. Humanitarian work differs significantly from economic development, specifically in its attention to immediate and short-term needs, such as emergency medical assistance and resource distribution. Organizations focused on service provision activities represent another form of development organization, by way of attention to projects that aim to directly provide services, such as training, legal assistance, micro financing, literacy campaigns, health services and more. Finally, other NGOs focus their efforts on

advocacy, promoting and educating on specific topics of interest. Examples include human rights advocacy and public health campaigns. The development industry in Haiti, in this sense, is made up of a largely uncoordinated group of organizations engaging a variety of different areas of intervention and activities depending on the purpose and objectives individual organizations seek to accomplish.

The manner in which the Haitian government understands and treats NGOs versus other organizational forms also complicates efforts to satisfactorily categorize them. Indeed, the Haitian state defines NGOs – referred to as *ONG* in Kreyòl and French – differently than it does other organizations engaging in similar activities and receiving funding from similar sources. NGOs, by definition, are forced to undergo a meticulous and drawn out process of registration with the Ministry of Planning (*Ministère de la Planification et Coopération Externe*). Official recognition as a registered NGO can take years (Schuller 2007a:98-99). In addition, they are required by the Haitian government to report regularly as to their activities and financial status. This oversight and accountability, however, is more an idealized one given that the Haitian government, and the Ministry of Planning lack the resources to adequately monitor NGO activities in the country (99). Other organizations – more often including smaller groups, such as local organizations and associations – follow a different registration process through the Haitian government and are not officially recognized as NGOs. Individuals and groups interested in obtaining legal recognition as an organization process their paperwork through relevant government institutions, the choice of which depends on the area of intervention the group wishes to pursue. This process is much less expensive, quicker, and involves little or no subsequent oversight in comparison to NGOs. Examples of relevant government institutions include the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (*Ministère de la Condition Féminine et aux Droits de*

*la Femme*), the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (*Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Ressources Naturelles et du Développement Rural*), the Ministry of Justice and Public Security (*Ministère de la Justice et de la Sécurité Publique*), and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Work (*Ministère des Affaires Sociales et du Travail*). Despite the significant procedural differences in obtaining recognition as an organization, there remains little functional difference between organizations legally recognized as NGOs and those recognized as other organizational forms.<sup>32</sup> Many organizations registered through other governmental institutions, apart from the Ministry of Planning, also compete for funding and carry out development projects in similar ways as those legally identified as NGOs. Although I would not hesitate to identify both the HR Org and the Youth Org as NGOs in a general sense, even despite their lack of recognition as such by the Haitian government, I prefer to use on the label of “organization” when describing formalized groups engaging within the development industry of Haiti. This label not only assists in avoiding confusion regarding Haitian versus generalized understandings of what is or is not an NGO, but it also allows flexibility in recognizing the simultaneous engagement of nongovernmental and governmental spheres of activity by some organizations, as will be seen in the case of the Youth Org.

For many residents of Port-au-Prince and beyond, the development industry has been a regular feature of their lives for many years now, with its influence having exploded in the years following Duvalier’s departure in 1986. Given that young people make up the majority of the country’s population, many have long observed or interacted with the development industry for as long as they can recall. The industry is represented by the visible existence of national and international organizations, flows of foreign aid workers in and out of the country, and a

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<sup>32</sup> The major difference is one’s ability to register as an NGO, in terms of having adequate funding to undergo the process. Foreign NGOs are more likely to follow this procedure to legal recognition although there are few repercussions for foreign organizations operating in the country without legal recognition.



seemingly endless amount of money available for projects aimed at development in its many forms (Schuller 2007b).<sup>33</sup> Thus, for many youth, the development industry appears as an especially attractive, and potentially lucrative career choice. In an environment where formal economic opportunities are limited and informal ones offer only scanty rewards, the development industry sits as a potential domain through which one can climb the proverbial social ladder, even with limited formal schooling and limited access to investment capital. Indeed, few productive options are available to a semi-educated youth, many of whom evaluate manual labor as beneath them. Thus, the development industry strikes many Haitians as a viable option for financial success and social prestige.<sup>34</sup> To be sure, economic and social success through the development industry may not be as easy as many imagine it to be. However, what remains strong is the view some have of the industry as a *potential* avenue of success. Many understand it as an option not solely available to a small group of educated or connected individuals, as the more traditional business industry tends to be through which connections and significant investment are prerequisites for successful engagement. Instead, the development industry appeals to a broader range of individuals. While successful engagement in the development industry certainly *does* require training and experience, for those who do not have access to a quality education, the ability to diligently observe, mimic, and make skilled or calculated decisions is understood as a means through which they can climb the development ladder. This entrepreneurial view of the development industry is one explored in Chapter 4 regarding the Youth Org's activities and aspirations.

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<sup>33</sup> Indeed, development organizations like to advertise the work they do and the resources they distribute. It is not uncommon to see a variety of organization logos on various items throughout the capital, including vehicles, tarps, food products, etc. Products of this sort are also regularly sold in local markets. This marketing of aid phenomena is one also referenced in Cooley & Ron (2002).

<sup>34</sup> The social evaluation of forms of labor in relation to class and reputation is also a topic engaged by Newell (2012) in the context of Côte d'Ivoire.

Those who do succeed in taking on coveted positions at NGOs, especially international NGOs, subsequently become part of the desirable “*klas ONG*” (NGO class) (Schuller 2009). Economic opportunities of the educated middle class in Haiti tend to translate into further opportunities for such positions, compounding the difficulty of successfully engaging within the industry for those that lack connections (Schuller 2007b). Haitians within this class are subject to greater social pressure on the part of family and friends to distribute resources or to serve as a network through which others seek access to NGO employment and resources. Despite barriers to entry, Haitians from a variety of economic circumstances search out ways to gain access to this coveted *klas ONG*. In some cases, they seek out formal employment in national and international NGOs. In other cases, they work with friends and neighbors to form their own organizations with the hope of accessing funds available for various development projects, soliciting not just international donors but national ones as well as funding from various Haitian ministries and government institutions. My observations and interactions with Haitians deriving from varying social backgrounds highlighted this fact as it appeared as if anyone and everyone had their own organization or association with development aims.<sup>35</sup> I was even encouraged to start one myself. In one instance, after visiting a tent camp in 2010 where displaced earthquake victims resided, my guide urged me to start an orphanage, what he saw as a humanitarian response to the poor conditions within which many children of the tent camps lived.

Many of the organizations I came into contact with, or the individuals claiming to have organizations of their own, represent little more than what political scientist Susan Dicklitch (1998) terms “briefcase NGOs”; that is, those with legitimizing papers only. Indeed, many Haitians – including HR Org and Youth Org members – view their legal recognition in relation

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<sup>35</sup> Schuller (2007b:74) also notes his personal observations of regular solicitation from Haitians desiring to start their own organization.

to the Haitian state as an important and necessary step that legitimizes their activities. In some ways, this was a result of a requirement by many donors that recipient organizations be legally recognized. Official registration with the Haitian government, despite connotations to the contrary, does not signal state monitoring or control over their activities. In most cases, there was little or no oversight on the part of the Haitian government.

Local formation of organizations or associations also comes in the form of platforms. A platform, in Haiti, can take the form of either social platforms, aimed at development objectives, or political platforms, aimed at taking part in electoral processes. In this sense, a platform merely indicates a formal relationship between entities, a coalition of sorts. Unlike NGO coalitions described by Yarrow (2011:99) in the context of Ghana, Haitian platforms represent a formalized coalition, marked by organizational procedures and legitimizing papers. In the “social” or developmental realm, coalitions of this sort often took the form of a number of officially recognized organizations working together to establish a formal relationship under the banner of a named, and legally registered “platform.”<sup>36</sup>

In ideal terms, a platform is understood to involve more individuals and more institutional backing than a single organization would, given its association with a group of organizations. Drawing, more or less, on ideals of democratic engagement, a platform is run by representatives from various associated organizations, that, in theory, negotiate and work

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<sup>36</sup> In some ways, a Haitian platform could be compared to social movement networks or webs as described by Sonia Alveraz and others (1998) or networks as understood by Cooley & Ron (2002), Jordan & Van Tuijl (2000), Keck & Sikkenk (1998), and Riles (2001). The importance placed on legitimization of Haitian platforms through a legal registration process with the Haitian government, however, points to a degree to which they appear as more formalized versions of networks. This is not to say that the organizations discussed here, the HR Org, the Youth Org and other development organizations, are not embedded in networks or webs through which they informally engage and mobilize participation in particular movements or campaigns. Indeed, the development industry itself is made up of both formal and informal connections across individuals and groups, creating a web of relations and interactions. In similar ways, development organizations engage networks beyond the domain of development. This is especially true of relations between development organizations and media institutions or even state institutions. The HR Org, in particular, regularly drew on its connections to political actors and journalists in their *sensibilizasyon* work, discussed in Chapter 2.

together for greater effectiveness in whatever task they seek to accomplish. In the realm of specific developmental areas of intervention, such as human rights, the objective might be to advocate for a particular stance in relation to events or human rights violations. Doing so through a platform allows for the presentation of a stronger and more cohesive front through which to advocate for change and pressure the government. The assumption by many is that a platform necessarily has more clout than any single organization does. In practice, however, the assumption of significant social backing inherent within a platform structure does not always correspond with reality. Instead, some individuals and organizations use presuppositions of this sort to their advantage; that is, they attempt to project or perform the idea that they have more social backing than they actually have in practice. In other cases, the democratic ideal associated with the platform structure is not always followed, with some platforms functioning under the leadership of a single charismatic individual.

As others have noted, the prominent role and place of NGOs in Haitian society directly undermines the ability of the state to set priorities and govern effectively (Schuller 2007a:99; Ramachandran & Walz 2012). As Schuller notes, “most donor policies and practices fund NGOs instead of the government” thus “nearly all ‘development’ occurs through the many NGOs that exist in Haiti” (100). Despite the implications of this claim, however, engagement with the development industry as an economic realm of activity within Haiti is not only solely engaged outside the realm of government and formal political arenas. The state itself has a distinct role in relation to development efforts. Often, state actors and institutions do so through the utilization and co-optation of projects and financial resources available through the development industry and the many organizations and donors operating within it. In a general sense, the Haitian state functions much like an NGO in constantly searching for foreign investment and donors for

various development-aimed projects. In this way, state actors can point to projects as facilitated by their efforts even if the projects themselves are conceived, funded, and implemented by foreign institutions. Indeed, during his time as president, Martelly approached state-led development in this manner, attempting to encourage foreign driven and initiated projects. He was known to be particularly friendly to the demands and expectations of various development institutions and courted international lending institutions, such as the World Bank and the IMF. In this way, he encouraged the implementation and continuation of projects aimed at social and economic development as conceived and directed by international donors and development institutions. At times, he was accused, by political opponents, of co-opting projects of this sort, making claims as to their accomplishments being his personal accomplishments as president. This was especially true regarding his campaign promise to increase school enrollment and implement free schooling as mandated by the Haitian constitution. By 2013, he had made tentative steps toward making this promise a reality, although many claimed that his advertised achievements represented the actual achievements of the World Bank's project. In this way, his billboards featuring claims as to the number of children enrolled in the free schooling program were said to have included students who were assisted more directly through the World Bank's education project.

Given its precarious reliance on the ebbs and flows of available funding for specific development projects, the state – in catering to donor interests, demands, and expectations – was in a precarious position; most notably, government officials were often at the mercy of donor interests when imagining and implementing projects. Under these conditions, political shifts of foreign states, such as the United States or Canada, had the potential to leave the Haitian state in a financially difficult situation. When the Canadian government decided, in 2013, to eliminate or

significantly reduce the amount of aid offered to Haiti, many Haitians – especially government officials – cried fowl. In this way, the relationship between the Haitian economy, state institutions, and aid dollars makes for a volatile situation of dependency (Étienne 1997; Ramachandran & Walz 2012). The short-lived nature of funds available for development projects, also significantly hampered the ability of the state to bring about long-term change and effectively invest in infrastructural projects. This tendency is not unique to Haiti, however, as many have identified the manner in which neoliberal development schemes and structural adjustment policies tend to shy away from investing in large-scale infrastructural projects; instead, they purport to allow the market system to take over control of state services under the guise of making them more “efficient” or profit-oriented (Steger 2003; Stiglitz 2002). Indeed, given that infrastructural projects often require extensive investment and years to accomplish, current development models preclude infrastructural improvement projects of this sort.

Even beyond the development industry, however, the idea of development itself has a prominent presence in contemporary Haitian society. Development as an idea focused on social change is a constant topic of discussion: it provides fodder for casual conversation on the streets, is the subject of heated debates among friends and family, and is regularly foregrounded as an important topic on radio and television commentary programs. In addition, there exists a regular stream of development industry funded conferences, symposiums, colloquiums, and training sessions on various topics taking place on a weekly or monthly basis in Port-au-Prince. Development, as an idea, relies heavily on a temporal framework aligning the past in relation to the present and possible futures. Claims to the ethical are also embedded in discourses about development as participants assign responsibility for past failures and future actions while pointing to the moral obligation of improving society. The general consensus of most Haitians is

a strong desire for change and development; indeed, no Haitian would conceivably claim to be against change. Instead of focusing on whether or not change is needed, discussions and debates work to identify key deficiencies in an effort to imagine effective solutions. The manner in which individuals understand deficiencies, historical roots of identified problems, and possible paths forward, however, differs significantly. In this way, social advancement, improvement, and development are hotly political topics; many, if not most topics of public interest – whether scandals, news, or events – have a connection to the idea of development or presuppose a need for development in some form or another. Discourses about development and political discourses – those focused on state institutions, political actors, and electoral processes – largely go hand-in-hand in contemporary Haitian society. Indeed, political critiques often draw on ideas about development – or a lack there of – and carry considerable weight in the eyes of most Haitians who desire some form of social change.

Political discourse itself, especially during the period of this research, remained strongly polarized with oppositional groups largely condemning all government action, or failures to take action, regardless of type and outcome. In general, formal political arenas were rife with constantly shifting alliances. The formation, and collapse, of political platforms were commonplace occurrences, with many political parties and platforms centering around charismatic individuals as opposed to ideological ideals. Both forms of political organization vied for public support. In many ways, there remains little recognizable difference between the two, although some of my interlocutors argued that platforms remain far more volatile to collapse, forming around individual personalities and collapsing due to personal differences. In this way, political organization in the Haitian context is coalitional, personality-based, and tends toward splintering. Groups, whether parties or platforms, form, collapse, and divide depending

on individual personalities and electoral cycles.<sup>37</sup> The tendency to form political organizations around charismatic leaders was one noted by Bellegard-Smith (2004:140) to also be in place under the Duvaliers. As he stated, “traditional political parties, when they existed at all, were rarely more than an arrangement of convenience among a leader, his clients, and followers.”

To speak of political parties, then, should not necessarily imply the existence of ideological differences. Instead, political party divisions remain more historically rooted in power struggles and conflicts between different personalities. While there exist dominant ideological camps through which we can understand contemporary political relationships, the instability of political alliances should also be taken into consideration. In broad strokes, some politicians are rumored to be, or explicitly purport to be, associated with Duvalierists while others associate both directly and indirectly with Lavalas. More recently, however, a general opposition has sprung up, one which rejects Lavalas, and its connection to Aristide, while continuing to stand in opposition to Duvalierism. Perhaps due to prohibitions put in place historically, banning those with direct affiliation with Duvalier or Lavalas, individuals and groups have disassociated themselves and formed parties and platforms under new names. Despite this, however, popular understandings often draw connections based on historical alliances and behaviors pointing to political associations with Duvalier, Lavalas, or the anti-Lavalas oppositional camp. These divisions are in no way clear cut as splintering regularly takes place and alliances are continually drawn and re-drawn. Even with groups purporting to be part of the “opposition” (*opozisyon*) significant in-fighting and splintering results in a lack of collaboration and ideological cohesion.

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<sup>37</sup> As with NGOs, political parties and platforms are required to legally register with the government. Those that fail to do so risk being excluded from electoral processes. Despite the direct relationship to the Haitian state that is implied in the registration process, there is little oversight of party and platform activities.



Suffice it to say, contemporary Haitian politics is – as is the case with most countries – a complicated affair characterized by power struggles. Interpretations vary widely regarding individual political actors and their pasts. Many political actors have long rap sheets and histories of shifting political alliances. Duvalierists, neo-Duvalierists, anti-Duvalierists, Lavalas supporters, anti-Lavalas opponents, actors with questionable military pasts, business elites, and political opportunists all vie for a role in state institutions. An antagonistic blame game is played by all sides, stirring up controversy and scandal whenever possible, an activity in which the media plays an active role. Thus, it is within this context that discourses about development are situated in direct relation to a politically antagonistic environment. Development itself is inherently political in the Haitian context, namely as a form of contestation aimed at challenging and reconfiguring power relations. Despite the manner in which political critiques are lodged against formal political actors and institutions, political contestation does not remain limited to the formal political arena as it can also implicate interpersonal power relations as well.

I now turn to an introduction of the two development organizations analyzed throughout the remaining chapters. I begin by ethnographically introducing each organization, followed by a comparative analysis. The chapters that follow include more detailed information about the organizations in relation to specific arguments as to their deliberative practices and the manner in which they represent sites of the political.<sup>38</sup>

### **Portrait of a Human Rights Organization (HR Org)**

Housed in a large, multi-story, orange and gray building, the HR Org – a prominent Haitian human rights organization – was both visible and invisible. Situated on the corner of a

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<sup>38</sup> While both organizations continued to operate up to the time this dissertation was finalized, I will generally use the past tense throughout so as to place my research in its appropriate historical context, avoiding a sense of "timelessness."

winding road headed up the mountain, the building itself stood out. And yet, at the same time, it blended in as just another large home or office building along the road. The entrance door and cement walls surrounding the yard lacked markings alerting passers-by of the organization's presence.

Pushing open the red metal gate along the north side of the building, off the main road, revealed a small covered courtyard, complete with table and chairs, an awning, plants, and a large generator off to the left against the outer cement wall. At times, interns and students would be camped at the table, working on various projects. During conferences, this area served as a way-station for journalists and visitors alike. Moving toward the building entrance, a set of wicker chairs were situated in the patio space a few steps up and into the building. Often, the organization's hired driver, Jean, sat at one of the chairs, waiting for his next task, occupying himself with his phone or reading the newspaper.

The building included two options for entry, a sliding glass door to the right or a doorway straight ahead. To the right was the office's main public area, housing an extra long wooden table, spanning the length of the room. Bookcases lined the wall to the right and two desks were situated against the far wall. The desks were home to two of the organization's five program heads, Theodore – directing the Program for Research, Analysis, Reflection, and Documentation – and Kerline – directing the Monitoring of Human Rights Program. The large space afforded by the room was often converted into a public meeting space for workshops, conferences, and press releases. The room also housed the organization's library, a space for students and others to browse the modest collection of books, reports, and other collected texts. On Monday mornings, all HR Org staff, interns, and volunteers, including the maintenance worker and driver, would

gather around the table for several hours, discussing everything from current events, organization business, and individual weekly tasks.

The other entry option, a doorway straight ahead, was the more direct route to the administrative divisions of the organization. The secretary's desk sat immediately inside, although the desk could also be reached in a round about manner through the other entrance. All spaces were inter-connected giving an airy sense of openness. The secretary, Guerline, was conveniently seated between the kitchen, which was straight ahead and to the right, and the stairway leading up to the main offices or down to the storage area. When not busy, Guerline would often sit reading the latest news offered by *Le Nouvelliste*.<sup>39</sup> With a warm and inviting demeanor, Guerline shifted between professional and casual banter with ease. Facing her desk was a long narrow bench, offering visitors a place to sit and wait for scheduled or impromptu meetings. Old copies of *Le Nouvelliste* always lined the bench, available as a distraction for those needing to pass the time. I spent a lot of time on that bench, chatting with Guerline about a range of topics. She was always happy to set aside her work to take up a conversation about anything and everything: politics, music, food, Haitian culture, and parenting.

During the morning and early afternoon, Natalie – respectfully referred to as “*sè Natalie*” or sister Natalie – was always busy at work in the kitchen, prepping food for lunch or cleaning up after. Junior assisted her while also remaining available for various maintenance and building tasks. Junior lived with his two small children and Natalie downstairs in a small living quarters. As guardian of the building, he was expected to be available at any hour of the day, maintaining the building and providing security through constant presence.

Past the kitchen and up the winding staircase was a communal area to the left and offices to the right. Occupied by couches, desks, and computers, the communal area offered student

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<sup>39</sup> The organization had a subscription and papers were delivered.

interns and spill-over staff a place to work, sharing computers and desks as needed. The rest of the upstairs space included three offices and a bathroom. Donald, the organization's director, occupied the largest office to the right. Once inside his office, a large meeting room to the left became visible. Given the room was attached to Donald's office, it was rarely used except for closed door meetings with donor representatives, politicians, or member organizations. Across the hall from Donald's space were two additional offices. One was shared by Alain – directing the Program for the Education of Human Rights Culture – and Pierre-Louis – who was in charge of the Legal Interventions Program. Marie, an intern-turned-staff member, also shared Pierre-Louis' desk, especially at times Pierre-Louis was out of the office. Pierre-Louis was always referred to by her last name, accompanied by the respectful “*mèt*,” marking her professional identity as a lawyer. Although many staff, including Donald, were law students, only Pierre-Louis could claim to be a practicing lawyer. Further down the hallway and next to the bathroom was the final office where Karl, the accountant, worked. His office also housed a desk for the administrative assistant, a role left vacant for a significant period of time before a new secretary was hired and Guerline took over this role.<sup>40</sup> Seated at a desk in the hallway, outside Donald's office, was Nadia, the director of the Communications and Advocacy Program, a relatively new position responsible for tasks such as disseminating information to media outlets and collating texts for a monthly newsletter.

While the key staff members remained relatively stable during my time there, interns and volunteers came and went. Some interns stayed only for their mandated three months, as was required to receive State University credit. Most, however, over-stayed their official internship period and some even transitioned to either paid and unpaid positions within the organization, as was the case with Marie and Félix, an intern who shifted to the role of volunteer after his

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<sup>40</sup> This happened after I had completed the bulk of my time with them.

internship period ended. The HR Org was well-known as a favorable environment for interns to thrive. While those who were simply seeking university credit didn't always integrate well to the level of involvement and commitment expected, they still received a warm welcome from the group. Donald explained his logic of welcoming interns and taking the time to educate them on the organization's functioning as a need to continually integrate young people. It was both necessary in terms of the logistics – the extra hands and, to a degree, the free labor – but also ideologically in terms of educating and replicating the organization's objectives and principles. Without the integration of young people, Donald told me, the organization wouldn't be around for long.

Operating as a platform, the HR Org was the product of a coalition of member organizations, all of which were human rights organizations themselves. Although the member organizations had a degree of control and oversight of the platform's activities and objectives, dedicated HR Org staff also had a significant degree of autonomy, especially regarding day-to-day operations. The organization was most notably autonomous regarding its financial operations. It was, like most NGOs, almost entirely reliant on international donors. With a number of simultaneous contracts with different donors, some tied to specific projects, the HR Org was able to effectively compete for funding with the help of administrative staff devoted to managing the financial details of those contracts. Despite a dry spell during which many contracts with donors ended and were not renewed between January and April 2013, the organization had a relatively stable existence. The majority of activities went on as usual during this period and financial ups and downs did not seem to have a significant impact on the manner in which the organization functioned in a general sense.

With thirteen paid staff members, a regular rotation of interns and volunteers, and a number of community volunteers within and outside of Port-au-Prince, the HR Org operated with a strong division of labor while also promoting a collaborative environment. Most members – with the exception of the cook, guardian, and driver – were educated at the State University and more-or-less considered part of the middle-class of Haiti. Within the organization, members engaged a number of different educational activities, including conferences, forums, training sessions, distribution of a monthly newsletter, and regular press conferences and interviews. While the majority of the organization's work remained focused on *sensibilizasyon* (advocacy or awareness) activities, they also offered legal assistance for cases involving human rights violations. In addition, a number of staff members and interns investigated, collected, and collated information regarding violence and crime in particular areas of the country.

The organization's director, Donald, encouraged a participatory and democratic atmosphere with all members required to take part in Monday morning meetings. During weekly meetings, tasks and organization business were discussed and current events were debated. I take up a detailed analysis of the group's discursive activities in Chapter 2. The group's relationship to the journalists and media agencies was notable. Through Donald's leadership, the HR Org built a reciprocal and positive relationship with the media, one that provided it a prominent existence as a respectable source of information and commentary. Donald, in particular, was solicited for interviews on a daily and weekly basis, especially regarding current event topics, and he was a regular presence on the radio and television.

My own participation at the HR Org included following their day-to-day operations, having access – albeit within limits – to everyday interactions, debates, and planning duties. I fully integrated into the fabric of everyday life within the organization by December 2011 and was

officially considered a volunteer, tasked to assist with daily duties, often offering a hand to Guerline. Occasionally, I was called upon for translation work – French or Kreyòl into English – and even wrote a grant application or two. During public activities, such as monthly conferences, I picked up tasks as needed, taking pictures, helping with food distribution and arranging chairs. Over time, my biggest task became one of organizing and cataloging the library. The organization had been forced to move after the building they were previously utilizing was deemed unsafe following the 2010 earthquake. As a result of the earthquake and the move, the collection of books and reports had become disorganized and difficult to use for research activities.

In my task to sort through and document the various books, documents and reports within the library, I had the privilege of obtaining a glimpse at the organization's past, and the activities of various other organizations tied to the HR Org. It was through this process that I discovered forgotten bulletins, newsletters, and reports published in the HR Org's early years. While some staff members knew of the organization's history in broad terms, few were aware of the early bulletins and other documents I came across. I documented, organized, and coded the library for searchability and easy access.

I was, in many ways, considered another staff member of the organization. I took part in planning meetings and had my own set of tasks to accomplish along with every other member. In other ways, however, I remained a less integrated member, not taking part in the collaborative editing process the rest of the group engaged in when producing texts, a process discussed further in Chapter 2. My presence as an anthropologist observing and researching their organization was occasionally considered a problem, and as a result I was excluded from more private meetings among member organizations. For instance, I was told I could not take part in

the strategic planning process that involved the active participation of member organizations between January-February 2012. Some member organizations, it seemed, were not as comfortable with my presence as others. Regardless, this exclusion only limited my participation at the organization on specific days or in designated spaces on particular days. In addition, although I was granted permission to record the group's debates about current events taking place during weekly meetings, I was strictly limited to recording only that portion of meetings. Staff members never failed to remind me to turn off my recorder prior to shifting to organization-specific discussions. During other segments of weekly meetings, including discussions of organization business and individual staff tasks, I was allowed to remain in attendance, participate, and take notes. Beyond this, I was welcomed by the HR Org staff with a friendliness that was not unlike an extended family.

### **Portrait of a “Youth” Organization (Youth Org)**

I first met Michel at an international conference on housing rights. Sitting at the same table alongside a number of current and past MCC (Mennonite Central Committee) workers.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps due to the fact that most of us sitting at that table were foreigners, he remained relatively quiet through the morning presentations. It was late October 2011 and since I was still a bit new to the development industry scene, I struck up a conversation with him during a break in presentations. Upon informing him of my research focused on Haitian development

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<sup>41</sup> MCC is a religious organization, largely staffed, in Haiti, by non-Mennonites. It has a significant presence in Haiti and around the world. They have a number of different development divisions and, in particular, fund human rights organizations. They differ from other international development organizations in that they ask their workers, who sign on for contracts that can last 2, 3, or 5 years, to learn Haitian Kreyòl and largely fend for themselves regarding food and transportation. When investing significantly in a local organization, MCC will sometimes insert one of its foreign workers into the organization in question. This individual effectively becomes a worker at the organization although they are supported by, and report back to, MCC. The HR Org had one such worker integrated into their staff for a period of time prior to my integration. In fact, it was through contact with that particular individual that I became aware of and sought participation in the HR Org. She was also present at the conference table the day I met Michel.



organizations, he excitedly told me of his affiliation with the Youth Org. We exchanged cards. Judging from the simple graphics and roughly cut edges, it seemed to me that his organization was underfunded or unsupported by major development donors. I politely listened to his statements as to his organization's activities and areas of interventions and I agreed to visit him at his office. At the time, I was pursuing a number of possible angles in nailing down sites of research. Michel's organization was hardly a blip on my radar; a seemingly unpromising lead given that most Haitians seemed to have an organization of their own in Port-au-Prince. Many of those organizations, I was learning, had little existence beyond a legally registered name.

Michel wasted no time in calling a few days later to set up a meeting. I agreed and headed down the street, a short walk from my apartment. When I arrived, he was waiting outside the building to greet me. Entering was an ordeal – from the narrow and uneven steps leading to the door, to the half-wall blocking further advancement once inside. The layout forced a decision: right or left? To the right was a dusty open space on an incline – a driveway constructed at an uncommonly steep angle – to the left, a door that seemed to be nearly half the width of a normal doorway. “I do it for kicks” could be heard emanating from some unidentified location, just over the make-shift wall or in one of the adjacent rooms. Clearly an English class was going on, unsurprising given the sign I spied outside the building advertising a professional and language school. Coupled with the instructor's heavily accented English, his phrase sounded more like “I do it for cake.” Off to the right, a lanky “*bòs mason*” (masonry worker) was molding the cement framing of an internal window. Despite his use of strings and nails to demarcate the frame's lines, it appeared to be shaping up unevenly.

Michel led me through the door on the left into a small, cramped room. A large wooden desk on the left sat facing a row of chairs in front of us. There was little more than a few inches

between the edge of the desk and that of the chairs. I did my best to squeeze into that space, taking a seat across from the desk. Behind it sat David, with a quiet but friendly demeanor. Rachel was seated just beyond the desk on a cushioned chair to my right. She greeted me warmly with her energetic personality and heavy-set frame. Both left the room promptly, leaving Michel and me to talk. Michel took David's place behind the desk facing me.

I was again subjected to a list of activities, a brief history of the organization, and an overview of their plans for future activities. As it was presented to me, the organization – a self-proclaimed youth development organization – was involved in every possible domain of intervention: human rights, women's issues, children's issues, water and sanitation, handicap accessibility, construction, food insecurity, emergency preparedness, and more. Michel proudly asserted that there were as many as 50 organizations operating as partners to the Youth Org. I politely listened and requested a list of the organizations he mentioned. Suspecting that I was being indirectly solicited for money – perhaps, I wondered, Michel saw me as having connections with donor institutions – I clarified my presence in Haiti, my research objectives, and my limited funding. Skilled at persuasion, he insisted I take part in the organization's activities and meetings nevertheless, reasoning that I could at least offer advice to the group. I agreed to attend the upcoming meeting that Saturday.

As Saturday rolled around, I headed to the late afternoon meeting, arriving on time. There I met the majority of organization members, eight in total, two of which were female. We pulled desk-chairs out into the cemented "backyard," a small courtyard surrounded by cinder block walls. Outside was the preferable location, someone pointed out, given the heat and the slight breeze. Michel, with his domineering presence and charismatic sociability, led the meeting. As I would soon learn, Michel often informally took on the role of moderator with his persistent

attempts to control discussions and the direction of the organization more generally. Even David, the ratified “president,” often backed down and allowed Michel to take on this role, sometimes agreeing with Michel simply to end a long, drawn out debate. Sitting in a circle, each of the members introduced themselves. Once I finished my own introduction, I was peppered with questions: How long would I be in Haiti? How did I learn to speak Kreyòl? What skills could I offer the group? What would my title be?

After a lengthy negotiation as to what my role in the organization might be, including my careful side-stepping of any public role – such as the suggested role of spokesperson – the group willingly accepted my title as “consultant,” one I would share with another member, Charles. Charles was one of the older participants, appearing to be in his mid to late 30s, and one of the few with formal, income-generating employment. With a shaved head and medium build, Charles’ staccato laughs and short, quiet comments had the air of friendly suspicion. Never hesitant to voice his opinions, the group easily ceded the floor to him, becoming uncharacteristically quiet to accommodate his strong but soft-spoken demeanor.

Other members of the group present included: David; Rachel, the designated vice-president; Michel, who was in charge of networking and funding; Ernesto, a slender, fast talking “engineer”; Fritz, who was in charge of activities focused on children, a role that suited his warm and sensitive personality; Jeremi, with a heavy-set build and boisterous joking personality, was the “expert” technician of the group; and finally, Dieula, the organization’s designated secretary. The complete opposite of Rachel, Dieula was both small in stature and personality; her shyness often meant she remained silent unless prompted to speak. Ernesto’s efforts to flirt with her often caused her to blush and turn away.

As I learned over the following months, the members at that Saturday's meeting were what could be considered the core membership. While active participation shifted from meeting to meeting and month to month – with some members taking extended breaks due to employment or family obligations elsewhere and other, new members, joining the group – those eight members remained relatively stable. Regardless, meetings never included more than 12 participants at any given time and while Rachel and Dieula's participation waxed and waned, no new female participants integrated into the group during my time with them. While Rachel's boisterous personality meant she took an active part in meetings, family and work obligations took her away for a number of months. Dieula, on the other hand, rarely voiced a word during meetings and also faced chronic illness, a *fèbles* (weakness) for which a cause went undiagnosed.

The members of the group were not just professionally connected by the organization but also personally connected as friends. Many had met during their time together as students at the same professional school. Others shared similar family ties to the same village outside Port-au-Prince.<sup>42</sup> The group celebrated and solidified their personal ties to one another through social activities such as ritual-like birthday parties that included food, cake, alcohol, and speeches. Despite financial shortcomings that prevented many of the organizational activities from taking place, birthday parties were viewed as necessary and the cost burden was shared by all.

Most members had no income generating activities but were not among the most destitute or poor of Haiti. Indeed, their participation in the Youth Org was on a volunteer basis as members rarely, if ever, received reimbursement or payment for their time and efforts. For many members, family supported them just enough to get by but not enough for them to feel satisfied in their social positions. David, for example, worked informally for a private elementary school.

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<sup>42</sup> Most Haitians living in Port-au-Prince herald from somewhere else or, at least, claim to come from elsewhere even if they themselves were born and raised in the capital. Each province and major city throughout the country has its own stereotypes, manners of speaking, and cultural norms.

Despite this, his wife was the breadwinner of the family, working as a petty merchant and teacher. Fritz, the only other married member of the group, was himself a full-time student at a professional school.<sup>43</sup> His educational pursuits, although respected by other members, sometimes caused friction as he often found it difficult to attend meetings. Active participation and commitment to the organization was expected despite the fact that all members were volunteering their time, energy, and sometimes even their personal resources to make it a success.

The Youth Org existed as a marginal organization, financially and socially, in relation to the development industry. Although members made concerted efforts to attract donor interest and gain access to donor contracts, they were largely unsuccessful in doing so. The organization, in general, lacked access to stable financing through which it could maintain a durable financial existence, and thus, was significantly affected by the rapidly changing tides of development donor interests. In this way, it suffered from chronic organizational insecurity (Cooley & Ron 2002). Members also lacked sufficient educational training and experience, preventing them from effectively competing for grants in relation to larger, more established organizations. Although Youth Org members planned a number of different events over the course of my time with them – ranging from conferences, training sessions, dance competitions, cultural events, press conferences, and resource distribution activities – very few of those they planned actually panned out; even those that did were often only marginally successful.

The group's interests did not rest solely within the domain of development, nor did they focus on specific areas of intervention within it. Instead, they attempted to maintain interest and simultaneous engagement involving a number of different social or developmental issues. In

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<sup>43</sup> He and David were the only married members of the group during the time of my research. Other members have since gotten married and had kids.

similar ways, they also worked to establish themselves across social domains, reaching beyond the “social” aspect of developmental engagement in an attempt to engage within formal political arenas as well. This move, in some ways, conflicted with their development interests. Yet for members, their simultaneous participation in multiple domains and across multiple social issues was unproblematic. Their flexible existence itself was an important part of members’ pragmatic strategizing. This topic will be taken up in more detail in Chapter 4.

As a marginal organization struggling to get access to the development industry and political institutions, the manner in which the organization functioned was relatively haphazard. Members did not have access to their own building and instead had to share space with others. Their financial status meant that they had to rely on others to provide them with access and time within that space. In similar ways, the participation of Youth Org members at weekly meetings and in preparation for activities was solely dependent on the degree of dedication and availability of its members. Thus, even with eight participating members, the degree to which each member was able or willing to devote their time to organization business varied significantly. This severely hampered any attempts at constructing a division of labor within the organization and led to a relatively unstructured existence. Meetings were also haphazard and unstructured, with conversational topics shifting rapidly. Discussions and debates were highly informal and reflected the interests of members in the moment. Although anyone, in principle, could participate in discussions, often it was only the more vocal members that actively did so.

As I discuss in Chapter 4, the group engaged a pragmatic and entrepreneurial approach to their organizational existence. In this way, they were less occupied by ideological interests or motivations and more interested in the practical and strategic means through which they could gain a foothold in either or both the development industry and formal political arenas. Their

meeting discussions, largely focused on strategizing and preparing themselves for future interactions, reflect this approach.

My relationship with the Youth Org was significantly different than the one I maintained with the HR Org, although members were similarly welcoming and friendly. While few at the HR Org viewed my presence as beneficial to them personally or the organization as a whole, Youth Org members regularly sought to use my presence in particular, and often strategic ways. Many viewed my status as a *blan* as potentially beneficial to the organization, particularly in opening doors to development donors. While I was committed to a reciprocal relationship with the group – providing assistance and advice in various ways in exchange for their allowing me to participate and observe their activities – some of the members’ requests also, at times, became uncomfortable for me on a personal level. In many ways, I felt as if I was their token *blan*. Members expressed hope that I might financially assist them through connections I might have to powerful or successful foreigners and international organizations. Even despite my protests as to the limited connections and sway I did have, members viewed my presence as useful to them, as it conjured up powerful assumptions in others. To other Haitians, I was their connection to foreign funds and a symbol of success. This was an impression I gathered over time, based on a number of frequent but small requests made of me. For example, at my first group meeting, members requested that I become the group’s spokesperson. My presence was also requested at meetings with foreign donors and other Haitian organizations, not because they desired my vocal participation, but rather because they understood my presence as potentially assisting them in getting what they were seeking from the meeting. Finally, I was repeatedly ask to sponsor travel to the United States and during discussions negotiating my ability to record meetings, members

requested that I begin collecting charitable donations through various connections I had back home, such as university email lists, and my family's church affiliations.

Despite personal discomfort, my participation at the group's meetings and activities was welcomed with friendly affection. I was viewed and treated as if I was another friend or close acquaintance. Members warmly thanked me for my assistance at events, some even noting surprise but genuine appreciation at my willingness to take part in manual labor associated with setting up for meetings and activities as well as cleaning up after.

In contrast to my experience at the HR Org, my request to record meetings at the Youth Org was viewed as politically sensitive. While I was allowed to record some meetings, most were off-limits. In the cases where recording was not a possibility, I rely on detailed notes for my analysis. My participation in the organization was also necessarily limited given the general disorganized manner in which the organization functioned. Organization business was not always dealt with at meetings and thus, I was often absent for the more informal decision-making processes and discussions. I also did not participate in most meetings with donors and thus, relied more heavily on second-hand discussions and reports about those meetings that took place during scheduled Youth Org meetings. Due to circumstances both within and beyond my control, I spent more time per week and a longer span of time with the HR Org than I did the Youth Org. While on an extended break from Haiti, the Youth Org reportedly lost access to their previous meeting space. Following this, the group did not hold regular meetings but continued to see one another and engaged in organizational business informally from time-to-time. I was not invited to participate in these impromptu meetings as they often started as social gatherings not necessarily intended as formal meetings. Family obligations also kept me from more actively pursuing participation with the Youth Org during that time.



## Drawing Out Comparisons

As can be seen from the brief introduction provided here, the HR Org should be understood as residing squarely within the domain of development, as a recipient of funding from prominent donor institutions and actively involved with development objectives and projects. In contrast, the Youth Org had a marginal existence in relation to the development industry and formal political arenas, actively seeking funding and participation but rarely able to secure significant sources of funding and largely failing to follow through on the projects and activities they imagined. The HR Org was a relatively large, financially stable and established organization focused on one specific area of intervention: human rights. It was able to financially support at least thirteen employees. Even for those not receiving a formal salary, such as interns, the organization provided them with adequate resources to carry out their activities, such as supplies, meals, and travel reimbursements. Given the financial support provided by the HR Org, most members could be conceivably considered solidly middle class. Most, if not all, staff and volunteers were also well-educated as current or former State University students.

The Youth Org maintained an underfunded existence. Although it had eight core members, member participation and commitment to the organization was limited by other obligations which were often prioritized over those of the organization on account of the lack of financial support and resources provided by the organization itself.<sup>44</sup> Youth Org members largely relied on family financial support and reported an personal economic existence characterized as “struggling.” Although many claimed to have university degrees, nearly all came from small, for-profit professional schools, the quality of which was questionable at best. Without full

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<sup>44</sup> Although I am unable to cite approximate numbers in terms of relative budgets of each organization, suffice to say that the Youth Org had no budget beyond what individual members were willing to contribute for specific projects and the HR Org received contracts from various donors that ranged from US\$10,000 to US\$250,000 depending on the project and its duration.

participation from its members and a lack of formal financing, Youth Org members regularly shifted their priorities and interests across social issues and areas of intervention. Members also explicitly sought roles that crossed social domains, particularly those identified as “social” and those considered “political.”

Even HR Org members, despite their vocalized commitments to development and human rights as apolitical endeavors, engaged politically. The manner in which members at each organization situated themselves in relation to formal politics, differed significantly: while the HR Org occupied a position in direct day-to-day contact with political institutions and staked out distinctly political stances, members identified it, and their objectives, as apolitical. They also regularly mobilized universal human rights argumentation as a political critique, often masking the political partisanship of their engagements. In contrast, the Youth Org lacked a functional political ideology but actively debated and enacted pragmatic strategies with the goal of taking part in electoral processes and bringing the group closer to a prominent role in formal political arenas. Thus, while Youth Org members sought to overtly and pragmatically take on political roles, HR Org members worked toward more tacit involvement, drawing on ideological objectives – aiming to effect change by through social and political pressure – as opposed to the pragmatic ones of Youth Org members.

Understandings as to what “politics” encompassed also differed between the two organizations. For HR Org members, “politics” and “the political” were largely aligned with formal political arenas, such as state institutions, political actors, and electoral processes. The identification of politics in this way, provided the group a moral high ground from which to analyze and critique those processes and actors associated with formal political institutions. For Youth Org members, their operational definition of politics and the political was much more

slippery. In some instances, members recognized a distinct boundary between the “social” and the “political,” aligning politics with electoral processes. In other instances, however, they tacitly pointed to politics as having an interpersonal existence as well, implicating non-state actors and those not engaging within formal political arenas. Despite this slipperiness, more often than not, “*politik*” was referenced most clearly in the context of discussions pertaining to the group’s activities in relation to electoral processes.

The manner in which each organization functioned also differed significantly. With more financial backing, the HR Org was able to maintain a stable and organized environment including the ability to rent a dedicated building and own a vehicle. The division of labor among members was more or less circumscribed and members were highly motivated to take part in, and contribute to, the organization and its activities. The Youth Org’s marginal existence had the reverse effect, resulting in unstructured functioning and a lack of a clear division of labor. Indeed, their reliance on others for a space within which to meet and hold activities severely limited their capabilities, especially once they were no longer allowed to use the space previously made available to them. Given the voluntary nature of its existence, members also struggled to motivate the participation of other members for a variety of reasons, primarily relating to the various family, educational, and work obligations of members. While HR Org staff gathered once a week for an organization-wide meeting, they regularly interacted with one another on a daily basis as most staff worked in the office Monday through Friday. Scheduled Youth Org meetings took place once or twice a week; however, only a few, more active, members interacted above and beyond those scheduled meetings. Thus, it was much more difficult for Youth Org members to accomplish the tasks they envisioned, especially given the lack of a division of labor and the amount of time that passed between each meeting.

Since both organizations engaged in development work, albeit in different ways, they were both subject to similar constraints following the norms of the development industry more generally. As many scholars have noted, donor-NGO dynamics are a major contributing factor to how development organizations function.<sup>45</sup> The power imbalance between donor institutions and recipient organizations can be quite significant, with recipients required to follow conditions as dictated by donor institutions (Reith 2010). Organizational insecurity can lead to an “NGO scramble” in which organizations are forced to compete for scarce resources, often forgoing ideological or aspirational objectives in the process (Cooley & Ron 2002). While the Youth Org was generally underfunded and uncompetitive in seeking grants from donors for specific projects, the HR Org maintained a number of simultaneous contracts with donors and staffed administrative positions, two of which remained dedicated to accounting and donor-related administrative tasks. In this way, although both organizations struggled to meet the varied and divergent demands of donor institutions from which they received funding, the HR Org was in a better position to weather those expectations and demands and exercised a degree of selectivity regarding potential donors. While Youth Org members imagined and planned projects that would work within the specific parameters of grant competitions and donor institutional funding interests, HR Org members were able to imagine, plan, and execute activities and day-to-day operations as the members themselves saw fit. The differences in social, political, and economic positions of each organization had important implications not only for their competitiveness in an increasingly scarce donor environment, especially following the flood of funding that came following the 2010 earthquake which later receded, but also in regards to how members at each

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<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Cooley & Ron (2002), James (2010, 2012), Kivland (2012), Reith (2010), and Schuller (2007b, 2012).

organization understood the development industry, formal political arenas, and their role and approach to each.<sup>46</sup>

Although the organizations remain distinct with very different objectives, activities, and discursive styles, they both straddle categorical lines blurring distinctions between a “development organization,” “human rights organization,” “humanitarian organization,” or a “political organization.” The Youth Org actively and overtly attempted to cross and straddle different domains and areas of development intervention, presenting itself as devoted to human rights issues at one moment and devoted to a political cause in opposition to President Martelly’s administration at another moment. Indeed, the group’s interests and priorities shifted quite frequently, often in relation to topics and issues carrying the potential to bring funding to the organization. Even the HR Org’s stable existence, as resting squarely within the domain of human rights, worked in tandem with members’ tacit political involvement. Their activities were very much politicized, even despite active efforts to remain outside formal political arenas. Here again, the primary difference between the organizations is their approach: whether motivated by pragmatics or by ideological commitments.

Attention to deliberative practices within both organizations reveals the different ways in which members at each engaged with development as a set of ideas and a domain of activity. For HR Org members, ideological attention to development and the manner in which they mobilized the apolitical status of their organization as a moral high ground legitimized the politicization of

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<sup>46</sup> Although estimates vary, the Special Advisor to the UN Office of the Secretary General reports that US\$6.43 billion in aid dollars were disbursed in Haiti between 2010 and 2012 by various multilateral and bilateral donors. An additional US\$3.06 billion from private donors, including those given to the UN and NGOs by individuals, foundations, and companies, were disbursed between 2010 and 2012. See “Lessons from Haiti.” *U.N. Office of the Secretary-General’s Special Advisor*. <http://www.lessonsfromhaiti.org/lessons-from-haiti/key-statistics>. Ramachandran & Walz (2012 :6) report that this aid represents a tripling of aid flows between 2009 and 2010. Prior to the earthquake, foreign assistance varied significantly ranging from US\$35.5 million in 1975, US\$380 million in 1991 and US\$93.6 million in 2008-9 (ibid.). A decreasing trend of available funds was noted during the time of this research (see Ch. 2) and was also a point of discussion in conversations with other scholars working in Haiti at the time (Schuller, personal comm.).

their interpretations and advocacy messages. The deliberative practices of Youth Org members reveals the manner in which members sought to utilize the domain of development and formal political arenas as a means to gain resources, power, and status for themselves.

The straddling of categorical lines also makes it difficult to identify one or both organizations as NGOs, although there is significant overlap regarding the manner in which both organizations functioned and those typically understood as NGOs. Both organizations received or sought funding from international donors, and, in this way, resembled the work of NGOs. Yet, the formal political involvement of the Youth Org – that is, their efforts to take part in the governmental realm of electoral processes – complicates use of the NGO label particularly in their attempts to seek out both governmental and nongovernmental roles. Separating the group’s development activities from their political ones in a clear cut manner – drawing on an NGO label in one instance and a political party label in another – ignores the fluid reality of the organization’s functioning. Indeed, members engaged both domains and aspects of their existence simultaneously and unproblematically. The HR Org, although squarely residing outside formal political institutions, utilized this placement to their advantage as they grounded their politicized interpretations in claims of injustice and human rights violations. It could, in many ways, be more clearly identified as an NGO, although one that was not nearly as apolitical as members understood it to be. This assessment of NGO work as necessarily political, especially in the case of advocacy focused NGOs, is one that has been recognized and analyzed by a number of scholars.<sup>47</sup> In addition, the NGO label does not adequately capture the relationship each organization had to the Haitian government. Neither organization was officially registered as an NGO. While the Youth Org was registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs, the HR Org was registered with the Ministry of Justice. Finally, popular discourse in Haiti often implied, or

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<sup>47</sup> See especially, Bob (2002, 2010), Englund (2006), Feher (2007), and Keenan (2004).

reserved, the NGO label as associated with internationally based organizations. This, in some ways, corresponds to the dominant trend in which NGO status in relation to the Haitian government was sought, for the most part, by international organizations. Indeed, the full title of the Ministry of Planning, translates as the “Ministry of Planning and External Cooperation.”

Both organizations engaged, albeit in differing ways, with a platform structure. For many reasons, the HR Org’s structure represented a closer approximation of an idealized platform, drawing on actually existing and autonomous organizations as its members. Member organizations also played a democratic role in the long-term planning and direction of the HR Org. In contrast, the Youth Org took tentative steps toward formalization of a platform status, meeting several times with the intention of creating statutes that would allow group members to apply for this official status under the name of “*Sove Ayiti*” (Save Haiti). As a participant at those meetings, it became clear to me that the group’s aim was not one focused on actually integrating organizations and working together with them in such a way as to create a democratically structured coalition. Instead, members sought to use a platform structure to engage more effectively, giving the impression of clout, despite little or no difference in leadership or structure. This related directly to the group’s dominant discursive activity focused on presentation and performance, as will be seen in Chapter 4.

Politically speaking, HR Org members were situated in strong opposition to President Martelly. Many of their advocacy activities reflected this political stance. The Youth Org also situated themselves in opposition, however, their alliances shifted a number of times. Through discussions of the 2011 election of Martelly, many claimed to have voted for him. Yet, as the group’s political ambitions heated up by March 2012, the group took on an oppositional stance and even took part in an oppositional political platform, as will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

This opposition, however, was largely engaged for pragmatic reasons, given that the group had an eye on the next presidential election and opposition to the president-in-office was understood as a necessary step toward electoral success. The group's political alliances appeared to shift yet again when I visited them during a follow-up trip in July 2014. At that time, I was informed of the role they had taken within Martelly's administration, namely as part of his Ministry in charge of political parties, a new ministry at that time. As a result, they gained access to Martelly's social program, *Ede Pèp la* (Help the People), and obtained limited funding to run a soup kitchen in the capital. During my visit, I was escorted to the soup kitchen which, I noted, was painted in Martelly's pink and white campaign colors. When questioned on this, the group assured me that their involvement with Martelly was simply an effort to gain recognition in the eyes of the population. They claimed no political or ideological commitment to Martelly and his government. In speaking with an unaffiliated young political hopeful not long after, she interpreted the government's formation of the new ministry as a move to co-opt a number of oppositional parties, with the Youth Org among them, in an effort to stem growing opposition by giving them a small and relatively insignificant role in the government.

As can be seen, the dissimilarities between the two organizations outnumber their similarities. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage. The differences make for a tale of contrasts from nearly every possible angle and, in some ways, precludes meaningful comparison. Yet, at the same time, those contrasts allow different vantage points from which to understand the role and place of local organizing activities within the country. Attention to small, struggling organizations such as the Youth Org has largely been side-stepped in favor of more established and formally funded organizations in the development literature. Their entrepreneurial approach has likewise been implied as not committed to developmental ideals as members seek personal



and group advancement. As Cooley and Ron (2002) indicate, this opportunism itself can be understood as a product of the political economy of the development industry, namely its funding structures. Yet what attention to the Youth Org reveals is that the manner in which members engaged an entrepreneurial and opportunistic approach to development was not solely the result of external pressures to conform to normative standards set by donor institutions. Instead, close analysis of the group's deliberative practices highlights the manner in which group motives and aspirations for financial and social success contributed to their participation in the NGO scramble. They were both pressured to yield to the demands of donors but also deliberately sought ways to effectively conform on their own terms and for their own purposes.

Thus, although organizations such as the HR Org garner much more attention from development scholars, the manner in which organizations such as the Youth Org reflect and attempt to work within particular standards – catering to and performing for donors and other audiences – provides a unique glimpse at the development industry in Haiti, namely one from the outside looking in. In addition, by analyzing the different approaches to development and politics engaged by each organization, their different objectives and deliberative practices allow for a greater understanding of the manner in which development and politics are entangled in the Haitian context. In particular, it allows for a more diverse picture of the different ways development is taken up as a form of political contestation.

## CHAPTER 2

### Discursive Blame Game: The Political Engagements of a Human Rights Organization

#### Introduction

Seated around a long wooden table, all of the staff at the HR Org listened carefully as Yves held the conversational floor, presenting a lengthy analysis of the school corruption scandal the group was discussing. A school director had been arrested for allegedly receiving government funds through the PSUGO (free schooling) program without following through on the terms of the agreement. “*M santi se youn nan program nèg yo fè dezòd ladann...menm jan gen anpil enspektè kòm si ki nan ministè, fò yo mare yo tou*” (I feel that it’s one of those programs through which people cause problems...in the same way, there are a lot of inspectors, like those in the Minister’s office, they need to arrest them as well).

“*Oke*” said Alain, the moderator of that day’s meeting, urging Yves to end his monologue. Yves concluded: “*Kap fè dezòd e m panse se pa nan sa yo pou n rete. Si limyè a ap kòmanse la, ke l kòmanse, m pa gen problèm ak nèg mare moun grenn pa grenn*” (People are creating problems and I think they shouldn’t stop there. If they continue investigating it, and that’s where they begin, I don’t have a problem with them arresting people one by one). Alain opened the floor, requesting those with other opinions to speak up. Theodore took up the call: “*Yo komanse mare kèk ti chat piti*” (They’ve started arresting a few small cats). “*Sa se ti mimi*

yo” (They are small kitties), Yves agreed. Theodore continued: “*Gwo gwo chat yo, sa vle di se kote problèm nan*” (The large cats, that’s where the problem lies).

Debates such as this, focused on analyzing, understanding, and taking a stance on current events, were a regular activity within the confines of the HR Org’s weekly staff meetings. As an established human rights organization with a prominent media presence, HR Org staff understood their role in Haitian society as one of *monitoring*, *analiz* (analyzing) and *sensibilizasyon* (making people aware).<sup>1</sup> In this way, they kept tabs on what was going on in the country by collecting available information (*monitoring*), analyzing that information as a group (*analiz*), and disseminating their interpretations and understandings of what happened through advocacy campaigns and educational activities aimed at a larger Haitian audience (*sensibilizasyon*).

Drawing from media discourses as a major source of information, HR Org members attended to a variety of events and issues, some of which were not always aligned with conventional human rights concerns, such as political violence. Instead of remaining preoccupied with questions of what was or was not a relevant issue to take up, group members understood the importance of human rights within a broader framework of development, with development itself understood as a right (Sen 1999). While the organization itself self-identified as a human rights organization, their varied interests also point to them as falling under the umbrella of a development organization. Despite this, their contribution to the domain of development is clear: members viewed information as a tool that could be used to bring about change. This way, their work was firmly grounded in advocacy and was educational in nature.

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<sup>1</sup> All three concepts – *monitoring*, *analiz*, and *sensibilizasyon* – were metadiscursive terms engaged by members themselves. I use them as analytical markers of circumscribed activities engaged by the group.

As self-appointed “watchdogs” (Donavan 2011), members viewed their role as one of keeping tabs on events and issues of importance in an effort to educate and otherwise make the general Haitian population aware of social happenings and more complex interpretations of those happenings than the media or political officials provided. The group’s *monitoring* task, in this way, was the first step of the process, as members worked to collect available information, both from media reports as well as word-of-mouth and anecdotal sources. Sitting down as a group to analyze the available information allowed members to co-construct shared understandings of what was happening, why it was happening, and who was to blame for it. Group discussions and debates revolving around *analiz*, then, served as preparation for the group’s final objective: the dissemination and circulation of their interpretations of events, publicly allocating blame in definitive ways. This *sensibilizasyon* work took on a number of different forms, including media interviews (radio and television), declarations that were published in newspapers and disseminated through radio and television media, and published reports with recommendations delivered to prominent government and civil society institutions. Declarations, often referred to as “denunciations,” were short texts that sought to take a definitive stance on current events as they unfolded. Monthly conferences, occasional workshops and training sessions were additional activities through which the group engaged their *sensibilizasyon* objectives. The director’s frequent interventions on radio and television media also served as a significant means through which the group’s *sensibilizasyon* goals were sought. While their *monitoring* and *analiz* objectives were necessary steps along the way, it was their *sensibilizasyon* objective that justified and legitimized the organization’s existence as an advocate for justice.

The discussion of the school corruption scandal, excerpted above, points to the group’s interest in not only understanding events as they unfolded by sharing information with one

another, but also identifying key problems and puzzling through questions of responsibility and blame. Given that many of the topics discussed by the group drew on limited information, or only partial information available, the group was forced to sort through ambiguous and unclear second-hand reports in an effort to understand and analyze events. The incompleteness of available information often provided fodder for interpretations and speculation, leaving them to fill the gaps with personal impressions and assumptions.

Seeking to challenge the status quo and power holders, the HR Org activities were deeply political, despite its existence as residing outside the realm of political institutions and formal political arenas (Alvarez et al. 1998; Feher 2007; Yarrow 2011). Indeed, the political commitments of the group were clear in their *analiz* efforts, especially their “blame game” efforts focused on identifying prominent government officials as culpable for identified “troubles” (Rappaport 1993). Co-constructing situated interpretations and political stances within group discussions effectively prepared the group for interacting with broader audiences through advocacy and educational activities. Although the political nature of their activities was clear, members largely understood their activities as apolitical, drawing on a strict definition of “the political” as one resting with formal political institutions and actors. By defining the political in this manner, members effectively assigned themselves the moral high ground in relation to those they actively criticized. By taking a broader definition of politics and the political, we can see how the group co-constructed and circulated politicized interpretations and critiques based on individual and group commitments in relation to state actors and other political officials. They effectively masked, or depoliticized, the political aspect of their activities by way of their self-appointed watchdog role – as operating outside formal political arenas – and their mobilization of rights discourse staked out ethical claims defining injustice and human rights.

In this chapter, I further introduce the HR Org, its members, and the dynamics of their *monitoring* and *analiz* activities. I then return to the group's discussion of the school corruption scandal, using it as an illustrative example demonstrating the interactional dynamics of an *analiz* debate. I focus on the discursive blame game engaged by the group as members took up oppositional stances regarding who was or should be held responsible. As the discussion demonstrates, their self-appointed watchdog status was as much about concerns for justice and human rights as it was political. I follow this analysis with an examination of three other, interconnected interpretive frames observed within group discussions: calls for the embodiment of insecurity, comparisons with conditions in other countries, and the organization of events within a narrative of decline interpretation. Through these interpretive frames, expressed and negotiated during *analiz* discussions, members succeeded in co-constructing shared understandings of injustice, cause/effect, declining conditions, and blame. Finally, I shift to an analysis of the group's *sensibilizasyon* objectives, highlighting the manner in which the interpretive work that went into the group's *analiz* activities circulated beyond the confines of the organization itself. Here I look at the dissemination process through which politically partisan and situated interpretations reached broader audiences.

I argue that despite the group's self-appointed status as an apolitical watchdog of Haitian society, their activities and access to media institutions allowed them a privileged status in disseminating situated and political interpretations to broader audiences. In this way, the deliberative practices within the HR Org, and the group's subsequent *sensibilizasyon* efforts, represent sites of the political; that is, a form of political contestation through which members worked to challenge existing power relations with the aim of radically transforming them. Members were active participants in a larger landscape of antagonistic and oppositional politics.

They not only reflected antagonistic political norms but also contributed to them, further entrenching anxieties and distrust of government officials and other power holders.

### **From Birth to Maturity: The Transformation of a Human Rights Organization**

The HR Org was born in response to violence taking place in the country following the first *coup d'état* that ousted Aristide in 1991. Although Baby Doc Duvalier's departure in 1986 was a time of celebration for many, significant violence, including coups and counter-coups, led to widespread pessimism regarding the degree to which the country would or could move beyond its dictatorship past. During the period between Duvalier's departure in 1986 and Aristide's election in 1991, the democratic process was severely hobbled by violence and a war between anti-Duvalierist vigilantes and Duvalierists/Macoutes (Girard 2005:108). Even despite Aristide's election in 1991 and his popularity among a poor, disenfranchised majority, he was quickly ousted in a military-led coup, the leaders of which representing Duvalierist and business interests. The period between 1991 and 1994, then, represented another violent one during which Aristide's supporters (*Lavalas*) were targeted. It is within this context of increasing violence and repression that the HR Org was born.

The groundwork for what would become the HR Org began in 1991 through the efforts of a group of private individuals interested in documenting human rights abuses during the period of military repression and violence between 1991-1994.<sup>2</sup> The organization was later handed over to a coalition of organizations, registering with the Ministry of Justice as a platform, in 1994. The organization was intended as a forum through which nine human rights

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<sup>2</sup> While organizing the organization's library, I came across a massive collection of reports in their original form following the 1991 coup. The organization's work in documenting the violence taking place during that period was utilized by the Commission for Truth and Justice, formed under Préval. The commission culminated in publication of "*Si m pa rele*" report, of which the organization has several leather bound copies on hand. When questioned on the organization's role in the commission's report, Donald was not aware of this history, and knew nothing of the original reports occupying space in the library.

organizations, referred to as member organizations, could collectively work together while not supplanting the autonomy of each individual organization. In this way, creating a coalition of organizations, as opposed to another autonomous organization, was understood as beneficial in that it offered a structure through which individual members could work together and present their collaborative efforts.<sup>3</sup> While the HR Org continued to operate as a platform, its current form resembles a semi-autonomous organization.<sup>4</sup>

The make-up of member organizations shifted and changed in the early years of its existence; however, since 1998, its membership remained relatively stable. Founding organizations generally remained with the platform and no new members were allowed in. Member organizations also retained a democratic form of involvement regarding long-term vision and structure of the organization although day-to-day functioning, financing, and decision-making took place within the HR Org itself, headed by the hired director, Donald, who had been with the organization since 2009.

Though constrained by the member organizations to a point, the HR Org was most notably autonomous in its financing, seeking out grant opportunities as an organization in its own right. It did not receive direct financial support from member organizations. The official rhetoric on funding, as announced at public events and in texts about the organization, always referenced three sources: member institution dues, sales of published documents, and project grant money from donor institutions. As was revealed after several months working within the organization, however, member organizations were not in fact paying dues and the organization

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 1 for a more detailed analysis of platforms within the Haitian context.

<sup>4</sup> I shift between referring to it as an organization and a platform, but generally preference the use of organization.



was not actually selling any publications as most documents they published were distributed free of charge.<sup>5</sup>

Although Donald often boasted to outsiders, including myself when I first spoke with him, that the HR Org was relatively self-sufficient and autonomous, this claim was more an ideal than a reality. When I joined the organization as a volunteer in December 2011, funding was stable. There existed a number of simultaneous contracts from different international donors, some tied to specific projects, others allowing more flexibility regarding where the money could be spent. The Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) was a favored financier of human rights activities in the country, although by 2013 they had begun the process of scaling back their operations in the country. As a result, MCC did not renew their contract with the HR Org in early 2013, although they did fund a cooperative project between the HR Org and another member organization. Grassroots International, another previous supporter of the HR Org, also did not renew its funding, which was flexible and not tied to specific projects. OXFAM, ICCO, and BD were also donors to the HR Org but strictly on a project-specific basis, usually with a contract spanning several years.<sup>6</sup> As many, if not most, project contracts came to an end around the same time, the future of the organization remained uncertain and the director scrambled to search and apply for alternative grants. By the time I left in April 2013, the group was in a precarious financial state, although they largely managed to carry on the majority of their activities

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<sup>5</sup> However, most texts were printed on a need-only basis as to limit direct costs to the organization. The group considered a document, report, newsletter or other text “published” at the when it was finalized (no other edits would be made), printed, and distributed to a target audience. Most texts were also finalized by way of an official signature, usually Donald’s, coupled with the HR Org’s rubber stamp. Sometimes texts were published in a more formal form through the use of spiral binding and plastic cover sheets; at other times, they were simply copied and stapled.

<sup>6</sup> OXFAM is a British confederation of organizations aimed at eradicating poverty and injustice around the world. ICCO is a Dutch religious initiative (largely Protestant) aimed at assisting with development efforts around the world. It was originally titled “Interchurch Coordination Committee for Development Projects” but is now titled, “Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation.” BD is a Belgian-based development organization named “Broederlijk Delen.”

nonetheless. Given that nearly all of their financial stability rested on the fickle nature of international donors and the project-by-project nature of the development industry, when the contracts ran out – which happened to be around the same period of time – the group was left scrambling to apply for grants from institutions they had not previously considered as options due to the tighter restrictions and conditions associated with those grants.

Even despite the dry spell in which the group had no active funding, a period that lasted several months, they managed to carry on in a more-or-less normal fashion given the savings they had put away periodically when funding was plentiful. Rather than allow the organization to be completely at the mercy of the grant economy and the whims of development industry interests, Donald, with the help of Karl, the accountant, had squirreled away a portion of each incoming grant to the organization's bank account.<sup>7</sup> This money was then available for expenses beyond what was accounted for and allowable by individual donors. In this way, the group was in a position to continue with activities beyond project cycles and could even start new activities without needing to search for financial backing upfront. Karl was also skilled at moving funds around and justifying changes to donor institutions in terms of contracted activities in such a way that the organization's regular activities continued to run even despite the lack of new donors or the fact that previous donors had not originally signed off on expenditures going toward those activities.

During the organization's difficult financial period, the money saved was crucial in keeping them afloat, albeit in a pared down fashion. Salaries continued to be paid but Natalie was not always able to offer a full lunch to the staff each day. Buying office supplies like toilet paper and drinking water became contentious topics during office meetings. The group was forced to table projects that were more expensive, such as training sessions outside the capital,

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<sup>7</sup> See James (2010, 2012) for detailed descriptions of the development “grant economy.”

but they were able to continue holding regular press conferences along with their monthly conference while also publishing their monthly newsletter, albeit with reduced circulation.

Prior to the funding crunch, the HR Org had also held round table discussions, training sessions and forums around the city, including activities in regions outside the capital. They engaged investigations on various topics such as sanitation and the state of public health infrastructures in the capital. They organized a series of meetings and activities for tent camp leaders such as training them on proper photographic techniques in an effort to encourage documentation of conditions in the camps. One particularly elaborate event was even planned as a training session for members of parliament.<sup>8</sup> Finally, they offered free legal assistance on select walk-in cases, or to individuals believed to be unjustly imprisoned. When funds were available, public events usually included a fair helping of snacks and drinks following an event. The quality and quantity of food offered to participants depended greatly on the funding source for the specific event. Some events were lavishly catered, others included only a bare minimum of coffee, water, and crackers. Food selections were necessarily scaled back with the funding crunch.

Regarding the structure of the organization, the official statutes outlined an intended structure that included the formation of different “commissions,” headed by member organization representatives overseeing the work of HR Org staff. In practice, this was never formalized in a functional manner. Instead of instituting this commission system, intended to be situated structurally above Donald’s leadership, a similar structure was institutionalized within the HR Org, referred to as “programs.” Drawing on similar title names as the intended

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<sup>8</sup> The event ended up being cancelled due to a lack of attendance. It had been planned as a weekend getaway at a beach resort north of the capital. Kerline, in charge of planning and executing the event, complained that the few parliamentarians who did show up also brought along too many extra guests, a sign that they viewed the event as a vacation as opposed to an educational activity.

commissions, as outlined in the statutes, the program structure replicated the commission's division of labor, however, it did so in such a way that granted the majority of oversight power to the director. Thus, although the platform's structure was intended to include significant oversight on the part of member organizations, this structure did not pan out in practice with the director overseeing the different divisions and activities on a daily basis.

As the director of the Education Program, Alain largely coordinated the Artibonite project, supported by MCC and aimed at coordinating local community members in an effort to document and report on the human rights situation in the region to the northwest of Port-au-Prince.<sup>9</sup> His work was supported by community organizers, who also participated in weekly meetings from time to time, with Marc being the most active participant. Community organizers, while considered staff, were unpaid volunteers with access to reimbursements for travel and other expenses. When funding for the Artibonite project came to an end, Alain focused his time on grant-writing to secure future project funds. Soft-spoken and long-winded, Alain had political ambitions, desiring to enter the electoral arena in the future. I often overheard him arguing with Guerline over last minute tasks or documents that needed finalizing and Guerline was never hesitant to express her frustrations regarding Alain's procrastination. As the office secretary, she was often in charge of the finalizing tasks of publication and grant submissions.

Pierre-Louis was the organization's in-house legal council. Spending much of her time outside the office, she came and went, taking various cases as they presented themselves. At times she worked with Kerline, the director of the Monitoring Program, taking complaints from walk-ins and investigating potential cases of human rights abuse. At other times, the two were in conflict as it was not always clear who was in charge of which cases and how follow-up tasks would be conducted. As they both had strong personalities, this usually meant they steered clear

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<sup>9</sup> The Artibonite is one of ten administrative and geographical regions of the country.

of one another. Kerline, a law student herself, focused her time on reports and training sessions, usually favoring issues tied to the status of Haitian women, such as cases of abuse and rape. As a large and, at times, aggressive woman, Kerline had a considerable presence at the organization. Her persistent teasing and demands of male members effectively allowed her to get a leg up in domains that are typically male dominated. While she was also generous and friendly, her moments of brooding and unhappiness reverberated and were felt by all. She was, in many ways, the most uncompromising of the group although most staff went out of their way to accommodate her expressed needs.

Theodore and Kerline, with desks next to one another in the large communal area downstairs, often coordinated with one another. When a series of training sessions on human rights aimed at university students was envisioned, the two of them worked together to coordinate and carry out the sessions. Although interns were always assigned to a particular program director, many of those assigned to either Theodore or Kerline served both in a flexible manner. This flexibility, however, was not free of conflict, particularly when Kerline needed her intern at times when they were busy assisting Theodore with another project or activity.

Theodore, like Kerline, was a law student at the State University.<sup>10</sup> At the HR Org, he was in charge of the program for Research and Documentation and often took charge of many of the recurring activities of the organization, most notably the monthly conference. Although all staff were expected to take part in the organization and execution of this event, it was Theodore who chose conference themes, contacted potential panelists, initiated writing the conference text,

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<sup>10</sup> It was not uncommon for individuals to remain students even despite no direct university involvement for a number of years. This was largely the result of an onerous requirement that students complete a lengthy thesis, referred to as a *Mémoire*. This thesis is comparable in length to a Master's thesis in the United States, although the requirement is tied to what might be considered equivalent to a Bachelor's degree. It was often difficult for students to gather sufficient support and advice from professors in choosing a topic and even more difficult to gather sufficient information and bibliographic sources. Most divisions of the State University also failed to adequately prepare students to complete such a project. Thus, many students languished in the not-quite-finished stage: they had completed all course and intern requirements but had not yet completed the *mémoire*.

and served as moderator. He also worked on projects aimed at coordinating tent camp leaders through meetings and training sessions, working directly with Marie in this task, the former intern-turned-staff social worker. Marie was also a university student, attending the social work program in the Social Sciences division of the State University. When the group collectively decided to undergo a formal research-based investigation, Theodore coordinated the interns in carrying out observational and interview-based fieldwork. Investigations of this sort were an occasional activity at the organization. During my time there, the group engaged in an investigation of public health facilities, a cholera vaccination program, and Martelly's eminent domain efforts aimed at rebuilding government buildings in the downtown area.<sup>11</sup> Theodore also served as one of the go-to staff members for various activities and tasks, especially those needing a public moderator or presentation of some sort.

Finally, Theodore was in charge of the organization's library, housing over 2,000 books, reports, newsletters, and newspapers. The library was open to the public, catering especially to university students, but was mainly a source of information for interns and other members working on various texts and reports. Interns were often tasked to write reports analyzing a particular aspect of society from a human rights angle and many searched out useful books and reports from the library. Not all reports of this sort were published and circulated more broadly although they were subject to collective editing, a practice common to most reports and documents produced by the organization.

In terms of language use, Kreyòl was the language of choice during all staff meetings and communication between staff members at the office and beyond. Members also adapted to

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<sup>11</sup> The group was concerned about those residing in the area and the fact that many landowners lack official papers to back up claims to ownership of buildings. Without legal papers, organization staff believed many would be left uncompensated and homeless. The problem of ownership is one that not only resulted from a long history of individuals setting up homes in empty spaces between, behind, and in front of other buildings, with no prior approval, as well as the result of a historically convoluted and difficult to navigate land tenure system.

occasional visits from donor organizations, representatives of which were often foreigners. Some organizations, such as MCC, made an effort to train all staff in Kreyòl. Others felt French was the only language necessary for its workers to learn and thus, HR Org members adapted as necessary, using French or enlisting the help of Karl, who spoke English relatively well. For written correspondence, members primarily followed the norm of French, given its status as aligned with a particular level of education and the respect it commanded. Letters inviting the media and partner organizations to HR Org activities were always in French, without exception. Reports intended for an audience that would include foreigners, such as foreign embassies or donor institutions, were likewise published in French. Reports, position papers (e.g., conference papers), meeting notes, newsletter articles, and training materials shifted between use of French and Kreyòl. The language choice largely depended on who initiated the writing in question and who the intended audience was to be. Choices between French and Kreyòl also varied over time; for instance, the weekly meeting notes were always done in French when I first began attending meetings, but six months later the norm had switched to Kreyòl.

Despite respect and use of French in most written documents, many staff members held nationalist and activist views regarding Kreyòl as an important part of Haitian culture and a necessary means through which to reach a larger Haitian audience. Thus, nearly all formal public speaking events, such as interviews for radio and television media, conference introductions, and similar activities, were carried out in Kreyòl. This linguistic choice largely went against a dominant norm in which French was used at most formal conferences and events. The director likewise utilized Kreyòl, even in his media interviews and commentaries, albeit a frenchified form of Kreyòl.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See the introductory “A Note on Language” in the front matter of this dissertation for more information regarding different variations of Kreyòl.

In this section, I have attempted to present an overview of the organization's history, its economic status, and the social dynamics and division of labor of members within the organization. In the following sections, I shift to specific examinations of the group's three primary tasks: *monitoring*, *analiz*, and *sensibilizasyon*. Although I attend to each as separate objectives, they are, in fact, interlinked in important ways, a point I make more clearly in the *sensibilizasyon* section.

### **The Dynamics of Monitoring**

By 10am Monday morning, Donald, Nadia, Marie and I sat waiting for the rest of the group to join us. The meeting could not begin with so few members present. So we waited. Seated at the large wooden table in the main public area, we waited for the empty seats to fill up. Theodore drifted in from the kitchen, a glass of water in one hand, a notebook and pen in the other. Kerline finished arranging her things at her desk and moved her own notebook and pen to a spot at the meeting table, immediately adjacent to her own desk. Instead of sitting down, she headed toward the kitchen. I followed her lead, in pursuit of coffee. In the kitchen, Jean sat at the lunch table finishing up his breakfast of spaghetti and ketchup. "When are you due?" Kerline teased, prodding and gesturing at his large round belly.

Voices drifted down from the stairs just outside the kitchen. Alain and two female interns chatted as they headed downstairs. Karl followed suit, immediately greeting everyone in a jovial manner. Guerline sat at her desk, while Félix hovered behind her, working to finalize the *monitoring* list that he would present at the meeting. The list conveniently organized the previous week's news into thematic categories, allowing for easy review when he would inevitably be called on to share. From the bottom of the stairs, Augustin could be heard working with the copy



machine upstairs, rushing to make enough copies of the meeting notes from the previous week's meeting. Everyone was to have a copy in front of them when she was called on to briefly review the meeting notes. The copier, as usual, was acting up. As I sat down in my seat, coffee in hand, Yves arrived. A volunteer since July 2012, he made his rounds greeting and joking with everyone before finally settling into a seat at the table.

After calling for stragglers to join, Donald pushed to start the meeting, asking for a volunteer moderator and another volunteer for the role of note taker. Although Theodore agreed to moderate, no one immediately vocalized a desire to take notes. This was typically a role reserved for interns, although volunteers such as Félix willingly took on the task as needed. Few enjoyed the role. Julien's name, a male intern studying social work at the State University, was mentioned as an option. Donald immediately protested, calling for a more gendered balance. Nadia would moderate and Julien could take notes, he suggested.

Nadia quickly took control in her no-nonsense manner, announcing the structure of the meeting, leaving it open for suggested alterations. As usual, no one objected. As the meeting got started, late-comers quickly and quietly joined the group. When Pierre-Louis floated in 30 minutes late, Junior jumped to assist by pulling an extra chair from the kitchen.

Within the office environment, participation in the organization's mission, goals, and activities was strongly encouraged. The everyday sociality of the group aided in this process as interns and newcomers were welcomed and drawn into the office culture through joking and teasing. Staff interacted regularly throughout the day with weekly Monday morning meetings and daily lunches serving as the key moments when staff were brought together as a group. Even despite the task-focused nature of Monday's meetings, the group generally maintained a balance between seriousness and friendly banter. Discussions over lunch more often than not veered in

the direction of light-hearted joking. Serious and heated discussions on a variety of topics also came up during lunch and were sometimes an extension of discussions that had taken place during meetings. The structure of weekly meetings rarely changed and nearly always proceeded with five distinct sections:

- *Rapèl*, Review of the previous week's meeting notes. The intern who held the role of secretary the previous week was called on to read through a formatted and printed copy of the notes.
- *Pataj enfòmasyon*, Sharing of information regarding the news of the previous week. The volunteer in charge of *monitoring* and collating news from the previous week, categorizing it into major themes, would give an overview of general and specific news items. Following this, a request was made to the group for any additional news not previously mentioned. All were welcome to contribute although elaborations beyond stating the details of the event or news in question were discouraged during this section. Analyzing and interpreting news items was a task reserved for the section that followed.
- *Analiz konjonkti*, Analysis of the situation/news. During this section, the floor was open to anyone wanting to offer an analysis of one or several of the news items previously presented. This portion of the meeting was often the longest and was in the form of an open debate with more or less control on the part of the moderator. Moderator control often depended on who this role fell to each week, with some paying closer attention to the time and others allowing a more organic discussion to take place.
- *Rapò ak planifikasyon*, Reporting and Planning. During this portion of the meeting, each member listed their individual tasks completed during the previous week, followed by a list of the tasks they planned to complete during the week ahead. The moderator choose the order of presentations by calling on individuals. All available members were expected to participate. Even small tasks were encouraged to be divulged to the group as a whole. The note taker was expected to follow-up with anyone absent at the meeting to get their individual task list in an effort to type up a complete list before the following week's meeting.
- *Enterè jeneral*, General Interest topics. Varying from week to week, this section of the meeting was reserved for discussion of organization-wide tasks and topics such as up-coming activities, issues relating to how the office functioned, reflections and reports on activities during the previous week, etc.

As can be seen from this overview, a significant amount of time was spent discussing organization specific tasks and activities but an equally significant, if not greater, amount of time was spent discussing and analyzing current events. The group's *monitoring* activities were

represented most prominently in the *Pataj Enfòmasyon* portion of meetings, with an intern or volunteer in charge of collating and presenting a text listing the different events and issues that had arisen during the previous week. Although this task was assigned to one individual, the *Pataj Enfòmasyon* discussion was a collective activity. Following presentation of the text, all members were called on to add information to previously mentioned items or provide the group with a synopsis of other events and issues not brought up during the presentation. Despite the open forum, however, comments were more-or-less limited to providing basic information as to the event or issue at hand. Interpretation, speculation, and elaboration on a topic were strongly discouraged. To be sure, it was not uncommon for members to slide into interpretation and analysis of an issue; however, other members, such as the moderator, often pointed out the importance of waiting until the *analiz* portion of the meeting before interpreting or discussing specific *monitoring* items.

The HR Org's task of *monitoring* Haitian society resembled that of the idealized watchdog role assumed to be the role of journalists and media institutions more generally. As others have noted, the media – sometimes referred to as the “Fourth Estate” – is often tasked to watch over and keep tabs on social happenings, particularly those pertaining to the role of government and the activities of government officials.<sup>13</sup> “In this conception, the press is expected to provide a conduit of communication between the government and the people, relaying all-important information about government to the citizens, and also to be a watchdog, or provide checks and balances” (Donavan 2011:1345). In the realm of development and in societies where NGOs have a prominent presence, organizations such as the HR Org, also view themselves as

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<sup>13</sup> See Donavan (2011), Louw (2005), Schultz (1998), Tannen (1998), and Whitten-Woodring (2009). As Donavan (2011) explains, the concept of the Fourth Estate derives from nineteenth century references to the press as another important institution seated in relation to government and the church. Applied to the American context, some of have argued that the press exists as the fourth estate alongside the three branches of government.

watchdogs, albeit self-appointed ones (Foucault 2001; McKee 2007; Schuller 2007). In a political proclamation made by Michel Foucault in 1984, taking on the role of a human rights advocate and activist, he stated: “Who appoints us, then? No one. And that is precisely what constitutes our right” (2001:474). He went on to argue in favor of this watch dog status as a “right” in reference to the role of international human rights organizations: “It is a duty of this international citizenship to always bring the testimony of people’s suffering to the eyes and ears of governments, sufferings for which it’s untrue that they are not responsible. The suffering of men must never be a silent residue of policy. It grounds an absolute right to stand up and speak to those who hold power” (2001:474-5). Foucault’s sentiment is also expressed in the UN’s definition of an NGO, albeit in a less politically passionate manner:

A non-governmental organization (NGO) is any non-profit, voluntary citizens’ group which is organized on a local, national or international level. Task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, NGOs perform a variety of services and humanitarian functions, bring citizens’ concerns to Governments, monitor policies and encourage political participation at the community level. (cited in Schuller 2007:27)

Indeed, HR Org members themselves viewed their role as one of monitoring and advocacy and saw it as one that could be tacitly compared with that of the media and journalists in Haiti. During one meeting, Nadia prompted a discussion of the role of media by pointing to the failure of journalists to take up their watchdog role. Referencing the manner in which journalist attention rapidly shifts from one topic to the next, as opposed to resting on one particular topic in an effort to understand it better, she stated:

*“Gen fèbles la nan sans sa a, ki pa jwe wòl li. Paske se pres la ki pou kenbe enfòmasyon an. Lapres ayisyen yon ti jan gaspiye enfòmasyon yo, kap kouri dèyè nouvo... Yo ta mèt mene yon ankèt apwofondi pou konnen ki kote dosye a ye, epi yo kite. Epi yo al dèyè nouvo bagay”*

There is a weakness in that way, of one not taking up their role. Because it’s the press that should hold on to information. The Haitian press, in some ways, wastes

information, runs after what's new... They should begin a deep investigation in order to know where the issue came from and then leave it. And then they go after new things.

Yves added that journalists were more concerned with “*chèche scoop*” (searching for the scoop) and stories that were “*chò*” (hot). Theodore concurred, describing the manner in which the Venezuelan government worked to control the media and communication, adding that “*komikasyon jwe yon wòl ekstrememan enpòtan nan sosyete a*” (communication plays an extremely important role in society) as it has the potential to be “*yon zanm*” (a weapon). The Haitian population, he argued, “*son pèp oprime*” (is an oppressed population) and the fact that “*medya pap chèche enfòmasyon pou ede moun konprann*” (the media is not searching for information to help people understand) means that “*you gen yon wòl yap jwe ki gen bò kote opresyon*” (they're playing a role that sits alongside oppression).<sup>14</sup> This collaborative discussion focused on the group's understanding of media as failing to take up their role. Instead of searching to understand how and why events happen, many argued, the Haitian media focused simply on reporting information and moving on to the next hot button topic. Left unstated, yet implied in the discussion, was a justification for the group's *monitoring* and *analiz* tasks, their role as self-appointed watchdogs. In this way, the argument as to the manner in which Haitian journalists failed to investigate and fully understand social happenings, indirectly justified their own *sensibilizasyon* activities. As Karl noted, it remains important to not just report information but “*pou nou chita sou yon komantè yo pou n wè, pou n wè kote yo sòti, ki sak kreye yo, ki sak pwovoke yo. Donk pou n rive sa ki bay yon pwoblèm. M panse ke: nou gen anpil work pou n fè... sosyete a gen anpil work pou l t fè*” (we need to sit on commentaries in order for us to see, for us

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<sup>14</sup> References to oppression here align with a popular analysis of Haitian culture and history by Haitian anthropologist, Jean Casimir. His book, titled “*La Culture Opprimée*” (The Oppressed Culture), is well read among State University students and Casimir continued, during the time of this research, to teach classes at the Department of Social Sciences.

to see where it's coming from, what created it, what provoked it. In order for us to know what the problem is. I think that: we have a lot of work to do... society has a lot of work to do).<sup>15</sup>

Although Karl generalized the “work” as something attributed to all Haitian society, his initial statements drew on “*nou*” (we), or the shortened form of “*n*,” inclusively referencing the group as, in some ways, responsible for taking up the task he references.

Despite its existence as a human rights organization, the events and issues that interested members on a weekly or daily basis were more often focused on a broad definition of human rights in relation to development. To be sure, members regularly mobilized rights discourse in pointing to various rights that were at stake in a given topic of conversation, or rights that were denied or compromised. Indeed, many of the theme headings used in the *monitoring* text included keywords with clear relevance to conventional human rights themes: “Justice,” “Insecurity,” and “Protests.” Other themes, however, were less clearly tied to human rights, including headings such as: “Politics,” “Floods,” “Fires,” “Accidents,” and “International news.” Members often spoke of “*enjistis*” (injustice), “*enpinite*” (impunity), and “*dwa moun*” (human rights) more generally, pointing to conventional human rights themes as tied to justice and legal concerns. At other times, references to rights were less clearly tied to these issues. For example, “*dwa lojman*” (housing rights) or “*dwa foncyè*” (land rights) were referenced when discussing the status and plight of tent camps residents following the 2010 earthquake and land disputes that had arisen during reconstruction efforts. At another meeting, the group discussed changes to the national taxation process, with Donald and Karl referencing this as “*dwa fiskal*” (fiscal rights). At yet another meeting, during a discussion of the need to purchase more cups for serving guests, Guerline proposed investing in larger glass cups as opposed to the small disposable plastic cups they usually relied on. She stated that it was important to “*pa vyole dwa alimantasyon moun*”

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<sup>15</sup> Karl's use of “work” instead of the Kreyòl equivalent, *travay*, draws on his knowledge of English.

(not violate people's right to nourishment). By not offering enough to drink at events, she argued, the organization was "*aloral nou ye*" (just talk).<sup>16</sup> Here Guerline pointed out that the group could be accused, as a human rights organization, of being hypocrites if they did not provide adequate nourishment to guests.

Yet, despite the regular mobilization of rights discourse and claims of injustice, there was little effort to distinguish which issues were relevant to the group's *monitoring* efforts based on their general objections aimed at justice and human rights versus a general interest in keeping tabs on the state of the country more generally. The organization's brochure also pointed to broader interests that encompass economic, social, and cultural rights alongside political and civil rights.<sup>17</sup> Referencing the history of the organization and its early attention to political violence throughout 1991-1994, the brochure points to the manner in which priorities were inscribed in the organization's mandate:

*Vu le contexte dans lequel elle a vu le jour, la [Platform] s'était intéressée surtout aux droits civils et politiques. Mais, compte tenu de l'indivisibilité des Droits Humains, l'Assemblée générale de 1992, a jugé nécessaire d'embrasser la problématique dans toute son intégralité. Depuis, les droits économiques, sociaux et culturels sont inscrits dans notre programme annuel comme prioritaires*

Given the context in which it emerged, the Platform was especially interested in civil and political rights. However, realizing the indivisibility of Human Rights, in 1992 the General assembly found it necessary to embrace the issue in its entirety. Since then, economic, social and cultural rights have been enshrined in our annual program as priorities.

The general nature of the organization's mandate of addressing political, civil, economic, social, and cultural rights practically translated on a day-to-day basis into an interest in anything

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<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 6 for a discussion of *aloral* and its political significance at the time this statement was made in April 2013.

<sup>17</sup> This language, and a division between "political and civil" rights versus "economic, social, and cultural" rights mimics the division made by the UN in the two covenants published and ratified as part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: the "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights" and the "International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights."

newsworthy. Indeed, the group rarely engaged questions pertaining to what “counted” as worthy of discussion from a human rights lens and members generally stretched the umbrella of human rights-related issues to encompass any current event topic, scandal, political crisis, or societal issue of concern.

The group’s attention to human rights as a formalized discourse and guiding principle follows global trends in which human rights legislation and advocacy dramatically increased, especially in the Global South, following the Cold War.<sup>18</sup> As Mark Goodale (2009:7) argues, “this dramatic emergence of international and transnational human rights meant that for the first time ‘human rights’ became a pervasive part of the logic of political and social resistance, particularly in parts of the world that had been the sites of the most intensive transnational development work, which was reborn under the sign of human rights and subsequently marked by a new kind of moral urgency.” In this way, human rights “has achieved a kind of global ascendancy as the discourse of political and moral accountability” (Goldstein 2007:50).

As many scholars of human rights have pointed out, most advocacy programs around the world tend to approach the question of rights from a legalistic standpoint, calling on universalized legislation and, consequently, a universalized discourse of rights (Riles 2006). A great deal of scholarly attention has been paid to the universality of human rights legislation and its application around the world (Goodale 2009; Goodale & Merry 2007). An important corollary to understanding this universal applicability, however, is an understanding of how ideas and discourses about human rights get taken up and used in particular ways and for particular interests. Despite the universal claims embedded in human rights discourses, the ways in which the discourse gets mobilized, adapted, and rearticulated represent what Sally Engle Merry (2005,

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<sup>18</sup> Human rights as a discourse has a much more extensive history and could be traced back to, for instance, France’s 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (*Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen*). See Arendt (2009) for a more extensive discussion of the Rights of Man.



2006) terms a “vernacularization.” In this way, local uses of human rights discourses can, at times, seem to be a direct contradiction from the perspective of an international human rights community (Goldstein 2007; Goodale 2007). For the social actors involved, however, such discourses are but one of many logics through which they express their interests and pose challenges to social and economic problems (Goodale 2007). Given the aspirational and normative capacities embedded in human rights discourses, they exist both alongside other discourses such as “development,” “security,” and “democracy” and often times overlap with them (Rajagopal 2007:280-281).<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, HR Org members’ approach to human rights falls in line with understandings of development in a broader sense; that is, human rights as an important part of working toward positive social change. Although members viewed their activities and interests as circumscribed within a general category of justice as pertaining to the legal system, they also presupposed the degree to which their own activities of *monitoring*, *analiz*, and *sensibilizasyon* would assist in the direction of positive social change. With most of the organization’s activities resting in the realm of discursive advocacy, as opposed to offering material resources or services to the general population, many members strongly believed that such efforts to would pressure those in charge to make positive changes.

The HR Org’s approach to human rights in relation to development mirrors arguments made by economist Amartya Sen regarding the relationship between the expansion of freedoms and development: “Development can be seen...as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy” (1999:3). Such a view necessitates a broader definition of development than offered by conventional associations of it narrowly focused on economic growth. According to

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<sup>19</sup> Assumptions regarding the inherent relationship between democracy and human rights will be taken up in the next chapter.

Sen (2006:160), “freedom is both (1) the primary objective, and (2) the principal means of development.” Even economic development can be understood through this lens, he argues, since poverty itself often leads to a lack of substantive freedoms, particularly in making a person “helpless prey in the violation of other kinds of freedom” (1999:6). He further explains that

What people can positively achieve is influenced by economic opportunities, political liberties, social powers, and the enabling conditions of good health, basic education, and the encouragement and cultivation of initiatives. The institutional arrangements for these opportunities are also influenced by the exercise of people’s freedoms, through the liberty to participate in social choice and in making of public decisions that impel the progress of these opportunities. (5)

Thus, although others have attempted draw a clean line between development and human rights objectives – as pertaining to economic improvement versus legalistic justice (e.g. Bornstein & Redfield 2010:6) – what becomes clear from organizations such as the HR Org is that such distinctions in practice are not nearly as easy to make, nor do local populations always recognize such distinctions themselves.<sup>20</sup> Serving as self-appointed watchdogs, then, members not only viewed their objectives as pressuring those in charge to take action, make changes, and uphold existing laws in regards to specific issues or violations, but were also motivated in the belief that their *sensibilizasyon* and advocacy efforts would assist in bringing about development or improvements in the future. In this way, the group’s lack of vocalized justifications for attending to specific scandals or events not conventionally recognized as human rights issues, is not a contradiction or a loose application of human rights, but rather corresponds with their general approach to development as a human right itself.<sup>21</sup>

Recognizing and understanding the manner in which HR Org members mobilized human rights discourses and viewed their role in society, allows us to better understand the significance

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<sup>20</sup> This is also true of the Youth Org. See Chapter 4.

<sup>21</sup> This conception also appears to align with Englund’s (2006:31) references to the concept “rights-based development,” although his use of this concept remains underexplored.

of their interactions and activities. The universalized moral logic tied to human rights discourses should not necessarily be understood as a primary motivation in drawing on such discourses. Instead, we need to look at the situated interests of speakers and the manner in which rights discourses emerge within specific contexts and interactions. Indeed, as Harri Englund (2006:47) argued, “people generally articulate, claim, and resist human rights in real-life situations. Moral or cultural relativism does not need to underlie the view that the understandings of human rights are particular.” We should not, for instance, assume that an HR Org member’s use of human rights discourse is necessarily tied to it as a moral imperative – as the right stance to take for ethical reasons. While this may indeed be the case in many instances, other interests such as political partisanship also underlie particular interpretations and attributions of responsibility regarding references to human rights abuses. In this section, I have dealt exclusively with HR Org members’ objective of *monitoring*, highlighting the manner in which they understood their human rights goals as linked to ideas about development and social change. In order to better understand the manner in which members interpreted and translated their *monitoring* task into advocacy work, however, it remains necessary to attend more closely to the deliberative practices of the group. It is through their *analiz* debates, I argue, that members co-constructed shared understandings of injustice and blame.

### **The Dynamics of *Analiz***

Once members felt satisfied that they had collected all newsworthy *monitoring* items, their attention at weekly meetings shifted to the objective of *analiz*. At that point, the moderator opened the floor for the *Analiz Konjunkti* portion in which members were encouraged to express opinions, present interpretations, and speculate on specific topics of interest. Not all *monitoring*

items were discussed. Instead, *analiz* discussions and debates were limited to only those topics of interest to group members. Often times, members focused on two or three major themes or events during the course of one *analiz* discussion. Hot-button topics such as political scandals – or, as arose a number of times, rape scandals involving high level government officials – elicited passionate opinions and an eagerness to discuss. Often, this particular portion of the meeting would last well over an hour or two. Even when short on time, members never neglected their *analiz* objectives; there was always a portion of the meeting set aside for analyzing current events as this was seen to be a crucial part of meetings.

Discussions were relatively informal and metadiscursively intended to remain open to different viewpoints. Donald, in particular, encouraged everyone's participation. Most members afforded one another a degree of respect when speaking, although hierarchies within the organization were embedded in the form and content of discussions. Despite a degree of hierarchy, authoritative roles, such as discussion moderator, shifted with every meeting. As the director, Donald had a prominent presence within the organization and he was granted the floor with more ease and fewer objections during discussions of more controversial topics. His contributions, however, did not dominate conversations nor did he have an aggressive personality; instead, his participation at meetings was sometimes punctuated by vocalizations of a passionate commitment to the topic at hand. His presence, in general, reassembled a patient father-figure, allowing others to voice their opinions while waiting his turn. Once gaining access to the floor, his utterances often included a collection of corrections and clarifications.

From the perspective of the group members, debates focusing on what happened, why, and who was responsible served an important role; it was a bridge between their *monitoring* objectives and their *sensibilizasyon* ones. In many cases, Donald expressed a genuine desire to

solicit everyone's position on a given issue prior to making any public statements to the press. He often justified the *analiz* portion of meetings as a necessary step in the process of hashing out the organization's stance on issues prior to media interviews. Disagreement and debate were believed to facilitate greater understanding of current events as the group pooled information, perspectives, and interpretations of events. While this was the stated ideal, in practice, the group often remained divided on the most controversial issues, such as the school corruption scandal hinted at in the introduction to this chapter. Debates rarely resulted in clear-cut stances, and Donald was often called on by journalists and others to make statements with little or no chance of consulting with the rest of the group. Disagreement, while failing to allow the group to reach their ideal of consensus, was valued and productive, as will be demonstrated in this section and the ones that follow.

Group members viewed their task of *analiz* as an important step in translating scattered and often ambiguous information into clearly defined political stances and calls for action. Obtaining a more in-depth understanding of events and issues, in this way, put the group in a better position to educate broader Haitian audiences and advocate for specific actions or changes. At the previously mentioned meeting at which Nadia expressed ideas as to the failure of journalists in taking up their watchdog role, her comments had come in response to an analysis on the part of Karl. The entire discussion began at one Monday morning meeting as Donald, taking up the role of moderator, called for members to collaborate in providing the group with information with which they could analyze. Donald asserted that, "*yon enfòmasyon chase lòt enfòmasyon...evènman chase evènman*" (information chases other information...events chase events) in the news, pointing to the manner in which information presented through the media unfolded rapidly and shifted in a similar manner. Indirectly, the entire discussion implied a need

for the group to continue engaging in their *monitoring* and *analiz* activities in an effort to assist the general population in understanding what was happening in society. Karl's analysis speculated that many Haitians were too busy dealing with the misery of fulfilling their daily needs, such as searching for food, that they were unable to focus on more important, national issues that directly affected them. He queried the group, "*eskè se pa misè d' une part se misè popilasyon an ki fè ki li pa gen memwa de listwa*" (is it not misery that plays a part, it's the population's misery that makes it not remember history). He also postulated that there seemed to be a degree of manipulation on the part of those in power, wishing to distract the population. As he stated: "*Si gon evènman ki ka bay pwoblèm, ki pa an favore yo, pou fè yon fason kreye yon lòt*" (If there's an event that creates a problem, that's not in his [political actor] favor, he would find a way to create another [newsworthy event]). This method of distracting the population through manipulation, he argued, keeps people from knowing what is really going on. The general population was understood as not having access to important pieces of information, as either in a position to be easily distracted or too busy with other, more immediate concerns. Members believed that many Haitians would not be able to make the important contextual and historical connections necessary for fully understanding what was going on. In this way, members indirectly appointed themselves as "experts" in the field of human rights, one asserted in relation to an uneducated and distracted public. This role in relation to a larger Haitian population also worked to legitimate their activities and objectives (Mosse 2011).

Karl's indications as to the importance of the group's *analiz*, and *sensibilizasyon* objectives parallel Donald's desire for the organization to be "*itil piblik la*" (useful to the

public).<sup>22</sup> This argument also arose amid the group's discussion of the school corruption scandal, during which Donald stated:<sup>23</sup>

*Se nou menm ki kapab ede moun lakay nou konprann bagay la pi byen. Se chak moun tou yap repete de bagay nan lari a ki trè konfiz... Donk moun yo pap atire atansyon sou aspè estrikyèl. Yo pou nou pa: pou nou pa gen- abòde kesyon an menm jan nenpòt ki lòt moun ki pa genyen chans pou li, li dokiman yo epi tout pa gen chans ki pa gen kapasite pou pou al fè rechèch alòske nou menm nou gen kapasite pou sa.*

It's us that are able to help people around us understand things better. Everyone is repeating things in the street and it's confusing the matter... Thus, people aren't paying attention to the structural aspects. They make us not, they make us not have- tackle the question in the same way that other people who don't have the opportunity to read the documents, and not everyone has the chance, has the ability to go search information as we ourselves have the ability to do.

Given that much of the information encountered by HR Org members emanated from mass media sources, such as radio, television, and news publications, as well as word of mouth, the information available to members and contributing to their understandings and interpretations of events was necessarily ambiguous, incomplete, and partial. Despite this, members eagerly analyzed even those current events that had next to no information available to the public, speculating as to what had happened and who or what was to blame. To be sure, not every current event was of interest to the group; however, in the case of political scandals, the group did not hesitate to take up the topic regardless of the extent of information available. In general, group members worked to identify what Roy Rappaport (1993) has termed "troubles," outlining them as injustices and interpreting cause, effect, and responsibility from there. Understandings and interpretations, more often than not, were situated in relation to individual and group interests, particularly in terms of political alignments. As others have noted, understanding human rights and evoking rights discourses are necessarily political acts, even despite to

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<sup>22</sup> This was expressed during an interview with Donald in late May 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Karl's metadiscursive reflections took place during a weekly meeting in early January of 2013 while Donald's came about during a late April 2013 meeting.

depoliticize, or mask the political implications of such efforts, given their existence as superseding individual governments or situational contexts (Englund 2006). Political discourses and human rights discourses, in this way, often go hand in hand. “All over the world, political discourse is increasingly imbued with the language of rights, universal, inalienable, inviolable” (Glendon 1991:12). Thus, the mobilization of universal human rights often conceals highly particular interests (Englund 2006:194).

Within the organization and through public interventions, members clearly took on political roles in society despite the manner in which the HR Org’s status stood apart from formal political institutions. Their status as apolitical and their situated position residing outside formal political arenas provided members with a moral high ground from which they assessed and critiqued state institutions, actors, and political processes. Instead of directly engaging in formal politics, members sought to influence the political realm via nongovernmental means. “Being able to have influence on government is precisely a condition of being independent from the party political process. The possibility of political influence is predicated on the condition of autonomy from ‘politics’” (Yarrow 2011:38). In this way, the HR Org, although not a ratified actor within formal political institutions, attempted to further ideological and political projects via institutional and discursive spaces carved out by the members themselves (44). They were, in this way, self-appointed watchdogs with particular interests and political commitments. The mobilization of apolitical claims regarding injustice and universal human rights also need to be understood as based on politically situated interpretations, as will be seen in the next section. Despite claims to the contrary, the collective engagements of the group were highly political, seeking to contest, challenge and transform power relations. It was through their use of rights discourse and their peripheral position in relation to political institutions and formal political



arenas, that group members worked to depoliticize the politically partisan nature of their situated interpretations.

In the sections that follow, I continue a focus on the group's *analiz* objectives by presenting and analyzing the school corruption discussion in more detail. I argue that this discursive activity represents a blame game: a means through which members co-constructed shared understandings of injustice and blame. Beyond this blame game aspect of *analiz*, the group also engaged other interpretive frames through which they understood current events. In particular, I examine discursive calls for the embodiment of insecurity, the use of comparisons, and the organization of events and issues within narratives of decline as other examples of how the group discursively co-constructed interpretations of events. The group's *analiz* activities, then, were the primary means through which members socialized one another regarding injustices, cause and effect, declining conditions, and allocations of responsibility. Finally, I end the chapter by shifting to focus on the group's *sensibilizasyon* efforts. Here I point to the ways in which the group's situated interpretations and politically partisan stances, emerging from their *analiz* activities, did not remain within the confines of the organization itself. Instead, members disseminated those interpretations and stances to a wider audience through various activities and strategies.

### **The School Corruption Debate**

Allocating and assigning responsibility for social problems and events was an important unstated objective of the HR Org meeting discussions. Not only did members seek to understand the cause and effect of what happened regarding the “troubles” they identified, but also sought to outline the consequences and place blame on those they viewed as responsible. As James

Laidlaw (2010:147) points out, “interpretation of not only why but actually what has happened is inseparable from, because partly constituted by...judgments about responsibility for it.”

As was hinted at in the introduction to this chapter, Yves opened the school corruption scandal discussion with his interpretation of responsibility regarding the events in question. The discussion was focused on news of the arrest of one particular school director, said to have illegally received funding via the government’s program offering free schooling for young children. Officially, the program was referred to as PSUGO (*Programme de scolarisation universelle, gratuite et obligatoire*/Program for universal, free, and obligatory schooling). Most people, however, referenced the program simply as “*lekòl gratis*” (free schooling). Despite a constitutional guarantee since the 1986-87 constitution was drafted, few previous leaders had actively attempted to make the guarantee a reality. One of Martelly’s campaign promises was to implement a free school program and, once elected, he appeared to make efforts toward that goal. His attempts, however, were not without criticism with regard to the manner in which he planned to fund and implement the program.<sup>24</sup> At the time of the discussion, the program had barely gotten off the ground and only included a limited number of grade levels. Although only one particular school director had been arrested at the time, many believed that this was merely the tip of the iceberg and that significant corruption remained, especially on the part of school directors and local inspectors. Corruption, in this context, was understood to be happening in relation to the distribution of government funds and the accountability of school directors, or the manner in which schools reported accurate numbers of students. It was said that many of the

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<sup>24</sup> A major obstacle to any leader wishing to implement such a program is private versus public school divide in the country. Only approximately 15% of the country’s schools are public, the rest remaining in the hands of private individuals which are often run like businesses. Attempting to sidestep this division, Martelly’s program, and Preval’s attempts before him, was said to offer subsidies to both private and public schools so as not to limit beneficiaries.

schools reportedly benefiting from government subsidies either did not exist or had more students reported as enrolled than were actually enrolled.

Yves believed that efforts to arrest those “at the bottom,” holding them responsible for corruptly profiting from the free schooling program, were both important and necessary. As Yves argued, many people were taking advantage of weaknesses in the system (*feblès*) and a lack of government control. This, he argued, allowed people to utilize government funds for their own personal benefit. His argument supported the targeting of what Theodore labeled as “*ti chat*” (little cats) as a means to combat and discourage corruption of this sort. Theodore countered this interpretation stating that the problem was in fact much bigger than a few corrupt individuals at the bottom. From his view, the problems stemmed from higher up, by way of government officials and institutions, and the manner in which they designed and implemented the program. It’s not the “*ti chat*” (little cats) that are to blame, he argued, but rather “*gwo chat*” (big cats). Referencing the program as “*gagòt*” (a mess) he went on: “*kesyon kòmanse depi nan palè nasyonal*” (the problems began from its conception in the national palace). With opposing positions staked out, the debate quickly heated up. Others readily contributed to the discussion, chiming in with their opinions. Marc, agreeing with Theodore, stated that the program, in general, “*mal chita*” (was poorly run) and that it had been “*mal ateri*” (poorly implemented).<sup>25</sup>

The majority of the group worked to convince Yves that the problem was inherent in the structure of the program, thus, the responsibility for problems should rest with the president. As Nadia stated, “*son pwoblèm strikti ki gen ladann*” (it’s a problem within the structure). From this viewpoint, a program so poorly structured could not possibly give positive results and would actually encourage corruption at the bottom. Alain argued that the president’s move to distribute lists of participating schools to corresponding *kazèk* (locally elected neighborhood

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<sup>25</sup> His use of the term “*ateri*” here relates to the discussion of it in Chapter 6.

representatives) was “*koms li lage kazèk yo nan yon batay avèk direktè lekòl yo*” (as if [the president] had placed the kazèks in a position to battle with the school directors). Theodore urged the group to “*konprann byen reyalyte ekonomik*” (have a good understanding of the economic reality) within which Haitians live on a daily basis. In some ways, this comment implies a sympathetic stance to those behaving in corrupt ways, explaining it as stemming from their economically poor situations.

Guerline disagreed with this attempt to place all the blame on Martelly and other government officials. In fact, she argued, the program started under Préval and was revealed to have flaws (*fòt*) at that time too: “*Kwa ki te gen estrikti li te gen tout bagay, li te gen fòt ladann wi*” (It had structure, it had everything, it had problems within it). “*Se tout leta gen fòt wi*” (Every part of the state has problems) responded Donald in a half-joking, half-serious manner.

Donald took the floor, clarifying and elaborating on points made by previous speakers. He explained the EPT (*Education pour tous*) program, its aims, and the government’s obligation to expand the availability of schooling more generally as well as eliminate illiteracy across the entire population, not just among children.<sup>26</sup> He pointed out that the free schooling program publicized by the president was in fact a program financially supported by the International Development Bank and the World Bank. The president’s move to tax all money transfers into the country under the guise of supporting the free schooling program, in Donald’s eyes, succeeded in confusing the population regarding where the money was actually coming from and where the collected taxes were actually going: “*Kounye a ou pa konnen nan ki nan kòb sa a. Èske li sòt agoch èske sòt pa adwat? Donk yo vin kreye yon konfizyon*” (Right now, you don’t from where

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<sup>26</sup> The Education for All Movement arose at the “World Education Forum” held in Dakar, Sénégal in 2000. Donald referenced an agreement to reach six specific goals by 2015. This agreement was made by those governments who were present at the meeting (164 total) of which Haiti was among them.

the money is coming from. Does it come from the left, does it come from the right?).<sup>27</sup> The group's duty, he went on to argue, was to help people understand the situation more clearly, to avoid creating more confusion, and to circulate information that the majority of the population do not otherwise have access to.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the points made by Donald and others, Yves continued to argue in favor of an interpretation of events that dispersed the blame as opposed to consolidating it in one place. Again returning to his original point, he attempted to redirect the conversation back toward school directors as shouldering some of the blame. Everyone already knows what Donald was telling them, he stated, the problem is rather that people are dishonestly signing an agreement, a contract with the government to provide schooling for children and then not following through with the agreement:

*Nèg la gen lekòl la. Wal chèche lokal, ou pa wè l. Pandan setan li nan pwogram nan, lap pran kòb la pa le fè ke leta ap gaspiye yon kòb. Men ou menm antanke sitwayen, ou asepte pou foure tèt ou nan yon bagay pandansetan ou pa ka jistifye l. Sa mal.*

A guy has a school. You go to check it out, but you can't find it. While he's registered in the program, he's taking money, making the state waste money. You, as a citizen, take part in something while at the same time you can't justify participation. That's bad.

Here Yves presents a hypothetical case study of a school director who claims to have a registered school which was later revealed to be non-existent. He pointed to how the director knowingly took the money under false pretenses and thus wasted the government's money. He then shifts to put his audience in the place of the director in question by using "ou" (you) and pointed out that the director, a citizen, took something dishonestly without justification. By placing HR Org

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<sup>27</sup> Martelly's taxation efforts were an attempt to harness the remittance economy largely supported by Haitian diasporans living in the US, Canada, and France. See Orozco (2006) for more information on the remittance economy in Haiti.

<sup>28</sup> See the previous section for a quote from Donald drawn from this interaction.

members in the position of the corrupt school director, as he does through this shift in pronoun usage, he subtly calls on members to recognize the action as morally wrong (Wortham 1992). Going after those at the bottom, he reasoned, would discourage others from engaging in similar behavior in the future.

The debate continued back-and-forth, with Donald asserting, “*fòk nou fikse de responsabilite*” (we need to fix responsibility). Moments later, pushing further on the topic of responsibility, he argued “*mwen pa dakò avèk tout moun responsab la*” (I’m not okay making everyone responsible). After repeated attempts to speak, Guerline jumped in:<sup>29</sup>

*Mezanmi, gon seri de bagay si nou pa di yo jan yo ye a bagay yo pap janm chanje vre non... Gon bagay lontan granmoun te konn fè lè yo voye al achte. Ou gen pou ou di men konbyen ou achte tan ou achte tan men konbyen kòb ou tounen. Gen moun ki trouve li veksan men se yon pratik nou te dwe kenbe. Moun nan konnen li gen lajan nan men l lap depanse... son pratik ki te genyen men depi yon moun fè sa ou wè l kòm si ou- ou (?) ou di l se vòle. Men se te yon bon pratik li te ye.*

You guys, there are a number of things, if we don’t tell them like they are, they’ll never really change... There’s something adults used to do a long time ago when they sent someone to buy something for them. You had to say how many you bought, how much you spent, and how much money you brought back. There are people who find this to be annoying but it’s a practice we should hold on to. People would be aware of the money in their hands, that they’ll be spending it... it’s an old practice but when someone does it, they’re seen as if they’re (?), as if you’re calling them a thief. But it was a good system.

As Guerline points out, in the past, when an adult or older person sent someone to make a purchase for them, it was expected that the person engaged with the task would give a report as to how much was spent and how much was left over. Today, she argued, people are bothered by attempts at transparency of this sort, as if it indicated they are being accused of stealing. This, in her view, was a problem of personal responsibility that needed to be changed on an interpersonal level. Yves agreed, adding that the president and those responsible for government programs

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<sup>29</sup> See Transcript 2.0 in the section that follows for placement of Guerline’s comment in relation to her interaction with other members.

could not be everywhere, all the time. They could not, he implied, oversee the program on the ground at all times.

Alain continued objecting to this interpretation, arguing that the president knew the problems existed, the problems were publicly denounced, and yet the program went ahead as planned anyway: “*Pwiske nèg yo ki chaje kap mennen pwogram nan yo kòmanse pwogram nan nan yon dinamik dezòd, yo komanse nan yon bagay ki pa klè donk sa vle di yo menm yo enplike nan dezòd la*” (As long as the guys in charge of the program implement it with a dynamic full of problems, they’re beginning with something that’s not clear, thus that means that they themselves are implicated in the problems). The arrests of directors, he concluded, could not possibly accomplish anything substantive (*pap abouti anyen*). Yves tried again, clarifying his stance:<sup>30</sup>

*Nou konnen mwen menm m pap defann program nan parapò a jan yo fè l. M denonse l. Men m di w si jounen jodi a e mwen menm, menm m gen kouzen m m di misye pa antre paske m konnen son nèg ki manfouben men m di l pa antre paske yo ka arete l, depi ou pran kòb la, yo ka arete w. Sa senp.*

You all know me, I’m not defending the program in terms of how they’re doing it. I denounce it. But I’m telling you that if today I, myself, I have a cousin, I tell the guy ‘don’t get involved.’ You see, if I know he is the type that is at ease, but I tell him ‘don’t get involved’ because they can arrest him. ‘When you take the money, they can arrest you.’ It’s simple.

Alain responded by trying to explain the problem in metaphorical terms:

*Ou estime gen yon pye bwa la se li ki bay kalite fri sa yo ki pa bon an. Ou amize w toutan wap jete fri yo wap atake fri yo epi ou kite pye bwa. M di bon non depi m pwan fri yo pa gen lòt fri kap tounen ankò pa gen lòt fri kap tounen ankò. M pwan fri yo pye bwa rete, ou pa fè anyen.*

You have a tree that gives a quality of fruit that’s not good. You have a good time throwing out the fruit, you attack the fruit and then you leave the tree as it is. I say ‘well, as long as I take the fruit no other fruit will return again, no other fruit will return.’ I took the fruit, but the tree remains. You didn’t do anything.

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<sup>30</sup> See Transcript 2.2 in the section that follows for more interactional context through which this comment emerged.

As Alain reasons, through use of the fruit tree metaphor, attacking what is produced by a tree, will not solve the problem in any significant way. Here he aligns those at the bottom, taking advantage of the problem, as the fruit. In contrast, the tree, or the root of the problem, is aligned with the government's poor design and implementation efforts. His implication is that if the tree produces bad fruit, then it was the tree itself that needs to be taken care of, not the fruit.

With the discussion centered on the question of responsibility, the group debated, who was really to blame in this situation? School directors? Inspectors? The government? The president? Theodore, Alain and Donald continued to take a stance in opposition to Yves' position that those at all levels were to blame. Yves repeatedly asserted that his position was not in support of the program, a stance that indirectly indexed his lack of support for the president. He argued that he agreed with the critiques others had made of the program. Yet he pushed for some recognition of blame on the part of those taking the money in a dishonest manner. With support from Guerline, Yves expressed a view that individuals at the bottom also had to take personal responsibility for their corrupt behavior.

After nearly 30 minutes of intense debate, Alain tried to make Yves understand the opposing interpretation: "*Vòlè te kòmanse depi anlè, si ou kòmanse mare yo kontrè fè w ta kòmanse mare gwo vòlè jiskaskè ou mare ti vòlè piti a*" (The thief began on high, if you begin arresting them, you know they need to begin by arresting the big thieves up until you get to the small ones).<sup>31</sup> "Why can't you do it the other way around?" Yves countered. "Because it's from above where the source starts" Alain responded. Exasperated, Yves summed up the debate: "*Ou pito kraze strikti la olye plis pral pa anba*" (You'd rather destroy the structure instead going from the bottom). "*Strikti pa bon. Strikti ladann li menm li pa bon an*" (The structure is not good.

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<sup>31</sup> This comment is represented in Transcript 2.3 of the section that follows.



The structure itself, it's not good) replied Valerie, a young female intern. After more than thirty minutes of intense debate, Alain once again performed his moderator role, jumping in to bring it to an end. The discussion slowly concluded with joking about Alain's knowledge of the program's name, with him admitting he had not actually realized the acronym for the program was PSUGO. Others teased him about this and the conversation moved on to other topics.<sup>32</sup>

### **Discursive Blame Game**

As can be seen in the school corruption discussion, HR Org members spent a great deal of time and energy debating how to properly assign responsibility for identified "troubles." Who is to blame for the corruption taking place within the government's free schooling program? Was it opportunistic individuals taking part? Or government officials who designed and implemented the program? On the one hand Yves and Guerline argued for recognition of personal responsibility of those individuals engaging in corrupt behaviors. On the other hand, members like Alain, Theodore, and Donald viewed such an allocation of blame as merely a symptom of a larger "disorder" (Rappaport 1993:297). From their view, until the root of the problem was taken care of, the symptoms would not go away. Alain's fruit tree metaphor directly indicates the manner in which he views individual acts of corruption by "*ti chat*" as symptoms of a larger disorder caused by "*gwo chat*." The debate centered on cause and effect in relation to attributions of responsibility; it represents a blame game through which members negotiated and co-constructed shared understandings of injustice and culpability.

"The allocation of responsibility is...a centrally important aspect of social meaning constructed in interactional processes" (Irvine & Gal 1993:4). Indeed, "our routine, everyday interaction is shot through with, and its course is pervasively affected by, our ongoing judgments

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<sup>32</sup> This portion of the discussion is represented in Transcript 2.3 as well.

about whose presence or absence, whose actions or omissions, whose words or silences, have contributed in which ways to things turning out as they are doing, and by our assigning responsibility accordingly” (Laidlaw 2010:146). As such, it remains important to analyze the ways in which individuals negotiate questions of responsibility and how that negotiation process unfolds interactionally. As advocates for the respect of human rights in Haitian society, HR Org members were embedded in a global discourse of ethics, one that was squarely situated on questions of both moral and legal obligations regarding state or government interactions in relation to a larger national population. But the group’s understandings and deployment of human rights discourses were necessarily anchored in particularities of context, including individual interests and subjectivities as well as interactional contexts. Thus, actual understandings of the moral and ethical implications of human rights as deployed through discourse and interaction were necessarily vernacularized or filtered through a context-based set of logics and interests that may or may not differ from uses of human rights discourses elsewhere. More precisely, debates about blame were necessarily engaged through the lens of individual and group interests.

Despite the group’s commitment to the law and human rights, their political commitments often took the lead in assessing issues and taking a stance on them. Their ethical stances, thus, were necessarily inseparable or indistinguishable from their political interests. Their stance in relation to responsibility aligns strongly with a general contempt for Martelly and other government officials. The contempt and distrust most members felt toward Martelly became a lens through which they interpreted current events. “Just as the adequacy of explanations of causality depends on the interests that motivate an inquiry, so attributions of responsibility depend upon the interests...that characterize human interactions: reactive attitudes

such as gratitude and resentment, indignation, approbation, guilt, shame, pride, hurt feelings, forgiveness, or love” (Laidlaw 2010:147). As the example hints at, members worked to interpret Martelly’s intentions and motivations in the process of attempting to assign responsibility to him. His behavior was suspect, for group members, not simply as a result of poorly designing and implementing the free schooling program, but also in the way he reportedly turned a blind eye to publicly expressed concerns regarding the design and implementation process. In his discussion of funding for the program, Donald references confusion as to which source of funding was actually supporting the program. His comments also imply corruption higher up, especially regarding where the money collected from remittance taxes was actually going.

Yves’ and Guerline’s insistence on spreading out the blame to include those on the receiving end of government support, conflicted with the majority of the group’s tendency to lay blame at the feet of prominent government officials. The group’s response to his stance is revealing as many, if not most of the vocal participants at the meeting staked out a position strongly in opposition to blaming “*ti chat*.” For them, the blame rested squarely on the shoulders of those who created and implemented the program, with many arguing the program’s structure was flawed from the start and thus those at the bottom could not possibly be held responsible. At least, some conceded, not before those at the top were arrested or otherwise held responsible.

As the school corruption debate demonstrates, there was strong group pressure to narrow the scope of who was to blame. More specifically, the president and his government were viewed as solely responsible for any problems in the implementation and functioning of the program. As Charles Briggs argues (1996:7), “by paying careful attention to the ways in which conflicts are created and mediated, they provide insights into the centrality of conflict to the constitution of social relations, institutions, and ideologies.” What debates such this one reveal is that

understandings and allocations of responsibility were highly circumscribed by political commitments. It was through Yves' and Guerline's efforts, and their refusal to narrowly assign responsibility, that the group's political commitments were brought into question and negotiated. The discussions, then, were not about seeking out the truth of what happened and why, assigning blame based on objectively determined understandings of cause and effect. Rather, through deliberative practices of this sort, members negotiated questions of injustice, what constitutes injustice and for whom, while also working to co-construct a theory of blame. The dominant theory of blame expressed in this interaction was one which identified "troubles" as emanating from a root problem: corrupt and inept government officials. This theory of blame, while negotiated in relation to a specific topic of discussion, provided the group with a foundation or a lens through which members could interpret and understand other events as well. Co-constructing understandings of justice and blame were of the utmost importance for the group, particularly in preparing themselves for their *sensibilizasyon* and advocacy efforts. Despite a purported ideal that discussions and debates served to elicit differing viewpoints through which greater contextualization and complication of the issue at hand could emerge, this was clearly not the case in practice. Instead, debates of this sort worked to productively limit shared understandings among group members. This is not to say that opposing viewpoints were automatically shunned or explicitly forbidden. Instead, the debate itself was a forum within which the negotiation process was interactionally engaged. It was through the expression of disagreement, then, that shared understandings were vocalized and negotiated.

There are a number of ways in which members rhetorically and interactionally worked to limit and construct a distinct theory of blame. Donald makes several attempts at this throughout the discussion, including statements urging the group to both educate the population as to what

was going on and avoid “confusing” people more than they already were regarding the issue. His comment pertaining to a need to “fix responsibility” (line 1 below) also points to a discursive attempt at limiting the scope of culpability. For him, and others in the group, responsibility should be limited in such a way as to focus primarily on the president and his government. Limiting responsibility, for Donald, would assist in their task of avoiding “confusion.” Donald, as is demonstrated below, also attempted to rhetorically simplify Yves’ argument:

### Transcript 2.0: Guerline Bids for the Floor

1	Don	<i>We men fòk nou fikse</i>	Sure but we need to fix
2		[ <i>de responsabilite</i> ]	[responsibility]
3	Alain	[ <i>jisteman</i> ]	[That’s fair]
4	Don	[ <i>wi</i> ] [ <i>Se vre</i> ] ( <i>les</i> )	[yes] [It’s true] ( <i>they’re</i> )
5		<i>Ayisyen men f- tout sosyete a men</i>	Haitians but it- all of society but
6		<i>De tout fason,</i>	In any case,
7		<i>m pa nan ti gwo a, ou wè ?</i>	I’m not one of the little big ones, you see?
8		<i>M pa ni benefisyè m pa ni entèmedyè.</i>	I’m neither benefiting nor am I an intermediary.
9		<i>Donk lè lap siveye tout sosyete a,</i>	Thus when they’re surveying all of society,
10		<i>men fò nou relativize sa=</i>	but we need to relativize it=
11	Theo	<i>=Non menm- menm si- menm la ankò</i>	=No, even- even if- even there as well
12		<i>Donald, lè yo pale de leta Ayisyen</i>	Donald, when they speak of the Haitian state
13		<i>gen de enstitisyon ki responsab</i>	there are institutions who are responsible
14		<i>anndanm leta.</i>	within the state.
15		<i>Èske lè w di leta Ayisyen, pa egzanzp,</i>	Is it when you speak of the Haitian state, for example,
16		<i>nan kesyon gagòt nan edikasyon an</i>	in the question of the education scandal,
17		<i>ou ka- ou ka atirbye l avèk kes- avèk DGI</i>	could you- could you attribute it to the ques- with DGI
18		[ <i>èske w ka atribye avèk-</i> ]	[could you attribute it]
19	Guer	[ <i>pa de- (resi)</i> ]	[not the (receipts)]
20	Theo	<i>avèk ministè sante piblik=</i>	to to the minister of public health=
21	Guer	<i>=eksize m=</i>	=excuse me=
22	Don	<i>=paskè m wè=</i>	=because I see=
23	Alain	<i>= [talè talè] =</i>	= [wait wait] =
24	Guer	<i>= [Theodore] =</i>	= [Theodore] =
25	Don	<i>=Mpa dakò avèk tout moun responsab la=</i>	=I’m not ok with everyone being responsible=
26	Guer	<i>=Non, eksize m</i>	=Non, excuse me
27		[ <i>(mwenn di a klotz) nou- nou eskize m</i> ]	[ (I will say in closing) we- we- excuse me ]
28	Alain	[ <i>non menm tap- m potko fin avèk</i>	[non even- I haven’t yet finished with
29		<i>mos(h)yon nan men (h). Ale nou Guerline]</i>	my mo(h)tion but (h) go ahead Guerline ]
30	Guer	<i>Dabitid, lè yon moun yo ap pale de leta,</i>	Ordinarily, when someone talks of the state,
31		<i>yo wè gouvènman sèlman [men</i>	They only see the government [but
32	Don	[ <i>e ki (?) lòt</i> ]	[what else]
33	Guer	<i>Men, s:-</i>	But, if:-
34		<i>mezami, gon seri de bagay</i>	Hey guys, there are a number of things
35		<i>si nou pa di yo jan yon ye a,</i>	if we don’t tell it like they are,
36		<i>bagay yo pa p janm chanje vre non.</i>	things will never really change.
37		<i>Nap toujou wè [sèlman]</i>	We’ll always see [only]
38	Yves	[ <i>wi</i> ]	[yes]
39	Guer	<i>Gwoup ki rive opouvwa...</i>	The group that’s in charge...

Lines 4-10 illustrate Donald's attempts to paint Yves' argument in an over-simplified manner; that is, as placing the blame at everyone's feet. As he argued, he himself was not participating or benefiting from the program (line 8), therefore, why should he have to be subject to government surveillance? This interpretation culminates with his rejection of making "everyone" (*tout moun*) responsible (line 25). This is clearly an oversimplification of Yves' argument. Implicating everyone, from Yves' point of view, is absurd as it paints a picture of it as spreading the blame to those not even involved or those not acting in a corrupt manner. This comment indicates a lack of actual consideration for the perspective presented by Yves and an attempt to rhetorically close down the argument. Instead of attempting to persuade Yves by presenting a stronger argument, group members vocalized stances and worked to delineate their stance as the dominant or accurate one by portraying the opposing stance as an overly simplified and easy to dispute argument, similar to a strawman argument. The accomplishment of this argumentation, however, took interactional work, apparent through referential content – such as Donald's over-simplification – as well as through the interactional dynamics themselves. In this task, Donald was not alone in attempting to close off Yves' and Guerline's argument.

The form of the unfolding interaction in Transcript 2.0 above also indicates a number of ways in which members worked to make their theory of blame the dominant one. More specifically, Guerline's participation is limited, in particular by the moderator, Alain. In her attempt to discuss past practices of accountability, she made a number of repeated attempts to gain access to the floor (lines 21, 24, and 26). Her persistence was finally acknowledged by Alain who jokingly allowed her to speak, implying that she would be taking his place in the conversational queue (lines 28-29).

Alain, performing the role of moderator, also limited, to a degree, Yves' participation.

Following Yves' initial opening to the discussion topic in which he stated his stance on the issue,

Alain attempted to redirect the discussion, requiring two attempts to successfully do so:

### Transcript 2.1: Alain Calls for More Opinions

1	Yves	<i>...e m sense m nan pwogram,</i>	...and I feel that in the program,
2		<i>nèg yo fè dezòd la- ladann anpil</i>	people are causing a lot of problems within it
3		<i>Menn jan, gen anpil enspektè</i>	In the same way, there's a lot of inspectors
4		<i>kòm si ki tou nan ministè a.</i>	as if they're all a part of the minister's office.
5		<i>Fò yo mare yo tou</i>	They need to arrest them too
6	Alain	<i>Ok [ ok ]</i>	Ok [ ok ]
7	Yves	<i>[Kap fè] dezòd</i>	[They're causing] problems
8		<i>e m panse se pa nan sa pou nou rete</i>	And I think that it's not just there we should stop
9		<i>si limyè a ap kòmanse la,</i>	If we begin to shine light on it there,
10		<i>Kel kòmanse, men m pa gen pwoblèm</i>	then that's where it begins, but I don't have a problem
11		<i>ak mare moun grenn pa grenn</i>	with them arresting people one at a time
12	Alain	<i>Mèsi Yves.</i>	Thank you Yves.
13		<i>Gen de lòt opin- gen moun ki gen lòt</i>	Are there other opin- Are there other people
14		<i>opinyon sou li?</i>	that have other opinions on this?

In line 6, Alain quickly jumped in to point to a need for redirection and then, when this attempt to gain access to the floor went unratified by Yves, he tried again in line 12. Thanking Yves for his participation, he opened the floor (lines 13-14) to "other opinions." Thanking people in this way was not simply a norm based on politeness. In the context of Haitian culture more generally, a "mèsi" response often signals a desire to shift or end a discussion. In addition to Alain's interjection in line 6, his thanking Yves and calling for alternative viewpoints subtly indicated disagreement and an attempt to limit Yves' from continuing.

Yves' participation throughout the discussion as a whole was typical of his participation at meetings in general. He was one of the more vocal members, however, his participation often took the form of side-comments, jokes, and supportive statements not intended as bids for the floor. In this discussion, he continued to participate in similar ways with regular interjections and rejoinders while also taking the floor from time to time to continue explaining his stance, as can

be seen from the unfolding interaction as presented in the previous section. Near the end of the discussion, Alain made several attempts to interject while Yves was speaking. When he finally gained access to the floor, he once again used his moderator role to legitimize claims that Yves was monopolizing the debate (line 32 below):

### Transcript 2.2: Alain Bids for the Floor

1	Yves	<i>...yon direktè ki ta aksepte</i>	...a director that would accept
2		<i>pran kòb l- kòb la l-li pa fè lekòl la vre</i>	money- the money but doesn't really have a school
3		<i>fò l konnen li konplis</i>	he needs to know that he's an accomplice
4		<i>M wè si arete l pou mwen</i>	I see that if they arrest him, for me,
5		<i>pa gen anyen ki mal nan sa</i>	I don't see anything bad in that
6	Nadia	<i>Gran [mak (?)</i>	Big [mark (?)
7	Alain	[men non Yves]	[but no Yves]
8	Theo	<i>Nou pa di [sa tou</i>	We're not saying [that either]
9	Alain	[se pa sa] e pap-	[it's not that] it's not- that
10		<i>(tout bagay li se bon wi)</i>	(everything he does is ok)
11	Others	[((indistinguishable chatter,	[((indistinguishable chatter,
12		multiple participants)]	multiple participants)]
13	Yves	↳((raising voice)) <i>men tout sa map di</i>	↳((raising voice)) everything I'm saying
14		<i>Nou konnen mwen menm,</i>	You all know me,
15		<i>m pap defann pwogram nan]</i>	I'm not defending the program]
16		<i>parapò a jan yo fè l</i>	in terms of how they're doing it
17		<i>M denonse l</i>	I denounce it
18		<i>Men m di w si jounen jodi a</i>	But I'm telling you that if today
19		<i>E, mwen menm menm gen kouzen m</i>	I, myself I have a cousin
20		[M di misye]	[I tell the guy]
21	Alain	[men Yves]	[but Yves]
22	Yves	<i>Pa antre</i>	Don't get involved
23	Alain	<i>Men Yv-</i>	But Yv-
24		[talè talè talè Yves	[wait wait wait Yves
25	Yves	[map- ou wè si m konnen li son nèg ki-]	[I am- you see if I know he is the type that]
26	Alain	[kòm nou pa ka- Yves ekoute ekout]	[since we can't- Yves listen, listen
27	Yves	[ki manfouben men m di l pa antre]	[is at ease, but I tell him, don't get involved]
28		<i>paske yo ka</i>	because they could
29	Alain	[Yves: talè nou pa-]	[Yves wait we can't-
30	Yves	[arete l depi ou ] pran kòb la,	[arrest him. When you] take the money,
31		<i>yo ka arete w. Sa senp.</i>	they can arrest you. It's simple.
32	Alain	<i>Kòm nou pa ka monopolize deba sou sa=</i>	Since we can't monopolize the debate on this issue=
33	Yves	=M konnen	=I know
34	Alain	<i>Men m panse gon bagay fondamantal</i>	But I think that there's a fundamental point
35		<i>pou nou klè sou li...</i>	That we need to be clear on...

As can be seen in lines 21, 23-24, 26, 29, Alain was persistent in his attempts to retake the floor, culminating in his performance of the role of moderator once again in line 32. Following this



excerpt were extended comments by both Alain and Theodore. Once Theodore had finished, however, Alain again mobilized his moderator role to justify an abrupt end to the discussion, further preventing Yves from accessing the floor (line 16 below):

### Transcript 2.3: Discussion Closes

1	Theo	<i>Men kèlkeswa volè a te kòmanse depi anlè, si w kòmanse mare yo ou konn fò t ap komanse mare gwo volè yo jiskaskè ou gen t- ti volè piti a=</i>	But since the thief began from on high, if you begin arresting them you know they need to begin arresting the big thieves up until you get the sm- small thieves=
5	Yves	<i>=Poukisa ou pa pran l nan sans envès?</i>	=Why can't you do it the other way around?
6	Theo	<i>Mm? Paske se</i>	Mm? Because it's
7		<i>[anlè a- se anlè a sous la kòmanse]</i>	<i>[from above- from above the source starts</i>
8	Yves	<i>[Ou pa chwazi (lanvès) sa, ou pito kraze strikti la wi</i>	<i>[You don't choose (the reverse) of that, you rather destroy the structure</i>
10		<i>[olye plis pral pa anba (ou tande?)</i>	<i>[instead of going from the bottom (you hear?)]</i>
11	Valerie	<i>[Strikti pa bon, strikti ladann li menm li pa bon an=</i>	<i>[The structure is not good, the structure itself]</i>
12			It's no good=
13	Alain	<i>=Ok bon, m panse nou nou nou pa ka</i>	=Ok well, I think we we we can't
14		<i>[kenbe deba sou sa</i>	<i>[hold on to this debate ]</i>
15	Yves	<i>[(?) bon sa a menm tou</i>	<i>[(?) well that in itself too]</i>
16	Alain	<i>Nou pa ka kenbe deba sou sa men nou ka kontinye reflechi kontinye diskite sou: kesyon: eh: eh:</i>	We can't continue a debate on this but we can continue to think about it continue to discuss the: question: of uh:
19	Marie	<i>PSUGO</i>	PSUGO
20	Alain	<i>SIGO? =</i>	SIGO? =
21	Valerie	<i>=((laughs)) =</i>	=((laughs)) =
22	Marc	<i>PSUGO</i>	PSUGO
23	Alain	<i>[Bon</i>	<i>[Ok</i>
24	Yves	<i>[lè elèv] lekòl yo vin pa gen direktè=</i>	<i>[when students] at the school don't have a director=</i>
25	Alain	<i>=mwen m tande sig la</i>	=I-I hear the acronym
26		<i>m sezi. M pa t janm konnen l</i>	I'm surprised. I never knew it
27	Marie	<i>Oh! =</i>	Oh! =
28	Don	<i>Poukisa ou pa t konnen?</i>	How did you not know it?
29	Alain	<i>M pa t konn sig la</i>	I didn't know the acronym
30		<i>M te konn pwogram nan</i>	I knew the program
31		<i>M pa t konn sig la</i>	I didn't know the acronym

Here we see Alain bring the discussion to an end (lines 16-18), assuring the group that they could continue to reflect on the issue in other contexts even though they needed to move on. As the discussion came to an end, Marie, Donald, and others participated in teasing Alain as to his lack of knowledge of the free schooling program's acronym. Yves, however, revealed his interest in

continuing the debate, as he again referenced the arrest in line 24. In response, the rest of the group ignored him and continued with their joking.

In addition to the interactional ways in which members attempted to limit participation and understandings of opposing stances, Yves and Guerline also metadiscursively referenced some of the tacit ways that other group members indicated their personal political commitments as contributing to their interpretations. Yves, at one point, revealed the implied stance in opposition to the president as underlying the arguments made by opposing members. Although it was never stated directly, the implication is that if one does not place responsibility squarely at the feet of Martelly and his government, then one is in support of the free schooling program. In even simpler terms: one is either for or against the president on the issue, and other issues as well. By blaming those at the bottom for the problems that resulted, the implication was that Yves is siding with the president. In transcript 2.2 above (lines 14-17), we can see that Yves responded to this implied either/or opposition, feeling the need to clarify that he was not actually defending the program and that he was, in fact, against it. Given that he was never directly accused of defending the program, his statement was clearly in response to an implied, rather than stated, opposition.

Guerline also highlighted what seems to her – and what I argue here – to be an effort to limit group understandings of blame as attributed solely to government officials and the president. Her contribution to the discussion, after repeated attempts to gain access to the floor, points to a degree of exasperation as to how the discussion unfolded and members' attempts to limit responsibility. In Transcript 2.0 above, we see an abrupt shift in her planned contribution, marked by an exclamation of "*mezami*" (line 34). Resembling the French "*mes amis*" (my friends), this distinctly Haitian expression is often utilized to capture attention and express

frustration or surprise. In that moment, the difficulty Guerline encountered in trying to gain access to the floor in combination with her frustration at the attempts of others to narrow responsibility to those in charge, culminated in her use of “*mezami*.” The explanation that followed, in Transcript 2.0 (lines 34-37 and 39), revealed her sense that the group was too narrowly limiting responsibility. Her statement in lines 37, and continuing into line 39, in particular, point to this narrow attention to those in power: “*Nap toujou wè sèlman gwoup ki rive opouvwa*” (We’ll always see only the group that’s in charge).

As can be seen above, the interactional form of the unfolding interaction, in conjunction with referential and rhetorical attempts to bring the discussion to an end, worked together in an attempt to encourage a limit to group understandings of injustice and blame. The debate, in this way, represents a negotiation process in which members worked to co-construct more general theories of blame, limiting responsibility to those in power. Thus, although the group metadiscursively viewed the discussion forum as having an atmosphere that encouraged inclusive participation and an embrace of different viewpoints, the actual interaction of the debate reveals subtle steering and considerable negotiation of issues that span far beyond the specific topic at hand. In this way, what was at stake was not simply regarding who was to blame in this particular instance, but rather points to attempts at limiting group interpretations of blame more generally. Indeed, a theory of blame in which “troubles” of this sort were understood as resulting from underlying disorders, attributable to social actors in positions of power, was a common interpretive lens through which group members understood and analyzed the cause and effect of identified injustices. In most cases, however, opposition to this interpretation was not vocalized and members took for granted this theory of blame as an interpretive lens for understanding social “troubles.”

The discursive work that went into the negotiation process, in many ways, resembles the “argument culture” or “culture of critique” described by sociolinguist Deborah Tannen (1998) regarding American society.<sup>33</sup> In her work, she points to a number of different discursive trends in the media, everyday discourse, the legal system, and even scholarly critiques, in which the objective of arguments was more focused on winning, or shutting down the viewpoints of others, as opposed to an inclusive pursuit for better awareness and understanding through debate and dialogue. Indeed, there is both a degree of unproductivity as well as productivity going on in the arguments described by Tannen. They are unproductive when viewed from a conviction that opposition and debate necessarily lead to “truth.” As Tannen (1998:260) states, “our glorification of opposition as the path to truth is related to the development of formal logic, which encourages thinkers to regard truth seeking as a step-by-step alternation of claims and counterclaims.” In similar ways, the debate analyzed here appears to be less about deliberation for the purpose of better understanding the truth regarding social happenings in Haitian society, and more about maintaining existing political commitments, indeed justifying such commitments through the interpretation process itself.

What, if anything, does this kind of debate accomplish? What is the pragmatic force of the HR Org’s blame game deliberative practices? At this point, it should be clear that debates such as this did not accomplish the metadiscursive goal of obtaining group consensus prior to taking a public stance, or making public statements on the issue. Nor did it assist in enlightening members to the complexity of the situation through the elicitation and consideration of differing viewpoints. Instead, participants staked out political stances and sought to maintain those stances in light of opposition. In some ways, this resembles the research of Julie Lindquist (2002) and

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<sup>33</sup> Tannen’s examination is largely aimed at popular audiences. I draw on it as a general comparison point not intended as empirical support for my own analysis.

her examination of political debates taking place in a local Chicago bar. The purpose of such debates, she argues, is not to persuade others to adopt a particular political positions but one of identify formation as anchored in relation to social networks. Yet, in contrast to her findings, the deliberative practices within the HR Org are less about airing political differences as a means of social cohesion and identify formation and more aimed at socializing to shared theories of blame. This shared understanding was not simply in regards to the specific issue of the school corruption scandal, but was also a general theory through which members understood and interpreted the cause and effect of identified “troubles.” Through this theory of blame, social problems of the sort debated here, then, should be recognized as attributable to the president and his actions or inactions. While the arguments of Donald, Alain, Theodore, Nadia and others may not have succeeded in convincing Yves or Guerline to change their personal stance on the issue, the debate was still instructive to group members as a whole, especially those who were less vocal, or to those that might consider taking up a vigorous stance in opposition to this theory of blame in the future. Yves’ refusal to place all the blame at the feet of the president and his government was an unacceptable stance from the point of view of many participants, and one that required intense rebuttal.

Given the need to establish coherence prior to circulating interpretations to broader audiences, co-constructing a shared theory of blame clearly played a vital role. The particular theory of blame allocating responsibility to specific power holders also relates to the manner in which group members sought to radically transform power relations by way of contestation lodged at political actors. The manner in which they did so, from a nongovernmental social position, provided members a moral high ground as they were able to present themselves as participants without formal political interests, as “apolitical.” Thus, the discussion was

interactionally productive for the group as it allowed members to negotiate, socialize, and co-construct shared political commitments and understandings of blame. By working to limit the participation of those with opposing viewpoints, and rhetorically restricting understandings of those viewpoints, group members such as Donald and Alain framed the discussion in favor of their own theory of blame based on personal political commitments. In the following section, I continue a focus on the group's *analiz* efforts, highlighting other interpretive frames through which members socialized one another to understanding Haitian society and "troubles" in particular ways.

### **The Production of Insecurity and Narratives of Decline**

In addition to productively constructing shared understandings of blame and injustice, debates and discussions centered on the task of *analiz* also worked to negotiate, construct, and socialize the group more generally to particular ways of understanding and interpreting events. For the group, debates of this sort represented socializing moments in which questions of injustice and cause/effect were practically applied to specific topics. Discussing available information, narrating personal experiences and anecdotes, debating the cause and effect of events, and allocating responsibility were all ways in which members negotiated and constructed interpretations. As a process of socialization, however, discussions and debates were necessarily messy, incomplete, and open to challenges and revisions, as was seen in the school corruption example. In this section, I will briefly discuss three additional deliberative practices mobilized during *analiz*, including calls for the embodiment of insecurity, the mobilization of comparisons, and organization of events into narratives of decline. Working together alongside the group's efforts to allocate responsibility – through the previously discussed blame game – these

discursive practices worked together, contributing to the shaping of interpretations in preparation for *sensibilizasyon* activities. As a foundation through which members interpreted specific events, discourses of this sort contributed to the co-construction of shared assumptions about how development, injustice, and politics functioned.

For HR Org members, “*ensekirite*” (insecurity) was an important theme and lens through they understood and interpreted both specific moments of violence as well as embodied feelings of an unstable social environment. Insecurity was, more often than not, a category of events within their *monitoring* activities, and was a regular feature of their *analiz* activities. Violence and insecurity, in this way, often went hand-in-hand, with insecurity understood as a growing problem, increasing “*jou an jou*” (day by day). In this way, reported fires at open air markets around the Port-au-Prince area were not solely understood as accidents, or the result of careless inattention, but as deliberate and recurring injustices. Interpretations of this sort contributed to embodied feelings of instability and uncertainty. In his *monitoring* report one Monday morning, Yves asserted that there is a “*monte vyolans ki pran plizye fòm*” (an increase in violence taking many different forms).

Insecurity, as Daniel M. Goldstein (2012:5) notes, is fundamentally about disorder: “it is a sense that the world is unpredictable, out of control, and inherently dangerous, and that within this chaos the individual must struggle desperately just to survive.” To be forced to live under conditions of insecurity is itself a violation of human rights. References to insecurity in the Haitian context, however, not only point to acts of violence, or the potential for violence at any moment, but embodied feelings that result from unpredictable and chaotic conditions. As both Gregory Beckett (2013) and Erica C. James (2010) analyze, the concept of “*ensekirite*” carries strong embodied meaning for many Haitians, representing a form of “ontological insecurity.” As

Beckett (2013:42) argues, if ontological security is “an autonomy of bodily control within predictable routines” then the opposite, “ontological insecurity” represents a kind of embodied crisis, a state in which conditions are unpredictable and subject to the whims of global capitalism, international decision-making, or – as was the case under Duvalier – political domination by a repressive government. This sense of continual social and economic upheaval, he argues, produces embodied feelings of crisis and insecurity. Within the HR Org, such feelings were not just expressed, but cultivated and encouraged. Within debates and discussions on the topics of crises, insecurity, and violence, the embodiment of insecurity was created and re-created anew by way of deliberative practices.

This embodied sense of insecurity was not only referenced in relation to specific events but also in relation to a general atmosphere of instability and violence. This was particularly true when discussing events as signs of a growing crisis in Haitian society, discussed more below. Such feelings of insecurity also manifested through encouragement by Donald that members discuss their own personal day-to-day experiences as direct evidence of the growing crisis and violence they were discussing. Eliciting personal experiences of events not covered in the news media was a regular, albeit unstructured, feature of meetings. At one particular meeting, he explicitly asked for group members to share their own personal experiences of violence and insecurity in an effort to contextualize the general observations they had been making. At times, members pointed to explicit violence they had indirectly witnessed, through word-of-mouth networks such as family members or friends. At other times, the violence referenced was less clearly the kind of physical violence often highlighted as a major contributor to feelings of insecurity. For instance, Pierre-Louis pointed to noise pollution as a form of violence she



suffered on a daily or weekly basis due to the activities of a local church in her neighborhood, one that tended to hold loud and energetic services late into the night.

In this way, discussions focused on personal experience and reported news were moments in which the group socialized one another to embody feelings of insecurity. In doing so, they mobilized situated interpretations as evidence supporting an interpretation of Haitian society as perpetually insecure and volatile. Following Merry (2007:45):

Violence cannot be understood in the abstract, apart from its social and cultural meanings. Moreover, it cannot be restricted to physical injury: the experience of violence is a culturally mediated event, wrapped in threats, emotional loss, fear, and anxieties of various kinds. Representations of violence and narratives about violent groups and spaces serve to construct fear and anxiety, even in the absence of blows.

Participants were never hesitant, whether encouraged or not, to share personal or anecdotal experiences as evidence of precarious or increasingly dire circumstances in the country. For instance, during a discussion of insecurity, Donald motioned in the direction of the busy street on the other side of the concrete wall surrounding the office grounds, stating that since members walked through the area on a daily basis, they were surely well aware of the everyday dangers of it. Although I had personally never witnessed or been subject to violence or aggression in that area, others readily agreed, chiming in with observations of armed individuals and thieves roaming the area. At least one drive-by shooting had taken place in the nearby commercial area during the time I spent working with the organization, an event that served to heighten feelings of insecurity.

My point is not to discredit claims to violence, crime, or general insecurity in the country, or the areas of the city where each member lived. In particular, I do not see my own personal, outsider, observations as somehow more “accurate.” Violence was indeed always a possibility

and sometimes even probable.<sup>34</sup> Instead, I wish to point to the ways in which the group collectively worked to assign meaning to experience, observation, and the information received via the media and word of mouth. As Jutta Weldes and others (1999:13) have noted, “meaning is thus a social rather than an individual or collective phenomenon: it is not that everyone has the same ‘ideas’ inside their heads, but rather that meaning inheres in the practices and categories through which people engage with each other and with the natural world.” Debates and discussions tying together the personal and the social were mechanisms through which members came to understand social happenings in particular, situated, and embodied ways. This was also accomplished through the lens of human rights discourses, especially pertaining to injustices in relation to insecurity and violence. It was also accomplished through recurring references to Haitian society as being on the edge of a social, political, or economic crisis. Discourses of this sort became a self-fulfilling prophecy: searching for insecurity and violence necessarily meant that they found it in some form or another.

HR Org members also regularly drew on comparisons with other countries, in both stated and unstated forms, as a means to tacitly point to the various failures of Haitian society. Comparisons, in some cases, worked with calls for members to embody feelings of insecurity in that they served as a contrasting case against which Haitian society was ultimately lacking. In some cases, participants referenced the manner in which other countries functioned, in sweeping and often generalized ways, highlighting, in the process, the flaws and failures of their own country. In other cases, members drew on unstated comparisons, referencing a general failure but leaving the comparison implied. As Pierre-Louis exclaimed during a discussion of electoral

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<sup>34</sup> My own personal experiences could never be an accurate depiction of actual levels of violence and crime in the country, not only because of the anecdotal nature of them but also due to my status as a *blan*. This visual status often shielded me from particular kinds of violence and crime, such as physical aggression, while potentially opening me up to other forms, such as theft.

politics, comparing Haiti's situation to Venezuela's ability to hold elections shortly after the death of Hugo Chavez, "*nou pa nan peyi seryè!*" (We're not in a serious country!). In this way, staff members assessed and evaluated current events through the lens of a progressive ideal, one in which other countries appeared to succeed. Indicating a normative ideal inevitably highlighted the ways in which Haiti failed to measure up.

As with the Nepali case analyzed by Mark Liechty (2003), comparisons expressed by middle class youth often produced anxiety and disappointment. In this case, middle class youth of Kathmandu regularly interacted with mass media goods and depictions of foreign locales, interactions which led to disappointing comparisons with their own lives in relation those that appeared to them as unattainably modern (237). The use of comparisons by HR Org members could be interpreted as a consequence of a general awareness of Haiti's status in relation to other countries. Indeed, many members did keep tabs on global events in much the same way as they monitored events in Haiti. And yet, the explicit comparisons made – for example, comparing the US justice system with Haiti's – were often too sweeping and generalized, sometimes even inaccurate, to be of much productive use in understanding the precise differences between the two comparison points. In fact, the accuracy of the comparison country was of little importance. The comparisons, instead, were focused more heavily on critiquing specific or general aspects of Haitian society. To point to an actual or ideal "other" was a means through which participants expressed their own idealized versions of a better Haiti while simultaneously pointing to Haiti as a failure. Although comparisons were not always mobilized in such a way as to imply or point to a decline or growing crisis, they did serve a similar purpose in discursively creating an embodied sense of Haiti as a failure and in a constant state of crisis.

Members' calls for the embodiment of insecurity and the regular vocalization of comparisons with other countries collectively fed into a broader interpretive lens co-constructed by the group, that is, the logical arrangement and interpretations of social happenings within a narrative of decline interpretation. In this way, members worked to place events within a broader interpretive framework, one that included unfolding events in relation to past events and processes. This temporalizing interpretive frame allowed members to explain the significance of individual events in relation to larger trends. The collective significance of many events was often referenced in relation to a growing "*kriz*" (crisis) or a downward spiral. Insecurity and violence, from this view, were seen as increasing and members expressed an alarmist stance in relation to specific events.

Narratives of decline, in this way, point to the manner in which HR Org members organized and understood events as temporally located in relation to one another, revealing a larger significance or social trend. Attention to decline and crisis, while explicitly highlighting a negative interpretation of unfolding events, indicates as much about decline as it does a progressive, if unstated, ideal. Narratives of decline and progressive narratives do not necessarily stand in opposition to one another; instead, they can work together, complementing one another (Kirsch, personal comm.). To speak of decline or crisis in the Haitian context is to imply an ideal or a need for improvement. It is to envision a progressive future, or modernization, amid a declining reality.

As a foundation through which members understood the cause and effect of unfolding events, this narrative of decline lens resembles Beckett's analysis of "crisis" as a recurrent and organizing feature of historical narratives of Haiti. He argues:

Is it possible to speak of Haiti without speaking of crisis? . . . For some, crisis is not just a regular feature of Haitian society but a normative one, an inherent, inescapable condition

that plagues the country and its people... There has been no shortage of accounts that describe Haiti as a country with a long history of crisis. But such accounts are rarely offered only as descriptions. Rather, they seek to explain the country's problems by treating crisis and disorder as intrinsic features of Haitian society. Cast in this light, the Haitian past becomes more than just a story of one crisis after another; it becomes a temporality defined by rupture and breakdown. Such a view presents Haitian history as a story of decline and marks it in stark opposition to the Western idea of linear development and historical progress. (2013:27-29)

This “Western idea” of progress and development, for many of the HR Org members, was not only in opposition to the narrative of decline they drew on but served as a counterpoint, a “normal” against which Haiti failed to measure up.

In this way, narratives of decline indirectly highlight members' expectations of development and modernity while also signaling significant disappointment in the lack of positive change (Ferguson 1999). Modernization, although recognized as a myth by many scholars has a strong ideological hold on the imaginations of populations around the world.<sup>35</sup> Ideologies of modernity encourage the construction of narratives and understandings of lived experiences through an ideologically situated lens (Latour 1991). It represents a desirable ideal, yet, as is the case for many, that ideal also tends to be unattainable. The paradox of modernity, then, is a desirability marked by disappointment: the “model or image of modernity is simultaneously the object of intense local desire and always out of reach, seemingly by definition an unachievable condition for those in the ‘non-West’” (Liechty 2003:xi).

As James Ferguson (1999:42) notes, modernization myths also carry strong assumptions as to a linear and sequential nature of development, necessarily obscuring the messiness and complexities of social realities. In his case study of the Zambian Copperbelt region, Ferguson argues that mineworkers “expressed their sense of abjection from an imagined modern world ‘out there.’” In doing so “they were not simply lamenting a lack of connection but articulating a

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<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Arce & Long (2000), Ferguson (1999), and Latour (1991).

specific experience of disconnection, just as they inevitably described their material poverty not simply as a lack but as a loss” (238). As with HR Org member’s vocalizations of comparisons, the modern “ideal,” and Haiti’s inability to measure up to that ideal, is strongly felt as a disappointing disconnect or failure. As with the Nepali example explored by Liechty, the life stories told to him by middle class youth “quite literally retell the Nepali past and present (as backward and deficient) even while they claim the future (by defining the deferred goals of ‘development’)” (2003:233). In their efforts to meaningfully organize events through the interpretive lens of decline, HR Org members brought order to an otherwise disorderly series of events.

During *analiz*, members most often vocalized a narrative of decline interpretation by pointing to specific events or a series of events as evidence of a growing crisis or as a sign that insecurity and violence were increasing each day. In contrast to short, evaluative comments made during group discussions, the narrative of decline frame was more clearly and coherently articulated in the texts collaboratively produced by the group and circulated to media outlets and broader audiences.<sup>36</sup> These texts should be understood as a product of the negotiation and co-construction processes engaged as a part of their *analiz* efforts. For instance, in an editorial commentary for the monthly newsletter summarizing the previous year’s developments, presented to the press in December 2012, the group wrote: “*Les graves et sérieux problèmes sociaux, politiques et économiques auxquels fait face la population n’ont pas cessé de s’amplifier*” (The grave and serious political, social, and economic problems facing the population have not stopped growing). Along similar lines, the newsletter produced for the following month (January 2013), began its editorial review with:

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<sup>36</sup> In the next section, I discuss the collaborative text production process in more detail.

*2012 a été une année de descentes aux enfers pour Haïti... À côté des désastres naturels, de la crise alimentaire, du chômage, des mouvements de protestations et de la montée grandissante de l'insécurité, l'année 2012 était marquée par une série de scandales et de révélations qui n'étaient pas sans effet sur la stabilité du pays.*

2012 was a year of descent into hell for Haiti... Besides natural disasters, food crises, unemployment, protests, and the increasing rise of insecurity, 2012 was marked by a series of scandals and revelations that were not without an effect on the country's security.

Embodying insecurity and mobilizing comparisons with other countries worked hand-in-hand in the discursive production of narratives of decline which served as an important interpretative frame through which members carried out their *analiz* objectives. Collectively, the deliberative practices within the HR Org worked to prepare members for *sensibilizasyon* texts and activities. The manner in which members constructed narratives highlighting a linear decline, or anti-development, implicitly signaled an idealized opposition of modernized development. Their discursive efforts represent a “a narrative device for putting meaning into the flux of historical process” and necessarily “carries an ideological load” (Ferguson 1999:80). Indeed, the ordering and interpretation of events within a narrative of decline is tied to the ideological and political commitments of members. As was indicated earlier, discourses of this sort became self-fulfilling prophecies for group members. Members went looking for signs of decline and inevitably succeeded in finding them in some form or another.

Indeed, the group's focus on failures and problems was also highlighted in their inability to identify positive improvements in Haitian society and their unwillingness to discuss positive aspects of current events. When Nadine attempted to point out the positive publicity that would come from an incident-free hosting of a Caribbean summit in the country – the fact that there were few traffic backups and no incidents of criminal activity during the period when foreign representatives visited Port-au-Prince – Theodore was quick to point out that the president, with

all the scandals he was involved in, would not be able to benefit from this positive publicity. At another meeting, discussing publication of the monthly newsletter, one member pointed out that the pictures and articles included in all previous publications unequivocally painted a negative picture of the country. Others agreed and a long discussion ensued as to possible photos that could be included on the cover, such as those that might reflect positivity, beauty, and Haitian nationalism. The group, as a whole, was hard-pressed to come up with suggestions. While most agreed with the desire to present material of this sort, an extensive discussion revealed few concrete ideas.

In addition, as will be discussed more in the following chapter, tacit expressions of political alignments often went hand-in-hand with discussions of crisis, insecurity, and violence in the country. There was never a shortage of critiques against the president's actions and inactions. Despite concrete social improvements going on around them – such as paving and fixing sidewalks, trash removal, clearing and rebuilding public spaces such as parks – group members never recognized those acts as positive, and often did not remark on them at all.<sup>37</sup> When they did discuss projects of this sort, they identified the political implications and negative ramifications, such as the poor execution and underlying motivations as to why they were being carried out. In other cases, as I discuss further in the chapter that follows, group members pointed to signs that the president's real intentions were to become the next dictator of Haiti, viewing specific events through the lens of a narrative of decline while implicating the president directly. Interpretations of a growing crisis and declining conditions, then, aligned with the group's interpretations of the president as desiring to become the next dictator.

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<sup>37</sup> Of course, members were not alone in this quest to condemn the president. The majority of journalists and media agencies also focused on critique.



Thus, the group's *analiz* objective played a significant role producing shared understandings of injustice, cause/effect, declining conditions, and blame. Negotiating a theory of blame, for the group, served as an interpretive frame through which members could understand and explain those events and issues identified as "troubles" within Haitian society. The ambiguity and incompleteness of information available to members assisted in this interpretive process and allowed significant room for situated interpretations based on individual and group interests to fill the void, including those pertaining to political commitments. Engaging a blame game and negotiating a shared theory of blame were not the only interpretive lens co-constructed and socialized during *analiz* discussions. Calls for the embodiment of insecurity, comparisons, and organizing events in narratives of decline were other, related ways in which group members co-constructed interpretive frames for understanding and analyzing *monitoring* items.

For HR Org members, the negotiation of shared interpretations assigning blame in circumscribed ways and highlighting increasing insecurity and decline in relation to other countries did not simply produce feelings of disappointment and despair. Instead, discourses of this sort worked to create a collective sense of indignation that fueled their *sensibilizasyon* goals. In this way, the group's *sensibilizasyon* objectives justified their existence and advocacy efforts and the moralizing force of their situated interpretations. Even in the interpretive frame organizing events and issues within narratives of decline, recognition of declining conditions ultimately motivated members to better educate and make people aware of what was going on, further justifying the group's interpretations and their desire to bring about change through advocacy. For group members, then, recognition of a decline signaled a greater need for advocacy and social change. In the next section, I examine the specific activities and means

through which group members sought to circulate and disseminate their situated interpretations, as produced through *analiz*, to broader audiences.

### **The Dynamics of *Sensibilizasyon***

As previous sections have highlighted, the discursive dynamics of the group's *monitoring* and *analiz* objectives functioned in such a way as to socialize and co-construct shared understandings of injustice, cause/effect, declining conditions, and responsibility. The deliberative practices within the organization, then, prepared members for their *sensibilizasyon* work. It was through *sensibilizasyon* efforts that the work of negotiating and co-constructing interpretations circulated beyond the confines of the organization itself. Indeed, this objective motivated the group's attention to *monitoring* and *analiz* in the first place; that is, members legitimated their internal work with the goal of educating and mobilizing a broader audience. In this section, I describe and outline the various means through which members pursued their *sensibilizasyon* goals, including the various preparations and activities engaged by the group. I also highlight the group's relationship with journalists and media outlets, pointing to this as a significant means through which members disseminated the situated interpretations and stances discussed in previous sections.

The HR Org's *sensibilizasyon* tasks were varied and generally included: planning and carrying out events such as conferences and training sessions, researching and writing reports and public statements, and preparing or carrying out press conferences and interviews on hot-button topics. Although members spent a fair amount of time planning activities and events aimed at specific audiences – such as tent camp residents or other human rights organizations – the bulk of their time was spent generating texts intended for dissemination to much broader

audiences. To be sure, some texts, such as reports or topical analyses as produced by interns, were never intended for broader circulation. Other texts, including press releases, conference papers, newsletter articles, and other reports, were written and revised with the distinct purpose of circulating to a broader audience. While some were aimed at denouncing specific events, actions, or inactions, most had the goal of educating people through an analysis of the topic in question and included suggestions for moving forward. Thus, although members often interpreted events and issues through a narrative of decline lens, interpretations of this sort did not lead to despair but rather indignation. Including suggestions for concrete or general changes in some of the texts they constructed, then, points to the manner in which members saw their work as potentially productive and conducive to bringing about change.

As an organization focused on advocacy HR Org objectives largely rested on analyzing and interpreting information and then disseminating those interpretations to larger audiences. These objectives align with identification of the tasks and importance of NGO advocacy work as “an act of organizing the strategic use of information to democratize unequal power relations” (Jordan & Tuijl 2000:2052). This definition of NGO advocacy implies an inherently political relationship, a topic I take up more fully below. Although *monitoring* and *analiz* were important aspects of the group’s work, it was their *sensibilizasyon* objectives that gave the organization meaning and purpose: “This advocacy work is increasingly seen by NGOs as an integral part of the role they play in civil society. Using information as a key tool, it entails the ambition to change the course of human development by promoting equal power relationships in national and international arenas” (ibid.). Yet the importance of information dissemination rests in direct relation to the group’s ability to collate, analyze and interpret information effectively: “information by itself is not enough to pursue effective advocacy. Often the available

information needs interpretation in accordance with the political arena in which it is being articulated” (2055). In this way, the HR Org’s three primary tasks were intimately tied, working in tandem in a largely sequential manner. The collection of information (*monitoring*) had to take place before analyzing available information (*analiz*) which was itself a necessary step to disseminating interpretations to larger audiences (*sensibilizasyon*). *Sensibilizasyon*, for group members, was as much about advocacy as it was about education, although, to be certain, the two go hand-in-hand. Advocacy necessitates an educational component if it is to successfully garner support from others and persuade of its importance.

For group members, engaging with current event topics and issues was both personally interesting as well as justifiable given the self-appointed watchdog role it played in society. Group members justified both the individual aspects of *monitoring*, *analiz*, and *sensibilizasyon* tasks as well as the collective importance of them. As was discussed in the *monitoring* section, members justified their watchdog role as one necessitated by the failure of Haitian journalists and media institutions to properly take up this role. The group’s task of *analiz* was also justified on the grounds of it being a necessary step between collecting information and properly understanding that information prior to taking a public stance or properly educating others. Donald, in particular, argued that because he was regularly solicited for interviews and statements by journalists, his most important task was preparing himself to express a coherent stance that reflected group consensus on the issues in question. He repeatedly argued that meeting discussions were an important part of prepping for media interventions he would be called on to make. Members also reflected on their privileged status in society as having access to information and ways of understanding that information that the general public otherwise did not. The duty of the organization, then, was justified on the grounds of bringing about awareness

and knowledge of the otherwise unknowable or unrecognized. Their role as self-appointed human rights watchdogs and experts ultimately legitimated the importance of their objectives and activities.

As important as the group's *monitoring* and *analiz* tasks were, however, without broader dissemination, both tasks were ultimately meaningless. Indeed, Félix remarked on this during one weekly meeting (April 2012), worrying that although the group's *analiz* efforts assisted HR Org members in understanding what was going on, without *sensibilizasyon*, the general population would not have access to that information. He argued that since those who are “*senp*” (illiterate) and living in the streets cannot analyze the situation in the same way the group could, members should imagine better methods of educating people: he urged the group to take their *analiz* and turn it into educational material.

The organization's relationship to journalists and media outlets was of the utmost importance to their *sensibilizasyon* objectives. This relationship ultimately had two, interrelated aspects to it: a reliance on media-derived reports as a source of information in their *monitoring* efforts and a means through which members sought to reach broader audiences. In contrast to advocacy campaigns focused on singular issues (e.g. Marschall 2004), the HR Org's work in this arena encompassed a broad range of issues. Focusing on one issue over another largely depended on what the hot-button topics were within media discourses and news reports. To be sure, members also made attempts to reinvigorate issues that had gone dormant in the media; however, given their dependence on the media itself as a source of information, members more often than not took advantage of the upswing of attention on any given issue as it unfolded.

Capitalizing on Donald's role as spokesperson and the public face of the organization is an obvious manner in which the organization disseminated situated interpretations. As the

director, Donald was the official spokesperson for the organization.<sup>38</sup> In fact, many interns expressed surprise upon entering and learning about how the organization functioned. They asserted that they had previously believed that the organization was primarily made up of Donald alone and that it revolved around him and his charismatic personality. What they found, instead, was a highly functional and collaborative environment, one which continued to operate even in the case of Donald's extended absence.<sup>39</sup> Given the tendency by journalists to seek out interviews with Donald, his face was necessarily the public face of the organization. And for those not familiar with the organization on a personal level, he was the only person publicly associated with the organization.

When not meeting with donors, partner organizations, or member organizations, Donald's day-to-day activities largely focused on media interviews and preparing various texts for circulation. His attendance at weekly meetings was often punctuated by frequent phone calls, drop-in guests, or other tasks that, at times, kept him from fully participating. Not a day went by when he did not receive a visit or phone call from journalists requesting comments or an interview. His commentaries regularly appeared on the radio, in print, and on television, sometimes as quotes at other times as audio or video clips. Donald's role as the public face of the organization was due to several reasons. For one, his previous work experience as a journalist meant that he sympathized with and catered to the media. He strongly believed that cultivating personal ties with journalists and media outlets was an important part of maintaining a presence in the media and thus, making his and the organization's stances publicly known. To this end, the

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<sup>38</sup> This was not without controversy and conflict regarding how member organizations viewed his role as spokesperson. The platform statutes specifically name an elected representative, drawn from the member organization themselves, as the official spokesperson. Donald argued, however, that the elected individual did not have the time nor the personality for such a task. Donald's role in this sense, was unrati ed by member organizations yet his popularity in the media prevented complaints from gaining traction.

<sup>39</sup> During my time with the group, Donald made a few extended trips abroad, with the longest being three weeks in the United States attending an international conference.

organization went to great lengths to cater to journalists, offering refreshments, special seating at events, providing texts during events, and otherwise being available and willing to be interviewed at any time, even on short notice. Donald was also a particularly personable and charismatic individual, traits journalists both appreciated and were drawn to. Whenever a conference was held at the organization, journalists always sought out interviews with Donald, even when he was not directly involved in the activity was not physically present. This often frustrated those members who actually moderated or organized the event, such as Theodore or Kerline, as well as the invited panelists who were themselves distinguished scholars or activists. Even when staff, during weekly organization meetings, complained about the behavior of journalists at particular events – for instance, their pushy or entitled behavior – Donald was quick to defend them or brush their behavior off as normal and to be expected. Thus, it was clear that Donald’s charismatic personality, his personal ties to journalists and media institutions, and his sympathetic approach to journalistic tendencies fostered the degree to which media outlets engaged with him and viewed his contributions to reports and commentaries as important and relevant.

The organization, under Donald’s leadership, also worked to better facilitate a positive relationship with journalists and media outlets during my time with them and even created a new staff position which aimed to better coordinate with representatives of the press and more effectively circulate texts to those representatives. Nadia was hired for this role in May 2012. Her position was one which worked directly in coordination with Donald on a day-to-day basis as she assisted him in writing various declarations circulated to media outlets. She was also in charge of coordinating the presence and activities of journalists at organization events. A former journalist herself, she was personally acquainted with many individual journalists and media

outlets. She also headed efforts to reinvigorate publication of the “*Se mèt kò veye kò*” newsletter, collating texts for inclusion, editing, and formatting them for printing.<sup>40</sup>

The text production process itself was a serious task within the organization as it represented another public face for the organization. Beyond the various texts required by donor institutions (reports, budgets, etc.), the production of public texts was a means through which members sought to boost credibility, command attention, and justify their *monitoring* activities. The process was a highly collaborative one, with all members, including interns, encouraged to participate in the writing and editing tasks. All texts, including intern reports and analyses were expected to be circulated and commented on by the rest of the staff. In reality, not everyone always took part in this process, however, all were encouraged to do so. Members viewed the quality of language and formatting of texts as important aspects of any publication. In addition to Donald’s participation in the media, texts were an important public representation of the organization and were thus viewed as requiring near-perfection in terms of professional presentation and language use.

When the group hastily put together an end-of-the year newsletter, sending it in to be printed shortly after compiling the divvied up workload, grammatical and spelling errors caused members to come to a collective decision not to distribute the already printed texts. Instead, staff worked to correct the errors and printed another batch in limited quantity. Because of their limited numbers, the copies were distributed at a small press conference only. This limited distribution was favored over a wider distribution of a text containing grammar and spelling errors. The importance of presentation was also made clear to me during the series of events

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<sup>40</sup> This title translates as “The owner of a body looks out for the body.” In early 2012 the group decided to start publishing a monthly newsletter. Throughout the organization’s history, newsletters have come and gone. Most members I was in contact with were not aware of past newsletters published in the name of their organization throughout its 20+ year history. This re-invigoration of a monthly newsletter drew on a previous one published by the organization, using it as a model in terms of title and content. The past version of the similarly titled newsletter was discontinued in 2006.



prepared in celebration of the organization's 26-year anniversary. Given my activities in organizing the library, which housed old documents, reports and newsletters published by the organization, I volunteered to put together a poster display briefly outlining the organization's history that was to be coupled with a selection of texts drawn from the library. The morning of the open house during which the display would be presented, Nadia reviewed the text I had edited. She insisted that I correct one small spelling error, and reprint the texts. She was particularly adamant about not allowing the error to be put on public display.

In this section, I have outlined the various ways in which members pursued their sensibilizasyon objectives, paying particular attention to the organization's relationship to journalists and media institutions. In the next section, I shift to an analysis of the political work obtained through the group's *monitoring*, *analiz*, and *sensibilizasyon* efforts.

### **The Political Work of Human Rights Advocacy**

HR Org's sensibilizasyon efforts focused on disseminating texts and other information via "political-communicative networks" (Alvarez et al. 1998:15).<sup>41</sup> Although they also relied on political actors, partner NGOs, and other local groups, the primary means of dissemination was through the media. The manner in which members carried out their educational and advocacy work rested primarily on their relationship to the media as a "dynamic site of struggle over representation" (Spitulnik 1993:296). Media, in this way, played an important role in the HR Org's work, both as a source of information about current events and hot-button issues as well as a means through which they could disseminate situated interpretations of those events to larger audiences. Within the organization and their task of *analiz*, members worked to interpret and analyze available information in such a way as to channel negativity into feelings of indignation.

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<sup>41</sup> Alvarez and others (1998) also suggest the use of "webs" as opposed to "networks."

This indignation then fed their *sensibilizasyon* efforts as they sought to challenge the status quo. The indignation fostered within group discussions, also fed into their *sensibilizasyon* efforts as they worked to transform feelings of hopelessness into mobilization. “It is often overlooked that NGO advocacy also entails a fight against cynicism and despair to which powerless communities tend to fall victim, in the face of massive political and practical obstacles impairing them to improve their lot” (Jordan & Tuijl 2000:2052). The discursive work engaged by the group, transforming information into indignant calls for action or change, was necessarily a form of political engagement, a site of the political.

As human rights scholar Thomas Keenan (2004:435-6) argued, a human rights organization relies on the fact that “those agents whose behavior it wishes to affect – governments, armies, businesses, and militias – are exposed in some significant way to the force of public opinion, and that they are (psychically or emotionally) structured like individuals in a strong social or cultural context that renders them vulnerable to feelings of dishonor, embarrassment, disgrace, or ignominy.” Thus, the HR Org’s attention to the manner in which information was received by a larger Haitian audience and their belief that they could reach this generalized audience via mass media points to their objective of not just being heard but being heard on a larger scale than face-to-face communication could obtain. As Rappaport noted, “it is one thing to make a discourse intelligible and quite another to make it audible” (1993:301). By making themselves heard, members ultimately sought to put political pressure on those in charge in order to bring about change. This goal follows the idealized conception of advocacy work outlined by Sen (2006:163), as he explains that “governmental response to acute sufferings of people often depends on the political pressure that is put on it, and this is where the exercise of political rights (such as voting, criticizing, protesting) can make a real difference.” “Mobilizing

shame,” Keenan argued, can be an effective way to pressure those in power to bring about change as it “presupposes that dark deeds are done in the dark, and that the light of publicity – especially of the television camera – thus has the power to strike preemptively on behalf of justice” (2004:446). The public aspect of advocacy work is of the utmost necessity if it is to be effective since “reason must be employed in public...if there is to be any possibility of progress or social transformation; beliefs and institutions have no hope of survival if they are not exposed to reason, to judgments sparked by its critical force in public” (436). Mass media, then, was a significant means through which HR Org members engaged politically as they sought to reach broader audiences.

Seeking to challenge the status quo and power holders, human rights advocacy work relies not just on a “moral theory” in which actors are driven solely by the ethical dimension of the campaigns and stances, but also on individual interests in relation to the organization within which they work and donor expectations (Bob 2002, 2010). Although the HR Org may not have had a direct or ratified role within political institutions, its objective to affect power holders and bring about change points to it as a site of the political through which members sought to transform power relations. Indeed, as philosopher and cultural theorist Michel Feher (2007:13) argues, nongovernmental organizations are necessarily political in nature:

No matter how beneficial activists find it either to drape themselves in the purity of ethics or to rest on the authority of science, neither their alleged philanthropy nor their claims to expertise enable them to eschew the conflicts and transcend the power relations that make up the social fabric in which they intervene. To put it simply, nongovernmental politics is no more apolitical than governmental – neither more impervious to the ways in which governmental agencies operate nor endowed with the legal or institutional authority to which these agencies lay claim. Nongovernmental politics can thus be envisioned as encompassing the political involvements of the governed, or better still, as the politics in which the governed as such are involved.

Yet despite the inherently political nature of their advocacy work, HR Org members worked to mask this aspect of it, depoliticizing the situated nature of their interventions. Beyond metadiscursive claims as to the apolitical status of their work, this depoliticization was the result of a number of different factors. Their privileged position in society, as residing outside political institutions and formal political arenas, afforded the group a degree of credibility in claiming its interests spanned beyond politically partisan divisions. The implication is that by residing outside political institutions, organizations of this sort have little to gain economically or socially from their advocacy activities beyond the desire for a more just and ethical society.

The mobilization of rights discourse also worked to depoliticize the group's situated interpretations as they presented a degree of moral outrage through their identification of specific situations, acts, and behaviors as instances of injustice. Such discourses provided an ethical rationalization for their work, masking the politically situated nature of their interpretations. In this way, the political component of advocacy work also arose in relation to the situated interpretations emerging from the group's *analiz* efforts, particularly in the fact that "they need clearly identified opponents and results in order to motivate public action" (Nelson 2001:268). The HR Org's task of *analiz* worked in tandem with their *sensibilizasyon* efforts to persuade and draw broader audiences to their perspective on otherwise ambiguous topics. The ultimate, unstated motivation of such activities, as Feher argues, is a "determination not to be governed *thusly*" (2007:14, emphasis in original); that is, to challenge and potentially change existing power relations and governing practices. Their interpretations assigned blame to formal political actors for the negative outcomes of activities and as negligent for those activities they

did not engage (19). Advocacy work, then, is intimately tied to understandings of democracy and the role of citizens in democratic societies.<sup>42</sup>

Another way in which members depoliticized their work was through enactments of expertise, legitimizing their watchdog role from the point of view that “they have something others lack” (Englund 2006:71). That is, members carried assumptions as to the uneducated status of a general public and their lack of awareness or capacity to fully identify “troubles” and understand them. HR Org members asserted the need to educate Haitians due to lack of knowledge or education on the part of many citizens. From this viewpoint, “illiteracy also equals ignorance, underdeveloped intellectual faculties that frequently result in mistaken beliefs and misunderstandings” (Englund 2006:119). When discussing politicians and elections, participants often remarked and bemoaned a tendency for Haitians to vote and react politically based on emotion as opposed to knowledge and careful analysis. The implication, from this view, is a need to better educate and inform the Haitian population to prevent the demagoguery of politicians from prevailing in electoral politics. Expertise, as Carr argues (2010:18-19), is something people do as opposed to something people have and, in many cases, requires collaborative labor to sustain it.<sup>43</sup> HR Org members, in this way, collaboratively produced and reproduced their own sense of expertise on topics of human rights, justice, and current events through metadiscursive reflections pitting themselves in opposition to a “Haitian public.” They viewed themselves, in contrast to Haitians more generally, as having superior analytical skills and greater understanding of social happenings. “Us” versus “them” oppositions such as this assisted in justifying their self-appointed watchdog role and simultaneously depoliticized their work, even, perhaps, to the members themselves.

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<sup>42</sup> This topic will be taken up further in the chapter that follows.

<sup>43</sup> I take up the topic of expertise through an examination of interactional discourse in the chapter that follows.

In this section, I examined the manner in which HR Org members engaged politically yet worked to depoliticize such engagements. I have hinted at the potential for members' situated interpretations and political commitments to have a real and significant impact on broader audience understandings of current events and issues. In the concluding section, I tentatively take up questions pertaining to the effect of HR Org engagements in relation to political actors and institutions, especially their role in relation to a politically antagonistic environment.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have attempted to present and analyze the make-up and functioning of the HR Org, by way of attention to the activities and processes through which members collected information, analyzed it in particular and situated ways, and subsequently circulated or disseminated their interpretations to a broader audience. The group's *analiz* efforts, in particular, worked to co-construct a shared theory of blame resting on situated identification of injustices, cause/effect, declining conditions and responsibility. Despite the manner in which the deliberative practices within the organization served to socialize group members to shared understandings and assumptions, the politically situated nature of their interpretations did not remain confined to the organization itself. Instead, the group transformed their understandings and political commitments into texts and media interventions available to broader audiences. Although the uptake of those interventions remains unknown, the manner in which members worked to depoliticize their contributions to wider debates regarding Haitian society, political actors, and institutions afforded the group a privileged position – a moral high ground – from which to engage in political contestation. In this way, I argued that the deliberative practices of

the HR Org represent a site of the political, a means through which members sought to radically transform existing power relations.

The manner in which members depoliticized their messages and activities was an important part of the group's discursive practices. It was the result, in part, of the group's social positioning as operating outside formal political arenas. In this way, the organization's objective of *monitoring* and educating on the topic of human rights, allowed members a privileged status in society, one which purportedly favored justice over partisan politics. Despite the organization's existence as external to politically partisan institutions, their activities – like those of media institutions – were squarely within a “web of influence” (Tannen 1998:78) that contributed to how events and political actors were understood and interpreted by larger audiences.

As sociologist Paul Nelson (2001:269) warns, “there is a danger that NGO advocates and friendly observers could be seduced by the heroic image that they and others have created.” In this way, Lisa Jordan and Peter Van Tuijl (2000:2053) argue for greater “political responsibility” on the part of the NGO advocates since “it cannot be denied that NGOs are in fact representing interests when they operate with an expertise in a specific political arena and use that knowledge to carry a campaign concern to a new level of decision-making.” The group's close ties to journalists and media institutions created a situation in which they could influence the ways listening audiences understood and interpreted events. In this way, the group's political commitments and stances had the potential to become “truth” beyond the confines of the organization itself. Attending to the internal dynamics and activities of the organization only gets us so far, however. More research and different methodological engagements are needed in order to understand the uptake and effectiveness of disseminated discourses.

Given the oppositional and antagonistic political environment of post-dictatorship Haiti, HR Org members were very much a part of this reality and likely contributed to the oppositional nature of politics and the general atmosphere of antagonistic discourses. Members were, in many ways, both a product of that antagonism – in their hyper attentiveness to media discourse as a source of information – as well as an actor contributing to the production and reproduction of antagonisms. Interpreting events, allocating responsibility and taking a public stance were, for the group, a form of agency that carried the potential to produce or reproduce the very object members sought to identify and explain: they searched for evidence of impropriety and growing insecurity by way of their attention to and negative assumptions about political actors, behaviors, and conditions in the country. Along similar lines, accusations of witchcraft carry the potential to produce the reality such accusations seek to explain: in witch hunts, the allocation of responsibility “turns what might otherwise be an accident or random misfortune into an action” (Laidlaw 2010:157). To seek out someone to blame for what might have otherwise been viewed as accidental, necessarily results in allocating blame in particular ways. Given that the majority of interpretive work engaged by HR Org members stemmed from ambiguous or inconclusive evidence, the potential for producing the realities they wished to explain only increased, with discourse being the means through which this process took place. Discourse, then, carries the potential to have significant pragmatic force in constructing shared understandings of reality. As I demonstrated, the deliberative practices within the HR Org were productive as members worked to co-construct shared understandings of injustice, cause/effect, declining conditions, and blame. In circulating their situated interpretations to broader audiences, HR Org members contributed to generalized feelings of anxiety and distrust.



Approaching political contestation and advocacy work in a critical light is not to say that all forms of contestation are necessarily unjustified. There are indeed legitimate reasons to denounce or otherwise alert the public to serious human rights abuses or abuses of power. Yet, what this analysis reveals is that much of the discourse on deficiencies, “crisis,” and “insecurity” rests on interpretations made through the lens of distrust and entrenched political commitments as opposed to unmediated concerns for justice.<sup>44</sup> Much of the problem lies in the lack of information available to the public regarding current events and scandals. Indeed, available information tends to be ambiguous or incomplete. Whether or not these factors can ever really be avoided, remains difficult to speculate. Yet, for better or worse, the gaps and ambiguities leave significant openings through which interpretations, accusations, and gossip have the potential to take over as reality for many people.

Despite the consequences of such situated interpretations and the public circulation of them, HR Org members did not reflexively recognize their political role in relation to formal political arenas and the manner in which they contributed to a general atmosphere of antagonistic politics. Indeed, members complained about and largely blamed politicians, and, at time, the media itself, for a general lack of justice and improvement in the country. Such engagements took place from a privileged position as self-appointed watchdogs operating outside formal political arenas. The group’s status as a human rights institution provided members with a moral high ground from which to lodge critiques and contestation with the objective of transforming power relations. Instead of recognizing the politically partisan nature of their stances, members felt justified in their role of *monitoring* and reporting observations, as if they themselves were

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<sup>44</sup> Chapters 4 and 5 will also hint at the strategic use of denunciations in Haitian politics. The Youth Org case presents an even starker picture of the use of such denunciations as a means to get a leg up in electoral processes.

detached outsiders, not subject to the same emotional, political, and individual interests as the rest of the population and the political leaders they regularly condemned.

## CHAPTER 3

### Educating about the Past: The Politics of Historical Interpretation

#### Introduction

It was February 28, 2013. The *Cours d'Appel* courtroom was over-flowing with spectators. “*Qu’avez vous fait de mon pays?!*” (What have you done to my country?!), Jean-Claude Duvalier indignantly fired in the direction of the sitting judge. After several failed attempts to summon Baby Doc to court, this was his first appearance at a hearing to determine if formal charges could be brought against the ex-dictator. The judge was considering multiple charges, most notably theft of state funds and human rights abuses (*krim kont imanite*/crimes against humanity). The call to try and convict Duvalier uneasily rested on questions as to the legality of such a pursuit. Given that Baby Doc had fled the country to settle in France in 1986 and did not return until January 2011, did his 25-year absence fall under the statute of limitations? Could he be tried?

Jean-Claude Duvalier’s statement in court that day not only expressed alarm regarding the current state of the country but was also an attempt to deny responsibility for those conditions by arguing that life under his leadership was better than it was upon his return years later. Mobilizing French, he reportedly stated:

*Je crois avoir fait le maximum pour assurer une vie décente à mes compatriotes... à l’époque le gouvernement gérait la misère mais les entreprises publiques fonctionnaient bien et les Haïtiens envoyaient leurs enfants à l’école. Je ne peux pas dire que la vie était*

*rose mais les gens vivaient déceimment... à mon retour en janvier 2011 j'ai trouvé un pays effondré et rongé par la corruption, c'est à mon tour de demander, qu'avez-vous fait de mon pays?*<sup>1</sup>

I believe I had made every effort to ensure a decent life for my fellow countrymen... at that time, the government had to deal with poverty but the public enterprises functioned well and Haitians sent their children to school. I can't say that life was rosy but people lived decently... when I returned in January 2011, I found a collapsed country, eaten away by corruption. It's my turn to ask, what have you done to my country?

Duvalier's assessment drew on an interpretation of the past as better than the present; he rhetorically pointed to a difference in standard of living, functioning state services, and school attendance as factors supporting this assessment. He clearly had an interest, in that moment, in softening the harsh light shone on his period of leadership, particularly in terms of corruption given that one of the charges against him was theft of state funds. His statements – whether heard directly, quoted on the radio, or through word-of-mouth – sparked controversy and fueled debates focused on the question of whether or not the country had been better off under Duvalier.

While Duvalier's statement sparked heated debate, the topic of debate itself was not a new one. The subject of how to best understand Duvalier's regime in light of current conditions reasserted itself repeatedly in varying contexts both before and after Duvalier's court appearance. Attending to a comparison between past conditions and those of the present, debates of this sort are not only examples of the important role history plays in relation to discourses about development, but it serves as a key focal point for many Haitians seeking to understand current realities. For many, interpreting the past is an important task in the quest to identify and solve Haiti's problems.

Through an analysis of debates comparing conditions under Duvalier with contemporary conditions, my engagement with historical narratives is less about staying true to a so-called

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<sup>1</sup> As reported on *Ranmase* (Radio Caraïbes) March 2, 2013.

“objective account” of historical events, what anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995) identifies as “what happened.” Instead, my analysis is more tightly focused on what he differentiates as “that which is said to have happened,” emphasizing a difference between socio-historical processes and “our knowledge of that process or on a story about that process” (2). This mirrors Charles Briggs’ (1996) distinction between narrated events and the narrative practices involved. For many reasons, we need to attend to not only the referential content of a narrated event but the manner in which events are told as they are constructed and interpreted for particular purposes. As is often the case with historical events, interpretations of Haiti’s dictatorship past are contested; thus, the act of narration itself provides a “central forum for contesting the ownership and social control of representations of conflictual events” (Briggs 1996:23).

The concept of “social memory” helps make the distinction between attention to the accuracy of a historical narrative and the intersubjective mobilization of particular narratives.<sup>2</sup> Memory connotes remembrance of something that happened in the past, the act of which is necessarily carried out in the present. Attention to interpretations of history in the present, known as “memory-work” takes “that which is said to have happened” as an important social and discursive process in the present.

According to philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1952), memory is inherently social; individuals acquire memories through social interactions and experiences and

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<sup>2</sup> Here I draw on Jackson’s understanding of intersubjectivity, with clear connections to the language as social action and dialogic approach favored by linguistic anthropologists. The intersubjective “turn” conceptualizes the individual in relation to larger social norms or what we might identify as “culture.” Here the emphasis remains on the “dialogic emergence” (Tedlock and Mannheim 1994) of cultural forms/norms through interaction: “selfhood is understood as a bipolar notion, arising from and shaped by ever-altering modalities of embodied social interaction and dialogue” (Jackson 1998:6).

they recall and localize their memories through social interactions in the present.<sup>3</sup> Thus, social memory can be both social and individual in its attachment to people and the social groups to which they belong (Fentress & Wickham 1992). In arguing that the past is reconstructed through a lens of present concerns and interests, however, is not to say that the past is continually recreated; rather, according to Halbwachs, there is a cumulative and presentist aspect to social memory: partial continuity is maintained along with the creation or recreation of interpretations based on present interests. Anthropologist Paul Connerton (1989) elaborates on this presentist angle, adding that individuals experience the present differently depending on the different pasts to which they connect their present circumstances. The past, he argues, affects the present in the very enactment of remembrance and reinterpretation. Thus, debates focused on social memory are linked to lived experiences in the present, contributing to how individuals conceptualize and embody those experiences.

If the concept of social memory implies a degree of consensus – that is, if we focus on the “social” aspect of remembering – then something about them must be agreed upon. Yet, by recognizing the link between historical narratives and present interests, which are at once social *and* individual, the inevitability of conflict remains undeniable. In this sense, social memory is necessarily unstable, slippery, and conflict-ridden as social divisions lead to different “versions” of remembrance. Hegemony of one historical interpretation over others, is rarely achieved; often, contesting narratives remaining in circulation, even if marginal in relation to dominant ones (French 2012:343).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Halbwachs utilized the term “collective memory” instead of “social memory” (see Fentress & Wickham 1992; Connerton 1989).

<sup>4</sup> Gramsci also noted the disjointed nature of popular memory. This analysis contrasts in some ways to his, particularly in the generalized ways in which he pits dominant historical interpretations against subaltern, popular ones. As Andrea Smith points out, his conception of “common sense” ideas held by subaltern groups and his view that common sense was itself a threat to a coherent political movement is problematic in many ways. See Smith

In her review of the semiotics of collective memory, anthropologist Brigitte French (2012:340) explains that “collective memories are (a) receptive to individuals’ positions in society even as they are not idiosyncratic; (b) mediated representations rather than absolute truths; (c) made and remade in complex and unequal social orders; and (d) related to questions of power insofar as efficacious collective memories are linked to authoritative truth claims about historical facts.” Discursive debates involving social memory, then, are inherently political. Discussions focused on the past represent moments when individuals assert the right to make historical claims. Attending to these conflicting claims to represent social memory, and the temporal links discursively mobilized by speakers, allows us to better understand the role of politics in relation to historical narratives.

In the case of the Duvalier debate, historical narratives and interpretations vary widely and depend on one’s age, education level, socioeconomic experiences, and political alliances. Thus, conflicts that arise between differing historical narratives arise along the fault lines of particular social divisions. Evaluations of Haitian society as “better” or “worse” in relation to its dictatorship past, from this view, are not simply a matter of objectively measuring differences regarding the material conditions or socio-economic status of those making claims regarding particular historical events. The process, rather, is also intimately tied to political commitments of the present. Deliberative practices of this sort are not just intellectual forays into the past but are intimately tied to the present and represent sites of the political as they reflect positionality and highlight social divisions. That is, when considering how and why an individual mobilizes particular interpretations of historical events, present day experiences and political alignments need to be taken into consideration.

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(2004) for a more extensive discussion on this topic. In her work, Smith effectively uses Gramsci as a starting point in analyzing narratives of the past and their potential for producing dynamic change (2004:253).

Just as the lived experiences of the present have the potential to affect understandings of the past, understandings of the past have the potential to affect lived experiences in the present. The discursive process for this is politically pragmatic and emerges from social interaction. In this analysis, I explore a number of discursive mechanisms through which this takes place, including erasure of the entextualization process, enactments of expertise, and the mobilization of temporal alignments. I introduce each of these themes below and explore them in more detail in the sections that follow. When used by speakers, mechanisms such as these contribute to the depoliticization of historical interpretations. That is, speakers metapragmatically work to downplay the manner in which personal political commitments permeate historical interpretations. They also attempt to mask the politically pragmatic objectives they seek to obtain through deliberative practices about the past.

Entextualization is the process by which an utterance or text becomes shareable or transmittable and, to a degree, replicated (Urban 1996:21). In the case of historical events, the entextualization process takes place through the identification of significant historical events, decontextualization of those events from their original context, and recontextualization of them in explaining or otherwise interpreting past processes. Entextualization, and the erasures built into the process, contribute to the making and re-making of social memories. Indeed, erasure of the entextualization process, or the process by which historical events were decontextualized and recontextualized, is a key means through which individuals mobilize historical events and narratives for various social and political purposes (French 2012:344). As historical interpretations take place through the lens of ideologies, “elements that do not fit [the] interpretive structure – that cannot be seen to fit – must either be ignored or transformed” (Irvine and Gal 2000:38). Erasures of this sort can at times be deliberate, at other times, unconscious.



Thus, by analyzing the present-day interests that contribute to both explicit erasures and/or the more tacit cherry-picking of historical details within narratives, we can better understand present-day social divisions and political alignments. The moments when such divisions and alignments are most apparent arise through discourse involving conflict, such as debates and arguments. Erasing the entextualization process by way of deliberative practices can have powerful depoliticizing effects.

Another discursive mechanism through which speakers attempt to depoliticize their historical interpretations is through enactments of expertise, that is, the manner in which individuals attempt to elevate their own interpretations of the past over those of others. Here I follow Carr (2010) and French's (2012) lead in approaching expertise as something that emerges interactionally and thus requires "work" to sustain. Rather than something individuals inherently possess, expertise is negotiated interactionally as status in relation to others. Enactments of expertise then, mask the politically partisan nature of historical interpretations by way of calls for greater "accuracy" and differential status claims asserting the right to represent the past. In similar ways, individuals also tacitly mobilize temporal links within discussions about the past as a means to align past events with the present. Discursive alignments of this sort can be a powerful tool through which speakers express political commitments through their interpretations of the past. Yet the role of politics once again remains at a tacit level, especially when coupled with claims of expertise and historical accuracy. The politically partisan nature of historical interpretations and the temporal alignments drawn by speakers, then, are depoliticized through the lens of a search for objective representations of past events. Yet the depoliticization enacted by speakers seeks to have pragmatic force, one that contests and challenges existing power relations.

In this chapter, I deal exclusively with debates focused on comparing conditions under Duvalier with those of the present, in particular, evaluations regarding the country's current state as either better or worse than it was under Duvalier. I draw on debates that took place within the confines of the HR Org, while also broadening my analysis to consider similar debates outside of, although not entirely divorced from, the HR Org. I focus on two specific sites: recurring debates within the HR Org and one conference debate outside the confines of the HR Org. To be sure, debates on the same topic also arose on a variety of radio commentary programs. The face-to-face context and the extent of participation from a variety of different social actors within the two sites I attend to here, however, allow for a more focused analysis of interactional dynamics than would be possible with radio discourse.

I begin the chapter by looking at debates within the HR Org: What positions are taken and by whom? What present concerns, socioeconomic experiences, and political commitments contribute to the positions staked out by individual members? Here I focus on the different factors influencing individual interpretations regarding whether Haiti is better or worse today than it was under Duvalier. Disagreement between members represent varying levels of commitment to democratic institutions in relation to the organization's human rights objectives. They also signal contrasting political commitments in relation to specific government officials. Finally, members differ in their lived experiences and memories as a lens through which they understood Haiti's dictatorship past. Here I focus on the manner in which individual members draw on present concerns and interests in their evaluations and assessments of the past.

I then move on to examine a heated debate that emerged during a conference organized by a related, but independent development organization, one I refer to as "Dev Org."<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>5</sup> I use this as a place marker for the organization as opposed to a pseudonym for it. More information about the organization will be provided in the sections that follow. I make no effort to protect the identify of the organization

emotional intensity of the debate at the Dev Org was itself notable. Over lunch the following day, Alain, the one HR Org member present at the Dev Org conference, reported to his fellow members that the conflict seemed to have arisen because of generational differences. While not necessarily disregarding this analysis, I move beyond it, focusing more tightly on the interactional dynamics involved in the debate and the manner in which they contributed to individuals arguing in favor of one interpretation over another. This analysis serves to not only highlight the manner in which present interests contribute to understandings of the past, but also points to the ways in which different interpretations of the past have a pragmatic effect on understandings of lived experiences in the present.

Ultimately, I argue, debates about the past, such as those centered on evaluating Haiti's dictatorship past, represent attempts to restructure or realign the present-day political commitments of others. As I will demonstrate, although speakers assert a need to educate others on the topic of historical events and conditions – what appears, on the surface, to be an apolitical endeavor – their discussions of the past became a tool for “educating” others regarding political commitments in the present. Utilizing the past in this way, side-steps explicit recognition of such interpretations *as* interpretations, or partial and subject to bias. Instead, participants were able to draw on ideologies that assume historical narratives can be decontextualized or recontextualized without losing their truth value in the process. Deliberative practices of this sort, then, are deeply political, even despite efforts by speakers to depoliticize the partisan stances they expressed through examinations of the past.

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itself for two reasons : 1) the event in question was public; and 2) the status and individuals associated with the organization are an important part of understanding the debate that took place there.

## Political Commitments and Historical Interpretations

“Duvalier’s right, the country has gone to hell (*peyi kraze*) since he left” said Junior, in his quiet and inarticulate manner. Theodore, the meeting moderator, jumped in quickly with “Thank you Junior” effectively cutting him off from further comment. Junior was prone to rambling, a tendency other HR Org staff often marked by snickering and rolling their eyes. As the office guardian, a live-in worker in charge of maintenance and security, Junior was also viewed as one of the least-educated of the group. Regularly attending meetings, he would usually sit quietly or doze off in his seat. At moments when his participation was required, others would frequently jump in to explain and guide his participation, attention and treatment not unlike that afforded to children. Despite this, all members were encouraged to vocally participate during meetings and Junior’s participation at that moment fell in line with this generally inclusive atmosphere. Theodore’s proactive moderating in response indicated both an attempt to control potential rambling while also signaling a level of disregard for Junior’s viewpoint on the subject.

“I don’t think we can say that the country has gotten worse (*fè plis bak*),” Theodore continued. “Duvalier’s trial is an important improvement. It’s a message warning those in power that they could find themselves in front of a judge someday.”

It was Monday morning, March 4<sup>th</sup> 2013 at the HR Org. Duvalier’s accusation in court during the previous week was still fresh in everyone’s mind and the topic of debate that day centered on comparing Haiti’s dictatorship past with the present. Monday’s meeting was not the first time that differing interpretations of historical developments collided within the context of the organization. The group of various staff and volunteers often engaged similar debates. Some took place within the confines of official meeting times, as was the case with this exchange.

Others arose organically in more informal environments, such as over lunch or in casual conversations throughout the day.

In fact, an extensive discussion on the topic of Duvalier's comments broke out over lunch the previous Friday. A number of organization members had been present at Duvalier's trial and had heard his comments directly. Others heard reports of it from their colleagues or from news reports. Everyone had an opinion. Was Duvalier right or wrong? While Junior was not alone in his general agreement with Duvalier, he was certainly in the minority among HR Org staff members. Most members adamantly expressed disagreement with this assessment, seeking sufficient examples that might "prove" improvement and thus warrant the label of "better." During Friday's lunch, three organization members – Theodore, Alain, and Donald – were particularly vocal in arguing against Duvalier's assessment while Louiceus represented the opposition, actively and articulately agreeing with Duvalier.<sup>6</sup> Unlike Junior, Louiceus' status as university-educated and his enthusiasm for studying history allowed him to argue his point of view more effectively. He was, however, unconvincing in the eyes of many of the other participants.

Louiceus argued that Haiti did seem worse off today, particularly in terms of employment opportunities, general orderliness, and crime rates. His debate opponents cited political repression, a lack of freedom of speech, and human rights abuses under Duvalier as evidence to the contrary. Louiceus' position took a nuanced interpretation of Duvalier's regime, noting that most of the repression and violence was directed toward those that had political ambitions. He argued that the level of control exercised by both Duvalier regimes held the flood of foreign importations at bay or, at least, minimized their effect on local production, and ultimately, the

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<sup>6</sup> Louiceus was a law student intern with only a brief presence in the organization (3-4 months). He was often fond of engaging informal discussions about history and his knowledge of historical events seemed, to me, to be remarkably detailed.

population as a whole. In addition, the diffused surveillance and repression served to keep tabs on criminal activity and helped to maintain a clean and orderly society. There was also a greater degree of social shame regarding theft and other criminal activity, he pointed out, and concrete consequences for social transgressions of this sort. His argument also focused on a comparison regarding waste management and trash in the country. In contemporary Haiti, waste management is recognized as a major social and health problem. Where and how to dispose of trash is an issue all Haitians deal with, not only with their own trash, but also in terms of navigating streets and sidewalks where trash tends to pile up. Under Duvalier, Louiceus noted, public spaces were kept clean and there were strict consequences for those disposing of trash in unapproved places.

The issues highlighted by Louiceus in that debate were both similar in content and in stance to discussions that often took place at various times within the context of the HR Org and its members. Violence, crime, environmental degradation, unemployment and trash as a health hazard were common topics of both formal and informal discussion. Indeed, topics of this sort were often analyzed through an interpretive lens of declining conditions, with members viewing them as signs of further social degradation.<sup>7</sup> Thus, regarding the specific issues pointed to by Louiceus, in other contexts and by other group members, such issues were similarly utilized as evidence of worsening conditions. In fact, Louiceus' analysis fell directly in line with previously made arguments by Donald, Theodore, and Alain. Despite the similarities in stance on these issues, the different discursive contexts and political implications led to what appeared to be contradictory stances.

What prompted this apparent shift in position regarding how members like Donald, Alain, and Theodore understood conditions in the country, as declining yet better than they were

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<sup>7</sup> This narrative of decline interpretation was discussed in the previous chapter. As I argued, the narrative of decline interpretive frame was co-constructed and socialized within the organization as a means through which members organized and interpreted events.

under Duvalier? Here I examine a number of factors influencing member interpretations on the issue, including a commitment to democracy as intimately tied to human rights guarantees, present political commitments in relation to specific government officials, and personal lived experiences. In this way, I point to the ways in which members discursively interpreted and configured notions of time, interpretations of which were anchored in the logic of present concerns (French 2012:345).

For HR Org members arguing from the point of view of Haiti being better off in the present, underlying assumptions as to the modernizing principles of democracy clearly influenced their understandings of the past. Democracy, from this ideology, is a socio-political system necessary for enacting positive social change and developmental improvement in the country. A truly democratic society, at least in theory, respects the rights of all citizens. The idealized link between human rights and democratic societies remains intimately tied to the historical development and spread of human rights discourses and the group's commitment to democracy follows this trend (Evans 2001; Ross 2003). While the reality of democratic institutions in countries like Haiti has rarely, if ever, reached this ideal of freedom and equal rights for all citizens, the assumptions attached to it remain strong. Stated and unstated claims that "human rights, equal rights and government under law are important attributes of democracy" (Fox & Nolte 1995:5) and that "if democracy then human rights" (Evans 2001:79) represents a powerful ideology through which many HR Org members organize their understandings and enact their roles as monitors of human rights violations and promoters of democratic institutions.

The group's commitment to the institution and ideal of democracy also stems from their legalistic approach to human rights advocacy. As was previously stated, many members,

including Donald, Theodore, Kerline, Pierre-Louis, and Louiceus, were, or continued to be, students of the law. As Annelise Riles (2006) has noted, most approaches to human rights advocacy around the world have focused on legal knowledge, assuming the law can and should be used as a tool or instrument in the fight for human rights. This instrumentalist approach has been taken up by human rights advocates around the world.<sup>8</sup> This was certainly the case for the HR Org as the group's primary objectives often rested on the issue of justice, identifying instances of injustice and denouncing impunity and the lack of follow through in holding social actors responsible for their misdeeds. Members bemoaned a lack of justice and condemned the ineffectiveness of governmental institutions in protecting the rights of Haitian citizens. For members, their condemnations focusing on a broad definition of "rights" – not only including political and civil rights but economic, social, and cultural rights as well. The group's concern for, and approach to "rights" was made legitimate by the fact that Haitian parliament ratified both of the UN Covenants, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). In the eyes of HR Org members who fought vigorously for ratification of ICESCR – which stalled for a period of years before finally passing in October 2013 – those bills were understood to have the force of law. Just as Mark Goodale (2007:6) has noted, "the idea of human rights must be legislated, legally recognized, and codified before it can be taken seriously as part of the law of nations," HR Org members strongly believed that until both UN covenants were ratified by the Haitian government, the organization itself could not successfully pressure the government to uphold them.

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<sup>8</sup> See Evans (2001), Goodale (2009), Goodale & Merry (2007), Glendon (1991), Steiner (2000), and Wilson & Mitchell (2003).



Thus, the HR Org's attention to reinforcing legal institutions and mechanisms for enforcement was an important part of their role as advocates for human rights. Members understood their *monitoring*, *analiz*, and *sensibilizasyon* activities as carrying the potential to bring about positive changes to Haitian society more generally. To them, grassroots and civil society action pressuring government officials to uphold the law would ultimately lessen the potential for rights violations in the future. Democratic processes and institutions were necessarily an important aspect of this legalistic approach to human rights, as members assumed that a functioning democracy could best guarantee rights and enforce the rule of law. As can be seen below, drawing on a selection of statements published and circulated publicly by the organization, the group presupposed an inherent relationship between democracy and human rights:

*Toute société démocratique a essentiellement pour caractéristiques la participation citoyenne, la liberté et l'égalité pour tous. Dans un système démocratique représentatif ou le pouvoir est établi par le peuple et au service du peuple, la notion "égalité" sous entend que tous les citoyens et citoyennes ont non seulement participé dans tous les espaces de décisions mais aussi ils ont la même chance, jouissent les mêmes privilèges et les mêmes droits. En effet, dans une démocratie fondée sur l'Etat de droit, l'application de la loi ou encore le triomphe de la justice est éminemment nécessaire.<sup>9</sup>*

All democratic societies essentially have the characteristics of citizen participation, freedom and equality for all. In a representative democratic system where the power is established by the people and serves the people, the concept of "equality" implies that all citizens not only participate in all decision-making but they have the same chance in life, enjoy the same privileges and the same rights. Indeed, in a democracy based on the rule of law, the enforcement of law in which justice triumphs is eminently necessary.

*L'existence d'une justice saine, équitable et d'une institution capable d'assurer sa mise œuvre constitue le pilier principal d'un régime démocratique et d'un Etat de droit... Dans toutes les sociétés où règne l'impunité, on cherche par tous les moyens à provoquer l'amnésie collective. On dit souvent un peuple sans mémoire est un peuple mort. Cela*

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<sup>9</sup> Published for the monthly conference, dated May 25, 2012. The document is titled "Droits Humains, Etat de Droit dans un processus Démocratique" (Human rights, state of law in a democratic process).

*signifie aucun progrès économique et social ne peut être effectif dans un pays où l'impunité est à l'honneur.*<sup>10</sup>

The existence of healthy and fair justice, and of an institution capable of ensuring the application of this is the main pillar of a democratic system and the rule of law ... In all societies where impunity prevails, one tries by all means to cause collective amnesia. It is often said that a population without memory is a dead population. This means no economic and social progress can be effective in a country where impunity is valued.

*La [Platform] entend souligner une nouvelle fois de plus que des élections libres, honnêtes, crédibles et démocratiques sont décisives pour garantir le respect de la volonté du peuple lorsqu'il s'agit de renouveler le corps législatif, de l'exécutif et les pouvoirs locaux.*<sup>11</sup>

The [HR Org] intends to emphasize once again that free, fair, credible and democratic elections are crucial to ensure respect for the will of the people when it comes to renewing the legislative body, the executive and local authorities.

Thus, one factor influencing the HR Org member's disagreement with Duvalier's claim that society was worse off in the present than it had been under his leadership, was their political and ideological commitment to democracy and the role of legal institutions in relation to human rights. For many in the group, supporting Duvalier's stance on the issue would have been tantamount to supporting dictatorship. For those who had a stronger commitment to the organization's human rights objectives, which was more the case for paid staff members as opposed to temporary interns such as Louiceus, support for Duvalier's statement was out of the question. Along similar lines, many group members, particularly Donald and Theodore, argued adamantly that Hugo Chavez was not a dictator, as some claimed him to be. Their support of

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<sup>10</sup> Published for the monthly conference, dated April 26, 2013. The document is titled "*L'impunité, un handicap majeur au bon fonctionnement de la justice haïtienne*" (Impunity, a major handicap for a well-functioning Haitian justice system).

<sup>11</sup> Published in a communiqué online (via the organization's website), dated April 14, 2015. Communiqués were almost exclusively written for the purpose of circulating statements about the organization's stance in relation to specific events. Although not all communiqués were posted online during the time I spent with the organization, there was a desire to do so and Donald expressed the hope that they would even translate them into a variety of languages such as English and Spanish. Despite this desire, my general assessment is that online media was under-utilized by the group, likely due to a lack of resources, time, and training.

Chavez was no secret as they often discussed and praised the assistance he offered to Haiti, especially in the form of cheap oil. They also remained attentive to the events that followed his death, including the funeral and elections.<sup>12</sup> Many in the group quickly and vigorously rejected the label of “dictator” whenever it arose in the context of discussions or was utilized in media descriptions.

Although the group’s commitment to democracy played a major role in their assessments regarding the status of Haitian society, their distrust and disdain for specific government officials – most notably, President Martelly – was equally important. That is, members often took a stance in opposition to President Martelly. As was referenced in the previous chapter, during the period of this research, the group had strong inclinations regarding Martelly’s legitimacy as president and generally denounced most, if not all, Martelly’s actions or failures to act. The justifications vocalized as supporting those denunciations ultimately rested on questions of development, democracy, and respect for human rights as members questioned his intentions to serve the people and rather saw him as, like many of his predecessors, acting for selfish and power-hungry reasons. Not only did group members proceed from a theory of blame that assumed responsibility for social “troubles” aligned with those in positions of power, but they also interpreted various behaviors of government officials as signs of impropriety, greed, and immorality. In the case of President Martelly, many of his utterances and actions were understood as signs of his desire to become Haiti’s next dictator. For them, the country was constantly in jeopardy of falling into another dictatorship.

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<sup>12</sup> Martelly’s attendance at the funeral was marked by scandal with HR Org members criticizing his choice in wearing a red shirt. This signaled, to them, an alliance with Chavez’ political commitments. Members believed this was a false front and worried about the message it would send to whoever came to replace Chavez and to other leaders around the world.

During one meeting, a month prior to Duvalier's appearance in court, Donald and Louiceus debated the likelihood of this happening. Leaders always have the intention of becoming dictators, Louiceus began. But, he argued, it simply is not possible for them to actually become dictators given the current political climate. The population would not accept this even despite accusations by political opponents accusing Martelly of consolidating power in a dictatorship-like manner. Denunciations of this sort, he argued, were simply a diversionary tactic. Donald disagreed, arguing that Martelly had already done a number of things that are not acceptable within a democracy. He had, according to Donald, failed to establish and follow the rule of law (*etadedwa*). And yet, Donald stated, Martelly had been allowed to get away with those actions, without the population doing anything to stop him. Donald cited a number of examples, including the fact that the prime minister, nominated by the president, was approved by Parliament despite the candidate's failing to pay taxes in the country.<sup>13</sup> He argued that even in countries that were technologically advanced, falling into a dictatorship was always a distinct possibility. He drew on Egypt as a comparative example, although he left the details of the comparison unspecified. "*Yon mis en place kap fèt*" (A process to put it in place is happening), he stated. Another participant, Yves, supported this interpretation, pointing to the issue of a rape accusation made against a member of the electoral counsel. In his view, this case pointed to the fact that impunity reigns: there's no fear of getting in trouble, he argued.<sup>14</sup> Yves went further,

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<sup>13</sup> The constitution includes a stipulation that disallows anyone as a potential candidate for prime minister on the grounds that they have not paid taxes in the country.

<sup>14</sup> The rape accusation Yves referenced here involved accusations against a government-appointed electoral counsel member by his secretary. The scandal was heavily debated and largely unfolded through media reports, interviews, and live debates between legal counsel as well as those directly implicated in the scandal. In the end, the young woman dropped the charges. The case was never heard in court although it could be argued that it was tried via public media and gossip. HR Org members analyzed the media's handling of the events as responsible for the woman's withdrawal of the case, given that her character was repeatedly, and often brutally, questioned. Evidence in the case, such as the medical report, were also analyzed, questioned, and critiqued to a fever's pitch during radio commentary programs, despite objections by the woman's legal counsel. Several months after Yves made this comment regarding impunity and rape, another rape scandal erupted, involving a member of parliament and a secretary working within the National Assembly. This scandal is further referenced in Chapter 5.

arguing that criminality is trivialized and that, within such conditions, the population could easily and unknowingly support a transition to dictatorship.

A number of months later, at another weekly meeting in March 2013, Donald urged the group to take a public stance on what he saw as an alarming situation. He pointed to a series of events that led him to believe that the unthinkable had become real: censorship of musicians and journalists was taking place in overt ways. An act of purported racism was also cited in which dark-skinned Haitians were banned from attending a government sponsored event. Given that discrimination within the political class based on race has a long history in Haiti (Trouillot 1990a), the interpretation of the president's actions being based on racism of this sort, resonated with many. Haitians, Donald argued, "*kap dòmi*" (are sleeping) and were acting like "*zonbi*" (zombis). To him, Haitians were not paying attention to what was going on and this, he implied, created a dangerous situation.<sup>15</sup>

By "unthinkable," Donald was referring to a past state of dictatorship, under the Duvaliers, coupled with a more distant past during which light-skinned Haitians ruled politically. It was also a reference to the speed and relative ease with which Papa Doc was able to consolidate power and shift the country solidly into a state of dictatorship, with little opposition from the general public. Prior to François Duvalier's rise to power in 1957, Haiti's political class had largely been dominated by a light-skinned Haitian elite. Papa Doc's appeal, at the time, drew on black nationalist fervor that largely arose from a recent past of foreign intervention and the

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<sup>15</sup> References to "zonbis" need to be understood within the context of Haiti as opposed to a Western stereotypical understanding of zombis. In Haitian vodou, zombis are understood as those whose souls have been stolen and enslaved by others for the purpose of making them "work" for the enslaver (the "master"). The process involves the use of a potion that mimics – or causes, depending on the interpretation – the death of the targeted individual only to have them "rise from the dead" as empty and soulless individuals doomed to "serve" a master mindlessly. In contrast to the Western depiction of zombis, to Haitians, zombis do not eat the flesh of the living nor do they threaten them. They are, however, frightening in their appearance and behavior. Wes Craven's (1988) film-length depiction of biological anthropologist Wade Davis' popular book, depicts Davis' journey to "discover" the mysteries behind the zombification process. Both the film and Davis' book (1985) are titled "The Serpent and the Rainbow."

US occupation of Haiti (1915-1934). The period was marked by growing resentment of foreign intervention and control of government and business enterprises by a Haitian mulatto elite. Papa Doc's association with the black middle class and his interest in Haiti's African cultural heritage made him an appealing candidate to many. Once in office, however, the soft-spoken country doctor ruthlessly strategized to quickly and effectively consolidate power. In citing Martelly's actions as alarming, Donald was both referencing a concern regarding Haiti's pre-Duvalier history of elite mulatto control over government institutions as well as a concern that Martelly might succeed in consolidating power and shifting Haiti back into a state of dictatorship with little recognition of the process as it was happening. In this way, members' distrust and disdain for those in power, especially President Martelly, led to interpretations of his actions and failures to act as signs of larger processes and undemocratic intentions. As was discussed in the previous chapter regarding insecurity and declining conditions, the search for impropriety and malevolent intentions became a self-fulfilling prophecy as members identified evidence in support of their interpretations.

In addition to an ideological commitment to democracy and political commitments in opposition to those in positions of power, members' assessment of conditions under Duvalier in relation to those of the present also derived from their lived experiences. Here I focus on three members in particular: Junior, Louiceus, and Donald. Junior's agreement with Duvalier's assessment of the country's status was not necessarily tied to political support for dictatorship, either Duvalier or Martelly. Instead, it was drawn from particular experiences, most notably a relatively impoverished life, albeit one that had a degree of privilege given his employment at the organization. Junior's involvement in the organization was a strong point of pride for him, as he was able to support his children and extended family because of it. Yet, there were also recurrent

moments of discord, most notably when he remarked as to his mother's illness and the poor medical attention she was receiving where she lived, in a province outside of the capital. He expressed to the group during a weekly meeting, that he wished to visit his mother before she passed away but lacked the money to do so. While the rest of the members patiently listened to him, they did not express a desire to help out financially nor did they, as far as was evident to me, allow him the time off to leave the city for an extended visit. In addition, moments of discord occasionally arose during weekly meetings as Junior expressed his disappointment in the organization's overall impact. At one meeting he argued in favor of more concrete action, stating that he himself was not afraid of protesting. He critiqued the organization members as doing too much *analiz* and not enough concrete action. In general, his assessments and contributions often took on a pessimistic slant, such as declaring "*peyi a pap janm chanje*" (the country is never going to change). His pessimism about the future of the country sometimes extended to a pessimism about the organization's ability to bring about change.

Louiceus and Donald also came from relatively impoverished and uneducated family situations, however, both were able to pursue educational objectives and had the opportunity, albeit later in life, to get a university education. Louiceus was approximately three years older than Donald, despite his status as intern in relation to Donald's position as the director of the organization. Their age difference, although only three years, is significant when considered in relation to the fall of Duvalier and the period of democratic transition that followed. Born in 1973, Louiceus was thirteen years old at the time Duvalier fled the country in 1986. Donald was only 10 years old. During an interview with me, Louiceus recounted what he recalled of the period, including many of the points mentioned above such as a lack of crime, cleanliness, and a lack of contraband items in the markets. While he conceded that much of what people say about

Duvalier is accurate regarding politically-motivated violence, he was also quick to argue that the effects of this violence and repression on the general population were often exaggerated. It was only criminals and politically engaged individuals, he argued, who were largely the targets of violence. In contrast to Louiceus' anecdotal memories of conditions under Duvalier, Donald never drew on similar recollections and relied rather on generalized reports of human rights abuses, violence, disappearances, and forced exile for those politically active individuals.<sup>16</sup>

Individual experiences, both in the past and the present, played a role in how each evaluated and understood Duvalier's statement regarding conditions in the present compared with those of the past. Anthropologist Andrea Smith's (2004) analysis of the recollections of former non-French settlers of Algeria regarding "melting pot" narratives emphasizes differences between "semantic memory" and "episodic memory." According to her, episodic memory, as rooted in lived experiences, results in different forms of recollection than those of semantic memory, which largely derive from second-hand ideas such as those learned in educational setting (2004:264). Through a close analysis of narratives drawing on past recollections of conditions in Algeria, she argues that "episodic memory may be more vulnerable and may even change with retrieval, whereas semantic memory seems to be less altered in this way" (ibid.). In the case of the HR Org and member positions regarding the Duvalier debate, we can see how different lived experiences of the past and present may lead to different interpretations and understandings of the past. Just as Louiceus' episodic memories of life under Duvalier influenced his interpretation of current conditions as worse than the present, Donald's semantic memories of the same period – drawing on popular and scholarly interpretations – likewise influenced his stance on the issue.

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<sup>16</sup> Theodore and Alain were both considerably younger in age and thus had no recollections of life under Duvalier.



While their individual personal experiences influenced their interpretations, their political commitments also played a role. Politically speaking, Louiceus' argument was not necessarily a defense of Duvalier or dictatorship in general, although he did express the sentiment that Haiti needed a strong leader, a "*dictateur de la loi*" (dictator of the law). His stance was less about political commitments and more about accuracy of historical accounts. Donald's political commitments, in contrast, were aligned directly with an activist's struggle for justice, siding, in particular, with poor and disenfranchised Haitians. Indeed, the narrative of his life story, recounted to me, reflected this stance as he repeatedly highlighted the ways in which his own life was marred by poverty and a struggle to survive and obtain an education. His life story, as he characterized it, was "*trajik*" (tragic). This is not to say that Donald necessarily simplified his examinations of Haitian society and history to fit a particular interpretation. Indeed, his contributions to group discussions often worked to complicate understandings of social happenings and historical processes. Yet, it remains clear that his political commitment to human rights, justice, and democratic rule of law more often than not motivated specific interpretations.

Although it would seem that, from a narrative of decline perspective, an assessment of the country as deteriorating both during and after Duvalier's departure would be self-evident, the analysis presented here points to several factors influencing individual interpretations, including ideological commitments to democracy, political commitments in opposition to specific government officials, and individual life experiences. Thus, what initially appeared to be contradictory stances on the part of members like Donald, Theodore, and Alain, makes sense if we take into consideration other factors influencing their interpretations of the past and the present context within which those interpretations arose. The stance most members took in opposition to Duvalier's assessment, was, in many ways, a politically-motivated exception to the

narrative of decline interpretive frame. In fact, other statements and published documents by the organization point to how members explained and understood this exception. From their view, while society was generally better off following Duvalier's departure, current events as they were unfolding under Martelly's leadership, point to the existence of a tipping point in which Haiti's status as a democracy was threatened:

*En somme, la [Platform] estime que ces vingt sept ans représentent un échec pour la classe politique haïtienne. En termes de bilan, le tableau sur la réalité sociale, économique et politique du pays est triste et sombre. Bien que le peuple haïtien ait maintenu les acquis démocratiques notamment la liberté d'expression, de réunion et d'association; ces droits fondamentaux sont, aujourd'hui, publiquement menacés.<sup>17</sup>*

In sum, the [HR Org] believes that these twenty seven years represent a failure for the Haitian political class. In terms of the report, the picture on the social, economic, and political life is sad and dark. Although the Haitian people have maintained democratic achievements such as freedom of expression, assembly and association; these fundamental rights are now openly threatened.

The disagreement expressed by a number of group members was based less on logic or historical "truths" and rested more heavily on present concerns. Debates on the topic of Haiti's dictatorship past were necessarily circumscribed within and through the lens of present ideologies, political commitments, and lived experiences. Here I examined the role of member ideologies concerning the relationship between democratic institutions and the organization's human rights objectives as well as individual members' political commitments in opposition to specific government officials, most notably President Martelly. While this section has dealt in more general terms with HR Org members' stances regarding past conditions in relation to present ones, in the next section I shift to an discursive analysis of a similar debate engaged during a Dev Org conference. I examine the various discursive mechanisms mobilized by participants in their arguments about

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<sup>17</sup> Published for the monthly conference, dated February 22, 2013. The document is titled, "Haïti, 27 ans après la chute de la dictature des Duvalier, quels sont les avancés dans le processus de l'instauration de la démocratie?" (Haiti, 27 years after the fall of the Duvalier dictatorships, what advances have there been in the establishment of democracy?).

Haiti's dictatorship past, including the enactment of expertise, mobilization of temporal alignments, and erasure of the entextualization process. Although the Dev Org example also points, in similar ways as the HR Org, to present political commitments as underlying particular interpretations of the past, by attending to the interaction more closely, I am able to examine the pragmatic effect discourses about the past have on present circumstances. In particular, I analyze the ways in which speakers discursively worked to depoliticize the partisan nature of their interpretations in an effort to reconfigure the political commitments of others. Following James Fentress and Chris Wickham (1992), I argue that remembering and interpreting the past are not simply individual acts of representing "what happened" but are a form of social action, carrying the potential to influence the manner in which individuals understand their lived experiences in the present.

### **Educating the Youth: Expertise and Political Alignments**

The conference Q&A took an unexpected turn as an elderly woman swiveled in her chair and began lecturing the young man behind her. Stuttering, her voice cracked with emotion: "...when someone acted politically, they CAME BY and TOOK his wife AND kids, do you hear? They took PEOPLE who had the same name AS HIM..." The level of emotion expressed in her speech demonstrated that she may have had a personal connection to the indiscriminate violence she described as typical of the Duvalier dictatorships: that anyone taking political action or acting politically was at risk of not only violence against the self but a whiplash effect of violence against one's family and innocent bystanders, those simply sharing a name, as she states. Her emotional outburst was one of many at that particular conference, all of which were

directed at the same young man who had earlier done the unthinkable in their eyes: he had expressed sympathy and nostalgia for Jean-Claude Duvalier's period of leadership.

It was late afternoon on the 29th of March 2012, nearly a year prior to Duvalier's trial and the HR Org's debate on the same topic, as examined in the previous section. The conference in question started out with little of the fanfare and emotion with which it ended. I arrived on time, which meant I was early by Haitian standards. At the time of my arrival, the room was mostly empty with people slowly shuffling into the open-air room, filling available seats. By the time the conference began, about 30 minutes later, every seat was occupied. Thirty minutes into the presentations, the back of the room and side entrance were packed with students and scholars vying for standing room.

The conference was taking place at a well-known development organization and foundation, *Centre de Recherche et de Formation Économique et Sociale pour le Développement* (CRESFED).<sup>18</sup> Founded and run by Suzy Castor, Dev Org was widely known for its scholarly publications, including books and a journal, and its availability of intern positions for students from the State University. It also continued to be the occasional site of scholarly debate, albeit an infrequent one. Activities such as the one analyzed here, regardless of the advertised theme, attracted many students, professors, independent scholars, and local NGO representatives.<sup>19</sup> While the Dev Org, at that time, was less active in terms of its public activities and its relationship with the press, it continued to partner with other organizations who were more active and also continued to garner a degree of respect among those familiar with its history and founders.

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<sup>18</sup> Center for Socioeconomic Research and Training for Development.

<sup>19</sup> In fact, the *Faculté des Sciences Humaines* (Social Sciences Department) of the State University organized a bus to take students and faculty from the university to the conference site that day.

The event that afternoon was not particularly notable. It was publicized as the launching of a new edition of the *Rencontre* (Meeting) journal. As a collection of scholarly reflections, that particular edition was dedicated to the late Jean-Claude Bajeux, a Haitian political activist and scholar of Caribbean literature. As with many organization-published journals, newsletters, or bulletins in Haiti, Dev Org's monthly journal was rarely published on schedule, with circulation taking place every other month or even every three months.

The conference that afternoon proceeded in the usual way conferences do, with panelists presenting prepared texts or ad lib commentaries. Most of the presentations had a general connection to the conference theme, although many also included tangential comments. One by one, each of the five panelists presented until all were finished.

Once the floor was opened to questions and participation on the part of the audience, a man I had encountered several times at different conferences in the past raised his hand and was granted permission to speak. He had presented himself to me in the past as a professor of linguistics, teaching at the State University's Department of Ethnology.<sup>20</sup> He sat next to me at the Dev Org conference and we spoke briefly before it began. He expressed his desire to continue his education, wanting to study economics and international development, hoping to eventually land a job at an international organization such as the UN or the World Bank. With the microphone in hand during the conference Q&A, he began by pointing out the contradictions and complications embedded in the discourse of reconstruction following the 2010 earthquake, a theme that had come up several times during the panel presentations. How, he asked, can we talk of *RE*-constructing the country when it was never really constructed in the first place? Reflecting

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<sup>20</sup> We had met months before, in November 2011, at a conference on international aid where he first introduced himself to me as a linguist. We ran into each other again at a conference put on by the State University's Department of Ethnology in February 2012, when he helped me navigate the department's buildings. At the time, he claimed to be a professor in the department; however, he appeared to be more aligned with the building's staff than he was with those intellectuals, scholars, and professors at the conference. I suspect, if he was actually an instructor there, it was likely a language course and not one requiring significant scholarly credentials.

on the destruction of a “Haitian mentality” predating the earthquake, he asked: “Shouldn’t we first reconstruct what it means to be Haitian, the Haitian nation, before attempting to reconstruct buildings?”

While these comments in and of themselves may have resulted in a heated debate – as development themes so often did – it was his later statements that brought on a thunderstorm of response. His shift to a stance and evaluation in relation to Baby Doc’s leadership riled up the audience:<sup>21</sup>

*Moi, maintenant je suis d'accord avec Jean-Claude et je l'aime parce que ma génération n'a pas connu n'avait pas plutôt connu Jean-Claude Duvalier vous vous l'avez connu mais pour nous maintenant cette constitution je l'ai à la main j'ai même les textes (des motions) après 25 ans dit-moi si Jean-Claude n'a pas eu vraiment raison de retourner dans cette (?) de macabre si on parle de criminels après Jean-Claude Duvalier ce pays a produit d'avantage de criminels pires que Jean-Claude Duvalier.. si si si on est honnête.. si on veut si on est honnête nous avons connu des criminels pires que ce qu'a connu sous le sous régime de Jean Claude Duvalier maintenant comme maintenant nous nous sommes dans un pays on sait pas où on va nous sommes comme dans un train qui a perdu sa rail maintenant nous sommes déraillés et il n'y a personne pour dire halte et nous vivons avec cette honte...*

Myself, now I agree with Jean-Claude and I like him because my generation didn’t know, never really knew Jean-Claude Duvalier. You, rather you all knew him but for now this constitution, I have it in my hand. I also have the text (of motions). After 25 years, tell me if Jean-Claude is not really right to return to this (site) of macabre. If one speaks of criminals after Jean-Claude Duvalier, this country produces an advantage for criminals worse than Jean-Claude Duvalier. If one is honest, if one wants, if one is honest, we have known worse criminals than those under Jean-Claude Duvalier’s regime. Now, since right now we’re in a country where we don’t know where we’re going. It’s as if we’re on a train that has gone off the tracks. We’ve derailed and there isn’t anyone to say stop, and we live with this shame...

At the time of the conference in question, Duvalier had been in the country for over a year and criminal proceedings had seemed to stall. The man queried the group as to whether Duvalier was

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<sup>21</sup> Since his comments were entirely in French, I have chosen not to follow the convention of underlining French utterances. I do, however, underline French utterances when they are mobilized alongside the use of Kreyòl, as was the case with other speakers at the conference.

justified in returning to Haiti after nearly 25 years in France. He asserted that there are far worse criminals in Haiti now than there were under Duvalier. He evaluated Haiti's current conditions as disastrous – a derailed train – with no clear leader, or no one “to say stop.” Continuing his commentary, the young man positioned himself in relation to a growing number of young people wanting to leave the country in search of life elsewhere:

*Maintenant qu'est-ce qu'il faut faire maintenant pour nous reconstruire? c'est ça notre grand problème maintenant il y a des jeunes (car parce que) moi nous sommes (des) jeunes notre objectif c'est de laisser ce pays pour ne jamais retourner et nous y sommes vraiment laisser (?). Maintenant je demande alors si je veux rester dans ce pays donne-moi une seule raison applicable...*

Now, what needs to be done now to reconstruct? That's our biggest problem. Now, there are many young people because myself, we're among a number of youth whose objective is to leave the country and never return and we're really going to leave it (?). Now, I'm asking this: If I want to stay in this country, give me one reason to do so...

His comments sparked controversy and strong emotions from various attendees, including the conference panelists. Another audience member, in line to speak next even before the young man's comments on Duvalier, chose to directly address the young man's sentiments rather than shift back to whatever comments or questions had originally prompted him to join the Q&A queue in the first place:<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> This interaction was also entirely in French and thus, I have not underlined the entire exchange as such.

### Transcript 3.0: Dev Org Conference Debate

1	Part 1	<i>Bonsoir, alors</i>	Good afternoon, well
2		<i>je peux tout commencer</i>	I could also begin
3		<i>ma préoccupation par la question</i>	my concerns with the man's
4		<i>de monsieur, bon,</i>	concerns, well,
5		<i>je comprend très mal</i>	I don't understand
6		<i>cet attitude de ce dédouaner</i>	this attitude of this (?),
7		<i>quelqu'un qui a pu maîtriser</i>	someone who has been able to master
8		<i>le français a parler comme ça</i>	French and speak like that
9		<i>et dit qu'il n'a que-</i>	and say that he has that-
10		<i>ne sait pas que Jean Claude Duvalier</i>	he did not know Jean Claude Duvalier
11		<i>était un dictateur, un criminel</i>	was a dictator, a criminal
12		<i>et sa génération ne connaît pas</i>	and his generation didn't know.
13		<i>c'est une c'est-c'est irresponsable</i>	It's, it's- it's irresponsible
14		<i>de votre parent monsieur de dire.</i>	of your parents, sir, to tell you that.
15		<i>Là je crois qu'on dans cette</i>	There, I believe that one- in this-
16		<i>de- dans cet- (en cette) la-</i>	in this- (in this-) there-
17		<i>on peut pas tolérer de quelqu'un viens</i>	One cannot tolerate someone
18		<i>dit ça, et di bon, si-</i>	coming here to say that, and well, if-
19		<i>vous pouvez aimer</i>	You can appreciate
20		<i>Jean Claude Duvalier</i>	Jean Claude Duvalier,
21		<i>C'est votre choix=</i>	that's your choice
22	Part 2	<i>=C'est un choix=</i>	=That's a choice=
23	Part 1	<i>=personne ne peut pas se battre</i>	=No one could argue with
24		<i>contre vous parce que vous aimez</i>	you because you appreciate
25		<i>Jean Claude Duvalier parce que</i>	Jean Claude Duvalier because
26		<i>vous êtes de la jeunesse rose,</i>	you are part of the pink youth,
27		<i>la jeunesse bleu comme ça peut (?)</i>	the blue youth, it's like that you can (?)
28	Aud	<i>[((clapping))]</i>	<i>[((clapping))]</i>
29	YM	<i>[Non.. non ]</i>	<i>[No.. no ]</i>

Here we can see that the ratified participant (Part 1) addresses the young man (YM) directly, expressing his disagreement with the argument that his generation did not in fact know that Duvalier was a dictator and criminal (lines 10-11). The speaker blames this ignorance on the young man's parents for presumably not sharing with him what life was actually like under Duvalier. He goes on to point out that his disagreement is not regarding whether or not the young man appreciates Duvalier, as this, he asserts, is a personal choice (line 21). Another audience member (Part 2) – an unrated participant – quietly expressed his agreement, paralleling the statement that it was the young man's personal choice to support or not support Duvalier (line



22). Part 1 goes on to mock the young man a bit, explaining his sympathizing with Duvalier as resulting from his support for Martelly. Here he references Martelly supporters as “pink youth” (line 26) and Duvalier supporters as “blue youth” (line 27), drawing on symbols such as Martelly’s campaign colors of pink and white, and the blue uniforms of Duvalier’s *Tonton Macoutes*. In doing so, he aligns Martelly supporters with Duvalier supporters. Accusations as to one’s support for Martelly, in contexts such as the Dev Org conference, were often viewed negatively. Indeed, the audience’s response (line 28) points to the implication that accusations of this sort were viewed as a form of mockery. The young man’s immediate disagreement in line 29 also highlights his own recognition of Part 1’s comment as an insult. His disagreement, however, goes unrecognized and he was not granted the floor to speak.

In this exchange, we can see how the speaker both complements the young man on his “mastery” of French while critiquing him on his lack of education on the topic of Haiti’s dictatorship past (lines 7-12). For the speaker, this appears as a contradiction; since French is a recognized index of educational level, how could the young man possibly be so ignorant? The use of French at the conference, in and of itself, is not entirely surprising as it is often the case in public and intellectual contexts such as this one that French is the dominant language. As an index of education, the norm of French is often assumed at conferences unless metadiscursively challenged by the moderator or tacitly challenged through codeswitching on the part of panelists or audience members.<sup>23</sup> At this particular conference, the moderator (Castor) had begun her introductions in French, effectively setting the stage for French use and all panelists followed

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<sup>23</sup> Arnold Antonin, a panelist at the Dev Org conference that day, is also known for his own monthly conference and debate, known as *Forum Libre du Jeudi* (Thursday’s Open Forum). At each conference, after introducing the theme and panelists, he always made a point of stating that speakers could choose whichever language they desired. At times, he even pointed directly at me, usually the only *blan* present, assuring the other attendees that I did in fact speak and understand Kreyòl.

suit with presentations in French. The young man's language choice also fell in line with this trend.

Although the speaker (Part 1) distanced himself from the young man he addressed, he too was of a relatively young age, likely a similar generation as the young man himself, if not younger. He continued with his response, ignoring the young man's objections, opposing not just the young man's stance in relation to Duvalier, but also his implied nostalgia for Duvalier's leadership. He pushed to complicate the young man's understanding as to why and how the country had gone downhill socially and economically since Duvalier's departure. He questioned the man's desire for a strong leader (i.e. a dictator) to solve Haiti's current problems: Would Haiti really be better off returning to a state of violence, repression, and docility? Is this really a good idea in the face of catastrophe, the 2010 earthquake?

Upon concluding his statements, control of the floor once again returned to the conference panelists. One after another, the panelists each followed suit in responding to and addressing the young man's concerns about the future and his interpretation of Haiti under Duvalier. One panelist stated, again mobilizing French: "*Il faut écouter ce que ce jeune homme a dit parce qu'ils sont des milliers de jeunes personnes à dire exactement la même chose. Ils ne réalisent pas ils ne savent pas, ils ne connaissent pas l'histoire de leurs pays, ils ne savent pas les leçons que produisent les années de dictature*" (We need to listen to what this young man says because he is among thousands of young people saying the exact same thing. They don't realize, they don't know, they don't know the history of their country. They don't know the lessons that brought about the years of dictatorship). Pointing out that this young man's interpretation of Duvalier's leadership was not an isolated case, he explained it as a lack of education and knowledge about the period. He argued for the importance of understanding not

only Haiti's history of dictatorship but also the process through which the country transformed into a dictatorship. As the speaker pointed out, many youth lack knowledge of this process, thus the lessons of the past were not learned. Here he implied an alignment between past conditions, those leading up to the Duvalier dictatorships, and present conditions.

Other panelists followed suit in seeing the young man's lack of knowledge about the period as to blame for his misguided historical interpretation. Some even urged him to read various scholarly texts pointing to historical events and processes contributing to the state of the country in the present. One panelist, a filmmaker and political activist, Arnold Antonin, attempted to directly address the young man's question as to what reason there might be for him to stay in the country.<sup>24</sup> He pointed to what he saw as the one reason to stay: "*pour changer ce pays*" (to bring about change). He went on to blame Duvalier directly for instigating many of the problems observed in the present and warned that if the young man continued to support Duvalier too much, he would be forced to flee the country. In stating this, he implied that the young man's support would bring to power another dictatorship, after which repression would surely follow. This last comment brought on a wave of laughter from the audience. Antonin's comments here, echoing previous ones, again aligned the past with the present, once more implying a parallel situation with the past; that is, Haiti's political future was teetering between democracy and dictatorship. While Martelly himself was only indirectly referenced (see Transcript 3.0, line 26), several commentators tacitly pointed to a political alignment between Duvalier and Martelly.

Alain Gilles, a researcher and sociology professor at the State University, took the floor following Antonin's comments. Without waiting to be formally called on, Gilles jumped in to speak and, given his social standing as a respected scholar and intellectual of Haitian history,

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<sup>24</sup> Antonin spent several years in exile due to the critical nature of some of his early films.

audience members collectively worked to quickly pass the microphone his way. Gilles began with a brief comment in French, his language choice following suit with previous speakers, but quickly switched to Kreyòl, hinting at a degree of emotion and passion not available to him in French. Given his status, his use of Kreyòl here did not signal a lack of education. His codeswitching was likely an act of resistance to the dominance of French, as was common of both professors and students in the sociology program at the State University. The codeswitching engaged by Gilles at the Dev Org conference was significant in that it prompted those that followed him to also utilize Kreyòl.

Gilles began by framing his contribution as intended for an audience much wider than the young man the group was addressing, as a contribution meant more broadly for anyone sharing his viewpoint, stating in Kreyòl: “*M vle di tout moun ki panse sa tankou jenòm nan fèk di a. M vle di yo onivo de konparezon de sa te konn pase avan avèk sa kap pase apre...*” (I want to tell everyone who thinks the same thing that the young man just said. I want to tell them that in terms of a comparison between what happened before and what’s happening after...)” He went on to describe “the biggest difference” as tied to state sanctioned violence under Duvalier and the terror it instilled in the population. His contribution to the discussion took the form of a lecture, educating the young man and others who might feel the same way as him about the period of dictatorship.

Castor interjected in support of Gilles’ interpretation, arguing in Kreyòl: “*se gras a batay... se gras a batay anpil moun ki fè ou ka chita la jodi a ap koute sa nap di a*” (It’s thanks to the battle... it’s thanks to many people’s efforts in fighting that you’re able to sit here today, listening to what we’re saying). Given her use of French in less formal settings, and her previous use of it at the conference, codeswitching to Kreyòl here indicates an emotional and personal

connection to the battle she mentions.<sup>25</sup> Her level of emotion expressed was also apparent in her breaking frame with the formality of the conference setting, swiftly jumping in to interject comments and add to the discussion. Her participation at that moment was to the detriment of others who clambered to participate, seeking a turn to speak.

The connection made by Castor to her personal experiences fighting against Duvalier's dictatorship remained at the level of presupposition although many, if not most, of the conference participants were well aware of her history of political engagement and exile. Castor is well known as a human rights activist, a historian and an author while her late husband, Gérard Pierre-Charles, who died in 2004, was also a prominent intellectual, economist, and political activist.<sup>26</sup> The couple were forced into exile, leaving for Mexico, by Papa Doc due to their political activities, namely their formation of an underground Marxist party in 1959. They returned to Haiti following Baby Doc's ousting in 1986. An active supporter of Aristide's early rise to power, Pierre-Charles led the split between *Organisation Politique Lavalas* (OPL) and Aristide's *Fanmi Lavalas*. Pierre-Charles maintained the OPL acronym once the split was accomplished but changed the party's name to *Organisation du Peuple en Lutte* (Struggling People's Organization), a party that continues to play a role in politics to this day, and continues to stand in opposition to Aristide and his *Fanmi Lavalas*.

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<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, in meeting privately with Castor a year prior to this conference, she tacitly refused to speak Kreyòl with me despite my own use of Kreyòl with her. This was not uncommon as I found many people, on the streets and elsewhere, assumed that I spoke French. Some people even seemed unable to recognize that I was in fact speaking Kreyòl with them until I explicitly pointed it out to them, at which point, they often acted surprised. The association between *blan* and French/English was clear as many simply assumed *blan* could not or would not speak Kreyòl. In many ways, this assumption was correct as many foreign aid workers often do not bother to learn the local language, instead choosing to learn French. Her language choices at the conference, prior to this moment, were also likely influenced by the fact that a prominent French man, an ambassador or embassy official, was present.

<sup>26</sup> Castor's most recognized text is "*l'Occupation Américaine d'Haiti*" (The American Occupation of Haiti), published in 1988.

Following Castor's interjection, the elderly woman previously mentioned took control of the floor, and microphone, and began her previously mentioned, emotional lecture entirely in

Kreyòl:

*Lè yo pran, yo pran yon opozan. Lè yon moun ap fè politik, yo pase pran ni madanm li ni pitit li, tandè? Yo pran moun ki gen menm non avè l menm si moun nan pa gen paran. Lè yap ranmase misye Louis yo pran tout Louis nan peyi a. Yo pa bezwen konnen si Louis sa a te kan (kèk) komèt. Premye rejim ki fè sa. On moun ap fè politik, defwa yo konn pete madanm li, ni ti frè li, ni pitit li...*

When they took someone, they took a dissident. When someone was acting politically, they went to take his wife and kids, do you hear me? They took people that had the same name as him, even if the person (wasn't the one). When they gathered Mr. Louis, they took every Louis in the country. They didn't need to know if this Louis was the one who (did it). The first regime [Papa Doc] was like that. Someone who would act politically from time to time, they often took out his wife, his little brother, his kid...

The discussion as a whole – beginning from the young man's initial comments – lasted approximately 30 minutes and was only brought to an end by Castor forcefully inserting herself once again amid continued chatter. Codeswitching between French and Kreyòl, but primarily using French, her final remarks attempted to summarize and wrangle everyone's attention away from the heated debate and back to the event itself. She was only partially successful in this attempt as side discussions continued, most notably between the young man in question and those around him, including the elderly woman seated in front of him. In the quoted material below, underlined sections represent Castor's use of French as opposed to Kreyòl.

Telling a brief illustrative story, Castor pointed to parallels between the debate as it had taken place that evening and a similar discussion she had previously taken part in. She recounted how, at the past event, a similar debate had arisen, focused on conditions under Duvalier. She asserted that a "jèn gason" (young man) raised his hand at the end of the debate and thanked the group for the debate. She reported him as saying "je vous remercis parce que jusqu'à présent m

*te toujou konpran ke diktati a se te meyè bagay pou peyi a. Men kounye a m tande nou pale kounye a m konnen sa diktati a te ye” (I thank you all because until now I had always thought that dictatorship was best for the country. But now I heard you speaking, now I know what dictatorship really was like). Her example here was obviously meant to parallel the debate taking place at the Dev Org conference and served to boost the authority of her personal stance regarding historical interpretations of the Duvalier debate. It also served as an attempt to legitimize the role of conferences in general, and the scholarly work of organizations such hers: “Donk sa montre nou la nécessité de multiplier les espaces de débat multiplier les espaces de discussion et justement si nou pa defann espas sa yo nap perdu... kòm nou très konsyan” (Thus, this shows us the necessity of increasing the space for debate, increasing the space for discussion and rightly, if we don’t defend these spaces we’ll lose them...as we know too well).*

Castor’s statements accomplish two things. First, she boosts the credibility of her historical interpretation – along with those who were aligned with her – by mobilizing a story in which a young man, taking a similar stance as the young man at the Dev Org debate, not only learns something from Castor and others present but also recognizes the errors of his previous understandings. In many ways, Castor seems to be attempting to teach the young man at the Dev Org conference a lesson that he should respect and learn from the dominant interpretation of the Duvalier dictatorship expressed by many at the conference. Given his continual efforts to push back against those attempting to lecture and educate him on the topic, her story appears to be a final attempt to persuade him. In this way, she tried to boost her personal expertise on the topic by pointing to how others have recognized it and accepted it in the past. Second, following other speakers at the conference, her statements aligned pre-Duvalier conditions with present day ones, implying that the country was, at that moment, on the verge of sliding into a similarly repressive

dictatorship. She warned of a need to fight to “defend” the right to spaces of open debate, or, she contended, they could be lost. Although Castor did not name or explicitly discuss Martelly’s presidency, her political alignment in opposition to him remained an implied undertone of her discussion of conditions and events immediately prior to Papa Doc Duvalier’s rise to power.

In this section, I have attempted to outline and present the unfolding debate within the context of the Dev Org conference. Although I have hinted at various mechanisms through which speakers mobilized support for their interpretations of the past, I take up this analysis in more detail in the next section, drawing on theories pertaining to the enactment of expertise, temporality, and political alignment.

### **Expertise, Temporality, and Political Alignment**

As the Dev Org example demonstrates, debates focused on interpreting Haiti’s dictatorship past in light of contemporary conditions did not begin with Duvalier’s statements in court presented in the introduction to this chapter. In fact, the Dev Org conference in question took place nearly a year prior to his appearance in court. Although Duvalier’s hearing did spark an increase in discussions focused on comparing conditions under his leadership with those of the present, debates of this sort did not rest solely on this contextual impetus. Instead, the subject of how to best understand Duvalier’s regime in light of current conditions re-asserted itself repeatedly in varying contexts and represented an important means through which many Haitians sought to understand their current lived realities. It was also, as I will show, a means through which participants attempted to reconfigure political alignments of the present. Three dominant themes arise from the Dev Org example: (1) the mobilization and enactment of expertise regarding historical interpretations; (2) temporal configurations and alignments between the past



and the present; and (3) uses of the past for present purposes in an attempt to re-configure political alignments. I will address each of these themes in the analysis that follows.

As was hinted at in the previous section, vocal participants in the Dev Org debate drew on a number of different discursive mechanisms to signal a degree of expertise on the topic of Haiti's dictatorship past in relation to the present. As French (2012:347) has argued, expertise or expert knowledge, is something that is created through interaction and action as opposed to being something people have naturally. Carr (2010:18) concurs stating that "expertise is something people do rather than something people have or hold." In this way, "expertise is presumed to be based upon a given expert's knowledge in relation to valued objects, which, in turn, naturalizes their ability to decode, translate, and explain 'the truth'" (French 2012:347). In the debate about Haiti's past, mobilization of discourse through which participants attempted to enact expertise indicate a desire to persuade others or, in some cases, bring disagreements to an end. It remains necessary to trace the dynamics of the manner in which participants attempted to enact expertise in order to "appreciate the way that expertise emerges in real-time interaction as actors and institutions struggle to author and authorize powerful texts that will be read as such by others" (Carr 2010:19).

The primary means through which conference participants enacted expertise in disputing the young man's interpretation was one of claims to education on the topic. Collectively, the group took on the role of lecturing the young man: pointing out the flaws in his interpretations, his ignorance on the topic, and his need to seek out knowledge from those with direct experience, such as Castor and other participants, or from some of the many books written on the topic. As one speaker pointed out, the young man's skilled use of the French language despite his ignorance of Haitian history seemed to be a contradiction. His linguistic abilities thus implied

that the man had a strong educational background – perhaps an indication of university education – and yet, somehow he had managed to remain ignorant all the same. Another speaker pointed to specific texts that the young man should read in order to sufficiently educate him on the subject. Others, such as Gilles, lectured the young man themselves, taking on the role of professor.

Through discourse, individuals thus attempted to harness power and authority to speak about the past and to convince others of that authority in an effort to persuade and, in this case, educate others. According to Carr (2010:18), “expertise is inherently interactional because it involves the participation of objects, producers, and consumers of knowledge. Expertise is also always ideological because it is implicated in semistable hierarchies of value that authorize particular ways of seeing and speaking as expert.” Enacting expertise is as much about the value of particular knowledge as it is about the ability to “communicate that familiarity from an authoritative angle” (Carr 2010:19). As Matoesian (1999:518) argued, expertise is the ability to “finesse reality and animate evidence through mastery of verbal performance.”

Language and linguistic registers can play a key role in enacting expertise through verbal performance of a mastery of appropriate registers. Carr (2010:20) defines an “expert register” as “a way of speaking that is recognized as a special kind of knowledge and manifests in interaction as such” (Carr 2010:20). In some cases, the use of specialized jargon or lexicon indexes familiarity with the subject matter in question, or conversely, the use of it excludes those who lack familiarity from sufficiently debating or engaging the topic. In the specific example of the Dev Org debate, language use and shifts (e.g. style, register, codeswitching) indicate for those present, a degree of expertise. As one participant metadiscursively pointed out, the young man’s ignorance makes little sense in light of his use of French when speaking. This follows Briggs (1996:26) argument that “in diglossic and multilingual communities, style shifting and code

switching provide narrators with formal resources for creating complex relationships between competing perspectives on narrated events and different ways of connecting them to the narrative event.” And yet, as we saw throughout the interaction, language choice is more complicated than simply an expression of education and knowledge. Kreyòl, for many, does indeed index a level of ignorance or a lack of education; however, for others, or in other contexts, it also indexes a national identity and pride as it represents what it means to be Haitian. Use of Kreyòl, in cases such as Professor Gilles’ use of it, represents a degree of resistance to the dominance of French as an index of education.

The emotion expressed by some participants – most notably the old woman and Castor – were also attempts to enact expertise through verbal performance, indicating a first-hand, direct experience with the topic. For the old woman, her emotional outburst pointed to a personal connection to the indiscriminate violence she discussed. “Narrators often change their voice characteristics when reporting emotionally charged speech; for example, a rise in pitch, an increase in volume, and a breathless quality may suggest that the character was excited or scared” (Briggs 1996:15). While she never explicitly recounted personal experiences, her narration and the emotion expressed in her voice, through the use of Kreyòl, was an attempt to enact expertise on the topic, ultimately discouraging disagreement. Having direct, personal experience – what Andrea Smith (2004) terms episodic memory – as opposed to indirect experience (semantic memory) drawn from sources such as books or word-of-mouth, can be a powerful tool in the enactment of expertise.<sup>27</sup> Given the duration of time that had passed since the fall of Duvalier in 1986, many young people had little direct experience with life under

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<sup>27</sup> Smith’s distinction is in contrast to Halbwachs use of “autobiographic memory” in reference to direct experience versus “historical memory” for those derived from secondhand sources.

dictatorship. Thus, generational conflicts as related to semantic versus episodic memories can result in different interpretations of the past.

Ultimately, the enactment of expertise has two angles. Through summoning of institutional knowledge (e.g. education), direct personal experience, or other training that has conferred “expert knowledge,” individuals not only seek to convince others of the veracity of their claims but also work to boost the value of their social standing in relation to the subject in question. “Enactment of expertise not only determines the value of cultural objects, whether mental states, real estate, wine, disease, or gold; it also confers value on those who interact with these objects, including the experts so enacted” (Carr 2010:18). In order to boost their own credibility, however, debate participants first had to label and assign a value of uneducated and ignorant to opposing interpretations, and to those voicing those interpretations (i.e. the young man). “Realizing one’s self as an expert can hinge on casting other people as less aware, knowing or knowledgeable. Indeed, expertise emerges in the hoary intersection of claims about types of people, and the relative knowledge they contain and control, and claims about differentially knowable types of things” (Carr 2010:22). This process is similar to that discussed in the previous chapter regarding the manner in which HR Org members elevated their own legitimacy and status in relation to a general Haitian population, ultimately justifying their self-appointed role as watchdogs and human rights “experts.” In the context of the Dev Org debate, participants drew on implicit hierarchies of educational status, boosting their own credibility as having a degree of expertise on the discussion topic through discursive efforts to assess and assign the label of “uneducated” to other participants.

While the various attempts at enacting expertise and the manner in which individuals do so remain clear, what remains to be discussed, however, is the pragmatic effect those enactments

of expertise obtain. That is, what is at stake for the participants? Why does understanding Haiti's dictatorship past in particular ways matter for those engaging in the debate? Analyzing the temporal alignments mobilized in the interaction itself highlights the links speakers themselves made between the past and the present. Attending to the temporal orders or temporalities engaged in discourse, we can better understand the "precise semiotic and discursive mechanisms by which the past is selectively brought into the present for strategic ends" (French 2012:338).

Debates about Haiti's dictatorship past represent an alignment of the past with the present; the past, in this way, serves a social and political purpose. The past and the present, in such discussions, represent temporal orders brought together by speakers. Aligning the two temporalities is a means through which a speaker "compares and assesses possible worlds, whether these worlds are different aspects of one's own experience or different hypothetical realms" (Irvine 2004:107). In some cases, the past is utilized in and of itself; in others, it is used to point to similarities with the present. In either case, "images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order" (Connerton 1989:3). And yet if present concerns influence readings of the past, then it makes sense that readings of the past might also have an effect on how one understands present circumstances. Temporal links, as will be shown, can be utilized by speakers as a means through which speakers seek to influence how others understand and interpret present circumstances. By attending to the tacit and explicit parallels drawn by speakers, we can identify the political and social implications of their temporal comparisons.

As can be seen in the Dev Org example, a number of speakers alluded to comparisons between a pre-Duvalier conditions, and the lessons learned from it, in relation to present conditions. This alignment of a particular historical period with the present is no accident or coincidence. Through temporal alignments of this sort, speakers sought to influence the manner

in which other participants understood and interpreted the current political environment, and more specifically, the political ambitions of President Martelly. Bakhtin's concept of "chronotopes" is useful here and can be understood as "a scale of spatial and temporal horizons within which some events are understood as meaningfully occurring" (Stasch 2011:3). Lempert and Perrino (2007:207) expand on this definition, drawing on Michael Silverstein for guidance:

Silverstein (2005) provides a more parsimonious gloss: 'the temporally (hence, *chrono-*) and spatially (hence, *-tope*) particular envelope in the narrated universe of social space-time in which and through which, in emplotment, narrative characters move' (p. 6). In this reading, which holds cultural ideologies at bay, chronotopes becomes akin to a denotational-textual 'field', a temporally situated, virtual space of emplotment – a denotational 'event-horizon.'

Chronotopes, then, involve an interactional alignment between past and present, indexically creating and presupposing this alignment in the process. Drawing such alignments can, and often does, result in the restructuring of social relations in the present. As anthropologist Diane Riskedahl (2007:308) argued, "speakers ground their words in various contexts to add layers of meaning which continually work to redefine how participants relate to each other." In the Lebanese case analyzed by Riskedahl, contested meanings of historical events and their significance to present conditions "may be used to reorient the Lebanese audience to a different understanding of current political events by drawing emotive connections to past events" (ibid.) By creating "alignments," speakers and texts make sense of current events through the lens of situated understandings of past events, linking them interdiscursively.

In the Dev Org debate, similar attempts at aligning past events with present ones for the purpose of influencing the manner in which others understood present circumstances appears to be at play. By implying a relationship between pre-dictatorship Haiti and the present, speakers pointed to the country as on the brink of falling into another dictatorship. While Martelly was left

unnamed, a political stance against him was tacitly expressed. Thus, from the point of view of the majority of vocal participants at the Dev Org conference that day, expressing support or nostalgia for Duvalier represented a serious social transgression and was effectively a vote in support of Martelly. From the viewpoint of the organization's director, her invited panelists, and many of the attendees, the young man's sympathy for Duvalier meant that he was ignorant on the topic of history and needed educating. The message was clear: anyone with experience living under Duvalier or sufficient knowledge of the period couldn't possibly sympathize with the ex-dictator and certainly wouldn't wish for a return to such repressive conditions. Support for Duvalier was effectively viewed as support for Martelly's efforts to become the next dictator of Haiti.

Throughout the interaction, speakers were successful in depoliticizing the historical comparisons they drew on precisely because they did not take an explicitly political stance in opposition to President Martelly, nor did they identify him directly. Rather, this stance was embedded in the temporal links speakers mobilized and the manner in which many pointed to a likeness between the past and the present, in Silverstein's (2005a) terms, speakers created "tokens of a type" (Riskedahl 2007:314).<sup>28</sup> Thus, discursive efforts to draw out a likeness between the past and the present were politically motivated and anchored in present commitments in opposition to President Martelly. Yet what made those temporal alignments successful was the tacit manner in which they depoliticized the political stance embedded within them; that is, speakers masked the political implications of their historical interpretations. This depoliticization process took place through the various ways in which expertise was enacted, particularly in speakers' attempts to assign hierarchical values to different interpretations based

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<sup>28</sup> Silverstein's use of "tokens" and "types" refers to interdiscursive relationships between moments of talk, those that resemble one another based on form and function (tokens) versus those that do so through the use of similar genres of talk (types).

on labels of “educated” versus “uneducated.” Such distinctions served to boost authority in relation to others while also drawing on ideologies that historical understandings should concern historical “accuracy” as opposed to political partisanship.

Erasing the entextualization process involved in decontextualizing and recontextualizing historical events in meaningful ways was another means through which interpretations of the past were depoliticized. Denying recognition of the process of entextualization is rooted in popular ideologies regarding the degree to which events of the past can be understood in isolation from the context within which they arose. Indeed, many in Haiti, and beyond, take for granted that narratives about the past have the ability to travel divorced from their original context, while still retaining their truth value (French 2012:344). That is, many Haitians assume that narratives and key historical events exist as points of evidence that can be drawn on for various interpretations of historical processes without the need to consider the context within which they took place.

Trouillot (1995) demonstrates the complexities of this process in relation to the discipline of history and the production of historical texts. As he argues, silences and erasures are an inherent part of each and every step when producing a historical narrative. In particular, he points to the manner in which silences and erasures result from individual decision-making regarding not simply the construction of a coherent historical text – such as the editorial decisions on the part of the author – but also determinations of what counts as historically significant enough to document and what historical artifacts ultimately make their way into the archives from which historians derive much of their research in preparation for their texts. From his view, the entextualization process is one marked by power: the decisions to include or not include particular events and actors in a given archive or text carries significant consequences for



how we understand the past. Thus, efforts to erase traces of the entextualization process have a pragmatic effect on how individuals understood the legitimacy and accuracy of a given historical interpretation. In this example, erasures of this sort worked hand-in-hand with enactments of expertise, boosting credibility of particular interpretations while masking the politically partisan nature of those interpretations.

The manner in which speakers interpreted historical evidence, enacted expertise, and attempted to reconfigure the political alignments of other participants also resulted in dismissing the anxieties of those expressing alternative interpretations of the past. It was clear from the young man's utterances that his interpretation of the past in relation to the present primarily rested on material and economic conditions. He was, in particular, concerned about his own future and his ability to make a living in light of declining conditions. The question he posed the panelists as to why he should even consider staying in the country, points to a preoccupation with social and economic uncertainty. From the point of view of those expressing opposing interpretations of the past, however, repression and freedom of speech trumped economic and material concerns. This attention to political freedoms was similar to evidence cited by Donald, Alain, and Theodore in support of an interpretation of Haitian society as better in the present than it was under Duvalier. Dev Org participants indicated this emphasis when implying that Haiti was teetering on the brink of dictatorship. As some argued, the fact that they were debating the topic at all, and expressing differing viewpoints, was evidence of improved conditions. Castor's comments at the end of the conference also make this point, especially her reference to a need to multiply spaces of debate in order to protect the freedoms many, such as herself, had vigorously fought to enjoy. Thus, in focusing on concerns over freedom of speech and spaces of

debate, opposing interpretations ultimately worked to deny legitimacy to the young man's economic and material anxieties.

Discussing the debate on the walk home, a group of social science university students, students of Gilles', conceded that the concerns expressed by the young man were in fact valid. They recognized that conditions in the country did indeed seem worse. They were concerned in particular by the fact that the judicial system was so weak that it had not been able to bring Duvalier to trial. They argued that at least under Duvalier, criminals were swiftly dealt with.

The students were in a peculiar position. They were both aligned generationally with the young man, indeed younger than him, and also formally educated on the subject of Haitian history and Duvalier in the manner conference participants had argued was lacking for the young man.<sup>29</sup> From such a vantage point, they were able to sympathize with both interpretations, recognizing and legitimating the young man's concerns about Haiti's future and his pessimistic attitude about the country's, and his own, economic future. More generally, his concerns are widely shared by many young people in Haiti, as Évelyne Trouillot, a novelist and professor of French at the State University, states:

Young people are a large part of the population and they are really affected by the country's economic difficulties and other problems: the school system's deficiencies, the unemployment, and the lack of opportunities. The young feel they do not have any future, any prospects...they believe that somebody who is young will be more able to understand their problems. And they have developed a sense of mistrust against the old politician class. (cited in Polyné 2013:244-45)

In other comparable contexts, such as many African countries, researchers have similarly recognized the anxieties many youth carry regarding their future and also the susceptibility of those youth to participation in volatile political movements (Englund 2006). As Polyné points

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<sup>29</sup> Sociology students at the State University were well acquainted with academic literature published on the topic of Haiti's history and socioeconomic development, especially literature published by Haitian intellectuals, many of whom were themselves professors at the State University.

out, it is not uncommon for Haitian youth to look to young politicians as potentially breaking with old patterns understood as having contributed to current conditions. Indeed, this was one interpretation of Martelly's rise to power: that he appealed strongly to a disenfranchised youth, particularly given his history and popularity as a crude and critical musician.

Thus, the stance-taking enacted within the Dev Org debate is complicated by many different angles. While the conflict could indeed be viewed through the lens of generational differences, as Alain summarized in his description of it to other HR Org members, what becomes clear from the analysis above is that historical interpretations, and the negotiation of opposing interpretations, take place through the lens of present concerns and commitments. The manner in which speakers negotiate questions of historical interpretation had implications for how others understood and interpreted the present as well as well as the past.

## **Conclusion**

In a country where problems can be identified in every corner and uncertainty remains a constant, debates about the failures of development become an embodied reality, contributing to how individuals understand and live their lives on a daily basis. Within these discussions, forays into the realm of history are a necessary lens through which many understand present conditions, as the result of a series of historical events and processes. Understanding the Duvalier dictatorships, for many Haitians, is an important focal point for any discussion or debate on the topic of development. Although it remains clear that discussions focused on past conditions under Duvalier in relation to present circumstances represented discursive attempts to place the past and the present in direct relation to one another, discussions of this sort also presupposed a relationship to the future. Temporally, historical events and processes were arranged by speakers

in particular ways so as to reveal an explanation of current conditions with a vision to the future. The purpose of the debates themselves, although often left unstated, was the search for effective solutions to Haiti's contemporary problems. The implication was that one needed to have an accurate grasp on historical events and processes in order to diagnose contemporary problems. In turn, without proper diagnosis, one could not effectively imagine and enact efforts to bring about change in the future.

Interpreting the past, then, is a necessary task in the quest to identify and solve Haiti's developmental problems. Put simply, talk about development functions on the assumption that the first step in moving forward is understanding how and why the country is the way it is today. Hashing out ideas through discourse and debate – ideas about historical trajectory, the roots of contemporary problems, and responsibility – is itself viewed as a path toward development or a necessary precursor to imagining and taking action in the future.

Debates focused on understanding Haiti's dictatorship past bring to light conflicting interpretations of historical processes and events. How are we to understand these differences of historical interpretation? Was Haitian society better or worse under Duvalier? While on the surface, the debate may appear to be an intellectual one: what "counts" in evaluating a historical period as better, or worse, than another? For those engaging in such debates, however, understanding the past is an important part of living in the present and imagining a better future. As was seen in both the HR Org and Dev Org examples, historical narratives and debates are less about historical accuracy and more concerned with reassessing understandings of the past in light of the present-day concerns. In this way, deliberative practices of this sort represent sites of the political as participants work to contest and challenge existing social and political relations.

In the context of debates about Duvalier, erasures appeared tacitly as individuals selectively mobilized those understandings of the past that fit with their present-day experiences and commitments. For instance, for those arguing that Haiti is better off today than it was under Duvalier, most narratives, such as those argued by HR Org members, highlight human rights abuses, political repression, and a severe lack of journalistic freedom under Duvalier. For those arguing that Haitian society is worse off today than it was under Duvalier, such details are downplayed in favor of other narratives such as the relative lack of everyday violence, a lower cost of living, and a general cleanliness of streets and cities under Duvalier. Drawing on Halbwachs' emphasis on the social aspect of collective memories yet recognizing individual and interactional factors as well, Fentress and Wickham (1992:x) argue that, "social groups construct their own images of the world by establishing an agreed version of the past, and to emphasize that these versions are established by communication, not by private remembrance. Indeed, one's private memories, and even the cognitive process of remembering, contain much that is social in origin." What this analysis demonstrates, however, is that consensus does not need to be the norm for accounts of the past to have social significance; conflicting accounts can also play an important social role. Indeed, attention to interpretive conflict regarding social memories remains an important means through which we can identify the various social fault lines along which different understandings of the past arise. Social divisions such as class, generation, and political commitments lead to different lived experiences of the present and thus, contribute to differing interpretations of the past.

While there remains a degree of truth value to be examined in how each of the opposing historical interpretations were presented, particularly in identifying erasures, I focused here on how events of the past were understood, selectively mobilized, and debated through interactions

in the present. It is the act of narration that is of importance here; that is, how the past is brought into the present through interaction and deliberation. How do interpretations of the past reflect present concerns and interests? What discursive mechanisms do speakers draw on to legitimize their own interpretations or delegitimize the interpretations of others? How do mobilized interpretations contribute to lived experiences?

From this examination, it becomes clear that the truth or accuracy of any given historical narrative only matters insofar as interlocutors themselves debate, negotiate, and search for a truth, signaling the importance of past events to present circumstances, and what truth might mean to the participants involved. Debating historical narratives with the goal of identifying an accurate picture of the past was indeed the vocalized objective I observed of my Haitian interlocutors. There was little recognition of the instability of historical narratives. Instead, debate participants expressly justified their support for one historical narrative over another, one interpretation over another, as a concern for accuracy in order to imagine effective solutions through which to bring about change. Yet accuracy, for the participants themselves, was assessed based on a variety of factors, all of which relate to lived experiences in the present. As was demonstrated in the HR Org case, members appeared to take contradictory positions in relation to evaluations of life under Duvalier, when viewed from the perspective of the group's interpretive norm of organizing events and issues within a narrative of decline. As was shown, this exception to the decline narrative was largely based on ideological commitments to democracy, political alignments in opposition to government officials, and individual lived experiences.

In this way, historical narratives can be both a political force in shaping understandings and perceptions as well as a tool for politically manipulating the understandings and perceptions

of others. Although the ideological and political influences were clear in the HR Org case, it was only through an examination of the discursive mechanisms mobilized by speakers during the Dev Org debate, that the present day implications, the pragmatic force of such debates becomes clear. In this example, speakers worked to enact expertise and draw temporal links aligning the past with the present. Such moves to educate, correct, or otherwise persuade others to adapt particular interpretations of historical events and processes must be understood through the lens of present experiences and political commitments. Indeed, as discursive tools, they succeeded in masking, or depoliticizing, the political partisanship underlying particular interpretations. In similar ways, the guise of searching for historical accuracy was itself a means through which participants boosted the credibility of their own interpretations over those of others. Assigning the value of uneducated to those with opposing interpretations further succeeded in legitimizing and depoliticizing interpretations of the past. Far from being an intellectual exercise in accurately understanding the past, then, debates of this sort are fundamentally political and personal.

In similar ways, speakers also sought to depoliticize the partisan stances embedded in their historical interpretations by erasing traces of the entextualization process entailed in decontextualizing and recontextualizing historical events for particular purposes. Put simply, speakers lifted events from their original context and organized them in particular ways depending on the purpose and the connections they wished to draw. The significance of efforts of this sort was most clearly identified in the ways in which Dev Org participants temporally aligned conditions in pre-Duvalier Haiti with those of the present. For those mobilizing narratives of this sort, erasing the entextualization process was necessary for their comparison to have persuasive power. To question this move of decontextualization would have resulted in potentially overturning the comparison itself. Such questioning did not take place, at least not

vocally, perhaps pointing to the tacit manner in which the comparison of this sort become embedded in the temporal alignments mobilized by speakers.

Although it remains clear that different lived experiences of the present influence the manner in which individuals understand the past, this analysis also highlights a reverse process; that is, different interpretations of the past can have an effect on how present conditions are understood. Here I follow Connerton (1989:2) in examining the ways in which “our experience of the present very largely depends upon our knowledge of the past. We experience our present world in a context which is causally connected with present events and objects, and hence with reference to events and objects which we are not experiencing when we are experiencing the present.” Yet what is significant in the analysis presented here is the manner in which speakers worked to affect how others interpreted the past and consequently, how they understood the present. This was precisely the aim of many of the Dev Org participants as they sought to reconfigure the political commitments of other participants by way of particular and partisan interpretations of the past. This process was most notable in the manner in which a number of participants drew temporal links between a pre-dictatorship Haiti and present conditions. Such alignments had politically partisan implications regarding how participants understood President Martelly’s intentions. Coupled with attempts to enact expertise regarding interpretations of the past, participants succeeded in depoliticizing their efforts to reconfigure the political alignments of other participants. In this way, their political proselytizing was successful due to claims of expertise: in assigning themselves the status of “educated” in relation to those evaluated as uneducated, they boosted their claims to legitimately represent the past. Thus, not only does this entail recognition of the various ways in which present interests contribute to understandings of the past, but also the manner in which interpretations of the past can influence how one



understands and lives in the present. The value of a historical product or narrative, as Trouillot (1995:146) argued, “cannot be debated without taking into account both the context of its production and the context of its consumption.”

Debates of this sort, and the discursive mechanisms through which they were engaged, also carry significant consequences for those who go against the grain in interpreting historical events. For speakers expressing support for the interpretation that Haitian society is worse in the present than it was under Duvalier, the collaborative work on the part of those taking up opposing stances, ultimately denied them of the very real, economic anxieties expressed through their interpretations of the past. As was shown, much of the interpretative conflict involved in historical debates of this sort revolved around questions pertaining to what counts as evidence of one historical period being better than another. For instance, was political repression a more important factor than economic conditions? The consequences of assigning an uneducated value to those interpretations that favored a privileging of economic circumstances, over, for instance, freedom of speech, is that those associated with the “uneducated” interpretations also personally take on that label. Given that interpretations based on economic factors were often motivated by present day anxieties related to employment and economic opportunities – as was the case with Junior and the young man at the Dev Org conference – to label those individuals and their historical interpretations as uneducated ultimately denies the legitimacy of their everyday lived realities.

The deliberative practices associated with interpreting the past reveals them to be a site of the political through which individuals mobilize challenges to existing social and political hierarchies. Discourse, in this way, is a form of social action as it has pragmatic effects. Historical narratives, much like discourse more generally, do not simply represent reality and the

past “as they are” but act on them, configuring and reconfiguring understandings of each. As was argued here, debates focused on understanding Haiti’s dictatorship past reflected present concerns and interests and also worked to reconfigure the manner in which individuals understood present realities, including political commitments and anxieties regarding socioeconomic uncertainty. The past, and interpretations of it, played a powerful role in this process. As Trouillot (1995:xix) notes, “history is the fruit of power, but power itself is never so transparent that its analysis becomes superfluous. The ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility; the ultimate challenge, the exposition of its roots.”

## CHAPTER 4

### Getting Started: The Political Pragmatics of Strategizing

#### Introduction

Once, twice, sometimes three times a week, organization members gathered in a dusty and haphazard space. Young students of the professional school housed in the same space wandered in and out of the connected rooms that sometimes doubled as hallways. As members trickled in and made their way to the back room, they pulled worn wooden chairs attached to desks into a circle, wiping off the light layer of dust that had gathered on the seats. They sat, waiting, chatting about their days, joking and debating the current political scandal. Relics of past activities rested idle in corners and members donned various versions of t-shirts advertising their organization. “*JMTADRDR en action*” (JMTADRDR in action) was scrolled across one in large yellow letters stamped on the back of a bright red shirt. Most shirts also featured sponsorship, markers that served as a history of funding sources the organization had, at one time, secured. One shirt featured a pairing of seemingly contradictory religious-based organizations, each with a circular logo and situated next to one another: *Secours Islamique France* (Islamic Relief of France) rested alongside *CARITAS*, a Roman Catholic Charity. In a dark corner, a long-forgotten banner stated “*JMTADRDR: Ann Bay Timoun Yo Yon Chans, Pa Maltrete Yo*” (Let’s give children a chance, don’t mistreat them).

The meeting space – and its rough and makeshift atmosphere – in many ways mirrored the organization itself, its day-to-day functioning and existence. Although I refer to the group as the Youth Org, their official name, registered with the Haitian government, was JMTADR (*Jenès mete tèt ansanm pou developman ki reel ak durab / Youth working together for real and durable development*).<sup>1</sup> Made up of a group of friends and acquaintances, members of the Youth Org worked hard to make something from nothing: to make a rough space work for them and to make their organization a success among the cacophony of organizations in Port-au-Prince. Like many similar organizations, their vision was expansive despite relatively empty pocketbooks.

In general, the Youth Org was a small, struggling organization that more often than not failed to carry out the activities members envisioned and meticulously planned. Their interests were vast and varied, capturing a range of developmental themes, and included an interest in entering formal political arenas, namely the electoral process. Unlike HR Org members, however, Youth Org members were less interested in development or politics as ideological commitments and more interested in the pragmatics of engaging in both or either domain. Members engaged an entrepreneurial approach to development and formal politics, approaching them as separate domains of practice. Yet their simultaneous engagement in both governmental and nongovernmental realms calls into question presuppositions of the boundedness of either. This simultaneous engagement was also pragmatic from the point of view of members as they searched for an effective means to climb the social ladder and advance socially and economically.

In this chapter, I remain primarily focused on Youth Org meeting discussions, pointing to the ways in which members mobilized a shape-shifting organizational identity, performed those

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<sup>1</sup> All names, including the name of the organization and political party, have been changed. I have chosen organization and political party names that meaningfully resemble the originals in order to give readers a sense of naming practices and the significations that were important to members.

identities, and rehearsed strategies during meetings. Attention to discursive activities among members reveals important aspects as to the group's entrepreneurial behaviors and behind-the-scenes planning, namely the interpersonal political maneuvers engaged by the group. Political maneuvers and challenges of this sort were not intended as ideological challenges to existing hierarchies but rather as a means to gain access to power and status. Given members' concerns regarding performance and presentation in relation to particular audiences, an examination of their backstage planning remains crucial. Without such attention, it would be impossible to fully understand the group's motivations and objectives. This analytical focus also reveals theoretically interesting aspects of the group's deliberative practices, namely the manner in which they imagined and rehearsed strategies in anticipation for future interactions with anticipated audiences.

Each meeting at the Youth Org included extensive debates and discussions, disagreements and, at times, conclusive decisions. Some meetings included ordinary planning activities, such as who would be in charge of t-shirt printing or what would be included in a budget proposal. At other times, members discussed new funding opportunities and updated one another on meetings with potential donors. More often than not, however, meetings were a space in which members imagined both long-term and short-term "*strateji*" (strategies) for accomplishing the group's objectives. In this sense, meetings largely consisted of what I call "strategizing sessions." That is, through debate, the group collaboratively and pragmatically imagined what actions might be acceptable and effective in the pursuit of particular and general goals. In referencing "strategy," I draw on the group's metadiscursive use of the term as an identifying marker for one of the important goals of meetings; I also use it as a metapragmatic descriptor of the meeting's dominant discursive activity, which largely centered on imagining

ways in which the group could advance and establish themselves and their organization. The goal of all the planning, all the strategizing, was to “*demare*” (get started) as a successful organization. The group’s objectives, then were circumscribed not by political or developmental commitments but personal, and group, advancement with strategies reflecting this generalized motivation: “getting started” was the ultimate goal, superseding ideological, developmental or humanitarian goals.

During strategizing sessions, tangible planning details were often set aside in favor of debates centered on discursive and behavioral strategies. Members focused heavily on what would be said or how they would behave in imagined scenarios. Similar in many ways to sociologist Erving Goffman’s (1959) “impression management,” a dramaturgical model of social interaction, members self-consciously attempted to control and manage how others perceived and interpreted them. Organization meetings represented “backstage” preparations in anticipation of taking on particular identities for an imagined and context-dependent audience. In this way, members focused on preparing themselves for future interactions. Their preparatory efforts often took the form of what I refer to as “strategy rehearsals,” or moments when a member or members set up an imagined scenario and acted out the manner in which the suggested strategy would unfold. Most strategy rehearsals either directly or indirectly referenced a projected audience and some even included vocalizations of that audience in response to member utterances and behaviors. Through the integration of strategy rehearsals during meetings, members practiced future performances in an effort to strategically control a given situation while simultaneously attempting to hide that same sense of deliberateness.

In this chapter, I point to the group’s strategizing and backstage meetings as a pragmatic form of political engagement. Their participation in the domains of development and politics,

however, differed quite significantly from the manner in which HR Org members engaged both domains, particularly regarding the Youth Org's entrepreneurial and opportunistic approach. In many ways, this approach reflects what Cooley & Ron (2002) term the "NGO scramble," as a necessary result of a highly competitive NGO-donor system. Indeed, members worked to perform and conform to donor expectations in this way. In contrast to Cooley and Ron's analysis, however, the Youth Org provides an ethnographic case study pointing to the ways in which group motives and aspirations also played a major role in the organization's functioning and the group's deliberative practices. In this way, members were both pressured to conform to the varied demands of donors while also seeking to do so on their own terms and for their own purposes.

After offering a general history and overview of the organization, its members, and economic status, I examine the group's "shape-shifting" tendency, a strategy that allowed members a degree of flexibility in their attempts to get started as an organization. I argue that the group's motivation to get started represented an end goal, as opposed to being a means to an end, and ultimately justified their entrepreneurial approach. Turning my attention to a focus on strategizing sessions, I highlight the manner in which members worked to manage the impressions others had of them. I attend to two specific aspects of the group's strategizing efforts, including their use of mimicry and their attention to anticipated audiences. Performing and presenting their relationship to gender, through the strategic placement and visibility of women in the organization, represents one specific example of the ways members anticipated audience reactions and adapted their performances in different ways depending on the audience. I conclude my discussion of the group's strategizing sessions with a discursive analysis of their intermittent strategy rehearsals, or interactional moments in which members prepared and

negotiated strategies prior to engaging them. What is revealed through this attention to the backstage reality of a marginal organization is a tendency toward shape-shifting and performance as the primary means through which group members believed success for their organization, and themselves, could be obtained. The manner in which members imagined, debated, and rehearsed strategies during meetings reflected their desire to reach an end goal of social and financial advancement. Utilizing interpersonal political maneuvers, members sought to gain access to power and social status, as opposed to challenging existing hierarchies. By adequately preparing for various performances, members believed they could produce the reality they sought: to get started as a successful organization.

### **Development or Politics?: The Discursive Dynamics of Simultaneous Engagement**

When I first started following the Youth Org, their activities seemed to solidly rest on objectives that could be broadly defined as falling within the domain of development.<sup>2</sup> When pushed, members could rattle off a litany of past activities, priorities, partnerships, and areas of intervention, all with an air of confidence about the capacity and history of the organization. The list was never consistent from individual to individual nor from moment to moment. All agreed that the organization began in 2001 and consisted of a core committee made up of nine members. David, the Youth Org's designated president, was a core committee member at that time and was, consequently, the only one that remained with the organization. Most of the core committee members at the time of the organization's birth, he stated, were lawyers. Michel too was an

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<sup>2</sup> Appendix 3 offers a rough chronology of the organization's activities. The chronology is primarily meant to serve as a guide for readers who might easily lose track of when particular meetings and discussions took place in relation to others. In this sense, it primarily lists those events and meetings discussed in this chapter and the next one. Appendix 4 provides another chronology, this one focused on the specific meeting analyzed in detail in the following chapter. It also includes transcript numbers and chapters for those portions of the interaction that were transcribed and analyzed. Since this chapter also draws, to a certain degree, on interactions that arose during that meeting, readers might find the guide useful for this chapter as well as the next.



original member of the organization, although David pointed out that he was not a member of the core committee until a few years later.

David explained that the impetus for starting the organization was the observation that many development organizations operated by way of demagoguery. Forming the organization, then represented a desire to depart from this tendency. As he stated, they wished to “*fè yon diferans nan peyi a*” (make a difference in society). He argued that the group hoped to “*mèt tèt nou ansanm*” in order to eliminate poverty as much as possible. Michel too identified a desire to bring about development that was “*dirab*” (durable) and Rachel dreamed about changing people’s lives through her work with the organization. Although they did not receive direct funding from development donors in the early years, David and Michel stated that one of the founding members often financed the organization’s immediate needs and activities himself, including providing a space within which to meet and provide cultural resources to the local population, including a library and a computer. Youth Org activities during the period between 2001 and 2010 remains unclear, with the narratives offered by David and Michel differing. David insisted on the apolitical status of the organization, pointing to it as preventing them from receiving financial support. In contrast, Michel discussed a formal political agenda and the early formation of an associated political party, PPL (*Pou Pèp la* / For the People). When the January 12, 2010 earthquake hit Port-au-Prince, however, the group not only lost the building within which they worked, but also their primary leader and financier. Despite the losses, however, the earthquake also provided members with access to new funding opportunities aimed at humanitarian assistance and reconstruction efforts. More information regarding their post-earthquake activities will be provided in the following section.

While the group identified the organization as focused on development and social issues when I first came into contact with them, by March 2012, they had shifted to a primary interest in joining formal political institutions through the electoral process. By and large, members saw their simultaneous participation in both domains as unproblematic; however, they maintained a degree of separation between objectives aimed at the “social” and those aimed at the “political.” Although members vocalized understandings of the two domains as fundamentally inseparable, they also noted that a division was necessary in order to satisfy donor desires, as many development donors implicitly and explicitly required a degree of apoliticalness from recipient organizations. When the political overlapped with the social, the group attempted to satisfy donor demands for apoliticalness while simultaneously maintaining those aspects of the project that were more overtly political. This point will be illustrated in the next section. At other moments, the group debated ways to increase visibility and support for their political projects through strategies that would deliberately veil the political nature of their activities, working to highlight, instead, the social or developmental angle. As was discussed at one meeting, communities “*anndeyò*” (outside) Port-au-Prince have an inherent distrust for political projects. Therefore, it was argued, the best approach would be to put on an apolitical face and gain support through social and developmental projects, only to reveal political connections later once tangible support from the community had been obtained. This use of development as a tool for gaining political support is part of a larger history of politics in Haiti (Trouillot 1990a). Indeed, as others indicated to me, Haitian politicians tend to mobilize development projects during electoral cycles as a way to gain popularity in the zones and departments they represent or hoped to represent. Such projects, it was argued, were often short-lived.

Meetings among Youth Org members shifted between formality and informality. Most began 30 or more minutes late, with many members trickling in even after meetings had officially started. With the majority of members claiming Protestant beliefs, most meetings began and ended with a prayer in a ritualistic and unreflective manner.<sup>3</sup> Although female members were more often than not called on to give prayers, the limited number of female participants also capped the practical application of this preference. Some meetings, although not all, included a review of topics that needed to be discussed. Other meetings were held with the purpose of dealing with one or two specific issues. Once meetings began, they largely took on a life of their own, straying from any degree of formality or any attempts at conducting the flow of participation. David only occasionally took on his role of moderator. Dieula, although in charge of taking notes, rarely wrote anything down. Her infrequent attendance also hampered any attempt at retaining a written record of meetings. Periodically the issue of attendance was brought up, and efforts were made to encourage regular attendance by noting who did or did not attend. At one point, some members threatened others with fines for unmotivated absences.

The haphazard manner in which members attended meetings resulted in only half-hearted pursuits at managing a division of labor. Although there were periodic attempts to carve out specific roles for individual members, distinctions rarely held for long making it necessary to discuss, as a group, nearly all details of planning a given project. This often frustrated members as they felt they were unable to productively advance in the planning and execution stages due to a lax approach to organizational roles. Despite this frustration, however, any vocalized attempts to define roles more clearly were ultimately thwarted by participation on the part of some members that waxed and waned. It was also difficult to maintain roles given that the group's

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<sup>3</sup> I am unable to speculate as to the degree to which group members' religious beliefs influenced their behaviors and approach to development and politics.

focus shifted in relatively swift and unpredictable ways from one meeting to the next. It was not always clear to me, for instance, what would be the focus of a given meeting as potential activities, and the interests of the group more generally, sometimes shifted without warning.<sup>4</sup>

Meeting topics generally focused on two angles – planning and strategizing – although the distinction was rarely clear-cut and depended on the interests and focus of a given meeting. At times, a meeting revolved around a single project, as members debated the planning of events in detail. In situations like this, group members seemed willing to argue endlessly about even the tiniest details, such as how many copies to include on a budget proposal or whether or not something even warranted a debate. At other meetings, when no specific project was the focus of their attention, discussions tended to concentrate on eliciting and debating prospective strategies aimed at moving forward and obtaining funding to support the organization's existence. Most meetings included at least a degree of strategizing, even when focused on a particular project and the practical planning details of that project. For this reason, I characterize the majority of the group's meeting time as strategizing sessions.

For the group, strategizing sessions were a highly pragmatic activity with strategies directly aligning with immediate goals. Such goals included, for example, funding a specific activity, gaining visibility and notoriety, obtaining a stable meeting location, or dealing with a political scandal. Beginning with a problem, members proposed strategies they believed would allow the group to reach their objective. Once launched, strategies were subject to debate and commentary by the rest of the group, with improvements, alternatives, and predicted outcomes thrown into the mix. During strategizing sessions, the group regularly oscillated between competitive and collaborative dialogue. Competitive discourse, debates, and arguments regularly

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<sup>4</sup> This unpredictableness would likely have seemed less chaotic if I had had access to the group's daily schedules, meetings, and the activities of individual members. A member attending a conference or other event, for instance, could cause the group to shift its focus completely at the following meeting.

arose within this context as members discursively “battled” for control over the conversational floor and worked to obtain cooperation and collaboration from fellow group members. Most discussions included a significant degree of rapid, overlapping speech as the more vocal members sought access to the floor. Disagreements and heated debates were the norm during strategizing sessions; however, they rarely broke down into serious fights as humor and willing submission – though not necessarily due to agreement – were often used to defuse mounting tensions. In theory, anyone could participate in meeting discussions. Yet this did not always work out in practice and a number of more aggressive and vocal participants dominated most conversations. There was little reflexive concern for the inclusive participation of all members. Even in the case of an attempt to democratically alter the organization’s statutes, no real attempt to gather votes was made and vocalized agreements or disagreement were taken as indicative of the group’s stance more generally.

In this section, I have offered a brief history of the organization and introduced the unstructured nature of its existence, including the informal manner in which meetings took place and their lack of a formal division of labor. In addition, I briefly presented the deliberative practices of the group’s strategizing sessions and introduced the manner in which organization members unproblematically straddled the line between development objectives and political ones. In the next section, I attend more closely to specific activities engaged by organization members, both successes and failures. In doing so, I argue that the group primarily functioned by way of shape-shifting, or adapting their identity and priorities based on funding opportunities and member interests.

## **Shape-Shifting: Navigating Success and Failure**

Once the majority of the group had appeared, the meeting tentatively got started, about 30 minutes late. David attempted to quiet everyone down and gather their attention, a difficult task given his quiet demeanor. He called on someone to give a prayer. It was early November 2011, not long after I began regularly attending meetings. The focus of the meeting was the planning of a series of activities members wished to organize in celebration of International Human Rights Day on December 10th. Michel expected funds would be relatively easy to obtain from MINUSTAH, the UN's "stabilization" mission. I was told the group had previously worked directly with MINUSTAH.<sup>5</sup> As the group discussed general planning of a conference, a cultural event and a march, they debated how to get around MINUSTAH's unwillingness to fund overtly political activities. Although it was recognized as a form of political engagement, the march was understood as the most important aspect of the series of events envisioned by the group. Many also believed it would garner the most publicity.

The discussion hinged on the contradiction of taking money from an institution that many Haitians viewed negatively due to accusations of human rights abuses by foreign MINUSTAH soldiers. That is, it was argued that some people may hesitate to take part in planned events due to MINUSTAH's sponsorship. Examples of MINUSTAH's abuses were still fresh in popular imaginations include its role in having infested the country's largest river and tributaries with cholera. MINUSTAH was also, at that time, snagged in a rape scandal involving a minor Haitian boy and several Uruguayan UN personnel.<sup>6</sup> In debating how to deal with the complications of receiving funds for human rights activities from an institution that itself was accused of human

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<sup>5</sup> The group's connection to MINUSTAH is a bit unclear but I believe it stems from their participation in the UN cluster system following the earthquake. Within this system, they worked under the "protection" cluster and likely received training from MINUSTAH at some point. Although I do not know if they received direct financial support from MINUSTAH, it was clear that they viewed it as a potential source of funding for future activities.

<sup>6</sup> This was not the sole rape scandal to surface, simply the more public one due to an explicit video that circulated and the Uruguayan government's interventions in bringing the soldiers to trial.

rights violations, Michel argued that it was not the group's fault that they needed money to do a little good; he insisted that all small organizations take advantage of donors, implying that it would be understood this way by the Haitian population. Not taking funding from MINUSTAH was not a possible solution, he stated. Instead, the group could strategically hide or leave out sponsorship information during activities. A debate ensued: Could they manage to avoid marking sponsorship? Another member argued that donors usually expect t-shirts will be printed advertising the events and donor support. Wouldn't they notice the lack of a budget line item for t-shirts? Perhaps, it was suggested, they could advertise certain events as sponsored by MINUSTAH and other events could also benefit from the same funding if they over-inflated the budget allowing reallocation of additional resources to other activities, such as the march.

Despite the confidence in securing funding for the December 10th activities, it soon became clear in the days and weeks that followed that funds would not be obtained. At that point, the group's focus shifted to a discussion as to how to still hold the march but do so without relying on outside funding. The necessary resources, it was decided, would be paid for by the members themselves, including a small number of t-shirts, banners, and a megaphone or vehicle-equipped speaker system (*sonomobil*). Each member would pitch in a portion of the cost. Although most of the t-shirts would be made for the members themselves to wear, additional shirts would be available to hand out to non-member participants on a first-come, first-serve basis. The group discussed ways to motivate non-members to take part as it was believed that significant participation was key to a successful march: it would either reflect well for the organization, if a lot of people took part, or it would make them look ineffective if very few people showed up. Press coverage was also key to a successful march; however, this too could

backfire on the group, as one member pointed out, especially if too few people showed up but the press covered the event anyway.

Given that the focus of the march was to highlight the lack of housing for displaced earthquake victims, a prominent human rights theme at the time, those continuing to reside in tent camps following the 2010 earthquake were seen as logical participants. One way the group imagined they could encourage cooperation was by directly or indirectly signaling the possibility that participants might receive housing in the future from the Youth Org. This implied promise was based on a proposal they had submitted to CIRH, the committee in charge of approving projects slated to receive earthquake aid monies.<sup>7</sup> The committee had reportedly asked them to make changes to their proposal and re-submit it, the only hiccup being that the existence of CIRH itself was challenged and uncertain: the mandate had not yet, at that point, been renewed by President Martelly. In the end, the mandate was never renewed. Instead, a new committee with more Haitian representation was formed. At that time, however, the existence of CIRH was still uncertain and group members believed it would be renewed eventually. The group had few doubts as to the eventual success of their proposal, despite their limited experience with grant writing and a lack of experience with multi-million dollar construction projects, such as the one they had submitted. The proposal, with a budget of over US\$1.7 million, called for the construction of a total of 200 homes over the span of 12 months.<sup>8</sup> Aiming to build homes in a coastal city more than an hour's drive south of the capital, this important piece of information

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<sup>7</sup> CIRH stands for “*Commission Intérimaire pour la Reconstruction d’Haïti*” (Intermediary Commission for Haiti’s Reconstruction). The committee was largely made up of foreign representatives with minimal participation on the part of Haitian institutions and officials. The commission was originally formed as a way to minimize corrupt use of earthquake donated funds from various foreign governments and institutions. The effectiveness of CIRH was called into question and critiqued by many Haitians. Raoul Peck’s film “*Assistance Immortal*” (Fatal Assistance) – released and shown in various locations throughout Haiti in 2012 – painted CIRH in a relatively favorable light, causing much debate about the film, especially within the HR Org.

<sup>8</sup> In retrospect, the group had little chance of succeeding in the request for funds as is indicated in Ramachandran & Walz (2012:11). Only two Haitian organizations received funding, totaling approximately US\$0.8 million of available funds.



was left unmentioned during discussions focused on motivating cooperation for the planned march. Most of those residing in the camps likely desired to stay within Port-au-Prince itself. Indeed, previous efforts at resettling tent camp residents outside the capital had largely failed.

Utilizing this project proposal as leverage to encourage tent camp residents to participate in their march, they planned to meet with camp leaders individually.<sup>9</sup> The importance of meeting leaders one by one was a topic debated during meetings: by approaching them in this manner, members could convince them that their project would benefit the specific residents at the camp in question. Meeting them all at once could potentially dilute the effectiveness of this claim. One member, in arguing about how strong a motivator housing would be in drawing participants to the march, stated that people were “*swaf lojman*” (thirsty for housing) and thus, they would surely participate if there was the possibility of getting something out of it down the line.

The effectiveness of this strategy was tested only once, with one camp leader. Few Youth Org members had personal connections to other camp leaders and none were willing to hit the pavement in an effort to network with more. At the meeting, Youth Org members encouraged a partnership stating a need for a bridge between their organization, presented as having access to resources, and “people in need” (i.e. camp residents), a bridge, it was argued, that the camp leader could provide. He, in turn, gave detailed examples of how he had previously dealt with resources made available to his camp residents. He told stories of his efforts to distribute equally, presenting himself as a fair and just leader. The meeting ended with a request that he take a census of those in need, leaving him with a form intended to collect information about those individuals, including phone numbers and national identification numbers. Both the camp leader

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<sup>9</sup> Leadership of individual camps is something that emerged spontaneously in the days and weeks following the earthquake. Leadership roles were largely drawn from pre-earthquake neighborhood street politics, and sometimes included street gangs. Access to camp residents at any given camp was often restricted by leaders and committees and, as I learned in May 2010 during preliminary research, it was wise to consult with those in charge prior to entering or speaking with tent camp residents.

and Youth Org members agreed that the census should be done at night to ensure that only those truly needy residents would be accounted for. It was widely believed that some camp residents lived in there only by day in an effort to collect available food and supplies handed out by international organizations. Only those without other options, it was argued, would actually sleep in the camps.

At a later meeting, the group argued the importance of having “free stuff” available to motivate people to participate. Giving away t-shirts was the most reasonable proposal since the group was dealing with considerable financial constraints. In fact, they had acquired a number of large, plain t-shirts from a donor organization in the past, one wishing to rid itself of less popular sizes. The group debated ways to cheaply tailor the extra large shirts to work for smaller sized individuals. I offered to create a flier for the march and was instructed to include a note about free t-shirts (see Figure 3). One member even suggested advertising free housing on the flier. This was quickly shot down as likely to cause more problems than it was worth. Rather, it was argued that camp residents would surely take part once they filled out the form given to the leader the previous day, and would show up hoping their participation might result in future housing opportunities.

Figure 3: Flyer for Human Rights March<sup>10</sup>



*Translation: [Sove Ayiti], an initiative of: [the Youth Org] is organizing a peaceful march so that everyone can have access to adequate housing. December 10, 2011; 8am; Departs from: Next to the stadium; Arrives: In front of Parliament During International Human Rights Day, come proclaim with us: Everyone Should be Able to Live like Human Beings! Everyone will receive a t-shirt*

In the end, the march did take place. However, no tent camp residents took part. In fact, very few people, other than personal friends of Youth Org members, even showed up. For better or worse, one media outlet with televised reporting, aired brief clips of the event and featured

<sup>10</sup> Although I created the general template of the flyer, members critiqued and edited it collectively at one meeting. The precise wording regarding t-shirts was chosen by the group. Copies of the flyer were made by David, however, I was never aware of the degree to which they were actually distributed.

interviews with two Youth Org members. Even with the quick and selective reporting, it was clear from the broadcast that attendance was poor.

This example, spanning several weeks of planning, points to a general trend in the group's history of planned activities: although some activities were marginally successful, most were not. Here I will discuss the varied activities, both successful and unsuccessful, that the group attempted to engage. In doing so, I highlight their shape-shifting strategy and their reflexive understandings of this strategy as pragmatic. I also examine member understandings of their abilities, successes, and failures.

Many of the activities discussed and planned by the group revolved around UN recognized "international days," such as International Human Rights Day (December 10th), International Youth Day (August 12th), and Universal Children's Day (November 20th). They also tended to imagine and plan activities that revolved around other important days such as Mother's Day and the anniversary of the 2010 earthquake. For example, the group spent considerable time planning events for the 2011 International Human Rights Day, as noted in the story above. In another case, for instance, the group attempted to hold a press conference on Universal Children's Day to bring attention to their organization as one that works with children. In both examples, the group failed to follow through with all, or some, of the planned activities. The human rights march, as noted above, took place; however, it was far from "successful." In the case of the Children's Day conference, although the group worked collectively to write and edit a text intended to be presented to journalists, they were ultimately unable to attract media attention or interest.

Members also put together various project proposals aimed at specific funding competitions such as the CIRH proposal mentioned previously and a BID (Bank for International

Development) project focused on providing Haitian nationals with resources and assistance for obtaining important documents such as birth certificates and national identification cards.

Neither proposal resulted in funding and the group was forced to abandon the projects as a result.

Another development focused project included a plan to open and run a soup kitchen. Michel explained to me his efforts to network with various donor institutions, such as the World Food Organization, in search of food donations with which to run such an operation. His attempts did not seem to amount to anything until a few years later, when the group was more actively engaged in formal political institutions, most notably as participants within the newly formed Ministry in charge of political party relations. By the time of my return visit in July 2014, the group had successfully set up a soup kitchen with the help of President Martelly's social program "*Ede Pèp la*" (Help the People).

Members also had marginal success in gaining resources for activities aimed at children and handicap-accessible construction methods. In December 2010, for instance, they succeeded in receiving funds and gifts for distribution to children through CARITAS. With this assistance, they held a Christmas party complete with food and cultural performances by the children attending the event. In December 2011, they again attempted to solicit CARITAS for similar resources but were not successful. In another case, limited funds were obtained for a cultural event for children in November 2012. The donor institution provided funds directly to the rented locale and also provided a bare minimum of funds directly distributed to a local restaurant that prepared cooked and packaged food for all attendees. The event included singing and dancing performances, mostly by the children and parents in attendance.

Members also found marginal successful in gaining access to resources, as opposed to direct funding, for distribution to particular segments of the population. In cases such as these,

the group was only given the resources in question and was expected to take care of any necessary expenses that came with the distribution process. For instance, Samaritan's Purse, a protestant-affiliated charitable organization, provided the group with toys and materials for distribution to children in select areas of Port-au-Prince. The materials were provided in the form of boxes labeled for specific genders and ages. Members were tasked to distribute them appropriately but they were also expected to carry out a series of proselytizing sessions with the children in advance. During one meeting, a discussion focused on the problems associated with this and most members generally expressed a desire to avoid carrying out the proselytizing request of the donor. In the end, the group distributed the boxes at a local church in David's neighborhood. The event included short speeches, some with religious content on the part of the church's pastor, prior to distributing the boxes. To the best of my knowledge, the group did no further work toward fulfilling the donor's request. Instead, Michel alluded to the fact that they submitted photos and videos of the event to the organization, in the hopes that this would be sufficient evidence pointing to their fulfillment of the agreement.

Attendance at various training sessions focused on topics ranging from handicap accessibility issues to emergency preparedness and political party functioning were also ways in which members succeeded in obtaining marginal success. Most of the time, this type of support did not go beyond the training session itself, most of which were aimed at training Haitian participants with the goal of those participants becoming training session facilitators themselves. The intention of the donor institutions offering this sort of assistance seemed aimed at providing local Haitians the requisite knowledge to then turn around and pass on that knowledge to others. In some cases, the group received equipment and materials from the same organization, such as a laptop and projector from Handicap International. Most donors, however, provided no further

financial support to the group. The manner in which donor institutions imagined that their trained “trainers” would finance activities aimed at teaching the same material to other Haitians, is unclear.

Years after receiving equipment from Handicap International, the group also participated in a training session with another international donor focusing on handicap accessibility in the country. This relationship was facilitated by their previous one with Handicap International. The group spent a good deal of time, spanning a number of weeks, optimistically planning a series of training sessions, as was requested of them by the donor representative. They believed they would receive financial assistance for those sessions from the donor. In the end, however, the group seemed to have misunderstood the extent of support the organization offered. While they were provided with resources, including a laptop and projection screen with which to use in training other Haitians, especially those involved in small-scale construction work, this was the extent of support offered. Although the donor reportedly requested that the group carry out at least nine training sessions in the Port-au-Prince area, they did not provide assistance to support those sessions, despite member assumptions to the contrary. After some negotiation, the donor representative agreed to pay for one training session carried out by the Youth Org. Members understood this session, taking place in mid-April 2012, as a trial run for the remaining ones, aiming to demonstrate to the donor representative their ability to carry out effective training. Following the “trial” session, the group met with the representative. At that point, he made it clear that funds for future sessions would not be available. Although the group was severely disappointed by what they viewed as a complete reversal on the part of the donor, they spent several meetings discussing ways to carry out the training sessions without this financial assistance. One suggestion was to request a fee from participants, although explicitly requesting

such a fee was viewed negatively. Thus, the group debated ways to imply the fee or otherwise attach hidden fees in such a way that would allow the group to carry out the sessions. The topic faded from meeting discussions over the course of the following month, however, as the group became more interested in politically-focused activities.

Other events planned by members were aimed explicitly, and some in more tacit ways, at gaining publicity and visibility for the organization. The Human Rights Day march is one such example. In that case, Youth Org members were not primarily focused on the plight of those continuing to reside in tent camps but rather the manner in which the event, if successful, could garner visibility for the group. As one member rationalized, if they were to succeed in encouraging a large number of people to participate, donors and government officials would become aware of it and would fund the group for future activities and projects. In many ways, this statement implied a threat: that those in positions of financial or political power would see the group as having a large public backing and they would desire to avoid angering or otherwise disappointing them. The group also sought to gain publicity in other ways, including press conferences, press coverage of events, and participation on radio commentary programs, during which members aimed to publicly denounce specific political actors, a strategy discussed further in the next chapter. As the group's political interests revved up, Ernesto suggested spray painting the Youth Org acronym or that of their political party on buildings around the city as a way to make the group recognizable to larger audiences. Indeed, in traveling through the downtown area of Port-au-Prince one afternoon, I spotted a Youth Org acronym spray painted on at least one temporary fence. Thus, in many ways, publicity was viewed as one of the more important objectives of the organization; the role of it sat alongside, and as a necessary corollary to, any activities and projects they carried out.



Finally, members also sought out, discussed, and in some cases, planned, activities that could be characterized as business ventures. The group viewed such efforts as a way to make the organization financially viable without necessitating support from development donors. Even so, members never reflexively recognized a difference between financial support from local businesses and support from development donors. Some examples include singing and dancing competitions and smaller business ventures such as selling chocolate on Valentine's Day or opening a small shop selling various everyday items, such as toilet paper, beverages, matches, etc. Shops of this sort could be found on nearly every block in the capital, many of which resided within homes.

In general, the group was rarely able, during my time with them, to receive more than meager crumbs offered from various, and seemingly random, donors. In general, the group suffered from chronic organizational insecurity. Rarely did money actually land in the hands of organization members as donors were often wary of directly transferring funds to local groups and preferred to cut checks directly in the name of caterers and building owners. Others, as described previously, chose to provide assistance in the form of tangible resources such as equipment, including laptops, projectors, projection screens, etc. In addition, their lack of access to a source of stable financing to support administrative activities, such as accounting and grant writing, ultimately made them uncompetitive in seeking funding for specific projects through development donors. They also lacked the experience and training necessary to effectively imagine and organize large-scale activities and events. Although many members were current or past students of one of the many professional schools in the Port-au-Prince and surrounding areas, the quality of the education they received was questionable at best.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Many professional schools refer to themselves as “universities” yet they do not have the same accredited or social standing as, for instance, the State University or private universities such as University of Quisqueya, Port-au-Prince

The group's activities and objectives point to them as actively shape-shifting, or shifting their identity and priorities as necessary to obtain funding and/or publicity for their organization.<sup>12</sup> In many ways, the group's shape-shifting efforts made their existence as an organization, an association, or a political party necessarily disorderly and difficult to categorize as one form or another. Pragmatically, for the group, however, this shape-shifting was not problematic and was actually a means through which they could flexibly shift their focus at a moment's notice; it was not unlike having multiple hats or identities available to wear at appropriate times. Not only was this the case regarding their shifting between development and electoral objectives, but also in terms of their priorities within each domain. For example, members publicly presented their organization as involved in a wide variety of development domains as they referenced fifteen "commissions" housed within: Communications Commission, Youth Commission, Project Management Commission, Child Protection Commission, Human Rights Commission, Commission on Women, Health Commission, Education Commission, Commission for Handicap Issues, Commission for the Elderly, Peasant Commission, Construction Commission, and the Religious Commission. Having such a wide diversity of interests allowed members to strategically elevate one over others at any given moment. In this way, their development priorities and areas of intervention were deliberately left unfocused so as to encompass as many themes and interests as possible. Priorities shifted with seasonal events and funding opportunities, focusing on different development donors for the support of appropriate activities. Many projects were conceived and aimed at specific funding competitions.

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University or University of Notre-Dame. I was once told that many of these professional schools hire students who are in the process of completing their degrees at an accredited university, or dropped out of those institutions without finishing. Ultimately, the quality of education available through institutions of this sort is by far lacking in comparison to accredited universities.

<sup>12</sup> Although not a term utilized in NGO and development literature, "shape-shifting" was tossed around as a descriptor of some NGO practices at the 2014 American Anthropological Association Conference in Washington, D.C., particularly during a panel focused on theorizing NGO interventions around the world, organized by Mark Schuller.

This approach meant that the group had to shift and adapt to the different and complex demands presented by different donors. Remaining “generalists,” but presenting themselves as intervening on behalf of particular issues within the development field, allowed members to quickly and easily shift their focus as new funding opportunities arose. When imagining and planning activities, then, the pursuit of funding was prioritized over ideological imperatives and commitments to specific development goals.

In the arena of formal politics, the group’s lack of commitment to one political ideology translated into alliances with oppositional political actors one moment, and government-in-office political actors at another. In this way, alliances were always in flux. Indeed, aligning or dis-aligning themselves with particular actors and institutions had little to do with political ideology or “vision” (*vizyon*); instead, they often networked through family and friends, regardless of whether those involved had a shared political vision. In many ways, alliances were evaluated in terms of political advantage. While their initial foray into politics included alignment with oppositional actors and groups, they later shifted to a direct role in President Martelly’s government, both serving within a newly formed Ministry aimed at coordinating political parties and receiving funding for “social” outreach efforts via a government-sponsored program.<sup>13</sup> From the latter alliance, the group was able to secure limited resources to manage the soup kitchen previously mentioned, a development that took place following completion of the bulk of the research for this project. When questioned on what seemed to be a significant ideological shift, David and Ernesto insisted that they were merely taking advantage of President Martelly’s social program to get a foothold in the community. They insisted that they had no ideological commitment to Martelly or his administration. Regardless of whether they publicly sided with

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<sup>13</sup> Their early involvement with oppositional political groups is evident in the “pink bracelet scandal” discussed later in the chapter.

Martelly or not, their soup kitchen was squarely branded as aligned with the president, particularly through the display of a pink and white color scheme decorating the soup kitchen's building.

Thus, although the group engaged and recognized the importance of a shape-shifting existence, they did not reflexively point to this as ceding control of their organization to donors or government officials. Indeed, they fiercely desired to maintain control over their activities and organization, viewing their shape-shifting efforts as pragmatic and strategic in nature. Instead of simply yielding to the demands of donors, compromising ideological objectives in the process, Youth Org members actively sought ways to work within the existing political and economic system on their own terms and for their own purposes. From this view, their shape-shifting tendency was not understood as problematic. Rather, the ability to shape-shift was viewed as an important strategy itself, one to be mobilized at opportunistic moments. This was demonstrated to me at the meeting with the donor representative, the aforementioned trial training session at which the members attempted to prove to the representative that they were skilled and capable at carrying out an effective series of training sessions on handicap accessible construction techniques. At the meeting, the French national informed the group as to the lack of funding opportunities available through his organization. Michel aggressively peppered him with questions as to the funding opportunities that *were* available. In explaining the one project grant offered, the man pessimistically evaluated the Youth Org's eligibility for it, stating that they were looking for organizations focused exclusively on handicap-related issues. Michel quickly dismissed his evaluation, explaining that even though "handicap" was not in the Youth Org's name, it was, in fact, one of their main areas of intervention. He alluded to the organization's statutes as proof of this.

Even given their relative lack of experience, educational training, and resources in relation to more successful organizations and political actors, members did not reflexively recognize these factors as playing a role in their inability to accomplish immediate objectives, such as securing funding for a specific activity. Nor did they necessarily view their shape-shifting efforts as contributing to this lack of success. Instead, they largely blamed other factors, such as the degree of time and effort they collectively applied in the planning and preparation of those activities. In other cases, members condemned external factors such as discrimination against them as a small, Haitian organization in competition with foreign development organizations. For example, following a rejection for the project proposal submitted to BID, Michel insisted the reason they were rejected was due to discrimination against them as a local organization. And yet, despite this awareness of the systemic inequalities built into NGO-donor relationships (e.g. Cooley & Ron 2002; Reith 2010), their understandings of a power imbalance were necessarily partial and based on the information the group had access to. While members were perhaps correct in suspecting a degree of discrimination against them in their application for BID funding, they were less willing to reflect on, or less aware of, their own inadequacies in preparing the project proposal. The last version of the BID proposal I had access to was a maximum of two pages of vague generalized rhetoric of wanting to help Haitians who had previously been unable to get official government documents. It included no reference as to where they were proposing to carry out the project nor how they would do so in relation to the government. No one seemed to have any concrete ideas of how the project would work, no budget had been prepared, and the proposal itself needed to be translated from French into English. This was a few short hours before the midnight deadline. Thus, although members submitted an inadequate proposal, they did not point to this as a factor in the rejection.

Despite repeated disappointments prior to their marginal political success in 2014, Youth Org members' optimism far outweighed their actual ability to bring in sufficient funds or effectively prepare for the kinds of large-scale events they imagined. Failure, to the group, highlighted a need to motivate greater member participation and imagine more effective strategies. This understanding is significant in that it tells us something about how credentials, experience, and education were understood, as skills that could be imitated and mastered. Success depended on one's ability to observe, mimic, and perform properly. The group's constantly shifting priorities is evidence of their precarious financial dependence on development trends and also signals an understanding that a shape-shifting approach was the best strategic choice and, more importantly, one that was seen as possible even given the limits of professional training and experience. In this section, I have outlined the various activities undertaken by the group, including those that failed or were marginally successful. Through an analytical lens of shape-shifting, I have pointed to the ways in which group members maintained this unproblematically flexible strategy in relation to projects and priorities. I turn now to the topic of the group's primary motivation as focused on getting started as a successful organization. I examine, in more general terms, members' pursuit of getting started and the manner this approach resembled entrepreneurial objectives as opposed to ideologically-driven ones.

### **Getting Started**

Gathered in a circle that late afternoon in mid-May, members finally shifted the discussion to the topic that had been the original impetus for meeting: preparing questions in anticipation for a Skype meeting with a US-based Haitian diasporan. The diasporan was looking to head a political party in Haiti. Although they were wary of his intentions, the group hoped he

would agree to take on the role of president of their largely dormant political party, PPL. An old friend of David's, the diasporan was seen as having considerable assets largely due to his religious activities in Haiti, the US, and other countries. Members wanted to ask specific questions that were important to them but were also concerned about asking them in the right way, so as not to reveal any weaknesses – such as their financially broke status – or reveal their hope that he would fully fund the party.

A few questions regarding the man's objectives were suggested. Ricardo proposed asking him about his nationality, assuming the man desired to run for president.<sup>14</sup> Given the scandal involving President Martelly, that is, the rumor that he had dual or even triple nationality, and the constitution's article forbidding this in the case of high level government officials, the question was a touchy one. In fact, the group had already expressed disagreement with the idea that a Haitian diasporan might take on a principle role in Haitian politics, despite the fact that many candidates and elected officials often did, or were rumored to have, such dual status. "It doesn't matter" remarked Michel in response, "what you need to understand is that diasporans are happy now that an American is acting as the president [of Haiti]."<sup>15</sup> In other words, even if the diasporan had political ambitions, and even if they disagreed with him becoming a presidential candidate, it was preferable to avoid bringing up the topic at that time since the current scandal regarding the president's nationality only boosted the likelihood that this particular diasporan would get involved in the first place. His involvement, and financial support, was their objective at the moment.

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<sup>14</sup> A relatively new but active participant of the group, Ricardo often accompanied Michel to external events and meetings.

<sup>15</sup> During the nationality scandal involving President Martelly, his alleged American nationality was always marked by references to him as an American, as if his Haitian nationality was automatically lost in the granting of a second, or third, nationality. There is no official process or requirement in Haiti to denounce one's citizenship when taking on another. The issue of whether or not Martelly actually has an American passport was never fully resolved although many Haitians I spoke with assumed it was the case.

Charles suggested asking a direct question about financing, that is, if the diasporan would in fact help in personally financing the party. Christophe and a few others objected, complaining that this was too direct, arguing that it was better to avoid seeming as if they would place all the financial responsibility on him.<sup>16</sup> Michel interjected, stating that if the man were to take on the role of president of the party, it would indeed be his responsibility to search for financial support. Christophe continued his objections prompting Michel and Charles to address him directly. Christophe, Charles argued, still had a few things to learn. In particular, he needed to understand that their organization had yet to get started financially: “Everything we do,” he argued, “is with the intention of *demare*.” Michel jumped in, supporting Charles’ assessment: Christophe also needed to understand that politics is all about money, not just popularity. You need money to win. After all, he argued, their party would certainly have won elections in the past had they obtained enough financing.<sup>17</sup>

Charles’ direct statement about *demare* (getting started), highlights members’ prioritizing of pragmatic objectives over ideological or developmental objectives. Indeed, this direct statement also corresponds with a general tendency to focus, during meetings, on pragmatic approaches to getting started, moving forward, or getting a foot in the door of formal politics and the development industry. In this way, their official rhetoric as to the desire to help fellow Haitians or specific segments of the population (e.g. disabled, children, women, etc.), was rarely vocalized during meetings. Despite the air of confidence members expressed regarding the group’s capacity to succeed, the organization was solidly situated on the margins of the development industry and formal political arenas. As Charles pointed out, the goal of all the

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<sup>16</sup> Also a relatively new member, Christophe began around the same time as Ricardo although his participation was less active than Ricardo’s.

<sup>17</sup> The group’s approach to politics may seem misguided and delusional, however, from the point of view of the general Haitian political field – as personality based, coalitional, and necessitating significant investment as a means to gain support – their behaviors and aspirations appear more rational.



meetings, the planning, and the debates was to ‘get started.’ That is, to fully enter the domain of development and/or political institutions in order to benefit from what was understood to be extensive resources and prestige available from within.

The manner in which Youth Org members viewed the development industry and the formal political arena as potential avenues of success, should be understood within a larger context of Haitian society and history. Many of the members, if not all, had grown up observing the flood of development monies, the flourishing of projects, and the waves of seemingly well-off foreign development workers regularly entering and leaving the country.<sup>18</sup> The question of whether this activity actual made a difference within Haitian society – providing effective services to the population, for instance – was not one that concerned the group.<sup>19</sup> Instead, the development industry appeared to members as one of the few domains where money seemed always available and ready for the taking. With the right skills and know-how, it seemed as if anyone could successfully take a seat at the table and benefit from the resources available. Regardless of the group’s beliefs about the endless supply of funding for development activities in the country, the reality of the situation was much different. As others have noted, funding opportunities came and went with donor attention to the country, often spiking with the occurrence of natural disasters.<sup>20</sup> The bulk of attention and funding usually, although not always, favored larger organizations, particularly those connected to international organizations or whose existence was instigated by foreign organizations (James 2010, Schuller 2012). The formal political arena was also a prominent domain through which Youth Org members believed skilled

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<sup>18</sup> While it is certainly true that the flood of development aid increased significantly following the 2010 earthquake, it by no means marks the beginning of a sharp increase in exposure, for most Haitians, to the international development industry. The Youth Org’s own activities predated the earthquake (2001) although they did seem to more actively place themselves within the trends of fundable development activities following the flood of aid after the earthquake.

<sup>19</sup> In contrast, HR Org members were well aware and critical of the history of the development industry – and foreign intervention more generally – in the country.

<sup>20</sup> This trend is a global one, see Klein (2007).

individuals could harness government funds and prestige. Given Haiti's history of explosive political violence and the periodic targeting of politicians, or those in the business class with political connections, this avenue was explicitly understood by group members as the more fraught option. During one meeting, Jeremi spoke seriously about the need to have visas in hand in case they needed to leave the country in a hurry. Despite this, the rewards seemed to outweigh the risks.<sup>21</sup>

In some ways, their behavior reflects the sort of "careerism" engaged by foreign development workers (Mosse 2011).<sup>22</sup> That is, official rhetoric referencing "helping" and "developing" societies around the world serves as justification for the continued perpetuation of development activities and the presence of NGOs in those areas. Development institution representatives and NGO workers, then, have an interest in protecting their jobs and careers, and this motivation gets reflected in calls for more funding, more development, and more projects, despite a recognizable lack of improvement and, in some cases, despite awareness of a notable increase in political, economic, and environmental problems as a result of development activities (e.g. Maren 1997). There is little to be gained, then, from admitting ineffectiveness, or even in some cases, the effectiveness of projects. Development can never really be "complete," after all, precisely because this assessment may call into question the careers and positions of those individuals working within the industry.

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<sup>21</sup> It remains possible that the group's focus on development and politics, despite their entrepreneurial approach, is a result of observations as to the difficulty of truly succeeding via more entrepreneurial means, such as business ventures. While many Haitians engage informal, petty ventures of this sort, it remains questionable as to what degree this actually results in financial stability. The established business class is much more difficult to enter given the historic barriers such as class and race. Many large business ventures, for example, the trade industry, have historically been dominated by Haitian-born families of Syrian, Lebanese, French, or German descent.

<sup>22</sup> "Careerism" in the development industry also relates to Schuller's (2009) analysis of an "NGO class" in Haiti. That is, those Haitian employees who have successfully climbed the social ladder via jobs at development organizations. This is both a class marked by economics but also in terms of the social prestige that comes with a job at an international NGO.

Youth Org members, although marginal to the domain of development and formal political arenas, viewed both domains in similar ways, seeing their potential for personal and group success as the primary motivating factor for participation. Getting started, then, reflected not just a means to an end, aiming, for instance, to bring about substantial change in the country, but became an end in and of itself. Their *demare* objective largely revolved around financial stability as well as obtaining visibility and prestige. Their pragmatic strategizing efforts were rationalized through this understanding of their organization; that is, as perpetually in need of getting started. The doing of activities was the end goal – disregarding whether or not those activities actually took place or were successful. In many ways, this orientation points to the group’s behavior as entrepreneurial, even despite their engagement in domains that typically imply a degree of selflessness and working in the interest of the many or a general public.<sup>23</sup> This reflects Max Weber’s (1946) distinction, that “either one lives ‘for’ politics or one lives ‘off’ politics... He who lives ‘for’ politics makes politics his life, in an internal sense... He who strives to make politics a permanent *source of income* lives ‘off’ politics as a vocation” (84, emphasis in original). Here too, we can apply this distinction to the domain of development: one either lives “for” development, striving for the ideological objectives aimed at societal change, or one lives “off” development, as a means through which to make a living and advance one’s career. To be sure, there can be, and certainly is, a degree of overlap between the two distinctions, as one could still remain ideologically committed to effecting political or developmental change while also engaging in it as a career. The point, however, is that Youth Org members exhibited entrepreneurial motivations, as opposed to ideological ones, highlighting

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<sup>23</sup> Of course, formal political arenas often carry conflicting assumptions. On the one hand, there exists an ideal of political actors as working in the interest of the population as a whole or a subset of the population. This idea rests uncomfortably alongside pessimistic assumptions as to the “real” motivations of politicians as self-interested and power-hungry. These conflicting understandings exist within the context of the U.S. (e.g. Tannen 1998) but are also seen in the Haitian context. My sense is that the former dominates in Haiti.

more prominently a desire, even if relatively unsuccessful, to live *off* politics and development as opposed to *for* them.<sup>24</sup>

The group's shape-shifting is also indicative of the importance of the *doing* as opposed to a focus on potential benefits for targeted recipients of projects and activities. Shape-shifting was a means through which the group could potentially reach their end goal of getting started. The flexibility of their shape-shifting efforts allowed members to take on a chameleon-like identity; it was through this approach that members expressed the importance of presentation, of wearing multiple hats as the context of a situation, and a potential donor, demanded. In this section, I have introduced the concept of *demare*, pointing to it as a primary goal for Youth Org members. Their approach to development and politics, I argued, reflected an entrepreneurial drive for personal and group success, as opposed to an ideologically-motivated one. In the following sections, I analyze the group's deliberative practices and the ways in which group members attended to presentation and strategizing by rehearsing for the various performances they imagined they would engage in future interactions. I first take up a theoretical examination of performance and performativity after which I shift to focus on two specific aspects of the group's attention to presentation: their efforts to imitate others and their anticipation of audience responses. Both are important for how members pragmatically worked to manage impressions. In general, attention to the group's behavior as performance is a direct result of their pragmatic pursuit of *demare*.

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<sup>24</sup> From this distinction, we might also point to the majority of HR Org members as straddling the line as members were both ideologically motivated to effect developmental change as well as benefiting economically from their roles within the organization.

## **The Importance of Presentation**

Shifting identities and mobilizing different masks was an important part of the Youth Org members' pragmatic strategizing efforts. This approach points to a concern for presentation and performance in obtaining financial stability and/or visibility. During strategizing sessions, members attended to questions of presentation, working to imagine effective identities that would allow them to convince others of their success and capabilities. At times this meant a performance of past success. Performing effectively required members to craft competent dialogue and behaviors, both of which were discussed and debated during strategizing sessions. Attention to the manner in which others might perceive their performance of particular identities was also important since the reception by projected audiences would ultimately be a determining factor in the success of a particular strategy.<sup>25</sup> When discussing, debating, and imagining specific strategies, many of the members' concerns revolved around questions such as: What strategies might be most effective? How might we carry out the strategy? How will it be received and understood? And finally, what potential consequences, positive and negative, might result from the proposed course of action?

Strategizing sessions, and the group's focus on presentation, represented reflexive moments of preparation for planned or imagined future scenarios. During meetings, those future interactions can be understood as "performances" with members preparing to "convey meaningful messages to those around [them]" (Korom 2013:1). The work that went into strategizing sessions, particularly in the collaborative and discursive forms they took, represents preparation, as members had to collectively decide how to approach a given scenario as well as

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<sup>25</sup> Imagining an audience and the reception of proposed performances is a theme that comes up in multiple chapters. Chapter 5 also deals with this topic, in relation to the Youth Org's strategic approach, focusing more tightly on questions of ethics in relation to their strategizing efforts. Chapter 6 takes up the topic in a slightly different manner, highlighting the role of audience reception regarding uptake and signification of circulating political critiques.

negotiate how that scenario might unfold. As anthropologist Frank Korom (2013:1) notes, “the idea that life is a stage and that we are all actors performing our selves in a routine way on a daily basis is nothing new, but it provides a valuable way to think about how human beings expressively and aesthetically create their cultural worlds through interaction with others.”

Although much of the anthropological literature on performance has tended to focus on specific domains such as theatre, folklore, or ritual-like events, such domains are more often than not highly circumscribed and recognized as performances precisely due to the distinct framing of them as different from other forms of social interaction; they are recognizably a performance, a ritual, or a ceremony.<sup>26</sup> The frame, in this way, is significant in that roles are more or less defined and the performance begins and ends in recognizable ways. For instance, performers are understood as such and audiences too, although at times drawn in as “co-performers” (Korom 2013), have their role and place in the performance. The frame of a performance, according to performance studies scholar Richard Schechner (1976:50), is marked “by building a nest out of the agreement to gather at a specific time and place, and to disperse once the performance is over.” He goes on to state that the existence, the arrival and departure of an audience produce the “theatrical frame” in such a way that:

Events can be experienced as *actual re-actualizations*: in other words, the reality of performance is in the performing; a spectator need not intervene in the theatre to prevent murder as he might feel compelled to do in ordinary life – this is because the violence on stage is actually a performance. That doesn’t make it ‘less real’ but ‘different real.’ Theatre, to be effective, must maintain its double presence, as *a here and now performance of there and then events*. (51, emphasis in original)

Some performances, despite a recognizable framing of it as a performance, seek to blur the line between the here and now and the representation of real or imagined past events enacted by

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<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Bauman (1975, 1984), Fabian (1990), Lemon (2000), Lempert (2006), Rumsey (2006), Schieffelin (1985), Taylor (1997), and Wirtz (2008).

performers. Attending a “guerilla theater” performance during my time as an undergraduate, the performance troupe’s efforts to blur this line were quite successful and nearly resulted in significant violence. Billed as a subversive critique of President George W. Bush, the play was titled “I’m going to kill the president.” Those wishing to be a part of the audience were required to meet at a specified location, from which they were escorted, in groups of two or three, to a nearby warehouse. Before gaining access, however, all potential audience members were required to attest, on video, to their identities as not associated with any covert government agency. The play itself was a collection of short skits poking fun at the president. At one point, a performer mimicked phoning the White House, requesting the audience shout out “I’m going to kill the president!” It was unclear, at that point, whether the phone call was legitimately made to the White House or staged as such. The uncertainty of that moment was quite effective as the play was later abruptly interrupted by a loud and persistent knocking on the warehouse door. The performers themselves appeared to drop their performed personas and went to investigate. As a number of government agents (FBI? Secret Service?) stormed in and proceeded to put the main actors in handcuffs, the audience reacted strongly, with some physically assaulting the “agents” in an effort to free the performers. The fight spilled outside, with many audience members fleeing, and a handful of others remaining in the area, continuing to fight. Although it became clear that the performers did not wish to drop their act until all audience members had fled, due to the escalating violence, they were forced to preemptively call an end to it and confess the fact that the agents themselves were a part of the theatre troupe. One revealed to us later that they had never had such a strong reaction from an audience in the past, despite having traveled the country performing the same act. In this example, the performers desired to draw in the audience

in an effort to fully blur the line between reality and performance. Indeed, they were quite successful in doing so.

Other contexts within which the line between “real” and “performed” has been analyzed, is through research focused on historically marginalized and/or romanticized populations, such as indigenous, aboriginal, or other marginal populations. For instance, Alaina Lemon’s (1996:481) work on Roma theater in Russia, argues that “performance is a site where both authentic identity and its antithesis are located.” Fred Myer’s (1994) analysis of Australian aboriginal performances of cultural authenticity for non-aboriginal audiences is another example. Finally, Dennis O’Rourke’s 1988 film titled “Cannibal Tours,” depicts tourists travelling to Papua New Guinea, demonstrating local efforts to perform the role of primitive, authentic natives. The filmmaker portrayed interactions between tourists and locals, pointing to a colonially-derived fascination with the native “other,” while also juxtaposing this image against moments of “inauthenticity,” particularly when providing subtitles revealing reverse “othering” by locals as they mocked and critiqued the tourists for whom they were performing. These performances of cultural authenticity or inauthenticity, then, are not necessarily circumscribed within traditional domains of performance, such as theatre or art; instead, they spill over into other interactional domains as well.

Thus, for some, the idea of performativity and performance can be much more broadly applicable. “As performance art grew in range and popularity, theorists began to examine ‘performative behavior’ – how people play gender, heighten their constructed identity, performing slightly or radically different selves in different situations” (Schechner 2011:11). Following a general trend toward post-modern rejection of “truth” or “fact,” “the acceptance of the performative as a category of theory as well as a fact of behaviour has made it increasingly



difficult to sustain the distinction between appearances and facts, surfaces and depths, illusions and substances” (ibid.). Although I explore gender performance in more detail later in the chapter, in this section I focus on the use of performance as a metaphor in describing and understanding social interaction more generally, and more specifically, the Youth Org members’ behavior.

Dramaturgical metaphors, popularized in sociology by Goffman (1959) and in anthropology by Victor Turner (1987), present culture and social interaction as performances. While Turner’s approach largely rested on an analysis of “social dramas,” focusing on socially disharmonic situations such as arguments or crises as moments in which transformation and change take place, Goffman’s approach to performance was much more generalized: “He believes all social interaction is staged – people prepare backstage, confronting others while wearing masks and playing roles, use the main stage area for the performance of routines, and so on” (Schechner 1976:49). Although recognition of Goffman’s approach continues to this day, much contemporary research elaborating on his impression management model largely takes place within the domain of sociology as opposed to anthropology.<sup>27</sup> I draw on Goffman’s approach given its clear relevance to understanding the behaviors and meeting discussions among Youth Org members. In doing so, I utilize Goffman as a starting point for discussion, as opposed to a strict model of social behavior.

For Youth Org members, strategizing sessions were largely efforts to manage the impressions others would have of the group itself. Impression management, according to Goffman (1959:80), involves the “contingencies which arise in fostering an impression, and of

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<sup>27</sup> For more recent examples, see Dillard et al. (2000), Gatlin (2014), Hogan (2010), and Marwick & Boyd (2010). One exception to this general trend is Emily Martin’s (1997) use of Goffman in examining the manner in which corporate actors “manage” themselves in response to employer pressures for an increasingly flexible corporate culture.

the techniques for meeting these contingencies.” During organization meetings, members discursively worked to manage the ways in which they would be understood and viewed by others. They often drew on imagined scenarios and projected audiences in preparing themselves for future interactions, meetings, events, and activities. Members’ impression management efforts represent the manner in which individuals are always in some way presenting or performing versions of themselves in an attempt to “control the conduct of others” (3). The impressions Youth Org members wished to convey, of course, varied with the task at hand. In general they were preparing for various performances: performances of competency, skill, guile, networking, and all around success. If, for instance, the group was faced with a potential donor, they sought to convey that they were a competent, successful, and financially stable organization. My own presence was used, at times, to convey this impression as they played on assumptions about foreigners, success, and money. In other instances, when faced with Haitians and other Haitian organizations, the group often wished to convey a degree of prestige regarding their connections to foreign organizations and past successes in terms of activities and funding.

As a “team,” in Goffman’s model, Youth Org members discursively engaged with one another, presenting potential verbal and behavioral strategies they believed would be successful in controlling how others perceived and understood their organization:

When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be. (1959:17)

Strategizing sessions, for the group, were a form of backstage planning in which the details of an upcoming performance or interaction were debated and hashed out: “A back region or backstage may be defined as a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the

performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course... it is here that illusions and impressions are openly constructed” (112).

Although the group appeared to understand the future enactment of strategies as a performance, they did not necessarily desire to frame their behavior and discourse in this way. That is, they did not wish others to view or understand their participation as a performance. Indeed, members’ efforts to present themselves in particular ways to a projected audience sought to disguise the deliberateness of the presentation or performance. That is, to avoid making audiences aware of their strategic efforts to present themselves in particular ways. In a sense, they were attempting to minimize suspicion from others that their performance was in fact, a performance: “In drawing attention to mimetic performance, this strain can create a feedback loop that intensifies suspicions, that makes actors mimic harder, that makes their strain more apparent, that ratchets up suspicions; and so on” (Lempert 2014:389). To reveal the performance as a performance would have undermined the presentation itself and the credibility of it. Unlike theatre and other circumscribed activities such as rituals, then, the frame distinguishing a performance from other social interactions and marking audiences in relation to performers was deliberately masked by Youth Org members so as to leave the impression that the frame was not there and the performers were not performing.

As a team, the Youth Org faced a number of challenges that would not ordinarily be faced by an individual. Being on the same page regarding objectives brought forth heated debates. As Goffman explains:

It has been suggested that the object of a performer is to sustain a particular definition of the situation, this representing, as it were, his claim as to what reality is. As a one-man team, with no teammates to inform of his decision, he can quickly decide which of the available stands on a matter to take and then wholeheartedly act as if his choice were the only one he could possibly have taken. And his choice of position may be nicely adjust to his own particular situation and interests. (1959:85)

Thus, while an individual's impression management efforts might take place silently and relatively quickly, for instance, in one's head, working as a team necessitated extensive discussion given that a delegated individual or individuals would, in effect, act on behalf of the collectivity once strategies and performances were engaged for the projected audience. This collaborative work took the form of what I call "strategy rehearsals," interactional moments when a member, or members, acted out suggested strategies and the group reflexively engaged with the rehearsed performance, disagreeing, reflecting on, adding to, or otherwise working toward consensus as to how the strategy should play out. Before turning to a more detailed analysis of the dynamics of strategy rehearsals, I will first briefly address two specific aspects of the group's impression management efforts: their mobilization of strategies that mimicked external, presumably successful, strategies and their attention to the perceptions and reception of projected audiences. In many ways, this projected audience was a recurring presence during strategizing sessions, particularly during strategy rehearsals. This was also true of members' gendered approach to presentation, as will be seen.

### **Mimicking Others and Imagining Audience Response**

Part of members' impression management efforts was to mimic or imitate what they understood to be effective strategies used by others. Group members attempted to replicate what they observed, sometimes explicitly citing an observed action or behavior as a strategy they wished to emulate; at other times, the mimicry was more tacit. They drew on observations from anecdotal experience, media interactions, and word of mouth discourse such as gossip and

rumor. For example, at one meeting, Michel expressed a desire to imitate what he saw as a political strategy on the part of members of the National Assembly:<sup>28</sup>

*Palemantè yo yo konn, fè tout diskisyon andann paleman. Eh gen des atik yo kache yo pa mete l nan moman ou pral sinyen bagay sa a te fon skandal sou Steven epi nan moman tout nèg vin sinyen kounye a ya kache res atik yo andann menm sò siyen ou tande nèg ap di wè bagay sa m pat wè m pat wè ou sinyen ou sinyen l nèt mwen menm se sa m vle nou fè mwen menm*

Parliamentarians know, they have all their discussions inside Parliament. They hide articles, they don't put them in at the moment when everyone is going to sign. This created a scandal for Steven [Benoit]. At the time when everyone came to sign, that's when they hid the rest of the articles. The hidden articles were tied to the original signature though. You hear guys saying "See this thing, I didn't see it, I didn't see it." If you sign, you sign it completely. For me, that's what I want to do.

Michel explicitly indicated his desire to imitate this example, when stating "that's what I want to do myself." In his view, the strategy cited was a successful one. The fact that the strategy was intentionally engaged, according to Michel's interpretation of events, in many ways, justified his desire to imitate it.<sup>29</sup> Other examples of the group's attempts to mimic what they understood as successful and effective strategies are less explicit and primarily revolve around impressions and ideas that members had about how development and formal political engagement works. For instance, in preparing a number of different project proposals aimed at specific donor competitions for funding, members repeatedly returned to a need for the purchase of a vehicle for the organization. In some cases, members justified this need by referencing the many vehicles with organization logos regularly observed throughout the Port-au-Prince area. It was understood, then, that successful organizations have vehicles with logos advertising their presence. The visible existence of vehicles of this sort, from the point of view of Youth Org

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<sup>28</sup> Also known and referenced by most Haitians as Parliament. This meeting discussion is presented in more detail in the chapter that follows.

<sup>29</sup> The ethics of engaging deceptive strategies is discussed further in the next chapter.

members, justified calls for a budget line item on various project proposals, indicating a need to purchase a similar vehicle. Obtaining a vehicle of their own was not simply a matter of imitating an observed norm, however, it also involved a degree of status: those organizations with vehicles were understood as legitimate and financially successful.

The group's understanding of the appropriateness of any given strategy, and the ideas expressed during meetings, were primarily rooted in their situated observations as outsiders to the domains they wished to succeed in. That is, they argued for or against particular strategies, drawing on observations as to how they believed things functioned and what they believed could or would be successful; observations such as these were necessarily based on a view from the outside looking in. According to sociologist James Jasper (2006:12), "cultural meanings permeate strategic action at every moment" with individual and collective understandings of the world affecting both the goals and the various envisioned "moves" through which one might arrive at a determined goal. That is, "culture is a tool kit we use in our strategic efforts" (ibid.). The group's optimistic attitude regarding their ability to succeed through effective strategizing reflects their belief that with the right cultural know-how, they could succeed. With limited resources at their disposal and a marginal existence in relation to the development industry and formal political arenas, their ability to observe, strategize, and imitate was believed to be a valued asset. This understanding is significant in that it tells us something about how credentials, experience, and education were understood: as skills that could be mimicked and mastered.

As with anthropologist Alexei Yurchak's examination of the transformation of state policy in relation to cultural practices in Russia and the socialization of a careerist ethic, Youth Org members worked to transform themselves from marginalized youth to successful

participants in the development industry and political institutions. Yurchak (2003:80) describes the careerist transformation as such:

The process of reinventing oneself to fit the norms of the true careerist necessitates endless performative rituals – from bodily acts (appearance, clothes, gestures, movements, way of walking, manners, voice, style of drinking), to speech acts (types of utterances, genres of speech, use of English and obscenities), to ritualistic acts of manipulating, reorganizing and reshaping one’s self-centered perspectives, emotions, feelings, the time and space of one’s daily existence and so forth.

In similar ways, Youth Org members drew on performances of behaviors they observed of those believed to be successful. That is, although they may not have mimicked others in a precise way, members attempted to approximate the behaviors of others in such a way as to bring about a transformation to the successful organization they imagined.

In much the same way, this behavior resembles that described by Sasha Newell regarding *nouchi* culture and “bluffeurs” in Côte d’Ivoire.<sup>30</sup> Examining the informal, and often illicit, economy of the streets in low-income areas of Abidjan, Newell reveals the importance of reputation and the role of performing to maintain reputations: “As in poker, the bluff [is] at once a misleading statement about one’s success and an attempt to profit from others through that performance. In an economy of cons, the bluff refers to the skill of the actors in extracting wealth through deceit as well as their ability to climb the walls of social hierarchy through illusion” (2012:144).<sup>31</sup> Instead of viewing bluffeurs as “posers,” Newell urges us to see them as performers (20). The bluff, in this way, is recognizable as a bluff. It is, essentially, a “public secret”: “Concealment of the public secret, the unarticulated knowledge that the bluff does not index real wealth, allowed the performative act through which *nouchi* transformed the symbolic

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<sup>30</sup> “Nouchi” are young men in Côte d’Ivoire earning their income through the informal economy. The term is also slang for “hoodlum” or “bandit” and is used as a label for the linguistic vernacular associated with individuals considered to be “nouchi.”

<sup>31</sup> For more on reputation and the performance of it, see Bourdieu (1984) and Munn (1986).

capital of their street names into the social capital of fistons [criminal henchmen working for a boss], producing real success behind the trick mirror of its imitation” (98). The transformation is effected – or at least believed to be possible – through mobilization of performances. Unlike nouchi culture as described by Newell, however, Youth Org members did not wish to reveal themselves as performing. The performance, this way, was to remain a secret, not to be revealed publicly.

The group’s use of mimicry was one way they attempted to transform their existence as a marginal organization into a successful one. Practices such as these often went hand-in-hand with their shape-shifting approach. In this way, by imitating personas they believed would be effective, they were able to wear different hats or present themselves in differing ways depending on immediate context and objectives. Mimicking what they observed, either specific behaviors or general trends, allowed them a means through which to perform a given identity more effectively. For the group, preparation for performances involving imitation were “methods to manipulate the source” (Lempert 2014:387) in order to make it work effectively for them. As with theatre and other performances, variation is inevitable (Korom 2013:15). The group’s mimetic efforts, then, can never be identified as exact replicas of a source. Instead, their efforts to imitate others point to member interpretations of their observations of the development industry and formal political arenas. It also highlights understandings as to how they believed things work in both domains. Although their attempts were never to identically imitate a cited, or uncited source, the resemblance to a source was, in many ways, the means through which they wished to obtain success through imitation. In this way, they desired to authentically behave as the identity they performed.<sup>32</sup> The imitation, then, drew on understandings of the potential for

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<sup>32</sup> As Michael Lempert (2014:390) warns, we need to be cautious about what is understood as mimicry versus what perhaps should not be recognized as such. It is also nearly impossible to pin down the motivations of others, thus we



success a given strategy appeared to hold for members while also representing a means to obtain similar success. In some cases, such as the parliament example discussed above, members presupposed intention as a necessary component of the strategic action they wished to imitate.

Members' attention to a projected audience was also an important component of their strategizing sessions and their impression management efforts. In general, they seemed aware of the restrictions and expectations of the donor-NGO system. For instance, they knew they had to satisfactorily "sell" a given project. In this way, their project ideas usually appeared as vague imitations of already-funded projects taking place in the country, such as food distribution, micro financing, and housing construction for earthquake victims. Other mimicked projects were a direct reflection of a specific donor's interests, such as those associated with handicap accessibility or women's issues. The group's primary concern, in this sense, was anticipating how they would be received or understood by other Haitians and foreigners.

In the MINUSTAH/Human Rights march example explored earlier in the chapter, we can see a number of different ways that the group strategically discussed and planned how a particular strategy might be received by a projected audience. For instance, the manner in which they invited individual tent camp leaders to meet with them, as opposed to meeting with many leaders at once, was a deliberate strategy aimed at conveying the idea that specific tent camps would have access to potential benefits, an idea that would only be diluted if leaders became aware that other tent camps were also solicited. This was despite their desire, and need, for a large number of people to participate in the march. During the planning of this event, the group also drew on cultural understandings of how "Haitians" would behave, particularly their needing "free stuff" as incentives to participate in the march. This played out during discussions of the

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need to be doubly cautious, although attending to interactional cues, such as uptake, as well as context can assist in this task.

flyer I produced for the event as I was specifically instructed to advertise free t-shirts, even despite the fact that very few shirts would actually be available for distribution given the limited funding available. They also anticipated that explicitly offering the potential for housing, as one member suggested should be added to the flyer, could potentially place them in a difficult position in relation to participant demands.

While many of these examples represent moments in which the group discussed strategies backstage prior to engaging them, I was also on the receiving end of similar behaviors, particularly regarding a shift in presentation based on assumptions as to what was expected and desired of me, as the audience. As was discussed previously, narratives focused on the organization's history and past activities were relatively inconsistent from one member interview to another. Meeting Michel at the organization office the first time produced stories of success and a history of activities. He exaggerated the size of membership and pointed to a large number of partner organizations, most of which, I learned later, did not exist or were defunct. His exaggerations in that moment highlight a desire to present the organization as having significant clout to a foreigner he likely believed to be a potential funding source or, at least, as a means through which funding could be secured. In doing so, he made particular assumptions about both my connections to larger funding institutions and the privilege my white skin could afford the group. Later stories gathered from individual interviews with Michel, David, and Rachel, nearly a year after I had integrated into the group, presented the organization differently. In particular, all three members pointed to a lack of resources and funding throughout the history of the organization. All three members also pointed to this as the major contributing factor to the group's relative lack of success or their inability to follow through on many activities. David and Rachel stating specifically that the 2010 earthquake was a significant blow to the organization.

The timing of the interviews themselves was indicative of the interests each member had at that moment. David's interview was carried out prior to the group's shift to a focus on entering formal political arenas and, consequently, he did not mention the group's political party or early political activities. In fact, he emphasized the apolitical nature of the organization, pointing to that factor as a reason the organization failed to receive significant funding. In addition, he pointed to past success of a dance competition (*konkou*) in 2009, describing it as not unlike the one the group was attempting to organize at that time. In contrast, interviews with Rachel and Michel, a number of months following David's interview, took place after the shift to an interest in politics. Both members highlighted the political activities of the past, referencing the early existence of the same political party (PPL) they had re-engaged in 2012 on account of the diasporan's interest. Michel also presented himself as having a political science degree when he did not, in fact, have one.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the interview narratives represented attempts to manage the impression they desired me to have of the group and were strongly aligned with the activities and interests at the moment when the interviews took place.

Finally, the assumptions members had about a projected audience also played a role in how interactions with those audiences played out. For instance, when a Haitian photography and professional association reached out to the Youth Org wishing to create a partnership, the group entertained the possibility and agreed to a meeting with a number of association representatives.<sup>34</sup> Weeks prior to, and immediately before the scheduled meeting, members strategized ways to approach the association. The day of the meeting, Michel expressed

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<sup>33</sup> This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

<sup>34</sup> At the time, I was confused as to why a development organization would partner with what appeared, despite their title as an association, to be a business venture. I was also confused as to why the Youth Org was entertaining the idea of a partnership since there was no explicit discussion with the association representatives as to how they would benefit from the relationship. It is possible Youth Org members viewed it as another organization/association they could list as a member when presenting their status and accomplishments and then could mobilize participation in the future if needed.

concerns, and certainty, that the visiting association representatives were only interested in getting a hold of the Youth Org's contacts, specifically those of foreign development organizations. Contacts, in this context, were viewed as a highly valued commodity. Once the representatives arrived and the meeting got started, they outlined specific ways they imagined the Youth Org could assist them, specifically regarding their desire to expand the professional school if the Youth Org was to have access to resources available from international organizations. Michel went on to explain, repeatedly, that the international organizations they had contact with only operate through a process of reference. That is, any contact with the organizations in question had to be initiated by Youth Org members. Thus, Michel preemptively addressed his backstage anticipation of the association members' intentions, working to head off any attempts the association members might make to "steal" (*vole*) the Youth Org's contacts. Michel strategically argued, on-stage, or, in front of the intended audience, that the Youth Org was a necessary mediating agent. Here we can see how the group's attention to and anticipation of projected audience reactions influenced the manner in which they imagined effective strategies and, at times, carried out those strategies.

In the following section, I discuss the group's relationship with, and performance of, gender as a specific example of how the group shifted the presentation of themselves in particular ways depending on the audience. I follow this example of the group's performance of gender with a discursive analysis of their intermittent strategy rehearsals.

### **The Presentation of Gender**

Although I arrived at 3:10 pm for a meeting that had been scheduled to start at three, it was not until 3:25 that I was joined by David. On my way out the door, he assured me that others

were on their way. While additional members did trickle in not long after, the meeting did not officially get started until nearly 2 hours later. It was 5:20 when the last three group members, Michel, Ernesto, and Ricardo, shuffled into the dusty, dimly lit space. Having passed the time playing a UNICEF sponsored board game, teaching players about the environment and catastrophes, David, Jean and Charles quickly set it aside in favor of starting the meeting.<sup>35</sup>

Appearing flustered and upset, Michel and the others dragged desk-chairs into place, joining our circle. Almost two and half hours late, the meeting finally got started. It was a Saturday in mid-May 2012, a regular meeting day. The emotionally charged disposition of those arriving late forced the group to set aside previous discussion plans in order to address their concerns. The late-comers had just returned from a meeting with a UN-associated platform of Haitian organizations, known as POH, of which the Youth Org was a participating member.<sup>36</sup>

The frustration arose because a request for funding from POH for a Youth Org activity celebrating Mother's Day, was denied. The platform's coordinator, Jessica, had reportedly stated that funding for women-focused activities should be reserved for organizations whose specific area of intervention was women's issues. From her perspective, the Youth Org was not a women-focused organization, both in terms of their activities and the relative lack of women participants. From the perspective of Youth Org members and their shape-shifting tendencies, this explicit exclusion of them from a competition for funding was an outrage. This, it was argued, was fundamentally unfair and signaled the coordinator's total control over the platform

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<sup>35</sup> The game featured a typical board game layout with spaces along which to advance, questions to answer, and challenges to overcome in advancing to the final goal, all in Haitian Kreyòl. Without reading the instructions – which were vague and lacking – the three members invented rules as they went along.

<sup>36</sup> This platform was social in nature as opposed to the two other platforms the organization was engaged in, or nearly engaged in, which were political platforms. The platform discussed here was called POH (*Plat-formes des Organizations Haitiennes*/Platform of Haitian Organizations). Member organizations had various development objectives, most of which were focused more generally on human rights or protection activities. The platform itself had a direct relationship to MINUSTAH and was an off-shoot of the UN cluster system that followed the 2010 earthquake.

and her misunderstanding as to how platforms are “supposed to function.” The discussion took a misogynistic turn, as Michel insisted “*pa ka gen fi sou tèt la san kontwole l*” (women/girls can’t be in leadership positions without being controlled). Indeed, he went on jokingly, women and men were created differently: women were created with weaknesses, men were not.

The group debated strategies for dealing with Jessica and it was decided that making her believe that Youth Org representatives were her friends and supporters would allow them to exploit any misstep as grounds for her removal. Ideally, Ernesto suggested, Jessica should be replaced by another female, as a male candidate might be viewed negatively. Not long after, Michel phoned Jessica offering his apologies for his outburst at the meeting and offered his assistance to her in any way she needed. The strategy was put into motion.

The charged dispositions and negative assessment of women in that moment resulted from the members’ outrage at being denied funding for an activity they viewed as legitimate. Indeed, the group’s participation in the platform was largely predicated on their belief that POH’s connection to the UN would likely result in funding opportunities not otherwise available to the group. In that moment, the group’s shape-shifting strategy was brought into question by Jessica. The response not only drew on gender stereotypes the members themselves appeared to believe – that women are incapable of successful leadership without the assistance of men – but they likewise drew on the assumptions and stereotypes they believed others would have when debating effective strategies for dealing with Jessica’s behavior. For them, finding a way to get Jessica removed from her leadership role was a necessary step. To do so, the group imagined a projected audience, in this case, POH and its members, and proposed to search out a suitable *female* replacement in an effort to downplay any concerns about sexism that other POH members might have. Thus, we can see how the group’s attention to impression management and audience

response played into their relationship to the question of gender. While the group engaged most explicitly in efforts to present the group as having particular relationships to the role of women, their pragmatic and strategic placement of women in particular roles also points to a flexible and shifting performance of masculinity on the part of the male members of the group.

The group's use and placement of women, and their simultaneous negotiation of masculinity, had both an agentive aspect as well as a social constructionist one; that is, "gender is something one continually does" as opposed to "something one has" (McElhinney 2003:27). As philosopher Judith Butler (1993:134) argued regarding the performance of gender, "a performative act is one which brings into being or enacts that which it names." Unlike Butler's influential theories on the social construction of gender (e.g. 1997), male Youth Org members *actively* participated in using and (re)presenting women in particular, circumscribed roles. "For Butler, there is no agency in the sense of a voluntarist subject, as actors are little more than ventriloquists, iterating the gendered acts that have come before them" (Hall 2000:186). Similar, in some ways, to the behaviors analyzed by Marjorie Harness Goodwin (1990), through her attention to gendered speech practices of African American children and the use of different speech practices with different activities and contexts, male Youth Org members shifted the presentation of themselves in relation to women depending on the context and the projected audience. To a certain degree, the assumptions and stereotypes they drew on in doing so were unconscious even as they were actively and strategically making choices as to the different ways in which they could present the role of women in relation to men. In this way, "an operationalization of gender, using and expanding the power that gender difference can create, [took] place through performance" (Busby 2000:22). Group members both produced particular understandings of gendered roles while simultaneously reproducing existing stereotypes and

assumptions. In this way, “gender is treated as the accomplishment and product of social interaction... Gender emerges over time in interaction with others” (Holmes & Meyerhoff 2003:11).

In the above example, and in general, the group largely understood the role of women in the organization as needing to remain circumscribed to particular tasks. On the one hand, male members expressed negative evaluations as to the ability, capacity, and trustworthiness of women in general. Many such evaluations took the form of jokes and metaphors that ultimately identified women as untrustworthy or entirely dependent on men. For instance, as a warning to the group to take their time and avoid mistakes, Ernesto argued his point through the use of a metaphor. He stated that to rush into it would be like telling a girl you just met, and fell in love with, that you have ten thousand dollars. She would, he argued, undoubtedly rush to say she loves you and then steal your money. At another meeting, Ricardo pushed the group to take charge of the situation at hand, urging them not to be like women in waiting for men to do everything.

On the other hand, the group regularly faced pressure from outsiders, particularly, from donors, pushing them in the direction of greater gender equality and inclusion of women in domains historically reserved for men. Just as the group worked to manage impressions of the organization and themselves via backstage strategizing more generally, they also worked in similar ways to control the place and visibility of women in the group. Given that there was a limited number of female members actively involved in the organization, and the participation of those members was limited, the group struggled to present their organization in the manner they desired.



In the realm of development activities, the obvious advantage of having a woman-focused angle, and female members to lead such activities, was clear in terms of opening up financial opportunities that would otherwise be off-limits. As was seen from the POH example, the group faced doubts from outsiders, such as Jessica, as to their women-focused priorities and thus faced potential exclusion from competition for available funds. Awareness of this manifested in their vocalized concerns as to the representation and participation of women in the organization. The desire to “take out” Jessica as the POH coordinator and replace her with a different, sympathetic female was a reasonable strategy from Ernesto’s point of view in stating, “only women can combat women.” Discussions of the Youth Org’s participation in the platform often included a call for greater female representation on the part of Youth Org members, even if this meant bringing in family and friends of group members only for the sake of POH meetings. In other cases, members saw potential donors and proposed activities as necessitating female leadership; in particular, this was true of activities that targeted women and, at times, those that targeted children. Applying for Christmas funding to hold a party and distribute gifts to children in December 2011, Rachel and I were dispatched to meet with a potential donor. Although Michel and Ernesto accompanied us to the donor’s office, they did so without any intention of actually attending the meeting.<sup>37</sup>

In the realm of politics, the group faced the government mandated quota of 30 percent for the participation of women in government institutions. In addition to this formalized pressure, the diasporan discussed previously vocalized, during one Skype meeting, a desire for women to be well-represented in their political party. Over the course of a number of Youth Org meetings that followed, various members made repeated references as to a lack of women participants in

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<sup>37</sup> Michel and Ernesto waited in the car while Rachel and I went in. The meeting did not, in the end, take place. I offer more details about this incident in the following chapter.

the group. This was despite Michel's assurance to the diasporan, that the group was "*chaje fanm*" (packed full of women).<sup>38</sup> He illustrated the group's commitment to the inclusive participation of women by narrating a story as to his active attempts to increase the participation of women. He stated that he had voluntarily turned down a leadership role in an associated platform in order to allow a woman to take on that position.<sup>39</sup> While I suspect this story was largely a fabrication, or at least an exaggeration, the manner in which he self-consciously presented himself as personally devoted to the cause of women's inclusion remains notable. The diasporan's expressed desire for women to play a significant role in the political party manifested increased worries by Youth Org members, expressed at later meetings, including a declaration that "*nou gen pwoblèm fi*" (we have a woman/girl problem). The desire to integrate more female members and the vocalized concerns citing a "problem" were less about diversification in terms of perspectives and advice, as the diasporan had desired, and more about impression management regarding donor expectations. References to a "woman problem" were, for the most part, a strategizing effort aimed at satisfying the demands of a particular audience.

At other times, the group mobilized assumptions as to Haitian cultural norms, arguing vigorously in favor of women taking on roles that fit with what they believed would be the audience's expectations, such as secretarial or accounting roles. In this case, the projected audience was a Haitian public, often referred to as "Haitians," "the people" (*pèp la*) or "the masses" (*mas la*). During discussions in which a Haitian audience was imagined, the group drew on gender norms and stereotypes of the proper role of women as a way of managing how the

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<sup>38</sup> It seems worth noting that the term "*fanm*" is usually avoided in everyday conversations as it carries negative connotations. While feminist groups have attempted to overturn those negative connotations and have sometimes utilized *fanm* in organization names and ordinary conversations, avoidance of the term remains notable. Instead, Haitians tend to use the term "*fi*" (girl) or "*madanm/medanm*" (madam or a group of women, especially referencing older or married women). The use of *fanm* here was likely instigated by previous comments made by the diasporan who tended to codeswitch frequently between Kreyòl, French, and English. In French, *femme* is not as ideologically loaded.

<sup>39</sup> He was presumably talking about POH although this was left unspecified.

group was perceived or understood. Women were deliberately placed at the welcome desk of the trial training session on handicap accessibility techniques in April 2012. The training session, it should be noted, involved only male participants. As I was the only female member able to attend the session, and the group believed the welcome desk demanded two people, Charles was slotted to assist me. He was mercilessly teased and, in the end, did not assist me. At subsequent meetings, during which the group attempted to carry out more training sessions despite a lack of donor support, they debated methods of advertising the sessions as free in an attempt to attract participants while charging fees by attaching them to various associated services. David suggested requiring that potential participants call to sign-up, reasoning that this could be a way to alert participants to associated fees so they would come prepared with money in hand. Debating this strategy, Ernesto argued for the necessity of having a female answer the phone, arguing that this would soften the blow of fees for an event that was otherwise advertised as free. The problem, however, was that the only females available to them at the moment were Dieula and I. Dieula, it was argued, would not be successful at such a task given her shy and quiet nature. The problem went unresolved and the training sessions were eventually abandoned altogether.

As can be seen, group perceptions as to how a projected audience would understand the role and place of women in the outward presentation of the Youth Org, its activities, and membership, necessarily shifted with the audience in question. While this deployment of particular presentations of gendered roles primarily rested on the use and placement of women in strategic ways, the group's behavior was as much about the role of women in the Haitian context, as it was about masculinity (Kivland 2012). In this way, group members negotiated performances of their own masculinity through presentations and performances of their

relationship to women. Masculinity, for the group, was an unmarked category couched within strategies involving the presentation of women. I now turn to a discursive analysis of strategy rehearsals, a distinct aspect of the group's backstage strategizing efforts.

### **Strategy Rehearsals**

Strategizing sessions and strategy rehearsals were the means through which Youth Org members collectively imagined and debated ways to get started as an organization. They allowed members to practice or otherwise prepare for the performances they imagined would take place in future interactions with projected audiences. As Schechner (2001:10) notes, "any event, action, item, or behavior may be examined 'as' performance. Approaching phenomena as performance has certain advantages. One can consider things as provisional, in-process, existing and changing over time, in rehearsal, as it were." Strategy rehearsals within Youth Org meetings were not full performances; rather, they were intermittent moments in which group members imagined and acted on scenarios involving specific strategies. Those engaging in a strategy rehearsal, more often than not, drew on projected speech, speaking on behalf of themselves or the group more generally. Rehearsals of this sort nearly always included explicit or tacit recognition of a projected audience. At times, members also vocalized the anticipated utterances of this audience, pointing to reactions and responses to the unfolding strategy. In this way, projected speech was often an important aspect of strategy rehearsals, serving, at times, as a frame marking the rehearsal performance itself.

Unlike performances, such as staged theatre performances, rehearsals represent unpolished presentations and provide the means through which performers "try out" a variety of approaches and interpretations in an effort to select a suitable one for the objective at hand.

“Early rehearsals, or workshops, are jerky and disjointed, often incoherent” (Schechner 1976:60). Thus, rehearsals remain unrefined. Participants frame and mark the beginning of a rehearsal through linguistic cues with others, or the same speaker, breaking that frame in various ways and for various purposes. Given the nature of a rehearsal, the point of which is to perfect or prepare for the best possible manner of presentation, the rehearsal and its framing is necessarily collaborative and messy. “In all cases rehearsal is a way of selecting from the possible actions, those actions to be performed, of simplifying these to make them as clear as possible in regard both to the matrix from which they have been taken and the audience to which they are meant to communicate” (Schechner 1976:61).

Strategy rehearsals, for Youth Org members, more often than not drew on projected speech as a frame marking the beginning of a rehearsed performance (Hymes 1981, Goffman 1974); in other words, reported speech was the marker by which a “performance is keyed” (Bauman 1993:183). At times this reported speech took the form of direct quotations, usually through the use of present tense verbs; at other times, it was marked by simple future verb usage. For instance, “*Mwen di ke...*” (I say that) or “*M ap di...*” (I will say) were often used to mark the beginning of a strategy rehearsal. Rehearsals of this sort were rarely sustained for long. More often than not, a member’s attempt to initiate and present a rehearsal of the strategy they proposed was quickly interrupted by other members voicing a critique or disagreement with how the strategy played out. Most rehearsals, in this way, were relatively short-lived.

As the group’s major focus became one of political ambitions, they worked to form various alliances with other oppositional political parties. In the process, they quickly became embroiled in a scandal. At a late April 2013 meeting, the group discussed ways to deal with one

particular scandal.<sup>40</sup> While the scandal primarily involved Michel, his presence as a member of their party implicated the group as a whole and their party's standing. The event in question was in relation to the group's recent activities with a coalition of oppositional political parties, a platform referred to as FPI (*Fòs Politik Inite* / Politically United Force). During a meeting for FPI at which Michel and another Youth Org member were present, Michel was spotted with a pink plastic bracelet in his bag. Given that the gathered group was situated in opposition to President Martelly, the pink bracelet was a clear transgression, as it was Martelly's colors and likely even had his name on it. Unfortunately for Michel, the bracelet was a symbol of alliance with President Martelly and his administration. The Youth Org members were justifiably concerned with how the other platform members would view their continued participation in FPI's activities and were concerned they would take action against the Youth Org politically or move to kick them out of the platform altogether.

At the Youth Org meeting that afternoon, the story was reported to those that had not been present when it happened, including myself. Four members participated in an unfolding discussion of the scandal and entertained suggestions as to how to deal with the situation.<sup>41</sup> In doing so, they shifted in and out of a rehearsal frame. The strategizing session below reflects the group's desire to control the situation as best they could, with some members supporting a preemptive break with the platform, including Michel with some support from Ernesto, and others supporting a more reserved "wait and see" approach, including David with some support from Jeremi:

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<sup>40</sup> This discussion took place at the same meeting as the one analyzed in detail in the chapter that follows. The meeting featured two major topics, one focused on the pink bracelet scandal presented here and the other focused on how to deal with the director of a different political platform who requested the group sign on to his platform as a condition of using his building for meetings. The group's simultaneous participation in both platforms was never reflexively recognized as a problem, however, participation in multiple political parties, as one, non-present member was accused of doing, was understood as highly problematic.

<sup>41</sup> Other members were present at the meeting but were not active participants.

## Transcript 4.0: Pink Bracelet Scandal

<p>1 Ern: <i>se paske pa gen nom</i>  2 <i>paske plis que ou pa gen nom</i>  3 <i>yo-yo-yo di nenpòt bagay=</i>  4 Mich: <i>=si nèg sa yo ta manke al sou lèzonn</i>  5 <i>yo dim gen braslè woz</i>  6 <i>map akize pi fò nèt andann=</i>  7 Jer: <i>=mhm=</i>  8 Dav: <i>=(laughs)=</i>  9 Mich: <i>Konprann?</i>  10 <i>[dayè pa gen prèv yo pat] filme =</i>  11 Dav: <i>[ ((laughs)) ]</i>  12 Ern: <i>=Wi=</i>  13 Mich: <i>=Konprann?</i>  14 <i>map di "bon" ke: eh</i>  15 <i>"lè nap pale de braslè woz la</i>  16 <i>sa pa sèlman mwen konn genyen l"</i>  17 <i>se tankou avè Victor Benoit</i>  18 <i>map pale=</i>  19 Ern: <i>=(laughs)=</i>  20 Mich: <i>=Map di</i>  21 <i>"denyèman m te wè w te soti</i>  22 <i>w gon braslè woz [ la" ]</i>  23 Ern/  Jer  24 Mich: <i>[Kilès ki ] toujou pa mete li? =</i>  25 Ern/  Jer:  26 Ern: <i>=(laughs)=</i>  27 Mich: <i>=Eh? =</i>  28 Ern: <i>=Wi:</i>  29 Mich: <i>Wal nan yon rankot nan Palo</i>  30 <i>kilès ki di w pa ale?</i>  31 <i>e tandiske lè wap pale nan radyo</i>  32 <i>moun konnen ke son bagay serye</i>  33 <i>kite yo fè erè</i>  34 <i>map- map vannen yo</i>  35 <i>[nan radyo pa di] anyen</i>  36 Ern: <i>[ ((laughs)) ]</i>  37 Mich: <i>Map di "Serge la son lòt abolotcho"</i>  38 Dav: <i>Non nòmalmàn</i>  39 <i>pa site no(h)n nèg yo=</i>  40 Mich: <i>=Non fò w komanse atake yo</i>  41 Jer: <i>[ ((laughs)) ]</i>  42 Mich: <i>[...Kounye a la lè bagay la ap</i>  43 <i>komanse fè bwil kounye a nom w vin</i>  44 <i>fèt ou menm nom pati a vin fèt</i></p>	<p>it's because we're not well known  because when you're not well known  they-they-they can say anything=  =If these guys were to get lost,  They would tell me they have a pink bracelet,  I'll accuse most of the members=  =mhm=  =(laughs)=  =Understand?  [ they don't have proof, they didn't ] film it=  [ ((laughs)) ]  =Yes=  =Understand?  I'll say "ok" that: uh  "since we're talking about pink bracelets,  it's not just me that has one"  it's like I'm talking to  Victor Benoit=  =(laughs)=  =I'll say  "last time I saw you leave,  you had a pink [bracelet"]  [ ((laughs)) ]  [Which among them] used to wear one?=  [ ((laughs)) ]  =(laughs)=  =right?=  =Yes:  You go to a meeting in the National Palace  Who would say you didn't go?  And at the same time when you're on the radio,  people know it's serious.  Let them make a mistake  I'll- I'll denounce them  [on the radio, not really say] anything  [ ((laughs)) ]  I'll say "Serge is just another bluffer"  No, normally  you don't cite a na(h)me=  =No, you need to begin attacking them now  [ ((laughs)) ]  [... When this stuff begins to get  attention ] now your name will be known,  the party's name will be known</p>
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As the interaction unfolds, we can see that the immediate objective is not just one of dealing with the scandal and containing it, but of visibility. Ernesto points out that the group's position in relation to the platform, and specific individuals within the platform, is one of relative disadvantage given the Youth Org's lack of public visibility (lines 1-2). Michel goes on to propose an active break with the platform, suggesting specific strategies for how to do it in a way that addresses both the scandal and the group's problem of visibility. In particular, he suggested the active use of the media to denounce the platform and platform members, for instance, accusing them of bluffing (as in line 37).<sup>42</sup> In the process, Michel shifts in and out of rehearsing the suggested strategy, positioning himself on the radio, with a stated audience of Victor Benoit (line 18) as well as an unstated audience of the Haitian public in relation to which he worked to persuade and position himself, and their political party, to become visible and known (line 42-44).<sup>43</sup>

Michel performed to the anticipated audiences both citing his general strategy of preemptive accusations while also reporting his own word-for-word participation in making those accusations. His performance of the suggested strategy unfolds with supportive affirmations and laughter from Ernesto and Jeremi (lines 19, 23, 25-26, 36, and 41) and, to a degree, David (line 8 and 11). The collaborative support encourages him to continue and elaborate. His degree of confidence builds and is reflected in line 27, when he emphasized his questioning of the political affiliation of specific platform members and his strategy of preemptively turning accusations against him into counter-accusations against other platform members. The momentum comes to a halt in line 36 when David breaks the rehearsal frame by

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<sup>42</sup> "*Serge*" refers to one of the participating organizations of FPI. Serge is a political platform, which is interesting given that it is also a platform within a platform (FPI). This, as far as I can tell, was not considered a problem.

<sup>43</sup> Throughout this meeting, Michel continued to mistakenly refer to Victor Benoit, a well-known politician for the political party *Fusion*. At one point, later on in the meeting, he corrects himself, asserting that he meant Jean Andre Victor, another well-known figure that was apparently a member of FPI. I was never privy to the details of FPI nor did I have access to the meetings.



vocalizing disagreement with a particular detail of the strategy, that is, Michel's use of a specific name when making accusations on the radio. David argues that this approach is not in good political form (lines 38-39) to which Michel counters, stating that it remains necessary to preemptively take up an oppositional stance, "attack them" (line 40), in order re-direct discussions about the pink bracelet away from Michel's and the group's commitment to the oppositional fight against President Martelly. In this way, Michel seeks ways to avoid accusations of secret alliances with the president, accusations that might paint them as spies. He also points to this strategy as benefiting the group's, and his own, visibility. The vocalized disagreement on the part of David shifts the conversation and allows space for expression of similar concerns, as Ernesto goes on, immediately following the excerpt above, to express hesitant concerns as to whether the kind of negative publicity Michel's strategy might generate would indeed be desirable for the group. Here we can see how the group mobilized denunciations as a form of political contestation. Yet, in contrast to the HR Org's engagement of similar behaviors for ideological reasons, Youth Org members viewed this contestation as a pragmatic means to gain access to power and prestige. They did not necessarily wish to overturn existing power relations but rather sought to manage a potentially damaging situation in such a way that would work in their favor.

Although, Michel hints at the strategy he would like to engage in relation to the FPI members in line 6, he does not begin the rehearsal itself until line 14, when he begins with "*map di...*" (I'll say). This marks the beginning of the rehearsal frame and is followed by further vocalizations of projected speech in lines 14-16. In line 17, he breaks frame briefly to clarify, for the group, who the projected audience is. In this case, Victor Benoit. From lines 20-30, Michel, with support from Ernesto and Jeremi, continues with the rehearsal, with only brief breaks in

frame to request participation and support from the group (lines 24 and 27). In this way, group members worked cooperatively in rehearsing the suggested strategy, even despite the one-man show aspect of this particular interaction, during which Michel was the only one vocalizing and acting out the strategy. The affirmations and laughter from others in the group served to boost Michel's performance. The length of the strategy rehearsal, in many ways, depended on the vocalized support from others in the group. It was only when David expressed explicit disagreement with a detail of the strategy that the frame broke and the rehearsal ended.

As can be seen from this example, strategy rehearsals were punctuated by frequent interruptions and shifts in and out of frame. Strategy rehearsals for the group were similar in this way to the description of a funeral rehearsal offered by John Emigh (quoted in Schechner 1976:61): "As the rehearsal proceeded an old man would stop the singing from time to time to make suggestions on style or phrasing or, just as often, just as much a part of the event being rehearsed... The rehearsal was at once remarkably informal and absolutely effective." Rehearsals, such as the one presented here, often lasted for only a short while, taking place over the course of a relatively small number of conversational turns. Other members frequently interjected objections, comments, or corrections. Commentaries about the rehearsed strategy, at times, attended to the utterance itself; at other times pointed to the manner of presentation as requiring improvement. Such interjections often served to break the frame of the rehearsal performance.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Another, more lengthy example of a strategy rehearsal can be seen in the chapter that follows. In that chapter, my analytical use of Transcript 5.3 was focused on questions of ethics as opposed to the interactional dynamics of it as a strategy rehearsal. Despite this, the interaction serves as another example of the collaborative work and framing of strategy rehearsals more generally.

In Transcript 4.1, we can see an example of an interjection on the part of Michel, pointing to the need for Ernesto to adjust his facial presentation in such a way as to perform seriousness more effectively:

**Transcript 4.1: “Your face needs to be serious”**

1	Ern	[...] <i>Nou ka di sa</i> =	[...] We can say that=
2	Mich	= <i>stati a we</i> =	=the statutes yeah=
3	Ern	= <i>nou konn sa vèbalman</i>	=we know that verbally
4		<i>nou ka di m sa</i> [après nous]	you can tell me that [after we
5	Mich	[màke sa e] David	[pay attention] David
6		David [màke]	David [mark that]
7	Ern	[après sa] <i>kounye a nou nan o-</i>	[after that] now we're in o-
8		<i>Ou konprann sa m di w la prezidan?</i> =	You understand what I'm saying President?= =mhm
9	Dav	= <i>mhm</i>	=mhm
10	Ern	<i>Après sa</i> [kounye a la nou menm]	After that [now we]
11	Mich	[Men men]	[butbut]
12		<i>gen pwoblèm sa a mwen menm</i>	there's this problem
13		<i>m di w lè wap pale,</i>	myself I say that when you're talking,
14		<i>fò w seryè nan visaj w=</i>	your face needs to be serious=
15	Ern	= <i>Non ah monchè m serye monchè</i>	=No ah my dear I'm serious my dear

In this interaction, another moment excerpted from the same meeting discussed in Transcript 4.0, the group had shifted to the secondary topic of discussion. In this discussion, they searched for ways to deal with the director of a different political platform, this one named *Ankadre Pèp* (Support the People). Although the content of this discussion is analyzed in more detail in Chapter 5, suffice to say that the strategy suggested, and, to a degree, rehearsed, by Ernesto involved altering the group's political party statutes in an effort to provide themselves an “exit door” to the five-year commitment demanded by the platform director. Ernesto's strategy rehearsal here is less clearly framed than that of the previous example, a consequence of both his rapid speech and tendency to lose track of his train of thought. It was also a consequence of Michel's frequent interjections both supporting and elaborating on Ernesto's strategy suggestion and rehearsal. Given that David had previously objected to a similar strategy, Michel's reference

to him in lines 5-6 in Transcript 4.1 are an effort to override David's objection, emphasizing his own support of Ernesto's strategy. Regardless of the content of the discussion, this short excerpt from a more extensive discussion points to the members' attention to bodily aspects of presentation as an important factor to consider in rehearsing, and eventually performing, the strategies they discussed. In lines 13-14, Michel lectures Ernesto on the need to perform seriousness when engaging the strategy, particularly in his face. This type of correction is not unlike stage direction given during theatre rehearsals.

As can be seen from the examples above, Youth Org members not only debated and described effective strategies during meetings, but they also acted them out as a means to think through effective utterances and behaviors as well as consider possible responses on the part of projected audiences. At times, multiple members participated in these impromptu strategy rehearsals; at other times, one member voiced multiple roles in an effort to convince others of the effectiveness of the suggested strategy. Given the desire to disguise their strategic intentions, or avoid letting others know that the performance was in fact a performance, the group used strategizing sessions and strategy rehearsals as a way to prepare in advance for future interactions. Strategy rehearsals, along with strategizing sessions more generally, were also a necessary task for the group, given that the individuals involved in enacting a given strategy would be doing so *on behalf* of the group as a whole. Backstage strategizing, focused on managing the impressions others would have of the group, then, was a collective and collaborative affair as opposed to an individual, psychological one. The group, as a whole, had an interest in the success of their organization; strategizing sessions and rehearsals were the means through which they attempted to gain consensus on how to proceed or act in a particular

situation in such a way as to positively benefit the group and their organization, moving them closer to their goal of getting started.

## **Conclusion**

The Youth Org represents an interesting case study of a struggling organization attempting to fully enter the domains of development and electoral politics in order to obtain personal and group success. Drawing on an entrepreneurial approach, members attempted to work within the demands set by donors, however, they did so on their own terms and for their own purposes. While the group was obviously distinct in many ways, it also represents larger trends in the development industry and Haitian society. On the one hand, the political economy of the development industry tends to reward competition and conformity to donor expectations. In this sense, the group's behavior can be understood as a logical extension of the development industry's funding norms encouraging competitiveness and opportunism. On the other hand, this research reveals the manner in which external pressures couple with internal motives and aspirations as members worked to perform different identities as a means to retain control of the fate of their organization.

In the Haitian context, the group's behavior also reflects a general atmosphere of economic insecurity. Where the formal and informal economies have largely failed to provide adequate and acceptable employment opportunities, both the development industry and formal political arenas offer viable options. As with Newell's (2012) analysis of nouchi culture in Abidjan, different types of employment carry with them particular ideologies of class and status, and are ultimately understood as affecting reputation. For semi-educated Haitians, such as Youth Org members, menial labor or informal work such as petty merchants, was understood as

reserved for particular classes of individuals and/or women more generally. Thus, for the members of the group, they sought alternative means to success in order to not only catapult their lives financially but socially as well. The group, then, spent a great deal of time attempting to open doors for themselves in an effort to *demare*, believing whole-heartedly in their ability to perform their way to success, despite professional, educational, and economic disadvantages. Youth Org members were not alone in this quest as many Haitian youth view the development industry and formal political arenas as potential routes to economic and social success.

The group's simultaneous engagement in the development industry as well as formal political arenas reveals something about how they understood the two domains to function. While, in many ways, members recognized the domains as inseparable, they also expressed political and pragmatic concerns regarding how their engagement in both would be understood by non-members. With many development donors requiring a degree of apoliticalness in order to receive funding, Youth Org members worked to present themselves as a social organization. At times, this took the form of a presentation of the group as a particular kind of development organization, such as one focused on handicap accessibility or women's issues. In terms of the formal political arena, they expressed concerns that many Haitians would be wary of their intentions if they presented themselves as a political party. In this regard, they hoped to utilize their social activities to gain trust and followers. And yet, despite this recognition of a division between the "social" and the "political," members saw them as going hand-in-hand. For the group, dividing the two domains was just one aspect of their attention to presentation and shape-shifting; that is, they shifted the presentation of the group as demanded by an anticipated audience. In their shape-shifting, the group blurred categorical distinctions differentiating development organizations, social organizations, human rights organizations, humanitarian

organizations, and political organizations. These distinctions, for the group, were only of importance in the context of a specific audience, and their anticipation of that audience's expectations.

Shape-shifting, for the group, was an important means through which they sought to obtain their end goal of getting started as a successful, financially stable, and prestigious organization. Given their pragmatic and strategic behaviors, as was brought to light by way of attending to their deliberative practices, getting started represented a justification and end goal for members; that is, the *doing* of activities was more important than the *result* those activities could have for a targeted population. In contrast to the HR Org, then, the Youth Org member's concerns rested not on ideological and political ideals but on practical and pragmatic grounds. In many ways, this resembles entrepreneurial behavior as members sought to live off development and politics as opposed to for them. In some ways, it might seem as if this commitment to pragmatic advancement was a necessary result of their marginal status in relation to each domain; that is, they did what they had to do given the circumstances. Without rejecting such an analysis, I hope the preceding examination of the discursive behavior of the group at least complicates this picture and points to the manner in which group members enacted entrepreneurial behaviors in the realms of development and politics unreflexively. Most notably, the group's attention to presentation and the manner in which they rehearsed various performances goes well beyond a simplified economic explanation and highlights how group members desired to bring about success through the performance of it. In this way, they looked to produce the reality they performed via the performance itself.

The group's attention to pragmatism also points to the importance of interpersonal political engagement as an avenue to success. That is, the group believed that by strategically

presenting themselves, they could compensate for short-comings regarding credentials, education, professional experience, and financing. Instead of placing importance on the ideological angle of development, the group side-stepped such questions altogether opting instead for practical ways to enter into the domains they saw as economically bountiful. Their political engagement was similar in many regards as their political alliances shifted for pragmatic reasons as opposed to ideological similarities or dissimilarities. Their path to entering into a partnership with the Haitian diasporan, for instance, lacked a discussion of political vision and focused rather on questions of financing and functioning. In similar ways, mobilizing forms of political contestation – as will be seen in more detail in the next chapter – was less aimed at challenging existing power relations in an effort to overturn them, but rather reflected a desire to gain access to power and status for themselves. In this way, the group did not critique or otherwise question how things functioned but rather focused on what strategies could work as a means to success.

Strategizing, mimicking and anticipating projected audience reactions were all important aspects of the group's backstage efforts at managing the impressions others would have of them and their organization. As was shown, this applies to the ways in which the group navigated questions of gender and gender roles as well. Shifting the visibility, place, and role of women in the organization in anticipation of audience responses was an example of how group members prepared and performed different identities for particular audiences. The group's intermittent enactments of strategy rehearsals during strategizing sessions also makes sense from an understanding of their pragmatic shape-shifting approach. Such rehearsals highlight the backstage aspects of their performative behavior.



Given their status as an organization, a group entity, backstage preparation played a necessary role in preparing individuals to act and speak on behalf of the organization as a whole. Rehearsing strategies, including the use of projected speech of members and anticipated interlocutors and audiences, allowed the group to imagine and negotiate the manner in which proposed strategies would play out. Such rehearsals also allowed the group to practice how they presented themselves, with fellow members critiquing not just the strategy as a whole but, at times, bodily behavior and utterances. The group's habit of debating strategies, rehearsing them and imagining responses, was mobilized, in some form or another, during many, if not most, meetings.

Why should we care about an organization like the Youth Org? Especially given their repeated failures at accomplishing the tasks they set out to accomplish? What impact and clout could such a small, relatively ineffective group actually have in the development industry or political institutions? Although I have highlighted the ways in which the group exaggerated and, in some ways, over-inflated their own skills and accomplishments, it remains important to note that it was only through access to the group's backstage strategizing that their marginal economic and social existence was revealed to me. Had I not had such access, I, like other audiences, would have only been privy to the identities group members chose to perform for me. Thus, although they failed in many ways, from the point of view of their planning and expansive vision of what the organization could and should accomplish, they were also, at times, successful in their performances to different audiences. The Haitian diasporan's interest in taking on a leadership role in their organization is one indication of their relative success in presenting themselves in a particular way, most notably, as an organization worthy of investing in.<sup>45</sup> Their

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<sup>45</sup> Although the group never did integrate the diasporan into their political party, the primary reason for this has little to do with the Youth Org itself. Following a meeting with members in late June 2012, prior to returning to the

integration into FPI and the desire, on the part of *Ankadre Pèp*'s director, for them to integrate into political platforms, all similarly indicate that they were, to a degree, successful in managing how others understood them, particularly in conveying a sense of importance, clout, and past success. In addition, the group did appear, from the outside, to have some political success in the months and year following completion of research for this project. This success was in the form of their participation in Martelly's cabinet of ministries and gaining access to resources to open a soup kitchen through a government funded social program. Although I visited with and received an update on Youth Org activities in the years that followed, my status as a relative outsider, no longer having access to strategizing sessions, meant that I could not adequately assess their relative success in relation to the soup kitchen and members' claims to political status within Martelly's cabinet.

In many ways, the group's deliberative practices involving strategizing and rehearsing strategies were sites through which members negotiated interpersonal political maneuvers. In this way, they sought a leg up in relation to others and attempted to navigate relationships and situations with an entrepreneurial eye to their own success. The group also functioned in direct relation to broader political norms. Although the Youth Org example is relatively insular, with only limited success in gaining access to larger audiences, the group itself did carry the potential to contribute to and participate in, the antagonistic environment that is Haiti's contemporary political situation. While they may not have actually succeeded in making a direct contribution, their approach did reflect, and reproduce, antagonistic norms. Given members' observations of

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United States for a few months, I searched for information online, seeking to find out more about the diasporan and his religious activities around the world. It was revealed to me, through news articles, that he was, at that time, caught in a legal-criminal investigation involving sexual contact with minors. He was, at the time of the Skype calls, under house arrest. Once back in Haiti, I inquired about him and David informed me that the group could no longer get a hold of the man and they had given up on him. This too makes sense, as a quick internet search revealed news of a court order, disallowing use of the internet in order to prevent his contact with underage girls. The ban came a month or two after the Skype calls with him. I did not share this information with the group since they appeared to have moved on and were no longer interested in his participation.

the development industry and formal political arenas, they grasped onto, through mimicry and understandings of audience reception, observations of antagonistic behaviors as viable means through which to obtain success and get a seat at the table within either, or both, domains. Imitating behaviors tied to political scandals and the use of public denunciations as a way to increase visibility and challenge accusations against them were both examples of the ways in which group members drew on situated observations as to how political engagement in Haiti functions. From those observations, they ultimately sought to replicate such behaviors for their own success. Their concerns were not pro-social in nature, as their participation in the domains of development and political institutions might imply; their behavior, rather, was largely entrepreneurial. In the following chapter, the Youth Org is again re-visited, with a more specific focus on the question of ethics and reflexive understandings of the ethical dimensions of behaviors and suggested strategies.

## CHAPTER 5

### Going to Church or the Devil's House: The Ethics of Political Strategizing

#### Introduction

David had been patient. Jumping in to express his objections twice already, he was shot down twice. Gaining control of the floor would require more than his characteristically quiet and respectful demeanor. He tried: "Wait, wait..." "Let me finish..." He tried again: "Guys, let me tell you something..." Repeating this a second time was finally successful in getting their attention: "Guys, let me tell you something. I don't know if we're entering the church or the devil's house..." The group quieted down. Jeremi chuckled. "No, let me say what I'm going to say," David quickly retorted. Having worked so hard to capture the floor and the group's attention, David stood his ground. He went on: "Things that make the news in the world, it's money. After that, it's power. If you have money, you take power. When you don't have money, everything they say about you will appear to be true."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah" Michel said, quietly expressing his submission to David's control of the floor. His use of repetition here also signaled a desire to get to the point. David was again quick to respond to Michel's interjection, "Let me say something..." imagining perhaps, that Michel's impatience was a bid for the floor. He elaborated his argument: "You don't have money now but this guy has money. He can pay for anything. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

Everything he says will appear to be true even if it's not, right? When you have money, you can turn things your way.”

It was the middle of April 2013 and the discussion was focused on the topic of the political platform, *Ankadre Pèp* (Support the People). The group had received an invitation to have their own political party, PPL, join the platform. Throughout the discussion, the group was split as to how to approach the issue. While they had no personal or ideological commitments to the platform and its director, many saw an opportunity to take advantage of the situation in order to gain a stable meeting place given that they had lost access to their previous location months prior.<sup>1</sup> The platform director had reportedly promised them use of his building for meeting activities but required that they sign on legally as part of his political platform. The requirement, as was stated in the copy of the platform's statutes he had given to David, was for the group to sign on to *Ankadre Pèp* for at least a five-year commitment. The group as a whole was interested in the prospect of a stable meeting location, although they were divided on whether it was worth the required commitment given that they expected their own political standing would increase once they acquired financial backing. With expectations as to the temporary status of their current misfortunes, no one wanted to be tied to someone else's platform for longer than necessary.

While two members, Michel and Ernesto, debated potential strategies that explicitly involved deceiving the platform director in an effort to create a “back door” through which the group could exit the platform without legal problems, two other members – David and, to a degree, Jeremi – objected on a number of accounts. David, in particular, expressed concerns

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<sup>1</sup> The group reported that the previous landlord had heard they were coming into money and was requesting they pay for their use of the space. The money referred to was the previously mentioned diasporan political donor. Despite the landlord's conviction, the group did not join forces with the diasporan and they did not, at that time, gain financial backing. They were unable to convince the landlord of this and given their financial situation, were unable to pay for use of the space. They spent several months meeting informally at various locations.

regarding the suggested strategies. This division was not absolute, as Ernesto also posed concerns from time to time, and Jeremi waffled between support for Michel and support for David.<sup>2</sup> David's concerns about money and power, and the group's vulnerable position given their lack of money, was not the first point of disagreement expressed. Indeed, David's objections in that moment were merely a culmination of a series of attempted, but disregarded, objections by both David and Jeremi. Even though both expressed concerns about the deceptive strategies suggested by Michel and Ernesto throughout the meeting, it was not until David expressed his final concern regarding the question of money and public opinion that the objections were taken seriously and followed by a request for David to present an alternative strategy.

David's success in capturing the floor in the moment when he questioned whether the group was going to church or the devil's house involved a significant amount of defensive discourse, preemptively warding off competition even as others expressed support in the form of affirmations, laughter, and submission. Michel's submission, for example, points to his acceptance of David's control of the floor without necessarily agreeing with what was being said (Vuchinich 1990). Despite David's defensive discourse, however, the moralizing choice he presented succeeded in capturing the group's attention. At that point, they largely allowed him to elaborate and explain. What was it about his statement that captured their attention?

David began his disagreement by presenting what, at first glance, seemed to be a moral choice: Should they enter the church or the devil's house? In order to understand the complexities of this statement, however, we need to first examine the rest of the interaction.

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<sup>2</sup> Michel and David were similarly in opposition to one another on the topic of how to deal with the pink bracelet scandal, discussed at the same meeting immediately before the *Ankadre Pèp* discussion. See Appendix 4 for a chronology of the April 2013 meeting in question. This chronology also highlights the various portions of the meeting that were excerpted in the form of transcripts in this chapter and the previous chapter. This appendix is meant to serve as a guide for readers regarding when particular moments arose in relation to others.

While it could be argued that David's train of thought over the course of the discussion would likely have veered and shifted, as is often the case in face-to-face interactions, I argue instead that his statements are best understood through an examination of the unfolding interaction for two reasons. First, David states his argument repeatedly, to the point of annoying his interlocutors, returning to the church/devil's house opposition again later in the interaction. Second, his argument stays surprisingly consistent throughout the discussion, even as the group's focus shifted a bit with his attempt to use an illustrative example as a tool in making his point.

This chapter continues an analysis of the Youth Org, drawing from insights presented in the previous chapter while also focusing on the question of ethics and responsibility. I track and follow David's participation in the strategizing session in question, utilizing it as a gateway to understanding the group's ethical imagination more generally. While the HR Org spent a good deal of time assigning responsibility to others, the Youth Org worked to mitigate the degree to which they could be held responsible for their behaviors. They imagined, enacted, and debated ways to minimize the degree to which their actions and discourses could be a liability in the future. Given the group's entrepreneurial approach to development and formal political arenas, they risked being shut out of either or both domains if their behaviors were recognized by others as unethical or problematic. Such recognition, then, could limit their access to economic and social advancement, a situation most group members sought to avoid.

After outlining David's objections and tracing the discussion that brought him to the moralizing choice he presented, I take a step back from the one specific meeting discussion, to look more generally at patterns of behavior regarding group members' use of deception and manipulation in their strategizing efforts. From there, I segue into a discussion of the various theoretical and analytical approaches to behaviors commonly characterized as corruption,

deception, or dissimulation. Here I emphasize the importance of also engaging theoretically with questions of ethics and morality. I then return to the meeting in question, attending to David's explanation and his utilization of an illustrative example of a recent rape scandal in making his point. Finally, I examine the alternative strategy he was called on to present. By tracing the interaction as a whole, I point to a deeper understanding of David's moralizing imperative as a call for a more effective performance of sincerity. My analysis ends with an examination of the various ways in which the group signals recognition of the ethical dimension of suggested strategies in an effort to mitigate ethical concerns through the negotiation of ethical affordances.

### **Strategies Proposed, Objections Voiced**

The debate about whether to join *Ankadre Pèp* or not began with Michel's announcement regarding a meeting with the platform's director. The rest of the group peppered Michel with questions about what exactly would happen at the meeting and how they would deal with the issue. Michel suggested giving the platform director papers that, as Ernesto described, "are not correct." That is, the group's political party registration papers were no longer active and thus not legal. Despite this, Ernesto suggested utilizing the original papers as a strategy. Ernesto and Michel elaborated on the strategy, proposing that the group act as if they were inexperienced or "misguided" by not fully reading *Ankadre Pèp*'s statutes. The hope, according to Ernesto, was to avoid bringing attention to their own false papers by not dwelling on the director's papers. David attempted to object to this strategy, with Jeremi co-opting his turn to express his own disagreement as can be seen in Transcript 5.0:



## Transcript 5.0: History Could Judge

1	Dav	<i>Tale tale tale=</i>	Wait, wait, wait=
2	Jer	<i>=Misye=</i>	=Guys=
3	Dav	<i>=Misye gon bagay m pa fin antre nan</i>	=Guys, there's something I don't
4		<i>lojik la=</i>	agree with=
5	Jer	<i>=Mwen menm tou we [gen prèv nan sa]</i>	=Me too yeah [there's proof in that]
6	Dav	<i>[lè w-</i>	<i>[When y-</i>
7		<i>lè w pral ekri nom w</i>	when you sign your name
8		<i>ki pral notarye,</i>	and it's notarized,
9		<i>se pa yon ti bagay piti ke li ye.</i>	it's not a small thing.
10		<i>ke yon bagay ou di ou pa gen</i>	You say you didn't consent to it
11		<i>konsantman sou li e pou di vi avek eh:</i>	and you'll live with uh: the guy's statutes,
12		<i>stati misye a avèk akt konstitif li a=</i>	with his Constitutive Acts=
13	Jer	<i>=uh huh=</i>	=uh huh=
14	Dav	<i>=w di w ekri nom w admèt</i>	=when you sign your name you admit to it
15		<i>kounye a la, pi devan</i>	Now, later on,
16		<i>sa sa yo ka vin jije w</i>	th- they can come back and judge you
17		<i>Kounye a yo ka di</i>	Now they can say
18		<i>Bon, se pa serye kounye a</i>	"Well, you're not serious now"
19		<i>Tout nèt FPI yo pral di</i>	All of FPI, they're going to say
20		<i>Ah misye sa yo gen lè</i>	"Ah mister those guys there was a time when
21		<i>yo pa t serye vre yo di-</i>	they weren't at all serious, they said."
22		<i>w konprann sa m di w la? =</i>	you understand what I'm telling you? =
23	Mich	<i>=Se dwa yo [se politik</i>	=that's their right, [it's politics
24	Dav	<i>[Istwa ka vin jije w nèt] =</i>	[history could judge you] =
25	Jer	<i>=((laughs))=</i>	=((laughs))=
26	Mich	<i>=se=</i>	=it's=
27	Dav	<i>=non [ (?)</i>	=no, [ (?)
28	Mich	<i>[istwa pap janm-] jije w</i>	[history will never] judge you,
29		<i>Bon, istwa pa jije Kaplim</i>	Well, history never judged Kaplim,
30		<i>istwa ap jije w=</i>	but you think history will judge you=
31	Em	<i>=((laughs))=</i>	=((laughs))=
32	Mich	<i>=listwa pa jije eh eh eh:</i>	=history has not judged uh uh uh:
33		<i>Himmler Rebu</i>	Himmler Rebu
34		<i>[ (?)</i>	<i>[ (?)</i>
35	Jer	<i>[Ebyen ou ka (moun ka) ]</i>	<i>[well then, you can- people can- ]</i>
36		<i>Pa gen moun</i>	There are never people
37		<i>[ki janm gon-gon twòp anje, twòp anje]</i>	<i>[who have- have too many, too many issues]</i>
38	Mich	<i>[ke istwa istwa</i>	<i>[that history, history</i>
39		<i>pa jije Rosnèl [Fevry.</i>	isn't judging Osnel [Fevry
40	Dav	<i>[si nou gon konsantman]</i>	<i>[if we have consent]</i>
41	Mich	<i>istwa pral jijè w</i>	You think history is going to judge you,
42		<i>kòman [pral jije w la?]</i>	how is it [going to judge you?]
43	Dav	<i>[si si gon konsantman</i>	<i>[if if there is consent</i>
44		<i>nou gen dwa di nap fon bagay ak misye=</i>	we can say we'll do something with him=
45	Mich	<i>= [eh heh]</i>	= [uh huh]
46	Dav	<i>= [ke nou pran konsantman</i>	= [if we get consent
47		<i>nou fon [bagay legal avè]</i>	we can do [something legal with him]
48	Mich	<i>[non: non</i>	<i>[no: no</i>
49		<i>eh: tande tande tande David.</i>	uh: listen listen listen David.
50		<i>Gon gwo pwoblèm=</i>	There's a big problem=

As can be seen in line 5, Jeremi expressed concerns about the existence of proof that could harm the group or reveal their deception. David continued with his disagreement, disregarding Jeremi's contribution. He expressed his concerns as to how others would look back on and understand the group: "history could judge" (line 24). His primary concern (lines 14-16) is that in signing the platform papers – regardless of whether the registration number they gave him was legit or not – they would ultimately consent to the terms laid out by the director. Down the line, they could not, he argued, declare that they were not "serious" at that moment without there being political consequences for the group. Michel countered this reasoning with a series of examples of famous political figures with checkered histories, highlighting the fact that despite scandals, all continued to hold prominent political roles to that day. The examples he provided included Kaplim (Evans Paul), Himmler Rebu, and Osner Fevry.<sup>3</sup>

As the discussion continued, a number of other strategies were suggested by Michel and Ernesto. David continued to object. Michel suggested fudging the registration numbers ever so slightly, changing the "AP" to "AC," in an effort to keep the group from any legally binding commitment. He argued for a need to "exploit" (*eksplwate*) the situation in order to utilize the director's building for their own purposes. David again objected. This time on the grounds that the director explicitly required a publicized partnership. The group would be required to appear

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<sup>3</sup> During the brief period in which Prosper Avril was president of Haiti (1988-1990), Evans Paul was repeatedly imprisoned and abused, presumably for his political support of Aristide at that time. In 1990, Paul was elected mayor of Port-au-Prince and although an early supporter of Aristide, their political differences and conflicts led to Paul's vocalized opposition to him during Aristide's second term as president. Paul also, more recently, served as Martelly's prime minister from December 2014 to the end of Martelly's term (February 2015). Himmler Rebu was a military colonel under Baby Doc and a participant in the *coup d'état* against president Namphy in 1988. Following participation in another coup attempt, this time against Prosper Avril in 1989, Rebu fled to the United States where he unsuccessfully applied for asylum. Rejection of his application resulted in his departure for Venezuela, where his asylum request was approved. As the head of a political party, Rebu has run for president and parliament several times since returning to Haiti. Under Martelly, he was the Minister of Sports. He is also a well-respected political analyst. Osner Fevry is a lawyer and political activist who has attempted a run for president in past elections. He currently heads a political party, one that has divided into two parties since its inception due to political differences. All three personalities have a strong presence in Haitian politics as well as pasts that are viewed as checkered and debatable.

in front of the media, declaring their alliance. This, David argued, could create a bind for the group down the line if they attempted to declare that they never really signed the agreement in the first place on the grounds that the numbers were false. David's immediate concern was that regardless of any identifying numbers and official paperwork involved, they would still have to visibly align themselves with the platform through a publicized launching of it, which, he implied, would tie them to the platform regardless of the legality of the paperwork. Michel went on to argue against David's specific concern, suggesting the group imitate a strategy observed to have been used by politicians in Haitian Parliament. Michel references his situated understanding of the scandal involving a senator named Steven Benoit, a particularly vocal opponent of President Martelly. He pointed to the signing of the constitutional amendments by members of Parliament. Following the signing event, accusations surfaced, claiming that someone had switched the documents, or had hid portions of the document at the moment of signing. Michel's understanding of this event was that a number of articles, as he states, the "rest of the articles," were left out during signing in an effort to facilitate the signing process. This example was quoted and analyzed in Chapter 4.

Michel argued that regardless of what articles were or were not in the text at the moment of signing, "you sign, you sign it completely." In spite of this strategic move of hiding portions of the document, Michel argued that the signatures were still legally binding. The scandal he eluded to included a whole slew of accusations of impropriety, including the kind cited by Michel. While in actuality most scandals of this sort went unresolved with little or no evidence to support or refute the accusations – in this case, no one could locate a copy of the originally signed amendments – Michel clearly drew on an assumption that the accusations were true and that hiding certain articles of the document was a deliberate strategy aimed at obtaining

signatures from individuals who would presumably not be in agreement with what was stipulated within those excluded articles. Not only did Michel see this as a deliberate strategy but as one he wished to emulate.

Michel's suggested strategy and the example from parliament were not well received by other Youth Org members. Jeremi, in particular, questioned him on the legality of the issue:

### Transcript 5.1: Legal Issues

1	Mich	<i>Talè talè talè talè=</i>		Wait wait wait wait=
2	Jer	<i>=Wi men kounye a Mercilus=</i>		=yes but now Mercilus=
3	Dav	<i>=gon bagay=</i>		=there's one thing=
4	Jer	<i>=eskè w pa panse bagay mechan</i>		=do you not think that bad things
5		<i>pa ale retou</i>		come back around to bite you,
6		<i>[pou met anba kòd? Apre</i>		<i>[to get you arrested? After</i>
6	Mich	<i>[Kounye a grenn bagay- pa gen kòd]</i>		<i>[Now, one thing- no one's getting arrested]</i>
7		<i>kote w pral wè [kòd sa a] =</i>		<i>How are you seeing a possible [arrest?] =</i>
8	Dav	<i>[talè:] =</i>		<i>[wait:] =</i>
9	Jer	<i>=Son bagay</i>		=it's something
10		<i>[politik li ye nan lajistis li ye]</i>		<i>[political, it's in the Justice system]</i>
11	Dav	<i>[Ban m di w...</i>		<i>[let me tell you...</i>
12	Mich	<i>[..son atak politik..]</i>		<i>[..it's a political attack..]</i>
13		<i>avan sa: =</i>		<i>before that: =</i>

Jeremi expressed concerns about legal repercussions, in particular, the possibility of arrest (line 6) on account of their actions. Michel continued to brush off mounting concerns, arguing in favor of “political attacks” and further strategizing ways to appear innocent in the matter. Down the line, when they wanted to retreat from the platform, he argued that they could point to misunderstandings as to blame. David and Ernesto did not bother engaging Michel's counter argument and instead, waited their turn to speak. David, picking up his role as moderator, which he rarely engaged, gave Ernesto permission to speak, staking a claim to the conversational floor for himself following Ernesto's turn. Ernesto suggested a different strategy, proposing that the group change their own statutes to include a clause about bankruptcy or lack of transparency as

reason enough to back out of a signed partnership with any political organization such as the platform in question. Michel supported this suggestion and they went on to collaboratively outline what the strategy would involve more precisely. David remained quiet during this time, a move likely prompted by his exasperation at not having a chance to fully express his concerns. His silence was also likely a result of Michel's overbearing support of Ernesto's strategy, marked by multiple direct requests to David that he "*makè sa*" (pay attention). As Ernesto completed his turn, he declared that his strategy would successfully create a "*pòt de soti*" (exit door) for the group to remove themselves from the partnership whenever they wished to do so.

Sensing Ernesto's turn was coming to an end, David vocalized his continued desire to speak with a submissive "ok" and "ok, listen, ok." Regardless of this bid for a turn, his requests went unratified. Michel and Ernesto continued to discuss the issue, forcing David to make repeated, and largely unsuccessful, bids for a turn. After two more strategy suggestions made by Michel and Ernesto – including the creation of a separate agreement between the two political organizations and the possibility of not signing the document with their real initials – David succeeded in capturing the group's attention: "Guys, let me tell you something. I don't know if we're all entering the church or if we're all going to the devil's house."

Was David's comment, in that moment, an opposition on ethical grounds given previously mentioned strategies utilizing deception and dissimulation? Or were they something else entirely? Before moving on to analyze David's objections in more detail, I take a step back from this specific strategizing session. In the following section, I examine the group's use of deceptive strategies more generally. I then shift to a theoretical discussion of corruption, deception, and dissimulation in relation to questions of ethics.

## **Strategies of Deception and Dissimulation**

Seated in the truck one day, Michel, Ernesto, and I sat waiting for the rest of the group to arrive for the scheduled meeting. It was early December of 2011 and only a few short months had passed since I had first started attending group meetings. We passed the time that mid-afternoon discussing development activities aimed at children. Michel argued that there are always significant resources available for projects involving children. I chimed in, stating that images of poor children were the easiest way to get people in the United States to donate funds. I spoke about the ads I had grown up seeing on television, including Christian Children's Fund, Save the Children, and World Vision, all featuring impoverished children as emotional blackmail encouraging people to donate. When asked how this system worked, I insisted that many organizations purporting to utilize child sponsorship had been found to be abusing the system and that the funds were rarely making it back to the children for whom they were collected. Once finished, Michel asked, "How can we get a TV commercial like that to play in the United States?" I was taken aback, particularly because they seemed to want to follow an approach to development I personally admonished. I responded, "I'm against that sort of thing." In that moment, without thinking, I had expressed moral opposition to a potential strategy. That is, the child sponsorship strategy, as adopted by some organizations, was morally "wrong" from my point of view.

Upon expressing this moral position, I was subjected to a lecture, a lecture on how, as a member of the group, it was my duty, my obligation, to convince people to give them money. Indeed, Ernesto asserted, it was in my interest to do so as the group could pay for my trips back and forth from the United States if they were to become financially stable. While my expressed concerns rested on an understanding of static moral choices – something as fundamentally right

or wrong – Ernesto and Michel objected on the grounds that my duty to the organization, and its financial success, was primary.

In the year and a half that passed since that interaction, I learned that explicit moral argumentation, of the sort that rests on general assessments of something as good or wrong, were rarely, if ever, mobilized during strategizing sessions. My moral reasoning for rejecting a Save the Children style approach to development was not recognized by Michel and Ernesto as convincing enough to warrant outright rejection of it. Rather, they viewed an ethical commitment to the organization as superseding other moral arguments such as the one I presented. Explicit moral argumentation, of the sort David appeared to mobilize in his church or devil's house imperative, did not seem to be of much importance to the group's strategizing efforts. In general, it was rare to witness group members express such explicit moral argumentation in support of, or as a challenge to, a suggested strategy. And it was even more rare for such argumentation to effectively convince other group members. Thus, David's use of a moralizing dichotomy during the April 2013 meeting was significant. Not only was it important from an outsider's point of view but was also clearly significant to the group as a whole, given their extended discussion of it and the various ways in which the group negotiated ethical concerns throughout the discussion, as will be addressed later in the chapter.

In the context of the church/devil's house discussion, David's objections seemed to hinge on the appropriateness of the deceptive strategies suggested by Michel and Ernesto; that is, David appeared to be labeling them as immoral or unethical, urging the group to avoid going this route (the devil's house). While David's objections will be analyzed more fully in the sections to come, suffice to say that the group's proposed use of deception appears, at first glance, to be an engagement with ethical concerns. Yet, is there necessarily a relationship between deception – as

standing in opposition to “truth” – and ethical behavior? It would seem, from a Euro-American Christian standpoint – thou shalt not lie, being a prominently recognized sin – that this connection would be self-evident and thus, not require interrogation, explanation, or even discussion. To be sure, group members themselves were followers of various protestant sects of Christianity and members unreflexively called for prayer both at the start and the end of each meeting. Yet despite this link between members’ religious practices and the “sinful” dimension of deception, this relationship cannot be taken as an absolute indication of the group’s ethical stance in relation to such behaviors.

My own immediate response to deceptive behaviors was one of discomfort, marking what my grandmother has termed “Midwestern honesty,” highlighting socialization as an explanation. In the Save the Children example, my response to Michel’s and Ernesto’s desire to follow the lead of a notably dishonest organization (Maren 1997), struck a cord and warranted nothing more than moral argumentation. From my view, the discussion should have ended there, with little or no need to further debate the issue given the self-evident nature, from my point of view, of the moral argument I presented (Keane 2016). The fact that neither Michel nor Ernesto found this argumentation even remotely convincing, points to something more. That is, there may not be a necessary or absolute relationship between religious beliefs and practices and the unethical dimension of deceptive behaviors. Indeed, can this behavior be explained via a culturally relativistic approach, one in which “Haitians” or the group members themselves are seen as having a different moral or ethical code than my own?

David himself drew this distinction for me one day. Following a return to Haiti after nearly a year away, I sat catching up on personal news with David, Ernesto and Jeremi inside their newly opened soup kitchen. Responding to a comment I had made about someone close to



me repeatedly lying, David exclaimed, “Americans! You lie to them once and they’ll never trust you again!” In his exasperation, David pointed to what he saw as an important distinction between what was “culturally Haitian” and that which he implied to be “culturally American”: that is, Americans tend to view one’s engagement in deceptive behavior as a direct reflection of moral character. His statement was, of course, too generalized and sweeping and cannot be taken to adequately reflect absolute categories of cultural difference. It does, however, reflect and reveal a reflexive understanding of the ethics of deception from his situated point of view. For the purpose of this analysis, I will not, like David, draw such gross over-generalizations based on defined cultural boundaries, the boundaries of which can easily be brought into question. Instead, I focus solely on the Youth Org and the manner in which they vocalized, negotiated, and justified the use of dissimulation and deception as organizational strategies. I argue for the importance of looking at interpersonal dynamics in understanding ethical imaginations, as opposed to assuming a necessary connection between deception and unethical behavior (Lewis & Saarni 1993). In this section, I focus briefly on outlining general patterns of behavior for the group, namely the discussion of strategies involving deception and dissimulation. Intended as necessary contextual information for the examination of the specific strategizing session involving David’s objections, I will more fully address the question of whether group members themselves recognized the unethical dimension of such behaviors in later sections of this chapter.

During my time spent observing group meetings, I became aware of the fact that the members regularly suggested and sometimes engaged strategies of dissimulation and deception. The kinds of strategies I am referring to are those that aim to deceive or otherwise manipulate an intended audience into believing something that does not accurately reflect the group’s actual beliefs or intentions, as expressed during strategizing sessions. More often than not, members

attempted to mobilize forms of dissimulation, concealing aspects of their true intentions or motivation, through a false or selective presentation of relevant information. In this way, group members sometimes drew on a “tactical selection of information” as opposed to outright deception (Massé 2002:177).

For example, Youth Org members often exaggerated and made false claims about their organization’s size, membership numbers, and past activities as a way to appear to have a larger following than they actually did and to seem as if they were engaged in far more activities than they actually were. Different members “created” organizations that were then claimed to be active partners of the Youth Org. These ostensibly fake organizations were, at times, mobilized in applying for funding. Sometimes the group would apply for the same funding in the name of five or six different organizations. To be sure, this strategy was not necessarily an outright deception since the organizations in question were officially registered with the government; thus, in the eyes of the law, such organizations did actually exist. On the other hand, they were essentially shell entities, with no actual membership above and beyond one named leader, a Youth Org member. In other words, the overlap in membership between the Youth Org and the other named organizations was absolute. In addition, those other organizations had no actual activities, although, of course, they would have had activities had their bids for funding been successful. I was asked to participate in one such request for funding via a shell organization for which Rachel was the named leader. Since it was an organization purportedly aimed at helping children, Rachel and I were sent to meet with the head of an international donor institution to request funds for a Christmas party at which the group hoped to distribute gifts to children. I was asked to vouch for the organization and Michel handed me the funding request document to prep me on the drive to the meeting. The organization name listed on the document was not the Youth

Org and in expressing my confusion, I was assured by Michel and Ernesto that this was not a problem and that I only needed to vouch for what Rachel would discuss with the director.<sup>4</sup>

Members also lied about their educational backgrounds and status, referring to themselves as engineers, doctors, or political scientists depending on who the audience was, and what could be gained from the performance. At one meeting, Michel lectured the group as to the importance of performing particular professional identities in order to gain admittance at various events they would otherwise be barred from. He gave examples of events in which he had posed as an engineer or a doctor, encouraging the rest of the group to do the same. As the group's focus shifted in 2012 to a primary interest in electoral politics, this coincided with a shift in public identities as many announced themselves as "politicians" or "political scientists."<sup>5</sup> During an interview with Michel in late June of 2012, for example, he asserted that he had a degree in political science from "*Quisqueya*." In doing so, he implied having attended Quisqueya University, a prestigious private university in Port-au-Prince. His actual degree, however, was from a small professional school that also had "*quisqueya*" in the name. This degree was not in political science but rather customs enforcement (*technique douanière*).

Deception was a common strategy, in particular, in relation to potential development donors as the group negotiated ways to work within donor expectations and constraints while still getting what they were looking for out of the relationship. As one member asserted, "there are always ways of making money without *blan* knowing." The degree to which the group engaged such strategies of dissimulation as opposed to simply discussing them, is impossible to know given my limited access to their interactions beyond the confines of organizational

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<sup>4</sup> The meeting never happened as there was confusion about it to begin with, confusion that was never expressed to me prior to going there. The director was out of town and subsequent requests for a meeting and funding were all denied.

<sup>5</sup> The French-derived title of "*politologue*" was regularly used. This term could either refer to the English equivalent of "politician" or "political scientist." My sense is that it has more of the educational legitimacy that a political scientist has as opposed to anyone having the ability to become a politician regardless of educational background.

meetings, a handful of activities, other member gatherings, as well as access to various organization documents. Even within the context of meeting discussions, it remains difficult to know, with certainty, the extent to which members debated and discussed strategies aimed at deceiving others. That is, I did not always have adequate context with which to evaluate statements and proposed strategies. Anthropologist Daniel Smith (2007) has similarly noted the impossibility of such an endeavor in his study of corruption in Nigeria, arguing that this methodological difficulty prompted him to focus exclusively on discourses about corruption as opposed to actual acts of corruption. In my case, the existence of conflicting information, for instance, did not always indicate where the deception emanated from. For instance, during an interview with David in late March 2012, I was told of a successful cultural activity, a dance *konkou* (competition) carried out by the organization in 2009. David spoke proudly of this event, remarking on it as a memorable moment for the organization. When I requested to see photos of the event, he declared they had all been destroyed in the 2010 earthquake. In interviewing Rachel a few months later in late June, she remarked on the failure of an attempted *konkou* in the same year cited by David. She mentioned, in passing, that the group had not been able to garner sufficient funds to carry out the event. Thus, while it seems clear that one of the members lied to me about the event, it remains impossible to pinpoint whether it was David or Rachel.<sup>6</sup>

In this section, I focused on examples of behaviors observed of the group over the course of this research, behaviors that draw on deception and dissimulation as organization strategies. In the next section, I outline various theoretical approaches to deceit, dissimulation, corruption, and

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<sup>6</sup> For reasons I cannot adequately explain, I strongly suspect Rachel was telling the truth. This brings up an interesting question regarding a gendered split on matters of deception and dissimulation. Unfortunately, I was unable to collect sufficient data to support an analysis of this sort. Rachel and Dieula's participation in the group had largely waned by the time of the April 2013 meetings, which I was granted permission to record. Although my notes on previous meetings do not provide indication of female agreement of or engagement with deceptive strategies, this absence is not itself sufficient evidence to pursue an analysis of this sort. In addition, many of the more prominent discussions that involved explicit debates about strategies of dissimulation did not include the presence of Rachel, and even when present, Dieula largely remained silent.

ethics. I then return to the church/devil's house interaction in order to fully understand the ethical and pragmatic implications of David's discursive interventions.

### **Theoretical Approaches to Deceit, Dissimulation, and Corruption**

Given the group's status as a development organization and a political organization, the behaviors as described in the previous section would likely be understood as "corruption" given the pro-social, non-profit nature of their endeavors. That is, their engagements were purportedly in the name of the greater good, or interests that go above and beyond the group members themselves. Indeed, interviews with David and Michel revealed motivations aimed at alleviating poverty and making a significant difference in Haitian society, as was highlighted in the previous chapter. And yet, the group's entrepreneurial approach to both domains brought about, at times, behaviors that could easily be identified as examples of corruption. Corruption in the development industry is not a new or shocking revelation. In fact, it remains relatively commonplace at all levels of the industry.<sup>7</sup>

Social scientific research on corruption has typically approached it as either a structural problem or an interactional problem (Haller & Shore 2005). Structural approaches often point to it as a non-Western deficiency, an indication of a cultural pathology or a symptom of economic and political instability. By contrast, an interactional approach views the problem as one of individuals abusing their public role in favor of private interests (3). Neither of these conceptions help to understand the specific socio-economic factors and the interactional contexts within which people engage in behaviors commonly assessed as corrupt. Anthropological attention to the everydayness of social happenings and interactions makes it well poised for more complex understandings of social behaviors of this sort. For a number of reasons, however,

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<sup>7</sup> For specific examples, see James (2010), Maren (1997), Shah (2010), and D. Smith (2007).

anthropologists have been hesitant to join the conversation or engage in research focused on corruption. Dieter Haller and Cris Shore (2005:7) cite three reasons, including a reluctance to criticize informants, the potential such research has for jeopardizing access to information, and the fact that many people “tend to keep these things secret, especially from outsiders.” I will explore some of these issues, as well as others, and highlight specific contributions by a number of authors.

The underlying ethical implications of behaviors including corruption, deception, and dissimulation, have complicated anthropological attention to them as subjects of research, particularly due to the historic dominance of cultural relativism as an anthropological maxim. Given the sometimes unclear or smuggled in definition of it as an approach to culture that sets aside all judgment, the “negative, moralising image associated with lies and deceit” (Massé 2002:175) and the fact that behavior of this sort “conjures up loaded images of immorality” (Shah 2010:72), can, at times, be a difficult task for an anthropological analysis without traces of ethnocentrism.<sup>8</sup> In addition, an anthropological commitment to the individuals and communities within which they work can also make research on behaviors of this sort seem as if it involves betrayal. As Haller and Shore (2005:7) state, to “highlight immorality or rule-breaking may feel like a betrayal of trust and confidence.”

In some scholarly quests, such as previous research focused on patient-healer interactions referenced by anthropologist Raymond Massé (2002:186), lies are themselves viewed as “invalid data,” a justification that then warrants excluding such cases from analyses. In my own casual interactions with fellow scholars working in Port-au-Prince, the authenticity of organizations

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<sup>8</sup> Franz Boas’ approach to cultural relativism does not imply a relationship to moral relativism, however, it is implied in later works, most notably by his student, Ruth Benedict (1934). Although most anthropologists today view cultural relativism as a methodological principle as opposed to an morally based one, confusion still arises when cultural relativism and ethnocentrism are presented as diametrically opposed concepts. See Moberg (2013) for a discussion of this conceptual confusion.

such as the Youth Org was called into question precisely because their so-called “corrupt” behaviors and their need to disguise the reality of their under-funded existence, represented a contradiction for scholars in search of “authentic” representatives of grassroots development, particularly those with adequately self-less, community-minded objectives. From this point of view then, Youth Org members were merely “hustlers,” an “invalid” site for those seeking to understand the manner in which local populations interacted with and were affected by the development industry.

Indeed, anthropological engagement with development, particularly those represented by the post-development critique have, at times, been motivated by a tacit political project aimed at valorizing impoverished or marginalized populations in relation to dominant groups, institutions, and social forces. Such research often produced results focused on the various mechanisms through which social processes work against, or subordinate, marginalized populations in non-Western countries, pointing to the production and reproduction of inequality and injustice (e.g. Escobar 1995). As Venkatesan and Yarrow (2012:4) explain, “anthropologists have tended to align themselves with the particular groups they study, and by extension a generalized non-Western ‘other.’” From this view, ignoring, downplaying, explaining, or otherwise justifying immoral or unethical behaviors, such as corruption and deception, is necessary; to do otherwise, would be tantamount to taking a “cultural pathology” standpoint, condemning individuals as responsible for their own situations. For other anthropologists, such research carries the risk of ethnographic observations getting taken up for politicized arguments of the same sort, even if they themselves did not intend such arguments.<sup>9</sup> This is not to say that corruption and unethical behaviors enacted by subordinate individuals have not been explored by anthropologists and

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<sup>9</sup> A Haiti-specific example is David Brook’s NYT editorial “The Underlying Tragedy” published on January 14, 2010, a few short days following 2010 earthquake. In it, he draws on and politicizes academic research, ultimately pointing a finger at cultural pathology as to blame for persistent poverty in Haiti.

other social scientists. Instead, many of those that have engaged such topics have explained them as “resistance” or as a result of economic necessity.

Intellectual engagement on the topic of resistance has generally been inspired by various works on power by Michel Foucault (e.g. 1978) and ultimately catapulted by James Scott’s (1985) influential analysis of the various “weapons of the weak.” This analytical trend complicated an understanding of acts of resistance by attending to the everyday “presence and play of power in most forms of relationship and activity” (Ortner 1995:175). This theoretical approach necessarily assigned meaning and intentions to actors, noting that such behaviors were a form of resistance to domination in some form or another. As a type of resistance, for example, Scott argues that one “might make use of disguise, deception, and indirection while maintaining an outward impression, in power-laden situations, of willing, even enthusiastic consent” (1990:17). Indeed, this approach has been replicated by historians and other scholars interested in historical events and processes, particularly in regards to slave cultures in the Caribbean.<sup>10</sup>

Yet, as Sherry Ortner argues, resistance as a behavioral explanation remains ethnographically and analytically thin (1995:190). Indeed, to assign meaning to behaviors as simply resisting is to deny a more complicated political reality within which most people live their everyday lives. Those said to be resisting “have their own politics – not just between chiefs and commoners or landlords and peasants but within all the local categories of friction and tension” (177). Complicating the analysis, she observes, appears to be itself politically motivated by a need to present those resisting in a particular and valorized light, thus, “the impulse to

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<sup>10</sup> The Haitian revolution and other forms of resistance against the system of slavery, in particular, have captured the attention of many historians and social scholars. Pre-dating the “resistance” trend, C.L.R. James’ ([1938] 2001) classic analysis of the Haitian revolution, points to the importance historical research of that sort held for those involved in contemporary struggles. Writing during on-going battles for independence in Africa, James’ contemporary agenda for revolution in the African context was embedded in the manner in which he imputed intentions and motivations on the major and minor figures of Haitian history. Other research focused primarily on slave resistance, both large and small, include: Bush (1990), Dubois (2004a, 2004b), Inikori (2003), Linebaugh & Rediker (2000), Reis (1993), Richardon (2005), and Robinson (2000).



sanitize the internal politics of the dominated must be understood as fundamentally romantic” (179). This is not to say that resistance is an unworthy analytical and ethnographic project; rather that “one can only appreciate the ways in which resistance can be more than opposition, can be truly creative and transformative, if one appreciates the multiplicity of projects in which social beings are always engaged, and the multiplicity of ways in which those projects feed on as well as collide with one another” (191).

Another similar approach to explaining behaviors such as deception and dissimulation has been to point to economic necessity. Erica Caple James (2010), for instance, analyzed lies and deception engaged in relation to development industry practices in Haiti. Through her research on humanitarian aid efforts following the 2004 *coup d'état* that ousted Aristide, she examined a number of accusatory practices, some of which were false or at least motivated by personal interests and interpersonal politics. Those lodging accusations included both individuals working within development institutions as well as beneficiaries, or would-be beneficiaries, of foreign aid. The picture she paints is bleak, pointing to the manner in which such organizations get drawn into local political struggles regardless of intentions, attempts at apoliticalness, or bureaucratic limitations. In one instance, she notes how a violent incident reported to her by a Haitian market woman was later revealed to be untrue (James 2010:60). This was the second incidence of violence reported by the woman, the first of which had resulted in financial and therapeutic assistance through the humanitarian organization within which James herself worked. James reports no need to question the veracity of the first story. The second, false story was recounted years later within an informal gathering of women “*viktim*” (victims of politically-motivated violence). As she explains, the performance and circulation of the false story represented a “means by which resource-poor viktim sought security, capital, and power,

especially when their ongoing struggles were no longer considered acute” (61). She similarly analyzed accusations of witchcraft as a competition for scarce resources and due to a lack of awareness of bureaucratic practices circumscribing the behavior and functioning of aid organizations, an accusatory practice she identifies as “bureaucraft.” She argues that “interveners accused each other of falsehood, misrepresentation, or fraud in the context of financial scarcity” (61). This attention to deception and dissimulation then, is explained as arising from particular economic contexts.

Analyzing corrupt practices of those engaging with the Indian state and participating in development projects, Alpa Shah (2010:72) explains the corrupt behaviors of local populations as “embedded in a local moral economy” which includes social relationships and understandings. Given the specific social and economic context, Shah explains that such behaviors are understood to be judged “in the context of values such as caste, negotiability, gift giving, hierarchy, and greediness” (79). Class relations as well as understandings, past experiences, and relationships with the state play a major role in individual engagement of behaviors labeled as corrupt. While this engagement with corruption complicates understandings of behaviors of this sort and hints at an ethical dimension, through her use of “moral economy,” the analysis prioritizes larger socio-economic questions over attention to interactional dynamics and the manner in which individuals express, explain, and negotiate ethical concerns.

Sasha Newell’s research on *nouchi* culture in Côte d’Ivoire, also addresses the topic of deceit in his examination of “bluffeurs.” Bluffeurs perform the appearance of having more money than they in reality have, through performances of wealth such as donning name-brand clothing and hosting elaborate drinking parties at local bars. “Their aim was not to foil others into thinking they were rich, but rather to convince them that they knew how to be rich, how to

embody the identity and lifestyle of those they aspired to become” (Newell 2012:144). Through attention to dissimulation practices of illicit street culture, Newell reveals the productive, as opposed to deceptive, aspect of such behaviors, arguing that such performances were not necessarily intended to deceive others, but to produce particular kinds of situations and social relationships.

More discursively and interactionally-focused anthropological research on deception, such as that of Ellen Basso (1987) and Alan Rumsey (2013), have revealed important insights into the ways in which behaviors of this sort play a significant role in social relationships. For Rumsey, deceit is something those residing in the Ku Waru region of Highland Papua New Guinea come to expect from others, a product, as he indicates, of socialization. Through an examination of “trickster” stories, Basso (1987:230) explores how deceit is utilized in an attempt to modify social relationships among the Kalapalo of central Brazil. In her descriptions, deception itself is not necessarily an ethical concern, nor one tied to positivist determinations of what is true or false but rather “refers to action that imposes an alternative sense of reality upon some subject of speech” (242). She characterizes her approach as one concerned primarily with interactional dialogue: “what in our view is perhaps strictly a matter of the speaker’s intentions, the Kalapalo hold to be a consequence of the dialogical, interpersonal processes of speaking” (242).

As Basso (1987:241) points out, seemingly common sense ideas about deception versus sincerity “affect the various definitions and functions of deception and lying proposed by linguists, speech-act theorists, and others who take the speaker of English as a model for universal laws of language use.” Indeed, Paul Grice’s (1975) philosophical examination of a “cooperative principle” rests on the assumption that successful conversation requires

propositional truth and that deceit necessarily violates this principle. Searle (1979) went on to distinguish between those fictive utterances that are propositionally untrue yet not intended by the speaker as deceit. To approach questions of deceit and dissimulation from this point of view ultimately reduces our analytical lens, focusing on questions of psychological processes and intentions. As contributors to Jane Hill and Judith Irvine's (1993) edited volume on responsibility and evidence have pointed out, however, not all societies assign and understand responsibility as solely resting on the question of speaker intentions; thus, it remains problematic to assume intentions are the necessary determining factor in contexts where deceit and dissimulation are engaged.<sup>11</sup>

Massé's (2002:175) research, attending to mutual mobilization of deceit and the cooperative discursive context of healer-patient interactions, takes a constructivist approach, urging attention to the productive "language-game" through which social relations and truth get produced interactionally. What Massé's research on deception, along with many of those explored above reveal, however, is a distinct avoidance of the topic of ethics.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, even Hill and Irvine (1993), in their examination of responsibility, side-step the question of ethics altogether, despite assertions by others as to the necessary relationship between responsibility and ethics (e.g. Keane 2016; Laidlaw 2010, 2013). Instead, they remain focused on the linguistic, discursive and interactional contexts through which responsibility and evidence are dialogically negotiated. Michael Lambek (2010), along with others contributors to his volume, argue that ethical concerns are themselves embedded in interactional discourse, including interactional dynamics (Sidnell 2010). Thus, to attend to the discursive and linguistic dimensions of

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<sup>11</sup> Other examples of research on the role of intentions in discourse include Duranti (1993), Brenneis (1986), and Rosaldo (1982).

<sup>12</sup> For example, James (2010), Massé (2002), Newell (2012), and Rumsey (2013) all discuss deception but side-step an explicit examination of such behaviors within the context of ethics.

responsibility calls for engagement with questions of ethics and morality. Because “humans are the kind of creatures that are prone to evaluate themselves, others, and their circumstance” (Keane 2016:6), blame and responsibility become a prominent evaluative exercise and one necessarily tied to questions of ethics and morality. Evaluations of others also reflect back on one’s self-understandings (Keane 2016:21). As James Laidlaw (2013:196) notes: “as the identities of acts are determined and responsibility for them attributed, so cumulatively persons’ reputations are affected and this in turn influences their self-understanding and the formation of their character.”

Ethics are an “ubiquitous feature of human life” (Keane 2016:6) and ultimately pervade our everyday interactions (Lambek 2010). Yet, as Webb Keane (2016:6) warns, to speak of the ubiquity of ethics is not to assume a degree of consensus or universal ethical code as “people can assert diametrically opposed positions or values such as hierarchy and equality, loyalty and justice, or fairness and discrimination, with equal ethical conviction.” To examine the relationship between deception and “ethical life” necessarily requires engagement with social and institutional contexts and, above all, interactional contexts within which ideas about ethics and morality get expressed and negotiated (ibid.). To engage with such questions, however, has not been an easy bridge to cross for anthropologists, particularly given the clear connection such concerns have to individual psychology. And yet, ethical concerns regularly bubble up to the level of conscious awareness and discourse: “for the psychology of ethics to have a full social existence, it must manifest in ways that are taken to be ethical by someone. Ethics must be embodied in certain palpable media such as words or deeds or bodily habits. The ethical implications must be at least potentially recognizable to other people” (Keane 2016:35).

Although philosophical engagement with ethics and morality has a long and complicated history, anthropological interest has expanded significantly only more recently.<sup>13</sup> Yet, despite increasing anthropological engagement, there still exists a significant diversity of approaches and a general lack of definitional consistency from one scholar to the next (Keane 2016). While many utilize “ethics” and “morality” more or less interchangeably (Laidlaw 2013), some avoid definitions altogether (Lambek 2010), or loosely distinguish the two based on intellectual traditions (Fassin 2012). Others urge precise analytical distinction. Among those that draw a clear conceptual line between morality, on the one hand, and ethics on the other, Jarrett Zignon (2008, 2009b) argues that ethics is the degree to which morality – and its institutional, (public) discursive, and embodied aspects – rise to the level of reflection and reflexive concern. That is, to engage ethically is to contemplate and examine what has otherwise been unreflexively engaged, as morality. For Keane (2016), however, the distinction lies in the question of everyday application or decision-making (morality) versus manner of life, such as values, and ideas of what is right versus what is wrong (ethics): “whereas morality deals with such questions as what one should do next, ethics concerns a manner of life – not momentary events but something that unfolds over the long term and is likely to vary according to one’s circumstances” (18). Morality, from this view, falls within a larger category of ethics:

As a rough heuristic, I take ethics to center on the question of how one should live life and what kind of person one should be. This encompasses both one’s relations to others and decisions about right and wrong acts. The sense of ‘should’ directs attention to values, meaning things that are taken by the actor to be good in their own right rather than as means to some other ends. This refers to the point where the justifications for actions or ways of living stop, having run up against what seems self-evident – or just an inexplicable gut feeling. (20-21)

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Fassin (2012), Fassin & Lézé (2014), Faubion (2011), Keane (2016), Lambek (2010), Laidlaw (2013), Lempert (2013), and Zignon (2007, 2008, 2009a, 2009b).

In the case of behaviors such as deception, we can see how morality and ethics are linked and, at times, overlap. To lie, for instance, may very well be motivated, in the moment, as tied to obligations or duty. To lie, or not lie, then, represents engagement with morally-based decision-making. And yet, that very same behavior could simultaneously be understood as having an ethical dimension, as pertains to values and one's relations with other people. Ethical concerns then, can be interactionally negotiated by participants as right, wrong, or necessitating some form of justification or recognition. The two concepts are not exclusive nor are they necessarily mutually constituted. In many ways, the terminological lines will necessarily remain unclear. This is not to say, however, that important intellectual insights have not been made via such attempts to outline a clear division between the two concepts.

More important than terminological clarity, however, is the manner in which individuals engage with questions of morality and ethics on an everyday basis; that is, how ideas are expressed through everyday interactions. This is not to say that all ethical and moral dimensions of social life do rise to the level of awareness; indeed, this is not always the case. Rather, we need to pay attention to moments of ethical and moral reflexivity – and the social circumstances that give rise to such reflexivity – in order to grasp an understanding of “unself-conscious responses to other people and their actions” (Keane 2016:24-25) as well as how individuals “do or do not make sense of those ideas” (38). It remains important, however, to avoid the assumption that the expression of ethical or moral ideas is simply one of revealing pre-existing conditions or social categories. Instead, we also need to look at the ways in which vocalization can result in negotiation on the part of participants and social changes (22). The expression of taken-for-granted assumptions ultimately opens those assumptions to potential questioning or (re)negotiation. In similar ways, Massé (2002:176) warns that we cannot simply reduce

interactions to predefined categories such as deception or lying, nor should we ignore the existence of such behaviors but rather need a “redefinition of truth as a strategic cultural construction rather than an empirically established fact.”

It is with these ideas in mind that I now shift to a more detailed analysis of the interaction at hand, pointing to the various ways in which David’s moral discourse (church versus the devil’s house) was mobilized, negotiated and understood, and what this indicates in terms of the group members’ ethical imaginations.

### **David’s Objections**

Understanding the ethical dimension of David’s church/devil’s house statement requires attention to the rest of the interaction, particularly his mobilization of an illustrative example and his suggestion of an alternative strategy. Following the moral imperative, David expressed his primary concern as one of financial imbalance and the capacity, of the platform director, to sway public opinion. He argued that money has the ability to twist the publicly accepted version of a story one way or another. While he does not explicitly state “public opinion,” the non-directed nature of his statements implies he was referring to general circulation of the story through word-of-mouth, such as gossip and rumor, and the media. His later example of journalists, and their ability to sway a story for or against someone depending on one’s financial clout, confirms this attention to public opinion.

David’s attention to the media, public discourse, and public opinion is unsurprising. Most scandals and accusations aired publicly in Haiti play out in the media, with little or no concrete evidence available to confirm or deny rumors. Instead, the veracity of accusations, and the widely-accepted narratives remain ambiguous, uncertain, and largely decided via the domain of



talk. Accusations of criminality also rarely get resolved through official channels such as the judicial system. His attention to how the group would get portrayed in the media here is also unsurprising given the importance the group generally placed on media attention. Members regularly strategized ways to gain visibility in the media since they saw this as both an important aspect of succeeding but also a means through which to gain access to more funding, as was discussed in the previous chapter. David also briefly worked as a journalist and continued to maintain connections with journalists such as those at Radio Caraïbes.

To illustrate his argument, David went on to cite a recent scandal circulating in the media regarding a Deputy, an elected official in the Lower House of the National Assembly (Parliament), and accusations that he raped a young secretary working in Parliament. News of the scandal broke on the Thursday prior to the Saturday meeting at which members discussed it. By Friday, a significant number of commentary and news reports aired on various radio stations reporting and analyzing the scandal. Even on Friday, however, there was hesitation on the part of broadcasters about whether to cite the name the Deputy or not. One station, Radio Caraïbes, indirectly fingered the Deputy in question by airing a classic Haitian song with the refrain “*Boujou Boujoli*.” “*Boujoli*” refers to a type of hair tie or clip that many female children wear in conjunction with braids or twists. It also resembles the name of the accused Deputy (Bourjolly). This subtle link to Bourjolly’s name was direct enough to prompt his participation on *Ranmase* the following day (Saturday). The moderator aired Bourjolly’s call, during which he proceeded to directly refute the accusations, telling his side of the story regarding what happened on the day in question, such as his interactions with the secretary accusing him of rape.

Since the Youth Org meeting was later that Saturday, some of the members were aware of the allegations, others were not. While David’s motivation in bringing up the example was to

utilize it as an illustration of his larger money/power/public opinion argument, he went to great lengths to give a play-by-play of the events: how the story broke, who intervened on the radio, and his suspicions as to what was going on behind the scenes. Ultimately, he provided enough information to inform those not yet familiar with the scandal. Yet, his attention was not on *what* happened, or the story of the rape, but rather remained focused on telling the story of how the scandal broke in the news: who spoke, when and what this reveals about backstage dealings and intentions. Within his detailed analysis, he also called for the participation of his fellow Youth Org members in acting out the events regarding how members of Parliament reacted to the news that their colleague was accused of rape. Transcript 5.2 includes is a detailed look at the discussion in question:

## Transcript 5.2: Rape Scandal

<p>1 Dav =men pwiske w gen lajan  2 pa sanble w  3 ban m bay nou yon egzanmp  4 gade yon Depite  5 sot vyole yon ti-ti fi la, pa vre?  6 nou pa tande sa [yap pale]  7 Jer [yo di]  8 li pat [vyole l non]  9 Dav [w pat menm]  10 Ah: pa fè sa monchè=  11 Jer =((laughs))  12 Dav pa fè [sa]  13 Jer [Bon]  14 prezidan chanm de- [depite a di]  15 Dav [fin tande]  16 fin tande=  17 Jer =m tap tande yè Scoop  18 Dav w son prezidan chanm depite  19 mwenn menm se prezidan  20 ou-nou tout la  21 nou s- nou se depite pou imaj enstitisyon  22 pou m mal kanpe  23 nan lapres  24 pou m di eh: y-yon depite te vyole  25 Mich [ya-yap wè pou depite (pou kale)]  26 Dav [yon danm nan lakou a pa  27 fè sa  28 Mich Nan-nan-nan [w nan lakou paliman?]  29 Dav [mwenn menm]  30 talè wi andann paliman wi=  31 Ern =Depite pa ka kanpe tout [jou-pou] =  32 Dav [kite] =  33 Ern =Pa t vyole li vre tou  34 [non e pa Deputy e fè l dwòl non]  35 Dav [Talè pa fè sa pa fè-  36 Kite m di w. Ah kite m di w pou m wè-  37 pou m montre w sa lajan ka fè=  38 Mich =Eh heh=  39 Dav =ok, jou- ou konn nèg karayib nèg  40 yo se ch- chi- chyen cho  41 nèg yo di li konfime  42 nou konnen l, li konfime nou konnen l  43 Bob C chita lap pale  44 nou genlè pa fè nouvèl souvan  45 li di se konfirme  46 men PA vle di non=</p>	<p>=but when you have money  what others say about you doesn't seem true.  Let me give you an example,  look at the Deputy  that just raped a you-young girl, right?  You've heard [them talk]  [they say]  he didn't [rape her]  [you didn't even]  ah: don't do that man=  =((laughs))  don't do [that]  [well]  the president of the Chamber of [Deputies said]  [finish listening]  finish listening=  =yesterday I was listening to Scoop [FM]  you're the president of the Chamber of Deputies  Me, I'm the president  you-we're all there  we're-we're Deputies representing the institution.  For me to stand up  in front of the media to say something negative,  for me to say uh: a-a Depute raped  [they- they would support the Deputy (?)]  [a girl in the yard. Don't  do that  In-in-in [you're on the Parliament grounds?]  [myself]  Wait, yes inside Parliament, yes=  =Deputy can't stand all [day- to] =  [leave it] =  =He didn't really rape her  [no, it's not the Deputy that behaved poorly]  [Wait, don't do that, don't do-  Let me tell you. Ah, let me to tell you so that I can-  so that I can show you what money can do=  =uh huh=  =ok, day- you know the guys at (Radio) Caraïbes  they're ho-hot-headed dogs  those guys said he confirmed,  we know it, he confirmed it, we know it.  Bob C. [Robert Celiné] sits down, he's talking  Sometimes we don't pay attention to the news.  He says it's confirmed  but he DOESN'T want to say the name=</p>
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As can be seen above, Jeremi challenged David's assumption in lines 7 and 8, which then prompted Ernesto and Michel to collaborate in this challenge later on, one not included in the excerpt above. Suffice to say, David was required to do significant interactional work in order to hold the floor (lines 10, 12, 15-16, 26-27, 30, 32, and 35-37) and likely elaborated on the scandal more than he might have done if others had not contested his interpretation. In fact, following the collaborative challenges on the part of Ernesto and Michel (line 25 and 33-34), David embeds and repeats assertions as to the veracity of the rape allegations, affirming his assumptions regarding the Deputy's guilt (lines 39-46). At that point the challenges ceased and David was given the space to elaborate on his example with limited interjections. Thus, part of David's motivation in extensively detailing the unfolding scandal was the skepticism expressed by both Jeremi and Michel. Jeremi, in particular, immediately questioned David's assumption, citing an alternative radio station as his source.

David further drew in his listeners by assigning roles to himself and other members, asking them to imagine the scenario as if they were a part of it. In lines 18 and 19, for instance, he assigned the group to the role of the president of the Chamber of Deputies. He even put himself in the same role, reflecting on how it would feel to appear in front of gathered journalists, having to stand up and announce the rape (lines 22-24). Other members pick up on the role-playing with Michel asking if David, the President of the Chamber of Deputies, is in the yard of Parliament when the rape happened (line 28).<sup>14</sup>

David's version of the story rested on assumptions of the Deputy's guilt, although he never explicitly stated this. Even though he attempted to shut down challenges to this assumption

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<sup>14</sup> As with Wortham's (1992, 1994) analysis of participant examples and classroom identities, David's role-playing, and assignment of roles to others, is an attempt to position himself and others as actors and identities within the narrated story itself. The degree to which other members pick up on this role-playing is limited; however, Michel's question (line 28) represents one such indication that members did play along.

as if the truth of it was not important to his larger point (lines 35-37), his story unfolds in such a way that it becomes clear that acceptance of this assumption is in fact an important presupposition to his larger argument: he speculates the existence of an off-air cover-up, a speculation that necessitates acceptance of the Deputy's guilt. David's analysis of the scandal drew on evidence cited from what he heard on the radio, mostly Radio Caraïbes, and he elaborated on an interpretation of what he believed must have been going on backstage. He speculated that money was involved, on the part of the Deputy, and that this must have been the reason radio stations were hesitant to reveal a name, that is, broadcasters were afraid of retaliation on the part of the Deputy and his family.

The more other members continued to push back against David's assumption, however, the more David had to work to maintain his speaking role. He continued to fight, however, returning to his main point about money and power as a way to side-step specific disagreements others expressed regarding his narration of the story (lines 36-37). Following the portion of the discussion cited in the transcript above, David continued with his story, mostly uninterrupted, repeating his larger argument regarding money and power. He argued that the reason journalists did not want to report the Deputy's name on the air had to do with the clout of the Deputy, his family connections, and the potential repercussions to the station and individual journalists if his name were to be revealed. "Money makes it work..." David argued.

By this point, the rest of the group had largely quieted down, indicating submission to David's control of the floor. At one point, Jeremi states "okay then, money makes it work, yes" signaling his agreement but also communicating a slight exasperation with the discussion. David continued regardless. He claimed that radio commentators at Radio Caraïbes attempted to contact the Deputy in question without success. Given how often the Deputy was ordinarily

available for commentary as a guest on the show, David implied his sudden unavailability was a sign of guilt. He then went on to discuss the reaction of fellow Deputies in the media, emphasizing their shock: “they say they never imagined their colleague could have done something like that...they’re ashamed for their colleague.” This again leads to David’s speculations about backstage dealings: “you know the huge negotiations. You don’t have money at all, he says ‘ok what do you need?’”

He examined Bourjolly’s and the victim’s family’s participation on *Ranmase* that morning, narrating the broadcast and placing himself in relation to it as a listener: “I’m listening to Ranmase, I hear the Deputy is going to intervene to show he’s not guilty, to show- even the family intervened.” With this, David brought his story back to his larger argument about the power of money. To strengthen his argument, he once again mobilized a participant example, calling on Ernesto as a hypothetical actor: “Ok, Ernesto doesn’t have a cent to his name. I call Ernesto on behalf of the victim’s family, I give him a house that’s worth three hundred thousand American dollars... Ernesto is saying ‘oh my dear, I’ll take care of it for you’... money made Ernesto talk.” Ernesto, in this example, is identified as an individual connected to the unfolding story, one who is in need of, and thus tempted by, offers of money. This identification of Ernesto as powerless in relation to other actors, is not unlike the larger argument David is trying to make: that the group as a whole was relatively penniless, and thus, powerless, in relation to the platform director. Thus, Ernesto, in the participant example David cites, represents the group as a whole (Wortham 1992).

At this point, David had maintained his dominance of the floor for a significant period of time, prompting Ernesto and Michel to interject in an effort to encourage him to conclude. Ernesto specifically prompted him to suggest an alternative strategy in light of his objections.

Despite their efforts, however, David continued to repeat his point about money and public opinion and elaborated on the role of the media. He argued that even though journalists should seemingly be on the side of the poor, since they are themselves often of a poorer class. Yet, he argued, they too cater to those with money, “turning” news reports ever so slightly against those without money and influence. David ended his extended analysis by again mobilizing a discourse with seemingly moral implications: “What do you say guys if we enter the church on this issue?”

David’s extensive discussion of the rape scandal, then, illustrates his earlier point regarding money, power, and public opinion. Here he argued that having money allows individuals to buy public opinion or otherwise turn it in their favor. His understanding of the group’s relationship to the platform director is one of a relative imbalance of financial backing, and thus, power. His example here reveals his concern that without financial clout, Youth Org members would be at the mercy of the platform director regardless of what is true, or what really happened. David was concerned, then, that any actions they decided to take against the director could come back to haunt them later on given their relative powerlessness. Although this example highlights David’s concerns more fully, it still remains unclear as to what the ethical implications of the church/devil’s statements are. For that, we need to look more closely at the alternative strategy he suggests, given the implication that his approach would be aligned with “going to church.”

### **An Alternative Strategy Proposed**

As indicated in the previous section, David requested that the group “go to church” on the issue. What exactly does he identify as a “church” approach and does this indicate ethical concerns regarding the use of deception proposed by others? At this point, the story remains

incomplete. As the meeting continued, however, David revealed a more complex picture as to what the “church” strategy might look like in opposition to the “devil’s house” approach suggested by Michel and Ernesto. He revealed this through his proposition of an alternative strategy.

The group had finally given David the space to talk and while he had to work to maintain his control of the floor, other members largely acquiesced and allowed him to speak. In fact, once David got started, he spent approximately seven full minutes, not just pointing to his concern regarding money and power but illustrating it fully with the rape example. Given the rapid overlapping speech characteristic of the group’s conversational dynamics, as was discussed in the previous chapter, the maintenance of David’s role as primary speaker for an extended period of time was unusual. At that point, the meeting had gone on for nearly an hour and a half. It was also a relatively heated debate. It remains likely that the group was tired and eager to move on, allowing David access to the floor in the hopes that he would conclude quickly. David’s extended turn did not go uncontested, although it did include long periods in which the rest of the group remained silent. Following David’s discussion of the rape example, Ernesto made a number of attempts to re-direct David’s discussion to not just focus on his objections but to move on to alternatives, interjecting “But what are you proposing president...”

Once Ernesto was finally successful in gaining access to the conversational floor, he continued to request an alternative. His urging was lengthy and repetitive, and, perhaps for this reason, succeeded in shifting the discussion away from the argument about money and power. Most notably, Ernesto labeled David’s vocalized disagreements with previously suggested strategies as an attempt to “regulate” the group and he justified his own support for those



strategies, stating that the group was “in a phase.” His turn was characteristically full of disfluencies and re-direction, a consequence of his habit of rapid speech:

*Prezidan, eskize, gade, non you kesyon m ta renmen poze w, pa egzant. Ou konnen, tankou, efè ya rive pandan w ale regle nou, pa egzant. Nou nan faz. Pou n al sinyen you you you papyè. Ki sa w pwopoze, dapre ou menm, ki-ki strateji ki metodoloji w pral itilize pou n fè l? Paske w konn nan moman la, nou pa- nou gon pwoblèm biwo, sa vle di pou nou eksplwate office dosye a, men ki metodoloji w pral pwopoze? W panse nou pral itilize pwiske, tankou, w wè metòd sa m pral- nou tap- itilisasyon ke m wè w pat (tèlman) antre nan lojik la, men ou menm ki santi w- ki sa w santi w pwopoze m avèk eh faz la a (ki bay) pwoblèm?*

President, excuse me, look, I would like to ask you a question. For example, you know, like, what happens all the while you're trying to regulate us, for example? We're in a phase. We're supposed to go sign a-a-a-a paper. What do you propose, in your opinion, what-what strategy, what methodology, are you going to use to do it? Because you know in the moment, we're not- we still have an office problem. That is, we need to exploit the office in this case. But what methodology are you proposing? What do you think we're going to use since, like, you see this method, I'm going- we would- the method you're not terribly in favor of. For you, what do you feel- what would you propose we do for, uh, this phase that's giving us problems?

As can be seen, Ernesto assessed David's objections as an attempt to regulate the group's actions. He outlined the problem at hand – the group's need for an office – and pointed to it as a consequence of the group's current “phase,” one needing to be overcome. He repeatedly requested that David offer an alternative solution to this problem, given his objections to previously suggested strategies. David picked up on this request and responded with an alternate strategy, one that unfolds collaboratively with the help of Ernesto and Michel and in the form of a strategy rehearsal:

### Transcript 5.3: David's Alternative Strategy

1	Dav	<i>Mwen menm sa sèl sa</i>	For me, the only thing that
2		<i>m tap pwopoze nou</i>	I would propose to us
3		<i>M byen pran tan pou vin ak sa</i>	I've taken a lot of time getting to this point,
4		<i>an nou mete misye jan nou di a</i>	let's make the guy see us the way we said,
5		<i>nou tap egare</i>	as inexperienced
6		<i>misye ap wè nou tankou egare</i>	The guy will see us as if we're naive.
7		<i>kounye a nap di misye</i>	Now, we'll tell the guy
8		<i>dapre analiz stati a</i>	"After analyzing the statutes,
9		<i>se vre nou pa gen pwoblèm</i>	we really don't have a problem
10		<i>Men dapre stati nou e PPL</i>	but according to our statutes, uh PPL's statutes,
11		<i>depi gen tèl bagay</i>	whenever a certain thing happens,
12		<i>li ka sòti nenpòt nenpòt moman</i>	we can leave at any time, at any moment .
13		<i>men PPL sensè nan li menm</i>	But PPL is sincere
14		<i>pou l avè w jiskobou</i>	in working with you to the end
15		<i>depi tout bagay ap mache</i>	as long as everything is functioning
16		<i>ak transparans byen</i>	with good transparency"
17		<i>mwen menm m te vle</i>	For me, I wanted-
18		<i>pa gon pati politik se vre pou al</i>	No political party joins a
19		[ <i>platfòm gon bagay mhm wi</i> ]	[platform there's something mhm yes ]
20	Mich	[ <i>map di pwiske nou pale stati a</i> ]	[I'll say "since we're talking about statutes"]
21		<i>nou te gen dwa menm pwopoze misye</i>	we could propose to him
22		[ <i>bon misye nan</i> ]	[ "well sir in ]
23	Dav	[ <i>wi pase s:-</i> ]	[yes go over th:- ]
24	Mich	<i>plas stati a, pou nou sinyen yon akò</i>	place of the statutes, we should sign an accord
25	Dav	<i>Ou- ou konprann?</i>	Do- do you understand?
26		<i>E [sa w bay la</i>	And [what you're giving there
27	Mich	[ <i>Sinye yon akò konprann?</i> ]	[sign an accord, understand?] ]
28	Dav	<i>fich danrejistreman di</i>	The registration paper says
29		<i>d'après avoir lu stati</i>	"after having read the statutes"
30		<i>men nou menm antanke</i>	But since we are
31		<i><u>homm::e politologue</u></i>	political me:n"
32		<i>nou pale stati</i>	we're talking about the statutes
33		<i>nou pa ka annik pran yon angajman</i>	"we can't just take on a partnership
34		<i>konsa pou nou</i>	like that for us
35		[ <i>pran nou pa gen pwoblèm</i> ]	[to take- we don't have a problem" ]
36	Mich	[ <i>an nap avanse stati a</i> ]	[let's move forward with the statutes-
37	Dav	<i>men nou FRANCH</i>	"but FRANKLY
38		<i>nou sensè avè w</i>	we're sincere with you
39		<i>nou pa vle fon bag-</i>	We don't want to do someth-
40		<i>n-nou pa ka fè bagay demogoji</i>	W-we can't be demagogues
41		<i>pa ka antre nan bagay demogoji</i>	We can't enter into demagoguing relationship.
42		<i>men koman nou ka sinyen</i>	But how could we sign
43		<i>ou ka sinyen yon akò maten an</i>	How could you sign a-an accord this morning
44		<i>avèk eh: yon yon platfòm politik</i>	with uh: a-a political platform
45		<i>aprèmidi- apremidi</i>	then this afternoon- in the afternoon
46		<i>ou retire pou tèt w=</i>	you withdraw yourself"=

47	Em	= <i>Selon stati a</i>	=“According to the statutes”
48	Dav	<i>Selon- se se se selon stati</i>	“According- ac- ac- ac- according to the statutes
49		<i>ki bay: eskè w wè sa m di w la?</i>	which gives:-” do you see what I’m saying?
50		<i>apa plizyè platfòm politik</i>	Besides, haven’t several political platforms
51		<i>yo pa kraze la</i>	fallen apart that way?
52		<i>se konsa ban m di w yon bagay</i>	It’s like that. Let me tell you something.
53		<i>sa angaje yon pati politik</i>	This concerns a political party,
54		<i>yon pati politik</i>	a political party.
55		<i>menm ministè lajistis</i>	Even the Minister of Justice
56		<i>pa ka annik leve</i>	can’t simply get up in the morning
57		<i>pou al retire rekonesans li</i>	and take away a party’s legal recognition.
58		<i>eskè w wè sa m di w la?</i>	Do you see what I’m saying?
59		<i>Pou montre jan pati politik la</i>	To have a political party
60		<i>fò w bay yo deja</i>	you need to already have
61		<i>li son strikti politik li</i> [ye ]	a political structure [for it
62	Em	[non w]	[No, but you’ve]
63		<i>konn wè sa</i>	Already seen that with
64		<i>nou de a la menm prezidan? =</i>	two functioning at the same time President? =
65	Dav	=Mhm =	=Mhm =
66	Em	= <i>Misyè pap janm kanpe di konsa</i>	=The guy is never going to tell us
67		<i>Stati nou fòk nou chanje l pa nou</i>	we need to change our statutes
68		<i>pa vle chanje stati pa li menm</i>	He doesn’t want to change his.
69		<i>eskè w wè sam di w?</i>	Do you see what I’m saying?
70		<i>paske stati nou yon bagay (?)</i>	It’s because our statutes are something (?)
71		<i>byenke se vèbalman nap di l =</i>	Although verbally we’ll tell him =
72	Dav	= <i>m dakò =</i>	=I agree =
73	Em	= <i>aprè nou kapab antre- antre l</i>	=After that we can edit
74		<i>nan nannan stati a</i>	the core of the statutes
75		[ <i>w wè sa map di w</i> ]	[you see what I’m saying?
76	Dav	[ <i>mwen menm se fot la m</i> ]	[For me, I don’t want us to be at fault. I]
77		<i>pa vle a wi</i>	don’t want that.
78		[ <i>ou konn poukisa?</i> ]	[you know why?
79	Em	[ <i>Non fot la m pa vle</i> ] <i>tou non =</i>	[no I don’t want to be at fault] either no =
80	Dav	= <i>Talè talè Ernesto</i>	=wait wait Ernesto
81		<i>tande sa m di w la</i>	listen to what I’m telling you
82		<i>w wè w wè kote misye a</i>	you see you see what this guy is like.
83		<i>m pa di li gen lajan non</i>	I’m not saying he has money.
84		<i>ou te mèt gen rezon zanmi</i>	You could be right my friend
85	Mich	<i>David, an ale chèche lajan</i>	David, let’s go looking for money

David describes his strategy as one of performing for the platform director a degree of misguidedness, presenting themselves as inexperienced and naïve (lines 4-6). His suggestion of presenting the group as “misguided” harks back to an earlier strategy suggested by Ernesto, and supported by Michel. He then launches into a rehearsal of the strategy he suggests. In doing so, he mobilizes projected speech, quoting what he believes they should say to the director. He

proposed a strategic presentation of the group as “sincere” (line 13). His performance included playing a persona of an honest, but naïve, political actor that sincerely desired to partner with the platform and its director but was also concerned over a conflict between the platform statutes and PPL’s statutes. Instead of hiding the clause in PPL’s statutes and deceiving the director into accepting it, David wished to point directly to the clause that would allow them to back out of the platform if transparency was lacking (lines 15-16).

This clause, it should be noted, did not exist at that time in the Youth Org’s statutes, however, the group had previously discussed adding the clause as a strategy for dealing with the situation. Thus, David’s suggestion is not unlike Michel’s and Ernesto’s regarding altering PPL’s statutes to allow for an “exit door.” The difference, however, is that David’s suggestion included calling attention to the clause. He suggested that by presenting the group as naïve and misguided, they could successfully request this addition to the platform’s statutes, or request that they draw up a separate agreement between the two organizations calling for respect of both the platform’s statutes and PPL’s statutes.

David continued with his strategy rehearsal, repeating his desire to present the group as sincere and “frank” (lines 37-38). He also went on to extensively perform a series of justifications to his projected audience (the director), as to why the addition of the clause would not be a problem. He performed one explanation to the director, stating that the group had every intention of committing to the platform long-term: they could not possibly commit to the partnership one minute and break the commitment the next minute (line 42-46). Shifting from first person plural (“*nou*”) to second person (“*ou*”) in lines 42-43, David appears to have attempted to turn the possibility of withdrawal around on the platform director, posing a concern that the director himself might sever the partnership at a moment’s notice.

At this point, David breaks frame and goes on to assure the group that their status as a political party would not be compromised in their partnership with the platform. He argued that the structure of the party, assuming it was in place to begin with, would remain intact and could not be dismantled easily. As he states, the Minister of Justice “can’t just get up in the morning and take away a [political party’s] legal recognition” (lines 55-57). Ernesto expresses support for David’s strategy, arguing that the director could not possibly ask them to change their own statutes if he was not be willing to change his own (lines 66-68). In his logic, the director would have to accept their concerns as valid and would likely seek out a compromise on the issue.

The discussion came to an end with David reiterating his worries about the power of money and their position of relative disadvantage in relation to the director (lines 82-84). The group never really came to a concrete decision on whether David’s alternative strategy would be adopted or not; however, the lack of explicit disagreement and the collaborative nature of the practice performance signals a degree of consent. Michel does, however, sidestep taking a stance on the issue by shifting attention back to the question of money, arguing for them to correct this problem as soon as they could by searching out financing (line 88). David is reluctant to allow this topical shift but Michel’s persistence wins out and the conversation shifts.

As mentioned previously, David’s disagreement with the strategies initially suggested by Michel and Ernesto were primarily on the grounds that the group could be liable for their actions down the line. What’s interesting here is his mobilization of moralizing discourse – “are we going to church or the devil’s house?” – in arguing *against* previously suggested strategies and *for* a different kind of strategy. In his unfolding logic, he subtly maps this moral opposition onto the strategies suggested; that is, the previously suggested strategies that explicitly draw on deception are akin to “going to the devil’s house” implying that his own suggestion is morally

elevated and aligned with “going to church.” And yet, the moral opposition implied here is not one of simply arguing against deception, and for sincerity. As was shown, David’s own alternative strategy makes use of sincerity but not in an “honest” way. Instead, it calls for dissimulation of another sort, through a deliberate attempt to present the group as sincere, and naïve, in order to successfully convince the platform director to accept their statutes and the backdoor clause embedded within it. In other words, David wishes to coerce the director into *knowingly* accepting the clause, as opposed to *unknowingly* accepting it. His argument, then, is less about what is right from a purely moral standpoint but about minimizing the potential legal and public image problems they could face down the line. The strategy of dissimulation he suggested points to a desire to more effectively *perform* sincerity. To *be* sincere is not the question; rather, the performance of sincerity is what matters. Convincing the director of their sincerity in joining the platform, David implies, minimizes risks and potential consequences down the line.

The strategies suggested by Michel and Ernesto, from his view, were ultimately the more fraught options. To David, those routes would require more careful planning and the deception would be harder to maintain. David’s suggested alternative is, in his view, the simpler, less dangerous option (the “church”). David’s use of the church/devil’s house opposition here fits with idiomatic uses of the phrase “*pa legliz*” (not church) as referring to something that is difficult or not easy. In this way, the group’s intentions to deceive or manipulate a situation to their advantage is not of concern; rather, their pragmatic decision-making on this matter is anchored in their understandings of anticipated liability, the context of a specific situation, and the group’s status in relation to others. In this case, the group was at a relative financial disadvantage in relation to the platform director.

## **Performing Sincerity: Productive Dissimulation**

Thus, what at first appeared to be a moral imperative – a choice between two strategies, one representing the devil’s house and the other representing the church – was less precisely about the ethical dimension of the strategies suggested by Michel and Ernesto and more about efficacy and pragmatics. This is not to say that the group side-stepped ethical concerns. I will deal more with the group’s recognition of the ethical dimension of the suggested strategies in the next section. Suffice to say, David was less concerned about actually being ethically sincere with the platform director and more concerned with performing sincerity in a convincing manner. His disagreement rested not only on the performance itself – that is, which strategy would more effectively convince the director – but also focused on potential liability and responsibility down the line. He aimed to minimize the risk of responsibility, and consequences, by refining their strategic approach to the director, particularly in the manner in which they performed their group identity.

Dissimulation and deception, then, were deployed in all of the strategies suggested, even David’s. And yet, we must necessarily take a step back from morally-laden implications such concepts carry, in order to look at the productive role they play for the group. Given the backstage nature of the group’s discussions, there does appear to be a degree to which we can confidently identify an intention to deceive on the part of Youth Org members. Yet, what is equally clear is that group members remained relatively unconcerned as to their own intentional desire to deceive. Their concerns with performance and responsibility, that is, the outcome or consequences of their performances, reveals that their interests lie in the projected performance itself and the manner in which they will be understood and received by various audiences, in this case, the platform director. Despite an entrepreneurial approach, the group’s engagement took

place in domains understood as largely pro-social; that is, both development and political work are understood to be aimed at serving others. This, by default, meant that the performance of sincerity – appearing ethical, or at least not unethical – was necessary in order to maintain a favorable reputation in the eyes of various projected audiences, including a general Haitian public. To be recognizably unethical, then, meant that their access to those domains might be limited. They aimed, in many ways, to produce the reality they sought to perform. By convincing the director of their sincerity, they could more effectively minimize the risk of negative repercussions or distrust on the part of the director. This is not to say that all members are equally concerned about liability. Indeed, it would seem David’s focus is much more on maintaining a positive social relationship with the director through the performance of sincerity, than those strategies proposed by Michel and Ernesto. Michel and Ernesto, in contrast, were more concerned with maintaining a positive image for the group in the eyes of an unseen audience of a Haitian public, regardless of what resulted from the interactions and partnership with the director.

Thus, as Basso (1987) urged, we need to restrain from focusing solely on the propositional nature of deceit – as based on the speaker’s intention to deceive – and look also at the role of interpersonal relationships. More specifically, we need to attend to the development of such relationships and “how they emerge through strategic interaction, the contextually located construction of reality” (241). The local Kalapalo term Basso loosely translates as “deception” then is not so much about intentionally aiming to deceive but rather involves imposing “an alternative sense of reality upon some subject of speech” (242). The success of such discourse, however, depends heavily on the interaction itself and the reception of it as speakers seek validation and ratification for their utterances. She explains: “What in our view is perhaps strictly



a matter of the speaker's intentions, the Kalapalo hold to be a consequence of the dialogical, interpersonal processes of speaking" (242)

Massé (2002) concurs in arguing for attention to "the production of dynamic truth" as it unfolds in the interaction. To reference truth, however, is not to speak of propositional content (e.g. Grice), but rather to look at the dialogic, and to a degree, the consensual and pragmatic nature of the interaction as it unfolds. As Massé (2002:178) argues, "we are dealing with a dynamic process of communication and a cultural construction of shared, negotiated and legitimised truth." What remains interesting and, perhaps different, about the Youth Org interactions versus, for instance, interactions in which deception and dissimulation are directly engaged in relation to an intended audience, is the backstage nature of their discussions. The debates about strategy and use of dissimulation took place in anticipation of future meetings and interactions with the intended audience. This backstage access, then, does indeed reveal something about the role of intentions: how speakers view their strategic choices and their attention to how intentions will be understood by projected audiences. Thus, while I am unable to analyze the actual interaction that unfolded in relation to the director, such as the degree to which the group was able to successfully perform the strategy they discussed, the interaction and its preparatory nature is revealing nonetheless. The group's attention to imagined outcomes and consequences point to the importance of reception, that is, the interactional consequences of perception that would inevitably factor into the interpersonal relationship with the projected audience. They sought to imagine how their strategies and performances would be received in an effort to mitigate liability when possible. In this way, their deliberative practices – as analyzed in both this chapter and the previous one – represent sites of interpersonal political engagement as members sought to effect power and status in relation to others via deliberation and preparation.

The group's strategic performances also had a pragmatic component as members sought to produce the realities they performed. The group's behavior, then, resembles Newell's descriptions of *nouchi* culture. As in the *nouchi* example, we can see that the Youth Org's behavior has a socially productive aspect to it: "deceit is expected, valued, and productive" (Newell 2012:5). The deception and dissimulation, as with the bluff, serves a socially important function: "Masking activities are not mere deceptions but rather performances that produce meaningful fictions" (246). The productive element is the potentially transformative function; that is, the ability to perform, through deceit and dissimulation, one's way into making the illusion a reality. This, in many ways, resembles Inoue's discussion of indexicality: the primary function of indexicality is not simply to name something that already exists; instead, indexing something through the naming of it "produces the object" (Newell 2012:36; see also Inoue 2002, Taussig 1992). While the Youth Org's objective to get started in the development industry and formal political arenas are not directly comparable to Newell's attention to the explicitly criminal nature of the street economy, the importance of reputation and the performative nature of deception is similar in both contexts. By performing particular identities, Youth Org members sought to have pragmatic force in affecting the situation and social relationships at play in an effort to gain status and power. For group members, then, their intentions to deceive were less important than the potential for their performances to pragmatically transform a situation in their favor.

The manner in which the group utilized sincerity as a strategic option in other instances also supports this analysis. While at times deception was viewed as the most effective route, at other times, sincerity or honesty was seen as a viable strategy. In those moments, sincerity was evaluated as a viable strategy not for moral reasons but as a pragmatic and strategic option in

light of a specific contexts and in relation to specific actors. For instance, during a Skype call between the group and the Haitian diasporan in late May 2012, the diasporan firmly expressed the importance of honesty in establishing a working relationship between himself and the group. This was not the first Skype meeting with the diasporan and the group had already exchanged a number of documents in negotiating the diasporan's role and support for their political party. This particular Skype exchange was full of references to honesty on both ends as each attempted to establish a particular kind of presentation of themselves. What's significant here is the way in which Youth Org members later, in a post-Skype discussions, negotiated strategies in relation to the diasporan. As the group continued to prepare documents that had been requested by him, they debated the degree to which they should reveal their financial status, for instance, the fact that they were broke and without a bank account. As they discussed how to deal with the diasporan's request for information on the group's financial status and their bank account number, one member argued that it was important to be honest with him due to the value he placed on this. Others agreed and the realm of possible strategies narrowed to strategies that would partially reveal their financial status but with caveats that included an explanation for their financially precarious situation. For instance, group members favored explanations that painted them as the victims of circumstance in suggesting that the 2010 earthquake was the reason they no longer had an office, furniture, and other resources. Others suggested similar strategies such as revealing their status as broke but adding assurances that the group would finance a percentage of expenses regardless.<sup>15</sup> The goal here was to perform sincerity while avoiding a presentation of the group as penniless and disorganized, believing this would ultimately scare away the diasporan as a potential donor. Thus, through the mobilization of sincerity, even in a

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<sup>15</sup> Michel argued that the group could later, once the diasporan was fully integrated and financially supporting the group, get the diasporan to pay for additional expenses if they were unable to find funds elsewhere.

limited fashion, the group hoped to gain the diasporan's trust and participation in their political platform.

### **Ethical Imaginations & Affordances**

What is revealed in the preceding analysis is that the performance of dissimulation and sincerity were understood by Youth Org members to carry the potential to have pragmatic effects for the group; performance of this sort were, in this way, understood as productive. Indeed, the group's attention to response and consequences were more important than their concerns regarding their own intentions to deceive. Yet this does not necessarily indicate that the group's interests lacked ethical considerations. Nor was David's seemingly moral imperative necessarily devoid of an ethical dimension altogether. Indeed, the interaction itself reveals a number of ways in which group members reflexively recognized the unethical nature of the strategies proposed. Throughout the interaction we can see how members engaged and negotiated ethical questions, working to justify suggested strategies in order to put ethical concerns to rest.

While the group was indeed pragmatic, this practical engagement in interpersonal politics was an important part of their negotiation of, and concerns for, the ethical dimension of their behaviors. As Rumsey (2010:117) points out, an ethical imagination necessarily concerns a regard for others and points to the ways in which individuals and groups creatively engage ethics in novel and everyday circumstances. Although Rumsey's use of the concept "ethical imagination" centers on how individuals and groups recognize and act in ways that are considered ethical, or good, I also utilize the concept in relation to unethical behaviors. For my purposes, an ethical imagination includes the manner in which members recognized and negotiated the ethical dimension of their behaviors, whether ethical or unethical. To recognize

something as unethical, then, indirectly points to it as standing in opposition to that which is considered ethical. The Youth Org's concern for others, the primary focus of their strategizing sessions, was less about whether or not the proposed strategy would benefit others in a positive way but rather how others would react and respond to their performances and whether or not this projected behavior would help or hurt the group down the line.

In a similar fashion, I find Keane's concept of "ethical affordances" useful in analyzing the group's strategic engagement with ethical concerns. Keane (2016:27) defines such affordances as "any aspects of people's experiences and perceptions that they might draw on in the process of making ethical evaluations and decisions, whether consciously or not." Ethical affordances, from this perspective, have three characteristics: (1) they usually work alongside other sources of information; (2) they are sought out throughout the course of practical activity; and (3) they are can be social in nature (2016:29). Analyzing ethical concerns and behaviors through the lens of affordances, allows us to take into consideration the manner in which past experiences come into play as individuals or groups evaluate situations and (re)act. Evaluation is a fundamental aspect of experiences with, and understandings of, the role of ethics and thus, plays a major role in how ethical affordances are engaged in everyday situations. "Ethical affordances are those features of human psychology, face-to-face interaction, and social institutions that can be taken up and elaborated within ethical projects. They are part of what makes it possible for ethics to be both a universal feature of human existence as an animal species and something that has a variable social history" (32). Here I examine the various ways in which group members discursively brought ethical concerns to the level of awareness, and thus made them available for negotiation by the group as a whole. Moments involving

deliberation of this sort reveals the various affordances through which members understood and rationalized behaviors in light of ethical concerns.

Throughout the interaction discussed at length in this chapter, and the pink bracelet discussion that preceded it, we can see a number of ways in which the group's ethical imagination is at play and the manner in which they negotiated affordances through which to justify and downplay ethical concerns. The discussion, as a whole, primarily rested on the question of dealing with the platform director although another significant portion of time during the same meeting was spent strategizing ways to deal with the pink bracelet scandal mentioned in the previous chapter. I draw examples of justifications from both discussion topics.

Most notably, members mobilized justifications in preemptive response to ethical concerns. Such justifications accomplish two things: first, they point to explicit recognition of the ethical dimension of the discussed behaviors. Second, they provide affordances through which the group could simultaneously engage the unethical behavior while deflecting or minimizing the unethical dimension of such behaviors. They did this by shifting responsibility for the unethical dimension elsewhere, allocating responsibility to others or to general societal norms. While there may be a degree of self-deception involved in this rhetorical move, they nonetheless provide the group with necessary rationalizations for the engagement of behaviors recognized as unethical. Although the group discussions remained in the realm of projected or proposed behavior, they align with Jack Sidnell's (2010:138) discussion of justifications, "in which an accused person admits that he did the thing in question but argues that it was not quite the wrong or bad thing that is supposed." Similarly, Laidlaw (2013:190) argues, in the context of philosopher John Austin (1961) and his examination of excuses, that "many attempts to attenuate

or mitigate liability for misdeeds involve claiming not that one did not do the thing in question, nor that one did it simply unintentionally, but rather that one did do it, “but only in a way.”

Referencing general processes and norms of behavior, members utilized phrases such as “*se politik*” (it’s politics) or “*se konsa*” (that’s the way it is) as a way to minimize ethical objections or concerns, pointing to it as “just the way things are.” As an ethical affordance, discourse such as this references observations of a general pattern of behavior, either socially, culturally, or within a specific social domain, such as politics. Recognition of the unethical nature of the proposed strategy remains embedded in statements such as these – implied in the need to mobilize the justification in the first place – while simultaneously deflecting responsibility by pointing to such behavior as a norm and to be expected. As was cited in the previous chapter, Michel’s statement that all small organizations take advantage of large organizations financially, has a similar effect in deflecting responsibility and downplaying any ethical concerns regarding the suggested strategy. In that case, Michel was deflecting responsibility for taking money from MINUSTAH for human rights activities when MINUSTAH itself was accused of human rights abuses.

Another example during which a “*se konsa*” justification was mobilized was during a discussion of the pink bracelet scandal. In Transcript 5.4, we see Michel perform a strategy in response to those accusing him of having a pink bracelet. His strategy involved counter-accusations pointing to others in the political platform as also having pink bracelets. His performance involves implying, but not directly stating, that he did not in fact have the bracelet. He does so by requesting evidence of its existence. Of course, the existence of the bracelet and Michel’s ownership of it was certain, as others point out in response, many of those present at the platform meeting saw the bracelet and could attest to what they saw.

#### Transcript 5.4: “*Se konsa*”

1	Mich	<i>Mwen menm lè m wè l nan poyèt l</i>	For me, when I see it on his wrist,
2		<i>kounye a si lap di</i>	Now if he says
3		<i>èske w ka vin ak prèv</i>	“Can you come with proof?”
4		<i>map di ou menm vin a yon prèv</i>	I’ll say “you bring proof
5		<i>ke m ta yon braslè woz</i>	that I had a pink bracelet”
6	Dav	(1.0) ((laughs))=	(1.0) ((laughs))=
7	Mich	= <i>W wè san-eh bagay konsa li ye</i> =	=you see without-uh things are like that=
8	Ern	= <i>kounye a gen tout pati</i>	=now ever party in the platform,
9		<i>yo di wi wi, w di non</i>	They will say “yes yes,” you say “no”

Here Michel suggests the use of dissimulation as a response to accusations of his having a pink bracelet, a signal of alliance with President Martelly, at a meeting of oppositional political parties. Michel’s strategic response includes the use of a preemptive counter-accusation that other members of the oppositional parties involved also had been seen with pink bracelets. He then anticipates his interlocutor’s response of “can you come with proof?” (line 4). The anticipated response, the lack of physical evidence in the case of the counter-accusation, then allows him to point to a lack of physical evidence in his case as well (line 6-7). Here he references a previous statement made where he explicitly pointed to this lack of evidence as advantageous (see line 10 of Transcript 4.0 in Chapter 4). The group’s immediate response to Michel’s suggested strategy and rehearsal of it is an uncharacteristic silence, followed by a hesitant laugh on the part of David (line 8). Such a response signals the group’s relative discomfort in relation to Michel’s strategy given that many individuals at the meeting in question observed the existence of Michel’s bracelet regardless of whether or not physical evidence could support this. Indeed, Ernesto points this out in lines 11-12, performing the reaction of the platform participants in response to Michel’s avoidance of responsibility. What’s notable about this example is how Michel mobilizes a “*se konsa*” justification when he states that “things are like that” (line 9) in response to the group’s hesitation and seeming discomfort with his



suggested strategy. Here he was signaling the unethical dimension of the dissimulation he suggests mobilizing and justifying the strategy by making a general claim about how things work regarding politics, accusations, and evidence. In using such a justification, he worked to minimize his own responsibility by pointing to it as a general behavioral norm.

In the *Ankadre Pèp* discussion, justifications were also mobilized in relation to suggested strategies. In Transcript 5.5, a negative characterization of the platform director and the manner in which he runs the platform is utilized in an effort to rationalize mobilization of an unethical strategy against him. The portion of the interaction transcribed below immediately followed David’s “history could judge” objections (see Transcript 5.1 above):

### Transcript 5.5: Shifting Responsibility

1	Mich	<i>non: non eh: tande tande tande</i>	no: no uh: listen listen listen
2		<i>David, gon gwo pwoblèm=</i>	David, there’s a big problem=
3	Dav	<i>=((laughs))=</i>	<i>=((laughs))=</i>
4	Mich	<i>=pwoblèm ki genyen nan</i>	=I saw a problem in
5		<i>regleman entèn misye a m wè a</i>	the guy’s Internal Rules
6		<i>Afè ke misye di se kòdonatè nasyonal</i>	What the guy calls the “National Coordinator”
7		<i>ki pou chwasi ki pou bay approbation</i>	which chooses, which assigns punishments
8		<i>pou tout [kandida jwenn sanksyon]</i>	for every [candidate that gets sanctioned]
9	Dav	<i>[menm sanksyon li</i>	<i>[even if his sanctions]</i>
10		<i>pa bon=</i>	are not good=
11	Ern	<i>=((laughs))=</i>	<i>=((laughs))=</i>
12	Mich	<i>=e di w:</i>	=and also tells you:
13		<i>[se kòdonatè nasyonal]</i>	<i>[it’s the National Coordinator]</i>
14	Ern	<i>[li ka ba w sanksyon wi]</i>	<i>[he could give you a sanction yes]</i>
15	Mich	<i>ki di</i>	It says
16		<i>[sesi pou sela sa a yon moun]</i>	<i>[this and that that a person]</i>
17	Dav	<i>[ki.. ki bay tout moun sanksyon]</i>	<i>[who..who gives everyone sanctions]</i>
18	Mich	<i>gade an gwo se kòdonatè</i>	looks at the big picture, it’s the National
19		<i>nasyonal la ki tout bagay=</i>	Coordinator that does everything=
20	Dav	<i>=wi</i>	=yes

Here we see Michel’s response to David’s objections as he argued that the platform director unfairly structured his organization in such a way as to control everything (lines 18-19). This, for Michel with others in the group agreeing – Ernesto in line 11 and David in line 14 – justifies an

avoidance of the five-year commitment. Yet Michel does not simply mobilize this justification in order to warn of the pitfalls of committing, he also uses it as a justification for the group's mobilization of a deceptive strategy against the director. In this way, Michel assigns responsibility for the group's projected behaviors to the platform director himself. His justification follows a "you did X, therefore I *had* to do Y" logic. Given that this portion of the discussion immediately followed David's mobilization of the "history could judge" objection, Michel's justification must, in this way, be understood in that context. That is, Michel vocalized the justification in an effort to move forward with his, and Ernesto's, proposed strategies, regardless of the unethical dimension of them.

In addition to Michel's attempt to lay blame at the feet of the platform director, Ernesto also mobilized another type of justification later in the interaction. As was quoted at length previously, Ernesto's response to David's argument about money and power pointed to the group as "in a phase" and thus needing to do whatever was necessary to overcome that phase. In some ways, this justification hints at a need to postpone concerns regarding ethical behavior, at least until the phase had passed. This postponement of ethical concerns also relates directly to the group's general aim and objective of getting started, discussed in the previous chapter, wherein "getting started" was vocalized as an end in and of itself.

Here we also see how the group understands causality in relation to responsibility. Specifically, members attempted to minimize or deflect responsibility away from themselves in an effort to justify unethical behaviors. They signal their recognition of the unethical dimension in the very manner in which they express justifications. Regarding the *Ankadre Pèp* discussion, vocalized justifications must necessarily be understood in the context of the objections other members expressed, those explored in previous sections. In this way, the group's ethical

imagination was also at play in the vocalization of objections, such as those by David and Jeremi. For example, Jeremi's statement worrying about the degree of proof that might result from the suggested strategy (Transcript 5.0, line 5) highlights concerns about responsibility while also flagging the unethical dimension of the strategy. David's general objections that "history could judge" (Transcript 5.0, line 24) also points to recognition of the unethical dimension of the proposed strategy, particularly in the way he implies that the strategy may be judged negatively in the future.

In the Save the Children example presented earlier, another kind of justification was mobilized by Ernesto and Michel: that of a moral obligation to the organization and its goal of getting started. They argued that my duty to the organization, assisting them obtain financial success, was itself, a moral obligation. This obligation was presented as more important than, or in contradiction to, any personal, moral stance I might have against the child sponsorship strategy utilized by Save the Children. My ethical stance, to Michel and Ernesto, undermined the group's viability, and was itself, unethical from the point of view of group solidarity.

Finally, attention to the group's deliberative practices and dynamics, at times, signaled something about members' ethical imagination. For instance, as the discussion of how to deal with *Ankadre Pèp*'s platform director unfolded, even prior to the suggestion of specific strategies, Ernesto responded to Michel's announcement about a meeting with the director by awkwardly referencing a deceptive strategy. His entry into the discussion was awkward in that he appeared to struggle to point to the fact of the deception itself:

### Transcript 5.6: Ernesto's Disfluencies

1	Ern	<i>e Michel fò m di yon bagay ou wè la?</i>	eh Michel I need to tell you something you see?
2		<i>Nou pral mete yon bagay mf-</i>	We're going to put something mf-
3		<i>[bay yon- yon- nou pral fê] bagay=</i>	<i>[give a- a- we're going to do] things=</i>
4	Dav	<i>fò n fê bagay yo</i>	<i>[we need to do things]</i>
5	Ern	<i>=stratejik pou n fê=</i>	<i>=strategically do things=</i>
6	Dav	<i>=stratejik</i>	<i>=strategically</i>
7	Ern	<i>Rezon eskize prezidan=</i>	The reason, excuse me president=
8	Dav	<i>=Mhm</i>	<i>=mhm</i>
9	Ern	<i>Si m pral bay misye papye ki pap-</i>	if I'm going to give the guy papers that aren't-
10		<i>ki pa korèkt</i>	that aren't right
11	Mich	<i>Mhm</i>	mhm
12	Ern	<i>fok nou pa fê twop komantè</i>	We need to avoid commenting too much
13		<i>sou sou sou sou sou:=</i>	<i>on- on- on- on- on:=</i>
14	Mich	<i>=sou stati=</i>	<i>=on the statutes=</i>
15	Ern	<i>=sou stati misye a=</i>	<i>=on the guy's statutes=</i>

In lines 3-5, Ernesto attempted to describe what the group was proposing to do. David, in turn, assisted and the two parallel one another in lines 3-6. This parallelism, despite Ernesto's participation, only seems to fluster Ernesto. He then takes the time to politely request sole access to the conversational floor in line 7. David submits and Ernesto again attempts to describe the proposed strategy. After more disfluencies (line 9), he finally made explicit reference to the deception itself, that the "papers aren't right" (line 10) While his speech, on other occasions as well, is characteristically full of disfluencies and rapid topic shifts, his attempts, in that moment, to state "papers that aren't right" took several turns and included several disfluencies. This indicates hesitation to directly characterize the deception as an act of deception. While he does finally characterize the strategy and its deceptive nature, his hesitation and eventual directness is itself out of the ordinary as I rarely witnessed members point to dissimulation of this sort in such a direct manner. In this way, Ernesto's discursive disfluencies reflect a degree of recognition of the unethical nature of the strategy.

Although David's mobilization of an idiom drawing on moral images of the church in contrast to the devil's house may not have been the moral imperative it seemed to be, the group's

pragmatic approach did integrate ethical concerns as an important consideration in assessing proposed strategies. As was shown in the various examples above, the group's ethical imagination was quite active. Through the use of justifications, in particular, members signaled an awareness of the unethical nature of particular strategies. In doing so, they brought the ethical dimension of behaviors to the level of awareness and discourse. This ultimately allowed members to discuss and negotiate such concerns. Although group members justified their behaviors by shifting responsibility for the unethical nature of them, this does not automatically place those behaviors out of the realm of ethics and into, for instance, the realm of self-interested politics. Even those acting in seemingly self-interested ways engage an ethical imagination, recognizing the ethical dimensions of behavior. Their recognition of something as unethical indirectly marks its opposite: the ethical. Through ethical affordances, individuals and groups make both conscious and unconscious decisions, even if those decisions involve recognizably unethical behaviors. The use of justifications and the shifting of responsibility, for instance, are examples of affordances through which members rationalized the use of unethical strategies despite recognition of them as unethical.

Even if the group's justifications do not get the group members off the hook in relation to how non-members audiences might understand their actions, such discourse is productive for the group members themselves. Their discursive efforts to shift responsibility and justify unethical behaviors serve as affordances through which group members discursively rationalized and made decisions regarding future interactions and behaviors. Yet the manner in which Youth Org members mobilized affordances in their decision-making process is necessarily anchored in the context of the group itself, as opposed to signaling something about Haitian culture more generally. Just as the group's behavior cannot be generalized, the manner in which non-members

may or may not evaluate the Youth Org's behavior does little to assist in understanding how the members themselves understand their own behavior and strategic choices. What this analysis reveals is the internal logics (affordances) through which the group negotiated ethical concerns regarding proposed behaviors. The affordances members viewed as legitimate are necessarily drawn from group member observations and experiences. Such observations and experiences also vary from individual to individual or from group to group and will shift with time and an accumulation of observations and experiences that could further support past affordances, or could result in challenging and transforming them. The backstage negotiation process itself is what is of interest here: the manner in which ethical concerns were brought to the level of awareness and made available for discussion and debate within the group.

## **Conclusion**

Following the previous chapter devoted to the Youth Org's social and economic status and their deliberative practices, this chapter took up the topic of ethics and the group's ethical imagination. At first glance, the Youth Org may appear simply as an underfunded organization working toward success in pragmatic and opportunistic ways, through the logic of "by whatever means necessary." From this view, members were engaging in the "game" of interpersonal politics and managing their development activities with little regard for ethics. Postponement or bracketing of ethical concerns in favor of pragmatic ones might seem to be an overall explanation for the group's behavior. Instead, what I hope to have revealed through this analysis is that a single explanation such as a general postponement of ethical concerns is not sufficient. Such an explanation presupposes a static approach to the group when in fact, as with all social interaction, the group is quite dynamic. While particular justifications mobilized by members

point to ethical postponement as a rationalization, such as Ernesto's "in a phase" justification, the group's dynamic engagement with ethical concerns points to more complex understandings of their behavior.

By tracing David's objections to the deceptive strategies suggested by Michel and Ernesto, we ultimately saw how his mobilization of a moralizing dichotomy was less about ethical behavior and more about the effective performance of sincerity. His objections, including the illustrative example of the rape case, point to an overwhelming concern for the perceptions and responses that others might have if the group were to engage particular strategies. That is, by engaging strategies that could be interpreted as unethical by others, the group's access to status and power might very well be limited. Here we can see how David, and other group members, were particularly concerned with liability for their actions down the line. Such concerns are anchored in questions of ethics, particularly in their efforts to evaluate their own behavior. David's alternative strategy, then, points to a minimization of liability and negative reception by a projected audience through the performance of sincerity. Although his alternative strategy also draws on dissimulation, it is presented as minimizing concerns regarding responsibility and consequences. As was analyzed in the previous chapter, members' anticipation of audience reactions remain important. In this way, performing of sincerity, and moral engagement in general, relates to the manner in which the group worked to manage the impression others would have of them. David's argument as to whether the group should "go to the church or the devil's house," then, prominently rests on pragmatic concerns, although such concerns were not altogether devoid of an ethical dimension. As a pro-social organization purporting to serve others, or work in the interest of others, revealing immoral or unethical behavior could ultimately result in damaging their reputation with specific audiences, including a general Haitian public.

Through further analysis of the unfolding interaction, we can also see other ways in which group members pointed to the ethical dimensions of suggested strategies. Indeed, ethical concerns remained an important factor in the group's pragmatic decision-making process. Throughout the unfolding interaction, members signaled awareness of the ethical dimension of proposed strategies. At times this came in the form of objections, such as references to legal problems and liability issues, at other times, through the vocalization of justifications. Attending to the interactional dynamics of the group revealed the manner in which members voiced, understood, and managed ethical concerns by way of ethical affordances. By mobilizing justifications for suggested strategies, members not only signaled an awareness of the unethical dimension of a given strategy but they also served to discursively shift responsibility away from themselves. Responsibility and liability, in this way, were of primary importance to the group's ethical imagination.

Through close analysis of one specific meeting discussion, this examination identifies the complicated ways in which group members engaged with questions of ethics, discussing and rehearsing ways to productively mobilize dissimulation and performances of sincerity in such a way as to have positive outcomes for the group. Their negotiation of ethical concerns throughout also highlight the manner in which they collaboratively constructed an ethical imagination and navigated affordances to best suit the practical situations they faced. To point to the dynamic process of negotiation of pragmatic and ethical concerns necessarily involves recognition of it as always subject to (re)negotiation and change. As the group's experiences and observations accumulate, membership shifts, or social positions change, their ethical imagination and understandings of appropriate affordances will likewise shift and change.



What, if anything, does this analysis reveal about ethics in relation to the domains of development and politics in Haiti? Although the group itself is admittedly a small one and perhaps not entirely representative, many of the behaviors, justifications, and understandings of ethical engagement span beyond the confines of the group itself. For instance, understanding the ethical dimension of a given behavior in the Haitian context, has little to do with an actor or speaker's intentions and depends heavily on reactions and understandings of that behavior on the part of interlocutors and audiences. This theme will also be taken up in Chapter 6. As will be discussed, the manner in which meanings and understandings of *pwen*, a Haitian verbal genre of critique, rely most heavily on how those critiques are received by targets and audiences, as opposed to depending solely on speaker intentions. For the Youth Org, their attention to audience reception is an important aspect of their ethical imagination and their understandings of appropriate affordances, allowing them to think through issues of responsibility and liability prior to acting. This is not to say that the group is necessarily accurate in their interpretations of how their discourse and behaviors will be received by others. Rather, their attention to this dimension reveals the importance of reception in assessing ethical affordances and acting accordingly.

Given that corruption is a hot-button topic both in relation to the development industry and political institutions, the question of ethics and reflexive understandings of ethical engagement are important topics to address. Many of the behaviors exhibited by Youth Org members could quite clearly be identified as "corrupt." Indeed, it would be easy, and perhaps partially accurate, to explain the group's behavior as a result of their economic marginality and their seemingly self-interested objectives focused primarily on an internally focused goal of financial success. Without inside access to the group's backstage strategizing, one might attempt

to interpret the group's behavior as a result of cultural difference. That is, the group appeared to see nothing wrong with their behavior, and thus explanations for this behavior on the part of an analyst might reside in the domain of "culture." What I hope to have shown from this analysis, however, is that the picture is more complicated, particularly when we look more closely at internal group dynamics, interactions, and backstage strategizing. Group members did in fact recognize the unethical dimension of the behaviors they proposed and subsequently pointed to a need to justify such behaviors prior to engaging them. They were not, then, unreflexively unethical; instead, they saw themselves as *justifiably* unethical.

For those wishing to engage grassroots organizations in the pursuit of political or developmental change, understanding the ethical imagination of the groups and individuals involved remains important. This is especially true given that foreign actors often express dismay about what they see as a lack of ethics or morals on the part of Haitian actors. Observations of corruption in both politics, more specifically, in Haitian politics, and the development industry are common and unsurprising. Development industry donors often presume that the pro-social nature of development activities should always supersede any degree of self-interestedness. Assumptions of selfless community-minded engagement in an economically poor, but politically dynamic environment such as Haiti remains a romantic and unrealistic expectation. Instead, those wishing to intervene developmentally need to gain a better understanding of how individuals and groups themselves understand and engage in political behaviors. This includes an examination of the economic status and the ethical imaginations of those one wishes to engage. This can be difficult, however, given the implications of the analysis presented in this chapter and the previous one, particularly the Youth Org's backstage politicking and their attention to performing particular and shifting identities as they worked to present themselves in particular

ways depending on the audience and context. Official rhetoric, then, may not necessarily align with backstage discourse and objectives. After all, *se politik*.

## CHAPTER 6

### **Slogанизation and the Political Pragmatics of Interdiscursivity: The Social Life of a Haitian Political Critique<sup>1</sup>**

#### **Introduction**

In the weeks leading up to the 2013 Carnival season in Haiti, the release of a Carnival-composed song, “Aloral,” by the musical group Brothers Posse, sparked controversy for its critical message accusing the Martelly administration of ineffectiveness and false promises. Highlighting a multitude of political scandals and development failures, the song queried: “*kòt chanjman?*” (where’s the change). In and of itself, the critical nature of the song was not notable, especially in the context of Haiti’s Carnival season, when critiques of government and political officials are the norm rather than the exception. Nor was the critical message of the song – declaring Martelly’s government ineffective – particularly new; there had been strong political opposition to Martelly’s presidency since he took office in 2011. The cause of the controversy, rather, was the government’s response to the song: Brothers Posse was excluded from participating in the government-sponsored Carnival parade.

Following the release of “Aloral” and President Martelly’s decision to exclude the band from the official parade, lyrics from the song – most prominently, the word *aloral* and the pair *aloral* and *ateri* – entered the realm of everyday discourse, becoming what Debra Spitulnik

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter was originally published as “Slogанизation and the Political Pragmatics of Interdiscursivity: The Social Life of a Haitian Political Critique” in the *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, Vol. 25(3), pp. 303-321.

refers to as “public words” (1997). The song accused Martelly of being “*aloral*” (all talk) and called for his administration to “*ateri*” (bring about concrete results). What began as a pointed political critique – a *pwen*, in Haitian Kreyòl – transformed into a pointed slogan – also *slogan*, in Kreyòl – that was widely repeated and recontextualized to fit a variety of different discursive scenarios.

In tracing the “social life” of the *aloral* critique (Agha 2005; Spitulnik 1997), I attend to the entextualization process through which the text circulated, a process that created “felt continuities across speech events” (Agha 2005:2; Silverstein 2005a). The entextualization/recontextualization process links and forges texts to socially transmittable culture (Silverstein & Urban 1996) and necessarily forces a broadening of the analytical frame to include discourse, utterances, or speech events beyond the original performance or text (Bauman & Briggs 1990). These interdiscursive links, indexing the song’s critique as a textual precedent or source, come to resemble circulatory or spatial movement across time and space (Gal 2007). It is the interdiscursive links that are of interest in understanding the social and political productivity entailed in the circulation of discursive forms and specific incidents of recontextualization. Such links indicate a “sharedness,” a degree of communicative competence assumed to be shared by participants as a condition of “successful” indexicality (Spitulnik 1997). As many scholars of language and culture, and linguistic anthropologists in particular, have noted, our everyday practices and interactions are always necessarily embedded in “interdiscursive webs,” connecting past and future speech events (Wirtz 2011). Cultural

transmission and change, as well as communication itself, depend on these interdiscursive links for successful social interaction (Spitulnik 1997; Urban 1991).<sup>2</sup>

My analysis focuses on the process through which *aloral* was transformed from a performed political critique (*chante pwen*) into a socially circulated slogan, or public word (Spitulnik 1997). The entextualization process is key to understanding the resultant interdiscursive links and “shared” quality of the text, providing an index through which participants interpreted and understood the *aloral* slogan. Of particular interest in the *aloral* case is the political partisanship entailed in recontextualizations. In mobilizing the slogan, speakers were able to express complex political sentiments while also participating in defining Martelly’s administration as “all talk.” In order to mark this political productivity, I use the term “slogan” and refer to the entextualization/recontextualization process as “sloganization.” My use of these terms refers both to an emic genre that is metadiscursively employed in Haiti and to a broader analytical concept.

The analysis that follows begins with attention to the Haitian verbal genre of *pwen* or *voye pwen* (the act of sending a *pwen*) as a culturally specific speech genre involving critique and/or insult. I outline the cultural context as well as the interactional characteristics of *pwen*, particularly the role of the target or “owner” of the *pwen* in constituting its publicly understood meaning. I contrast the discourse genre of *pwen* with *slogan*, treating the entextualization process as a point of differentiation and setting the stage for an understanding of *aloral* as a *chante pwen* (a *pwen* sent through song) within the context of Haitian Carnival celebrations.<sup>3</sup> I then turn to an analysis of the Brothers Posse song. Through a presentation of the socio-political context within

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<sup>2</sup> For more on interdiscursivity, see the *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* special issue on the topic (2005, Volume 15, Issue 1). Interdiscursivity is also often referred to as intertextuality. I follow Bauman's (2005) preference in reserving the term intertextuality for scenarios explicitly focused on written texts.

<sup>3</sup> *Chante pwen* are also referenced in scholarly literature as *chan pwen*.

which the song was released and the poetic form of the song lyrics, I highlight the aspects that favored the detachability of *aloral* and, to a degree, *ateri*. I then trace a series of examples derived from observation of formal and informal interactions in Port-au-Prince, including observations within the HR Org and radio commentary programs. These examples highlight the entextualization (slogonization) process that transformed *aloral* from a *pwen* to a slogan, a transformation that included a shift from a singular, direct political critique – source to target – to a repeatedly recontextualized indirect reference. The examples demonstrate both the creative adaptations of the slogan and the slogonization process as politically productive. While the slogan’s meaning was broadly shared and recognized, recontextualizations continued to index the political nature of the source critique and, consequently, its usage was circumscribed by political partisanship.<sup>4</sup> That is, mobilization of it was limited to those taking a political stance in opposition to President Martelly. Individual moments of recontextualization represent diffused sites of the political as speakers negotiated their own political stance in relation to others and actively contested existing power relations in the process. I conclude my discussion by analyzing President Martelly’s public response as an important defining moment for the *aloral* slogan and as one that contributed to its continued circulation.

By tracing the social life of *aloral*, I point to the ways in which a verbal genre, development, and political social action intersect in the Haitian context. As will be shown, the *aloral* critique was communally mobilized across time and space and its meaning publicly negotiated and constituted by the sender (Brothers Posse), an audience (through interdiscursive recontextualizations), and the critique’s target (President Martelly). This process signals a politically productive competition to control how actors, events, and processes are understood by

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<sup>4</sup> This analysis is in contrast to that of Lauren Squires’s (2014), which demonstrates how the process of indexical bleaching, or the loss of an indexical source, facilitates broader diffusion of a text.

a larger public; a politically contentious game involving “wars of interpretation” (Alvarez et al. 1998:7). In the case of *aloral*, the sloganization process represents a general – albeit contested – acceptance of the “all talk” interpretation as the dominant one characterizing President Martelly’s administration. By recontextualizing *aloral*, individuals not only aligned themselves politically in opposition to Martelly but also actively participated in co-constructing an understanding of him as ineffective in bringing change or development to the country. Thus, the sloganization of *aloral* succeeded in organizing a public and its politics with individuals actively participating in the (re)configuration of social relations both interpersonally and nationally. Beyond the specific case of Haiti, I propose “sloganization” as a useful way to conceptualize the political pragmatics of interdiscursivity. Whether harnessing pre-existing sentiments or creating new ones, sloganization serves as a diffused process through which words and phrases become a pre-packaged means for expressing and disseminating complex political sentiments.

### ***Pwen* and Slogan as Politically Engaged Critique**

Understanding how the entextualization process unfolded in the case of *aloral* necessitates attention to the Haitian cultural context, particularly in terms of *pwen*, and the associated *voye pwen* and *chante pwen*. As a distinct verbal genre in Haiti, a *pwen* is a pointed utterance, one that is both simple and elegantly complex at the same time, packing an indexical “punch” through pithy word play.<sup>5</sup> As Kivland states, “*pwen* are symbolic condensations of reality designed to wield persuasive force” (2012:156). *Pwen* have a distinct social and historical relationship with Haitian *vodou*. In the context of *vodou*, *pwen* play an undeniably prominent

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<sup>5</sup> I draw on Morgan’s definition here, utilizing “verbal genre” to refer to “speakers’ use of culturally significant varieties and styles that mediate, constitute and construct contexts” (2002:45).



role. Karen McCarthy Brown's general description of *pwen* characteristics in *vodou* is useful in making sense of its usage in other contexts:

*Pwen* refers to an object or a series of words or actions designed to focus the power of a particular *lwa* [spirit] and thus enable a person to use that power by internalizing it. *Pwen* can be sung, swallowed, put under the skin, worn around the neck, or performed over a person. Thus, when Ogou sings a point song, at the same time that he is sending a pithy communication to his enemies he is also providing his followers with a talisman to use when they are angry.<sup>6</sup> (1989:74)

*Pwen*, in this sense, are understood as carrying a degree of power, a force practitioners attempt to control and mobilize in productive ways. The power associated with *pwen* also goes beyond a *vodou*-specific context and often takes the form of a critique or insult utilized both within face-to-face interaction as well as via wider means of dissemination, such as through radio media. Indeed, radio-based political commentary programs often include hosts and guests sending *pwen* (*voye pwen*) against oppositional political figures. Politicians, in particular, attempt to harness public support for their interpretations through the deployment of *pwen*. *Pwen* and political critiques, for the most part, go hand in hand in the Haitian context (Richman 1990).

Within the field of Haitian studies, scholars who address the topic of *pwen* tend to identify indirectness as one of its prominent characteristics (e.g. Averill 1997; McAlister 2002).<sup>7</sup> In practice, however, the use of indirect addressivity or indirect performativity is a strategic choice that depends on the context and the perception of possible repercussions.<sup>8</sup> While there are

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<sup>6</sup> *Ogou* is a *lwa* associated with fire, commonly recognized as having a fiery nature.

<sup>7</sup> Many Haitian scholars note similarities between *pwen* and discursive genres found in other African or African Diasporan contexts (e.g. Averill 1997; Kivland 2012; McAlister 2002; Richman 2005). Haitian *pwen* are noted as resembling African American "signifying" and "sounding" (Gates 1988; Labov 1972; Mitchell-Kernan 1972; Morgan 1996, 2002), Barbadian "dropping remarks" (Fischer 1976), and "throwing" or "dropping words" in Jamaica and Trinidad (Yelvington 1996). To these examples cited by others, I would add that "wording" in Nigerian Pidgin (Faraclas et al. 2005) and ritual insults in the context of Wolof *xaxaar* (Irvine 1993) also have a number of characteristics in common with Haitian *pwen*.

<sup>8</sup> My analysis here is similar to that of Morgan's (2002:55) analysis of African American discourse in that she views indirectness as the norm but one within which "the uses of directed and direct discourse styles are viewed as choices."

clear advantages to the use of indirect addressivity or indirect performativity, direct addressivity, or a minimally veiled message, can also be viewed as advantageous or appropriate in particular contexts, as will be seen in the *aloral* example.

While direction versus indirection remains a context-based choice on the part of the sender, this choice is not necessarily always a pragmatic or functionally based one.<sup>9</sup> Aesthetic and creative language use, such as wordplay, abstraction, intensification, or exaggeration, also play a significant role in the creation of a *pwen* and is one of the primary means through which *pwen* are evaluated by hearers (Richman 1990). Skill at quick-witted banter and joking are socially valued in Haiti. Particularly valued, as noted by Marcyliena Morgan in regard to African-American communities, is the maintenance of “a cool social face” based on “the ability to act on symbolic incidents and subtle varieties of cultural practice with eloquence, skill, wit, patience and precise timing” (2002:40). Aesthetic appeal through creative poetic means and a smooth delivery all play into how listeners evaluate the *pwen*, collaboratively constitute its meaning, and respond in kind.

*Pwen* also involve another key feature of verbal genres found in many African and African Diasporan communities: the collaborative process through which a meaning or interpretation is constituted (Lempert 2012:193). According to Morgan (2002:39), “the system of social face found in African American communities requires speakers and audiences to have nearly equal responsibility, knowledge and power in interactions.” In the case of Haitian *pwen*, the target’s response confirms for (over)hearers (i.e. the audience) the veracity of a given insult or critique. Judith Irvine (1993:122) illustrates this process well in the case of Wolof *xaxaar* in Senegal: “one woman who gave vent to anger at a *xaxaar* performer for having insulted her

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<sup>9</sup> For a detailed analysis of indirection see Lempert (2012). See also Haugerud (1995) and Brenneis (1987) for examples of indirectness in practice.

became the target of even more gossip, both for the angry behavior itself and for its implication that the insulting allegations – previously only rumored – were really true.” Targets are said to *ranmase* or “collect” the *pwen* that was aimed at them, in keeping with the proverb that asserts “*mèt pwen ranmase pwen*” (the owner of a *pwen* collects the *pwen*). The manner in which one collects a *pwen* plays a significant role in fixing or defining its meaning (Richman1990:118).

Given that the response to a *pwen* serves a crucial function in orienting and defining the meaning of it, the hearer or target of the *pwen* must carefully weigh their options in responding. The proper response for a directly or indirectly referenced target is to respond in kind, normally with another *pwen*. As Elizabeth McAlister (2002:168) explains:

Direct refutation of a *pwen* steps outside the bounds of the communication style and is considered clumsy; conversely, the sender may deny that a given statement was a *pwen* and therefore make the overhearer seem paranoid. The overhearer may choose to ignore the message, suspending conflict at the moment. The socially prized way to respond to *pwen* is to return it with another *pwen*, enlarging the frame of discourse by challenging or embellishing the utterance of the first communicator.

As will be shown in the *aloral* example, the collection of the *pwen* (i.e. President Martelly’s public response) favored the transformation of *aloral* from a *pwen* to a slogan or public word.

### **Carnival *Chante Pwen***

The Carnival season (*Kanaval*) in Haiti is much anticipated, with a large portion of the population taking part, both directly and indirectly. Celebrations are held over the course of several weeks, leading up to the main Mardi Gras parade, the *defile kanaval*, historically held in the capital city of Port-au-Prince.<sup>10</sup> As music and dance are an important aspect of celebrations, the Carnival season is a period during which a flood of new songs are released, by nationally

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<sup>10</sup> Upon taking office in 2011, however, President Martelly chose a different city each year to host the *defile*. This change was not without public, and political, outcry as the *defile* includes considerable private and public funding.

recognized bands as well as local neighborhood bands (Comhaire-Sylvain 1951; Kivland 2012). This ritual season is also a period during which social tensions concerning class, race, and politics bubble up to the level of explicit discourse (Averill 1994, 1997; Comhaire-Sylvain 1951). In this way, Carnival celebrations in Haiti are deeply political. As Gage Averill (1997:154) notes, “Carnival is the most important crossroads of music and power in Haiti,” and the state, or government, is thus “at pains to co-opt, incorporate, regulate and control Carnival’s ‘critique.’”<sup>11</sup>

With the *defile kanaval* primarily sponsored by the government, a “Carnival Committee” is organized by the Ministry of Culture each year to judge musical submissions and select approximately fifteen bands to participate in the parade. Each chosen band is granted an elaborate *char*, or float, on which to ride and perform to the crowds that gather. Playing a distinct role in the Carnival ritual, *chante pwen* are composed specifically for Carnival celebrations, many of which include direct or indirect critiques of various power holders, government officials, and politicians. Musicians compete in composing and performing creative *chante pwen*. Competition for public appreciation and circulation happen at a variety of different societal levels. At the national level, musical groups compete for a spot in the official *defile*. At the local level – that of a neighborhood, or zone – musical groups vie for public appreciation. Street bands circulate song lyrics via word of mouth as they battle for community support and *fanatik* (devoted fans) within particular neighborhoods (Kivland 2012:142). From the zone to the national level, “it is in such celebrations [Carnival/Rara] that politicians and other powerholders may find their faults and shortcomings most unabashedly, vulgarly, and mercilessly trumpeted through the country’s mountain pathways and city streets” (J. Smith 2001:55).

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<sup>11</sup> Another similar, but distinct season in Haiti is *Rara*. *Rara* takes place during Easter and includes a week-long celebration involving street bands – including drummers, horns, and dancers – parading in the streets both day and night, marking the end of Lent.

Particularly at the national level, Carnival *chante pwen* most commonly target politicians and political leaders; they have been likened to a “weapon” deployed against stakeholders (J. Smith 2001, 2004; Averill 1997). Karen Richman (1990:115) asserts that “the ability to use song as an interpersonal weapon is a valued skill in Haiti. Where social norms emphasize the avoidance of direct confrontation, voicing an adage, typically under the transparent veil of non-directed, objectified discourse, serves as a vehicle for persuasive maneuvering, venting hostilities and exercising power.” And as Averill (1994:219) notes, “Carnival’s anti-authoritarian – and even revolutionary – potential also motivates the state and elites to intervene to contain and co-opt carnival and its meanings and to transform carnival (and carnival bodies) into a terrain of class and political conflict.” Direct critiques thus risk government censorship. Even critiques of a more indirect nature risk censorship; however, in censoring a group, such as banning them from the state-sponsored *defile*, political officials essentially acknowledge themselves as the intended targets and, in doing so, confirm the veracity of the critique in question. Whether they use direct or indirect addressivity, musicians have the potential to put government officials in a bind, challenging them to censor their critiques. Indeed, Averill (1997) provides numerous examples of musical censorship and the role of *chante pwen* in serving as a catalyst for the removal of particular government figures throughout Haitian history.<sup>12</sup> The ousting of Baby Doc in 1986 is one particularly striking example: he and his wife fled the country one week prior to Carnival celebrations that year, a move that is largely understood as not a mere coincidence (160).

Yet *chante pwen* are not simply a form of resistance mobilized once a year; as with *pwen* more generally, musical critiques of this sort are an art form, appreciated for their poetic

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<sup>12</sup> In many ways, political critique through song, especially during Carnival season, is more the norm than the exception, with the state having little control over the dissemination of critiques through radio broadcasts. This was not always the case, however, as various stakeholders throughout Haitian history have attempted to silence and otherwise control radio media. While it would be naïve to say that this threat does not still exist, violence against radio stations and journalists during the period of research for this project (2013-2015) was much less common than it had been in the past.

structure and aesthetic value. As Jennie Smith (2001:48) notes, the key is an ability to make words and rhythm “say more than that which meets the ear.” Thus, musicians compete for attention and appreciation from the listening public through creative composition that attends to both content – the message or critique – and form – the poetic structure. Richman (2005:17) adds, “although *pwen* may be spoken, singing is the more effective weapon for launching *pwen*, especially in public antiphonal exchange between leader and chorus.” Call-and-response can be a productive exchange between speaker and audience in that it “can help to create an exaggerated impression of unity, participation, and enthusiasm in a crowd” (Haugerud 1995:85-6). Composing a call-and-response chorus, then, adds to the poetic effect and amplifies the message by encouraging dialogicality.<sup>13</sup> As will be seen in the *aloral* case, a call-and-response poetic structure also facilitated detachability of the text and the transformation of it into a slogan or public word.

According to Spitulnik (1997:166), public words are words, tropes, or phrases that are well-known and standardized to the point that “knowledge of them is virtually essential for one to be considered a communicatively competent member of a particular society or subculture.” A public word necessarily obtains a shared quality among a given speech community. In the Haitian context, a text that circulates widely and is generally recognized and understood – if not utilized – is metadiscursively identified as a slogan. A key characteristic of a slogan, as with a public word, is its pithiness: “condensations or extracts from much longer speech events, and when used, they may function metonymically to index the entire frame or meaning of the earlier speech situation” (Spitulnik 1997:166). As an analytical concept, however, public word does not call attention to the politically productive nature of *aloral* as a slogan, that is, to the partisan

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<sup>13</sup> A similar case can be found in the Cuban context in which repetition and call-and-response are regularly utilized to call down *orichas* (Wirtz, personal comm.).

stance embedded in the text as an important aspect of its interdiscursive usage. While *aloral* was broadly recognized as interdiscursively linked to the original critique made by Brothers Posse, it is precisely this political index that limited its usage.

In Haiti, slogans remain relatively similar to *pwen*, particularly regarding their condensed quality. Musical critiques are a significant source from which many slogans derive, although, to be sure, not the sole source. Chelsey Kivland (2012) describes slogans at length in her discussion of street band politics. In her descriptions, neighborhood bands work to compose catchy slogans in the hopes that they will get taken up and repeated by *fanatik*. As she states, “slogans are those lyrics that can stand in for the whole song and identify the band. But in a more specific sense, slogans are the emotionally charged lines that rally the crowd and configure conflicts and alliances” (155). She goes on to state that:

Much enjoyment comes from crafting a witty slogan, and from deciphering, as well as adding to, its polyvalent meaning. A good slogan is so pithy and so charged that it is said to act like a “punch,” compelling people to adopt its viewpoint. Yet for it to be successful, it must also be sufficiently figurative, coded, and polyvalent so that its sender can ensure its uptake while denying any specific intent or the impression of commanding. Slogans, in short, are rhetorical acts of concealment and revelation, representing a deliberate yet artful strategy of political persuasion and organization. (2012:156)

While there are clear similarities between the verbal genres of *pwen* and *slogan*, it remains useful to distinguish the two.<sup>14</sup> Echoing McAlister’s (2002:168) tacit terminological distinction, I understand *pwen* as having the potential to become a *slogan* through repetition, such as through word of mouth or radio broadcasts. That is, the distinguishing characteristic is the repeatability of a *slogan* through the entextualization/recontextualization process. As with the *aloral* example, a *pwen* can become a *slogan*; however, not all *pwen* do indeed transform in this way.

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<sup>14</sup> Others, such as Kivland (2012), often use the terms interchangeably.

While in many ways, Spitulnik's public word captures the essence of a Haitian *slogan*, this terminology is less than ideal for the analysis at hand due to the implication of political neutrality. As an analytical concept, public word does not call attention to the politically productive nature of *aloral* as a slogan; that is, the partisan stance embedded in the text as an important factor of its interdiscursive usage. For this reason, I employ "slogan" to refer to a pithy word or phrase which is socially circulated, widely recognized, and politically productive.

### **The Poetics of "Aloral"**

When the Carnival Committee released the list of fifteen bands chosen to take part in the official Carnival parade in late January 2013, the Brothers Posse song "Aloral" had already received a fair amount of attention from the press. The song was noted as particularly direct and forceful with its anti-Martelly message, a deliberate shift away from the more indirect, comedic critique launched by the band during the previous year's Carnival.<sup>15</sup> While Brothers Posse was initially listed as one of the chosen groups for the 2013 parade, according to reporting on the Carnival Committee's decision, they were later taken off the list. This move sparked considerable backlash and controversy. Days later, in a radio interview just prior to the commencement of Carnival celebrations, President Martelly confirmed rumors that it had been his personal decision to take Brothers Posse off the list, declaring that they would not "create the kind of ambiance his government was seeking...it's a party that's being organized; it's not a protest."<sup>16</sup> The irony was lost on no one. President Martelly himself was a professional musician, formerly known as "Sweet Micky": a flamboyant, crude and critical singer famous for his

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<sup>15</sup> Haiti's daily newspaper, *Le Nouvelliste*, printed the song's lyrics in its January 23, 2013 issue, followed by an article on Brothers Posse on January 28, 2013, which featured an interview with lead singer Don Kato. Brothers Posse is generally considered a *mereng* (méringue) group. *Mereng* features songs with a syncopated five-beat pattern. This style of music is an important part of Carnival.

<sup>16</sup> Jacqueline Charles. 2013. "Haitian Bands Say Michel Martelly is Censoring Carnival Songs." *Miami Herald*, February 8. <http://www.mercedsunstar.com/news/local/article3274192.html>.



Carnival *chante pwen* against past presidents. With his charisma and distinct flavor of *compas (konpa)* – a Haitian style of popular dance music – his performances as Sweet Micky were both wildly popular while also notoriously controversial due to his sexual humor and socio-political commentaries. Given his historic participation in *chante pwen*, his decision to exclude the band was widely viewed as political censorship.

Despite exclusion from state-sponsored Carnival celebrations that year, “Aloral” circulated widely. It ultimately became the undisputed hit of the 2013 season: it played constantly on the radio and television, and could be heard emanating from various locations on the streets, including cars, homes, and portable electronic devices. An instrumental version of the song was even performed by marching bands in the official *defile* and other parades around the country. The circulatory “success” of the song, however, came about through the transformation of *aloral* from a *pwen* launched by Brothers Posse to a widely recognized, recontextualized, and repeated slogan. This process was due to a combination of factors, including the poetic structure of the song, the socio-political context of its release, and the diffused process through which the “all talk” accusation came to be defined as an accurate understanding of Martelly’s administration. The president himself was an active participant in this process, a point that will be addressed more thoroughly in the final section.

The sloganization process marking the social life of *aloral* involved “the process of rendering discourse extractable, of making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit—a text—that can be lifted out of its interactional setting” (Bauman & Briggs 1990:73). The poetic structure of the song favored this entextualization process, presenting the key concepts of *aloral* and *ateri* in such a way as to promote detachability: both terms came packaged as ready-made texts that captured the essence of the political critique. The song utilized call-and-response to

launch accusations of the president’s political promises as *aloral*, referring to them as simply talk with no concrete results. It also highlighted and placed *aloral* in opposition to *ateri*, mirroring the dominant ideology in Haiti that separates “talk” from the realm of “action.” In their song, Brothers Posse’s “all talk” critique reiterated this familiar ideology, but did so using terms that had not been commonly placed in opposition or heard in everyday interactions, namely, through the use of *aloral* and *ateri*. *Aloral*, in particular, had previously been viewed as a more frenchified term, based on the French *à l’oral* (in speech), as opposed to the more common, Kreyòl-identified term, *pawòl*.<sup>17</sup> Increased references to *aloral* documented after the 2013 Carnival season, however, reflect more than a simple terminological shift from *pawòl* to *aloral*. While the process effectively resignified *aloral* to refer to something as “all talk,” recontextualizations of it also indexed a particular political stance in relation to the president-in-office.<sup>18</sup>

The song is divided into a number of different sections, the first of which is distinctly separated by rhythm and melody. This section serves as an introduction and includes a statement by lead singer Don Kato in which he proclaims that he is telling the truth and predicts that the song may cause some people to become angry: “*Mwen vin pou m chante, mwen vini pou m pale, pou di verite, Gen moun ki pral kontan, gen moun ki pral fache...*” (I’ve come to sing, I’ve come to speak, to tell the truth, there will be people who are going to be happy, there will be people who are going to be angry...). The song then launches into the main melody and rhythm, although with lyrics that serve as an introduction to the song’s general critique. This secondary

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<sup>17</sup> Similar to the French term *parole*, in its simplest form, *pawòl* means “talk.” To “*bay pawòl*” refers to someone who is just talking or saying what they think the other person needs or wants them to say. One example of “*bay pawòl*” is to make false promises.

<sup>18</sup> Resignification via sloganization is a fairly common process in Haiti. McAlister (2002:169) referred to this process as “poaching of meanings” when discussing the creative and coded use of language during periods of extreme political repression. As one Haitian friend pointed out to me in discussing the sloganization of *aloral*, there are many idiomatic phrases or references that remain in use today despite decontextualization from a source. His example was “*gran manjè*” (big eater), a class critique lodged by a long-forgotten *chante pwen*.

introduction illustrates a scenario in which the lead singer confronts the president in his office, calling for him to *ateri* his promises.<sup>19</sup> Following a section in which the lead singer, “DK” in the transcript below, lists the “popular zones” (low-income districts) of Port-au-Prince, the chorus, “Chor” in the transcript, responds with “ATERI.” This call and response continues as DK makes a direct threat as to what will happen if the president does not *ateri*:

### Transcript 6.0: Brothers Posse’s “Aloral”

1	DK:	<i>Bonjou</i>	Good day
2		<i>mwen mesaje a</i>	I messaged to tell you
		<i>vin pale mwen di w ak w</i>	I’ve come to talk with you
3		<i>Pa ta ret tan pou fon ti pale</i>	You couldn’t stay and wait for a chat
4		<i>misye danm le dirijan</i>	Mr. and Ms. Government Officials
5		<i>Son jou mwen tap tan</i>	I waited a day
6		<i>pou di m kot chanjeman</i>	To say where is the change
7		<i>misye le presidan</i>	Mr. President
8		<i>Poukisa bilan gen gou lambi</i>	Why does the report taste good (like conch)
9		<i>nan bouch ou</i>	in your mouth
10		<i>Epi nan bouch pèp la</i>	But in the mouths of the people
11		<i>se fye l tèlman gen grangou</i>	it’s bitter, so much hunger
12		<i>Pwomes se det</i>	Promises are debts
13		<i>Pèp la pa jwe pou mande</i>	The people aren’t playing in asking for
14	Chor:	<i>ATERI</i>	RESULTS
15	DK:	<i>Site soley delma 2</i>	Cité Soleil, Delmas 2
16	Chor:	<i>ATERI [...]</i>	RESULTS [...]
17	DK:	<i>Etidyan, lapolis dyaspora</i>	Students, the police, the diaspora
18		<i>yo mande</i>	they’re asking for
19	Chor:	<i>ATERI</i>	RESULTS
20	DK:	<i>Si w pa ka ateri</i>	If you can’t bring about results
21	Chor:	<i>FÈ ZÈL FÈ ZÈL</i>	AWAY WITH HIM, AWAY WITH HIM
22	DK:	<i>Si w pa ka ateri</i>	If you can’t bring about results
23	Chor:	<i>FÈ ZÈL FÈ ZÈL</i>	AWAY WITH HIM, AWAY WITH HIM

As can be seen in the excerpt above, the target of the *pwèn* is explicitly stated – “Mr. and Ms. Government Officials,” and “Mr. President” (lines 4 and 7). The song draws on Martelly’s campaign slogan “promises are debts,” accusing him of not following through on his promises

<sup>19</sup> The music video enacts this scenario and was also the version submitted to the Carnival Committee in competing for participation in the official parade. It is available for viewing via [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

and not bringing about change (lines 6 and 12).<sup>20</sup> Thus, calls for “*ateri*” represent requests for change in the form of concrete results, as opposed to talk. The critique is also coupled with a relatively direct threat of “away with him” if results are not actualized (lines 21 and 23).

The main, later repeated, sections follow, including the one transcribed below in which *aloral* and *ateri* are in direct opposition. In it, DK calls out a specific scandalous event after which the rest of the band (Chor) responds with “ATERI.” This *ateri* series is immediately followed by one in which the lead singer calls out a generalized social or institutional domain in which the president had promised significant change, and the band replies with “ALORAL.” Brothers Posse, in this way, composed a *chante pwen* aimed at the president that identified the problem of *aloral* and proclaimed the solution to be *ateri*:

#### Transcript 6.1: Brothers Posse’s “Aloral” (continued)

1	DK:	<i>Nan zafè voyaje,</i> <i>piye lajan</i>	In the case of all the trips (the president made), wasting money
2	Chor:	<i>ATERI</i>	RESULTS
3	DK:	<i>Nan zafè siren,</i> <i>voye manda</i>	In the case of sirens (on private vehicles), forcing cars out of their way
4	Chor:	<i>ATERI</i>	RESULTS
5	DK:	<i>Kale poster, bloke lari</i>	The president’s posters, blocking the road
6	Chor:	<i>ATERI</i>	RESULTS
7	DK:	<i>Nan zafè BBM, revoke moun</i>	In the case of BBM, firing people by text
8	Chor:	<i>ATERI</i>	RESULTS
9	DK:	<i>Edikasyon</i>	Education
10	Chor:	<i>ALORAL</i>	ALL TALK
11	DK:	<i>Etadedwa</i>	Rule of Law
12	Chor:	<i>ALORAL</i>	ALL TALK
13	DK:	<i>Anvironman</i>	Environment
14	Chor:	<i>ALORAL</i>	ALL TALK
15	DK:	<i>Enerji</i>	Energy
16	Chor:	<i>ALORAL</i>	ALL TALK
17	DK:	<i>Ti doudou cheri</i>	Program “Ti manman cheri”
18	Chor:	<i>ALORAL</i>	ALL TALK
19	DK:	<i>Kreyasyon anplwa</i>	Job creation
20	Chor:	<i>ALORAL</i>	ALL TALK

<sup>20</sup> For a similar case, see Haugerud (1995:99).

In this section of the song, the band references a number of well-known political scandals: the many diplomatic trips taken by the president, government officials using sirens on their private vehicles to more effectively move through traffic, the many large posters of the president advertising his accomplishments, and an incident involving the firing of workers by text message. In line 17, “*Ti doudou cheri*” references the president’s social program titled “*Ti manman cheri*.” This program allotted a small amount of money per month to poor mothers with children enrolled in public schools.<sup>21</sup> Following a list of scandals, DK draws on a number of social and economic issues in need of developmental change, including education, rule of law, the environment, energy, social services, and employment (lines 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, and 19). The band, in response, labels those themes as “all talk,” highlighting the manner in which Martelly had promised change in those areas but did not follow through. While the song does require a degree of shared contextual knowledge, the general message is direct and the references are relatively easy to grasp with minimal socio-political knowledge.

The song directly addresses its target from the start and also indirectly addresses an audience through the poetic structure of the song. With its rhythm and call-and-response structure, the piece beckons an unseen audience to collaborate in sending the *pwen* against the president and his administration. The simplicity of the song’s rhythm and message boosted repeatability. In contrast, another popular song from the 2013 season was catchy in its wordplay but lacked a simple rhythm and poetic structure. The song creatively coded its targeting of Martelly through the use of “*nou pa ka mate li*” (we can’t put up with it any longer) which clearly has phonetic similarities to “*nou pa ka Martelly*” (we can’t support Martelly anymore). Despite general appreciation for the song’s wordplay, its rhythm and lyrics were largely unclear,

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<sup>21</sup> The amount given was approximately 500 HTG a month, per child, about US\$11.63 in 2013. The program was widely criticized for many reasons and appears to have been a failure given that most schools in Haiti are private and thus the majority of those living in poor neighborhoods had little chance of obtaining this assistance.

failing to encourage repeatability. With “Aloral,” the poetic structure was constructed in a way that allowed key terms to be detached, ready for repetition and recontextualization. It is the key terms – *aloral* and *ateri* – that were taken up and recontextualized. As with *xaxaar* poems analyzed by Irvine (1993:120), part of the success of longevity in this case is due to poetic form “which contributes to making its content memorable.” Thus, the song’s message and poetic structure facilitated the detachment, repetition, and recontextualization of the key terms *aloral* and *ateri*.

### **The Political Frame of “Aloral”**

Even before the critique lodged by Brothers Posse debuted, Don Kato had been politically opposed to Martelly. The two sit on opposite ends of the political spectrum within the historical context of Haitian politics. Many claim Martelly to be a Duvalierist. Whether Martelly actively supported or benefited under either of the Duvaliers is open to interpretation and debate, although his past activities point to his sympathizing with Duvalier.<sup>22</sup> On the other end of the political spectrum, Don Kato is known to have had direct involvement in the anti-Duvalierist political party *Lavalas*, particularly under René Préval.<sup>23</sup> Martelly’s opposition to *Lavalas* was clear in his 2002 Carnival *chante pwen* critiquing then-president Aristide’s alleged corruption regarding foreign aid donations of rice; the song became the hit of the 2002 Carnival season. Interestingly, this “*Diri*” (Rice) song was resurrected during the 2013 season as another *pwen* directed at President Martelly given that he too became immersed in a scandal involving imported rice. Radio stations featuring the song used it to point out the contradictions involved in

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<sup>22</sup> See Chapter 1 for more information regarding Martelly’s activities in relation to Duvalier and other Duvalierist social actors.

<sup>23</sup> In the August 2015 elections, he ran as a candidate for Senate representing the Western Department, which includes Port-au-Prince. He ran under the banner of Préval’s former party, “*Verité*” (Truth).

Martelly’s “censoring” of Carnival participants as it indirectly pointed to Martelly’s own historic participation in Carnival *chante pwen* aimed at past governments.

Given their political differences, then, it comes as no surprise that Kato would choose to lodge a strong critique accusing President Martelly of developmental failures and that he would do so during the Carnival season. His critique was particularly effective given the manner in which it drew on calls for change and proceeded to highlight a lack of change; the absence of notable improvements served as powerful evidence as to the accuracy of his interpretation of Martelly’s ineffectiveness. Kato was quoted in *Le Nouvelliste* describing the song’s inspiration:

*L’année dernière, ous avons sorti “Stayle”, pour dénoncer le comportement du président Martelly qui, selon l’avis de plus d’un, se vante à tout bout de champ. Malheureusement, le message a été compris dans un sens comique. C’est regrettable. Pour écrire le meringue de cette année, j’ai essayé une approche participative, et j’ai fait un sondage sur les réseaux sociaux. J’ai demandé à mes contacts de partager avec moi ce qu’ils ont observé cette année dans le pays. La majorité des réponses confirment que le gouvernement fait plus de promesses que de réalisations. Il fait tout à l’oral. Le gouvernement n’a pas atteri, et “Aloral” cible ses points faibles.<sup>24</sup>*

Last year we released “Stayle” to denounce the behavior of President Martelly who, in the opinion of many, boasts at every turn. Unfortunately, the message was understood in a comical way. This is regrettable. Writing the meringue [a musical genre] this year, I tried a participatory approach, and I did a survey on social networks. I asked my contacts to share with me what they have observed this year in the country. The majority of respondents confirmed that the government has made more promises than achievements. He’s just all talk. The government has not brought about results, and “Aloral” targets these points of weakness.

Despite Kato’s references to a “participatory approach” – that is, his attempt to diffuse responsibility for it – the song itself directly addresses the target and does little to code the message. The critique is very direct. The Brothers Posse case, in this way, points to the political advantage of direct addressivity.

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<sup>24</sup> The original text is from the January 28, 2013 edition of *Le Nouvelliste*. As is usually the case with news reports written in French, as most are, it is difficult to know for sure whether the quote is what the interviewee said or represents a translated version, into French.

Ultimately, Martelly's political move of blocking Brothers Posse from participating in the *defile* served as a response to the band's *pwen*, confirming, for many, the veracity of the accusations. Indeed, news of Martelly's decision to exclude the band spread like wildfire through the media and brought heightened attention to, commentary on, and sympathy for the band. Radio stations often critical of the government played "Aloral" constantly, far more often than any other song. This repetition of the song, coupled with considerable attention to the topic on political commentary programs and in day-to-day interactions, helped to further the extent to which people sang along and sympathized with the band. Many pointed to the president's act of banning groups from participating as a sign of his dictatorial tendencies, a critique repeated long after the Carnival season ended.<sup>25</sup> The song's poetic structure and this socio-political context both favored the sloganization process, which in turn helped to solidify "Aloral" as the hit of the 2013 Carnival season.

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<sup>25</sup> This was also one of the events highlighted by HR Org members in accusing Martelly of desiring to become the next dictator of Haiti.



Figure 4: *Le Nouvelliste* Illustration Featuring *Aloral*



*“Artist, your float has not ateri, no”  
“I’m not surprised; all their promises were aloral”<sup>26</sup>*

As we have seen, detachability favored *aloral*’s transformation into a slogan as individuals creatively adapted it to fit a variety of social contexts, some of which were explicitly political in nature, others not. These recontextualizations indirectly indexed the original context and target. This indexing was politically productive in aligning speakers in opposition to the president. Although the indexical relationship to the original critique was widely recognized, its usage was constrained by political partisanship, as will be seen below.

<sup>26</sup> This illustration appeared on the cover of *Le Nouvelliste* on February 6, 2013. It was created by artist Jerry Boursiquot (Bousiko).

## **The Social Life of *Aloral***

During and immediately following the 2013 Carnival season, *aloral* could be heard in everyday interactions in the form of simple jokes-as-accusations that something was “just talk.” My ethnographic research on the activities and discussions at the HR Org, the Youth Org, and attention to prominent radio commentary programs also pointed to the circulation and evolving social life of *aloral* as politically significant. The data presented here come out of participation in these two contexts rather than from systematic observations of a sample population or researcher elicitation.<sup>27</sup>

Use of the *aloral* slogan was most notable at the HR Org, given their explicit opposition to President Martelly and their frequent public denunciations of both his actions and inactions. During weekly staff meetings, I observed a steady increase in recontextualizations following the Brothers Posse Carnival controversy. For example, during one weekly meeting, Yves interjected “*Aloral!*” in response to a comment made by Theodore regarding President Martelly’s attempts to attract investment to the country through a program advertising Haiti as “Open for Business” (in English). In doing so, Yves replicated the call-and-response structure of the song. Both Yves and a few other members giggled in response and the conversation continued. While this particular occurrence did not elicit extensive feedback, it was clear that fellow participants recognized the interdiscursive and indexical relationship to a source. This scene was repeated at various times and in different conversational contexts within the organization, giving rise to increasing levels of reaction and interaction, such as giggles, laughs, jokes, and rejoinders.

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<sup>27</sup> For this reason, the analysis necessarily remains incomplete. Given that I did not attend to uses of *aloral* prior to the period in question, I cannot definitively say that it did not have a social life even before the emergence of the Brothers Posse critique. I do believe, however, that the manner of recontextualizations, reactions to them, and the metadiscursive analyses of *aloral*’s post-Carnival usage point to a significant shift in usage even if it did have a pre-Carnival existence. In addition, my discussions about this project with local Haitians July-August 2014, signaled to me that the shift in *aloral* usage was indeed significant.

In other cases, the alignment with the source critique and target was more indirect as *aloral* was mobilized as a joke in non-political contexts. This was the case at the HR Org on a morning when the printer was malfunctioning. The intern in charge of printing copies of the previous week's meeting notes was unable to do so. As she made her way down the winding staircase to join the rest of us at the meeting table, she announced her inability to print copies for distribution. Seated facing the staircase, Donald, the organization's director, jokingly commented that the notes would be "*aloral*." His use of *aloral* in this instance was a play on the French *à l'oral*, meaning literally that the notes would be read aloud. If not for the sloganization process, this comment would not have sparked the wave of appreciative laughter and rejoinders that it did. Rather, it was the indexing of the Brothers Posse critique that made the joke effective in that moment.

Other instances in which the poetic form of the song was preserved in its recontextualized form came through coupling of *aloral* with *ateri*, often but not exclusively in political discussions. For example, as I sat with a friend one day, a former neighbor, we discussed his employment with an international NGO and the status of the project he was involved in. He expressed a degree of skepticism as to the viability of the project, describing it at one point as: "*Li aloral kounye a, nou poko rive ateri l'*" (It's just talk right now, we haven't yet applied it/produced results). With this statement, he recontextualized the song lyrics to the issue being discussed and assessed with me. The source was indexed by a chuckle and a smile following his statement. Since he was also personally implicated in the project described, the manner in which he claimed the project had "not yet" produced results distanced him slightly from the source *pwen*. At the same time, however, his doubts about the viability of the project hinted at semi-alignment with the source critique—that is, with the idea that results would *likely* be lacking.

The *aloral* slogan was also recontextualized in more creative ways, straying further from the poetic structure of the source. Many uses, particularly on radio commentary programs, drew on *aloral* as a noun modifier, with speakers creatively attaching it to something that they wished to point to as not serious, not applied, or not bringing about results. While this was especially the case with radio stations that were explicitly in opposition to the president, it also came up during news reports and debates on less explicitly oppositional stations. It was especially prominent on programs featuring a range of guest participants – including civil society representatives, elected officials, activists, and political scholars – such as the popular Radio Caraïbes program “*Ranmase*.”<sup>28</sup> Recontextualizations of *aloral* included examples such as “*rejim aloral*” (government that is just talk) and “*kandida aloral*” (candidates who are just talk). More often than not, examples such as these were utilized in reference to President Martelly’s administration or to candidates who were sympathetic to, or aligned with him. In these examples, speakers directly situated themselves in opposition to the president, interdiscursively taking a political stance against his administration.<sup>29</sup>

I also witnessed examples of *aloral* as a noun modifier in contexts less explicitly tied to President Martelly. At another weekly meeting at the HR Org, Alain lamented the decline of moral accountability, saying that there seemed to be a tendency in Haiti to have “*moral aloral*” (morals that are just talk). While he was not directly addressing President Martelly, his use of

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<sup>28</sup> “*Ranmase*” is known in particular for bringing oppositional political figures together to debate.

<sup>29</sup> The recontextualization style of *aloral* is similar but different than the phenomenon described by Richman (1990) as *non pwen* (*pwen* name). While it seems plausible that *aloral* could have become a *pwen* name for President Martelly, instead it became a slogan used primarily as a descriptive modifier. Other *pwen* names were used to reference Martelly, including “*Kale Tèt*,” a creative reversal of the president’s self-appointed nickname, *Tèt Kale*. *Tèt Kale* was a deliberate play on the dual meanings “bald head” – since Martelly himself is bald – and “all the way,” used to describe his administration. Those referring to him as *Kale Tèt* (meaning “to abuse or plunder”) were implying that the president was destroying the country. This represents an example of what Angelique Haugerud (2013:190-91) describes as “political culture-jamming,” in that humor and creative wordplay attempts disrupt the branding messages of politicians by “exposing contradictory meanings.”

*aloral* indexed the source target and aligned his own *pwen* with the source critique.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, discussions concerning immorality were also engaged during the 2010-2011 election, referencing Martelly's flamboyant and morally questionable musical history. Since taking office, discussions focused on the ethics of Martelly's behavior took place in a variety of forums, including within the HR Org itself.

The sloganization of *aloral* led to a metadiscursive analysis of its meaning on a weekly news commentary broadcast, a discussion that focused on what exactly *aloral* refers to. This metadiscursive reflection signaled the extent to which the slogan had circulated. The exchange arose on the weekly political commentary program, "*Hebdomadaire*" on the station RCH 2000. The program billed itself as one that did not simply analyze the news of the week but rather, explained things in such a way that listeners could grasp the subtleties.<sup>31</sup> The program often metadiscursively engaged in political discourse in a way that was not heard on other political commentary programs. In order to accomplish this, a female host acted as a ploy in eliciting unclear or unstated contextual information. In other words, she acted as if she was in constant need of having everything explained to her, in many ways, acting as a child might – or an anthropologist – in probing for explanations. Her male counterpart took on the role of teacher, obliging her requests for more information while also performing signs of annoyance and frustration, such as sighing, talking over her, ignoring her statements or questions, or raising his voice.

The interaction transcribed below is drawn from the April 14, 2013 broadcast with the discussion prompted by news of a declaration made by *Lavalas* political leaders that their party's

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<sup>30</sup> The discussion was in regards to the creation of an electoral council to oversee pending elections. This political "crisis" went on for months as politicians bickered over member appointments. While President Martelly was not directly implicated, he was indeed a key player in the process.

<sup>31</sup> RCH 2000 is owned by politician and former *Lavalas* supporter, Arnel Bélizaire. Bélizaire squarely rested in opposition to President Martelly and his radio station reflected this political stance. The fact of his ownership of the radio station was publically known but not advertised explicitly in the station's content.

campaign slogan would be “*Aba tout kandida aloral*” (Down with all *aloral* candidates). The first excerpt demonstrates the connection made between the everyday discursive use of *aloral* and its connection to the source critique. It features the female host (F) questioning the male host (M) about the campaign slogan in question. While this program in particular rarely included guests, it regularly drew on pre-recorded discourse of those involved in a given story. This particular episode featured an audio clip from a press conference at which the political slogan was announced, a portion not included in the transcript:

### Transcript 6.2: Radio Political Commentary on *Aloral*

1	F:	<i>Ou kwè m pa t tande</i>	Would you believe I haven't heard
2		<i>tèm kanpay yo a.</i>	the campaign theme.
3		<i>kijan tèm kanpay yo a rele,</i>	What are they calling
		<i>te di ankò?</i>	the campaign theme again?
4	M:	<i>Aba tout kandida aloral</i>	Down with all the <i>aloral</i> candidates
5	F:	<i>Ah! Non misyè. Ou wè,</i>	Oh! No sir. You see,
6		<i>si misyè sa tap chèche moun pou l fè kòb</i>	if this guy had found people
7		<i>avèk pawòl aloral li a</i>	to make money with his talk of <i>aloral</i>
8		<i>menm si li pa t soti nan kanaval</i>	even if he didn't take part in Carnival
9		<i>li ta ka fè kòb</i>	he would be able to make money
10		[ <i>menm se yon...</i>	[even it's a ...
11	M:	[ <i>yo mande popilasyon an</i> ]	[They're asking the population]
12		<i>pou bay tout moun ki</i>	to get rid of all the people who are
13		<i>aloral kanè nan eleksyon</i>	<i>aloral</i> in the election

Here F elicits the campaign slogan from M in line 3 and reacts to it with exaggerated shock and confusion in line 5. She highlights the source critique and author of *aloral*, arguing that Don Kato, and the band more generally, should be making money from the frequent recontextualizations of *aloral* (lines 6-9). In this way, she implies that Brothers Posse are not only responsible for the slogan, but are the owners of it. This discussion is a clear sign of the extent to which the *aloral* slogan had circulated and the degree to which recontextualizations continued to index the source critique. Following this interaction, M continued with an analysis

of the news, refusing to entertain further discussion of *aloral* until later on in the program, when the following exchange occurred:

**Transcript 6.3: Radio Political Commentary on *Aloral* (continued)**

1	F:	<i>Pierre-Louis, gon lòt bagay ankò</i>	Pierre-Louis, one other thing
2		<i>eh ki kandida ki aloral sa yo?</i>	Um what candidates are <i>aloral</i> ?
3		<i>bon koman fè pawòl sa yo?</i>	well why are they talking this way?
4		<i>Ki sa sa vle di?</i>	What does that mean?
5		<i>Kòmsi tout kandida</i>	It's like all the candidates
		<i>ka tap pale nan bouch</i>	are able to talk with their mouths
6	M:	<i>E pa nan bouch ou pale?</i>	And it's not with your mouth you talk?
7	F:	<i>Non tout... kòmsi yo pa di gen anyen,</i>	No, all... it's like they're not saying anything,
		<i>yo pap fè anyen</i>	they're not going to do anything
8		<i>m pa konprann koman w fè tout moun</i>	I don't know how you make everyone
9		<i>[pran pawòl misye a</i>	[take up this guy's talk
10	M:	<i>Yo di nou moun aloral la]</i>	[They're saying people who are <i>aloral</i> ]
11		<i>se lè yon moun ap di</i>	are people who say things like
12		<i>map fè si, map se la</i>	I'll do that, I'm like that
13		<i>map... map voye anpil timoun lekòl</i>	I'm...I'll send a lot of kids to school
14		<i>epi li pa fè anyen</i>	and then he/she doesn't do anything

In this segment, F acts confused and pushes to understand the meaning of *aloral* in its widely circulated form (lines 1-5). She begins with a neutral interpretation, from the French *à l'oral*, which is quickly rejected by M as inaccurate and ridiculous (line 6). After a brief, generalized, and politically neutral example of how a person who is *aloral* might act (lines 11-12), M utilizes mock reported speech to draw on the most frequently repeated example, one also cited in the source critique: Martelly's promise to provide free schooling to all children (line 13). By indirectly referencing the target through this reported speech, M draws on his previous statements – presented as politically neutral with an unspecified context – to imply that the free-schooling example is of the same sort. This example of Martelly's campaign promise, and the evaluation of it as *aloral*, is by no means politically neutral. Citing the example serves to directly align M's on-air persona with the source critique against Martelly.

As is demonstrated in the examples outlined above, “Aloral” by Brothers Posse had considerable success in making its way into everyday discourse. Speakers recontextualized the song’s lyrics in their everyday interactions and, in doing so, they forged interdiscursive ties, signaling its circulation as a slogan, with or without replication of the poetic structure of the song. While the entextualization process of *aloral* allowed the song to be detached in some ways from its original context, subsequent recontextualizations also retained an interdiscursive relationship to the political stance expressed in the original critique.

Despite widespread repetition and creative recontextualizations, the slogan’s use was not limitless. In particular, those politically aligned with the president and his administration did not utilize the *aloral* slogan. Indeed, government officials sympathetic to the president occasionally spoke on the radio metadiscursively complaining about the prevalence of *aloral* as a slogan. Beyond this usage, however, there was a careful avoidance of it, as will be seen in Martelly’s public response. Thus, due to the lingering interdiscursive link to the original critique, those mobilizing recontextualizations of *aloral* were necessarily taking a political stance in relation to the president and indirectly participating in critiquing his administration. Political partisanship was therefore embedded in the slogan despite the indirection it carried and the degree of plausible deniability it afforded. The transformation of a *pwen* into a critical slogan created a concise but indirect way for speakers to voice opposition to Martelly while maintaining a degree of plausible deniability. In Erving Goffman’s (1981) terms, speakers took on the role of animator but not author. The transformation of *aloral* from a *pwen* to a critical slogan created a concise but indirect critique, the use of which allowed individuals to participate in a collective – albeit diffused – act of sending a *pwen* against the president. While the above examples of the *aloral* slogan are not meant to be representative, they do serve to hint at the various ways in which



individuals mobilized and responded to the slogan. Recontextualizations of the slogan represent sites of the political through which contestation and collaboration were simultaneously enacted. In the final section, I address the topic of President Martelly's public response to the *aloral* slogan, a crucial moment in the process of defining the slogan's public meaning and encouraging continued circulation.

### **Failed Denial: The Branding of an "Aloral" President**

While circulation through the sloganization process was an important factor in defining the slogan's publicly recognized meaning, President Martelly's public responses were also important. In the first, he justified his exclusion of Brothers Posse from the official Carnival parade on the grounds that their song was "inconsistent" with the Carnival theme.<sup>32</sup> In doing so, he did not follow the socially valued manner in which a target should "gather" (*ranmase*) a *pwen*. Rather than responding in kind by means of another *pwen*, Martelly directly addressed the *pwen* by taking official action against the band, later stating that the song did not bother him on a personal level.

Many Haitians dismissed Martelly's rationales, claiming that he was censoring public expression. The public critique of his response parallels the example given by Richman (1990) in which an American ambassador and Aristide – who was, at that time, the president-elect – went head-to-head, publicly sending *pwen* aimed at one another. In a subsequent public address, the ambassador attempted to "explain" his intentions in an effort to correct what he saw as misinterpretations of his use of Kreyòl proverbs. His directness was interpreted by many as "accepting responsibility for the very thing the thrower of *pwen* strategically avoids" (121):

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<sup>32</sup> The 2013 Carnival theme was *Ann Pote Kole: Yon Ayisyen, Yon Pye Bwa* (Let's Bring Them Together: One Haitian, One Tree).

essentially, his response was read as admitting defeat. Ultimately, Martelly's response promoted the social circulation and sloganization of *aloral* precisely because his move to exclude the band was read as a sign of the critique's accuracy.

Martelly's second public response came several weeks after Carnival, and was replayed and analyzed by nearly all major news commentators. The newsworthiness and repetition of his statements further demonstrated the degree to which the slogan had come to brand him and his administration as ineffective and all talk.<sup>33</sup> This public declaration, more than simply a second response to the same *pwen*, was aimed at the Brothers Posse's original critique as well as the *aloral* slogan in its broadly circulated form. It was widely read as a sign that the slogan had gotten under his skin and that he could not let it go. In Transcript 6.4, I have divided his speech into five sections for easy referencing in the analysis that follows:<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> On the topic of branding, see Lempert and Silverstein (2012).

<sup>34</sup> Transcribed from Radio Kiskeya's commentary program "Interêt Publique" airing March 2, 2013. The same speech was aired on a number of different radio stations.

## Transcript 6.4: President Martelly's Response to *Aloral*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>1 <i>Nou gen jodi a yon gouvènman<br/>ki vle sèvi peyi a,<br/>ki vle sèvi popilasyon.<br/>Paske tèt kale<br/>pa vin pou pèdi,<br/>paske ou pa ka kale tèt kale.<br/>Tèt kale ap ba nou developman tèt kale.<br/>Sak pa kontan, anbake.</i></p>                                       | <p>We have today a government<br/>that wants to serve the country,<br/>that wants to serve the population.<br/>Because <i>tèt kale</i> [referring to himself]<br/>does not come to lose,<br/>because you can't beat me [<i>tèt kale</i>].<br/><i>Tèt kale</i> will give us development <i>tèt kale</i> [all the way].<br/>Those that aren't happy, can leave.</p>                                     |
| <p>2 <i>Nou pral ateri, nap ateri alekri.<br/>Nap ateri sou teren an, sou papye,<br/>nan tèt ti moun yo<br/>nan vant moun, nan pòch moun.<br/>Paske lè m ba w travay<br/>mwen met lajan nan pwoch ou.<br/>Lè m ba w edikasyon,<br/>mwen met konesans nan tèt ou.<br/>Nap ateri.</i></p> | <p>We are going to <i>ateri</i>, we're going to <i>ateri</i> writing.<br/>We're going to <i>ateri</i> on the ground, on paper,<br/>into the heads of children,<br/>in people's stomachs, in people's pockets.<br/>Because when I give you work,<br/>I'm putting money in your pocket.<br/>When I'm giving you education,<br/>I'm putting knowledge in your head.<br/>We're going to <i>ateri</i>.</p> |
| <p>3 <i>Se nòm al pou yo di m pa ateri,<br/>paske kòb leta pa sèvi<br/>pou achte bildin miyami ankò.<br/>Se nòm al pou yo di m pa ateri<br/>paske leta pa peye nèg<br/>pou al fè pwopagann,<br/>pou achte mèsedès ankò.</i></p>   | <p>It's normal for people to say that I haven't <i>ateri</i>,<br/>because state money is not being used<br/>to buy buildings in Miami anymore.<br/>It's normal for them to say I haven't <i>ateri</i><br/>because the state is not paying people<br/>to create propaganda,<br/>to continue buying Mercedes Benzes.<br/>They say we aren't going to <i>ateri</i>.</p>                                  |
| <p>4 <i>Yo di nou pa ateri.<br/>Nou pa repon dirèk<br/>paske kòm chèf leta,<br/>nou pa ka rantr nan yon polemik.<br/>Nèg kap pale nou mal.<br/>Moun kap pale nou mal,<br/>se dwa w pou pale nou mal.<br/>Bondye ba w bouch pou pale.<br/>Pale pale w, pale pale w, ou mèt pale.</i></p> | <p>We don't respond directly<br/>because as the leader of the country,<br/>we can't enter into a polemic.<br/>Men can talk bad about us.<br/>People can talk bad about us,<br/>it's your right to talk bad.<br/>God gave you a mouth to talk.<br/>Talk your talk, talk your talk, you can talk.</p>   |
| <p>5 <i>Moun kap pale yo<br/>se pale yo konn pale.<br/>Nou menm, nou konn chante,<br/>nou konn travay.</i></p>  | <p>People who are talking,<br/>they're talkers, they know how to talk.<br/>Ourselves, we know how to sing,<br/>we know how to work.</p>   |

Martelly's response includes a direct refutation of the *aloral pwen* in (2), drawing on *ateri* to claim that his administration would bring about results. In (4), he clumsily denies this directness, presumably as a way to "save face" or control potential interpretations of his discourse as direct and therefore inept. Yet his attempt to deny accusations reads as blundering and defensive in light of the interdiscursive link to the original critique made in (2).

The failure of this response, in competitive *pwen* terms, is compounded by its attempt to do too much. Martelly also tried to respond to the original *pwen* by sending a *pwen* back at his opponents in (3) and (5). The *pwen* in (3) is clearly directed at Don Kato, indexing scandals that erupted during Kato's time with the Préval administration, when government funds were said to have been used to buy expensive cars and houses in Miami. In (5), Martelly shifts his aim to a larger public that is repeating and recontextualizing the *aloral* slogan, marked by references to "people," "men," and "you." On an aesthetic level, his *pwen* attempts do not meet performance criteria; they are too long-winded and repetitive. Instead of successfully collecting or gathering the *pwen*, Martelly's response was widely read as overly defensive.

What is particularly interesting about this response is that, despite utilizing *ateri* repeatedly and thereby directly indexing the source critique, not once did Martelly utter "*aloral*." This indicates the degree to which vocalizing the *aloral* slogan had become tantamount to taking a stance in opposition to the Martelly administration. This is consistent with the general avoidance of the slogan by government officials sympathetic to the president mentioned previously. Thus, *aloral* was politically productive in that its usage had become a form of stance-taking, with recontextualizations differentially mobilized based on political partisanship.

## **Conclusion**

In this analysis, I have traced the social life of *aloral* as it transformed via the sloganization process. In its transformation, *aloral* went from a singular, direct critique to a repeatedly recontextualized indirect reference signaling a political stance in relation to the president. In the process, the *aloral* slogan interdiscursively maintained its link to the source

critique and the political partisanship entailed therein. Despite broad recognition of the slogan's meaning, the partisanship embedded in the *aloral* slogan resulted in differential use of it.

In an environment where politics are contentious and ambiguities abound, critiques are an important part of day-to-day political engagement through which actors attempt to control how they and others are understood. Through the verbal genre of *pwen*, Haitian actors vie for public appreciation of their skill in delivering effective critiques and responding to critiques in kind. Despite the use of humor and wordplay, this discursive competition is not merely for play, as it carries the potential to have pragmatic effects for those involved. The sloganization process through which a critique takes on a more diffuse existence in everyday discourse serves to amplify the political consequences entailed in the critiques as a form of contestation.

Slogans, whether reflecting pre-existing sentiments or creating new ones, serve to organize a public and its politics. However temporary a slogan's social life may be, the sloganization process represents a means through which both unity and political divisions are created and/or maintained.<sup>35</sup> In this way, it represents both a form of political contestation – calling into question existing power relations and social hierarches – as well as a means through which collaborative political unity is tentatively organized. Sifting through the layers of ambiguity that exist in day-to-day politics, slogans provide clarity and simplified interpretations of actors, events, and processes. This is particularly effective in the realm of development given that all Haitians desire change in the form of tangible improvements. To talk of change is not enough. Talk is only legitimated through concrete action. Implying that slogans create simplified and widespread interpretations is not to deny the existence of contestation; in fact, contestation plays a key role in the process. The indexical and interdiscursive relationships created through

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<sup>35</sup> Here I follow Jackson (2013) and Haugerud (1995, 2013) in their attention to the creation and maintenance of political unity and divisions through discursive means.

the sloganization process are “recognized and ratified by a collective based on some metacommunity awareness” (Jackson 2013:152). In some instances, a slogan’s usage creates interdiscursive moments through which a sense of *communitas* emerges, signaling a shared bond of political partisanship. In other instances, speakers use it as a political weapon against opponents or as a means to highlight political differences. In this way, sloganization is a process through which words or phrases become a pre-packaged means for expressing complex political sentiments.

For a historically marginalized population, the sloganization process also provides a means for a larger public to engage actively in political matters.<sup>36</sup> Rather than simply being a descriptive repetition of politics “as they are” – that is, internalization of conventional, albeit oppositional, discourses in relation to power holders and social hierarchies – recontextualizations of critical slogans such as *aloral* are politically productive in that they actively (re)configure social relations, both interpersonally and nationally. Political critiques, then, have the power to define issues and “create spaces of action that position people with respect to them” (Silverstein 2005b:1).

Ultimately, the political productivity embedded in the sloganization process directly contradicts the talk/action ideology entailed in the *aloral* critique. In mobilizing the *aloral* slogan, individuals did not simply repeat and unreflexively “buy into” an understanding of Martelly’s development efforts as ineffective; they actively took a stance and aligned themselves politically with one particular interpretation of the president, thereby participating in defining understandings of him as all talk. To be sure, the critique of Martelly as ineffective was not initiated by the Brothers Posse song. Interpretations of this sort had circulated nearly from the

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<sup>36</sup> This cultural process has led many Haitian scholars to interpret music and *pwen* as a means of “power” for a largely disempowered population, especially in economic terms. See Averill (1997), McAlister (2002), and J. Smith (2001, 2004) for particularly prominent examples of this scholarly interpretation.

moment Martelly took office in 2011. What the Brothers Posse song offered, rather, was a pithy version of this critique, readily recontextualized and repeated, and carrying significant indexical and interdiscursive weight in the process. It was only through attention to a variety of dispersed discursive moments, highlighting broader connections or links between instances of recontextualization, that the political productivity of the *aloral* slogan was revealed and its pragmatic effect identified. The scattered moments within which the slogan was recontextualized were not only politically productive on an individual level, in signaling a political stance, but also became, collectively, an effort to “reorder” the social and political environment “around the fact of their occurrence” (Silverstein 2005b:4). In this way, individuals collectively participated in, and contributed to, an antagonistic political environment. While it remains unclear whether the *aloral* slogan will continue to be a significant indicator of political partisanship in the future, what is clear is that the sloganization of *aloral* momentarily branded Martelly’s administration as ineffective.

## **Conclusion**

This dissertation analyzed the politically productive role of discourse in Haiti. Focusing on development as a topic of conversation as well as a domain of activity aimed at social improvement, I highlighted the ways in which politics and development are intimately intertwined. Even before the influx of aid to Haiti following the 2010 earthquake, intense attention, both by those outside and those residing within the country, had long sought to address the question of “What’s wrong with Haiti?” Discourse engaging ideas about development and practices associated with it, from this starting point, seek to diagnose deficiencies, identify historical causes, and envision solutions in the form of directed social change. Development represents a temporal frame, implicating not only the past in relation to the present but also imagined futures. In addition, it is also understood as an ethical mandate attending to improvement as a social good. In this way, many Haitians are drawn to development precisely because it encapsulates an embodied sense of social and economic insecurity while simultaneously feeding on understandings of declining conditions and an overwhelming desire for positive social improvement.

By focusing on discourses of this sort, I attempted to broadly address the question of what development accomplishes for those that engage in it. Attending to development as a discourse, as emerging from interactions between individuals with particular interests and commitments, I approached development as a category of practice. From this view, development



is not simply a set of activities associated with circumscribed institutions or within the development industry itself, but carries meaning beyond those institutional activities as individuals discursively engage with it as a form of directed social change. This approach necessitates attention to interaction and discourse as the sites through which meaning and social action emerge. Here I drew on linguistic anthropological understandings as to the role of language as not just mediating or representing culture but also contributing to the production and reproduction of cultural forms. Discourse itself is not merely a disconnected phenomenon, an agent in and of itself. Instead, it is the product of talk between and among situated individuals, individuals who have varied interests, understandings, and motivations.

Through attention to culture and social action as emerging from social interaction, the individual interests of those involved necessarily come into play, including political commitments. Discourses about development, as was shown in the preceding chapters, is a form of political contestation, what Li (2007) refers to as a “practice of politics.” Through discussions and debates, participants actively negotiated social relations, taking part in establishing, asserting, challenging and reinforcing power and status differences in relation to both their immediate interlocutors as well as those they sought to address, such as political power holders (Lutz & Abu-Lughod 1990). The deliberative practices engaged in this process represent sites of the political and ultimately had pragmatic effects on social and political relations.

The research presented here was primarily anchored in two specific sites within which deliberation on the topic of development took place on a regular basis: the HR Org and the Youth Org. Through attention to situated moments of talk within and beyond those organization, this research offers empirical specificity regarding the precise ways in which politics and development are entangled in the Haitian context. As local Haitian organizations, each site

offered a contrasting vantage point from which to examine the manner in which participants understood and situated themselves in relation to development as an idea and a set of practices. For the HR Org, this situatedness was primarily based on ideological commitments, that is, members held strong beliefs about justice and human rights in relation to politics and development. Members also held partisan stances in relation to political actors, such as President Martelly. In this way, their ideological and political commitments came into play when discussing and analyzing current events in preparation for their *sensibilizasyon* objectives. Indeed, as was shown, the group's disdain and distrust for political power holders played a major role in how many of the members understood and interpreted current events. Those understandings, in turn, contributed to the interactional dynamics within the organization, with members collectively working to co-construct shared understandings of injustice, cause/effect, declining conditions, and blame for identified "troubles" or deficiencies. The group's deliberative practices worked to reconfigure understandings, political commitments, and social relations on an interpersonal level. As I argued, deliberative practices of this sort represent a site of the political through which members sought to challenge power holders in an effort to radically transform power relations and social hierarchies. The manner in which members masked the politically situated nature of their interpretations served to boost their moral credibility in relation to those actors, institutions, and practices they regularly condemned. In this way, their situated position as residing outside formal political arenas worked in conjunction with the mobilization of moralizing discourses pertaining to human rights and injustices, providing members a moral high ground from which to lodge political critiques.

Debates about historical events and processes were similarly affected by individual interests and commitments and also represented a site through which political interests were

negotiated. Interactionally, participants debated interpretations of the past with the explicit and tacit goal of more accurately understanding history. Yet, as was shown, debates of this sort were less about historical accuracy and more focused on present concerns and social relations.

Understanding Haiti's Duvalier past, for many, represented a means through which participants sought to reconfigure the present political alignments of others. This was accomplished through temporal alignments of the past with the present, tacitly interpreting the present status of the country as one that was on the verge of falling into another dictatorship. Interpretations such as these were interactionally effective given the various ways in which participants worked to assign themselves a degree of expertise, or the right to speak authoritatively about the past. Interactional moves such as this also worked to depoliticize, or mask the politically partisan stances hinted at in the process of interpreting the past.

In contrast to the HR Org's ideological approach to development and rights advocacy, the Youth Org was pragmatic in how they viewed and understood development and formal political arenas as sets of practices through which they believed social success could be obtained. In many ways, their pragmatic and opportunistic approach can be understood as a logical effect of competitive funding structures pressuring members to conform to donor expectations. Yet, as was shown, group motives and aspirations also played a major role as members sought to retain control of the organization, working within the parameters set by donors but doing so on their own terms and for their own purposes. Planning, preparation, and the performance of various identities in relation to different audiences were the means through which they believed success was possible. Their relationship to the domain of development and electoral processes primarily revolved around observation and mimicry, strategies through which members sought to produce success through performance. Their strategizing efforts – in particular, their mimicry and

attention to projected audience responses – highlighted members’ interpretations as to how development and politics “work” and were necessarily drawn from situated observations obtained from a marginal position in relation to those domains. The manner in which members employed interpersonal political maneuvers was one tied to pragmatics, not necessarily intended as ideological challenges to existing hierarchies and social relations. Instead, they were largely viewed as a means through which the group could obtain access to power and status. The group’s simultaneous engagement in governmental as well as nongovernmental domains also challenges popular assumptions as to the bounded nature of each domain in relation to the other.

Although their pragmatic approach resembled entrepreneurial objectives, the Youth Org’s engagement in domains largely understood to be pro-social, necessitates interrogation of those behaviors easily identified as “corrupt,” particularly members’ use of deception and dissimulation. As I demonstrated in Chapter 5, group members did not side-step ethical concerns; instead, they discursively engaged with them, seeking out ethical affordances that served to justify their actions despite recognition of them as unethical. In this way, from the point of view of members, it remained important to attend to ethical concerns, since identification of their behavior as unethical by non-members could potentially limit success and access to resources and status. This highlights a need to consider the ways in which seemingly corrupt behaviors are indeed understood as unethical, yet justifiably so in the eyes of participants.

Both the HR Org and the Youth Org demonstrated an interest in questions of responsibility, albeit in differing ways. For Youth Org members, the primary concern was an eye to projected audiences, the reception of their performances, and an avoidance of responsibility for behaviors understood as unethical in light of particular political and developmental standards.

In this way, members self-consciously worked to avoid having others assign responsibility to them as reflected in their strategizing efforts. For HR Org members, assigning responsibility to government officials or other power holders – playing a discursive blame game – was the primary goal. Indeed, this was also a major factor in debates about Haiti’s Duvalier past and was at the core of political critiques such as *aloral*. Debates about the past represented efforts to allocate blame in particular ways, while simultaneously serving as a means through which participants tacitly vocalized political commitments. As was shown in the case of *aloral*, political critiques highlight another means through which a blame game was enacted: critiques of this sort often draw on development as fuel for the political fire, assessing the successes and failures of political actors in relation to development. Responsibility, then, is a key lens through which developmental concerns are engaged, politically and pragmatically.

As was shown, both organizations were situated in direct relationship to the general antagonistic political environment characterizing contemporary Port-au-Prince. Within this atmosphere, discourses aimed at political actors, institutions, and practices regularly took the form of critiques, denunciations, and condemnations. Although there is an obvious relationship between “politics” and state institutions, actors, and practices, I drew on a more general definition, focusing on political action as plays of power. Here I followed Lutz and Abu-Lughod’s (1990) focus on the “politics of everyday life.” Although the pragmatic effect of the deliberative practices analyzed here often implicated state institutions, formal political actors, and electoral processes, they also arose in relation to specific actors and situations residing outside formal political arenas.

While the HR Org drew on and contributed to the antagonistic political environment within the country through their *monitoring*, *analiz*, and *sensibilizasyon* activities, the Youth Org

worked to replicate similar political behaviors by mimicking observed strategies and political maneuvers, such as publicly denouncing political actors. In this way, although the HR Org sought to transform power relations through their discursive involvement, the Youth Org drew on similar behaviors as means to access power and status for themselves. They did not necessarily wish to change or alter how political actors and institutions behaved but sought to gain a foothold and place for themselves. Both organizations worked to produce the realities they described, with the HR Org doing so for ideological reasons and the Youth Org for pragmatic ones.

Although this research demonstrated the manner in which pragmatic effects and political action were anchored in direct relation to the specific characteristics of the sites within which they arose, attention to deliberative practices as sites of the political also provide a glimpse into broader social processes and the entanglement of development and politics more generally. To this end, I also drew on sites that went beyond the confines of the two organizations in an attempt to make broader connections to similar discourses at other sites as well as pointing to broader processes such as that of sloganization discussed in the final chapter. As was demonstrated, political critiques represent wars of interpretation in which actors vie for control over how social actors and events are understood and interpreted by a larger Haitian audience. The “success” of a given critique, however, depends not simply on providing a convincing or accurate interpretation. Instead, speakers rely on both the reaction of their target as well as audience uptake of the critique. With critiques focusing on the developmental failures of political actors, the potential for success also increases, especially given the desire by most Haitians for some form of positive social change. In this way, critiques play on general presuppositions identifying development as an ethical mandate. Through the sloganization process –

transforming a political critique to a widespread slogan – complex political sentiments were condensed into pithy catch phrases. Moments of recontextualizations represent sites of the political through which speakers quickly and easily signaled a political stance in relation to specific actors and events. For slogans that circulate more broadly, such as the *aloral* critique, they carry the potential to organize and reconfigure social relations, especially in terms of political actors. They are both a form of political contestation as well as means through which political unity can be collaboratively constructed. In many cases, political critiques magnify the distrust and disdain Haitians have for political leaders, amplifying political antagonisms more generally.

A contradiction also exists in relation to the role of NGOs and development in Haiti and the manner in which many, if not most, Haitians distrust their own government and elected officials. Although NGOs have largely come to replace the role of the state in terms of development activities and service provisions available to the population (Étienne 1997, Schuller 2009), many complain as to the lack of resources or services and a general ineffectiveness of NGOs in the country. Yet, many of those same individuals also condemn government officials as corrupt or consumed by self-serving interests. Fueling political antagonisms through relentless political attacks only serves to further undermine the state's ability to govern and implement effective development solutions. This situation was clearly illustrated immediately following the 2010 earthquake when many Haitians and foreigners alike condemned the Haitian government's lack of response. As the Associated Press reported, the Haitian government received merely one penny out of every aid dollar distributed.<sup>1</sup> Thus, critical understandings of the Haitian government influenced the degree to which foreign aid was made available to the Haitian state,

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<sup>1</sup> Associated Press. 2010. "Haitian government gets just one cent of every aid dollar." *Tampa Bay*, January 27. <http://www.tampabay.com/incoming/haitian-government-gets-just-1-cent-of-every-aid-dollar/1068704>.

directly affecting the ability of the state to respond to the disaster. In turn, the slow and unproductive response of state institutions and actors was mobilized as a justification for side-stepping the state and instead funneling the bulk of aid monies through NGO activities. In effect, assumptions as to the corrupt and ineffective nature of the state became a self-fulfilling prophesy, contributing to the degree to which it *could* be effective.

Thus, antagonistic political relationships can serve to prevent leaders from productively working toward positive social improvements, even as they are critiqued for their inactions. Approaching political leaders with disdain and distrust, then, leads to the assumption that those entering politics are only seeking to advance their own careers or gain personal power. When coupled with acts of political contestation – such as political critiques and denunciations, as were engaged by the HR Org and proposed by Youth Org members – those assumptions become truth for many people and ultimately shape the interpretive lens through which they come to understand social actors, behaviors, and events. Political attacks, even if mobilized by a genuine desire for development and change, also serve to distract and become a vicious cycle through which “attack begets response, which becomes fodder for further attack” (Tannen 1998:66). This case was clearly seen in the *aloral* example.

Political contestation and entrenched antagonisms also carry the potential to bubble up to the level of explicit violence. Although this did not happen during the period of this research, there was always the distinct possibility that it could, further contributing to feelings of insecurity, as was discussed in Chapter 2. Indeed, I witnessed growing concerns as to instability and insecurity, even beyond the organizations examined here, with individual Haitians pointing to media discourses as evidence of those concerns. In those instances, preemptive media reports announcing government actions, such as press conferences on specific topics, even resulted in



vocalized concerns by listening audiences that one not venture out at that time for fear that reactionary violence might follow. This was the case when Martelly announced a press conference to address concerns that he had dual, or even triple, nationality. If accusations proved true, it could lead to a forced resignation given that it was strictly forbidden by the constitution. The power of media and word-of-mouth discourse in this case – especially for those that assumed Martelly was in fact an American citizen – led to heightened concerns as to the likelihood of popular protests and street violence following what many speculated would be an admission of guilt in the matter. As it happened, Martelly used the press conference to further deny accusations, presenting evidence of his passports for journalists to examine and photograph during the conference. A similar situation took place in February 2016 when Martelly’s term was slated to end even despite the fact that failed elections had not produced a successor to take his place. Media reports and commentaries on the part of political opponents were adamant that Martelly would not step down as he was obligated to do, pointing to assumptions as to his intention to maintain power for as long as possible. This discourse was not unlike that presented by HR Org members regarding Martelly’s desire to become the next dictator of Haiti. Despite dire predictions on the part of oppositional political actors, Martelly did in fact step down on the day his mandate expired. The event had been so hyped up by the media, however, that many Haitians remained in their homes and some foreigners left the country in anticipation of violence.<sup>2</sup> Instead of the projected violence and crisis, oppositional political actors worked together to quickly form a temporary coalition government that would facilitate another round of elections within a determined time frame.

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<sup>2</sup> As one friend reported, all was quiet on that Sunday in Port-au-Prince. She also noted that journalists were especially disappointed by the turn of events.

Although the examples cited above did not result in violence as predicted, the social process of producing and reproducing anxiety and distrust by way of political contestation can have, and indeed has had, disastrous consequences for the country. Kivland (2012) and Schuller (2012) point to the important and significant role of street politics, such as “*manifestations*” (protests) and other forms of popular demonstrations, have had throughout Haitian history. More specific instances of street protests and activism, and their consequences, have been explored by James (2010) and Maternowska (2006). James outlines the process through which a handful of individuals with political and personal interests ultimately succeeded in closing down the operations of a development and humanitarian organization by stirring up public resentment through denunciations. Along similar lines, Maternowska points to the process by which public denunciations and rumors, whether justified or not, carried significant consequences for those unfortunate enough to be the target of such discourse. Both cases point to the ways in which antagonisms encouraged and led to political action in the form of denunciations and protests. The potential for feelings of insecurity, distrust, and contempt to have pragmatic force and transform into physical violence cannot be overlooked. Discourse, in this way, carries the potential to aid in this transformation.<sup>3</sup>

Ultimately, my aim was to interrogate the taken for granted assumptions and negative evaluations of the country embedded within discussions focused on interrogating “What’s wrong with Haiti.” In this way, this research pointed to the manifold ways in which Haitians engage

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<sup>3</sup> In many way, oppositional discourses and publicly expressed contempt for Rwandan Tutsis just prior to the 1994 genocide instigated the events that followed. Of course, this example has a long and complicated history of antagonistic relations rooted in colonial practices as opposed to ancient ethnic hatreds. A similar process took place along the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic in 1937. Dominican hatred of Haitians arose through denigrating discourses perpetuated by the Dominican president at the time (Trujillo). As a result, military involvement was unnecessary as Dominicans willingly murdered Haitian neighbors they had previously co-existed with in a relatively peaceful manner. See historian Richard Turits’ (2003) analysis for a more detailed examination of the unfolding events. My point in highlighting these two examples is to bring light to the extreme ways in which discourse can play a powerful role in creating and maintaining antagonistic relations.

politically by way of discourse about development. Deliberative practices in relation to ideas about development, then, carry the potential to play a prominent role in how challenges to power relations and social hierarchies unfold. In this way, although I remain focused on discourse about development and its associated practices as an analytical focal point, I also highlighted the powerful role of discourse and specific deliberative practices as contributing to the production of anxieties regarding conditions in the country and distrust of the intentions of specific power holders. In this way, I have argued that development is a form of political contestation playing an important role in the politically antagonistic environment of the country. This is not to say that discourse itself is to blame for Haiti's underdevelopment but rather, that it contributes to the state of the country in previously unrecognized ways. Haiti's problems are not simply developmental as pertaining to a lack of material and tangible improvements. Nor, however, is the problem one that rests solely on political grounds, such as the result of corrupt individuals working for personal gain regardless of the consequences for the country as a whole. Instead, the problem is much more diffused, with discursive norms and interactions playing a role as well, even among individuals and entities purporting to work in the name of pro-social and apolitical development. Thus, this research points to the need to incorporate attention not just on the failures of development from above, such as donor institutions and foreign involvement in the country, but also at the level of everyday discourse and engagement with questions of development. What this research discovers is that when we look at the everyday, on-the-ground discursive engagement of situated individuals, we see that it plays a politically productive role, one that cannot and should not be ignored.

Through this research, I have attempted to lend empirical specificity to previous understandings as to the role of politics in relation to development. Instead of identifying politics

from a top-down perspective, I have attended to the emergence of meaning and social action as it arises from specific social contexts and interactions. While development can, at times, be utilized as a mask of power, as many post-development critics have assumed, it is also a means through which individuals manage and work to transform power relations and social hierarchies interpersonally and in relation to formal political actors and institutions. Those engaged in discourses and deliberative practices of this sort are, as was shown, active participants as opposed to passive recipients of “development discourse” as a dominant and subordinating ideology. Thus, by shifting definitions of discourse and politics, this research reveals the politically productive role of development in relation to situated individuals and contexts. No longer limited to a priori assumptions as to the ideological connotations of development, focusing on discourse as moments of talk provides a more grounded approach to development as a set of ideas and practices engaged by situated individuals. Relations of power emerge from within social interaction and are actively negotiated by those involved.

This research also challenges the widely held ideology in Haiti that the value of “talk” differs from that of “action.” For many Haitians, dividing talk from action is common sense, and is often mobilized as a political accusation, as the *aloral* slogan suggests. Talk, from this ideology, largely describes, exaggerates, or interprets reality; it remains distinct from the realm of action, through which events, change, and progress are understood to take place. Action is necessarily valued more highly than talk, and talk itself is not recognized as capable of producing action. Given the overwhelming desire of most, if not all, Haitians for social change in some form or another, talk is the domain of demagogues and only action legitimates concerns as to the intentions of social actors working in the name of development.

Yet, even for Haitians who subscribe to this ideology, talk does play a role in relation to action, as it is often viewed as an important starting point to reaching the point of action, or, at least, productive action. Many believe that the practice of analyzing and understanding Haiti's deficiencies can lead to the identification of effective solutions, a first step in the process of bringing about positive social change. Thus, for many Haitians, discourse plays a key role in the developmental process, even if it is not understood to be capable of producing action or having pragmatic force itself. This analysis highlights the various ways in which the line is blurred, with discourse itself producing and reproducing particular social relations and understandings of reality. We should not, as the talk/action ideology implies, assume that talk simply reflects social conditions and realities as they are or as one imagines they should be.

The manner in which this research is useful or insightful largely depends on the audience in question. For academic audiences, I follow a long line of linguistic research pointing to the importance of engaging with questions of language, discourse, and interactional context. I highlight the role of ethnographic methods in uncovering behaviors and discourses that are both highly specific – anchored in particular contexts – while simultaneously making connections between those behaviors and the manner in which they come to have pragmatic effects and (re)produce broader social processes. For scholars of Haiti and those interested in development more generally, this research highlights the importance of attending to discourse and language in understanding how and why individuals engage with ideas about development and development practices. Without attention to discourse as moments of talk, we run the risk of assigning a priori meaning in ways that may not be entirely accurate or called for. This, in turn, can severely hamper examinations as to *how* individuals understand development and development activities, and *why* they engage in discourses and activities of this sort. The important point is that due to

the involvement of a variety of differentially situated individuals, interests and motivations will necessarily vary accordingly. It is only through close attention to discourse and interaction, I argue, that useful understandings emerge. A linguistic anthropological approach to language as social action, then, carries the potential to elicit empirical specificity regarding the entanglement of development and politics. Without resorting to the reductionist assumptions Yarrow (2011) accuses post-development scholars of making regarding how, and in whose interests politics function, this attention to discourse as moments of talk can be intellectually productive. When coupled with a broad understanding of politics as tied to power relations more generally, research of this sort can reveal the specific means through which individuals seek to contest and transform existing hierarchies and relations within the politics of everyday life.

For development workers or activists seeking to utilize academic research to affect positive social change in countries such as Haiti, the implications of this research serve to further complicate such endeavors. My hope is that this research highlights the importance of integrating attention to discursive behaviors. In terms of conceiving and implementing effective solutions to the many developmental problems in the country, it remains important to remember that context matters. Without attention to context and interactions, the best we can hope for is ineffective solutions with little social impact. Yet, as many scholars have demonstrated, rarely do development projects result in little or no social effect. Instead, unintended consequences abound, even in cases of “failed” projects (Ferguson 1994, James 2010, Schuller 2007b). Thus, more careful attention to context and the individual interests of those involved remains necessary, in order to, at the very least, avoid further amplifying existing – or creating new – social problems.

At the same time, this research demonstrated that debates about development and development activities in Haiti are a vibrant and productive social arena. Haitians are not merely passive recipients of aid nor are they incapable of examining social processes, interrogating historical events, or imagining possible futures. They are, instead, active participants in the construction and production of the social realities within which they live on a day-to-day basis. They also seek, as was clear from the Youth Org example, to maintain control of their own futures. In this way, we need to not only listen to what local populations are saying regarding developmental desires and aspirations but also pay attention to the social and political relations within which they come to understand their realities and everyday circumstances. In this way, we would be better positioned to assist in working toward tangible and positive social change.

## APPENDIX 1

### Transcription conventions

- = Latched speech where one speaker ends and another picks up immediately with no pause between but no noticeable overlap of speech. Always comes in pairs (the ending of one speaker and the beginning of the next).
- An utterance that is cut off by the speaker. Examples include disfluencies, self-corrections, and stuttering.
- :
- Indicates a stretching, or elongation of the immediately preceding sound
- ...
- Brief pause
- (x) Any speech in parenthesis indicates that I'm not certain as to what is stated, usually this is due to overlapping speech. If a question mark is included within the parenthesis, it represents a moment when I am unable to make out what is stated.
- (1.0) Any numbers in parenthesis indicate a pause and the length of the pause.
- [<sub>x</sub><sup>x</sup>]
- Brackets across speakers indicate overlapping speech. That is, two speakers were talking at the same time. The brackets indicate when the overlap began and ended.
- (h) Indicates laughter or chuckling within or between the utterances of a single speaker.
- ((laughs)) Indicates participant(s) was laughing or chuckling but no utterances accompanied the laughter.
- [x] Indicates author notes on the interaction.
- “x” Quotation marks indicate reported or projected speech
- xxx Underlined text marks words or phrases in French (as opposed to Kreyòl)



XX Capitalization marks emphasis. Emphasis is only marked when significant to the analysis at hand.

*Note:* Periods and commas are utilized as they would normally be used for written English, as a means to ease reading and understanding the English gloss.

## APPENDIX 2

### Linguistic Debates about Creole Languages

What does it mean for a language to be a creole? This question has an extensive and controversial history, not only in the discipline of linguistics, but also among populations that speak so-called creole languages.<sup>1</sup> The current status of creole studies, largely within the discipline of linguistics, rests on a fundamental, seemingly irreconcilable divide centered on the question of how to properly define the boundary of what distinguishes a creole language from a non-creole language. It remains unclear, for instance, whether, or to what extent, a number of African languages also played a role in a creole language's development alongside European languages.<sup>2</sup> The most significant disagreement lies between those who approach creoles as marked by structural differences and those that approach them as marked by specific socio-historical circumstances within which they arose, namely, slavery and plantation economies (Baptista 2005). On the structural side of the debate, linguists argue that creole languages were born under conditions of particular kinds of linguistic pressure and resulted in languages distinctly marked by those conditions. For instance, it is believed by some that the conditions of slavery, in which newly acquired slaves came from different language communities, produced an

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<sup>1</sup> For more information regarding Kreyòl's genesis and theories of creole genesis more generally, see Baptista (2005), Bickerton (1973, 1975, 1992, 1998, 1999, 2004), Chaudenson (2001), DeCamp (1971), DeGraff (1999, 2003a, 2003b, 2004), Lefebvre (2004), McWhorter (1997, 1998, 2003), Métellus (1998), Mufwene (2001, 2003), Palmié (2006, 2007a, 2007b), Siegel (2004), Singler (1992), Thomason (2001, 2002, 2003), and Thomason & Kaufman (1988).

<sup>2</sup> In the context of Haiti, linguist Claire Lefebvre (2004:7-36) concentrates her efforts on making connections between Kreyòl and Fongbe, a member of the Kwe language family.

environment where all newly arriving slaves were required to quickly adapt to the communicative norm, a local pidgin, or a budding creole. There is little agreement, however, as to what the exact linguistic pressures of this situation were, especially given the diversity of colonial relations with slave populations and significant transformations of those relationships over the course of several hundred years. Did slave masters simplify the grammatical and lexical features of their own languages in such a way as to communicate more effectively with slaves? Were the budding languages solely the result of communication among African slaves themselves? By what process did the language expand and develop? Scholars actively disagree about the specific linguistic evidence slaves populations were subjected to, if there was an absence of linguistic evidence from which to adequately learn the colonial language (Bickerton 1975) or if creoles inherently developed from a pidgin-to-creole cycle.<sup>3</sup>

Even despite the clear line between those scholars that attribute structural differences and those that assert socio-historical differentiation, scholars on both sides actively debate the question of creole genesis and influence, taking up different stances regarding superstrate versus substrate influence, drawing distinctions, in some cases between influence exerted primarily on a creole's lexicon versus its syntax. Some argue that European languages were more likely the superstrate language – the more influential language in the development of a creole – as opposed to the substrate language. Different arguments on the issue include: dominant or equal substrate influence (McWhorter 1997), superstrate feature acquisition as determined by substrate forms (Mufwene 2001), and creole development resulting almost completely as a result of vernacular

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<sup>3</sup> Bickerton's theory was expanded later as the *Language Bioprogram Hypothesis*. See McWhorter (1997) for an overview and critique of Bickerton's theory. While Bickerton's theory has largely been dismissed by most creole scholars, he continued to actively engage and assert his views, and his disappointment at not being taken seriously, in published debates (DeGraff/Bickerton 2004; Bickerton/Singler 1992; Bickerton/Thomason 1992).

forms of European languages interacting and competing within the colonial environment (Chaudenson 2001).

Even historians argue over the specific socio-historical conditions and patterns of slave dispersal during the extensive period of colonial plantation economies of the Caribbean and elsewhere. The difficulty in determining from which ethnic and language groups African slaves derived is clearly demonstrated in the work of historian Philip D. Curtin (1969). He argues that often slaves were brought to particular ports only to be sold and taken elsewhere, the records for which remain incomplete. Despite this, John K. Thornton (1998:305-10) argues that during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the period corresponding to the Haitian Revolution, most slaves came from the Kongo region, due to a civil war raging in the area of central to western Africa. He also argues that splintered sovereignty in Igbo country of West Africa, caused it to be the second largest supplier of slaves to the Americas (310).<sup>4</sup> In linguistic terms, the gaps in historical records make it difficult to pinpoint which languages or language families were predominant influences on the development of specific creole languages. This disagreement has laid fertile ground for linguists to extrapolate dramatically different theories of genesis and development. Stephan Palmié (2007b:181) synthesizes the problem in asserting that, due to a lack of concrete historical evidence, “the vague and ambiguous nature of the historical record for the Caribbean has given linguists near-unlimited interpretive leeway in concocting explanations for the presence or absence of creole languages in certain regions.” For example, while John McWhorter (1997) argues that creoles were likely already in use along the coast of Africa, spreading to the New World through voluntary and forced migration, Robert Chaudenson (2001) and Salikoko Mufwene (2001) argue that creole languages were able to develop slowly in the initial, relatively

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<sup>4</sup> Thornton argues that Kikongo was “in all likelihood, the most commonly spoken first language” in Haiti (1998:321).

stable period during the sixteenth century, before the slave trade expanded dramatically to the levels of trade we typically associate with the region. The level of brutality and turnover, at that point, necessitated greater importation of Africans to the New World. Their argument posits that the so-called creole languages were fully expanded before the volume of the trade escalated. Derek Bickerton (1975) attempts to explain the development of creoles from an understanding of plantations as constantly in flux. In his view, fluctuating conditions resulted in unique linguistic pressures that can only be attributed to universal or biologically tied processes of language development and learning. Children, from this view, were the motivating force for the development of creole languages as they had few linguistic models to draw on and relied instead on biological universals. Ultimately, what the diversity of theories on this issue reveals is that there exists little agreement as to what exactly differentiates a creole language from other languages, including their genesis, development process, and the socio-historical conditions within which they developed. Despite the absence of definitive historical evidence, creole scholars have continued to treat languages they have identified as creoles as exceptional in relation to other, non-creole languages.

The intellectual process of categorization and differentiation itself is distinctly connected to a historical legacy of slavery and racism (Degraff 2005:534). The label of creole is based on the belief that creoles are exceptional cases of language genesis and transmission, the result of a so-called “catastrophic” clash of cultures. As languages born under conditions of considerable duress and among populations who did not previously share a language, creole languages have long been characterized as relatively simplified languages.<sup>5</sup> One common implication that results

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<sup>5</sup> One theory of language transmission and development treats pidgins as early, unelaborated forms of creoles. From this view, creoles develop from pidgins as they became a native language for a given population. See, for example, Foley (1988). Both pidgins and creoles have largely been stereotyped as simplified languages in relation to non-pidgin and non-creole languages.

from such a label is that creole languages have structural deficiencies that ultimately limit their capacity for future development of more complicated expressive discourse. This ideological determination reflects many of the long-held beliefs of Haitians themselves: that Kreyòl is not capable of being used for “advanced” and “intellectual” purposes. In his influential work seeking to discredit those ideologically-rooted, and ultimately racist, beliefs that make up “creole exceptionalism,” linguist Michel Degraff (2005:545-6) focuses on five of the most common myths: (1) creoles are a degenerate offshoot of European ancestry languages; (2) due to structural deficiencies, as implied in being a degenerate offshoot, “decreolization” is both necessary and inevitable; (3) creoles are “special hybrids with exceptional genealogy”; (4) creoles have an “abnormal transmission” in comparison with other languages; and finally, (5) creole languages demonstrate the earliest stage of language development, as early forms of “protolanguage” and are thus “living fossils of human language at its evolutionary incipience.” The myth that creole languages are “degenerate offshoots of European” languages is most often demonstrated, in the specific case of Kreyòl, when it is referred to as “Haiti’s language of broken French” (549). What is often ignored, however, is the distinctly different grammatical structures, with some aspects being *more complex* than those of the French language: “It can be argued that the mental processes underlying creole genesis are similar to those underlying language change” more generally and Kreyòl “has the means to expand its vocabulary as needed” (552).

The last myth is particularly interesting in its ideological connotations. It takes the position that creoles are “spontaneous” in their development and lack a connection to intellectual culture. The implication of this idea denies attention to socio-historical context, pointing to creoles as representing an early stage of language formation. According to Degraff however, there is “no precise and operational structural litmus test, and no coherent theoretical tools, for

deciding where the ‘innovations’ of language change qua ‘normal transmission’ end and where the ‘innovations’ of language change qua ‘normal transition’ begin” (2005:562). After a thorough analysis of the five myths, Degraff concludes that labeling particular languages as ‘creoles’ and ‘exceptions’ has served to justify “the widespread exclusion of monolingual creole speakers from a number of spheres where socioeconomic power is created, reproduced, and exercised” (577). The seemingly insignificant categorical label of creole, then, becomes a barrier to overcoming stigmas associated with social status and beliefs about linguistic transmission and development.

Although variation exists for all languages, from one social group to another or one geographic location to another, variation in creole languages have been treated, once again, as exceptional and requiring theoretical explanation. When discussing the possible existence of a “creole continuum” or “post-creole continuum” we are posited with an interesting, but ultimately problematic, theoretical proposal. Bickerton (1975) and David DeCamp (1971) are two prominent linguistic theorists regarding the existence of a linguistic continuum within delimited creole societies such as Haiti. While theories centered on the existence of a continuum bring welcome attention to linguistic variation within a given social group, they have also brought ideological baggage regarding a need to explain the previously inexplicable exceptions. This ideological baggage is a product the trajectory of the discipline of linguistics has taken and the assumption that one community equals one language, which is also related to an approach to language as a homogenous entity.<sup>6</sup> Bickerton, in particular, makes an interesting assumption in regards to creole “systems.” Recognizing variation of features along a delineated continuum, he identifies certain forms and features – namely those labeled as part of the “basilect” or forms/features most drastically different from the identified superstrate language – as

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<sup>6</sup> See Dell Hymes (1967) for a critique of the assumption of one culture equals one language.

representing an earlier language form or stage of language change. Other forms or features – those identified as part of the “acrolect” or most similar to the superstrate forms – represent a latter stage of language change. Ultimately, Bickerton claims that linguistic variation in a creole society exists as a result of different linguistic evolutionary speeds. In the case of French Guyana, he states that, “the Guyanese continuum...reveals itself as an unusual, though perhaps not unique, case of the preservation of diachronic changes in a synchronic state” (1975:17)

This argument harks back to early theories of cultural evolution, in which certain social groups were identified as “primitive” cultures and represented an earlier stage in the cultural evolutionary scale.<sup>7</sup> Largely abandoned within most anthropological circles, approaching language variation in this way at best makes unwarranted assumptions about why variation exists, and at worst applies dangerously ethnocentric judgments about “early” language forms in relation to “later” forms of development. Indo-European languages, from this evaluative scale necessarily represent a later stages of linguistic development. Although DeCamp does not necessarily make the same assumptions about linguistic stages that Bickerton explicitly makes, both authors seem to ignore the obvious point that variability exists within any and all linguistic speech communities. This approach to variation in creole communities as exceptional, falls in line with Degraff’s analysis of the label of creole. Creoles have long been considered exceptions, therefore the processes by which they exist must also be explained as exceptional in relation to “normal” language processes and change.

Partly due to linguistic specialists’ insistence on continuing to use this label, the ideologies associated with them endure, whether consciously or not. This situation becomes dangerous for speakers of languages identified as creoles; as individuals internalize those ideas,

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<sup>7</sup> While ideas and assumptions about cultural evolution were widespread up until WWII, this view is predominantly associated, within the discipline of anthropology, with Henry Lewis Morgan.



it then becomes difficult to eradicate or change them (Degraff 2005). In contradiction to traditional categorization, some scholars have begun to urge the use of caution when applying a creole label both in terms of a category of languages and a category of cultures (Palmié 2006). Aisha Khan (2001:295) argues that recognition that what has been typically seen as specific cultural development in the Caribbean can be said to describe cultural development around the world more generally.<sup>8</sup> Yet, because the concept of creolization has been historically linked to particular cultures, it holds “powerful preconceptions” about what culture is or is not. Ideological associations of this sort, work to limit broader application. As Viranjini Munasinghe (2006:550) states, “creolization fails as theory because of its peculiar ontology, which combines theory with ideology.” The ideologies associated with the creole or creolization label are clear when considering the manner in which attempts to apply the labels to other areas of the world result in considerable backlash. For instance, some linguistic scholars have postulated that Middle English itself was a creole (Dalton-Puffer 1995; Görlach 1986). This theory has not taken hold, with many pointing to a lack of structural similarities or processes of language change in comparison with, for instance, Caribbean creole languages. It remains important to note, however, that creole scholars have been unable to identify structural similarities or similar processes of language change from one creole language to another (Baptista 2005).

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<sup>8</sup> Ulf Hannerz (1987) also posited the argument that the term creolization could be used to characterize cultural development around the world.

## APPENDIX 3

**Table 1: Chronology of Youth Org Events and Activities**

Date	Event/Activity
June 2001	Youth Org is born as JMTADR (Youth working together for real and durable development)
2009	Dance competition held, as reported by David
Jan. 12, 2010	Port-au-Prince earthquake
	Youth Org lost building, equipment and leader
	Began participating in UN “cluster” program as part of the “protection” (human rights) cluster
mid October 2011	Author met Michel at a housing conference
late October 2011	Author first visited Youth Org office
	Author had first meeting with all core Youth Org members
November 2011	Meeting discussion of MINUSTAH funding for human rights activities, including a march
	Michel commented that all small organizations take advantage of large ones
mid December 2011	Discussion with Michel and Ernesto about Save the Children child sponsorship
	Rachel and author travel to meet CARITAS director in search of funding for a Christmas party for children
mid January 2012	Preparation of text for a press conference on the 2 <sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the 2010 earthquake (January 12)
late January-early February 2012	Discussion about and meeting with Haitian photography association, possible partnership between the organizations
late March 2012	Interview with David
April 2012	Michel lectures rest of members about the importance of drawing on

	different professional identities
	Members attended training session on handicap accessibility put on by international organization
	“Trial” training session for handicap accessibility, carried out by Youth Org
May 2012	Youth Org members shift to a dominant interest in entering formal political arenas
late May 2012	Skype calls with Haitian diasporan
June 2012	Interview with Michel
	Interview with Rachel
mid April 2013	Two Youth Org meetings held
	Meeting discussion: Pink bracelet scandal and joining Ankadre Pèp (see Appendix III for detailed timeline of discussion and associated transcripts)
July-August 2014	Return visit to Haiti
	David compares Haitian and American distrust for lies
	Observations of Youth Org’s soup kitchen, discussions with David, Ernesto, and Jeremi regarding Youth Org’s relationship to President Martelly and his administration

## APPENDIX 4

**Table 2: Chronology of Youth Org Meeting Discussion (April 2013)**

Discussion Topic	Description	Transcript
<i>Pink Bracelet Scandal</i>	“They don’t have proof” that Michel had a pink bracelet	Transcript 4.0 (p. 305)
	Counter accusation strategy	Transcript 4.0 (p. 305)
	Politics and denunciation, “Se konsa”	Transcript 5.4 (p. 370)
<i>Ankadre Pèp</i>	Michel announced meeting with director	
	Ernesto suggests giving director outdated papers, marked by disfluencies	Transcript 5.6 (p. 374)
	Michel & Ernesto suggest presenting group as naïve	
	David & Jeremi object to strategy suggestions, David presents “history could judge” objections	Transcript 5.0 (p. 323)
	Michel attempts to shift responsibility by condemning the platform director	Transcript 5.5 (p. 371)
	David objects, points out that director requires a public launching	
	Michel suggests a strategy that mimics one from Parliament, hiding articles of their statutes when signing	
	Jeremi & David object, pointing to possible legal issues in the future	Transcript 5.1 (p. 326)
	David picks up moderator role, gives Ernesto permission and claims access for himself after	
	Ernesto suggests adding an “exit door” to their statutes	

	Ernesto rehearses strategy and Michel corrects his mannerisms, calling him to be more “serious in his face”	Transcript 4.1 (p. 309)
	Michel & Ernesto continue strategizing, suggesting the group creates a separate agreement to sign or not sign the document with their real initials	
	David presents his “church or the devil’s house” objections	
	David explains his objections with the example of the rape scandal	Transcript 5.2 (p. 349)
	Ernesto re-directs the discussion, calling for an alternative and claiming the group was “in a phase”	
	David presents alternative strategy and rehearses it	Transcript 5.3 (p. 356)

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