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NOU BEZWEN LAPE PA DESTABILIZASYON: GRAFFITI, LOCAL PARTICIPATION, AND LANGUAGE POLITICS IN POST-EARTHQUAKE HAITI

Abstract:
Since the fall of the Duvalier dictatorship in the mid-1980s, multilingual political graffiti, along with murals containing several layers of political and religious symbolism, have been two of the most visible and public means for Haitians to circulate messages critiquing and supporting the status quo. More recently, Haiti has been referred to as the "Republic of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)," alluding to the more than 10,000 NGOs that operate with little inter-agency coordination or accountability to the Haitian people and have eroded the sovereignty of the Haitian government (Kristoff et al. 2010). Following the earthquake of 12 January 2010, a coalition of foreign governments, NGOs, and international agencies planned and mobilized a multi-billion-dollar reconstruction effort that has categorically excluded the vast majority of Haitians (Peck 2013). This study draws upon scoping interviews with hundreds of displaced Haitians, in-depth interviews with community leaders and reconstruction stakeholders in Haiti and South Florida, and upon participant observation conducted during six weeks of consulting for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) during the aftermath of the earthquake. This qualitative and interpretive work explores the history of engaged public visual art in urban Haiti, examines local participation and language politics in the context of reconstruction, and presents the multilingual and multimodal graffiti of one Haitian artist as a case study for challenging the existing foreign-dominated power structures through the artist's direct engagement with Haitians and foreigners alike.

Keywords:
Haiti ◆ street art ◆ 2010 earthquake ◆ development ◆ foreign aid ◆ graffiti

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Prologue: $ekou$

Photographed in the Tabarre neighborhood of Port-au-Prince in 2010, less than three kilometers from the US embassy, this mural depicts a haggard yet resilient urban Haitian struggling under the weight of sekou (meaning "help" or "aid" in Kreyòl). Employing a stylized orthography that replaces the standard "s" with US dollar signs, along with an anthropomorphized "e," this aerosol mural critiques the philanthrocapitalist system that has inundated Haiti with foreign workers and funding meant to offer relief from poverty and natural disasters. In many instances, however, these initiatives have made conditions worse for local residents (Schuller 2010; Schuller 2013; Peck 2013). Through a lack of inter-agency coordination and minimal accountability to the people and Government of Haiti, neoliberal aid policies led by foreign governments, NGOs, and international organizations during the past five decades have had deleterious effects. These include decreased food security, contributions to the unsustainable urbanization of Port-au-Prince, and reinforced corruption and nepotism in Haitian institutions. More recently, post-earthquake reconstruction policies have been perceived as prioritizing foreign economic interests over local needs. Additionally, UN Peacekeepers stationed in Haiti after the earthquake fomented a cholera outbreak responsible for nearly 10,000 deaths, the

worst in recent world history (World Health Organization 2017). Graffiti and street art are one of the few means for non-elite Haitians to critique this monolithic system and circulate their ideas and priorities for reconstruction.

I. Introduction

> *After the dictator Jean-Claude (Baby Doc) Duvalier fled the country in February 1986, a crowd of Haitian demonstrators tore a statue of Columbus from its Port-au-Prince base in Bicentenaire, carted it off, and threw it into the Caribbean Sea. The statue was never recovered. The Haitian public renamed the site in honor of Charlemagne Péralte, the black peasant farmer who in 1917 raised an army of peasant farmers, the Cacos soldiers, to fight against the American marines who were then occupying the country.*
> (Robinson 2007: 25)

For at least the past 40,000 years, and perhaps much longer, humans have been marking their landscapes with symbolic visual imagery (Chippindale & Taçon 1998). The term "graffiti" first appeared in English in 1877, borrowed from the Italian *graffiti*, which was initially used to describe ancient drawings or writings scratched on walls, such as those found in Pompeii and Rome. The Italian term originates from the Greek *gráphein*, meaning to draw or write. What we today consider modern graffiti was born in New York City in the 1960s, largely innovated by writers and artists hailing from socially and economically marginalized communities and served as a means to make their mark *on* a society from which they felt excluded (Castleman 1982; Ahearn et al. 1983).

In Latin America, graffiti and street art have been described in three main ways. One, they serve as tools of mass communication for marginalized peoples. Two, they are forms of low-tech media accessible to the public that offer the power to counteract elites' control of high-tech media. Three, they are an effective means of creating and championing alternative threads of historical memory, which challenge the dominant discourses espoused by political and economic elites (Chaffee 1993). Waldenburg (1990) and Peteet (1996) have shown how graffiti has been used globally as an agentive device by various actors in two of the most ideologically divisive conflicts in contemporary geo-politics: the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

This article builds on scholarly sources documenting political murals in Port-au-Prince between 1986 and 1995 (Brown 1994; Brown 1996; Butcher & Middelanis 2010), as well as the lone journalistic source explicitly addressing *textual graffiti* (Charles 2010), and has been supplemented by my own interviews with scholars and journalists focusing on *textual graffiti*. Despite the ubiquity of graffiti in Port-au-Prince and other urban centers, this article presents the first academic research work focusing on *textual graffiti* in Haiti I am aware of. Due to the

intrinsic criminality of graffiti writing[1], as well as the codes of secrecy that exist among writers, scholarship on graffiti as a whole is relatively limited. These realities, combined with the tense political atmosphere in Port-au-Prince, contribute to the paucity of scholarship on Haitian graffiti specifically. This article aspires to add to the limited body of academic literature addressing the history of politicized paint-based visual culture in urban Haiti and its role in expressing the populist sentiments of the marginalized majority of urban Haitians.

Having orchestrated the largest successful slave revolt in recorded history by defeating the three most powerful European colonial powers of the era, Haiti rendered itself in 1804 the second free and independent modern nation-state in the Western hemisphere. Today, as a primarily Kreyòl-speaking country, with a vast majority of its population of African descent, Haiti is not neatly categorized with its regional neighbors based on any shared history of recent independence from colonialism, language, or physical appearance. Despite these differences, the case of Haitian graffiti is ripe for examination, using Chaffee's (1993) three-pronged Latin American lens of mass communication among marginalized peoples, the subversion of elite-controlled high-tech media, and creating and championing alternative threads of historical memory which challenge the dominant discourses of political and economic elites.

DELMAS, 2010: Multilingual *textual graffiti* communicates an urgent need for help, in English and Spanish.

As Robinson's (2007) epigraph above foreshadows, this article examines the intersections of public art, foreign intervention, and Haitians' ownership of the historical narratives that shape people's national and collective consciousness. More specifically, it focuses on the evolution of graffiti as popular engaged art in Haiti and how graffiti is being deployed in Port-au-Prince to circulate Haitian perspectives and critiques of reconstruction in the wake of the earthquake of 12 January 2010. Finally, it posits that the earthquake and its ensuing foreign-dominated reconstruction efforts are the catalyst for the creation of a new multilingual and multimodal subgenre of public visual art in urban Haiti.

[1] Here I use the term "graffiti" to describe a message (visual, textual, or multi-modal) affixed with paint to a public surface (most commonly a wall) without receiving permission from the property owner, whereas "public art" is used to describe a message affixed with paint to a surface with permission from the property owner.

II. Methodology

Data informing this research were collected in several ways:

1) participant observation and analysis of grey literature[2] gathered while working during the spring of 2010, in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, as a pro bono consultant in applied anthropology with Peace Corps Response (PCR) and the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Office of Response Coordination (ORC);

2) scoping interviews with 466 Haitians living in camps for Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in and around Port-au-Prince during the PCR / USAID mission, using opportunity sampling;

3) ethnographic interviews with seven reconstruction stakeholders[3] and two IDP camp committees[4] in Port-au-Prince in 2010 and 2011;

4) ethnographic interviews with eight Haitian American community leaders in Miami, Florida, in 2011, selected using opportunity and snowball sampling;

5) analysis of photos of graffiti and street art taken by the author during fieldwork in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area in 2010 and 2011.

Scoping interviews were conducted exclusively in Kreyòl; ethnographic interviews in Haiti were conducted in Kreyòl, English, and French; ethnographic interviews in Miami were conducted in English, code-switching frequently into Kreyòl and French. Participant observation activities with non-Haitians transpired in English, while participant observation activities with Haitians transpired in Kreyòl and French.

I use the term "scoping interviews" to describe brief, formulaic conversations with Haitian IDPs that ranged from 5 to 25 minutes. These interviews were conducted at the request of the USAID-ORC in order to produce weekly reports documenting the perspectives and priorities of Haitian IDPs concerning international relief and earthquake response. Scoping interviews were not recorded (although notes were taken), and were conducted based on opportunity sampling during 23 unique visits to 16 IDP camps in and around Port-au-Prince during April

[2] "Grey literature" refers to research and reports produced outside of traditional commercial and academic publishing avenues. In this case, the literature comprises assessments and strategy outlines produced by the US Government, the Government of Haiti, and international organizations.

[3] Here I use "reconstruction stakeholder" not to signal an affirmation of neoliberal discourses, but as a catchall phrase to describe a range of individuals with personal or professional stakes in earthquake reconstruction (e.g., community members in neighborhoods affected by the earthquake and people in positions of authority in organizations assisting in reconstruction).

[4] IDP camp committees are composed of residents and elected officials in camps for Internally Displaced People. Every camp visited during fieldwork had a camp committee, but only two committees were willing to be interviewed. For a more detailed discussion of IDP camps and committees, see Schuller 2013.

and May of 2010. Scoping interview questionnaires (see Appendix 1) consisted of open-ended questions intended to create a baseline for what displaced Haitians considered the most important issues and priorities, and what roles they thought the central Government of Haiti (GOH) and international organizations should play in post-earthquake reconstruction.

The table below contains a list of IDP camps visited, each camp's International Organization of Migration (IOM) identification number (when available), estimated population on the date of visit, date(s) of visit(s), number of scoping interviews conducted, and presence of vital services requested by USAID-ORC. The results of this scoping research were used to prepare questionnaires for ethnographic interviews with community leaders in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area and South Florida. In order to preserve the anonymity of the ethnographic interviewees, I have replaced their names with pseudonyms when quoting them directly. The only exceptions to this among the following are public figures who consented to my using their real names: *Miami Herald* journalist Jacqueline Charles, University of Miami professor Yves Colon, and Port-au-Prince-based graffiti and aerosol artist Jerry Rosembert.

Camp	SSID #	Population Estimate	Date(s) Visited (all 2010)	# of People Interviewed	Tarps	Water	On-Site Health Clinic
Valle Bourdon	N/A	14,000	16 Apr	30	yes	no	No
Tabarre Issa	'114_05_353	5,000	18 & 28 Apr	35	yes	yes	Yes
Corail Cesslesse	N/A	unknown	15, 18, & 28 Apr	50	yes	yes	yes
Champs de Mars	'111_01_034	unknown	17 & 21 Apr	40	yes	no	no
Canape Vert	'111_01_019	unknown	17 Apr	25	mixed	no	no
CEPEM	'112_01_083	unknown	19 Apr	30	yes	no	no
HENFRASA	'112_01_063	7,500	19 Apr	25	yes	no	no
St. Louis de Gonzague	'112_01_166	unknown	19 Apr & 5 May	15	yes	yes	yes
Automeca	'112_01_093	11,000	19 Apr	40	yes	some	no
Pétionville Golf Club		55,000	18, 26, & 30 Apr	100	yes	yes	yes
ATSCT	'118_04_028	167	24 Apr	2	yes	no	no
Delmas 33		13,820 families	27 Apr	25	yes	some	no
Villam-Beta		5,000	27 Apr	30	yes	some	no
Rue Fort Mercredi	'111_03_001	4,000	29 Apr	20	no	no	no
“Cité #1”	'118_04_006	unknown	25 Apr	4	yes	no	No
Canaran 2		3,000	4 May	15	some	some	No

III. From Murals to *Spre*: Engaged Public Art in Haiti since the 1980s

> *Visual culture is everywhere in urban Haiti, from the facades of beauty salons and lottery booths, to the gingerbread-style houses and murals that animate city streets. Colorful outbursts of red, blue, and yellow, along with caricatures of Rambo, Pelé, and Jesus, adorn tap-taps—taxi-buses fashioned from pickup trucks that clog Haiti's urban streets.* […] *Wherever Haitian visual culture appears, and in whatever medium, much of it is infused with religion, sometimes intertwined with politics, and often reflects the complexities of Haitian history and culture.*
> (Rey & Stepick 2006: 7–8)

In an urban setting like Port-au-Prince, where billboards cost upwards of USD 5,000, where cans or buckets of paint cost $5, and cement walls, fences, and surfaces abound, it is logical that hand-painted text, images, and advertisements are the media of choice for Haitians with a message they wish to disseminate (Charles 2010). Driving through Port-au-Prince, one sees all manner of hand-painted surfaces, including advertisements for barbershops, construction supplies, restaurants and bars, and other local businesses. There are also advertisements for multinational brands like Fanta and Coca Cola, detailed murals lionizing politicians and historical figures and most prominently, pithy textual messages scrawled in spray-paint on every imaginable surface. Though the factors motivating the creators of this phantasmagoric array of visual culture are as diverse as the city's residents, the second section of this article focuses on the emergence of a large sub-set of visual culture that is purely political in nature.

Prior to the earthquake of 2010, there were two distinct genres of politicized, paint-based visual culture in urban Haiti: murals[5] and *textual graffiti*. Murals are the work of individual artists or collectives, which prioritize a visual aesthetic but often include some limited text, and are meticulously applied using liquid paint with brushes to walls with the permission of property owners. Works of *textual graffiti* are concise and pithy messages, primarily written in Kreyòl, that are hurriedly applied to walls with paint from aerosol spray-cans, almost always without the permission of property owners. Whereas murals can be composed by known artists or novices, most *textual graffiti* are written by a small number of young men whom Jacqueline Charles of the *Miami Herald* calls "guns for hire," because "they sell their services to politicians, powerbrokers, and anyone with a grudge or something to profess."[6]

[5] For excellent photos of political murals in Haiti, see Butcher & Middelanis (2010) and Brown (1994 & 1996).

[6] This term refers to the mercenary nature of these writers. They are generally young men in their late teens to early thirties, who have had some formal schooling but, like the vast majority of Haitians, they have been unable to find employment in the formal economy. Although there are exceptions, the majority of these *guns for hire* are not politically or ideologically invested in the messages they paint.

PORT-AU-PRINCE, 2011: Hand-painted mural in support of then President Michel Martelly

PORT-AU-PRINCE, 2011: Hand-painted mural of Argentinian football star Lionel Messi

DELMAS, 2010: Textual graffiti calls for the installation and proliferation of a new government.

PÉTIONVILLE, 2011: *Tet Kale* means "Bald Head" and is one of raunchy pop-singer-turned-President Michel Martelly's nicknames.

According to interviewees in South Florida and Port-au-Prince in 2011, graffiti did not exist in Haiti prior to the 1980s. As Jean-Claude Duvalier's grip on power[7] began to weaken, both politicized murals and *textual graffiti* first emerged as grassroots forms of political expression. Beginning as ephemeral acts of political dissidence, both genres have been credited for voicing and strengthening the wave of populist discontent that forced Jean-Claude Duvalier into exile in 1986. In these early days, when the threat of censorship through violence by the *Tonton Macoutes* was most acute[8], coded murals used the imagery of Vodou to anonymously critique the Duvalier regime (Butcher & Middelanis 2010; Brown 1994, 1996). In addition to providing artists and communities with a means to safely express political dissent, muralists' use of polyvocal images were particularly effective because they engaged with a long tradition of syncretism in Haitian visual culture and marshaled the power of Vodou to unify people and combat oppression.[9]

[7] At age 19, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier became President of Haiti in 1971 after the death of his father, François "Papa Doc" Duvalier. This father-son tandem ruled Haiti from 1951–1986, when Jean-Claude was overthrown in a popular uprising.

[8] The *Tonton Macoutes* were a notorious paramilitary organization, mostly consisting of volunteers, which upheld the Duvalier regimes from the late 1950s through the late 1980s via terror and violence.

[9] The marriage of syncretic religious belief and visual culture in Haiti dates back to the colonial period, when French planters forced African slaves to convert to Catholicism. The tradition of images depicting Catholic

Following the ouster of Jean-Claude Duvalier in 1986, murals gave way to an explosion of what I refer to as *textual graffiti*, a form that continues to dominate the visual landscape in urban Haiti today. *Textual graffiti* are discrete linguistic units that, like political murals, often contain a superficial meaning *and* secondary meanings encoded in Haitian oral history and contemporary culture.[10] In addition to the increased freedom of expression that accompanied the disbanding of the *Tonton Macoutes*, two other factors contributed to the proliferation of *textual graffiti* in the late 1980s. The first was the establishment of Kreyòl as one of Haiti's two official languages by the 1987 Constitution (see Section IV below on the link between languages and graffiti). Second, according to two interviewees, there was a dramatic increase in the construction of walls around houses and compounds in Port-au-Prince, motivated by property owners' heightened feelings of insecurity during this transitional period (Charles 2010). When I interviewed journalist Jacqueline Charles via phone in 2010, she added that, "as Haiti moved toward a more democratic form of governance, the walls became a place for different political factions to battle it out."

Bracketing what Midellanis (2010) refers to as the "Second Wave" of political murals in urban Haiti were the election of Jean-Bertrand Aristide as Haitian President in 1990 and the coup d'état that removed him from power in 1991. Characteristic of this era were overt political murals expressing communities' joy at Aristide's election and later, outrage at the attempted coup (Middelanis 2010). Middelanis classifies the murals of 1994–1995 as the "Third Wave," celebrating the US intervention and perceived restoration of Aristide and democracy. During this period of turmoil and political maneuvering among Haiti's elites, public art (and murals in particular) became an important medium for non-elite Haitians to express themselves and make sense of their turbulent environment. As Brown notes:

> In the fall of 1994, art was a primary response to liberation [...] Art helped restructure life toward normality. It accomplished this by allowing Haitians to begin to piece together, in a public forum, their own version of who they are, what they have been through, and what they have accomplished. Haitian artists told these multiple stories in the most democratic of languages, that of visual imagery. (Brown 1996: 48)

By the time of Aristide's exile to the Central African Republic in 2004, many Haitians had begun to view the United States and its military no longer as agents of democracy, but as facilitators of the kidnapping and forced exile of their democratically-elected president (Robinson 2007). While the amity in the relationship between the US and Haiti has waxed and

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saints, while simultaneously representing *lwa* to the community of believers familiar with the code, was an innovation allowing slaves to pay homage to the Vodou pantheon while outwardly appearing to honor Catholic saints. For more information on religious syncretism in Haiti, see Rey & Richman 2010.

[10] A ubiquitous example of this polyvocal *textual graffiti* I observed during fieldwork in 2010 was the phrase *Jèn Kore Jèn*. Superficially the phrase translates to "youth support youth," interpreted by the uninitiated as a general call for solidarity among young people; however, it was also a prominent slogan in Wyclef Jean's unsuccessful presidential campaign in 2010. This polyvocality is likely related to the rich tradition of Haitian proverbs; for more information, see Jeanty & Brown 1976.

waned over the last two centuries, the interviews I conducted demonstrate a palpable feeling of resentment among Haitians toward the US government, foreign NGOs, and international organizations at the forefront of neoliberal initiatives and earthquake reconstruction in Haiti. These sentiments are fueled by a growing resentment and frustration about the invasion of foreign NGOs during the past two decades, which many believe has eroded the sovereignty of the Government of Haiti (Étienne 1997; Schuller 2007; Peck 2013).

DELMAS, 2011: A palimpsest is created when an older mural of one of Haiti's founding fathers (likely Toussaint Louverture) is covered by newer textual graffiti imploring readers to vote for three different senate candidates.

PÉTIONVILLE, 2011: Polyvocal textual graffiti (see footnote 10)

Having first traveled to Haiti in 2004, and having returned in 2010 and 2011, I have observed a shift in the language, content, and aesthetics of Haitian graffiti. Here I use the "graffiti" to refer to what Haitians call *spre,* an onomatopoeia and English loan-word that refers to both text and images created with aerosol paint in public spaces. Since the earthquake of 2010, *spre*, which had previously been the provenance of Kreyòl-language *textual graffiti*, now prominently transmits messages in English, French, Spanish, and Kreyòl (or some combination of the four). Furthermore, a new generation of *spre* artists are combining these multilingual texts with socially conscious images to construct complex, multimodal messages that hold foreign NGOs and

international powerbrokers accountable. These messages engage not only Haitians and foreigners working in Haiti, but also concerned parties and actors beyond Haiti's political boundaries who are involved in earthquake reconstruction.

PORT-AU-PRINCE, 2011: An example of aerosol murals painted by the artist Epizod in support of musicians-turned-politicians Wyclef Jean and Michel "Sweet Mickey" Martelly. Although they feature characteristics of traditional public visual art, these murals exhibit several elements of the shift in visual art proposed in this article: multilingual text (here the Kreyòl "yon", "tet", and "kale" and English ("Haiti"), mixing text with images (e.g., the politicians and Haitian flag), and the artist's signature (Epizod) and phone number to allow future clients to contact him.

When I interviewed him in 2011, Yves Colon, Professor of Journalism at the University of Miami, characterized graffiti as "a way to communicate universal Haitian sentiments to the outside world." He noted that many Haitians are frustrated because their voices are not being heard in reconstruction planning. I contend that the traumas caused by the 2010 earthquake, coupled with the planning and implementation of large-scale reconstruction without input from most Haitians, has resulted in the multilingual, multimodal, socially conscious shift in Haitian graffiti. Whereas political murals and textual graffiti prior to the 2010 earthquake focused primarily on domestic issues, recent works of aerosol artists Jerry Rosembert and Epizod focus on language politics, Haitian agency in reconstruction, and holding international powerbrokers accountable for the fallout of profit-driven philanthrocapitalism. However, before presenting a closer reading of Rosembert's work informed by an interview with the artist, I will draw on the ethnographic and applied research that I conducted with displaced Haitians in 2010 to delineate how they perceive their exclusion from participating meaningfully in reconstruction.

PORT-AU-PRINCE, 2011: Painted over a hand-painted advertisement, this complex aerosol mural combines the English text "Help Us" with an image of an eye with a red, white, and blue iris, the colors of the Haitian flag. Next to the eye is an image of a man speaking the Kreyòl text: "Haiti" Gen Yon Je Kap Gade W; which translates to English as "Haiti has an eye that is watching you." This multilingual multimodal piece, signed by the aerosol artist Epizod, implores the international community for help, while reminding them to be accountable for their actions.

IV. Profiles of Exclusion: Historical Context, Local Participation, and Language Politics

a. Historical Context

Equitable political participation and language politics have been points of conflict in Haiti's distant and recent past. Since 1954, the influx of foreign NGOs and aid organizations responding to natural disasters, along with the neoliberal economic policies that followed, have further divorced non-elite Haitians from policy decisions that affect their daily lives (Woodson 1997: 110). Beginning with a historical overview of the interplay of natural disasters and foreign interventions, and followed by examples from fieldwork, this section analyzes how reconstruction planners' ignorance of Haiti's sociolinguistic nuances, along with a lack of meaningful participation by Haitians on local levels, has exacerbated the post-earthquake realities and diminished political agency for the majority of Haitians.

While nearly 50 years had passed since the last noteworthy earthquake struck Haiti, seismic activity has been documented for more than 450 years, occurring at intervals from one to 120

years (Moreau de Saint-Mèry 1797; Prepetit 2008).[11] Despite well-known historical accounts and scientific descriptions of Haiti's history of earthquakes, as well as repeated warnings from at least one prominent Haitian seismologist (Prepetit 2008), the earthquake of 2010 caught the Government of Haiti and her foreign partners completely off-guard. For scholars of history, journalistic depictions of the 2010 event bear an eerie similarity to US American missionary M.B. Bird's description of the devastating earthquake in Cape Haitian in 1842:

> Cape Haytien […] was overtaken by sudden destruction; whilst all were occupied with their usual business their houses shook and fell, burying many of their inhabitants in the ruins, maiming some, and, in a moment, sending others into eternity [...] In the night which succeeded the catastrophe, the fallen timbers among the ruins took fire […] which must have been an awful addition to the agonies of those whose death was not instantaneous. [...] Even man himself did not respect these misfortunes. Beings without pity came from the country—we are informed—and pillaged what they could snatch from the ruins, instead of rather helping their fellow-citizens in their distressing misfortune. (Bird 1867: 201–205)

Both Bird's mid-nineteenth century writing and popular media accounts of the 2010 earthquake deploy a Western gaze to delineate racialized caricatures of survivors, framing them as looters and inhumane opportunists capitalizing on their countrymen's misfortune to enrich themselves.[12] The dehumanization of these survivors feeds the White Savior narrative pervasive in international development, which, along with the great philanthrocapitalist profits to be made, ultimately excludes Haitians from having agency in the relief and reconstruction efforts in their own country. This type of reporting constructs Haitians (and other people of color in the developing world) as unfit to govern their own affairs, thus justifying the continued presence of international organizations and NGOs. Graffiti and street art are among the few media that Haitians have at their immediate disposal to critique this predatory system and circulate their own perspectives and ideas about Haitian identity, earthquake reconstruction, and much more.

During the middle of the 20th century, another natural disaster played a major role in reshaping Haitian society, especially in regard to the establishment of long-term foreign aid missions. In 1954, Hurricane Hazel ravaged Haiti and left many rural Haitians homeless and hungry. International NGOs responded and provided broad-scale disaster relief, and by 1959, CARE, CRS, and ADRA had opened permanent offices in Port-au-Prince in order to oversee and regularize humanitarian assistance. As the Cold War intensified in later years, providing food aid became a way for the US to prevent Haiti from leaning too far left on the political spectrum,

[11] Seismic activity is reported in 1564, 1684, 1691, 1701, 1713, 1734, 1751, 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1783, 1784, 1785, 1786, 1787, 1788, 1789, 1797, 1818, 1842, 1860, 1881, 1887, 1910, 1911, 1912, 1917, 1918, 1922, 1924, 1946, 1952, 1956, and 1962.

[12] For examples, see CNN 2010; Grillo 2010; BBC 2010.

like its neighbor Cuba. With the help of a US-backed army, Dr. Francois Duvalier was rigged into power in 1957, beginning the reign of a US-friendly dictatorial regime that remained in place for nearly 30 years (Woodson 1997: 110).

In the 1970s, neoliberal policies imposed upon Haiti by the United States and international financial institutions (IFIs) significantly altered the country's demographics and economy. In exchange for military and economic aid from the US, France, and Canada, the Duvalier regime ceded greater economic control to foreign interests, which allowed IFIs to execute a two-pronged plan focused on the economic and agricultural sectors. By imposing structural adjustments that kept wages low, dismantled obstacles to free trade, privatized public enterprises to reduce public employment, and curbed social spending to reduce deficits, IFIs accomplished two things: Haiti became the cheapest labor source in the Western Hemisphere and the largest importer of US food in the Caribbean (Dupuy 2010).

The decline of rural agriculture and the dispossession of farmers, combined with the expansion of manufacturing industries primarily located in Port-au-Prince, fomented wide-spread rural migration to the capital and resulted in an explosion of *bidonvilles*[13], where enforcement of building codes and maintenance of infrastructure could not keep pace with rapid population growth. Furthermore, an ill-fated, US-backed program to eradicate hearty, local Haitian pigs and replace them with more expensive varieties from the United States destabilized a modest yet robust peasant economy and essentially privatized pork production. This disastrous policy deprived peasants of important economic and nutritional resources, and decreased Haitians' food security and sovereignty (Parisio 1997). The effects of such neoliberal policies on Haiti's demographic shift are illustrated by the growth of Port-au-Prince during the latter half of the 20th century: In 1950, the city had 150,000 inhabitants, growing to 732,000 in the early 1980s, and expanding to about 3 million in 2008, representing nearly one-third of Haiti's total population at the time (Dupuy 2010).

Although these policies established a manufacturing sector that was profitable for owners and investors, they also divested hundreds of thousands of small-scale rural farmers of their livelihoods, decreased food security for the majority of Haitians, and spurred a period of rapid unsustainable urbanization. According to numerous respondents from my fieldwork with displaced Haitians (Norton 2010), as well as Haitian social outreach workers I interviewed who engaged thousands of Haitian IDPs during research funded by UNOPS, the proliferation of *bidonvilles*, traffic caused by the strained transportation infrastructure in Port-au-Prince, and general overcrowding significantly increased the number of deaths and injuries caused by the

[13] *Bidonville* is the French equivalent to the Portuguese term *favela*, which describes low-income, marginalized settlements build on the mountainous outskirts of major cities.

2010 earthquake. Additionally, the subsequent centralization of Haiti's economic resources to Port-au-Prince made the earthquake of 2010 devastating on a national level.[14]

b. Local Participation

> *Given the inequalities that marginalize Haiti, particularly the poor majority, the points of view presented to date are dominated by white, foreign do-gooders, either volunteer missions or professional humanitarians. Their stories necessarily celebrate their good intentions and minimize and even denigrate the contributions of Haitians, while also often failing to fully and accurately report the many difficulties that too many Haitians still face.*
> (Schuller & Morales 2012: 3)

Prior to the earthquake of 2010, there were more than 10,000 NGOs present in Haiti, many operating with little government oversight or interagency coordination. This resulted in an NGO-per-capita rate higher than anywhere else in the world. This high level of involvement, particularly in the domains of education and healthcare, eroded the sovereignty and weakened the already limited capacity of the Government of Haiti to provide services to its citizens (Collier 2010). With the leading roles being taken by foreign donors following the earthquake, as well as the formation of the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission (IHRC) to manage reconstruction funds, the Government of Haiti, and especially non-elite Haitians, were effectively removed from the reconstruction planning and decision-making processes.

Led by foreign ministers and IFIs, the initial stages of reconstruction planning were undertaken at donors' conferences in Montréal on 25 January 2010; Santo Domingo on 17 March 2010; and New York City on 25 March 2010. Although an impressive sum of $9.9 billion was pledged during these meetings, all were conducted outside of Haiti and in languages inaccessible to the majority of Haitians. One major result of the donors' conferences was the formation of the IHRC, a 26-member commission charged with managing funds and approving reconstruction projects for an 18-month period between April 2010 and November 2011. Co-led by then Haitian Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive and UN Special Envoy Bill Clinton, the IHRC's members were to be composed of equal numbers of Haitians and foreigners.

Although the membership ratio within the IHRC was equitable on paper, the distribution of reconstruction funds was not: only 1% of all reconstruction funds were directed through the Government of Haiti, with the rest going directly to NGOs and other service providers. Furthermore, The Center for Economic Policy Research found that Washington, DC-based for-profit development companies (a.k.a. "Beltway Bandits") received 83% of USAID contracts,

[14] According to the Government of Haiti's post-earthquake *Action Plan*, Port-au-Prince accounts for 65% of Haiti's economic activity and 85% of the nation's tax revenue (Government of Haiti 2010).

while only about 2.5% of funds went to Haitian companies, and less than half of 1% of funds went to Haitian non-profit organizations (Robles 2010). Former Prime Minister Bellerive lamented the lack of transparency in this arrangement, stating that "NGOs don't tell us […] where the money is coming from or how they're spending it." Additionally, Antonal Mortiné, executive secretary of the Haitian Platform for Human Rights Organizations, stated that the IHRC has made Haiti into a *restavèk*[15], adding that "this is not the path to democracy" (Bell 2010).

In addition to the higher-level exclusion of non-elite Haitians from reconstruction planning, I observed first-hand how excessive foreign involvement in the implementation of reconstruction policies made life more difficult for many Haitians. According to assessments by the *Ministére des Travaux Publics, Transports et Communications*[16], during which engineers assessed the structural integrity of 382,256 buildings in earthquake-affected neighborhoods, 46% of structures were significantly damaged and 20% were deemed completely unsafe for habitation (Schwartz et al. 2011). Considering that 70–85% of Port-au-Prince residents are renters, and that an estimated 1.5 million people in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area were displaced by the earthquake, the resulting wave of foreign NGO and relief workers looking for housing, with the ability to pay rent in cash for months in advance, drove up the cost of rental housing by more than 300% (Schuller 2010). This drastic increase in housing costs, coupled with the decrease in local economic activity due to the quake, forced many Haitians to languish in IDP camps and reside in structurally unsafe dwellings. According to the Displaced Tracking Matrix[17], as of June 2016, 61,302 people remained displaced and living in IDP camps as a result of the 2010 earthquake, the vast majority residing in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area (ReliefWeb 2016).

Despite foreign control of reconstruction decision-making bodies, many Haitians are involved in the day-to-day implementation of reconstruction initiatives. Of the diverse groups of Haitians involved in reconstruction projects, the most indispensible and frequently over-qualified are the SUV drivers used by NGOs and foreign organizations to shuttle their employees around the city. In addition to the ability to navigate Port-au-Prince's narrow, pot-holed, and pedestrian-filled streets, these drivers regularly serve as tri-lingual interpreters (English, French, and Kreyòl), cultural brokers, ad hoc consultants, and conduits of information between international organizations and the communities in which they reside and work.

[15] *Restavék* is a Kreyòl term that refers to a system of child slavery common in urban Haiti. For more information see Padgett & Klarreich 2001.

[16] Haiti's Ministry of Public Works, Transportation and Communication

[17] According to ReliefWeb, the DTM is a monitoring tool designed to provide timely and accurate information on the population and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) sites. It is a camp-based rapid assessment that gathers information mainly through observation, physical counting, and informant interviews. First rolled out in Haiti in March 2010, DTM v1.0 was developed in collaboration with the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster and other partners, taking into account the emergency information needs of various clusters immediately following the earthquake.

During post-earthquake work with USAID in 2010, I became acquainted with three Haitian drivers at the US embassy, and learned their personal histories.

> **David**, a short and slightly-built man in his mid 50s, was born into a middle-class family in Haiti, attended elite private schools in Port-au-Prince, and spent most of his adult life splitting time between Haiti and the United States. Prior to the earthquake, he had been working as a computer technician and jazz singer in New York City. For many years, he sent money back to Port-au-Prince to construct a large home for his extended family, where he eventually planned to retire. The earthquake damaged his retirement home, so he returned to Haiti to oversee its repair and took a job as a driver at the US embassy because it was the most lucrative work he could find.
>
> **Claude**, a large, fashionably dressed man in his early 40s who wore his hair in long, neat dreadlocks, was a very successful businessman prior to the earthquake. He owned and operated a number of profitable hair salons throughout Port-au-Prince that catered to the tastes of foreign workers and Haitians of the "NGO class" (Schuller 2009). After most of his businesses were destroyed in the earthquake, he networked with former clients to secure a job as a driver at the US embassy.
>
> **Charles**, a gregarious and energetic man in his late 30s, held professional degrees and had significant work experience as a civil engineer. When I met him, he was working as a driver for the US embassy while awaiting a Canadian visa to rejoin his family in Québec. Of the three drivers I worked with regularly, I got to know Charles the best and, during long drives through heavy traffic, he often shared with me the daily frustrations and humiliations he experienced as a result of his interactions with the embassy employees and foreign aid workers whom he drove around the city.

Charles readily acknowledged that he and many other drivers were overqualified for the positions they held and explained that, in an atmosphere where NGOs preferred to bring in engineers and specialists from their home countries, driving SUVs for foreign organizations was one of the best jobs available to Haitians regardless of their education or professional experience. Despite Charles' demonstrating proficiency in English, French, and Kreyòl on a daily basis, the foreigners and aid workers he drove often made derogatory comments about Haitians in English; presuming that he did not speak English, or not caring about the effects their words would have should he understand them.[18]

Additionally, Charles told me that many of drivers working at foreign embassies or NGOs were among the hundreds of thousands of Haitians whose homes were destroyed in the earthquake, and that each night many returned to tents in the same IDP camps that received services from their NGO employers. Once among family and friends in the camps, the drivers often shared the latest barbs hurled at displaced Haitians by the very people whose job it was to help them,

[18] To read more about the disparity between expatriate and Haitian employment opportunities and compensation, as well as mismanagement of reconstruction funds, see Elliot & Sullivan 2015.

which contributed significantly to cultivating and perpetuating negative perceptions of foreign workers and organizations.

Charles also described widespread nepotism in hiring practices, especially regarding access to earthquake-related funds and jobs. In a moment of candid reflection, seemingly torn between gratitude and guilt, he told me that if it were not for a personal connection through his wife he would not even have been granted an interview for the driving position he now held. He went on to relate his own experience in job-seeking to the broader relationship between nepotism and success in Haiti: "If you want to make it in Haiti you need to be politically related to someone…if not, you're not free to do what you want."

In addition to the wasted potential of skilled Haitian workers, there has also been mismanagement of unskilled workers in high-profile employment initiatives. The Cash for Work program (CFW)[19] was created to provide displaced Haitians with modest financial incentives to undertake labor-intensive tasks like removing rubble and constructing emergency shelters. Although the program was assessed internally as capable of providing "tangible, though limited, contributions to Haiti's recovery" (USAID 2010: 4), many of the Haitians I interviewed had other opinions. A prominent *houngan*[20] and community leader, who is also a US-educated scientist, described CFW in this way:

> Anyone out driving in the city will see groups of people gathered under "Cash for Work" banners; it's easy to notice that three people are pushing around garbage and nine others are sitting in the back doing nothing! […] Although people are getting paid, it is overall detrimental to people and should not be encouraged. There are no evaluations of the work being done.

After observing first-hand numerous CFW projects in Port-au-Prince in the months following the earthquake, I strongly agree with sentiment expressed above. Many displaced Haitians I interviewed had received jobs and benefits through CFW, and were grateful for the opportunity to earn money. However, an equal number of interviewees were dismayed by the nepotistic ways in which CFW jobs were distributed, and by the lack of discipline and diligence demonstrated by the majority of the recipients of CFW jobs. Numerous respondents worried that these practices not only lowered the value of Haitian labor, but also reflected very poorly on the collective work ethic of Haitians and their willingness to take an active role in rebuilding their communities. Several Haitian interviewees suggested that instead of being paid a standard

[19] CFW was funded by USAID and implemented by the International Organization for Migration, the Cooperative Housing Foundation, Development Alternatives Incorporated, and Chemonics International Incorporated.

[20] *Houngan* is the Kreyòl word for a Vodou priest, which is derived from the Fon word *Hounnangan*.

day wage for their work[21], CFW laborers' pay should be structured around the amount of work they complete.

Considering the inequitable distribution of reconstruction funds; foreign workers' negative impact on housing available to displaced Haitians; the underutilization of skilled labor; and the mismanagement of unskilled labor, the current state of affairs in earthquake reconstruction in Haiti can be categorized as a crisis in local participation. The results of this crisis are numerous: Haitian IDPs have remained homeless for longer periods of time and are forced to inhabit buildings that are not structurally sound; the value of Haitian labor, both skilled and unskilled, has been drastically reduced; and, Haitians feel categorically excluded from the planning and execution of post-earthquake reconstruction. Prior to addressing how an aesthetic shift in post-earthquake graffiti has begun to engage these consequences of foreign dominated reconstruction, the next section will provide an overview of language politics in Haiti, with a focus on education and reconstruction.

c. Language Politics

> *Pour le créolophone des masses son ignorance de la langue officielle l'exclue de certaines activities sociales, économiques, et même politiques.*
>
> *For the majority of monolingual Kreyòlophone Haitians, their ignorance of the official language [French] excludes them from certain social, economic, and political activities.*
> (Valdman 1975: 174–175, my translation)

Although Haiti was once considered a primary examplar of *diglossia* (Ferguson 1959), more recently, scholars have rejected this notion, opting instead to characterize Haiti's sociolinguistic situation as one of *linguistic conflict* (Valdman 1988). In this model, an estimated five percent of Haitians are true *balanced bilinguals* in Kreyòl and French, with the remaining 95% of the population composed of monolingual Kreyòlophones implementing varying degrees of selective code-switching and hypercorrection in order to deploy the language of prestige on the Kreyòl-French continuum (Valdman 1988).

This linguistic division is part of a broader social division, with salient racial and economic implications, whose origins can be traced back to French colonialism. James Leyburn (1941) articulated this stratification as an ongoing class conflict between the "yeomanry"—whom he broadly defined as rural, poor, agrarian, illiterate, monolingual Kreyòl speakers, black or phenotypically African, isolated from outside world, open devotees of Vodou, and practitioners of a common law system of marriage known as *plasaj*—and the "elite," whom he broadly defined as urban, renters, merchants, professionals, government employees, French-speaking

[21] About 6 USD per day.

(i.e., Valdman's *balanced bilinguals*), light-skinned, overtly Catholic, never engaging in manual labor, and adherents to marriage practices deemed Western and legitimate.

Although Leyburn's caste-based analysis is an excellent point of departure for discussing language and class in Haiti, I agree with Jean Price-Mars' (1962) critique of *The Haitian People*, and believe that it is too rigid to accurately describe the sociolinguistic reality in Haiti today. To better understand the role of language in the exclusion of Haitians from reconstruction planning, it is helpful to examine the roles of Kreyòl and French in Haitian society, and their relationship to the national education system. Although I have conducted research on language and education in Haiti in the past (Norton 2005), during the spring of 2010 I interviewed a seasoned Haitian educator and administrator in order to better understand this complicated relationship.

A native of Kenscoff, M. Jean completed his university education at the *Université de l'Etat d'Haiti* in the early 1960s, specializing in teaching classical languages. M. Jean was part of the talented cohort of Haitian educators who were recruited to teach in Francophone Africa after decolonization, and spent many years working in Zaire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Gabon before returning home to work in higher education in Haiti. During his academic career, M. Jean served as a classroom teacher, academic adviser, *lycée* director, disciplinarian, and university liaison. He currently splits time between the US and Haiti, and when I met him he was living with his wife in a tent inside the garage of their earthquake-damaged home in Delmas.

According to M. Jean, conflict between differing views on language pedagogy in classrooms is the biggest problem in Haitian education today—a phenomenon he referred to as "*le bilinguisme*." Prior to the education reforms instituted by Regnaud Bernard in the 1970s, which implemented CONFEMEN recommendations that elementary education be conducted in students' mother tongue[22], all instruction in Haitian classrooms had been done in French. The Bernard Reforms mandated that basic education be done in Kreyòl, followed by a transition into French-language instruction after elementary school, and they have been lauded by some educators as a successful means of negotiating the complicated relationship between language and education in Haiti (Jiwolyen 2002). Despite the early successes of the Bernard Reforms, there was a strong backlash against any form of Kreyòl-language instruction in Haitian schools. This dissent emanated primarily from Haitian elites and the middle class, but has also been echoed by significant numbers of rural and urban monolingual Kreyòlophones, who, with good reason, feel that mastering the French language is the best way for their children to achieve social mobility.

[22] *Conférence des Ministeres de l'Education des pays ayant le français en partage* (CONFEMEN) is a yearly international meeting of francophone educators. See http://www.confemen.org/ for more information.

While the implementation of the Bernard Reforms has been controversial in Haitian primary, elementary, and secondary schools, it has been enthusiastically embraced in what M. Jean refers to as *edikasyon popile*. "Popular education" refers to the literacy trainings conducted by NGOs and the Government of Haiti that reach out to the sizable percentage of the Haitian population that cannot read or write. Since the 1980s, substantial resources have been invested in literacy training for adults, but no exact records have been kept documenting what percentage of the population has been reached or how effective the trainings have been. In recent years, rhetoric about literacy, literacy statistics, and literacy trainings have become politically charged, used by politicians as a tool to support their campaigns or slander opponents.

Political maneuvering, and its consequences, have contributed greatly to the deterioration of the quality of education in Haiti during the last 70 years. During the relatively stable and prosperous period that followed the transcendental but short-lived presidency of Dumarsais Estimé, the Haitian education system was a model among Francophone countries. However, things changed for the worse after François Duvalier took office in 1957. Duvalier's repressive policies of the 1960s, coupled with the overseas employment opportunities created by the decolonization of Francophone Africa and the reprioritization of French language education in Canada, sparked a massive exodus of well-trained educators from Haiti (along with doctors, engineers, and other professionals). During the lean years that followed, the quality of Haitian education was diluted further by the appearance of *écoles boulettes*. Borrowing the name from the ubiquitous neighborhood-based lottery gambling booths in Haiti, enterprising Haitians founded numerous *écoles boulettes* (as well as pharmacies) with the hopes of making money in hard economic times. Although locally based and inexpensive, *écoles boulettes* offered an extremely low quality of education to their students. Proprietors' main concern was making money from the schools, not recruiting good teachers or taking an active role in ensuring high academic standards, a sentiment concisely articulated by M. Jean: "*Comme ça, l'education était une maniére de gagner l'argent*" ("Just like that, education became a way to make money.")

The state of education in Haiti today reverberates with its history of dilution of quality and class-based division: there are a few very good schools that primarily cater to elites and the NGO class, while the remainder of schools offer a level of instruction that is very poor. Concerning language of instruction, today teachers explain lessons partially in French and partially in Kreyòl, reflecting a widespread pattern of *translanguaging* demonstrated by Haitians across social classes.[23] Unfortunately, the linguistic awareness and accommodation demonstrated by Haitian teachers have not been adopted, much less acknowledged, in the

[23] Contrary to the more linear and rigid definitions of code-switching, *translanguaging* is a more dynamic form of bilingualism in which speakers access different linguistic features or various modes of autonomous languages in order to maximize communicative potential (García 2009).

efforts of the international aid community's engagement of Haitians in reconstruction planning and execution.

Nowhere is the linguistic exclusion of non-elite Haitians from reconstruction planning more salient than at the United Nations Logistics Base (LOG Base), situated in Port-au-Prince's *ancien aéroport*. Located in central Port-au-Prince, and littered with the rotting remains of antiquated aircrafts, the LOG Base is the operational headquarters for reconstruction planning, inter-agency coordination, and UN-coordinated operations. Here planning and coordination are organized around cluster systems with themes like education, health, and religion. In addition to being "incomprehensible" and "dysfunctional," no effort was made by UN administrators to interface with the Government of Haiti to involve them in planning, management, and decision-making within the system (O'Connor 2011).

While the atmosphere of the LOG Base is cosmopolitan in some senses[24], it is virtually devoid of Haitian faces, except as menial laborers in the kitchens and café, or drivers loitering near their vehicles waiting for their passengers to reemerge from cluster meetings. LOG Base policy dictates that all meetings be conducted in English or French (with the vast majority taking place in English), which excludes all but the most elite Haitians from participating even if they were able to enter the Base. Points of entry to the Base are tightly controlled by MINUSTAH soldiers[25], who apply very different levels of scrutiny to people attempting to enter the LOG Base depending on appearance and mode of transportation. As a white US American travelling in an SUV, I was never asked for identification or credentials during my five trips to the LOG Base in the spring of 2010; however, those perceived as not having attributes typical of foreign aid workers were treated much differently. On multiple occasions, I observed that dark-skinned, phenotypically African people attempting to enter the Base on foot were denied entry.

To illustrate this point, I share a story recounted to me by a Haitian American women's rights activist whom I interviewed in Miami in 2011. When the Organization of International Migration blocked an administrative procedure that had been promised to help an IDP camp, home to more than 3,000 displaced Haitians in Pon Wouj[26], Michel organized a peaceful protest march to the LOG Base comprising mostly of women. Upon arriving at the LOG Base, the women were refused entry by the MINUSTAH guards. Although Michel was not surprised that the demonstrators were not admitted to the LOG Base, he was shocked by the open hostility

[24] One senior colleague at USAID likened the LOG Base atmosphere to the space station bars depicted in the film *Star Wars*, abuzz with employees hailing from myriad cultures, speaking unrecognizable languages, and festooned with uniforms and credentials from different countries, agencies, and government branches. Based on my own time at the LOG Base, I concur that this is an apt comparison; however, my most lasting impression was a feeling of unease created by numerous foreign police officers openly carrying firearms despite being in another sovereign nation, well outside of their own jurisdictions.

[25] *Mission de Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en Haïti* (MINUSTAH) is the 10,000 strong UN peacekeeping force that has maintained a presence in Haiti since the ouster of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004.

[26] Pon Wouj is a low-income neighborhood not far from *Cité Soleil* and is famous for being the burial place of Haitian founding father Jean-Jacques Dessalines.

with which the MINUSTAH soldiers treated the women, including refusing to give water to a woman who became sick from the heat and exertion of their walk from Pon Wouj. Disdain toward Haitians by MINUSTAH peacekeepers has been further evidenced by high-profile cases of rape, sexual assault, and other abuses (Garces 2011; UN 2012).

Considering the US Government's complicity in the installation and continued support of the Duvalier regime; the devastating effects on the quality of Haitian education fostered by the brain-drain resulting from the Duvaliers' repressive policies; the complicated relationship among language, class, and education in Haiti; as well as the combination of the absence of Haitians in meaningful positions, the prioritization of English and French and the erasure of Kreyòl, and inconsistent perimeter surveillance at the UN LOG Base; I argue that the international aid community's ignorance of Haiti's sociolinguistic reality is part and parcel of the systematic exclusion of the vast majority of Haitians from reconstruction planning and policy-making that affects their daily lives. This systematic exclusion results in Haitians' disillusionment and distrust of internationally led development and aid initiatives, which plays a significant role in perpetuating the nepotism, short-sightedness, and lack of cohesion that impede Haitian involvement in reconstruction projects initiated and managed by international NGOs and agencies. Furthermore, the results of this exclusion devalues Haitian labor and pushes skilled Haitians to seek work abroad, thus strengthening a vicious cycle that increases Haiti's dependence on predatory, neoliberal, and philanthrocapitalist foreign aid.

V. A Closer Reading: Jerry's Engaged Graffiti in Port-au-Prince

> *In the hours after the earthquake struck on Jan. 12, thousands of shocked countrymen had congregated in the giant plaza, weeping and crying out for Jesus. Jerry, a 25-year-old graffiti artist, knew what to do: with a can of spray paint, he turned a map of Haiti into a person who cried and held his hands skyward in prayer. Jerry didn't sleep that night, and after dawn broke the next day, he sprayed five more crying Haiti's in a neighborhood called Bois Verna. Soon afterward, the symbols appeared all over town.*
> (Bhatia 2010)

The crux of the current article lies in establishing a link between art and empowerment; and more specifically, showing how graffiti art addresses the specific modes of exclusion that prevent non-elite Haitians from participating meaningfully in post-earthquake reconstruction. As the third section of this paper demonstrates, street art played a significant role in helping to bring about the fall of the Duvalier regime; however, this is not the only example of the agentive power of art in Haiti's history. With this in mind, it is useful to examine briefly other intersections of Haitian art, international interests, and community engagement.

Despite the prominence of public art and artistic decoration in urban and rural Haiti, historic commitments to art by prominent Haitian heads of state[27], and vibrant mixed-media traditions associated with Vodou, the influence and awareness of Haitian art on a global scale began with the founding of the *Centre d'Art* in Port-au-Prince in 1944 by US American teacher and amateur painter DeWitt Peters. With backing from the United States and Haitian governments, Peters' *Centre* is credited with launching the careers of renowned Haitian artists Rigaud Benoit and Hector Hyppolite (among others), and exposing the majesty of Haitian art to international artists like Wifredo Lam, André Breton, and Truman Capote (Bach 1952; Rodman 1965). While it is undeniable that talented artists existed in Haiti prior to the founding of the *Centre d'Art*, it is equally undeniable that Haitian art would not have achieved the level of prestige and esteem it enjoys today without some outside help.

Another example of the intersection between local movements and international actors is Arnold Antonin's documentary film *Beauté contre pauvreté à Jalousie* (2000). Set in the *bidonville* of Jalousie, perched precariously on a steeply graded mountainside overlooking the affluent commune and suburb of Pétionville. The film begins by documenting pressing problems faced by the residents of Jalousie, which are common in many of the overcrowded *bidonvilles* in urban Haiti: lack of potable water, high crime rates, and few creative outlets or leisure activities for youth. To address these problems, community leaders enlist the help of renowned Haitian sculptor Patrick Vilaire and work with him to create a mixed-media mural covering one wall in a heavily traveled public square at the center of the community.

Adorned with mosaics, sculptures, and paintings, the mural depicts the dreams of the community: easy access to clean water, happy families, and citizens voting without interference. Through first-hand testimonials of residents, the artist, and the community committee, Antonin demonstrates the mural's positive impacts on the neighborhood. By taking control over a public space that once menaced residents with mud, dust, and trash, the mural has not only inspired residents to beautify their neighborhood by planting flowers and keeping nearby areas free of debris, it has motivated the community to create a youth arts training center, and attracted attention and funding from UNESCO, resulting in the installation of six new water pumps and official street signs. Antonin's film demonstrates the transformative power that simple actions like beautifying public space through collective art can have in creating solidarity and positive momentum toward progress in marginalized communities with few resources.

More recently in 2013, and likely drawing inspiration from Antonin's film, Jalousie played host to the Government of Haiti's *Beauté contre Pauvreté* project (also know in UK English as *Beauty versus Poverty: Jalousie in Colours*). With a budget of $1.4 million, the GoH refinished and painted the north-facing concrete facades of many of Jalousie's homes in a phantasmagoric

[27] *Lycée Petion* offered art classes as early as 1816, Christophe's national schools in the North offered art classes during the same time, and King Henry I of Haiti opened a full-fledged specialized art academy (Trouillot 1997).

array of colors in homage to celebrated Haitian painter Préfète Duffaut's "cities in the sky" motif. In addition to improving the neighborhood's visual aesthetic, the project also offered one year of rent subsidies to residents in several high-priority IDP camps as a means to encourage them to relocate to permanent housing in Jalousie. While some Jalousie residents welcomed the project, critics see it as an ineffective use of reconstruction funds whose main aim is to create a prettier view for the luxury hotels, boutiques, and residences in the posh suburb of Pétionville, located just below Jalousie.[28]

"Jerry"

In a country where few people read French, and fewer people own televisions, Kreyòl-language radio broadcasts are by far the largest disseminator of news and information among Haitians, both rural and urban. Of the 40–45 radio stations operating in Port-au-Prince prior to 12 January 2010, the majority were damaged in the earthquake, killing many journalists and destroying equipment both expensive and difficult to replace. The communicative void created by this catastrophe generated space for graffiti to expand its influence and prominence as a mode for circulating Haitian perspectives on news and current events. In order to exploit this new opportunity, artists needed to be sensitive to the complexities of Haitian language and society, and to have knowledge of how to navigate the internal and international power structures within the city.

Jerry is a Port-au-Prince based visual artist in his early 30s who started writing graffiti in 2001. Jerry's work is a running visual commentary and critique of current events that are informed by his personal, educational, and professional experiences. After his mother died when he was six years old, Jerry was raised by his father, who worked as a clerk in a camping equipment store in downtown Port-au-Prince. Jerry completed secondary school, and spent several years studying art at the *École Nationale des Arts* in Port-au-Prince, prior to taking a job in youth outreach with a US American NGO. In 2008, his art took a socially-conscious turn when he began using *spre* to paint murals addressing issues like environmental degradation, hunger, and neglect of patients in Haiti's overburdened healthcare system (Bhatia 2009).

I first learned of Jerry's work in April of 2010 while conducting scoping interviews with Haitian IDPs and became fascinated by his socially conscious works that used both images and text to call attention to the dire state of affairs in Haiti. After being put in contact with him by a mutual friend and communicating via email for several months, I returned to Port-au-Prince in July 2011 to interview Jerry and photograph his work. I was mostly interested in talking with Jerry about the motivation behind his murals and how his work with NGOs influenced his

[28] For more (in English) about the GoH's Jalousie's 2013 beautification campaign, see Daniel 2013. In French, see Alterpresse 2013. For my favorite Jalousie visual, see the French hip-hop group Milk Coffee & Sugar's "Freestyle en Haïti" video, featuring Haitian rapper K-Libr: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQv2pJSyT-8&list=UUX_83DeWPBTvaANzZRpMVMQ

graffiti, but during the course of our discussion, I gained a great deal more insight into what makes his art so respected and moving for people of vastly different backgrounds.

PORT-AU-PRINCE, 2011: Jerry's *Crying Haiti,* an anthropomorphized map of Haiti sheds tears of sadness in the wake of the 2010 earthquake.

In creating works of socially conscious graffiti art, Jerry is motivated by three main factors: sharing the misery that many Haitians experience on a daily basis with a broad audience, including the Haitian elite and international aid workers; beautifying neighborhoods by covering negative *textual graffiti* with what he describes as "something beautiful"; and using visual imagery to communicate pride and love with what he deemed as "the 70% of Haitians

PORT-AU-PRINCE, 2011: Jerry's sad flower is a commentary on the environmental degradation of Haiti's rural and urban landscapes. This photo is particularly biting, as the anthropomorphized flower looks sadly on trash piled next to an empty dumpster and hand-painted advertisements for hard alcohol.

that cannot read." From my perspective as a researcher, Jerry is succeeding in all these goals: his work is wildly popular with Haitians across the socioeconomic spectrum—lauded by Haitian IDPs, wealthy art gallery owners, the intelligentsia, and even police officers. Perhaps more importantly, the same *guns for hire* whose ubiquitous political doggerel motivate Jerry to create aesthetic graffiti, and who habitually paint over other murals and graffiti, have largely left Jerry's murals untouched, which serves as a testament to myriad communities' respect for Jerry's art.

Prior to devoting himself full-time to graffiti and traditional art, Jerry worked for a US American NGO doing outreach with kids in low-income neighborhoods in Port-au-Prince. In this capacity, Jerry encouraged kids to eschew violence through sports and art. Although he is longer employed by an NGO, he continues to collaborate with selected organizations, including the World Food Program, Catholic Relief Services, and the Red Cross. All of these collaborations were initiated by the organizations and have included activities like leading drawing workshops, participating in public health outreach campaigns, and painting pre-fabricated houses. In addition to these more applied interventions, Jerry also believes that graffiti can play more abstract roles in reconstruction in Haiti, noting that through his work he aims to incite conversations between people of different classes and origins, both Haitian and foreigners, about issues that they would not discuss otherwise. More specifically, Jerry sees his role in reconstruction as "making beautiful works that motivate people to love their country and believe in who they are."

Jerry's positionality as a college-educated, middle-class Haitian equips him with the perspective necessary to interpret current events in Haiti within a framework enlightened by a broader understanding of historical and international processes. Jerry's artistic talent allows him to translate complex concepts into simple but powerful images that are accessible not only to Haiti's impoverished majority, but also to elite Haitians and foreign workers. Jerry's work experience with international NGOs has given him an understanding of the international aid

system and allows him to frame his work in a way that criticizes these processes without alienating individuals or organizations. Linguistically, Jerry is extremely savvy, effectively deploying English and Kreyòl in his works of graffiti and interviews with journalists and scholars, all the while using French in fliers advertising an exhibition of his more traditional art (see Appendix 2).

PÉTIONVILLE, 2011: One of Jerry's earliest and most well-known pieces depicts a young woman struggling to choose between education and money. Painted in a section of Pétionville known for prostitution, the mural offers social commentary without moral reproach on a difficult predicament faced by many young women in urban Haiti.

The final section of this article analyzes one of Jerry's murals in greater detail and explains how it directly addresses the exclusion of Haitians from meaningful participation in post-earthquake reconstruction vis-à-vis local engagement and language politics. While it represents only a fraction of Jerry's body of work[29], it is a salient example of engaged graffiti art in post-earthquake Port-au-Prince. In addition to receiving praise from Haitians of various backgrounds, as well as significant international media attention[30], Jerry's style of multilingual and multimodal engaged graffiti has inspired other artists in Port-au-Prince, like Epizod. Jerry

[29] During our conversation in 2011, Jerry estimated that he has made more than 30 murals throughout Port-au-Prince, and that his work is most concentrated in Pétionville, Downtown, La Lou, and Carrefour Feuilles. In the years that have followed, he has remained active in painting and has made numerous trips abroad to share his work, including visits to Dartmouth College in 2014 and 2018, recounted nicely here in the blog *Black Praxis*: https://blackpraxis.com/blog/haitian-artist-jerry-rosembert-moise-visits-dartmouth

[30] A Google search of "Jerry Graffiti Haiti" conducted in November 2012 returned more than 2.3 million hits, including articles about Jerry and his art in publications like *The Guardian*, *New York Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and *ABC News*.

takes his growing influence on other artists as a compliment, and hopes that it helps strengthen the trend of artists creating more aesthetic graffiti in Port-au-Prince and throughout Haiti.

Lave Men W

This mural depicts an adult man and a child standing near a water spigot[31]; the man is teaching the child about the importance of hand-washing. The image is accompanied by the Kreyòl text *Lave Men W*, which translates to English as "Wash Your Hands." The image and accompanying text are composed of at least three different colors, indicating that the artist was not rushed while composing the mural, which demonstrates the property owner and host community's authorization and inherent approval of this work. The mural is painted over and among sloppily written *textual graffiti* endorsing political candidates. Grammatically, the text is in the imperative mood, literally instructing its Kreyòlophone audience to wash their hands in order to avoid the spread of infectious disease. Visually, the text is accompanied by an image, making it accessible to literate and non-literate Haitians alike, but also to the vast majority of international aid workers who cannot read, speak, or write in Kreyòl.

Aside from its language and imagery, the placement of this mural is equally important in reaching a broad audience. Displayed in a visible location along a heavily travelled road in Pétionville, the mural is equally accessible to people travelling by foot and by car. The mural's geographic location is also significant: traditionally home to many of Port-au-Prince's economic elite, Pétionville has become a flashpoint in the conflict surrounding forced relocations of IDPs, as well as the profiteering and lavish lifestyles of many international aid workers (Romero 2010). Additionally, in the months following the quake, the Pétionville Golf Club (PGC) was transformed into the largest IDP camp in the country, at its peak being home to more than 60,000 people. The camp's population density and susceptibility to flooding pushed PGC residents to the top of the high priority list for relocation to long-term camps like *Corail Cesseless* and *Tabarre Issa*. The buzz of activity surrounding these relocations created an even broader audience for Jerry's mural *Lave Men W*.

[31] Photographed by the author in Pétionville in April 2010.

Through its deployment of didactic images and Kreyól-language text to directly address a Haitian audience concerning a vital issue of public health, *Lave Men W* circumvents the foreign-dominated reconstruction power structures that have categorically excluded the participation of Haitian community leaders who are not members of the political and economic elite. Jerry's savvy deployment of Kreyól also challenges the dominant positions of English and French as the languages of reconstruction planning; however, coupling Kreyòl text with an image allows the message to be interpreted and understood by viewers not literate in Kreyòl: this audience includes not only non-literate Haitians, but thousands of international aid workers.

Jerry's art employs well-informed yet subtle techniques to challenge the dominant modes of exclusion outlined in Section III of this article. Drawing on a nuanced understanding of Haitian language and society, a familiarity with the NGO sector, and a desire to empower Haitians through public art, Jerry's work is an important example of initiatives that advocate for and empower Haitians without alienating foreign workers and donors.

VI. Conclusion

> *If, by a true statement of facts and a fair deduction from them, I shall in any degree promote a better understanding of what Haiti is, and create a higher appreciation of her merits and services to the world; and especially if I can promote a more friendly feeling for her in this country and at the same time give to Haiti herself a friendly hint as to what is hopefully and justly expected of her by her friends* […] *my object and purpose will have been accomplished.*
> (Douglass 1893)

This article has documented the emergence and evolution of murals and political graffiti; the recent history of foreign humanitarian and neoliberal interventions and their consequences; the exclusion of Haitians from meaningful participation in post-earthquake reconstruction vis-à-vis local participation and language politics; and has offered a closer reading of how one Haitian artist is using his awareness of these issues to compose graffiti art that challenges existing power structures to engage Haitians affected by the earthquake directly.

Data collection in Port-au-Prince showed that the vast majority of Haitians strongly support international involvement in earthquake reconstruction, believing that a strong international presence can help fill in gaps left by a weak central government that was crippled by the earthquake. However, this support for international involvement comes with suspicion and distrust sown by centuries of foreign interventions that have left Haitians worse off than they had been, including but not limited to European colonization and the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, British and Spanish antagonism during the war for independence from France, financial reparations paid to France following independence, decades of isolation enforced by the US

embargo, the US military occupation of Haiti from 1915–1934 (and US control of many important Haitian financial institutions until 1947), US complicity in the installation and support of the Duvalier regime, the eradication of the *kochon kreyòl*, and US complicity in the removal of Aristide from office. In short, Haitians are eager to receive, yet extremely wary of, help from abroad. In fact, many of the IDPs I interviewed considered foreign intervention as both the source of, and potential resolution to, many of Haiti's most pressing problems.

I conclude this article with a photo of the *textual graffiti* from which it draws its title. The text, written in Kreyól, reads "*Nou bezwen lape pa destabilizasyon*;" translating to English as "We need peace, not destabilization." This concise yet powerful statement expresses a universal sentiment held by all societies; however, considering the sheer scale of international involvement, lack of accountability and interagency coordination, and systematic exclusion of Haitians from meaningful participation in reconstruction planning and decision-making; this simple *spre* statement speaks volumes about the current state of affairs and the implication of (sometimes) well-intended foreign power-brokers in post-earthquake Haiti.

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APPENDIX 1:

IDP Scoping Interview Questionnaire

1. What is your name?
   Kouman w rele?

2. How old are you?
   Ki laj ou gen?

3. Do you live in this camp?
   Eske w rete nan kan sa a?

4. How can foreign aid workers help people in this camp?
   Kouman kominote entènasyonal kapbab ede nou isit?

5. What are your priorities for relief and reconstruction?
   Kisa priyorite nou yo pou rekonstriksyon peyi a?

6. What advice would you give to foreign governments and organizations working to rebuild Haiti?
   Koumen w dwe konseye gouvernman epi organizasyon etranje yo ki travaye pou rekonstwi Ayisyen?

APPENDIX 2:

French-language flier for Jerry's art exposition, 2011

LIVE SHOW - EXPO AQUARELLE - COCKTAIL
DIMANCHE 13 MARS 2011

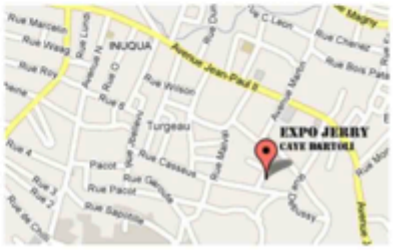
Depuis cinq ans, JERRY a décidé de faire parler les murs. De Delmas à Bois-Verna, de Pacot à Bourdon, de Lalue à Debussy, et jusqu'à Petionville, les graffs de JERRY sont devenus un fil rouge dans la ville. Au-delà des mots, il crée pour sensibiliser, mobiliser, éveiller les consciences. Il crée pour réinventer Haïti. A coups d'aérosols.

INVITATION JERRY ROSEMBERT MOISE est heureux de vous inviter à une après midi artistique où vous aurez le plaisir d'assister à la naissance de l'un de ses graffiti puis de découvrir, autour d'un cocktail, sa toute première exposition d'aquarelles inspirées de ses plus beaux graffiti de Port-au-Prince.

RÉSERVATION OBLIGATOIRE Afin de vous garantir une place parmi nous, nous vous demandons de nous envoyer un courrier électronique avec votre nom ainsi que celui des amis qui vous accompagneront à : jerryandfriends@yahoo.fr

HORAIRE
14h : ouverture de l'exposition
14h30 : Live Show accompagné au tambour par Emmanuel DELLY (CHAY NANM, Renette DESIR...)
15h30 - 17h : Cocktail et exposition

LIEUX Caye BARTOLI, 17 rue WILSON, quartier PACOT, Port-au-Prince



VENTE PRIVÉE Des aquarelles en séries limitées et numérotées seront mises en vente à un tarif spécial pour les amis de JERRY à 50, 100 et 150 US$. Commandes possibles, paiement CASH seulement.

Retrouvez l'actualité de JERRY sur **FACEBOOK « JERRY AND FRIENDS »** ou par mail en nous envoyant un courrier à jerryandfriends@yahoo.fr

PORT-AU-PRINCE, 2011: This flier employs standard Haitian French to describe and advertise a live aerosol art show where Jerry will paint and have pieces for sale.