

The Haiti Exception: Anthropology and the Predicaments of Narrative
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Haitian Culture in the Informational Economies of Humanitarian Aid

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[–] Abstract and Keywords

This chapter examines the activist landscape in post-disaster Haiti by reflecting on personal experience as a foreign academic and would-be aid worker in the capital city of Port-au-Prince in the year following the January 2010 earthquake. The chapter describes involvement in a housing rights activist coalition, a collective of various Haitian grassroots organizations that was working to mobilize internally displaced persons. It also considers the role played by culture as a closed system in the two-way and behaviour change communications projects that were initiated in post-earthquake Haiti. The chapter shows how humanitarian communications as governmentality targeted culture, identifying particular cultural traits or behaviours that were imagined to support or impede Haiti's prospects of economic and social recovery. The chapter concludes by arguing that there are disconnects between humanitarian aid and their supposed recipients.

Keywords: housing, Haiti, Port-au-Prince, earthquake, internally displaced persons, culture, behaviour change, communications, governmentality, humanitarian aid

When the earthquake hit Port-au-Prince in January of 2010, I had just left my *Kreyòl* lesson at a school inside the crowded and sinuous alleyways of the Solino neighbourhood. My teachers were members of a grassroots solidarity organization who, two years prior, had been my students in a seminar I was teaching on Frantz Fanon, part of their popular university programme. To conclude my lesson on 12 January 2010, they had taught me a *Kreyòl* proverb, carefully spelling it out onto the chalkboard: *bat bliye*, *kò songe* [the stick or weapon forgets, but the body remembers]. After the lesson, my teachers saw me onto a crowded *tap-tap* and waved goodbye, and the earthquake hit as the makeshift bus travelled up the narrow street of Poste Marchande. In the turmoil that followed, I forgot ever learning the proverb. But a few months after the quake, on my first trip back to Haiti and the now half-destroyed schoolroom, the words were still visible on the chalkboard, seemingly prescient of what was to come.

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In the months following the quake, I returned to Haiti regularly. I was pursuing a new research project on post-earthquake spaces as spaces of exception, the phenomenon of the squalid tent cities and their relationship to the gated compounds of the foreign aid community (my pre-quake project on literary and media representations of the political turmoil of 2004 no longer seemed relevant). I was also trying to help, to combine research with praxis, and I was doing neither terribly well. I was also trying to get back some of my *Kreyòl*: the chalkboard in Solino seemed to remember more than I could, **(p.157)** and I was certain that whatever I had learned had been knocked out of my head by the earthquake, an event that my body remembered all too well.

My post-earthquake research and solidarity work led me to a housing rights activist coalition, a collective of various Haitian grassroots organizations that included my *Kreyòl* teachers. The coalition was working to mobilize the masses of displaced people (peaking at 1.5 million) by educating them on their rights to housing guaranteed by the 1987 constitution and on the illegality of forced evictions. It was abundantly clear that I was getting more out of the coalition than I was able to give. I was both fascinated and relieved to be in the midst of a culture of activism, of political mobilization represented by the more seasoned organizers, people who had seen the popular movement wax and wane – sometimes violently – over the years. Despite this, and despite what seemed to me their own unimaginable traumas, they remained committed, calm and steady, clear that their project did not begin with the earthquake and that it would not end when the scores of NGOs packed their bags to chase other disasters. Of course, the younger activists were less patient; they talked of revolution, mostly amongst themselves, and I'd seen them throw rocks at a MINUSTAH (i.e., UN's Stabilization Mission in Haiti) truck during a rally on the Champs-de-Mars, an act which excited much discussion in the group and for which the rock throwers were thoroughly chastised.

For the first anniversary of the quake, the housing rights coalition organized several *animations* in various tent camps: they screened short documentary films, and one long-time popular organizer would 'animate' the crowd with traditional songs and give the microphone to the more intrepid camp residents – from children to grandmothers – who wanted to tell their stories. Then activists and lawyers would inform the audience about their rights, about what to do if they faced illegal eviction (a problem that was becoming critical during this period) and about the politics and economics of aid. When the speakers referred to their movement as part of a local history that included slave revolt, the resistance to the US occupation of 1915 led by Charlemagne Pérault and the toppling of the Duvaliers, I felt I was in the midst of the Haitian exceptionalism that is evoked in so much scholarship, including my own: Haiti as the site of the only successful slave revolution in world history, the first black republic and the second republic in the Americas after the US; a place that had developed popular traditions of political engagement and mobilization; Haiti, where *négritude* stood up for the first time.

The earthquake anniversary events were mostly successful, meaning that a crowd of camp dwellers gathered and participated, and that those who were facing eviction, lack of water, sanitation or other problems were able **(p.158)** to communicate face-to-face with other Haitians who, importantly, did not work for NGOs. The coalition acted on the problems communicated to them, even if they were not able to solve them. However, one such event went awry, and the conflict that ensued offered a stark demonstration of the fragility of political organizing and mobilizing in the chaotic post-earthquake moment, and the ways in which this tradition was in conflict with other cultural formations – both local and foreign – that were perhaps more powerful. The event in question was to take place one afternoon in Camp Kanaran, located on a dusty plain about ten miles from Port-au-Prince. An 'unofficial' or

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'squatters' camp that at the time received no aid or assistance, Kanaran, 'the promised land', was where internally displaced persons (IDP) went when they had nowhere else to go. People were likely drawn there by the possibility of receiving aid or services left over from the nearby official camp, Corail-Cesselese, a camp built by the US Army on an equally waterless and denuded stretch of desert. The coalition group arrived and as usual set up a small sound system and projector, and pinned up photos of earthquake wreckage on the rough walls of Kanaran's makeshift community centre, a wooden shelter. While Haitian rap blared from the speakers (to the consternation of the older coalition members), a small group of organizers and camp residents began to have a heated conversation. A certain Pastor Franc, the self-appointed *chef* of the camp, claimed that the coalition had not received permission from his people to hold their event. Trying to grasp the real reason behind his refusal, the coalition tried to convince him that they had no affiliation with a political party. The pastor then stated that he already had an event planned for the afternoon and, indeed, a short distance away, a large professional sound stage was being constructed, crowned by a banner bearing the name of a US evangelical organization. The coalition members promised that their event would be over long before the event approved by the pastor began. But the pastor and his spokesperson, a well-dressed young woman in pressed jeans and gold-toned earrings, were adamant. Suddenly, the young woman began to scream, and someone pulled the plug on the rap music. Then, belying her delicate frame, the woman pushed the coalition organizers towards their cars. Sound systems, photos and banners were quickly repacked, engines started and the coalition fled, leaving a cloud of red dust in their wake. The few camp residents that we saw in Kanaran that day remained at a distance or stayed inside their tents, gazing tiredly from the doorways, unwilling to enter the fray.

The incident necessarily troubled my narrative of Haiti's exceptional status as a place of popular political action and of a resilient culture of collective resistance. I was reminded instead of other less salutary versions of Haitian exceptionalism: passive and dependent people who follow corrupt strongmen; **(p.159)** a place where nothing gets done; a 'failed state'; a ward of the international community, 'republic of NGOs' and, it should be added, of Christian missions.

When I went to do research on the large international organizations working on the IDP housing issue, I expected to hear this version of the Haitian exception, or else the version that assigned to Haitians an exceptional penchant for violence, rioting and looting. However, these discourses of Haitian exceptionalism were by no means dominant. What I heard more often represented was what I propose may be an emergent version of Haitian exceptionalism, and it related in paradoxical ways to the botched *animation* at Camp Kanaran. For while the effort to communicate information was being suppressed in Kanaran by Haitians themselves, humanitarian organizations like the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in reports, programme initiatives and in the mainstream press, were extolling the Haitian public's embrace of and, even, their cultural penchant for communicating and enabling the free flow of information through their participation in new innovative programmes that were variously termed 'two-way communications' and 'behaviour change communications'. An article in the *New York Times* on an IOM initiative called 'Voices of the Voiceless', which installed suggestion boxes in the camps, quotes the IOM Communications Director Leonard Doyle stating that the initial success of the programme was an 'absolute blow-me down surprise' for within only a few days the IOM had received 700 letters, which Doyle described as 'real individualized expressions of suffering' (Sontag, 2010). Echoing the same sentiment, an IOM fact sheet of the same period characterizes the letters that camp residents deposited in the suggestion boxes as 'a torrent of pent-up emotion'. Haitians traumatized by the earthquake, it seemed, had a particularly strong disposition to express themselves through the individualized modality of the personal letter,

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communiqués that also asked for water, food and, most often, jobs. But, as the *New York Times* piece states, 'the $400,000 program was intended to give voice to the voiceless, not food to the hungry or money to the destitute' (Sontag, 2010).

Voices of the Voiceless was part of a series of intersecting and converged two-way communication projects developed by the IOM's communications staff, who were leading innovators among the many humanitarian communications professionals working in post-earthquake Haiti.[1] The IOM's projects **(p.160)** included a *Kreyòl*-language graphic newspaper called *Chimen Lakay* [*The Way Back Home*], which at its height had a circulation of 500,000, and a radio programme of the same name that aired on a major station out of Port-au-Prince. Letters collected from the Voices suggestion boxes and kiosks were sometimes published in *Chimen Lakay*, or read aloud on the radio show. The IOM also created special SMS codes for calling in or texting needs or suggestions to a call centre, but, as with the Voices letters, these messages and the needs they expressed were not responded to, but were collected, coded and their locations mapped on a web platform called *Noula.ht* [*We're here*]. There were also special codes for responding to surveys that appeared in the graphic newspaper or were recorded onto CDs and played by *tap-tap* drivers, who received phone minutes for their efforts.

Two-way and behaviour change communications were sometimes described as 'self-help', sometimes as projects of 'democracy promotion' and sometimes as part of efforts to improve 'civic governance'. The last two claims situate these new communications initiatives under the broad umbrella of beneficiary participation, a priority of the development community at least since the 1980s, and codified in the 2005 Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness. The new imperative to increase 'participation' and also 'empowerment' was the other side of the coin of the World Bank's downsizing of states in the Global South (structural readjustment) as a condition for granting aid. In the market-driven ethos of neoliberalism, civil society should hold states accountable and thus, in the Global South, foreign-funded NGOs, the representatives of civil society, were tasked with the job of creating a more participatory and empowered citizenry. Of course, this amounted to yet another way of marginalizing the postcolonial state.

As Tanya Li, Nancy Postero and Erica Caple James all suggest, participation is also a concept critical to neoliberal governmentality in the Global South, and to projects that seek to train citizens to internalize conducts and behaviours that conform to the goals of international interests. Governance, or social regulation through governmentality, is necessitated by the weakening of state power and capacity under neoliberalism. In ethnographic studies of Indonesia, Bolivia and Haiti, conducted in the period between 1995 and 2005, Li, Postero and James, respectively, argue that neoliberal governmentality functioned through foreign-funded NGO projects that had a mandate to train and educate populations to be participatory citizens, which meant adopting the individualistic behaviours of personal responsibility, rational **(p.161)** decision-making and calculation and risk aversion (Li, 2007; Postero, 2007; James, 2010).[2]

Foucault elaborated the theory of neoliberal governmentality, which he also termed 'governance at a distance' or 'the conduct of conduct', to describe a non-sovereign form of power that directs conduct so that individuals govern or regulate themselves in conformity with the needs of the authorities. As suggested above, the models of conduct disseminated in neoliberal governmentality are particularly oriented towards personal responsibility, which Wendy Brown argues is carried to new heights under neoliberalism (Brown, 2005: 42). Brown also asserts that neoliberal governmentality imagines the ideal citizen as a 'rationally calculating individual [who] bears full responsibility for the consequences of his or her action no matter how severe the

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constraints on this action' (Brown, 2005: 42), a particularly cruel mode of governance in an environment like Haiti.

As suggested by the numerous reports that were published by communications professionals in the humanitarian community following the Haiti quake, two-way and behaviour change communications represented a radical change in the way that organizations were meeting the participation challenge, and thus the goal of governance at a distance, or governmentality. According to the reports' authors, initiatives like two-way communications were enabling direct communication between aid-givers and aid-receivers, thus diminishing the need, they implied, for the intermediary of the local NGO.[3] As *Ann Kite Yo Pale* [*Let Them Speak*] (Wall and Gerald, 2012) and *Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid* (Anderson, Brown and Jean, 2012) argue, SMS messaging, mobile phones, touch-tone phone surveys and NGO-sponsored call centres were giving voice directly to the voiceless and permitting 'one-to-one communications' between donors and beneficiaries, thus revolutionizing the possibilities for increasing participation.[4] Since most Haitians had access to radios and mobile phones (often shared) with texting capabilities, advocates argued in the various reports written from 2011 to 2013 that vital information could **(p.162)** now move from 'person to person', or directly from agency to individual and individual to agency. This created a 'dynamic information flow', which was 'two-way but […] also networked, not merely one-to-one communications but many-to-many' (Mandel, 2012: 6). One report, *Humanitarianism in the Network Age* (OCHA, 2013), in which the Haiti quake response and two-way communications figure prominently, claims that the emergence of responsible and 'connected' communities in places like Haiti was leading to nothing less than 'a fundamental shift in power from capitals and headquarters to the people aid agencies aim to assist' (OCHA, 2013: 2).

Rumours and revolution

As suggested by their categorization as 'self-help', two-way and behaviour change communications redefine 'participation' by describing it, not only in terms of agency-beneficiary relations, but also as part of psychosocial support initiatives, or forms of psychotherapy. *Ann Kite Yo Pale* claims that 'providing channels for people to talk about their experiences is an important psychosocial exercise in and of itself' (Wall and Gerald, 2012: 13), while an issue of the IOM's quarterly magazine *Migration* claims that IOM staff working with tent camp residents were 'encourag[ing] active communication […] giving voice and identity to those likely to be seen only through the prism of the helpless victim' (Baptiste, 2010: 13), that is, giving people the *feeling* that they were being listened to, which was also the goal of the Voices of the Voiceless suggestion boxes and call-in numbers.

The link between therapeutic self-expression and governmentality was suggested to me by an IOM communications staff member, who admitted that one goal of the various Voices of the Voiceless programmes was in fact to let people 'vent' so that they wouldn't do so in more dangerous ways. Indeed, working with a population long demonized for its exceptional propensity for 'savagery', revolution, violent mass movements and general ungovernability give critical importance to the perceived need to channel these tendencies into other less 'destructive' directions. The issue of *Migration* magazine cited above describes the effort to mitigate the risk of violence as an effort to quell rumours or misinformation: 'rumors that forced evictions may occur is spreading talk of popular resistance' (Baptiste, 2010: 11). Community mobilizers were thus talking to camp residents, listening to their concerns and giving them accurate information in order to prevent 'misunderstandings from blowing up into violence' (Baptiste, 2010, 11). The author of the *Migration* piece rehearses the fetishization of

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information and communication that we've seen elsewhere, by associating the 'threat of violence' and 'popular resistance' with 'rumour' and 'talk'. In the often **(p.163)** therapeutic language of such reports, then, 'pent up emotion' and suffering, if circulated as 'rumour', had the power to ignite violence. Mass mobilizations were the result of self-expression run out of control, and Haitians had to be trained to redirect their need to vent into more civilized forms of self-expression equated with voice and participation. Governmentality, then, was in part enacted by encouraging IDPs to vent their 'feelings' through individualistic modes of communication – writing letters and sending text messages – not necessarily to each other but to humanitarian organizations.

But giving IDPs the feeling that they were being listened to was also a way of short-circuiting and halting the spread of their messages of critique, rage and dissent. As Brown asserts, putting the case slightly differently, neoliberal governmentality's crafting of individualized subjects creates 'political passivity and complacency' and diminishes the desire to 'alter' or effect change in a given social, economic or political environment (Brown, 2005: 43). Brown adds, rather darkly, that a 'fully realized' neoliberal body of citizens would 'barely exist as a public' (Brown, 2005: 43), an apt description for the kind of citizenry that two-way and behaviour change communications programmes seemed to be envisioning.

Communicating culture

In a sense, we could say that two-way and behaviour change communications, as a project of governmentality, tried to intervene and alter Haitians' exceptional 'nature' as unruly, rebellious and given to popular revolt, by replacing it with a different version of exception: Haitians who loved to communicate, and who could thus be trained to practice 'better' forms of communication (i.e., individualized and rational) and to reproduce 'positive' forms of information (i.e., official and sanctioned). In this respect, in post-earthquake Haiti, humanitarian communications as governmentality targeted culture, identifying particular cultural traits or behaviours that were imagined to support or impede Haiti's prospects of economic and social recovery. Despite analysing interventions into behaviour and conduct, governmentality theorists have little to say about culture. This is partly a disciplinary issue, as most major theorists of Foucauldian governmentality are sociologists (like Nikolas Rose) or political theorists (like Wendy Brown and Barbara Cruikshank). As the cultural critic Tony Bennett points out, areas that would normally be designated 'culture' are categorized otherwise in governmentality theory. As an example, he points to Mitchell Dean's enumeration of the areas of analysis that distinguish governmentality theories from theories of the state: 'characteristic forms of visibility, ways of seeing and perceiving', 'distinctive ways of thinking and questioning relying **(p.164)** on definite vocabularies and procedures', 'specific ways of acting, intervening and directing' (Dean, 1999, qtd in Bennett, 2003: 47). As early as 1992, Bennett, in contrast to the prevailing trend, asserted in the influential edited volume *Cultural Studies* that culture *is* governmentality (Bennett, 1992).

But Bennett's work on culture and governmentality corresponds to governmentality theory more generally by focusing on the post-welfare states and 'advanced democracies' of the Global North. To find scholarship on how culture might play into (neoliberal) governmentality outside of these contexts, we must turn to anthropology, whose principal object of analysis is culture, and usually cultures outside of the Global North. In her ethnography of governmentality and development in the Sulawesi highlands of Indonesia, Tanya Li argues that under the liberal Dutch colonial administration of the mid-nineteenth century, governmentality was enacted precisely through interventions into local culture, a project that was officially termed the Culture

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System (Li, 2007: 34–38). Li sees a genealogical relationship between the governmental practices of the colonial Dutch Culture System and the World Bank's neoliberal social development programmes that targeted post-Suharto Indonesia with the goal of transforming society and social relations (Li, 2007: 230). Li's discussion implies that culture is a critical category in the analysis of governmentality, as deployed in colonial and developmentalist projects (neoliberal or otherwise).

It would seem, then, that two things distinguish analyses of post-welfare state governmentality (of the North) from analyses of neoliberal governmentality in the Global South: first, the role played by development and humanitarian actors, and, second, the role assigned to culture. This coincidence of development and culture is not an accident; it attests to the mutual influences and benefits that have long characterized the relationship between anthropology and development (and, before that, colonialism) (see Asad, 1979). On the one hand, colonial administrators, humanitarians, and development and international policymakers have long derived their ideas about culture from the discipline of anthropology; on the other, anthropology, focused largely on ethnographic studies of culture, has strong historical ties to colonial and imperialist projects in the Global South. James Clifford suggests that the 'ethnographic authority' behind the culture concept, which allows the fieldworker to define an object of study by isolating or 'represent[ing] discreet, meaningful worlds', is informed by Western colonial epistemologies (Clifford, 1988: 39). He asserts further that, while the culture concept was developed to replace the nineteenth century's evolutionary models of culture, 'for all its supposed relativism […] the concept's model of totality, basically organic in structure, was not different from […] [what] it replaced' and that 'despite many subsequent redefinitions the notion's organicist assumptions have **(p.165)** persisted' (Clifford, 1988: 273). Michel-Rolph Trouillot, seeking to account for the persistence of the organic notion of closed cultures, argues that it results from anthropology's failure to acknowledge how context and power have shaped its key concepts. Anthropology, he argues, has allowed the idea of culture to be reified into 'culture concepts', because its practitioners have not resisted the borders of the nation-state system, which have also served to delimit and define particular cultures, thus determining the object of ethnographic study. For Trouillot, the dearth of ethnographies on African-Americans is evidence of the determining role of the nation-state (the US in particular) in the definition of cultures as closed systems whose members inhabit what he terms the 'Savage slot' (Trouillot, 2003: 103–14).[5]

Humanitarianism and development are among the global institutions that have instrumentalized anthropological notions of culture, and they therefore do more than disavow and benefit from the colonial power that Trouillot identifies in anthropology's culture concept. Rather, the ongoing colonial authority and relations of power inherent in the culture concept enable humanitarianism to exercise that power by intervening in or targeting culture. Such colonial humanitarian practices are perhaps most obviously revealed in contemporary projects that seek to 'civilise the savage', that is, to change behaviours by promoting democracy, empowerment, human rights, participation or communication skills; in short: governmentality.

Culture as a closed system played a vital role in the two-way and behaviour change communications projects that were rolled out in post-earthquake Haiti. In this respect, humanitarian communications adopt the culture-as-communication version of the culture concept that begins with Radcliff-Brown's functionalist models based on cybernetic feedback, and leads to the work of Clifford Geertz, who argued, as part of his formulations of the culture concept, that culture is communication itself (Geertz, 1973: 93). Indeed, since culture is

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communication, understanding in order to instrumentalize it is among the *raisons d'être* of humanitarian communication efforts. For humanitarian communications, culture functions as a vector, a ready-made machine of information flow that must be harnessed in the project of changing behaviours, or governmentality.

The International Federation of the Red Cross's report *Beneficiary Communications Evaluation: Haiti Earthquake Operation 2011* represents a particularly vivid example of the way the culture concept grounds the **(p.166)** colonial governmentality of two-way communications. The report deems the communication practices of Haitians as particular or exceptional, and demonstrates its (anthropological) expertise and authority by educating its readers on the language of Haitian communication, listing *Kreyòl* expressions that signify conversation or word of mouth – *radyo bouche* [*sic*, mouth radio] *radyo 32* (i.e., mouths have thirty-two teeth), *radyo dyol* [*sic*, a difficult to translate term that means something like 'snout'] and *ti parle* [*sic*, a little chat]. The report's playful use of this abundance of expressions and the glossary that appears in the appendix suggest, as we've seen elsewhere, that Haitians have a unique cultural penchant for communication, a trait that the report's authors instrumentalize by representing it as a particularly fertile opening for projects of (new) communications. The task of the communications specialist working with this population, then, is to 'select […] the right entry point', that is, an opening into this closed system, in order to 'assure wide and accurate diffusion' of Red Cross information. Further, the report's authors counsel practitioners that closed systems of communication (or 'communities') allow the work of communication to be outsourced, because, 'in a cohesive community, people will share information with neighbours' (IFRC, 2011). Haitians, here, are targeted as consumers of models of conduct and behaviours presented as 'information'. Their own cultural practices are put in the service of modelling neoliberal conduct and citizenship, and Haitians are called upon to reproduce information or governmentality, which, if they are properly trained, can take place through their informal everyday communicative practices. Indeed, the IFRC report implicitly suggests that understanding the cultural symbols and practices of the 'Other' is as necessary to the humanitarian communications entrepreneur as it is to the anthropologist, or the marketing professional.

As did the IFRC, the IOM used culture, traditional Haitian symbols and *Kreyòl* expressions to brand its various programmes and to articulate its messages, with common Haitian symbols, proverbs and practices acting as 'entry points' into communities in order to change behaviours or enact governmentality. In the interests of pursuing one of the primary goals of governmentality as it appeared in post-earthquake Haiti – dissuading popular and collective forms of political mobilization – visual and textual materials, like the *Chimen Lakay* graphic newspaper, translated or recoded symbols that denote and connote Haitian histories of popular democratic action and the public spaces and identities to which they are linked. One widely disseminated graphic illustration that appeared in *Chimen Lakay* and on flyers, websites and T-shirts announcing a number of the IOM's communications programmes, depicts a curvy Haitian woman dressed traditionally in headscarf and homespun blue cloth, bending down on one knee as she **(p.167)** blows into a conch shell with shiny lips. In one version, a series of half circles flow from the shell's opening, evoking radio waves or internet connection bars and suggesting the modernity (and civilization) of official information, which is conflated with new modes of communication. In the colonial era of Saint-Domingue, the conch shell was used to call the slaves to assemble for work. Independent Haiti reappropriated the symbol to signify freedom from enslavement: according to the founding narrative of the Haitian nation, the conch shell called on the slaves to begin their revolution. The conch-bearing slave appears most prominently

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as a symbol of Haiti's national founding and national culture in the statue of the *Nèg Mawon* [Maroon Slave] which sits on the Champs-de-Mars in Port-au-Prince (not far from the now destroyed National Palace). The male slave, shell to his lips, tilts his head back so that the tip of the shell creates the apex of the statue, suggesting both the power and the reach of his message. He also holds a machete at his side. In the IOM's rendering, the conch-blower is neither a slave nor a man and, of course, *she* is not in possession of a machete. The gender switch is crucial here as part of the resignification of the symbol: freedom becomes 'empowerment' (discourses of which generally target women) and empowerment is modernity, achieved through the unencumbered flows of open communication. Furthermore, while the original symbol represents a message of revolt, a message that names itself as political and demands action and a response, the IOM transforms the slave and the conch into a symbol of communication as an end in itself, communication as 'empowerment', 'voice' or 'participation'. In this version of the symbol, governmentality is both the message's means and its end.

Colourful drawings of *tap-taps*, Haitian busses that are important sites of social exchange, also appeared regularly on IOM products and in publications as symbols of communication and information sharing. References to *tap-taps* also appear in the titles of particular programmes and IOM-sponsored cultural productions (the sitcom *Tap-Tap*; Radyo Tap-Tap). In IOM materials, the *tap-tap* signifies a moving yet closed system of culture or communication, continually replenished with new members. As such, the *tap-tap* represents an ideal version of culture as communication: closed and thus possessing a 'captive audience' (as one report on Radyo Chimen Lakay asserts), its members would potentially carry the official and authoritative messages disseminated back to their various communities (on CDs played by drivers at the IOM's behest). *Tap-taps* also appeared on the banner of an IOM-managed website or 'people's blog', a clearing house for its various 'converged' projects, which was called nothing less than 'Citizen Haiti'. The latter transformed Haitian public or national identity (also evoked by the *tap-tap*) into the cultural identity of the citizen-communicator engaging **(p.168)** in proper conduct in a networked world. Citizenship is thus drained of its associations with legal rights and agency here, just as the symbol of the conch shell-bearing slave is drained of its revolutionary connotations, its message of freedom from enslavement appropriated and 'modernized' to signify freedom as open and networked communication.

Camp cultures and communicability

Shortly after the earthquake, the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) produced a soap opera called *Anba syèl la* [*Under the Skies*]. It was filmed at Camp Carradeux near the Tarbarre neighbourhood outside of Port-au-Prince. Screenings of *Anba syèl la* began in tent camps in early summer of 2010, and within a month or so, when the *New York Times* ran a story on the project, the series was being screened three nights per week in sixteen camps around Port-au-Prince, including the camp where it was filmed, Carradeux. The *New York Times* article quotes an unidentified screening organizer who states that 'the programs will fill in for a government that has failed to communicate effectively, letting rumours and schemes spread among those desperate for help' (Cave, 2010). In echoing the article in the IOM's *Migration* magazine cited above, which identifies 'rumours' or unregulated communication as a potential source of 'popular resistance' and violence (Baptiste, 2010: 11), the organizer's words suggest why MINUSTAH might have financed a soap opera.

As stated above, rumours signal the unruliness of communication, information's potential for unregulated movement and mobility; rumour is a kind of metonymy for the perceived unruliness of the 'mass'. As we have seen, though, when the mass or crowds are defined as 'closed'

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communities or cultures, they become a natural resource that humanitarian communications projects can exploit in the service of spreading official messages and information, for disseminating colonial forms of governmentality. *Anba syèl la* indeed represents the tent camp as a space whose intimacies created the conditions for contamination by the violent virus of 'rumours' but also for nourishing the flows of and dissemination of authoritative information. The crowded space of the tent camp is thus imagined as another resource for spreading 'good' official information, a vaccination against rumour and revolt, and was thus a critical tool in the arsenal for governing at a distance.

Anba syèl la includes a series of comic interludes in which one character, the grandfather, insists that his tent is private and not open to flows of people – and messages – from the outside. The grandfather requires his camp neighbours to follow the protocol of 'knocking' before entering his family tent, to which his family members repeatedly respond that a tent is **(p.169)** not a home, and that 'no one has a house right now' (MINUSTAH, #1).[6] The grandfather's old-fashioned rules are thus dismissed not only as antisocial but also as signs of refusal of his social obligation; for visiting friends always have much valuable and 'life-saving' information to impart. People with good information will not aid the family, but impart the knowledge that will allow them to help themselves and then integrate them into the network of information sharing. The tent itself, with its permeable and undefined borders between public and private, operates as an ideal 'entry point' for the messages of governmentality that the humanitarian community wished to disseminate among camp residents.

In its attempt to train spectators to adopt approved information and modes of communication, *Anba syèl la* represents a version of governmentality that Charles Briggs calls 'communicability'. In his analysis of governmentality in public health programmes among poor populations in Venezuela, Briggs argues for this expanded notion of governmentality, which evokes the structural conditions of viruses and their spread, unacknowledged in the public health discourses disseminated to poor populations. As such, communicability allows us to see how governmentality is linked to political economy (Briggs, 2005: 274), how it 'helps shape material inequalities' and hierarchies within a particular 'sphere' that is itself created by the authoritative ideologies that subjects are called upon to internalize (Briggs, 2005: 274). Citing Bourdieu, Briggs argues that communicative competence 'constitutes symbolic capital, locating individuals and populations in social hierarchies' based on their possession of specialized forms of knowledge and information, especially important in an age in which information is a highly valued commodity (Briggs, 2005: 273–74). Communicability is thus central to self-regulation or governmentality, because through it individuals 'interpellat[e] themselves' into hierarchies 'as producers, translators, disseminators, or receivers of particular types of discourse', or else are positioned as marginal or 'out of the game' entirely (Briggs, 2005: 274).

Anba syèl la is about an extended middle-class Port-au-Prince family forced to live under the same tent. The family consists of the grandmother (unnamed), grandfather (Jean-Joseph), daughter (Marie-Lise), son-in-law (Akim) and grandson (Prince). Each character acts as a representative of particular discourses and models of behaviour, and each can thus be positioned in the hierarchy of communicability, as a producer, disseminator, translator or receiver of the symbolic capital of authoritative information whose aim is to govern conduct and behaviour. While Akim (and his friend **(p.170)** Jacques) are disseminators and sometime translators, poised to rise up in the communication hierarchy, Marie-Lise and her mother (the 'Grandmother') are mostly receivers, the latter showing some capacity to learn and thus become a disseminator of good information. The son, 'Prince', inhabits all three positions (receiver,

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disseminator and translator), but in addition, as an unformed and thus flexible subject, he shows signs of mobility, a possible future as an authority or 'producer' of knowledge himself. Indeed, in one episode, after Prince has demonstrated his highly developed communication skills, his mother exclaims that he will one day become President.

As willing receivers and translators of 'good' information, Akim, Jacques and Marie-Lise all communicate rationally in the language of psychology, self-help, entrepreneurialism, calculation and risk aversion. The grandfather is an interesting case, as the communicative role he inhabits does not appear in Briggs's lists of possible subject positions. As suggested by his definition of his tent as a private (i.e., closed) space, Jean-Joseph is 'out of the game' since, in contrast to the others, he refuses to welcome the 'new' information and the neoliberal languages of the younger generation. Instead, Jean-Joseph communicates anger, stubbornness, incivility, nationalism and traditionalism, qualities that are often conflated. Yet Jean-Joseph is not merely 'out of the game', he refuses to play. Jean-Joseph is thus a blocker or disabler of governmentality as effected through person-to-person communication within the space of the camp. At one point, Akim tells him, 'you […] understand […] nothing. Your mind is closed up like a clogged gutter' (MINUSTAH, #8). Indeed, Jean-Joseph not only positions himself outside of the imposed sphere of communicability, he tries to block or 'clog' its flows of information. He refuses official solutions, regularly tries to undermine the family's efforts to engage in good communication and rational conflict resolution, and distrusts the authorities, whom he calls *blan-yo* [the foreigners], and their information. In one episode, the family listens to an official radio broadcast, which states that 'in the days to come, there will be a solution to help fix things […] keep following the news so you can find out what will take place next' (MINUSTAH, #1). While the grandmother is relieved to receive this information (which only promises that there will be information), Jean-Joseph expresses the suspicion that 'there's something corrupt behind this' on the part of both the state and the *blan-yo*.

Episode Five focuses on the problem of trash in the camp and provides an occasion to articulate and model neoliberal ideologies of personal responsibility. When Jean-Joseph has injured himself on a rat trap and begins to blame everyone around him, the ever-present neighbour Jacques enters the family's tent to opine, 'trash. That's our biggest problem in the camp' (i.e., not food or water) (MINUSTAH, #5). The entrepreneurial son-in-law Akim, **(p.171)** immediately adds, 'we can't continue like this. We can't just do nothing. We must act'. Jacques then gives the obvious neoliberal interpretation that personal responsibility is the problem and the answer: 'the people are those who are responsible for what's going on […] the problem is that people refuse to use the trash receptacles'. Jean-Joseph then begins his efforts to derail the 'positive' direction of the conversation. He accuses the group of blaming the poor for the trash problem, and then links the absence of sanitation services to the failures of the aid apparatus: 'so where are the state representatives? Where are all those foreigners here in the country to help us?' Jean-Joseph critiques the neoliberal discourses of Akim and Jacques that do indeed blame the poor camp residents, rather than the aid systems that are failing them. But *Anba syèl la* articulates this critique in order to marginalize, dismiss and contain it, putting it in the mouth of an 'old man' who is also sexist, uncivil, naïve and untrustworthy. Reinforcing the rejection of this critique, Akim and the others ridicule Jean-Joseph's musings as irrational, irrelevant and, most importantly, a waste of valuable time that should be applied to the practical effort of solving the trash problem. In these scenes and others, those who possess a greater share of symbolic capital within this communicative sphere enforce the division between officially sanctioned information and 'rumour', and thus have the legitimacy (and duty) to contain the latter.

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As the disabler communication, Jean-Joseph represents an odd assemblage of discourses, which are all coded as irrational, unruly and potentially violent. In the trash episode, after Jean-Joseph has asked the other men why they are blaming the poor 'for everything that goes wrong', he recounts childhood memories of an earlier moment in Haitian history, when the streets were clean and when there were different models of giving voice and agency to the poor: 'when I was a little boy in Port-au-Prince, Fignolé's *woulo konpresè* [steamroller] would come into Bel-Air and force both the bourgeoisie and the state authorities to respect the working-class people'. Daniel Fignolé was President of Haiti for three weeks in 1957. A labour organizer, he led the massive Mouvement ouvrier paysan (Peasant Worker Movement), and was supposedly able to mobilize mass protests at a moment's notice, what was termed his *woulo konpresè* [steamroller]. Fignolé's legacy is controversial, but his popular democratic movement is often cited as one of the more legitimate democratic movements in twentieth-century Haiti. Here, Fignolé's 'steamroller', described by the irrational and untrustworthy disabler Jean-Joseph, is coded as a dangerous popular movement, connoting both the violence of political mobilizations and the specific political conflicts that beset the presidency of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who supposedly hired gangs of impoverished young men, called *chimères*, **(p.172)** to intimidate his opposition.[7] In addition to the specific connotations that are loaded onto this historical reference – the danger of rumour, of groups of people working together, the spectre of the *chimères*, etc. – Jean-Joseph's reference to history itself is coded as irrational. His story of the *woulo konpresè* and his reminiscences of the formerly tidy streets of Port-au-Prince are indeed idealized and contain selective detail, but that's not the problem registered by the family. Rather, no one understands why Jean-Joseph is talking about his childhood and Haitian history in the first place, as they see no relationship between the past and the current (trash) problems. Ultimately, Akim chides the group: 'this discussion is not getting us anywhere. Rather, let's sit and think about how we can help people in the camp wage a battle [*batay*] against trash'. Acting here as translator, Akim resignifies and depoliticizes Jean-Joseph's historical references by making the object of their struggle trash itself (and the retraining of the social misfits who don't throw it in the receptacles), rather than justice or the right to basic sanitation services. Where Jean-Joseph critiques the international aid community for its shortcomings, Akim lets it off the hook.

In an ironic moment, Jean-Joseph suggests using violence, a *baton* [heavy stick] to beat the message about throwing trash away into the people. On the one hand, the reference links Jean-Joseph to the violence of the popular mobilizations in Bel-Air, which he remembers with pride, but, on the other, Jean-Joseph's ironic suggestion that they beat the message of proper hygiene into people implicitly connects neoliberal governmentality, the project of behaviour change communications, to the repressive apparatuses (represented by the MINUSTAH forces themselves) that were everywhere being exercised to contain, subject and regulate the IDP population. Jean-Joseph's ironizing, then, reveals the mutually supportive relationship between governmentality and the international policing that was called upon when governmentality failed. Such forces of repression are of course entirely absent from the universe depicted in *Anba syèl la*, as well as from all the cultural products disseminated as part of behaviour change and two-way communications projects.

The ironic suggestion that humanitarian communications projects were beating information, or messages of governmentality, into the Haitian people's **(p.173)** hearts and minds also leads me back to the proverb with which I began: *bat bliye, kò songe*. If people were indeed internalizing the modes of conduct that the humanitarian community was trying to drum into them, how did they do so? And what messages did they remember, and how did they respond? What messages did they try to communicate through the new vehicles of communication made available to

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them? While the Haitian IDPs' reception of humanitarian communications projects is beyond the scope of this article, I will close by relaying two suggestive anecdotes.

I returned to Camp Kanaran and Pastor Franc several months after the housing coalition had tried and failed to hold their event. This time, I was shadowing the IOM communications staff, who were organizing their own tent camp animations as part of BCC and two-way communications efforts. The pastor (who didn't recognize me from my earlier visit) of course warmly welcomed the IOM crew and he and I, the only two people in attendance who were given chairs, sat side-by-side to watch the show. First, the emcee, Wilkenson, an actor by training, got the crowd warmed up and laughing with jokes and stories. Then he said a few words about the difficult situation in the camps, before launching into a recitation of slogans that appeared in *Chimen Lakay – met ko veye ko* [the one who owns the body looks out for the body] and *atansyon pa kapon* [prudence is not cowardice] – which he encouraged the crowd to repeat. Those who did so the loudest received IOM T-shirts and other small gifts. PSA films were then shown on the usual topics (cholera prevention, how to secure your tent, the virtues of citizen trash clean-up projects) and, following each short film, Wilkenson tested the crowd's 'capture' of the message communicated: 'what do you do to secure your tent?' and the entire crowd would scream in unison, 'Klourè! Mare! Fouye!' [Nail! Tie! Dig!], and more T-shirts would sail through the air into the crowd's outstretched hands. Rote memorization of slogans seemed to equate with 'participation' in this particular experiment in behaviour change communications, which showed overtly that the goal was governmentality, a modelling of communicative conduct that felt distinctly undemocratic. Indeed, when not called upon to repeat slogans, the crowd remained silent and obedient, perhaps self-consciously performing because they were under the watchful gaze of their pastor, the IOM staff and even me, the only *blan* in the group. The crowd knew all too well that all three of us had the power to give them much more than information, and so the stakes of internalizing and performing the conduct communicated to them were high.

The second anecdote, relayed to me by several people who were in attendance, involved another IOM camp animation that was perhaps more indicative of the tensions that could disrupt communication/governmentality projects. Unsurprisingly, this one employed therapeutic self-expression. **(p.174)** During the summer of 2011, when camp evictions were becoming a critical problem, IOM communications staff were sent to camps slated for relocation in order to inform the residents about what was about to take place as well as to give them the chance to process and air their feelings. The event in question went badly: camp residents were furious and frightened about the imminent relocation. They expressed anger, frustration, threats and generally did not demonstrate the proper 'communicative conduct' that such events were supposed to produce. These IDPs were not 'processing' their feelings or 'venting'; they were making demands and they wanted answers. When no answers were forthcoming, they became unruly and rudely heckled the IOM staff members, who quickly packed up and shut down the event.

This was precisely the kind of exchange that the housing coalition would have welcomed: a conversation, a possibly heated debate (or worse), but both sides would at least have agreed that they were engaged in a communicative process whose goal went beyond the act of communication for its own sake, an imagined scenario in which communication would not have served governmentality, but resisted it. We can only hope that as Haitians are further integrated into the information society and its neoliberal modes of governance, they will maintain their own versions of *radyo bouche* and the 'unruliness' of their local traditions of communication.

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Notes:

(1) The International Organization for Migration is an intergovernmental agency whose member nations are also members of the UN. Following the Haiti quake, the IOM took on a number of roles: it was the 'camp manager of last resort', or the organization that provided aid to camps that had not been picked up by organizations like Oxfam or Samaritan's Purse. IOM also chaired

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the ‘Camp Cluster’, and was thus responsible for coordinating the various organizations’ aid priorities and delivery. They also monitored IDP numbers, kept track of locations of camps and coordinated registration.

(2) See also Grewal (2005).

(3) Importantly, reports on two-way communication programmes published following the earthquake [see n. 3] rarely mention the role played by local NGOs in the ‘networked flows’ of information.

(4) Additional reports from this period on the technology/disaster aid nexus include: *Media, Information Systems and Communities: Lessons from Haiti* (Nelson and Sigal, 2013), and *Closing the Loop: Responding to the People’s Information Needs from Crisis Response to Recovery and Development* (Mandel and Somerfeldt, 2012).

(5) Trouillot further argues that the reification of culture in US-based anthropology has led to the field’s silence on the question of whether or not ‘culture’ is merely a code word for ‘race’ and thus carries implications of racism (Trouillot, 2003: 111–13).

(6) This and all subsequent quotations of *Anba syèl la* were translated by the author.

(7) Richard Sanders explains that ‘*Chimère* is an insulting invective that expresses utter contempt and hostility for people of a certain colour, class and political persuasion’ and ‘[n]ot surprisingly, the U.S. government agencies that coordinated the 2004 coup, such as the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development and the military, all embraced the pejorative label’ (Sanders, 2007: 50). Furthermore, the class politics that undergird the use of the invective ‘*chimère*’ are confirmed by the fact that the word is used with its French spelling.

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