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Gluing Globalization: NGOs as Intermediaries in Haiti

Drawing from two ethnographic case studies, both from Haiti, this article argues that nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), as intermediaries, “glue” globalization in four ways. First, in their “gap filler” roles NGOs provide legitimacy to globalization, representing alternatives to states fragmented by neoliberalism. Second, NGOs, in the contemporary neoliberal aid regime, can undermine the governance capacity of states in the Global South, eroding the Keynesian social welfare state ethos and social contract that states are (or should be) responsible for service provision. Third, NGOs provide high-paying jobs to an educated middle class, reproducing inequalities inherent to and required by the contemporary neoliberal world system. Fourth, NGOs, as an ideologically dependent transnational middle class, constitute buffers between elites and impoverished masses and can present institutional barriers against local participation and priority setting. Drawing on recent anthropological scholarship that moves away from reifying NGOs and their professed ideologies, this article focuses on NGO practice. [Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); globalization; Haiti; neoliberalism; nongovernmentality; NGO class; semi elites; transnational middle class]

Anthropologists’ contribution to globalization theory tends to be marginalized, in part because we have tended to focus on the effects of globalization on local populations or local people’s responses. Many use a polarizing language of the “global and the local” (Goodale 2007; Kearney 1995), thus theorizing globalization within binary terms. Missing from many analyses are intermediaries, rendering anthropologists unable to discuss the “architecture” (Bello 2003) of the contemporary world system. This article provides one potential anthropological contribution to the study of globalization. For present purposes, *globalization* is defined as a multifaceted set of phenomena that construct a common global economy, flattening nation-states’ sovereignty by pushing them to relinquish at least some state functions. At the same time, globalization highlights and even commodifies cultural differences, often triggering a defensive, xenophobic nationalism. This article discusses globalization’s neoliberal variant—neoliberalism being the political-economic ideology that markets should be free from government interference (Harvey 2005). Understanding globalization as a set of processes avoids a number of conceptual problems, including reification (Trouillot 2003), and it draws our attention to institutional conduits for these processes. I argue that NGOs are central to globalization processes and thus are good sites for anthropological inquiry.

Especially following the “New Policy Agenda,”¹ the NGO sector worldwide has seen an explosive growth. Roger Riddell (2007:53) recently conceded that it is impossible

to even guess at their number. Local communities have noticed the sudden proliferation of NGOs, calling them “briefcase” (Dicklitch 1998:8),² “mushroom,” “phony” (Jackson 2005:178–179), or “come-n’-goes” (Hilhorst 2003:84). Donor discourses declare NGOs to be democratic, closer to the people, and less prone to “bad governance” typical of states (Clark 1991; Paul and Israel 1991). Anthropologists have challenged the neoliberal assumptions behind this discourse (Farmer 2003:368; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Kamat 2002; Karim and Leve 2001). This article continues this conversation, asking what roles NGOs play (if unwittingly) in holding together the contemporary neoliberal world system itself.

As anthropologists have argued, NGOs are excellent places to study global/local connections (Davis 2003; Karim and Leve 2001; Stonich and Bailey 2000) because NGOs are positioned as intermediaries within the world system (Kamat 2003:93; Markowitz 2001:41). Their funding streams, if not their institutional decision-making structures, are multinational, often foreign to the areas in which they work. Yet NGOs’ legitimacy rests on their claims to being close to the people; they are “local” (Fisher 1997:454). Drawing on research from other NGO scholars, I argue that NGOs are best seen as “semielites.” As intermediaries, they are the contemporary inheritors holding up the contemporary world system fragmented by neoliberalism: they are “gluing globalization.”

Drawing from two ethnographic case studies, both from Haiti, this article argues that NGOs “glue” globalization in four ways. First, as gap fillers NGOs provide legitimacy to neoliberal globalization, representing alternatives to fragmented states. Second, NGOs can undermine Southern³ states’ governance capacity, eroding the Keynesian social welfare state ethos and social contract that states should be responsible for service provision⁴—an ideology Glick Schiller and Fourn (2001) have termed an “apparent state” (212). Third, NGOs provide high-paying jobs to an educated transnational middle class, reproducing inequalities inherent to and required by the contemporary neoliberal world system. Fourth, NGOs constitute buffers between elites and impoverished masses and can present institutional barriers against local participation and priority setting.

Case Study: Two Women’s NGOs in Haiti

As anthropologists have argued, NGOs lose conceptual unity when confronted ethnographically, as the many different “stakeholder groups” (Hilhorst 2003:146) within them assign different meanings to NGOs’ actions. While some participants are motivated primarily by NGOs’ missions, for others these organizations provide the means to pursue higher status, travel opportunities, or simply a job (Fortun and Fortun 2000:214; Hefferan 2007:50; Hilhorst 2003:146; Schade 2005:130). Drawing on Norman Long’s (1992) “social actor” theory, several British social anthropologists argue that aid recipients are agents, engaging in their own meaning-making (Mosse and Lewis 2006; Rossi 2006). I therefore focus on NGO practices, particularly the processes by which organizations set goals and priorities, the specific activities in which they engage in order to meet those goals, and the relationships they engender with their recipient populations.

This article is based on twenty months (October 2003-May 2005) of participant observation in Haiti with two women's NGOs, complemented by four months of archival and interview research with governmental and international organization representatives in Pòtoprens,⁵ Brussels, Geneva, and Washington, D.C. In all, I formally interviewed 21 staff and 8 clients at one NGO, 22 staff and 11 clients at the other, 9 Haitian government staff, 8 international NGO representatives, 12 donor representatives in Haiti, and 21 donor representatives at their international headquarters. I asked people to define concepts such as "participation" and "autonomy" and then assessed their (and their NGOs') participation and autonomy. In addition, I asked people to assess their and their organizations' development priorities, their relationships with other stakeholder groups, and the roles of foreign institutions in Haiti's "contemporary situation." I also conducted follow-up meetings with staff and recipients during the summer of 2006, discussing a Kreyòl synthesis that I had written based on my dissertation.

I will call the first NGO I studied "Fanm Tèt Ansanm" (Kreyòl for "Women United").⁶ Fanm Tèt Ansanm was founded during the mid-1980s, during the tumultuous period surrounding dictator Duvalier's ouster. This organization works with women factory workers on an array of programs, including literacy; health and human rights education; a women's health clinic and a couple of grassroots networks: a Women's Committee to discuss and defend workers' rights and a Prevention Promoters network, giving information and condoms to people in their factories, churches, and neighborhoods. New people are invited to the organization by an existing community leader; alternatively, they can be recruited during lunch breaks by staff, or at celebrations held on seven special days commemorated by Fanm Tèt Ansanm—including Labor Day, International Women's Day, and World AIDS Day, among others.

Sove Lavi (Saving Lives), the other NGO in the study, was also founded in the 1980s, and like Fanm Tèt Ansanm was started by a foreign donor agency. Sove Lavi worked with Community Action Councils (CACs), leaders chosen from peasants' associations to promote community education, which focused at first on hygiene and child survival. Because of this grassroots communication structure, Sove Lavi was chosen as one of the subrecipients of funding from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria (or "Global Fund"); Sove Lavi's goal was to promote HIV/AIDS prevention. USAID also selected Sove Lavi for their prevention program that centered on abstinence promotion. The community-based CAC model was replaced by a Caravan (a mobile HIV prevention education program), and Sove Lavi also opened four satellite offices that functioned as youth centers.

Undermining Southern State Capacity

Donor shifts within neoliberal globalization—whereby NGOs are the preferred targets of public development aid—amount to a "privatization of the state" (Karim and Leve 2001). Many decisions about economic governance have shifted "above" to international development agencies and "below" to NGOs (Ferguson and Gupta 2002). Once states are splintered, NGOs serve as "'putty' to stuff the cracks" (Bebbington and Thiele 1993:212). Recent anthropological works suggest that Southern

states are not eroded as much as they are transformed to support neoliberal interests (Chalfin 2006; Gupta and Sharma 2006). This important corrective was built on ethnographic case analyses of customs inspections or border control regimes – admittedly forms of governmentality that fit within USAID’s (2004; 2005b) current focus on weak states as nexuses of international drug trade and terrorist networks.

Bracketing the evolving role of Southern states, neoliberal globalization entails an erosion of at least some forms of governance both North and South, and the privatization (or other diminution) of some state governmental functions and institutions, through processes that used to be called “structural adjustment programs” (Bello 2003; Davis 2006; Schaeffer 2005).⁷ NGOs are central to this process; without recipients of aid other than Southern governments, these institutional shifts would not be possible. NGOs provide and depoliticize services that were previously under governments’ purview. Without these stopgap measures, other international institutions would not have been able to demand the rolling back of public service provision. Scholars have called NGOs “gap fillers,” providing services that under a Keynesian developmentalist logic had—or should have—been fulfilled by states (Bailey 1998:6; Dicklitch 1998:6; Lind 2000). Whether or not these (often Northern) NGOs share a neoliberal orientation with donor groups, they clearly benefit from the “downsizing” of Southern states.

In Haiti, during the 2004–06 interim period, not all the “gaps” were filled. Two highly visible effects of state failure point to shortcomings within neoliberal globalization’s circumvention of Southern states. National highways, admittedly in precarious shape, deteriorated. In addition, trash pickup was almost nonexistent in some areas, particularly low-income neighborhoods of Pòtoprens. The lack of services was a visible reminder not only of state failure but also (donors’ and) NGOs’ centrality in formally state affairs.

“Gap filler” NGOs were visibly in charge. They even marked territory, a specific form of dividing “turf” (Étienne 1997:64; Thomas-Slayter 1992:142), following the USAID protocol on “branding” (USAID 2005a). Georges, an NGO employee, said, “organizations always want themselves to be the only ones working in the area.” I have seen signs with an NGO logo welcoming me to a particular provincial town. More often, this marking of territory was accomplished through a sign mentioning a particular project: “food for work,” “road rehabilitation,” or others. Haitian ethnology MA student Sauveur Pierre Étienne (1997) called this situation an “invasion” of NGOs, an observation, later elaborated by social sciences professor Anile Louis-Juste (2007), who critiqued the “NGO-ization” of Haitian society.

At least since 2001, when I first traveled to Haiti, the national network of roads has been in a state of disrepair. A significant reason is that since this time, the Inter-American Development Bank and other multinational lending agencies have blocked loans to the Haitian government (thereby accumulating arrears)—ostensibly pending the resolution of an electoral crisis. This crisis was “resolved” on February 29, 2004, when Aristide was forced to leave the country. It was only after the installation of elected president Préval, more than two years later, that work began on this stretch of road. It was finished in another one and one-half years.



Figure 1. Piles of trash blocking a primary street.

During the period of my fieldwork, October 2003 to May 2005, another infrastructural system was not functioning. Urban trash cleanup, at least in Pòtoprens, reached crisis proportions. In Centre-ville (*lavil*), the traditional older center of town, remnants of an earlier elegance are buried under trash. On National Route #1 (which is named after Haiti's liberator Jean-Jacques Dessalines), it often took a public transit (or *tap-tap*) 45 minutes to travel 4 blocks from national phone company headquarters to the *Mache Tèt Bèf* (head of cattle market)—both of which were burned during the two-year interim period following Aristide's departure. At several places in the road, heaps of trash piled 10 feet high bottlenecked the two-lane road.

To many, the piles of trash were highly visible signs of state failure (see Figures 1 and 2). Hélène, a former factory worker and a volunteer leader, said, "There isn't a government *at all*."⁸ During a Fanm Tèt Ansanm Women's Committee meeting, people defined trash cleanup as a state responsibility that had not recently been addressed: "We deserve to have at least 10 trashcans. The city government needs to provide trashcans, so that every time they fill up they are emptied. As long as the garbage isn't removed, the road will never be fixed." This simple statement sparked a 30-minute conversation about the state of trash pickup, the government, and citizens' rights and responsibilities:

Thérèse: We don't have a government in our country!

Hélène: What I see here, I see that this is the government's role . . .

Frisline: Yes, but the government resigned! . . . There is no one, no state that will come in to say, 'this has to stop!'



Figure 2. People make their way between piles of trash blocking the street.

This conversation focused almost entirely on the government's responsibility and absence during the 2004–06 interim period. These low-wage workers and unemployed women are savvy regarding matters of state and civil society. They regularly debated civic themes, discussed solutions for problems, and brainstormed strategies. If not the government, who should pick up trash, and how?

During a November 2006 Web search on NGOs working in Haiti, I could not find images of dilapidated roads or trash, the two most visible signs of state failure to residents, probably because they are ostensibly government responsibilities. Picking up trash is not “sexy,” like building schools or a clinic. Further, with donors’ (e.g., USAID, the EU, and the Global Fund) current foci on “results”-based management and contracting, trash management does not produce the same sense of satisfaction in getting the work done. Frisline said, “You pick up the garbage today, and then tomorrow there will be garbage again.” In addition, it is sweaty, dirty, smelly work. Only one day-laborer was willing to pick up trash in the neighborhood. He was hired by an NGO founded by Haitian hip-hop artist Wyclef Jean to pick up trash. Teams of yellow-shirt clad “volunteers” (paid Haiti’s minimum wage of 70 goud, or \$1.75, per day) were highly visible picking up trash in middle- or mixed-income neighborhoods and major thoroughfares since December 2005. But this contract could expire at any moment, leaving these people out of work and the streets strewn with trash, with neighborhood associations who had performed these tasks now unwilling or unable to return to this recently privatized work.

The examples of roads and trash highlight the end result of neoliberal structural adjustment policies, the “privatization of the state” (Karim and Leve 2001). Stephen Jackson (2005) called this erosion of the social contract “nongovernmentality,” which

he defined as “a new cast of mind, emerging in the 1980s and consolidating itself in the 1990s, which believes that the welfare of the population and the improvement of its condition can best be served by ‘non-state’ actors” (169).⁹

Politics of the Stomach

In the mid-1990s, following the 1994 restoration of constitutional order, a period in which financial support to Haiti peaked at \$1.8 billion from fiscal years 1995 to 1999 (World Bank 2002), a full 90 percent of the Haitian government budget was financed externally (Morton 1997:vi)¹⁰—a condition some call *politik vant* (politics of the stomach) (e.g., Fatton 2004). The majority of the internally financed 10 percent of Haiti’s budget was garnered through *rentable* (between profitable and solvent) public-owned utilities and enterprises in sugar and cement. During Préval’s first term (1996–2001), these latter nationalized industries were privatized. But water, electricity, and telecommunications remained “public” utilities, despite privatization moves by interim (2004–06) Prime Minister Gérard Latortue, a U.N. retiree (2004:19, 23, 24, 28).¹¹

Since Haiti’s budget was extremely dependent on foreign aid, shifts towards directly financing NGOs had a disastrous impact on state responsibilities. Since 1995, with a divided government in the U.S., bilateral and multilateral donors funded (mostly Northern) NGOs instead of Haiti’s government. A former high-level USAID employee said that “problems in Washington made our job difficult. Sustainable development requires building state institutional capacity.” Since these NGOs did not fill all gaps left by a privatized, outsourced government, tasks like trash cleanup and road repair were not completed. While it may be true that governments did not fulfill some of their basic functions, the social contract at least implicitly implied their responsibility. Private, often foreign, NGOs are not beholden to the same logic of public, civic responsibility. If an NGO engaged in a formerly government task, like trash cleanup, the results were never sustainable; they became dependent on the decision of foreign donors, not responsive to the will of the people as citizens. As Frisline explained, “When you’re put in the position of begging, you are obliged to accept whatever they give you, whether it’s what you need or not.”

The Public-Sector “Brain Drain”

Haiti’s government was also weakened by a “brain drain” of Haiti’s public sector, as NGOs, paying higher salaries than their public-sector counterparts, “raided” governmental offices (Morton 1997:25). For example, in August 2004, there were 145 job advertisements in Haiti’s largest and oldest daily newspaper, *Le Nouvelliste*. Of these jobs, 64 were for international agencies, including several multipage spreads for the U.N. Next were NGOs; because their names were not usually mentioned, I could not determine whether they were for foreign or “national” NGOs.¹² NGOs and international agencies accounted for almost three-quarters of the total want ads (74.5 percent). Of the remainder, 29 were for private-sector jobs and 8 were for a position within Haiti’s government. NGOs and international agencies were much better options for middle-class job seekers than the public sector. That a minority of

people in Haiti are employed in the formal economy needs to be kept in perspective. It has been estimated that NGOs provide up to one-third of all jobs within the formal economy.¹³

Two friends' stories illustrate this situation. Emile received a degree in agronomy and worked for the Haitian government from 1986 to 2005. He offered many examples of the relative inefficiency of NGOs, compared to the more modest budget of the Haitian government. Government vehicles had always been older and worn, while NGOs had bigger, newer vehicles. Salaries earned by public sector employees were calibrated against Haiti's minimum wage, whereas international NGOs' salaries needed to be competitive for college-educated foreign professionals. According to Emile's estimations, the Haitian government could do nine times the work of a Northern NGO with the same amount of funds. Ironically, he too left the public sector to work in a Northern NGO in early 2005, because he told me that he was no longer able to get by on state salaries, given the sharp increases in living costs. Another friend working for a USAID-financed NGO project spent almost a year finding a Haitian project manager because qualified personnel have been "spoiled by inflated USAID salaries . . . they wanted to be paid twice the salary of the doctor who has been there for years."

Georges was one of a few people with a master's degree who returned to Haiti, and one of even fewer whose degree was not from North America or Europe. He strongly supported President Préval and was good friends with a former secretary (one step below minister) of the sector of his specialty. After Préval's election, he was offered a position within the new government. Georges decided to stay at his NGO post because, while his rank would increase three steps, from an "Animateur" (trainer) to a "Chef de Bureau" (bureau chief), he would have had to accept half his current salary. As one of the two primary breadwinners for his parents, nine brothers, and their spouses and children, finances loomed large in his decision. In both cases of Emile and Georges, the Haitian government lost (or lost the opportunity for) qualified, amiable, dedicated workers because of comparably low wages.

Thus, despite many NGOs' good intentions, their prominence and receipt of foreign funding is undermining Southern states, eroding their capacity to provide services and to govern. Concomitantly, NGOs also erode the notion of the social contract through what Jackson (2005) calls "nongovernmentality."

"NGO Class"

Up until now the discussion has focused on Northern NGOs eroding the public sectors as "gap fillers" and as the government's competitors. Even progressive Southern NGOs can become neoliberal globalization's unwitting partners. Given donor preferences to give directly to Northern NGOs, USAID and Northern NGOs need to find local implementation "partners." The Haitian government asserted that the former create their own local organizations (Ministère Agrikilti ak Resous Natirèl 2000:9), and demanded, "It is imperative that NGOs and donors **stop using peasants' organizations** to justify what they want to do or justify their projects" (21). Georges called

these donor- or NGO-created groups “phony” organizations. He continued, “Very often, community organizations allow themselves to be used by the political sector, and sometimes the community doesn’t have much confidence in them.”

In Haiti, there is a popular conception of a *klas ONG* (NGO class). This is a play on the term *klas politik*, the self-named “political class,”¹⁴ as well as recognition of NGOs’ increasing centrality. Using Marxist terminology, the NGO class is not quite “for itself” but also not quite engaged in false consciousness; here however, the NGO class may be a class “for itself,” sharing common interests with their benefactors, without whom this class could not exist. As I outline below, this class is characterized as having certain advantages vis-à-vis the general population. Even chauffeurs are seen as possessing this privilege; as Jean-Baptiste explains, “I am working, and people say, ‘Oh! You make money, you work in an NGO!’” Collectively, NGOs’ constant and deep presence in the country since the mid-1990s has been blamed as a primary factor in the inflation of housing prices in the capital.

James, an engineer by trade and education, worked for a large contracting firm, making good money by Haitian standards; he bought his family of eight brothers and two sisters a large house and truck. However, James failed to woo his college sweetheart because his job was not “respectable” enough. His heart was broken when he found out that she married a low-rung NGO employee who did not finish high school: “When people see an NGO, they turn their head,” he said forlornly. Another frustration for James was his long and arduous process of attempting to get a U.S. visa. He visited the consulate four times and had three letters from U.S. citizens testifying that they knew James and would invite him as a houseguest. Two U.S. graduate students, including the author, visited the consulate with him, under the strategy that our presence would lend credibility and respect to his case. It did not. I tell this story often, especially to the many people who, within the first minute of meeting me, asked me for help obtaining a U.S. visa. James noted with disgust that on one of his visits, a guard at an international organization received a visa. Judging by his gleeful demeanor, he was the only successful candidate. Other people in the room had white missionaries (even a priest fully dressed in frock and collar) or really sick children with them, all of their cases denied. “Imagine! A guard!”

Once they receive their coveted U.S. visa, as was the case for six women’s NGO employees, the narratives upon their return (one had deliberately extended her stay on a Canadian visa) were striking in their similarity. As an anthropologist who was similarly scratching the surface of their society, I often found myself in the awkward position of having to challenge visitors’ first impressions of my own U.S. society and culture. The women remarked upon the state of infrastructure, the impressive array of consumer choices in malls and grocery stores, and talked about how “Americans”¹⁵ offered lessons for Haitians of unity and respect for one another and the law. Their hyper-individualist analyses had key elements conveniently edited out, including racist exclusion of cousins who worked lowest-status jobs like janitors or night guards, but these analyses were given extra credence because the narrators had first-hand experience.

As suggested by the “raiding” of the public sector (the “brain drain”), NGOs tend to employ an educated middle class. Thus, their employees tend to have higher levels of

cultural or symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1980, 1984). Interestingly, 21 of the 145 want ads discussed above were in English. Whereas only 10 percent of Haiti's people read French, one of Haiti's official languages, the number of people literate in English, a foreign language, is even smaller. An estimated 500 thousand children (out of a total population of 8.3 million) are without access to basic education, and only 35 percent of children finish fifth grade (IGOH 2004:33).¹⁶

For an even clearer example, several job descriptions and qualifications required familiarity with particular software (or USAID accounting procedures), and most required some college education—at least a “certificate” offered from a seminar, which several state university colleagues disdained as “money makers.” This requirement is another clear indication of distinction and exclusion. Only 1 percent of people living in Haiti have access to tertiary education.¹⁷

Looking more closely at the ads for NGOs, only 3 of the 44 listed the organization's name (it was the same ad, printed three times). Twenty-three of the ads mentioned the sector of intervention. Fully 18 of the 44 ads—almost half—did not even identify a sector; applicants presumably did not care whether the NGO was working in health, education, or rural development; nor did they seem to care about the NGOs' orientation.¹⁸ This mirrors several people's critique that “it's just a job” (Hefferan 2007:50; Hilhorst 2003:134). Danielle, a leader with a peasants' association and aid recipient with a “national” (as opposed to local) NGO, declared: “[NGO] leaders always want to direct an enterprise, a business” (see also A. R. S. Progetti S.r.l. 2005:22).

NGO offices also consume (multinational) products of modernity. Most have diesel-powered generators, many have air-conditioning, all have at least some computers, and many have satellite Internet service. Like the visas, these acts of consumption, and the creation of an educated middle class, help integrate Haiti into the world system. The bulk of Sove Lavi's nonpersonnel budget went to a Ford SUV, Texaco gasoline or diesel, an A/C Delco generator, and several new Dell computers. Thus, these acts of consumption, markers of distinction of this “NGO class,” directly fed the U.S. economy,¹⁹ further contributing to Haiti's “current account balance” deficit, reproducing inequality within the world system.

NGO practices can strengthen local inequalities and create a donor-dependent class. In addition to higher salaries, NGO employees have access to many privileges: clean drinking water, electricity to charge cell phones, e-mail, and the ever-prized U.S. visa. These privileges in turn plug individuals into the global economy. People's first visits to the U.S. solidified neoliberal ideologies. This artificial, dependent middle class – the “NGO class” – thus directly supports a form of economic globalization, accomplishes ideological work, and further stratifies the Haitian population, selecting a chosen few for privileges denied Haiti's poor majority.

Reproduction of Hierarchy

Haiti has the world's second-most unequal income distribution: the top quintile earns 68 percent of the country's income, and the bottom quintile 1.5 percent (Jadotte

2006:9). Given this, it is tempting to use Marxist analytics of class, especially class inequality, employing polarizing language of “an elite” and a “popular mass” (*mas pèp la*), both in the singular. However, Haiti’s systems of inequality are more complex. As Dupuy (1989), Trouillot (1990), Nicholls (1996), and others argue, there are not traditionally one group of elites but two: a black military elite and a lighter-skinned mercantilist elite. Color prejudice kept these two elite classes divided, as they competed with one another for control (Nicholls 1996; Trouillot 1994). The majority of people in Haiti are not employed in the formal sector;²⁰ most of these people do not sell their labor power to a capitalist owner, but rather work as day-laborers, engage in microcommerce, or are involved in agriculture as either peasants or farmworkers. For these reasons, several Haitian scholars eschew the direct application of “classes” in Marxist terms, preferring instead “social layers” (*kouch sosyal*) (Jean 2002:19).

However, by any measure, inequality and exclusion are omnipresent in Haitian society. While 80 percent of Haiti’s population survives on under \$2 per day, making Haiti the poorest country in the hemisphere (estimates of per capita GDP range from \$400 to \$535), Haiti also has the most millionaires per capita. One percent of Haiti’s population controls almost half of the country’s wealth. There are different interpretations of the sudden rise of liberation theology priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide; some argue it resulted from an organized mass popular movement (Dupuy 2005; Farmer 2003), while others liken the rise to populist manipulation (Deibert 2005; Nicholls 1996). These disparate accounts both maintain that Haiti’s extreme inequality and exclusion were central. As world system scholars have noted, neoliberal capitalism requires the existence of a middle class to act as a buffer (Robinson 2004; Wallerstein 2004), a stabilizing force preventing such social unrest as has engulfed Haiti during the past two decades since the beginning of the “democratic transition.”

Even progressive Southern NGOs can provide institutional layers against grassroots social change movements and even grassroots development. Sove Lavi’s community leaders, who were selected in part because of their cultural capital, had several conflicts with the NGO. Community leaders expressed frustrations in a “post-mortem” focus group evaluation for Sove Lavi’s donor, USAID. They complained about Sove Lavi staff arriving late, staff’s apparent lack of respect for their time, and the lack of response to even simple demands such as a certificate or badge (to help leaders attain local legitimacy). In addition, Sove Lavi ignored community leaders’ recommendations for projects addressing gender-based discrimination and poverty as critical factors in HIV/AIDS transmission. These recommendations could have been forwarded to donors like USAID but went nowhere because Sove Lavi left little space for discussion (Schuller 2007b). One such recipient expressed the frustration in economic terms: “They don’t accept [our suggestions] because they are just doing business.” Georges, frustrated with Sove Lavi’s policies that constrained trainers, the public face of the organization who took the heat from frustrated community members, called their approach an “interest-based strategy” (*strateji enterè*).

Sove Lavi staff were aware of this problem; all front-line trainers mentioned it in interviews. According to Mme. Lejeune, the technical director, “Often, when people

make demands, you feel powerless to respond.” In my own focus group meetings, community leaders critiqued the power imbalance. Said Danielle, “Sove Lavi staff make all kinds of money while we do their work for them for free. Things can’t stay that way.” Gabrielle, who has worked with Sove Lavi, was more critical:

[NGOs] take the illness [of AIDS] and turn it into a business. They let people die . . . Thanks to this illness, many people have become *gran nèg* [bigwigs], many people become rich. Many people drive fancy cars, fancy motorcycles. Many people are *achte* [making] a lot of money on the backs of people who are living with the illness. Many people living with the illness, we continue to die.

A more open, autonomous, and participative NGO, Fanm Tèt Ansanm had demonstrably more amicable relationships with aid recipients who tend to be of a lower *kouch* (social level) than Sove Lavi recipients. Service recipients participated in more decision-making processes, not just implementation (Schuller 2007a). However, tensions arose in a dire economic context. Over time, volunteers began to use the same language as Sove Lavi’s, critiquing the fact that they were giving free labor. In addition, spaces for member discussion and decision were gradually diminishing, in part because of the changing landscape of aid financing, with greater emphasis on numerical “results” (Schuller 2007b). As a result, several ideas for projects arising from member participation remain unimplemented. Fanm Tèt Ansanm became increasingly known only for its HIV/AIDS prevention work. While they are extremely effective, nearly always surpassing numerical targets, aid recipients’ requests for other programs—such as support for public transport, unions, or neighborhood associations—remain unaddressed. Recall Frisline’s quote about being put in the position to beg; this dependency is reproduced at the community level. This highlights donors’ indirect control of priorities, a subtler erosion of member participation undermining “bottom-up” initiatives. Over time this disconnect in priorities was felt by aid recipients in similar terms as at Sove Lavi.

Internal social dynamics shape NGOs’ work, and the implantation of foreign-funded NGOs supports existing hierarchies and exclusions. Even NGOs like Fanm Tèt Ansanm, with a history and desire for grassroots empowerment, can play a role in centralization and community disempowerment if they are not consciously and actively working against it.

NGOs as Semielites

NGOs or NGO employees are not true “elites,” despite the material and cultural privileges they maintain. While some NGOs like Fanm Tèt Ansanm enjoyed a measure of autonomy and defended their *politik* (the same word for either politics or policies), many like Sove Lavi are donor-driven. And as argued above, even Fanm Tèt Ansanm is unable to promote community interests if different from donors’ interests. Additionally, while many Southern NGOs have familial ties to traditional elites, and while some Northern NGO staff earn six-digit salaries (Richardson 1997:23),²¹ as

institutions, they sit outside official power structures, entirely dependent on donor funding for their continued existence.

Howard Zinn ended his tome with a plea to the U.S. middle class, what he called “guards of the system.” He argued,

The Establishment cannot survive without the obedience and loyalty of millions of people who are given small rewards to keep the system going: the soldiers and police, teachers and ministers, administrators and social workers . . . these people—the employed, the somewhat privileged—are drawn into alliance with the elite. They become the guards of the system, buffers between the upper and lower classes. If they stop obeying, the system falls. [Zinn 1995: 622]

Intermediaries, uncertain of their position within the system, hold the key to change. When this middle class identifies with “the people,” change is possible. Ordinarily, this class identifies with the ruling class because of privileges granted, becoming a stabilizing factor preventing class struggle or revolutionary change in a Keynesian–New Deal “class compromise,” a “buffer.” Even more so than a middle class in Northern post-Fordist information- and service-based economies, the “NGO class” is dependent on the transnational ruling class. NGOs exist and employ professionals at current high levels because of donor policies and practices. If and when these policies or financial flows change, this entire class could cease to exist.

World systems theorists grant agency to and focus on actions of a transnational capitalist class (Robinson 2004; Sklair 2001). While an important actor within the world system, this class needs either hegemony or coercion to maintain control. Despite the growing rise in worldwide military expenditures and war-induced deaths, this strategy is showing signs of faltering (Wallerstein 2003). Without a class of semielites, this rule of the capitalist class is not possible. Neoliberal globalization, like imperialism, colonialism, and slavery before it, requires intermediaries—local people chosen to receive some benefits of the system of exploitation, inequality, and exclusion. Many examples of such intermediaries—semielites—arose from Britain’s strategy of “indirect rule” (Padmore 1969), like the Nuer’s “government chief” (Evans-Pritchard 1969) and East India Company Brahmins. Southern NGOs are contemporary inheritors of this position of intermediaries. These semielites are buttressing the contemporary neoliberal world system, “gluing globalization.”

By Way of Conclusion

While Hardt and Negri (2001) characterize NGOs as “mendicant orders of Empire,” (36), I use the phrase “semielites” and invoke Zinn’s (1995) notion of “guards of the system” to point out that several directions are possible. Like other emergent “classes” such as the “creative class” (Florida 2004) that transforms rusted-out postindustrial cities into livable cities where creative capitalism can rebuild, this NGO class is a transnational middle class promoting a vision of globalization. Unlike the productive

creative class, the NGO class is entirely dependent on outsiders, foreign donors, and their short-term contracts.

This article has discussed four significant institutional roles NGOs play in the set of processes that is globalization. First, NGOs provide legitimacy and alternatives to states, being fragmented by neoliberalism in their roles as “gap fillers,” visibly manifest in state failure in roads or trash. Second, NGOs (sometimes unwittingly) directly contribute to the weakening or undermining of states through hiring practices and policies that drain state capacity, particularly its human capacity through higher salaries. Third, NGOs contribute to reproducing inequalities inherent to and required by the contemporary neoliberal world system, highlighted by conflicts at Sove Lavi. Fourth, NGOs constitute intermediaries, an ideologically dependent transnational middle class that identifies with foreigners and the transnational capitalist class, expressed by U.S. visa holders.

A word about “gluing.” Glue is a substance—sometimes toxic, sometimes not—binding different materials together. There are different kinds of glue, depending on the surfaces. Some variants are “stickier” than others, like epoxy or wood glue compared to sweet-smelling natural-material paste. The final conglomeration is often an unplanned patchwork, a repair of materials snapping off or mosaic. Continuing the metaphor, NGOs can have stronger or different bonds—can be closer to local communities or to foreign donors—depending on their orientation. Sove Lavi bonded more closely to the donors, unlike Fanm Tèt Ansanm before the latter received large support from the Global Fund. And the resulting patchwork of heretofore public social programs need not be understood as planned or part of some deliberate design or “conspiracy.”

Like other anthropological accounts, this article attempts to theorize larger dynamics through examination of a case understanding the global in the local, the “glocal” (Ritzer 2007). This article does not claim representativeness across very diverse and disparate areas across the world. With an *N* of only two NGOs, I cannot do much more than pose questions for anthropologists’ further elaboration and reflection. In this spirit, borrowing analyses from Bourdieu (1980) or Scott (1998), I hope this article has helped generate questions about how the system tends to reproduce itself. If not consciously acknowledged and worked against—deliberately employing what De Certeau et al. have called “tactics” (1998)—even progressive Southern NGOs can be gluing globalization through undermining Southern states, creating a donor-dependent, ideologically supportive middle class, and presenting barriers to local participation, thus ensuring more top-down approaches to development decisions.

NGOs are as likely to maintain as change the status quo (Fisher 1997:452). As a force connecting peoples—societies and cultures, as well as political structures—globalization may be “value neutral.” Activists are constructing a competing “globalization from below,” such as the World Social Forum. Here too, Southern NGOs are points of contact. NGOs are central to the architecture of any conception of globalization (Bello 2003). It appears that NGOs are gluing globalization. Which form is up to individual NGO practice.

Notes

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1. The “New Policy Agenda” of international financial institutions is an economic model holding that foreign direct investment and not traditional “development” funding is the engine for development. Consequently “transitional” economies should embrace neoliberal free market-oriented policies (Moran 1998).
2. The NGOs are literally no more than the official papers in the founders’ “briefcase.”
3. The “South” is a geopolitical term replacing more implicitly hierarchical terms such as “Third” or even “developing” world, while noting differences in power.
4. Numerous counterexamples can be offered to highlight Southern states’ history of being non-Keynesian, of not providing service. However, in Haiti and elsewhere across Latin America, at least this ideology was operant in early developmentalism, and certainly was an explicit social movement goal (Edelman 1999; Harvey 2005; Lind 1992).
5. In this article I refer to place names in Haitian Kreyòl, the only language of 90 percent of Haiti’s population and the first language of all Haitians, despite its marginalization.
6. Groups’ and individuals’ names were changed to protect peoples’ identities.
7. For example, the World Bank calls them “Development Policy Loans” and uses “Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers;” the IMF uses “Staff Monitored Programs.”
8. Several other interviews contained identical statements. All interviews were conducted in Kreyòl and translated into English by the author.
9. Jackson’s concept represents a departure from Foucault’s governmentality, in that the latter focuses more on the “conduct of conduct”—how all social fields are becoming “governmentalized.”
10. A more recent report detailing the expenses of the interim government puts the figure at 65 percent (Mulet 2007).
11. In 2007, Haitian president Préval announced that the phone company (TELECO) would be privatized (see Schuller 2008 for a fuller discussion).
12. The Haitian government defines “National” or “Haitian” NGOs as those with founding papers in Haiti, its central office in Haiti, and a board with at least two-thirds Haitian citizens.
13. Interview with Ministry of Planning, April 2005.
14. Referring to people who are always working for the state or competing with one another for power, an educated elite.

15. I often used the term *Etazinyen*—U.S. person—not “American,” which could rightfully describe residents of two continents. To claim “American” just for the U.S. is often considered imperialist.
16. A report cited on the World Bank’s Web site said that approximately 20 percent of urban Haitians complete ninth grade, compared to about 5 percent for rural areas, <http://www.worldbank.org/research/projects/edattain/edattain.htm>.
17. For more information on access to tertiary education, see Earth Trends Country Profiles, 2003, <http://earthtrends.wri.org/text/population-health/country-profile-80.html>.
18. Another possible interpretation of this is that NGOs already had an insider candidate in mind.
19. Former USAID administration said that USAID “is really an investment in America” (USAID 2001:29): 93 percent of USAID funds return to the U.S.
20. Most estimates place the number at 85 percent, but the CCI (*Cadre de Coopération Interimaire*, or Haiti Interim Cooperation Framework), in an unauthored report approved by the international community (IGOH 2004), places the number at 70 percent.
21. One U.S. NGO director received \$278,749 in 1994.

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