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The violent lifeworlds of young Haitians

Gangs as livelihood in a Port-au-Prince ghetto

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The Haiti Youth Project

This study is a part of the larger Haiti Youth Project focusing on different areas of youth involvement and the social mobility of youth in Haiti. In addition to this study, the Haiti Youth Project also includes two other qualitative studies; the first focuses on youth and education,¹ and the second on youth and labour migration.² The project also comprises the Haiti Youth Survey 2009,³ a national household survey with a focus on youth. The Haiti Youth Survey represents an extensive national pre-earthquake baseline covering the three key sectors that influence youth social mobility, namely education, labour force participation and migration. In addition, it includes demographic and socio-economic data at population and household level. The project is a follow-up to the Haiti Living Condition Survey 2001⁴ and is funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹ Lunde, Henriette (2009a), *Youth and Education in Haiti. Disincentives, vulnerabilities and constraints. Haiti Youth Project*. Fafo-paper 2008:26

² Lunde, Henriette (2010a), *Young Haitian Labour Migrants. Risks and opportunities in Haiti and in the Dominican Republic*. Fafo-report 2010:24

³ Lunde, Henriette, ed. (2009b), *Haiti Youth Survey 2009. Volume I: Tabulation Report*. Fafo-report 2009:53 (also available in French) and Lunde, Henriette (ed.) (2010b), *Haiti Youth Survey 2009. Volume II: Analytical Report*. Fafo-report 2010:44

⁴ IHSI/Fafo (2003), *Enquête sur les Conditions de Vie en Haïti – Volume I*, Institut Haïtien de Statistique et d'Informatique, Port-au-Prince and IHSI/Fafo (2001), *Enquête sur les Conditions de Vie en Haïti – Volume II*, Institut Haïtien de Statistique et d'Informatique, Port-au-Prince

Executive summary

After the forced departure of elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004, the ghettos of the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince, erupted in a violent uprising known as ‘Operation Baghdad’ which cost thousands of lives. The tension simmered for seven months until the use of force against demonstrators by the interim government caused it to blow up. The sudden outburst of extreme violence came as a surprise to the interim government, as well as to the UN peacekeepers. Although the violence had been triggered by the *coup d’état*, it was rooted in long-standing frustration and aggression over the marginalized position of people in the ghettos.

Operation Baghdad came into existence within a specific social and historical context. But there is reason to be cautious of similar trends and undercurrents in today’s post-earthquake Haiti. Popular tensions and unfulfilled expectations, combined with social structures facilitating rapid mobilization, are factors common to the situation in 2004 and they could potentially entail a risk of renewed instability. Global generosity and engagement after the earthquake, and promises made by donor countries and intergovernmental organizations, brought high expectations of a better Haiti. Although results of the reconstruction are starting to show, the process is slow and many still find themselves far from the progress. The patience of President Martelly’s young electorate is also beginning to dwindle and internal tensions may be on the rise.

The rapid mobilization in 2004 was possible because of the pre-existing gang or *baz* structure in the ghettos. The *baz* structure formed part of Aristide’s patrimonial network but took on a life of its own after his departure. As long as the *baz* fulfil a purpose in the life of their members and/or the local community, the void of one *baz* or *baz* leader is likely to be filled by a new one. The *baz* meet a number of needs in their local communities, including redistribution of resources and a certain provision of order. If public institutions and private organizations are unable to fill this void, it is reasonable to believe that the old *baz* structures will still be present and have a function in the urban ghettos.

A legitimate, effective and unbiased law enforcing agency in the ghettos is a precondition for reducing community support for the *baz*. Recently, confidence in the Haitian national police has increased to some extent, but this positive trend has been countered by an equal decline in public confidence in MINUSTAH. Support for the UN mission has been decreasing for a long time but after the introduction of cholera, and several allegations of sexual assaults and attempted homicide, it has fallen sharply. The highly visible presence of foreign military personnel, who are perceived as an invading force, is likely to counteract the positive trend towards the PNH; it may also sustain community support for, and the perceived need for, the *baz* in the ghetto areas.

For marginalized children and youth, the *baz* represent access to one of a very limited set of opportunities available to people of their social status, and they are also an entry point to a potentially rewarding distributive network. The report is empirically based on interviews with youth who participated in Operation Baghdad, and it discusses the motivations that lead ghetto youth to join a *baz*. Among them is the need for protection from abusive household members, police violence and violent street life. Within the *baz* structure, their abilities and life skills, such as being streetwise and having a low threshold for committing violence, are

valuable. Most of the children and youth who are attached to a *baz* have weak connections with their parental household and spend much of their time in the streets.

Owing to the earthquake, the number of children orphaned or separated from their families is even higher today than it was in 2004. Although a number of organizations are engaged in a range of activities for supporting these children, it is utopian to believe that the NGO-community will save them all. For children in the streets, the *baz* structure fulfils important social functions. Recognising this, and understanding that the *baz* are dynamic social organisations with a potential for change given the right conditions, is important when attempting to improve the conditions for these children.

Abbreviations

CNDDR	Commission for National Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration (<i>Commission nationale de désarmement, démantèlement et de reinsertion</i>)
CBO	Community-based organization
DDR	Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration
FADH	The Haitian National Army until 1995 (<i>Forces Armées D'Haïti</i>)
FRAPH	The Revolutionary Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti (<i>Front Révolutionnaire pour l'Avancement et le Progrès d'Haïti</i>)
MI-NUSTAH	United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (<i>Mission des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en Haïti</i>)
MSF	Doctors Without Borders (<i>Médecins Sans Frontières</i>)
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OP	Organisations Populaires/Organisations Politiques
PNH	The national Haitian police (<i>Police Nationale d'Haïti</i>)

Introduction

Haiti is infamous as a violent country with high rates of killings, kidnappings, rapes and robberies. Although the attention towards security issues at times tends to get overemphasized at the expense of underlying structural causes – such as poverty, social inequality, and weak law-enforcing institutions – there is no doubt that lack of security is a major problem, particularly in the poorest parts of the capital Port-au-Prince.

High crime rates and gang-related violence is, however, a rather recent phenomenon in Haiti, reaching high levels over the past decades. Prior to this, during the Duvalier period (1957-1986),⁵ violence was predominantly top-down and state sponsored, and mainly executed through the Duvaliers' private militia, *Milice de Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale* (MVSN), commonly known as the *Tonton Macoute* (Nascimento 2006).

After the Duvalier rule ended, violence in Haiti has been dominated by a number of different actors including urban gangs, vigilante groups, former members of the Haitian army (ex-FADHs),⁶ and the use of force by the Haitian National Police (PNH) and the UN mission (MINUSTAH) (Muggah 2005). From the early 1990s the country experienced a collapse in urban security with large-scale violent riots and demonstrations, kidnappings and summary killings. Cité Soleil, the country's biggest slum area with approximately 300,000 inhabitants, was completely controlled by local gangs. In 2007, the UN regained control of the territory through massive use of force. The cost was high in terms of civilian losses and accusations of numerous human right abuses.⁷ Since then, the security situation has been dealt with rather heavy-handedly by the UN and the PNH.

The specific context for this report is a particularly violent period of Haiti's recent history, rooted in a popular uprising after the forced departure of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide on February 29, 2004. In the subsequent twenty-two months, until the end of 2005, an estimated 8,000 people were murdered and 35,000 women sexually assaulted, half of whom were under the age of 18 years (Kolbe and Hutson 2006). Identified perpetrators included criminals, Lavalas and anti-Lavalas groups, the PNH and UN peacekeepers. During this time, the inner-city areas of Port-au-Prince exploded in uncontrolled violence. Social anthropologist J. Christopher Kovats-Bernat (2006a), who was present at the time, described the situation like this:

Arson, riot, looting and summary execution have once again formed the lexicon of political conflict on the street. Vigilante bands and entrepreneur assassins roam the Port-au-Prince slums of Bel Air, Cité Soleil and La Saline with Uzis, semiautomatic handguns, combat-grade shotguns, assault rifles, bayonets, whips and machetes. Amid

⁵ François 'Papa Doc' Duvalier was president from 1957 to 1971, followed by his son Jean-Claude 'Baby Doc' Duvalier who was president after his father's death in 1971 until he was overthrown by a popular uprising in 1986.

⁶ The Haitian army, *Forces Armées D' Haiti*, feared and discredited for massive human rights abuses, was disbanded by President Aristide in 1995. Haiti has since then been without a legitimate, national army.

⁷ One example is the 'Operation Iron Fist', launched by MINUSTAH in August 2005 against gang leader Emmanuel "Dread" Wilme in Cité Soleil. During the operation, in which Wilme and several other gang leaders were killed, allegedly more than twenty unarmed people were killed and wounded, including women and children (Dupuy 2007: 193). Similar occurrences were documented in Bel Air and other ghetto areas; see for instance (Griffin 2004 and Hallward 2007).

the chaos and a state of siege on the streets, and in the complete absence of legal authority, political scores are being settled alongside of personal animosities being avenged. Summary executions are being carried out on roadsides, the bodies littering the streets with single bullet holes through their foreheads. Dozens of others are being killed in less formal ways, their bodies machine-gunned, hacked to death, decapitated, mutilated and burned alive. [...] Haiti is not teetering on the brink of civil war, it is in the full throes of civil war.

The situation described above erupted within a specific social and historical context. The trigger effect was the *coup d'état* against Aristide, but what appeared as sudden mayhem was rooted in long-lasting frustration and aggression over the marginalized position of people in the ghettos.⁸ President Aristide, being the first Haitian president representing the poor majority, had brought hope and expectations to the many, although the benefits had mainly reached the selected few. Nevertheless, for the urban poor he personified the promise of a better life. His removal unleashed tensions and frustration stemming from marginalisation combined with thwarted expectations.

Although the situation described above seems alien to anyone visiting Port-au-Prince today, it is worth being cautious of possible undercurrents in the population similar to those that existed in 2004. Popular tension and unfulfilled expectations, combined with social structures facilitating rapid mobilization, are factors common to the situation in 2004, and they potentially entail a risk of renewed instability.

The earthquake that hit the already ravaged country on January 12, 2010 was one of the most fatal natural disasters of our times. An estimated 220,000 people were killed and an additional 2.3 million were displaced from their homes. The capital and much of the surrounding areas were practically reduced to rubble. Within minutes the country went from a bad situation to one worse than anyone could have foreseen. Heart-rending pictures and personal stories broadcast globally ignited a chain of sympathy and generosity worldwide. A trail of Hollywood celebrities visiting the crisis area meant that Haiti benefitted from the CNN-effect longer than most other natural disasters. The 'Hope for Haiti Now' telethon, featuring international superstars, alone raised USD 66 million through popular contributions. By the end of the year, Haiti had received (in commitments and contributions, pledges not included) USD 3.6 billion in international humanitarian assistance.⁹ Former US President Bill Clinton was appointed the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Haiti and the reconstruction slogan 'build back better' held the hope of a new beginning for the affected country.

Two years later, many of the poor still find themselves worse off than they were before the earthquake. Despite a highly visible international presence, the humanitarian support is nowhere sufficient to meet the needs of the affected population. In addition the cholera epidemic, brought to the country by UN soldiers, is still a threat. In light of the promises made and expectations raised, it is not unreasonable to expect an undercurrent of frustration and discontent to be on the rise. This risk was recognized by Prime Minister Garry Conille when meeting with US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. *The greatest risk to us right now*

⁸ The term 'ghetto' has negative connotations and some writers choose to use the term *bidonville* or shantytown instead. Reflecting on her upbringing in Haiti, the diaspora writer, Edwidge Danticat (2002) says, 'The biggest sorrow is to hear that what you call a home, other people call a ghetto'. When I choose to use the term ghetto, it is because that is how my respondents describe their own environment. Their identity as 'ghetto-people' is explicitly used to unite the poor people in their struggle against the upper- and middle classes.

⁹ See UNOCHA, Financial Tracking Service <http://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=emerg-emergencyCountryDetails&cc=hti&yr=2010>

is the sentiment of inertia, the feeling among Haitians that they've been left behind, Conille said. Referring to the fact that two years after the earthquake, nearly 500,000 people still live in squalid tent camps. President of the Senate, Simon Desras, stated it even clearer: *I believe the longer the victims of the earthquake are living in these precarious conditions, the more they will be discontent. That could lead to destabilization.*¹⁰

Another factor potentially contributing to impatience among the urban poor, who are predominately young people, is the election of national pop star Michel 'Sweet Mickey' Martelly as the country's president. Presenting himself as an anti-establishment candidate, and performing on stage with Haitian superstar Wyclef Jean during his election rallies, Martelly appealed to the urban youth (Lunde 2012). His election raised the hope of many young people, marginalized in the ghettos. However, after eight months in office, Martelly has little to show for his presidency, and frustration and discontent are growing among his young electorate. All in all, the current situation in urban Haiti holds a high level of tension with few possible outlets. Keeping a tight lid on the security situation, MINUSTAH and the PNH quickly quell popular demonstrations. As a result, for the population eager to express their frustration, the international community and national elite are perceived as using the UN to block public opposition (Lunde and Luzincourt 2010).

The violence that occurred in 2004 and 2005 might not happen again but, nevertheless, an unforeseen event or the rise of a new populist leader could possibly trigger new aggression. What this report seeks to achieve is an analysis of the context that made it possible for inner-city Port-au-Prince to turn into a war-zone within a matter of days in 2004. The first part focuses on social structures facilitating the rapid organisation of armed resistance in the ghettos. The second part analyzes the incentives for local youth to join the armed groups and participate in the fighting. Examining these factors raises question as to how best to address both the security challenge and the situation for marginalized urban youth in present day Haiti.

Methodology

The empirical data on which this study is based was collected during a preparatory one-week visit to Haiti in June 2007, and three weeks of qualitative fieldwork in the affected areas of Port-au-Prince in July and August of the same year. During the fieldwork, interviews were conducted with leaders of several *baz*¹¹ involved in the violence following Aristide's departure in February 2004; these were youth directly involved in the uprising as armed fighters, as well as youth who carried out supplementary roles, such as spying, guarding kidnapped victims or hiding weapons. Interviews were also conducted with youth who were in the area while the violent upheaval was taking place, but who were not directly involved in the conflict, as well as members of local communities. In addition, meetings were held with central actors such as higher representatives from local NGOs/CBOs, the Haitian National Police (PNH), the National Commission of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (CNDDR), relevant UN organisations, and the UN peacekeeping mission (MINUSTAH).

¹⁰ USA Today, *Haiti's slow recovery leading to discontent*, 10.02.2012.

¹¹ *Baz* or *baz armé* can be defined as groups of young people, some armed and others not (Nascimento 2006). They are popularly described as gangs.

The field team consisted of a Fafo researcher (the author), a local facilitator, an interviewer, an interpreter and a driver. The local team was made up of people with strong connections to the different *baz* in the wider Bel Air area of Port-au-Prince. Members of the armed groups and the population in the ghettos considered these people to be trustworthy actors, owing to their previous work with Viva Rio and the CNDDR, and this gave us access to first-hand information from respondents that otherwise would have been outside the reach of a study like this.

In this study I have chosen to focus on the larger Bel Air region of Port-au-Prince, including some of the neighbouring areas that experienced high levels of violence after 2004 such as Delmas 2 and La Saline.¹² Other areas in Port-au-Prince that could have been relevant to include in the study are Cité Soleil, Carrefour Feuilles and Martissant. Several considerations led me to concentrate on Bel Air. First of all, it was clear from the outset that it would not be possible, in any meaningful way, to cover all the affected areas of Port-au-Prince within the limits of the project. Although the above-mentioned areas of Port-au-Prince have a common feature – namely organized violence – the history of the violence, the organisation of the armed groups, their relation to other groups within their own and other areas, and the level of embeddedness of the groups in the local community vary widely. Cité Soleil, for instance, was literally controlled by gangs for years, to the extent that the Haitian police or other national authorities were unable to enter out of fear for their own lives. In Bel Air, on the other hand, the outburst of violence was much more closely related to the political circumstances leading up to Aristide's departure in February 2004 and the situation that followed. Bel Air was one of Aristide's strongholds, and perhaps the area which benefitted most from his patronage and where he enjoyed the greatest support. All these factors make Bel Air a particularly interesting case when analyzing what happened after the president's departure in 2004.

The sensitivity of the subject, combined with the low age and vulnerable position of many of the respondents, raised a number of ethical considerations during the project. All phases of the project were guided by the main ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and 'do no harm'. Ideally the respondents should not only have the right to refuse to answer questions, and at any time have the option to withdraw from the project, but they should also be fully aware of what the project is about and understand how the data are to be used. This was at times difficult to achieve, which left the researcher with an extra responsibility to protect the interests of the respondents. If identified through their stories, the former or active *baz* members participating in this study run the risk of sanctions and reprisals from both from their own or other *baz*, and also from government authorities and the local communities. This makes confidentiality a particularly important issue in a study of this nature. Hence no names of respondents are used and details which could lead to identification have been omitted.

¹² For example, the inclusion of Delmas 2 in the Bel Air region is an operational move by MINUSTAH and does not correspond to the general perception of the people living there. Quite the contrary, the *baz* in Bel Air and Delmas 2 were fighting each other for many years, and the local communities have a strong feeling of identification to their areas.

Riots, rebellion and connections

On February 29, 2004, President Aristide, representing the party *Fammi Lavalas*,¹³ was ousted in a *coup d'état*. An armed rebellion starting in the town of Gonaïve quickly spread to the rest of the country forcing Aristide into exile. The rebellion in Gonaïve was initially led by the Artibonite Resistance Front (formerly known as the Cannibal Army), but was soon taken over by former members of the defunct Haitian Army (FADH), former rural police section chiefs, and members of the death squad *Front Révolutionnaire pour l'Avancement et le Progrès d'Haiti*¹⁴ (FRAPH) (Dupuy 2007). These former FADH and FRAPH members and the former chiefs of police were all part of the Duvalier machinery of power and fiercely anti-Aristide from the very outset. The Cannibal Army, on the other hand, had originally been a pro-Aristide armed group and part of his personal, informal structure of protection. Aristide had started questioning the loyalty of the Cannibal leader, Amiot Metayer, and in 2003 Metayer was killed, allegedly ordered by Aristide himself. Amiot Metayer's brother, Buteur Metayer, took over the leadership of the group. He renamed it the Artibonite Resistance Front, took up the quest to revenge his brother and succeeded. The private militia Aristide had established for his own protection became the beginning of the end of his presidency. Aristide had created a monster, which turned against him.¹⁵ The story of the Cannibal Army is interesting because it illustrates the informality of rule as practiced by Aristide as, by and large, he ruled through informal networks.

Jean-Bertrand Aristide came to power with a mandate from the country's poor majority. As a parish priest, inspired by liberation theology, he took up the fight against the Duvalier dictatorship and the country's wealthy elite. He became the charismatic leader of the popular movement *Lavalas* [the flood] and the voice of the poor and deprived masses. At the centre of his political conviction was the principle *Tout moun se moun* [all people are people], meaning that every person is endowed with the same essential dignity (Hallward 2007). A radical message indeed, in Haiti's highly class-divided society.

In 1990 he was elected president with 67 percent of the votes in Haiti's first democratic presidential election. Aristide did not trust the state apparatus, and with good reason. Brought to power on the fierce rhetoric of encouraging class struggle, Aristide and his followers represented a threat to the privileged classes. The army remained loyal to the elite and the neo-Duvalierists, and succeeded in ousting Aristide nine months into his first term. When he returned from exile in October 1994, one of his first political actions was to disband the army.

¹³ *Lavalas* started out as popular anti-Duvalierist movement and was Aristide's platform when he won his first election in 1990. The political party *Fammi Lavalas* was established by Aristide in 1996 in opposition to the ex-Lavalas faction the *Organisation du Peuple en Lutte* (OPL), led by Gérard Pierre-Charles.

¹⁴ FRAPH (The Revolutionary Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti) is a violent paramilitary organization which was formed to constitute a political force in opposition to the Aristide movement. The CIA was involved in the creation of the organization and several of the key figures were on the CIA payroll (Fatton 2002: 93). FRAPH was also central in the first coup against Aristide in 1991.

¹⁵ Another example is Cité Soleil *baz* leader Thomas Robinson, alias 'Labanye.' He switched sides after receiving financial and political support, as well as firearms and impunity from the PNH, from Andy Apaid who was a businessman and leader of the anti-*Lavalas* Group of 184 (Griffin 2004). From being a part of Aristide's informal network of protection, Labanye and his Boston *baz* became the most brutal enemy of Lavalas-supporters in Cité Soleil, accused of killing *baz* members and civilians.

However, the demobilisation process led by USAID/IOM was incomplete at best (Muggah 2005). Most of the weapons remained in the hands of former FADH-soldiers, and command and control structures were largely untouched. In the absence of a formal force loyal to his office, Aristide created an informal structure of protection loyal to his person. It consisted of groups of young men, who benefitted from Aristide's patronage and could be armed and mobilized for violent action when necessary.

These armed groups are popularly described as 'gangs', or by Aristide's political opponents as *chimères*. Rather than using these derogatory terms I have adopted the more neutral concept of 'baz' or 'baz armé', which is the term the respondents themselves used to describe their group association.¹⁶ A 2006 mapping identified 20 different *baz* in the larger Bel Air region (Nascimento 2006). In this report, the term *baz* is confined to those groups whose members participated in armed violence after the departure of Aristide in 2004. This excludes for instance youth groups solely involved in recreational activities or community development that may also describe themselves as *baz* (Spraos 2007).

Aristide had a strong support base among the urban poor and the second coup against him in February, 2004 sparked heated reactions in the Lavalas-supporting regions of Haiti, specifically the urban slums of Port-au-Prince. Mass demonstrations mobilized tens of thousands of protestors from areas such as Bel Air, Cité Soleil, Martissant and Delmas to march towards the National Palace demanding the return of their president. Lavalas leaders held fiery appeals and the rhythms from the local *rara*-bands pulled people onto the streets.¹⁷

For seven months the demonstrations took place peacefully. Sporadic use of force by the PNH against the demonstrators did not escalate into fighting until September 30. On this day, a legal demonstration was held to mark the 13th anniversary of the first coup that ousted Aristide in 1991. Around 10,000 marched to the National Palace demanding the removal of the transitional government, the release of political prisoners, the departure of MINUSTAH and the return of President Aristide. Outside the palace, the Haitian police opened fire on the demonstrators and killed four people. The next day, interim Prime Minister Latortue conceded in a radio interview that the police had shot at protesters and individuals had been killed, and indicated that the authorities from now on would take action against further protests. This incident marked the end of the non-violent protests and the beginning of what was to become known as 'Operation Baghdad'. During the weeks to follow, human rights organisations registered a sharp increase in warrantless arrests and shootings of Lavalas supporters by police and anti-Lavalas paramilitary groups (IJDH 2004). Within a short time the ghetto residents mobilized and armed themselves against attacks by the PNH and former FADH members who, after the removal of Aristide, had occupied most high-ranking positions within the PNH. People in the ghetto also suffered attacks from gangs supported by the anti-Lavalas coalition known as Group of 184 (Griffin 2004). Operation Baghdad was the name given the ghetto

¹⁶ In Haiti one finds a number of different violent actors who are, to varying degrees, opportunistic, criminal, political, and embedded in local communities. A mapping (Nascimento) conducted in 2006 identified 11 different types of armed actors, namely: *Organisations Populaires/Organisations Politiques* ('OPs'); *baz armé*, armed gangs; *Zenglendos*, prison escapees/deported nationals; *Groups Zéro Tolérance/brigades de vigilance/ brigades de quartier*, private security guards; *Front de résistance, ex-Fad'H*, dismissed civil servants, active policemen associated with criminal activities; *Hommes en noir*, organized crime. The terms are, however, dynamic and overlapping.

¹⁷ The role of music is very central in Haiti in communicating, for instance, community grievances, news and political protests. *Rara* is both a type of music and a six-week annual street festival where peasants and the urban poor get to express their political views through religious and cultural rituals. *Rara* music was used extensively during the demonstrations, both to attract people to the marches and to communicate the political message. For in-depth knowledge about the importance of *Rara* in Haiti see McAlister (2002).

uprising by the bourgeois and the interim government in an attempt to label the people fighting as terrorists. The term, however, was also adopted by the demonstrators themselves and used in parallel with the term the *Mouvman san pran souf* [Movement without a break],¹⁸ in short just called 'the Movement'.

The centre for Operation Baghdad was Bel Air, a Port-au-Prince downtown area and major Aristide stronghold. Previously a well-situated neighbourhood for the privileged elite, Bel Air had, through a long process of slumification, become one of the poorest areas in Port-au-Prince. The rapid mobilization in Bel Air was possible because of the patrimonial structures of the pro-Aristide *baz* already existing in the local neighbourhoods. Together with the popular organisations (OPs),¹⁹ the *baz* were used by Aristide to channel resources from the state to the local communities and to consolidate political support in the ghettos. Both OPs and *baz*, increasingly overlapping, were used to distribute resources in the local community, including money for school fees and electricity bills, food and clothes. Association with an OP or a *baz* was also the doorway into public employment: for example, at the harbour, the PNH or the overstaffed, national telephone company, Teleco.

The different *baz* had a strong local identity. Most often a *baz* was seen as representing a block, and existing in opposition to other blocks. One of the things that gave a *baz* legitimacy was that they protected local inhabitants. The block was the *baz* jurisdiction and if you belonged there and supported their cause, you were safe. Outside your home area you were on your own. This was the case before 'the Movement' but intensified during the time of fighting. A young man from Bel Air described the situation as follows: *Some people within the block did not support 'the Movement'. They were taken as traitors or spies, and did not feel safe. The ones that supported 'the Movement' felt safe within their own block. Stealing, kidnappings, and so on could happen to non-supporters in their own neighbourhood, but not to supporters.*

Occasionally the local *baz* were mobilized for violent action against political opponents of Aristide or *Fammi Lavalas*. During Operation Baghdad this happened on a scale previously unknown in Bel Air. All the different *baz* got together in a loosely organized movement under the leadership of local *baz* leader Dread Mackenzie. According to local respondents, Dread Mackenzie was the most respected but also most feared *baz* leader in Bel Air. This was because he kept a tight leash on his commanders. Anyone acting out of place, for example committing rape or attacking local street vendors, risked execution and was used to set an example to others tempted to challenge the leader's authority. Mackenzie was killed early during Operation Baghdad and was replaced by General Tou Tou. His successor did not enforce the same deadly discipline, which according to some respondents was one of the reasons why the situation got out of hand and escalated into extreme violence. Another reason was that the Movement in the beginning consisted of local *baz*, embedded to varying degrees in the local community. However, during the course of fighting, opportunistic criminals, as well as pro-Aristide groups from other parts of the country who lacked attachments to the local community, also joined the violent uprising. The original goal of returning Aristide to power became diluted by short-term opportunistic goals. The use of excessive force by the PNH, MINUSTAH, and ex-FADH members, among others, also contributed to an escalation in violence. In the end what started out as a public mass mobilization for democracy, degenerated into armed

¹⁸ Literally meaning 'without catching one's breath'.

¹⁹ Organisations Populaires/Organisations Politiques (OPs) are community-based organizations that ordinarily enjoy tight relations with political leaders, redistribute resources, gather votes, and orchestrate vigilance brigades (Muggah 2005: 50).

fighting across several conflict lines, followed by a wave of kidnappings, gunfights, murders, arson, theft and sexual abuse.

Children and youth were involved in high numbers and acted in a number of different roles during Operation Baghdad. The most common job for the youngest children was to act as *antennas* or spies for the *baz*. Without raising suspicion the youngest children were able to monitor areas or gate points and warn the *baz* when the PNH, for example, was making patrols. The children were rewarded with a pot of food or a little money for bringing back useful information to the *baz*. Other tasks the children reported carrying out were guarding kidnapping victims, usually in groups of three, armed with a gun and a cell phone. Younger children were also attractive for transporting weapon as they were less likely to be checked than older youth. This, however, changed during the course of the fighting as the PNH and MINUSTAH became aware of the strategy of children transporting weapons. Creating barricades out of burning tyres, setting cars on fire, and participating in protests were also typical tasks conducted by children from 9-10 upwards. The youngest of our respondents, who said he had been armed by the *baz* and had participated in the front line, was 11 years old at the time of fighting. Interviews with community leaders, police officers, UN officials and *baz* members confirmed that this was not unusual, and also that children younger than this were carrying arms and taking active part in the fighting.

The next chapter will analyze why these youth became involved with the *baz* and, in particular, why these young people joined armed groups and what role the groups played in their lives.

Why did young people get involved in Operation Baghdad?

The reasons youth got involved in the armed struggle after Aristide's departure must be seen in relation to the position that the different *baz* held in their respective neighbourhoods. As discussed above, many *baz* enjoyed some local legitimacy as part of Aristide's patrimonial network which distributed resources and assistance to the ghetto. They also held a position as protectors of their block. There is no doubt that the Movement, with the local *baz* in the front line, at first received broad support in the ghetto for their opposition against what was perceived as a forceful removal of their elected president. That the people's initial attempts at non-violent protests were met with armed force from the transitional government, through the PNH and MINUSTAH, entrenched this support in the population.

However, during the course of fighting, the hostility changed. From being politically motivated and directed against the interim government, the PNH, anti-Aristide supporters and MINUSTAH (because they were defenders of what was perceived as an illegitimate regime), the hostility degenerated into more random acts of violent crime. Inhabitants of Bel Air suffered massive human right abuses at the hands of the PNH and MINUSTAH, but they also fell victim to inter-*baz* fighting, kidnappings and rapes. As a result of the escalating violence, the *baz* lost some of their legitimacy as protectors and defenders of the ghetto. Most of the blame for the increasing brutality of the Movement was nevertheless placed on outside elements participating in the fighting, especially armed *baz* coming from Gonaïve. One Bel Air respondent, an 18-year-old youth who had not been an active member of any *baz*, represented the view of many members of the local communities when he explained that in the beginning, he participated in the demonstrations to get Aristide back, but after a while it had developed into a '*movement of thieves*'. *They acted like they came to help*, he said, *but they just came to steal. It was not people from Bel Air who participated in the violence, but those who came from outside*. Through externalizing the acts of random violence, the armed *baz* managed to maintain some support even in the midst of chaos, and this was despite the pressure they exerted on the population to join them and support their fight. During the violence, some of the *baz* ended up preying on the very same population they initially had set out to protect. However, given that the PNH and MINUSTAH were viewed as hostile perpetrators of violence, who did not have any legitimacy as law enforcers, there was no one else to fill the security vacuum, and the *baz* still represented the flawed, but only viable element of order in people's daily life.

The part of the population who had the alternative to flee, most often to family members in the countryside, did so while the severest fighting was going on in 2004 and 2005. Those who stayed depended on the protection of *baz* for survival. *If you were living in Bel Air, you had to be a part of the Movement*, one of the armed *baz* members participating in the fighting explained. *If you fight, you stay; if not, you leave*. Others chose not to actually fight, but still considered themselves members of the Movement, based on their place of residence. *If you live in a block in Bel Air and you are ok with it, then you are in the Movement. You don't necessarily need to hold a gun in your hand*.

Some of the children and youth interviewed for this study joined the armed *baz* because they felt they had no choice, not even the alternative of not joining. The fear of being killed as a traitor was overwhelming, and made the children go to extreme measures to prove their loyalty. Others had very clear objectives for wanting to join, which was often a strong political conviction combined with the loss of previous privileges they had enjoyed under Aristide's patronage. Most of the youth would find themselves somewhere in between. The young people who got involved in the Movement were typically poor, local youth with little or no education and weak links to their families. As ghetto children, they were met with condescension or disdain from people living in other areas. The possibilities of finding a life outside the ghetto were perceived as minimal.

To what extent people in general, and young people in particular, can be said to have an agency in a context which is so structurally confined can be debated at length. The young people who explained that joining the *baz* was a conscious choice were those who had a social position which left them *in a position to choose*. The lower down in the social hierarchy a person is, the narrower the range of possible choices (Bauman 1992). The life choices for young people in a place like Bel Air are limited from the outset, and an added context of conflict further imposes limitations to traditional alternatives. Common livelihoods for the ghetto-youth such as charging *tap-taps*,²⁰ shining shoes, and conducting petty business in the streets were made impossible as gun fights and random crime made people stay away from the streets. At the same time new opportunities were created through engaging in *baz*-related activities. In a setting like this, to draw a strict line between 'forced' and 'voluntary' recruitment makes no sense in most cases (see Honwana 2006). Rather than trying to impose such an arbitrary distinction, it is more fruitful to analyze how these youth navigate within the altered social setting they find themselves, and which needs are fulfilled as a result of their association with the *baz*.

During the individual interviews with *baz* members and associates, a number of benefits related to *baz* membership came up. To what extent the benefits formed part of their initial motivation for joining, or were subsequent benefits which the youth negotiated for themselves as *baz* members is, at times, hard to distinguish. Haitian youth, like everyone else, tend to rationalize their choices in retrospect and there is reason to believe that, at least for some, the decision to join may have been less conscious and informed than how they chose to portray it afterwards. As such, these 'benefits' can be seen as potential reasons for joining, but they could also be the result of adapting to a new social setting. For the purpose of preventing youth from joining armed groups, as well as demobilizing those who are already involved, it is essential to have an understanding of what the *baz* association offers in the way of opportunities which are not available elsewhere.

Mobilization and motivation

The movement to bring Aristide back was carried out with the support of, what was initially, the relatively well-organized structure of the *Organisations Populaires* (OPs) and local *baz*. The most central figures in the Movement did not join during the course of fighting, but had

²⁰ Small, colourful buses which are the most common form of public transport in Haiti. Since there are no signs indicating the destination, children are hired to call out the destination to potential passengers as they are passing along the road, and they also charge them the fee for the ride.

previously occupied vital roles in Aristides's extended political structure. As discussed previously, during his second term, Aristide was known for mobilizing armed groups from the urban areas for political ends, and at times these mobilisations ended in violent demonstrations. One may argue that Operation Baghdad was not unique in terms of its initial structure, but it quickly became so in scope.

Tens of thousands of people joined the demonstrations and showed their discontent in front of the national palace. However, some of these ended up taking on a more active role, either as armed fighters or by directly supporting the armed *baz*; in this report the latter are called 'associates'. Among those who took up arms for political reasons, many were already in some way insiders and benefitted from membership of the President's far-reaching network of redistribution and protection in the ghettos. As such they were loyal supporters of Aristide's presidency with a strong self-interest in keeping him in power.

One of the first moves by the interim Latortue government was to fire thousands of public employees who had benefitted from Aristide's patrimonial practice of overstaffing public offices with workers. Some had no function other than cashing a pay check. As this practice was used in particular to maintain the support of the urban poor, the detrimental effect was strongest for people living in areas like Bel Air. Both those who lost their jobs, and the many more who were dependent upon those who had been fired, had a strong motivation for taking up arms in order to bring Aristide back to power. For the 750 members of the Presidential Guard²¹ and the PNH who were fired, weapon in hand, this was especially easy.²² The members of the Presidential Guard and the PNH who were fired were those loyal to Aristide. In addition to losing their job, many of them were also accused of gang membership and faced with the threat of arrest. Pictures of dismissed former security staff were shown on television and their names given on the radio. Having been turned into fugitives, while still carrying their IDs and service weapons, they had little to lose in joining the armed rebellion.

Many of those who lost their jobs in Bel Air had previously been working in the national phone company, Teleco. Teleco was a well-known Aristide cover institution for buying support, or for social redistribution, depending upon the lens one uses. A 26-year-old man who was participating in the national DDR-programme at the time of the interview, had been an armed fighter, and he gave losing his job as the reason for becoming a *baz* member. While Aristide was in power, he supposedly had a job at Teleco, without ever setting foot there. The monthly check of 1,250 Haitian gourds he received was issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs. Without his monthly allowance as a 'ghost worker', he needed new ways to make a living and he also felt strong loyalty to Aristide for *speaking up for the ghetto people*. All of those fired from Teleco were somehow related to Lavalas, as this was the network through which the jobs were distributed. Some were holding double positions as Teleco employees, and also members of Aristide's private security units. This was the case for the brother of this young *baz* member:

F: Tell me, what was the motive for the riots?

A: Our motivation came from the firings at Teleco. After the firings at Teleco... What happened was that my brother was working at Teleco. I was supposed to get a job at

²¹ USGPN - The Security Unit of the National Palace Guard (*Unité de sécurité générale du Palais national*).

²² Numbers according to the interview with Samba Boukman, presidential representative of the CNDDR and former spokesperson for Operation Baghdad, at the Hotel Oloffson, 14.08.07.

Teleco. What happened was that the new director started firing people without any reason. He fired real and fake technicians. Firing-arresting.

F: What do you mean by firing-arresting? Did they get arrested as they were being fired?

A: Yes, exactly.

The brother, who was fired, was also a member of the Presidential Guard and became one of the leading commanders during Operation Baghdad. The respondent, who had been a member of one of Aristide's private security groups, called *Fokon nwa* [black hawk], described himself as an Operation Baghdad militant. These young men enjoyed personal benefits specifically based on their potential to be militarily mobilized against Aristide's political opponents. Others benefitted without having explicit links to the previous president's security organisations. The support for Aristide was, and at the time of the fieldwork remained, strong in urban poor areas.

The respondent continued: *It all [the Movement] started after the departure, the kidnapping, of the President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. We call it kidnapping because he is the one who had an eye on us in the ghetto. He is the one who kept us in mind. After he was gone, then every ghetto started to go bad. Now the youth from the ghetto are unemployed and the ghetto is ignored. They don't care about health and education [for people] in the ghetto. They totally forgot us since he left! He was our only hope. That is why the whole movement evolved in this way.*

As could be expected, the older youth and the ones most closely integrated in Aristide's patrimonial structure claim the most explicit political purposes for joining. Many of them spent some time at Aristide's orphanage for street children, *Lafanmi Selavi* [the family is life]. From its establishment in 1986, after the fall of the Duvalier regime, *Lafanmi Selavi* was an institution with clear political underpinnings. Aristide used the conditions of street children as a symbol of the extreme social stratification in Haitian society, and blamed the Haitian state for the structural violence and the lack of dignity suffered by the extreme poor (Bernat 1999: 123). The children at the orphanage took part in political training programmes, had their own radio station, and frequently participated in political demonstrations representing Aristide's party Fanmi Lavalas. The orphanage was closed down after the coup against Aristide in 1991, but the boys who had lived there continued to make up a backbone of loyal Aristide supporters who could be mobilized when needed. They were well integrated in Aristide's patrimonial network and held positions in the OPs or *baz* in poor urban areas such as Bel Air. The most central leader of Operation Baghdad in Bel Air, Dread Mackenzy, was himself raised at the orphanage, and kept several of his friends from *Lafanmi Selavi* as his closest associates.

The strongest political motivations for joining were found among the oldest youth. The younger *baz* members, in their early teens or younger, had rather vague political beliefs. When asked directly why they had joined the *baz*, many of them replied that they were fighting to get Aristide back. Some would utter strong statements such as *The President was my President and I was willing to die for him* (boy, aged 14). Others repeated the rhetoric they had heard during demonstrations and sang pro-Aristide songs, criticising the bourgeois and the transitional government. In general the youngest argued that Aristide took care of ghetto people and street children, but most were not able to explain why life with Aristide was better than life without.

The need for protection

The youngest children involved in *baz* activities who participated in this study were around 13 years old at the time of the interviews. They all considered themselves *timoun lari*, or street children, before joining the *baz*. *Timoun lari* are highly exposed to violence and abuse. Being associated with an armed *baz* provides them with a sense of protection, as *baz* members may be willing to defend and revenge them. It also imposes fear and respect on other street children, as well as on their families and people in the local community.

That the children identify themselves as *timoun lari* does not necessarily imply that they do not have family alive. Most of them had at least one parent with whom they still had some contact, but the family's inability to care for them had pushed them to establish a life for themselves in and on the streets. Some would visit their parental household regularly, and also support the household economically at times. Others had ran away and cut the bonds with their families completely, some after experiencing domestic abuse.

Violence among street children

The street children in Port au Prince live in a violently contested space where their life is constantly under threat. The general public perceive them as disposable, and they often live and die unnoticed (Bernat 1999). Their way of life is competitive and dependent upon imposing fear on others, which leads to a high level of intra-violence among the groups of street children. In order to survive in the streets of Port-au-Prince, one needs to constantly prove oneself. One of the children participating in the study was 13 years old at the time of the interview. During the Movement he had been hanging around the *baz*, at times being paid for singing and running little errands. He was now being cared for by a local organization and was off the streets. When asked about the violence among street children and his role in it, he explained it like this:

F: Did you use to fight?

A: Yes, I used to fight.

F: Who did you fight with?

A: I fought, but I don't really remember... If someone comes to bother me or do me harm, I can take a rock and hit his head.

F: Why would someone harm you?

A: If I steal someone's things. But if I don't do that, I will fight that person and bleed him [cut him with a knife or razorblade].

F: Did you sometimes throw stones at people while they were sleeping?

A: Yeah, after they have done me harm. I know I am little. I take it easy. Sometimes when they sleep in public places, I take matches and burn their pockets and hit their heads with stones.

F: Did other people do that to you while you were sleeping also?

A: Yeah, when they are searching for money in your pockets, if they don't find it, they burn your pockets.

The 'sleep wars' in Port-au-Prince, with street children waiting for their opponent to fall asleep before attacking him with stones, is a widespread phenomenon and analyzed at length by social anthropologist J. Christopher Kovats-Bernat (2006b). Another of the young informants explained how he lost his best friend in a 'sleep war':

A: I can tell how he died... While he was sleeping, other kids in the street dropped a big block on his head.

[...]

F: Are the children often that malicious to each other in street?

A: They are very malicious to each other.

F: What kind of harm do you inflict on each other?

A: One might wait for the other to sleep and then burn him, break his leg and take his money.

These children are living in a *culture of everyday violence* (Scheper-Hughes 1992). Some of them have escaped a situation of domestic abuse, and they are all navigating within a social setting dominated by hunger, crime, internal brutality and also institutionalized and state-sponsored violence by the Haitian police, the PNH. Street children are regarded as outside the normative socializing control of adult society, and are often perceived as unsocialized or as an asocial threat to the established order (Bernat 1999: 122). They are blamed for social decay and an escalation in social ills such as crime, drugs and prostitution. Street children have also been central as a group that can be mobilized for political purposes, such as demonstrations. This meant that they became legitimate targets for state repression after the coup against Aristide in 1991. After General Cedras' overthrow of Aristide, the children living in his orphanage, *Lafanmi Selavi*, became victims of politically motivated violence. Bernat (1999) claims to have documented rapes, disappearances, fire bombings, torture and the executions of children at the centre, all at the hands of Cedras' forces. This was confirmed by respondents who had lived in the orphanage during this period.

Police violence

Street children are criminalized as a group, and are perceived as a punishable category – guilty until proven innocent. They have been the prime target for the notorious Anti-Gang Unit of the PNH; large groups of children have been arrested in swift and brutal clean-ups, *arimaj*, and detained for 'association with gangsters' (Kovats-Bernat 2000: 419). According to Haitian law, 16 is the minimum age for prosecution. But this does not prevent the police from placing children far younger in juvenile prison. When I visited the juvenile prison in Delmas 33 during the summer of 2007, a total of 142 children between the ages of 11 and 17 were being held in detention, sharing four prison cells. During the visit I spoke with three boys, all of them aged 16. One had been there for 17 months, one for 18 months and the third had been imprisoned 15 days before. As is the case for most of the young inmates, none of them had been sentenced, but they had been told that they would have to 'stay there for a while'. According to one of the prison guards, the paradox is that because there is no legal authority to sentence the minors, and no perceived alternative, the arrested children end up being imprisoned indefinitely without getting their case tried.

More than being arrested, the street children interviewed feared police brutality. When Aristide in 2001, with the help of the United States, was re-inaugurated as president he started a 'zero-tolerance' campaign against crime. The campaign was inspired by Mayor Rudy Giuliani's 'zero-tolerance' in New York and was used to politically gain support from the US. Vigilante 'justice' was encouraged by the president, who stated that [...] *if a delinquent forces someone to hand over car keys and gets behind the wheel of that car, he is already guilty of a crime. So there is no reason to take him to court* (USDS 2002). The campaign was interpreted by the police and vigilante groups as a blank check for summary execution (Amnesty International 2004).²³ Street children became a specific target. A DDR-officer in MINUSTAH gave this grim description of the situation for the street children:

That the gangs use street children is nothing extraordinary. Grown-ups have always used street children [in Haiti]. They are abused by paedophiles, in drug trade, used to commit violence, burn houses... They'll do anything if you pay them. They attach themselves to a *baz* because they are afraid of the PNH, and often move from *baz* to *baz* for protection. They are scared of the police and for a good reason. The PNH kills the kids like dogs.²⁴

Execution of street children by the national police has also been recognised by the international community. In 2006 the UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict reported violations against children by the PNH, including the illegal detention of children and sexual abuse of female children while in custody, as well as executions and mutilation of street children during police operations (Peacebuild 2008). Several of the street children interviewed for the study had experienced violence at the hands of the police. A 13-year-old boy explained how he got a gun wound in his leg during an *arimaj*.

A: It happened in Kafou Ayopo when all of us were sleeping. Police pulled up, so I ran and they shot me.

F: Were you carrying a gun when the police shot you?

A: No, it was when we were sleeping. They came and started beating us and shooting at us, so I ran. That is how I got shot.

F: Did it happen often that the police came and harassed you?

A: Yes.

F: Do they still do that or is the situation better now?

A: The situation is better now, but only if you don't do bad things.

F: Did the police come after you because you were a street child or because they knew you were a member of the *baz*?

A: Mrs. Coicou [Jessie Coicou, spokeswoman for the PNH], she made a press conference and said that the street children, they are not innocent at all.

²³ See also The Miami Herald, October 1, 2001, Get-tough policy blamed for vigilante killings in Haiti <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/haiti/haiti-vigilantes.htm>.

²⁴ Interview at the MINUSTAH compound, Hotel Christopher, August 15, 2007. Since then a vetting process has been initiated as part of an ongoing police reform, but the process is slow and complicated (ICG 2011).

The street children are afraid of the police and the vigilante groups, called Group Zero. All of them know of someone who has been arrested, abused or killed by the police, and several of them tell of first-hand experiences. Police abuse of street children is well-documented. However, in order to understand the children's behaviour, the rumours and stories which circulate on the street, and which the children firmly believe, are as relevant as the actual facts. One example of a widespread rumour among the street children is that the police after Aristide's departure collected 500 street children, put them in containers and dropped them in the sea. Such beliefs, regardless of their truth content, motivate the children to establish relationships and seek protection with armed groups.

Domestic abuse

Many of the street children in Port-au-Prince have a history of domestic abuse or lives as *restaveks*²⁵ (domestic servants) (Smucker and Murray 2004). For some of them, attaching themselves to a *baz* is a way to protect themselves against violent household members. One of the respondents, a 14-year-old boy, ran away from home at the age of 12. Both his parents had died when he was still a young child, and he was left to live with his grandmother. When the grandmother also passed away, the child was placed with more distant kin who abused him regularly. To avoid the domestic violence he escaped from the household and tried to make a living for himself in the streets charging *tap-taps*. When Operation Baghdad started soon after, he was recruited by the *baz* and given a weapon to participate in the fight against the anti-Aristide forces. As a *baz* associate, his social position made him untouchable for his extended family members. The family was scared of him, and also of the possible revenge by other *baz* members if they were to lay a hand on him again. Being armed and part of the *baz* community gives the children a feeling of invincibility. Despite the extreme violence and war-like conditions in Bel-Air during Operation Baghdad, the boy claimed to feel safe living in the streets as a *baz* member, and much safer than he did previously living with his extended family.

Children growing up in violent homes, without the positive mitigation of a secure school environment or support from family or community groups, are at high risk of adapting to violent behaviour (Willman and Marcelin 2010). Many of the children are already socialized into a context of violence before getting involved with the *baz*, because of living in the streets or an unsafe home environment. One of the young respondents, a boy in his early teens who had also run away from a household with domestic violence, said that he had learned to use a knife by watching his parents fight:

No one taught me how to use a knife. I just learned it from my parents when they were fighting each other. One day my mother was going to stab my father in the neck. My father blocked the knife with his hand and got his fingers cut off.

For some of these children, violence has been present all their lives. From an early age they have by necessity become used to negotiating a violent environment, and their threshold for using violence is lower than for children who are not accustomed to this kind of context. During Operation Baghdad, the willingness to participate in graphic displays of hyper-violence, such as beheading enemy corpses, was a way for children and youth to prove their loyalty to the *baz*.

The children drawn to *baz* for protection purposes are children who, from the outset, find themselves in a particularly vulnerable position. None of the young respondents, whose

²⁵ For more information about the living conditions of *restaveks* in Haiti see Sommerfelt (ed.) (2002).

involvement in the Movement had gone beyond simply participating in the demonstrations, enjoyed the protection of their families or the local communities. On the contrary, they were children trying to escape violence in abusive households, or attacks by the police and vigilante groups while living in the streets.

Survival

As discussed previously, the *baz* in Bel Air were an important part of Aristide's local patronage and a channel for redistributing resources such as jobs and money. While Aristide was still president, some of the *baz* supported the local community by paying school fees for children, paying electricity bills, and arranging block parties with food and music. However, the assistance was conditioned on the political support of the *baz*. Community members who did not support the *baz* did not report having received anything. On the contrary, they expressed fear of the armed *baz* and preferred to stay at a safe distance.

Street children would hang around the *baz* hoping for food or to be asked to run an errand. At times, the *baz* leader would buy a full pot of rice and beans from a street vendor and let the children eat. According to a local community leader, the *baz* would not ask the children to do anything in return, but the children would be eager to prove their loyalty and get the acceptance from the *baz*.

F: After the kids have been given food, is it expected that they should do something for the *baz*? Fulfil a role?

A: No, it is not expected, but the child might do something to please or to help the person who has given him food.

F: How would they do that?

A: For instance if someone [in the *baz*] talks bad about a person, they may burn that person's car.

The eagerness to please might be an expression of a need felt to reciprocate the favour. It may also express an ambition to navigate into a position where the child might get more responsibility and tasks leading to higher rewards. For marginalized children and youth, the *baz* represented access to one of a very limited set of opportunities available to someone of their social status; they were also an entry point to a potentially rewarding distributive network. Some of the street children would do favours for several *baz*. As long as they were all within the same neighbourhood (i.e. Bel Air) this did not appear to be a problem. The children did not have any formal relationship to the *baz*, but provided little services, in the hope of some compensation, as one of several coping strategies.

One of the respondents, thirteen years old at the time, had become a 'double agent', doing favours for both the *baz* and the police. He was not a member of any *baz* but participated in demonstrations and block parties, and was sometimes paid a little money for performing as a rapper. Together with a friend he had established a relationship with a group of policemen, and used to hang around on their lunch break, at times receiving some leftovers. While making sure not to draw too much attention to themselves, the boys would pay close attention to what was being said, and keep the *baz* informed about every piece of information they picked

up. They would also warn if the police were entering into *baz*-controlled areas. As a reward for the information-sharing, they were given food by the *baz*. One day the respondent was asked by a policeman if he could take him into Bel Air. The respondent said he was willing to do so, and advised the policeman to dress down and braid his hair. At great risk, he took the policeman into the area under cover of being his friend. For this he was rewarded with money, as well as a TV set and a radio. While providing information to the policeman, he also continued reporting to the *baz*. As such he maximized his potential as an *antenna* but at a very high risk. Fortunately he was never discovered by the *baz* as a traitor. When the interview took place nearly two years later, he still had a beneficial relationship with the policeman and referred to him as a 'good friend'.

Street children attached themselves to *baz* before Operation Baghdad but when the violence intensified, the use of local children and youth became more explicit. The fighting made it impossible for many children who had made a living in the street to continue their other income-generating activities such as charging *tap-taps*, wiping windshields, and selling petty objects. Instead, the changed context opened up new, high-risk, opportunities for making money. Respondents tell of being paid, either with money, or with food, clothing or shoes, for participating in manifestations, making barricades of burning tyres, spying, or hiding and transporting weapons.

Many of the youth were armed by the *baz* without being full-fledged *baz* members. Guns and ammunition were provided widely to people protesting against the removal of Aristide. One of our respondents was only 11 years old at the time of Operation Baghdad but he participated in the armed fighting. When asked how he acquired a gun, he simply replied that he had asked for it. *After Aristide left they [the baz] were handing out guns in the ghetto.* According to him, everyone willing to fight was armed for battle. The story was verified by several other youth in their early teens who had participated in armed fighting. Some returned their weapons after the end of every battle, while others were allowed to keep them. Access to guns is likely to have been a strong incentive for children and youth to become associated with a *baz*. A gun represents invincibility, respect, and access to money and goods. An older *baz* member who was active in a *baz* prior to Operation Baghdad, but was now a born-again Christian and school teacher, described how he was still struggling with adapting to a life without weapons. *If for example I get up this morning and I don't find anything to give to my kids, I have a bad idea this morning. I think badly. I would say: Shit! I'm living in a country where it is difficult to find a little food for my baby. What am I going to do? I gave my weapons, my guns, to DDR, but there is no progress! I am the same as I was before. I need to have something to do so as not to go back to the violence. Violence is something very dangerous...*

Baz members with specific roles in the *baz* were provided for by the *baz* leaders. One of the respondents had the special responsibility to report if other *baz* members were acting out of place, for instance robbing local merchants. In return he was given a weapon and received money for the information he gave – information likely to have grave, possibly fatal, consequences for those reported on. Interestingly, the *baz* leader, Dread Mackenzie, also paid for the respondent's school fees in 'peace times'. The ambiguity between the *baz* as a community-based actor of redistribution, and a ruthless keeper of self-imposed order, is characteristic of their relationship to the local community.

The social functioning of the baz

The *baz* also fills a social function in the lives of the young members and associates. It provides them with a feeling of social belonging in a context where many have weak linkages to their families, and few other social institutions inspire confidence or address their needs (Spraos 2007). With weak safety nets around them, these youth need to be a part of community and establish mutually reinforcing bonds through reciprocity.

Baz members often share common interests such as sports, music and political discussions. When asked how they got in contact with the *baz*, several of the youth mention the demonstrations for Aristide's return as an attraction. The manifestations would often be a combination of political demonstrations and block parties with the enticing rhythms of rara-bands pulling people onto the street. Bel Air holds few recreational activities for youth. High unemployment and low school attendance leads to idleness, and youth try to kill time by playing football in the streets, or cards or checkers along the sidewalk. Some of the youth are not street children or in search for protection, but rather *jén avantury*, adventurous youth, who search for action and change, and find it in the context of the *baz*.

The respondents consistently called the Bel Air region where they live 'the ghetto'. Being 'ghetto people' is a common trait that creates bonds among them and unites them in the fight against discrimination and top-down attitudes from people from other parts of the city. The children find few positive role models as they grow up, particularly when they are from dysfunctional families. Leaders and high-rank members in the *baz* represent respect, social status and opportunities. A French MSF worker explained it like this: *The street children have no hope. They see the big guys with guns and want to be like them. They are attracted by the group feeling, the status they get, the food they are given, protection and jobs.*

Within the *baz*, upward social mobility is possible at an early age. One of the respondents was 14 years old at the time of the fieldwork, but had been in command of a large group of younger children during Operation Baghdad. The children were armed with knives and bottles and sent out to *turn the streets upside down*. The children would be expected to return with money, food or other items they could share with the group. The young 'leaders' would also get money from higher-ranking members to buy food and care for the children under their command.

The *baz* were locally-based and members came from the same neighbourhood. Although hierarchical structures became clear during fighting, *baz* members consisted of friends and family member. The loyalty to one's *baz* and block was strong, and the mission to stand together and protect one's area appears meaningful. Being part of a *baz* gives increased status to children and youth who would otherwise have been at the bottom of the social ladder. Fighting for the community cause gives them the feeling that they have the respect of people in their local area; they have taken on the important purpose of protecting their families and neighbours from threats, both from other *baz* and the police and zero tolerance groups.

From post-Aristide to post-earthquake Haiti

The narratives in this report are situated within a specific time and place in Haitian history, namely the popular uprising in Bel Air after the forced removal of President Aristide in 2004. The violence did not erupt right away but lingered in the form of discontent and frustration for seven months before being ignited by the transitional government's use of force. The present post-earthquake setting is different but contains some of the same elements. The reconstruction process after the earthquake has been slow, and a cholera epidemic has further aggravated the situation for many inhabitants. Two years after the earthquake, more than half a million people are still living in IDP camps (Oxfam 2012). The tent population in particular is vulnerable to attacks, and sexual assaults have increased dramatically since the earthquake (Small Arms Survey 2011).

Global generosity and engagement after the earthquake, and the promises made by donor countries and intergovernmental organizations, brought high expectations of a better Haiti. Although the results of the reconstruction are starting to show, the process is slow and many still find themselves far from the progress. The heaviest responsibility lies with President Martelly who came to power with a mandate from the country's youth (Lunde 2012). After eight months in office, he still has little to show and is obstructed by a government and senate unwilling to cooperate. At the same time, his young electorate is starting to get impatient and an undercurrent of internal tension may be on the rise. This report does not intend to make predictions as to what may or may not happen in the near future. It does, however, advise that the parallels of increasing popular discontent and unfulfilled expectations should be noted, and it also points out that some of the conditions that contributed to the uprising after the removal of President Aristide in 2004 still remain in place.

The violent uprising in the Port-au-Prince ghettos in 2004 and 2005 was quelled by MINUSTAH and the PNH using heavy-handed force, and a number of known and alleged *baz* leaders and members were killed or arrested. However, after the earthquake in 2010, around 500 of these escaped from prison and returned to their home ground. The return of former leaders makes remobilization a more likely scenario and has led to an increase in violence as former leaders regain their territories (ICG 2011). However, *baz* leaders in the Port-au-Prince ghettos rarely live long enough to grow old and are frequently replaced by ambitious members. The weak and shifting leadership means that the *baz* do not represent a national security threat *per se*. But, as has been repeatedly proven, they hold a violent potential that can be mobilized on the orders of political actors.

The *baz* structure in Bel Air was a part of Aristide's patrimonial network but, since his departure, it has taken on a life of its own. As long as the *baz* fulfil a purpose in the life of the individual members and/or the local community, the void of one *baz* or *baz* leader is likely to be filled by a new one. As has been discussed in this report, the *baz* meet a number of needs in their local communities, including redistribution of resources and a certain provision of order. If public institutions and private organizations are unable to fill this void, it is reasonable to believe that the old *baz* structures will still be present and have a function in the urban ghettos.

An ongoing, although incomplete and delayed, vetting process of the PNH has resulted in growing confidence in the police force, though it is still limited (Small Arms Survey 2011). A legitimate, effective and unbiased law enforcing agency, which also operates in the ghettos, is a precondition for reducing community support for the *baz*. Increased confidence in the national police has, however, been countered by an equal decline in public confidence in MINUSTAH. Support for the UN mission has been decreasing for a long time but, after the introduction of cholera and several allegations of sexual assaults and attempted homicide, it has fallen sharply. The highly visible presence of foreign military personnel, who are perceived as an invading force, is likely to counteract the positive trend towards the PNH; it may also sustain community support for, and the perceived need for, the *baz* in ghetto areas.

This report has discussed a number of motivations for ghetto youth to join a *baz*, either as a member or as an associate. Among them are the need for protection from abusive household members, police violence or violent street life. The *baz* represent one of the few networks available to marginalized youth which offer the possibility of upward social mobility. Within the *baz* structure, their abilities and life skills, such as being streetwise and having a low threshold for committing violence, are valuable. Most of the interviewed children and youth who were attached to a *baz*, had weak connections with their parental household and spent much of their time in the streets. The *baz* represented a community of belonging, in which the members shared food and goods and protected each other. Children in the street, although highly independent, are dependent upon a network of reciprocity with other street children (who may also call themselves a *baz*) or a local *baz armé*, for everyday survival.

Owing to the earthquake, the number of children orphaned or separated from their families is even higher today than it was in 2004. Although a number of organizations are engaged in a range of activities for supporting these children, it is utopian to believe that the NGO-community will save them all. For children in the streets, the *baz* structure fulfils important social functions. Recognising this, and understanding that *baz* are dynamic social organisations with a potential for change given the right conditions, is important when attempting to improve the conditions for these children.

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The violent lifeworlds of young Haitians

Seven months after the forced departure of elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004, the ghettos in Port-au-Prince erupted in a violent uprising costing thousands of lives. The tension simmered for seven months until the use of force against demonstrators by the interim government caused it to blow up. The sudden outburst of massive organized violence came as a surprise to the interim government, as well as to the UN peacekeepers.

Could what happened in 2004 happen again today? By analyzing the social structures facilitating the rapid mobilization of armed resistance in the Port-au-Prince ghettos, together with the incentives for local youth to join armed groups and participate in the fighting, this report points to important parallels between post-Aristide and post-earthquake Haiti. Examining these factors raises questions such as how best to address both the security challenge and the living conditions for marginalized urban youth in present-day Haiti.

