

# Leaders in Bel Air

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## I. Introduction

Bel Air is one of the oldest districts of Port-au-Prince, located in the heart of the city, close to the National Palace, the Champ de Mars, Cathedral, port and the main market area. Over much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was home to an urban middle class of merchants, liberal professionals, public employees and artists. From the 1970s onwards, though, its social and geographic profile changed significantly. Following the crisis in traditional farming, among other factors, thousands of migrants arrived from the country's rural interior, swelling the city's population and density. This led to a collapse in its already flimsy urban infrastructure and the growth of new settlements like La Saline, Forturon, Fort Dimanche, Pont Rouge and Warf Jeremie, turning this region of the capital into one single urban sprawl with the commune of Cité Soleil. Bel Air's social indicators fell steeply and the area became associated with 'slum formation,' 'the informal economy,' 'environmental degradation' and 'violence.'<sup>1</sup>

The census conducted in 2007 by the Brazilian non-governmental organization Viva Rio exceeds the original boundaries of the district and includes 'Greater Bel Air,' which encompasses the aforementioned zones situated in the lower part of the city close to the sea, as well as Portail Saint Josef, Tokyo, Delmas 2 and Solinó, and extending as far as the high-lying areas of Fort National-Bastia. The census provides the only demographic data available on the region. Some 135,000 people live here. Most of the adult population is formed by migrants and the children of migrants from the country's interior.

The census also revealed a dramatic fall in the population between 2004 and 2006: 43.5 % of the population had left the area during this period: six among every ten families had sent their children under 17 years away from Bel Air.

The exodus coincides with the period of *vyolans* (violence) after the overthrow of President Jean Bertrand Aristide in 2004. Aristide was born in the south of the country and while still a child migrated to Bel Air, where he grew up and 'was made' (we return to this expression later). It was there that he constructed his closest social base.<sup>2</sup> As well as forming the centre

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<sup>1</sup> The data available on the population of Port-au-Prince's metropolitan area reveals demographic growth rates well above the national average. Citing figures for the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards: 1950: 143,594 inhabitants, 1971: 493,983 inhabitants, 1982: 719,617 inhabitants, 2009: 2,500,000 inhabitants. One of the best descriptions of the social transformation of various regions of Bel Air over the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be found in the novel *Adieu mon frère* by Edwige Danticat (2008). Also see Nascimento & Thomaz 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Aristide was educated in the Salesian Seminary and preached at the Church of Saint Jean Bosco in La Salines. As we shall see later, the data obtained in our research indicate the importance of the Salesian Seminary in training young leaders from the area. Some of them even completed university education,

stage for clashes between Aristide's party members and their enemies, Bel Air was also one of the first settings for the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH).<sup>3</sup> As the operational procedure for the UN's 'stabilization missions' demands, another program was launched in parallel with the military operations and involving the 'Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration' (DDR) of participants in the recent armed conflicts. The main areas for the DDR program's activities were the capitals so-called 'hot zones': Cité Soleil, Carrefour Feuille, Martissant and Bel Air.<sup>4</sup>

In May 2007 twelve 'community leaders' from Bel Air signed a Peace Agreement brokered by two institutions: the National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR) and Viva Rio (VR) (@photo).<sup>5</sup> The NCDDR had been set up the year before, transferring responsibility to the Haitian government for the DDR programs, which had previously depended on the UN civil control since 2004. VR had arrived in Haiti in 2004 following a request for assistance from the DDR. After evaluating the situation, the NGO concluded that Bel Air's urban, political and historical centrality made the region suitable for the development of other projects in the region in healthcare, sanitation, water supplies, conflict management, training (in the sports, arts and IT areas) and so on. This strategy

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like Aristide himself, who graduated in psychology from Haiti State University. As well as founding the Famni Lavalas movement, Aristide was president of the country twice: in 1991 he became the first elected ruler after four decades of dictatorship under the Duvaliers (first François, then his son, Jean-Claude). His 1991 government lasted just seven months before being overthrown by a violent military coup. Three years later Aristide returned to power following US military intervention, allowing him to complete his mandate (1994-1996). Five years later Aristide was elected once again and governed the country until 2004, when he was deposed during a foreign military intervention (led by the United States, France and Canada).

<sup>3</sup> The resolution creating MINUSTAH was approved by the UN Security Council in April 2004. Two months later the first blue helmets arrived in the Caribbean country.

<sup>4</sup> The DDR program was created in 1989. It was implemented for the first time in Haiti following the 1994 military intervention that returned Aristide to power. Formally its objective was announced as follows: "Dismantlement of armed groups and reintegration of hard core members; Building the capacity of state actors and communities into a mutually reinforced partnership; Development of mechanisms for dialogue and conflict management at the community level; Support to community recovery, creating opportunities for the voluntary surrender of weapons; and Strengthen and support the implementation of the legal framework to reinforce control measures against the proliferation of small arms." UNDDR, Country Programs, Haiti, <http://www.unddr.org/countryprogrammes.php?c=80>. For an overview of the so-called 'second generation' of DDR programs, such as those implemented in Haiti from 2004 onwards, see Muggah 2005, and also [http://unddr.org/docs/2GDDR\\_ENG\\_WITH\\_COVER.pdf](http://unddr.org/docs/2GDDR_ENG_WITH_COVER.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> As well as the local leaders and the representatives from the two institutions brokering the deals (NCDDR and VR), the Peace Agreement signing ceremonies were also attended by representatives from MINUSTAH, PNH and diplomatic representatives of Brazil and Norway @photo@.

favoured intervention in the peace stabilization process, which from the outset emphasized actions linked to 'development' in parallel with 'security' actions.<sup>6</sup>

VR's presence grew exponentially in a 25,000 m<sup>2</sup> area located in the centre of Bel Air, which expanded even further after the earthquake that struck the capital (especially this central area of the city) in January 2010. The local area was transformed into a refugee camp and later an aid distribution centre for the victims. Today there are approximately 1,000 people in the region engaged in activities linked to the NGO. Viva Rio has become an important source of resources, stimulating an ever growing number of actions and feeding the population's expectations, interacting intensely with (and also helping shape) the forms of leadership and association found in the area.

The Peace Agreements have been continually renewed. The number of signatories has grown significantly, rising from the initial 12 who signed in 2007 to the 77 signatories of the Fourth Agreement, signed in May 2010.<sup>7</sup> Expansion of the area covered by VR's work has been accompanied by an increase in the number of leaders representing the different zones. The social profile of the leaders has also changed: the average age dropped, women signatories appeared, and the level of education increased globally.<sup>8</sup>

The research presented here emerges from a request from VR to study the social world of community leaders in Bel Air. This is a key question for social intervention policies in the area that involves central aspects of the disarmament and reintegration processes as defined by the United Nations: to what extent should these processes include the armed leaders or participants in the armed struggle? Which actions from the past should be condemned and which of those people agreeing to disarm can be reintegrated?

According to specialists in 'post-conflict situations' and according to the UN's own documents,<sup>9</sup> one of the 'original features' of the Haitian process in 2006 was that it rapidly ceased to be a war between two belligerent forces, with violent actions spreading to involve various relatively independent groups, multiplying the conflicts. According to these same documents, the

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<sup>6</sup> For an examination of VR's approach and initiatives in Bel Air in the context of implementing actions to stabilize and rebuild the region in the post-conflict period, see Moestue & Muggah 2009.

<sup>7</sup> In May 2011, shortly after concluding fieldwork for this study, the Fifth Peace Agreement was signed by 106 people.

<sup>8</sup> The Fourth Peace Agreement was signed by representatives from the following sectors of Greater Bel Air: St Martin, Delmas 2, Bel Air, Solino, Fort National, Bastia, La Saline, Fortouron, Pont Rouge and Fort Dimanche. In the first two agreements, the signatories were all men; the third and fourth were signed by four and 23 women, respectively.

<sup>9</sup> See Hamann 2009, Moestue e Muggah 2009 and UNDDR.

response to the questions in the previous paragraph should be left for the 'local actors' to determine. In many cases, therefore, defining the boundary between who can be integrated and who should be tried and imprisoned is basically an issue resolved in practice.<sup>10</sup>

Clearly this is a vital question for many of Bel Air's residents. For example, it helps explain the meaning of the word *rechechè*, designating people sought by the police and the UN forces. Likewise the word *reintegrè*, used to designate individuals who laid down their weapons and are now fully recognized citizens – as we shall see, some have even taken 'leadership training' and 'conflict resolution' courses offered by international agencies or NGOs and today see themselves and are seen as 'development professionals.' Inevitably, perhaps, the accusation of being "made up of bandits," initially levelled on various occasions at the DDR, then at the NCDDR and VR itself, forms part of the mobile social universe surrounding the disarmament process.<sup>11</sup>

As well as examining these legal and political clashes, the research also took into account the stigmatization affecting the region and its inhabitants. Although the number of violent actions (and deaths by firearms) has fallen noticeably over the last few years,<sup>12</sup> Bel Air continues to occupy one of the lowest positions in the geography of Port-au-Prince's social hierarchy and inequality. The area and the people living within it are painted with a set of values that associate poverty and the absence of urban infrastructure with violence,<sup>13</sup> reinforcing a perception of threat and *desod* (disorder), a mixture of political action and delinquency in which the area's leaders appear generically identified with (or reduced to) the image of bandits – who use or possess guns or who are close to those who do.

Similar identifications (and reductions) are found in much of the literature and public debate not only on the policies for integrating armed leaders in 'post-conflict' situations, but also more generally on 'poverty and violence' in contexts like Haiti's that supposedly involve the 'absence' or 'weakness' of the State. According to this narrative, the scarcity of resources and institutional structures leads to the formation of 'predatory' social structures and personalities, predisposed to 'corruption,' 'illegality' and 'violence.' Steeped in preconceptions

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<sup>10</sup> The DDR stipulates that "the negotiation and identification of the beneficiaries of the program is the responsibility of the State (i.e. the NCDDR)" and that the "principal gang leaders wanted by the police cannot be included in the DDR process" (UNDDR 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Another accusation is frequently made by those who attack the DDR programs developed in locations like Bel Air and Cité Soleil: they are not truly 'effective' because the "weapons are still there, hidden."

<sup>12</sup> For data on victimization and violence in Bel Air, see Fernandes & Nascimento 2007. For a more comprehensive assessment of the viewpoint of Viva Rio, including the *Bèlè Vet* (Green Bel Air) project, see Moestue & Muggah 2009.

<sup>13</sup> We describe this stigmatizing logic in Neiburg & Nicaise 2010.

and normative generalizations, the capacity of this approach to make sense of these situations is extremely limited. Instead of empirical data, they make vague associations; descriptions blur with moral censure and political prescriptions, reinforcing the stigmatizations.<sup>14</sup>

This stigmatizing narrative contrasts with another narrative that looks to present singular social experiences ‘from the bottom up’ and which, rather than dwelling on the violence and personalization of Haitian social life, emphasize the supposedly ‘traditional’ forms of associationism and the fundamental role played by the leaders in these initiatives.<sup>15</sup> However, this is a narrative that romanticizes and isolates associationism from the wider social geography to which it belongs, also formed by events and processes at other scales – national and international, for example. The attempt to identify these associative traditions as the foundations for ‘true democracy’ in the country<sup>16</sup> tends to ignore the fact that these traditions are also spaces in which hierarchies and power positions are constructed, a universe formed at multiple levels in which some individuals (leaders) act as mediators, shifting between spaces and regulating the circulation of people and resources.

The critical distance maintained here in relation to these narratives that alternately stigmatize or romanticize locations like Bel Air is based on our ethnographic research. Lengthy field observation of everyday life and forms of sociability, direct participation in conversations, in-depth interviews that enable the reconstruction of personal and group trajectories, along with the analysis of other data obtained from a diverse range of sources, allowed us to construct a more subtle and complex view of the different forms of association and authority in Bel Air. In our research the leaders appear embedded in the world from which they emerge, along with people’s expectations for improving their lives.<sup>17</sup> In this way a picture materializes of the recent social and cultural history of the region: a non-linear and polyphonic history that reveals associative traditions, conflicts, the use of weapons, changes in the modes of distributing resources and the formation of families, the construction of relations of affinity and enmity between people, and the generation of feelings of hope and frustration. As we shall see, the

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<sup>14</sup> Recent examples of this narrative can be read even in the titles of the books by Etienne 2007, Fatton 2002 and Wargny 2004, among others. Lundahl (e.g. 2011) has produced the most sustained analysis of the supposed relations between ‘underdevelopment’ (lack of the State, etc.) and ‘violence.’ For a critical analysis of this narrative of lack, absence, predation and violence, see Evangelista (2010). It should be noted that this view of Haiti is also present in a number of documents produced by the UNDDR, which, for example, speak of the “violent Haitian psyche” (UNDDR 2006). For a view of the elite class’s representations of Haitian poverty, see Thomaz 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Among others, see Smith 2001, Greene 1993, Laguerre 1975, Michel 1997 and Smart 1988.

<sup>16</sup> Here mention is typically made of the fact – undoubtedly relevant – that the 1987 Constitution promulgated after the end of the Duvalier dictatorship recognized for the first time the right of citizens to create associations.

<sup>17</sup> Concerning “expectations of modernity,” see Ferguson 1999.

term *fristrasyon* occupies an important place in the political economy of the conflict and the distribution of resources in Bel Air.

Our starting point, therefore, was to locate the leaders within Bel Air's social universe, and more specifically within the universe of forms of the area's authority and association. This allowed us to situate the figure of the 'community leader' [*lidè kominotè*] alongside other figures from which the former is sometimes distinguished and with which it is sometimes merged, depending on the contexts and viewpoints involved. These are figures like *lidè, notab, grannèg, chèf, chèf konbit, prezidan, samba, boss, soldà, kowonel, lidè amè, bandi, ajan lyezon, or pwofesyonèl du developman*, among many others. These figures, in turn, seem to be linked to a series of forms of association, including *komytè, kombit, atribisyon, tètansanm, ti leglise, organisasion populè, brigad vijilans, lakou, katye, group rara, gang, zenglendo, gueto* or *baz*, again among many others.<sup>18</sup>

To comprehend the social universe of leadership in Bel Air we proposed: (1) to reconstruct the social trajectories of leaders; (2) map the semantic field of the terms used to designate them; (3) relate the leaders to the different forms of association that recognize them and in which they participate; (4) examine the forms of sociability in which leaders and associations are created and recreated; (5) analyze the connections between leaders, associations and territoriality, producing a social cartography of local politics; (6) observe the relations between the construction of leaders and family configurations, including gender and generational relations; and (7) consider the links between forms of local authority, government authorities, national political networks, international agencies and NGOs. Examining the social experience of more than one generation of people also enabled us to situate these topics in time, continually taking into account their historical dimension.

The text presented here is centred on the leaders themselves and on the population of Bel Air, but also incorporates the views of other agents who form part of the social world under study, such as employees of the government, international agencies and NGOs, through the observation of their activities, interviews and the examination of documents produced by the same.

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<sup>18</sup> Suffice to note for now that these sets of terms refer generically to people with authority and to associations between people. The ambiguity and contextuality that define the meanings of each of these expressions prevents us from indicating equivalent expressions here in English. But rather than 'translating' fixed meanings, the present text is concerned with comprehending what these terms mean in the flux of the lives of the people for whom they make sense.



The research was conducted between June 2010 and June 2011 by a team from the Culture and Economic Research Laboratory (NuCEC), based at the Postgraduate Program in Social Anthropology, Museu Nacional, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.<sup>19</sup> It drew from the contact maintained with the region since 2007 when we began to develop the project 'Currencies, Markets and Nations. An ethnography of/in Haiti from a comparative perspective.'<sup>20</sup> The research also drew from the participation of three of its members in the aid activities for victims of the earthquake that struck on January 12<sup>th</sup> 2010.<sup>21</sup> The organization of camps for those made homeless, the distribution of resources and the censuses made of the affected population in Bel Air all afforded the researchers close contact with the social universe of the local authorities and organizations in an extreme situation. This also led to the choice of two key terrains for observing the actions of the leaders and local associations and the interactions between these and the international agencies, namely the two refugee camps located in the centre of Bel Air: Asile Communale and Parc/Place de la Paix. Ethnographic research in these camps enabled us to switch the viewpoint from the leaders to the population itself, providing valuable data on how the actions of leaders and other agents (such as the government, international agencies and NGOs) impact on people's everyday lives, as well as providing an insight into the expectations and judgments of both the population and the leaders concerning the actions of these other agents.

The ethnographic investigation was concentrated in two periods: July/August 2010 and February/March 2011. During this time we: (a) lived on a day-to-day basis with the leaders and the local population; (b) took part in various meetings of local associations such as committees, churches, *rara* groups and *baz* groups; and (c) reconstructed (through lengthy interviews) the trajectories of 41 leaders. As will be seen in the next section of the text, this enables us to discuss things such as: the impact of age and gender variables in the social universe of leaders, the importance of school education, the leaders' family configurations, the activities performed and the qualifications obtained by themselves and by their parents.

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<sup>19</sup> The team was composed of seven members. As well as the three authors of the present text, the team included four research assistants: Handerson Joseph, Herold Saint Joie, Jean Luis Sergo and Jonhy Fontaine.

<sup>20</sup> Coordinated by Federico Neiburg, the project receives financial support from The Brazilian National Research Council (CNPq) and the Rio de Janeiro State Research Foundation (Faperj), and is also linked to the Economics, Currency and Market Laboratory of the Interuniversity Institute for Research and Development (INURED, Haiti). This text builds on two previous partnerships between our team and Viva Rio: see Neiburg & Nicaise 2009 and 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Pedro Braum Azevedo da Silveira, Jean Luis Sergo and Jonhy Fontaine.

## II. The social universe of leaders

The choice of the 41 people from whom we obtained exhaustive data on their social trajectories was determined primarily by qualitative rather than statistical criteria. The ethnographic fieldwork suggested that we should not try to construct samples based on pre-constituted formal groups, such as the local committee members or the signatories of the Peace Agreements.

Were we to focus on the committees, for example, which would be considered? Only the 'committees' recognized and registered by the government with the stamp of the Ministry of Public Affairs on their statutes? Would it be right to include those committees that are, as we explain later, officially authorized to transfer resources from the State and cooperation agencies to other groups? What validity would there be, for example, to a sample that placed side-by-side churches, associations linked to music and vodou (notably the *rara* groups) or more generically the *baz* [bases] – a key unit of sociability and politics in the area, covered extensively later?

In fact, the representativity of the leaders is more than just a methodological issue. It is a crucial issue for the leaders themselves and for the policies involving them. As one example: in 2008 and 2009 we had the chance to accompany a number of meetings relating to the formation of the 'Forum of Bel Air Associations and Leaders' promoted by the NCDDR. The initiative of creating the Forum failed to take hold, but by observing the dynamic of these meetings – where people discussed the region to be included (what were Bel Air's boundaries?) and what would be used as criteria for membership (which associations should form part?) – we were able to learn even prior to the formal start of our research that the question of representativity was not just a methodological question for ourselves: it is actually a key issue for the leaders.<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, one of the first impressions we had in the field was precisely the sheer proliferation of associations and committees. Before we became specifically interested in the leaders, the fact that we were conducting research in the area, combined with our foreign status, immediately activated a capillary structure of organizations and 'notables' from the

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<sup>22</sup> At the time we also closely monitored – also along with a team from INURED – the successful creation of another forum in Cité Soleil. This reinforced our impression concerning the complexity of the universe of local political representation.

different blocks and corridors who set up improvised assemblies and meetings to welcome us. These situations, generated by our own presence in the field, followed a ritual re-enacted innumerable times in our research and that continues even today: the meeting begins with a prayer; minutes are recorded; the association members talk about the objectives, emphasizing its importance for improving the lives of local people and the vulnerable situation in which the population lives; we present ourselves; and a discussion begins that frequently concludes with another prayer. The discussion topic usually emerges from an interrogation of our team's objectives and the nature of our link to Viva Rio. This would usually prompt us to explain that we were not employees of the NGO and could not therefore intervene in the elaboration of local 'development projects' or provide any kind of 'help' to the committee – which was clearly their expectation. At most we indicated our willingness to act as a transmission line for the association's needs and expectations. This made sense to everyone involved and led to an agreement. Our activity did indeed have consequences sometimes for the relations between the NGO and some of the associations with whom we created links over the course of field research.

The proliferation of associations is partly explained by the trajectories of their members and the fluctuations in the connections between them and their national and international 'partners.' This also means that the associations may sometimes experience dormant periods only to be re-activated in response to new facts that raise expectations of developing new projects, mediating external funds or creating a new contact. But as well as proliferating, the associations are organized according to various logics that introduce different territorial reference points and enable their members to belong to more than one association simultaneously, or to larger bodies such as associations of associations. For example it is frequently the case that an association, the *committee of street X* for example, is totally or partially included in another association, *the committee of district Z*. And the latter may also form part of associations of associations that similarly cover even larger territories.

Being a member of a committee, participating in an association or pursuing either as a personal goal is a part of life for Bel Air's residents, especially the lives of those people who see themselves as leaders and/or who are recognized as such. Indeed all the 41 leaders in our sample have or have had more or less strong connections with one or more associations over their trajectories.

The set of signatories of the Peace Agreements undoubtedly forms a sample of local leaders. But the research cannot be confined to this group for reasons that once again, beyond

'methodology,' relate to crucial aspects of the very social universe under study. Indeed the continual yearly increase in the number of signatories of the Agreements expresses changes in the principles used to recognize leaders, highlighting the fact that leadership is fundamentally contextual. It also allows us to glimpse another aspect of the social universe of leaders, namely its constant movement, generated by the trajectories of the lives (and deaths) of people and by changes in the configurations and networks to which these people belong – the beginning of a policy, the advent of a project, the shaping of a particular network in relation to the distribution of a particular resource, the outbreak of a conflict, the outcome of a violent action, and so on.

The perception of these structuring dimensions of the social universe of leadership (its temporal and contextual nature) was reinforced precisely by the ethnographic procedure that informed the construction of the 41 trajectories, enabling us to map the networks of sociability and interests generated by the field research in an ethnographically controlled way. More than once, this allowed us to perceive that someone presented by one person as “a leader who should be interviewed,” might not be recognized as such in another situation or from another person’s viewpoint, their leadership status being questioned or even subject to accusations (such as “he’s not a leader, he’s a bandit”).

In any event, by adopting this ethnographic procedure the networks of sociability uncovered in the field led us to various Peace Agreement signatories. Among the 41 trajectories that we reconstructed in depth, there are four leaders who formed part of the group of 12 signatories of the First Peace Agreement (2007) and 12 who belonged to the group of 77 leaders who signed the last Agreement concluded within the research period (May 2010). On the other hand, according to their own information, the 41 people interviewed in depth are distributed across the following zones: Bel Air, 16; La Saline/Forturon, 11; Delmas 2, 6; Portail Saint Josef/Tokyo, 3; Fort National/Corridor Bastiat, 3; Solino, 1; and Warf Jeremie, 1.

The initial gateway to this social universe were the leaders who we already knew as a result of our earlier stays and investigations in the area. Thanks to this prior experience, we had a clear idea of the diversity of the social universe of leaders when we developed the plan for the present research. From the outset, therefore, we tried to include some of the significant variables relating to age, gender and education, as well as the real or attributed proximity to weapons, churches or vodou, the market and the international cooperation system, especially VR whose actions in the area were increasingly visible and intense.

As we stated earlier, the field research began in June 2010. By chance three members of the team – two Haitians and one Brazilian – were in Bel Air when the earthquake struck in January 2010. They immediately became involved in the work of providing assistance to the victims. The network of employees and people linked to Viva Rio also immediately became entwined and coordinated with the actions of the local population. This happened naturally and spontaneously from the moment of the tragedy, since VR already formed part of the zone's social landscape. In Kay Nou, the site run by the NGO in Bel Air, a refugee camp was quickly set up and a few days had sheltered more than 2,000 people in tents, providing water, food and first aid (foto@). Our Brazilian researcher stayed in Haiti until August. To some extent he ceased being a researcher during this period and transformed into a VR employee, representing the NGO in meetings with local leaders and with funding and intervention agencies, helping coordinate actions, responding to complaints and demands, discussing problems and organizing activities (such as the refugee census and the relocation of the people camped at Kay Nou). The contact with leaders who participated in these initiatives undoubtedly influenced the choice of some of the 41 people interviewed. At the same time, this shared history, linked to the painful and extreme experience of the earthquake, inserted the researcher – and with him our entire team – in an even denser network of sociability, allowing us to perceive other, more intimate dimensions of authority and social life in the area. These are analyzed in section III of the present text. We turn now, though, to a closer examination of some of the social and personal qualities of the leaders.

### *1. Age*

The youngest member of the group of 41 leaders whose complete trajectories were reconstructed was 25 years old, while the two oldest were over 60. Although, as we know, the sociological criteria defining a generation are not solely age-based, broadly speaking we can identify two generations of leaders: one generation formed by individuals aged between 25 and 39, and another formed by individuals aged over 40. We interviewed 17 people from the younger generation and 22 from the older.

As we shall see, the older leaders were formed during (or soon after) the 'first Aristide' government (i.e. in the 1990s). Many had participated in the Fanmi Lavalas movement, some of them had taken part in the armed struggle that followed the overthrow of the 'second Aristide' government in 2004. The younger leaders were formed during the 2000s and were still fairly young during the 'times of violence' and grew up used to the presence of MINUSTAH

and the ‘development’ agencies. However it should be noted that the social universe of leaders is not only structured around political history. As we shall see later, a number of other elements are just as relevant.

The majority of those interviewed began to be recognized as leaders when they were in their twenties. From this viewpoint, leadership appears to be an attribute of youth.<sup>23</sup>

## 2. *Place of birth*

According to the census conducted by Viva Rio in 2007 (henceforth CVR-2007), 63 % of the total population of Greater Bel Air was born in Port-au-Prince. However the enormous impact of migration into the area can be seen more clearly when we examine different age bands: among those over 25 years old, the proportion of leaders born in the city’s metropolitan zone falls to 40%. Among the interviewed leaders as a whole, 34 declared themselves to be from Port-au-Prince, i.e. 82% of the total of 41 – double the percentage indicated by the census for the total population.<sup>24</sup>

We underline the verb ‘be’ in order to emphasize and explore three crucial elements of leadership: belonging, recognition and identification. The leader belongs to his or her local base and is recognized by the latter. At the same time the leader is recognized and identified as such by entities at larger scales, including the level of national politics and international cooperation. This dynamic of ‘top-down’ recognition and identification is objectified in the gestures, speech and group dynamics, and the capacity to mobilize people verbally and assemble residents in meetings. It is also visible on the bodies of the leaders, on the name tags that they display like necklaces, multiple ID documents that denote some of the positions occupied by their wearers: a post on a committee or an association of committees, a connection with a government authority (the city council, the Ministry of Public Affairs), a job with an international cooperation agency or an NGO. (photo@)

People usually ask about someone’s place of birth in Creole with the formula *kibò ou fèt?* This translates literally something like “where were you made?” The reply *mwen fèt bèlè* (I was made in Bel Air) does not necessarily refer to the place of biological birth (which may have

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<sup>23</sup> Though here it is worth recalling a statistic for Haiti as a whole that certainly applies to Bel Air too: the average life expectancy of the population is just 57 years.

<sup>24</sup> The same does not occur in the previous generation, where the strength of immigration to the city is much more perceptible: only 14 mothers and 16 fathers of our interviewees came from Port-au-Prince’s metropolitan zone, roughly half the number found in the generation we interviewed (their children).

been outside Bel Air) but to the fact that the person was ‘made’ in the local area: he or she feels like someone from there and is recognized as such, the person was made there. But at the same time, as well as being a manifestation of personal belonging and affirmation, the reply *mwen fèt bèlè* (or its equivalent, *mewn moun bèlè*, I am from Bel Air) may also express – depending on the context – a wish to be recognized. As we show later on when we examine the trajectories of leaders who were born in Bel Air, grew up outside the area and returned to it because of their work for international cooperation agencies (including VR itself), declaring oneself to be ‘made in Bel Air’ in the social universe of generated by our research on ‘leadership in Bel Air’ (as our investigation was presented in the field) – research linked to VR, which everyone knows runs various projects in the area – means claiming a quality that the person knows will be positively evaluated by the NGO and which may indeed influence decisions over recruitment. This is an identification, then, that sometimes acts as turning point in the making of the leader, as we shall see.

### *3. Education*

When we observe the educational level of the 41 interviewees, strong evidence emerges that they comprise a relatively highly qualified group compared to the local population as a whole. According to CVR-2007, 10.3% of the inhabitants of Greater Bel Air have never been to school, 20.3% have completed primary school, 13.4% completed secondary school and 3.5 % completed university education. In contrast, all of the 41 interviewees (100%) finished primary education, 23 of them (56%) began and 12 (29%) completed secondary education and 4 completed university degrees (almost 10% of the total sample).

The educational gap between our 41 leaders and the area’s general population is enormous: Bel Air’s leaders clearly have a lengthier educational career than the local average. We can conclude that education is a constitutive principle of leadership and, moreover, as well shall see later on when we analyze some of the personal trajectories, we can note that educational careers and leadership careers seem to form in parallel, irrespective of other elements in the profile of the 41 interviewees, who as mentioned earlier include a wide assortment of leader types: committee members, Peace Agreement signatories, former combatants, people who in

some contexts are or were identified as bandits. In Bel Air and in a world like Haiti where educational capital is extremely scarce, schooling makes a huge difference.<sup>25</sup>

#### *4. Parental occupation*

The occupational careers of the parents of the 41 leaders reveals a dynamic that is widespread in the area and that cannot be captured through statistics: the dynamic of opportunities and the multiple temporary jobs, the instability of work and the 'odd jobs,' which allow people to do many different things both consecutively and simultaneously. For residents of Bel Air, 80% of whom are 'unemployed' according to some estimates (in other words, people who were born and grew up in this dynamic), what could the terms 'occupation,' 'profession' or 'employment' actually mean?

However some of the statistical data is significant. Among the women interviewed in CVR-2007, 44.7% declared themselves to be traders. This extremely high proportion not only reveals a gender issue, associated with the female nature of the market, it also points more generally to the importance of commerce in Haitian social life.<sup>26</sup> If we focus on the mothers of our interviewees, we can note that the proportion is even higher: 32 of them (78.8 % of 41) are or have been 'traders' or 'do commerce,' expressions that in turn encompass a variety of activities and resources at different scales. But generically the term refers to the universe of small businesses (*peti bisnis*) and small earnings (*fè peti*) that enable the day-to-day survival of a population that mostly makes do with very little money and has no job or salary.<sup>27</sup>

When we examine the activities of the fathers, the perception increases (already observable in relation to educational level) that we are dealing with people with relatively high levels of resources in the context of a social universe marked by extreme vulnerability. When speaking of resources, it is important to stress that we are not referring merely to salaries or income, but also (and, very often, primarily, in a world like this where money is so scarce) to personal connections, access possibilities, contacts in other circuits and at other levels.

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<sup>25</sup> According to the UNDP report for 2005, the literacy rate among people between 15 and 24 was 66.2%.

<sup>26</sup> See especially Mintz 1959 and 1960 and Neiburg 2010.

<sup>27</sup> According to CVR-2007, 78% of the families in Bel Air have a monthly per capita income below 43 dollars, while 37.6% earn less than a dollar a day. This data is consistent with the findings of the last UNDP report (2005) which suggests that 75% of the country's population survives on less than 2.5 dollars per day.



Seven of the individuals from our group of 41 (i.e. 17%) had fathers with a military background. This fact will become even more relevant in the following sections of this report when we discuss the importance of proximity to weapons in the construction of leadership, the effect of the dissolution of the army (in 1995) in the creation of a large unemployed population among whom frustration replaced the feeling of professional and national pride associated with stable employment with the State, and the influence on the trajectories of some leaders of their fathers' proximity to politics, their 'close contact with the palace' (the government) or their access to the president's circle.

Among the fathers of the 41 individuals making up our sample of leaders, another six seem to share this generic sense of proximity to politics: one 'politician,' one lawyer, one security guard, two *makouts*,<sup>28</sup> and a chauffeur (for Jean Claude Duvalier).<sup>29</sup>

This proximity to politics among the parents of our 41 interviewees also extends in some cases to their mothers. In recounting their life histories, several leaders traced the origin of their own interest in politics to their mothers, recalling activities in which these women had been involved during the interviewee's childhood or youth, events in which they had accompanied their mothers (the case, for example, of one interviewee whose mother had been a trade unionist).

It is precisely the condition of being 'children' and 'siblings' of the 41 leaders interviewed in depth that allows us to situate them within their particular family universe.

## *5. Family, gender and place of residence*

The characteristics of the residential units in Bel Air vary considerably. In the upper parts of the region solid constructions with two or three floors and various residences predominate, while in the lower areas of Bel Air, the poorer regions close to the sea, the dwellings are built at ground level from flimsier materials and tend to have just one room. However the limits of these dwellings do not necessarily correspond to the limits of the social units residing there.

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<sup>28</sup> *Tonton makout* was the name given to members of the Militia of National Security Volunteers (MVSN) created by François Duvalier. However the term *makout* is not only used to designate individuals who commit violent acts, but also more generally to refer to party activists or people who gave local support to the Duvalier regime (see, for example, Trouillot 1990).

<sup>29</sup> The other activities of the fathers were as follows: 2 pastors, 1 musician, 2 lottery ticket vendors (*bolette*) and at least 6 whose activities (carpenter, mechanic, hairdresser) indicate the extensive universe of trades and activities omnipresent on the streets and alleys of Bel Air: artisan workshops, mechanic workshops, bakeries, beauty parlours, etc.

Clusters of dwellings may be occupied by people who recognize themselves as a single family, in the same way as some alleys or *lakous*.<sup>30</sup> In many cases the place used to make and consume food is outside the dwellings, in the alley or street. The domestic kitchens merge with the *chen janbè* (posts run by women selling food to the public).

The residences are also flexible in the sense that people not only live in them permanently: they also comprise temporary accommodation. Female traders who travel (between Port-au-Prince and the country's interior, or between Port-au-Prince and the Haitian commercial centres located outside the country, such as Miami, Santo Domingo or Panama), men who migrate to work in the Dominican Republic or live in the United States and occasionally return to the country (all the 41 leaders interviewed had siblings, parents or children living abroad<sup>31</sup>), or young people from families living in rural areas who spend days or months in the city in the homes of relatives.

Many residential units revolve around women.<sup>32</sup> They take care of the children, provide the youngest everyday with their basic subsistence needs (in an environment of extreme poverty such as this, we are sometimes talking literally about food and water). Most of the 41 leaders interviewed had been raised by their mothers only, either without their fathers or with fathers who were not the biological father. Almost all the leaders have siblings with different fathers and mothers.

As we mentioned previously, a number of the parents of the 41 leaders interviewed in depth were linked in some form to the State, the government or politics. It should be added that the parents of several of these leaders do not live with them. Some of the leaders maintained a relationship with their father, others did not know their father or ceased to have contact with him when he left home. Despite frequently not being officially recognized as children by their father, and though many of the mothers were not the father's official wife or their house the latter's main residence, a number of these fathers helped raise the children, contributing

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<sup>30</sup> The *lakou* is the basic social unit in rural Haitian social organization (Bastien 1985, Barthélemy 1989, Herskovits 1965 [1937], Lowenthal 1987, Moral 1961). It is a space which is at once familiar and ritual, the place of residence of the extended family, its saints (the *lwes* of vodou) and the ancestors (traditionally the remains of the family dead rested in the *lakou*). Far less has been written on urban *lakous*; the exception is Marcelin (1988).

<sup>31</sup> The family relation with migrants is essential in terms of making up the income of Haitian families in Haiti, especially for poorer families who regular or sporadic remittances from abroad, which primarily reach them through companies like Western Union (omnipresent in places like Greater Bel Air) and mobile phone corporations.

<sup>32</sup> The literature on this topic speaks of 'matrifocal' families. For further discussion, see Marcelin 1988.

either occasionally or permanently to expenses linked to the children's education.<sup>33</sup> Everything suggests that, whatever the duration of the personal relationship with their father, the mere fact of being the child of someone with power who circulates among other social spheres made a difference to the trajectory of some leaders. This is what one of our interviewees revealed when he recalled that his father – with whom he said he had almost no contact – was a colonel in the army, according to him a true *granchèf* [big boss].

As we pointed out earlier, our choice of the leaders to be interviewed was influenced by the dynamic of our activities and our sociability in the field. The research team was made up of six men and one woman with most of the ethnographic research being undertaken by the men only. This basically inserted the team into male networks and undoubtedly contributed to the fact that the set of interviewees included just three women. However the predominance of men is also explained by the traditionally male structure of leadership – as can be verified, in fact, by observing the signatories to the Peace Agreements in Bel Air: the first female community leaders only appear in the third Agreement where three of the 29 signatories were women.

Gender relations in the social universe of leaders raise various questions and above all require observation of the data over time in order to be able to perceive the changes. As we indicated earlier – a topic to which we shall return – the construction of leadership is based on mechanisms of belonging, recognition and identification. These mechanisms explain, for example, the existence of female leaders of women's associations (fairly frequent, as we shall see) or the promotion of female leaders through the leader identification and training policies developed by international agencies and NGOs, very often implicitly or explicitly concerned with questions such as gender equality and women's empowerment. This extends to the Haitian State itself, which created a Ministry of the Female Condition in response to demands made by donors.

In addition two elements clearly influence this incipient female 'ascension' in leadership: the relative pacification of the region, relegating the networks of armed male leaders to less central positions, and the consequent increase in the value attributed to school education and training (especially technical courses) as social capital, areas in which Bel Air's women participate intensely.

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<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that all education in Haiti today has to be paid at source, including public education.

We return to these questions in the sections below, focusing in particular on the gender oppositions that seem to characterize Haitian social space – the traditional idea that men are engaged in agricultural work and politics, women in the home and market.<sup>34</sup> Although this may still be relatively valid in terms of the rural environment, a more nuanced approach is undoubtedly necessary when we turn to examine urban contexts like Bel Air where men, most of whom are unwaged, focus their activities on the street (converted into a marketplace), perform small jobs, create opportunities and try to maximize the income provided by the mediation of resources and the ‘politics’ surrounding ‘development.’ This possibility is not closed to women: on the contrary, it is open to them too, as shown by the growing importance of professional qualifications and the explicit policies of gender empowerment promoted by agencies working in the area, identifying and creating new leadership profiles. This complex dynamic in which territories, generations, genders, activities and agencies are inter-related will become clearer in the next section where we analyze the various dimensions of leadership.

### **III. The dimensions of leadership**

We can now specify the overall objective of this research. Its aim is not to produce either a definition of leadership or a typology of leaders. Instead it looks to comprehend the various dimensions organizing the social universe of leaders, the modulations in people and situations produced by a complex and interconnected set of social properties, emotions and ways of being, acting and relating with others that make someone a leader, recognized and identified as such in specific contexts and interactions. As we stated earlier, a person may be a leader in one interactive situation or scale of action and not in another, some people are transformed into leaders (nobody is born a leader), while others cease to be.

In this section we explore three central dimensions of leadership: territoriality, resources and the relation between national politics and international aid. To examine the first dimension, we describe the meanings of one of the key words in the vocabulary of leaders, *baz* [base], a polysemic term that designates: (a) the place to which the leader belongs, (b) a space of sociability, his or her circle, (c) the control of a particular area, and (d) an actor who in certain

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<sup>34</sup> See Mintz 1971.

contexts, notably conflicts, feels and acts, takes stances, attacks or defends, including militarily.

The term *baz* can be applied to committees, *rara* groups, networks of friends or other forms of association. In all these cases the same two principles are at work: segmentarity and sovereignty. The first principle indicates that (a) there are *baz* at different scales (the word can designate a *katye*, a *bloc*, a *kwen*), (b) the *baz* are defined and exist relationally, not in isolation, mapping a field of affinities and solidarity, rivalry and conflicts, and (c) the *baz* are related to each in different ways depending on the scales. For example: *baz* that are in conflict on the relatively small scale of the same *bloc* may be allied in a war at a larger scale – this was precisely the case in a series of armed incidents that took place shortly before the signing of the First Peace Agreement in 2007, which involved hostilities between the *baz* *Bel Air* and *baz* *Delmas 2*, at the same time as ‘internal’ conflicts were occurring in the latter *baz*. In this play of alliances and divisions, new *baz* are created, some grow in size (their leaders gain influence or control over larger territories) while others lose strength.

Though, every *baz* (whether a *rara* group, a circle of friends, a local development association or the armed base, for example) implies a question of sovereignty, some type of control over the territory, protecting the population and understanding its needs, trying to find solutions to the ‘problems,’ helping the community and sometimes entering into conflict with other *baz* or with other leaders. Consequently one of the basic activities of leaders – activities in which they invest much of their energy daily – is the generation and distribution of resources: food, money, jobs (essentially temporary and unstable) and services (internet access, electricity to charge mobile phones, help when needed, contributions towards school fees or buying medicines, for example), but also friends and prospects for the future.

The fact is that people in *Bel Air* express the desire to ‘improve’ their lives. The leaders themselves exist in relation to these expectations, which is why they frequently face demands from their ‘bases.’ Sometimes indeed an increase in the flow of resources (in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake, for example, a case discussed below) stimulates even further the feeling of exclusion of those outside the circuit, inflames people’s passions, increases the tension of the relations with leaders and alters the balance of power between old and new leaders. In the field, we even observed how the increase in the flow of resources – and not only the worsening of people’s needs – forced some leaders to leave their local area or stop frequenting certain streets and alleys because of the threats from those who had been

excluded. For example, this occurred numerous times in the months following the earthquake when the UN's *Cash for Work* programs were being implemented.

The term that best describes this mixture of unfulfilled expectations and threat is *frystrasion* [frustration]. It indicates a state of things on the verge of exploding. People from the *baz* may speak of their *frystrasion* concerning the leader, whose leadership status may become threatened by youths from the *baz* itself. The leader in turn may use the same term to press for more resources from the sources generally located outside the local area: UN agents and agencies (or their sections, such as UNDP or the DDR), the IADB, the World Bank, USAID, CONCERN or Viva Rio.

The mediation between leaders and these higher-level agents and agencies involves different activities and capacities: development projects, forms of mediation, relations with the palace, armed actions, and so on. It is not uncommon, therefore, for the implementation of a project in a particular area to be based on a leader expressing concern over his or her inability to control the *frystration* of his base, emphasizing that this frustration may degenerate into *desod* [disorder], leading to crimes such as thefts or kidnapping. These are always highly unstable situations for the leaders, though, since violent actions can in turn deauthorize and weaken the leader in the eyes of development agencies, suggesting that the person lacks sufficient authority over his or her base.

The fact that such apparently diverse actions – such as those linked to development or to illegal activities – form part of the same universe is shown in the trajectories of a number of the interviewed leaders who had been simultaneously or consecutively employed by government agency, participants in armed conflict, and members of UN teams, aid agencies (such as USAID) and NGOs.

The trajectories of the interviewees reveal the historical dimension of leadership, the different profiles acquired over the course of time in relation to other agents, the emergence of new kinds of local associations and distinct forms of mediation – as we shall see, both at the level of national politics and at the level of international cooperation. It is thus useful to observe these modalities over the course of time, not as a historiographic curiosity but because they remain alive in some form in the present, in the leaders and *baz* we observe in the field. We focus specifically on this historical dimension in the last part of this section.

## 1. Bases and territory

The First Peace Agreement (May 2007) clearly recognized the importance of the territorial dimension of leadership. It was signed by 12 people. The signatures that appear at the end of the document are divided into four groups of three signatories, corresponding to four zones or *baz*: Solinò, Bel Air, Delmas 2 and Forturton/La Salines. The entire architecture of the ‘Pact to Reduce Violence,’ as the text was also known, was built on territorial principles. It presents the figure of the Conflict Prevention and Management Agent (APGC, also known as the *ajen lieson*), whose “job is to work towards the training, education and dynamization of the community groupings of the district’s various families, and towards reducing violence in their zone of influence [...]. The agent is an employee of the NCDDR who performs a civil and social activity in his or her district, who should be a native of the latter, a resident of the zone and enjoy the trust and respect of people from the area.”<sup>35</sup> Among our group of 41 leaders, a number became *ajen lieson* recognized in the Peace Agreement documents or, more generally, in the context of Viva Rio’s *Tamboù Lapè* project which, as stated earlier, played a key role in the negotiation of the Agreements.

One of the most notable aspects of disarmament was the distinction between those leaders who engaged in the process (and became part of the circuit of actions implemented by the DDR, NCNDR and Viva Rio) and those who remained on the margins, whether out of their own choice or because they were not or did not feel invited – an ambiguity that once again relates to the recognition and identification of leadership cited at various points in this text. As in all good diplomacy, here too there are implicit and explicit codes of involvement and obligation, mixed with feelings of commitment, opposition and indifference.

For the leaders who engaged in the process, who signed the Peace Agreements or who were nominated as APGCs or *ajen lieson*, the respect for the terms of the agreement shown by the people from their *baz* became a measure of their own leadership.<sup>36</sup> One of the first tests in this respect were the events following the signing of the First Peace Agreement, organized as part of the *Tamboù Lapè* project, and which once more revealed the importance of the territory in

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<sup>35</sup> The texts of the subsequent Agreements changed, the description of the requirements relating to the definition of the leader becoming more exhaustive. In the Third Peace Agreement, for example, the following items were included: “be voluntary; behave morally, be sincere, fair and honest; be engaged in development initiatives and actions promoting peace; be capable of resolving a conflict; and not be wanted by the police or being tried by the justice system).” However the texts of the Agreements maintained their reference to a territory and a link with the people living there: the person should “be a native of the district, a resident of the zone and enjoy the trust of most of the district’s members.”

<sup>36</sup> This is what we observed in the field on the few occasions when peace came under pressure from actual events or threats. Undoubtedly this mechanisms helps ensure the effectiveness of the agreements even today.

the attempt to construct a peaceful public space in Bel Air. Late afternoon, *rara* groups coming from the two zones that until shortly before had been at war (Delmas 2 and Bel Air) advanced with their crowd of musicians and fans into the territories of the rival *baz*. But instead of this territorial invasion being interpreted as a challenge or a prelude to conflict, it meant – as the leaders who had organized the event intended – an expression of hospitality shown to their neighbours that would help reinforce the climate of non-violence.<sup>37</sup>

The *rara* groups occupy a singular place in the poorer districts of Port-au-Prince, such as Bel Air.<sup>38</sup> They are one form of association among many others, which, as we are looking to show in this text, map the social geography of authority in the area. The *rara* groups are formed by men and women who like music and who in some cases earn some money as professional musicians or singers. The *rara* groups are closely linked to the universe of vodou, which also produces ‘strong people,’ *ougans* and *mambos*, located in space, in the *baz* associated with *ufòs*.<sup>39</sup> There are even *rara* groups that develop or are ready to develop local projects similar to those run by other associations. Hence, for example, on one occasion we were taking part in a meetings with a *rara* group in its *baz*. In the group there was a strong presence of Rastas, always heavily engaged in cultural activities, especially in music and the region’s political life. At the end, after the presentation speeches, as in many other meetings with associations, there was a prayer, except that this time the prayer, led by one of the Rastas, was Islamic and in Arabic.

The performances of the *rara* groups generally occur in the early evening, in the streets, principally between the end of carnival and the start of Easter. In the political period close to elections, the *rara* groups frequently take part in the electoral campaigns.<sup>40</sup> In the time of *vyolans* (between 2004 and 2006) the *rara* performances, demonstrations and even the armed struggle itself formed part of the same constellation of events. The *rara* groups, political leaders and armed leaders were all seen to form part of the *mouvman* (movement).<sup>41</sup> To outsiders, these performances very often evoke feelings of threat and disdain, phrases like *ratla ap vini* (literally, the rats are coming), the use of terms like *desod* or *chimè*.

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<sup>37</sup> Interviews with Rubem Cesar and Robert Montinard.

<sup>38</sup> Though, of course, they are also found in the rural zones.

<sup>39</sup> On *rara*, vodou and politics, see McAlister 2002.

<sup>40</sup> During the political period and at other times, during other moments of the year, *rara* groups may be invited to take part in political campaigns.

<sup>41</sup> Indeed this was the view expressed in the DDR’s first documents (e.g. UNDRR 2010). We return to this question at the end of the text.



As we mentioned earlier, the former term, *desod* (disorder), is used to describe a state of things (a place or a situation can be *desod*) or a state of mind inclined towards trouble. It can be stated as an accusation, “they make *desod*,” or as a threat: “be careful or else there’s going to be *desod*.” The term *chimè*, on the other hand, carried the double meaning of the French *chimère*, idealist and monstrous. It is generally used in a pejorative sense to designate a hybrid of militia and delinquent. Opponents of Aristide and much of the sociological literature and journalist reports on the Fanmi Lavalas movement use the term *chimè* precisely in this sense. For them *chimè* represents Aristide’s *baz*, generically encompassing in this idea places like Bel Air, Cité Soleil or Martisant.

However none of the leaders from the area who were members of Aristide’s party at the time, including those who participated in the armed resistance to his overthrow between 2004 and 2006, identified themselves as *chimè*. The *baz* for them, as for Bel Air’s inhabitants in general, has other meanings. The *baz* (and here once again we are referring to all of them, clearly, not only to the *baz amè*, the armed bases) is a place of belonging and protection, a space of sociability (basically male, as we have stated, although women leaders may also speak the language of the *baz*) – simultaneously a concrete site located in the territory and a more or less abstract moral space whose boundaries and dimensions are, as we have seen, mobile and malleable.

## 2. Associations and resources

We have already mentioned that part of our team was in Bel Air when the earthquake struck in January 2010. Although calculations of the loss of human life and damage caused by the tragedy vary considerably, it is estimated that more than 250,000 people died, most of them in the metropolitan zone of Port-au-Prince. According to UN estimates, 40% of the city’s buildings were affected. As well as loved ones, many people also lost their homes or had to abandon them because of the risk of collapse. Many people also lost their jobs.

Bel Air was struck hard. A few hours after the quake, Viva Rio’s headquarters in the area was filled with the homeless and injured. In a short time there were around 2,000 people. They were sheltered in tents and given water, food and medical assistance. Based on our conversations with leaders and members of the area’s associations, we estimate that around 30,000 were living in the refugee camps surrounding *Kay Nou*. Undoubtedly the earthquake deeply shook the relations between people and between people and the territory.

The fact that the research lasted more than a year allowed us to witness significant processes and changes. The refugee camps were ideal spaces for observing the day-to-day life of leaders and the activities surrounding them, the emergence of new associations, their interactions with those already existing, the redefinition of agendas and priorities. The involvement of some of our team in the work of assisting the victims and organizing the camps immediately located us within the space of relations between the leaders and local associations, the population and the intervention agencies. In this situation of dire need, this space became even more vital for the generation and distribution of resources – basically tents, medications, water and food.

We systematically researched two camps located right in the centre of Bel Air, between Rue Delmas 2 and Rue Saint Martin: Parc/Place de la Paix and Asile Communale. We reconstructed some of the personal and family histories, held meetings with the local committees, talked to the leaders and other people in the neighbourhood, observed the everyday life of the camps, and paid special attention to something that also elicits considerable attention among the people themselves: the circulation of resources.

One year after the earthquake, there were new needs, including basic sanitation, urban infrastructure and schools. Nobody knew what the future would bring, whether the locale would become another *bloc* within the district or whether the people would be transferred to other areas of the city. Nonetheless the presence of the refugees reflected the enormity of the tragedy and the transformations for everyone. The district's pace of life changed drastically. The distribution circuits altered for some items such as water (which we ourselves had studied only a short time before):<sup>42</sup> the line of kiosks along Rue Saint Martin, already run-down and further damaged by the earthquake, became even more in demand; new forms of distribution appeared, such as the trucks belonging to international agencies that assist the victims; after the outbreak of the cholera epidemic, free drinking water points were placed in some locations. Questions concerning the efficiency, pace and adequacy of these actions and the causes of the epidemic not only stir the debates in wider public spaces (where the country's future or forms of international cooperation are discussed), they also and primarily mobilize the people from the area themselves since the subject is a vital issue for them.

One of the encampments occupies one of the zone's main public spaces, as important as Viva Rio's own headquarters became, which is located next to it: the football pitch of the *Aigles Noirs* team, now called Parc de la Paix. Next to it emerged a public square, the Place de la Paix.

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<sup>42</sup> Neiburg & Nicaise 2009.

Both are supervised by the same committee formed by 16 people, including five women. Along with the committee, a security brigade composed of 20 men was formed that works mainly at night. Some of them were previously police officers, military personal and security guards at the presidential palace. The committee had already made a request for official recognition to the Ministry of Social Affairs and had a head office (the *biwo administratyon*) in a tent donated by the Salvation Army.

According to its members, the committee was formed the day after the tragedy at the initiative of some of the area's *notab* ('notables'). Some of them were not part of the affected population and had participated in or directed previously existing associations, including one of the most active in the area (the CSCSM: Rue Saint Martin Civic Service Committee). Representatives from the homeless were also included on the committee, some of them from other regions of the city, along with other people who had previously been residents of the area and whose homes had been destroyed.

In the conversations with them we were able to note how, especially the younger people and women, were keen to organize the population and welcome aid. Some also refer to their school education, which from their point of view better qualifies them to carry out the tasks, or to their university studies, sometimes including more than one technical or language diploma. It was common to find leaders with this profile in the *biwo administratyon* talking among themselves and with friends, organizing tasks, holding or planning meetings.

One of our interviewees once defined the leader as someone "who know a lot of people." And, indeed, the leaders seem to be always accompanied and in contact with people, for example greeting someone before the start of an interview, being approached by others immediately afterwards. Leaders are always in a hurry, they live a daily life of encounters and conversations. Meetings with donors and intervention agencies, NGOs, government bodies, neighbourhood associations, district associations, chats with other leaders, as well as giving constant attention to those who ask them for resources. They also spend time arguing, sometimes in loud voices, with agitated gestures and body movements that impose authority – forms of interaction typical to the aggressive male sociability of the *baz* which is also present, albeit with different modulations, among the female leaders.

Leaders do indeed speak loudly, know how to argue and if necessary inflame passions, but at the same time another of the leader's qualities is the capacity to calm people down, resolve conflicts, *pozè* [calm] the overexcited crowd.

Some members of the Parc/Place de la Paix camp committee were taking or had taken courses intended to reinforce their leadership qualities, such as conflict mediation and management (we were able to accompany these courses when they were provided in the area by CONCERN during the research period). These training courses are an important mechanism in the creation of new generations of leaders, even if, obviously, not all those who take the courses will be automatically recognized as leaders by the population or by intervention agencies working in the area.

The inhabitants of the refugee camps and the members of the committees know very well that they live in a universe that is not only composed of good intentions. They frequently relate bad actions, embezzlement of funds, thefts, sexual aggressions. Various times we heard people refer to leaders or members of a committee as *poch pwela*, an accusation of theft that literally means “to put the pan in one’s pocket” – an expression that forms part of the semantic field of the *gran manjè*, the glutton synonymous with the corrupt politician.

The dynamic of accusations (irrespective of the reality of the facts) is part of the dynamic of rivalry between leaders and candidates for leadership who question the activities of the former in this way. This rivalry may also lead to a multiplication of the forms of intervention used by cooperation agencies, each one trying to impose different styles, sometimes activating different networks of mediators, contributing to create or reinforce the action of the leaders themselves.

The refugee camps display this multiplicity of complementary and competing agencies and agents, territories divided by the colours and banners of the different institutions (@photo). The leaders know how to navigate in this space, moving between the distinct operational logics of the donor institutions and maximizing the possibilities enabled by the presence (or promise) of aid.

### *3. National politics and international aid*

The universe of leaders and associations in Bel Air is a universe of variations. In it we can observe, among other elements, the dynamic behind the formation of families and neighbourhoods, the mobility between the rural and urban zones, the associations linked to Catholicism, Protestantism and vodou, the forms of creating political power, the local legitimization of the authority of the national State and the intense foreign presence

structuring Haitian social life in the form of governments, armies, churches, international agencies and NGOs.

More specifically we can identify three chronologies interwoven in the history of the relations between the associations and leaders, the Haitian government agencies and the so-called international community: the chronology of national politics, the chronology of international geopolitics<sup>43</sup> and the chronology of natural disasters that have affected the country.<sup>44</sup> It is not our aim here to provide an exhaustive reconstruction of events. Instead our intention is to observe some of the significant points of this history in order to gain a better understanding of the singularity of the current situation, the focus of our research.

The first 'aid missions' to Haiti date back at least to the period of occupation of the country by the United States (1915-1934) and the implementation of local intervention projects principally in rural areas, addressing issues related to health and agriculture.<sup>45</sup> Some attribute the origin of the expression *mangè disastre* to the food that arrived in Haiti sent by US government agencies and civil society organizations (first church missions, followed by NGOs) in response to humanitarian catastrophes produced by hurricanes during occupation and especially afterwards in the 1960s.<sup>46</sup>

However it was after the fall of Jean Claude Duvalier, in 1986, that the presence of the international community intensified, shaping in a unique way the social universe we observe in Bel Air.<sup>47</sup> The international economic blockades and the succession of foreign military interventions contributed even further to the growing presence of 'international aid' arriving in the country via government agencies (like USAID), multilateral institutions (like UNDP and IOM) and NGOs. This aid is essentially distributed in three forms: directly in the 'base,' 'local communities' or 'target groups,' through 'partnerships' between the local communities and government, and directly to the government in the form of loans or donations. The latter was the case, for example, of the "aid for development and governance" sent by the US federal administration in the 1990s as part of the Transition Initiative (USAID/IOM), which among

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<sup>43</sup> This geopolitics stimulates the dispatch or blockade of resources to the country and marks the rise or fall influence on Haiti of certain countries (and their government agencies and NGOs), including today, for example, the 'Group of Friends of Haiti,' whose existence was formalized shortly after the earthquake of January 25<sup>th</sup> 2010, formed among others by Brazil, Canada, France and the United States.

<sup>44</sup> In international cooperation a distinction is made between agencies that deal with development aid and those agencies that deal with situations of crisis or catastrophe (which may be different institutions or different agencies within the same institution, as in the cases of the European Union and the UN).

<sup>45</sup> See especially Schmidt 1971, Smith 2001 and Renda 2001.

<sup>46</sup> Smith 2001.

<sup>47</sup> It should be noted that USAID suspended its activities in Haiti during most of the Duvalier dictatorship, between 1963 and 1973.

other things promoted the “identification and training of community leaders.”<sup>48</sup> In fact various neighbourhood associations and community leaders in Bel Air were formed in the context of this initiative.

Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the international presence in Haiti shows a growing preponderance of US entities, but the intervention of agencies from other countries still has structuring effects even today. One example, also from the 1990s, is the participation of the French NGO known as GRET (*Association de Solidarité et de Coopération Internationale*) in the development of ‘social engineering,’ which led to the formation of a network of local committees linked to the execution of public policies, such as water supplies in poor districts of Port-au-Prince, including Bel Air. Water was distributed by the government agency (CAMEP) and the project was executed with US funding (USAID) in partnership with the IOM and CONCERN. Today the committees and associations of committees (formally recognized by the Ministry of Social Affairs) form part of the geography of associationism in the zone, just as their acronyms can be seen identifying public works (bridges, streets, rubbish skips) or distribution points for resources and services (water kiosks, latrines, cybercafés). Likewise the *prezidan*, *secretè general*, *trèsorier* and other figures chosen to make up the committees form part of the area’s social universe of leadership.

On the other hand, these interventions are linked with other kinds of associations. As we remarked earlier, many of them recall modalities found in the rural world, or constructed in the to and from between the urban and rural areas that characterizes Haitian social space. As the CASEC (Communal Section Administrative Councils) show, some associations created in the rural context form part of the structure of the State itself (the CASEC were constitutionally identified as the country’s smallest administrative political unit).

Today’s forms of association and leadership can be traced back to the groupings that emerged in the 1960s, in the church’s actions, especially the *Komytè Ti Legliz* (KTL) or ‘small church committees’ that formed part of the universe of liberation theology. The Salesian Seminary and the Church of Saint Jean Bosco, both located in La Saline within Greater Bel Air, played a central role in propagating the *Ti Legliz* movement. Today, though, this network is part of a

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<sup>48</sup> These programs were considered a counterpart to the application of the ‘structural reforms’ demanded by international agencies. Some blame this mechanism for the reinforcement of the ‘clientelist networks’ of the Fanmi Lavalas movement led by Aristide, especially after he returned to power following US military intervention in 1994 (see for example Manigat & Moïse 2001).

much more varied and complex field in which the Pentecostal networks also occupy an important place.<sup>49</sup>

When the people interviewed recount their life histories, other actors emerge. Some are more institutionalized in kind (though extremely varied) such as the university associations, scout groups, Popular Organizations (POs) and Vigilance Committees. Others are more diffuse, such as the older *makout* networks, the associations linked to the universe of vodou or even the networks grounded in armed actions located on a blurred boundary between actions defined as 'political' and those identified with *gangs*.

The accounts of the interviewed leaders weave a history of three decades. In them appear other elements at a smaller scale, though just as significant. One of these elements, which helps shape the careers of leaders, is the acquisition of skills and qualifications through training courses, while another – highly significantly – relates more generically to the possibility of maintaining and cultivating personal relations with *blan* (foreigners). A detailed examination of the first encounters between the individuals who later became leaders and the *blan* shows the structuring importance of outside agencies and actors in the personal and collective lives of Bel Air. The first time that a foreign mission (a multilateral entity, a church or an NGO) is received in the zone, the chance to earn a small amount as a French or Creole teacher in an embassy, hotel or some other 'cooperation' environment – small events like these can have major impacts on people's lives, altering the course of a trajectory, helping to make the person into a leader. Let's turn, then, to the lives of some of these leaders.

#### **IV. The lives of leaders**

Each one of the 41 people interviewed reveals, through their singularity, aspects of the social universe and dimensions of leadership. Several of these aspects have already been described in more general terms over the course of the text. Others deserve to be examined in more depth, including female leaders, professional qualifications and youth, development as a moral value and as a profession, the proximity to weapons and criminal actions. These topics will be explored below through the reconstruction of some individual trajectories. These are based on

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<sup>49</sup> See Hurbon 1987 and 2000.

the biographies of the leaders of Bel Air who we interviewed, but the collages are our own: they are not descriptions matching the succession of events in real lives. This methodology was adopted for two reasons: firstly to preserve the anonymity of our interlocutors in the field (a commitment to them made by ourselves in the interviews); and secondly to maximize the descriptions, combining the features we wish to highlight in a single small history that occupies just a few pages.

### *1. The female leader*

Michele has already become used to the new routine. Once a week she heads down to Bel Air with groups of residents to help them obtain documents like passports, voting cards, ID cards and travel visas. She accompanies them to the departments and offices responsible for issuing each document, provides instructions and where necessary helps fill in the record cards, questionnaires and forms. The activity intensified last year since many inhabitants from the region devastated by the earthquake of January 12<sup>th</sup> 2010 lost their 'papers' under the rubble. Michele doesn't mind the work. After all, as she always says, "a community leader is there to serve the community."

This service is, as she herself states, 'hard.' Every weekend, generally on Saturdays, the young leader joins her women friends and neighbours at the head office of the organization she coordinates (called the Organization of Women for the Development of Bel Air), located in the living room of her home. There they discuss the main problems affecting the region's women and the community in general. Lately the group has been concerned by the high number of pregnant girls in the zone, who, according to Michele, "need to drop out of studies to care for their babies." She dreams of finding an institution, either a government agency or an NGO, that can help them run a project with the young mothers. The organization is looking to create a program to monitor the health of the pregnant girls and their newborn children and, if possible, build a community crèche in the area. They have already taken these plans to the city council, the Ministry of Public Health and some foreign NGOs working in the district. So far they have only met with refusals. Michele knows very well what she is taking about. She became pregnant at the age of 20 and only managed to complete her studies with much hardship and the help of her mother and sisters.

Accessing resources – whether from the State or foreign agencies – is a fundamental part of a community leader's activities. In fact it is this aspect that to a large extent makes someone into



a leader: the capacity to obtain resources to be distributed subsequently through locally executed projects.

As well as holding meetings and presenting demands, Michele's organization runs a project in partnership with the government to prevent the spread of cholera. A team of boys and girls was assembled that visits the homes in the zone every day. The objective is to 'sensitize and mobilize' the inhabitants of upper Bel Air. In parallel, Michele participates in a training course in 'conflict management' run by a European NGO that has an office close to her street. She goes there once a week, a kind of pilgrimage – the attendance of courses and seminars aimed towards 'conflict management' and 'leader training' – that has marked the trajectory of many of the region's leaders since the end of the 1980s.

Along with the community activities, Michele gets on with her own life. She looks after her son, now already five years old, studies for her final school examines – feared by the young people – and works with her mother in the Croix des Bossales market, where she sells *pèpè*, second-hand clothes. The money she earns goes to help pay house bills and for her son's school. The boy's father, who today lives in Jacmel, in the southeast, "only helps now and again."

Michele comes from a poor family. Her own father, who died when she was 10 years old, was a farmer from a village close to Gonaïves, in the mid-north. He came to Port-au-Prince while still young, lured by a job he had obtained along with his older brother in the same market where his daughter and former wife work today. He had been a truck driver. In Croix des Bossales he met Nadège, a woman a few years younger who travelled to the capital each weekend to sell the farm produce she bought in her own home town, Leogane, situated to the south of Port-au-Prince. They married and moved to Bel Air. They had eight children, three boys and five girls.

Michele was born in 1985, in her current home in Bel Air. "There wasn't time to take my mother to the hospital," she says. There she grew up and studied, attending both primary and secondary schools in Bel Air. She reached the 'Filo,' the final year of the school system. She completed the required number of school hours, but did not take the required final exam, which would have completed her studies. Today she studies in the time left between working in the market and her 'community work.' She dreams of passing the exam and going to university. She wants to study accountancy.

As she herself relates, the young woman began her activities as a community leader when she left school. At that time, around four years ago, she was advised by one of her brothers, also a leader in the area, to develop her work in the zone and get in touch with the European NGO active in the region, since “they were looking for women leaders to help with their projects.”

Michele, who said she already helped local residents, mainly by given additional tutoring for children, therefore went to speak to some friends and neighbours. She presented them with her proposal to create a ‘woman’s organization’ that would discuss the district’s problems and contribute towards development of the zone.

As Michele recounts, “I explained to the girls that they needed to participate, it wasn’t a job just for the men,” and she added, “*fòk nou famn mete tèt nou deyò.*” The expression, used both in our conversation and in the encounters with her friends from the organization, carries a clear message: the women need to get out of their houses and put themselves ‘in the street’ to discuss the community’s issues and ‘participate in development.’

As can be readily perceived in Bel Air, whether in meetings, consulting the records of organization members or in conversations with the population, the social universe of leadership is predominantly male. However, as the women of the region like to emphasize, this reality has been changing considerably. Today it is possible to encounter a fairly large number of entities headed by women. This phenomenon can be related to two factors. On one hand, it derives from the initiative of the women themselves who increasingly feel the need to “put their faces in the street,” as Michele says, to debate local problems and identify and search for solutions for the community. On the other hand, it stems from the growing demand from NGOs and international agencies working in the city to include women in the forums responsible for elaborating and executing ‘development projects.’ These changes are undoubtedly helped by the pacification of the area and the consequent decline in influence of armed leaders or those close to those with weapons, the large majority of which were men.

The month after the meeting to inaugurate the organization’s foundation in August 2006, Michele went to the Ministry of Social Affairs with its statutes to register the entity with the State. “A real organization has to be registered,” she argues. The statutes were written by herself and her friends over the month. They also received help from Michele’s brother. “He already had experience of the procedure,” she added.

## *2. The man of arms*

Kevenson was born in La Saline in 1985. His childhood and adolescence was split between the district and the town of Jacmel, in the south-east, where lives his father's family. He has little formal education having dropped out of school at the end of primary level due to a lack of money. His mother, a clothes trader in the Croix des Bossales market, had to use the small amounts of money she earned from sales to raise her six children.

Kevenson is proud to have always been in the company of older people from a young age. "I was very intelligent, with a strong personality, I only liked being with older people," he says. While still a youth, he joined a *rara* group as a percussionist. Then, from the end of the 1990s onwards, he came into contact with politics, participating in demonstrations and campaigns in support of the then presidential candidate, Jean Bertrand Aristide.

Soon after, at the start of the 2000s, he created the *baz Staff Lasalin* along with a group of old street and neighbourhood friends. During this period, the group's political aims brought it closer a fanatical supporter of Aristide, Ti-Jean, considered one of the 'big bosses' of the zone as a whole.

In 2001, following Aristide's election, some armed groups from La Saline began to demand tax payments from traders in the Croix des Bossales market and the trucks that off-loaded there, previously controlled by *baz Fòturon*, a neighbouring area. Kevenson and other members of the *Staff* became 'soldiers' for Ti-Jean. The demand from the 'big boss,' backed and accepted by President Aristide, prompted the beginning of heavy armed conflicts between the *baz* of the two regions. Young people were killed, others had to flee, areas of La Saline were set on fire, later reconstructed as part of a government housing project. Kevenson, shot four times, still has a bullet lodged in his right leg today, a fact that fills him with pride.

From 2002 onwards the 'war' between La Saline and Fòturon, as the area is called by the residents, cooled off. But it was only a short pause before Kevenson and fellow members of the *Staff* needed to use their weapons again. In 2003 some groups formed by opponents of Aristide, principally police officers, security guards, former military personnel and *depoté* (ex-emigrants sent back to Haiti by the US government for their supposed involvement in illegal international networks or for crimes committed in the United States), began to launch attacks against those *baz* more closely identified with the government. The *baz* of Greater Bel Air, including *Staff*, responded: "we had to defend our area and Ti-Tide," claimed the then 'soldier.'

In 2004 the situation worsened following the Aristide's ousting from office. The police, now backed by a new government, cracked down on Bel Air and La Saline as a whole. Ti-Jean, along

with his brother and other 'bosses' from across the zone, began a 'movement' campaigning for the return of the elected president. There were clashes, demonstrations and new fires, including the Tèt Boeuf market, burnt down the following year by another *baz* from the region. In parallel the repression of the MINUSTAH troops increased. During this period Ti-Jean was assassinated.

Little by little the money of the *baz Staff* was shrinking. The Aristide government – which had been a source of income through the projects implemented in the zone – had been ended. The market became less profitable because of the increased violence. From 2006 onwards Kevenson and his friends began to commit robberies and kidnappings in the centre of the city and the wealthier districts. This was a form of obtaining money to survive and finance the 'movement.' At the end of the year Kevenson was imprisoned. He spent 12 months in jail. He was accused of being a criminal and organizing robberies.

He was released at the start of 2008 because of, according to him, 'lack of proof.' He returned to La Saline and since then lives off small jobs and selling drugs through the *Staff*. At the start of 2010 the area had become volatile again when prisoners escaped from the national penitentiary, destroyed by the earthquake. Armed conflicts with the police and the *chimè* who returned to their *baz* became almost daily. He decided to stay in Jacmel for a time. Six months later he returned. Kevenson continues to be recognized as a *granèg* in the zone. He basically lives off selling marijuana and now also sells demolition material from the earthquake.

### *3. Qualification and youth*

Jean is 28 years old and directs the Association of Intellectual Resources for Social and Cultural Progress (ARPSC), created in 2007. The association is recognized by the Ministry of Social Affairs and has already obtained 18 study awards for children from the IOM and applied for funding for a new project proposing to create cleaning brigades in the zone's streets and alleys. It also organized training courses for young people and adults in the healthcare area, specifically questions related to HIV-AIDS and cholera. During the summer holidays the ARPSC runs activities for children, families collaborate with money, food or drinks. On the days of the year commemorating events from the nation's history, such as the Day of the Flag and the Day of the Death of Dessalines, the association organizes cultural activities, poetry readings, dance and theatre.

The ARPSC is located in Forturon, while the people who participate in its actions and are affected by them live in the zone. The members refer to the association as the base, speaking of the *baz ARPSC*. The territory surrounding the *baz* is marked: the nearby alleys and lanes are filled with graffiti reading ARPSC. Some include messages such as “Faith, Peace and Development.”

The zone was heavily affected by the earthquake of January 12<sup>th</sup> 2010. There are alleys in which almost all the houses were destroyed. More than a year later the rubble has still not been removed, there are still dead neighbours under the rubble. This was an issue repeatedly mentioned by people who had some hope that our presence indicated a potential source of help. Jean’s residence was almost unscathed. He lives in a large building with two floors and numerous small one-roomed apartments, some of them with separate entrances. There is one bathroom for the entire building. Jean’s mother, who is widowed, lives on the upper floor with some nieces and other people. He occupied an apartment with an independent entrance on the ground floor. As well as the bed, there is a mattress, “because there’s always someone else staying.” There is also an extension with various plugs which friends can use to charge their mobile phones.

Jean is the fourth of six children. Before meeting his mother, his father was in another relationship, which means that Jean has another four siblings. Two sisters live in the United States, one in Miami and the other in New York. Jean’s father has already died. He had arrived in the Jeremie region in the mid-1970s. “He arrived and stayed” in Forturon, though he travelled all the time to his home region, transporting goods. He was also a mechanic and once even opened a clothes shop where Jean’s mother also worked as a seamstress.

Jean feels that his father would be very proud of him. Not only because he is the only one of his siblings to finish college (communication sciences at a private university in Port-au-Prince) but also because of the activities which he pursues to help people from the district. Jean invested considerably in his studies, performed various jobs to get by and had the privilege of receiving help from his family. He is also the only university graduate among the members of the ARPSC, which was founded by the group of friends. One of his closest friends is William, who lost his mother when little and lived with his father, a well-known *grannèg* from La Salines who had been a security guard at the National Palace. William is also an *ajèn liason* for CNDDR and obtained a contact with the IOM to whom he submitted the first ARSPC project. This was rewritten by Jean and typed up on the computer of a nearby cyber-café, run by another friend, also a member of the association.

#### *4. Politics and development*

Robert typically defines himself as a 'development professional.' He was born in one of the poorest regions of Bel Air 45 years ago. The parents had just two children, first Robert followed by Carole who today lives in Miami. Their father was an electrician, their mother a vendor at the Croix de Bossales market, very close to home. As the only male child, Robert received a lot of support from his parents and invested in studying, reaching college and graduating in psychology at the State University. While he was at secondary school he moved district, leaving Bel Air. First he went to live with friends in Carrefour Feuilles where he married, had a child, separated and continued living there for a while. He has lived in various regions of the city and now rents apartments in the area around 40 Rue Delmas.

When he thinks about his formative years, he recalls his experience as a scout when he was a child and later as a teenager. He likes to tell how the scouts taught him the virtues of working in a team and allowed him to see the country, visiting the interior of Haiti. The pleasure of travelling and learning about the territory, people and the needs of the population spurred Robert, like many other youngsters from his generation, to engage with collective problems, especially children's futures, as he himself always emphasizes.

At college he became involved in student activism and theatre. It was the end of the Duvalier dictatorship, the present was difficult, but young people like himself had hopes for Haiti's future. Robert re-encountered old friends from Bel Air and gradually found his way back to the district where he had been 'made.' Some of his friends were artists like himself, painters and musicians. Some were Rastafarians, which, despite agreeing with the Rasta principles, was never an option for him since he was always closely involved in vodou.

Some of his Rasta friends had been born in the area, others arrived from outside to become engaged in the zone's teeming political and cultural life. Some of them are even today recognized as leaders of Bel Air, others died in armed actions. They supported President Aristide. Robert never took a direct part in armed actions, though he was always close to those who did. He argues that politics is not the solution to Haiti's problems: "what the country needs is development."

When he was finishing university, a theatre colleague found him working giving French lessons to the wife of a foreign ambassador. It was the first time that Robert had direct contact with a *blan*. Through this contact he was recruited by a European NGO to take part in a rural

development project in the north of the country. When the work ended he invested the money in paying for a trip to New York, saw the city and liked it, learnt a bit of English and thought about staying, but came back.

Shortly after, USAID/IOM invited him to join a project assessment team in Bel Air. He started to work, then, towards the zone's development, working for various agencies and NGOs, like UNDP, CONCERN and more recently Viva Rio. He became specialized in awareness raising and leadership training activities. Soon after the UN military intervention he was also recruited by the DDR as an *ajan lieason* in Bel Air.

For many years now he has spent most of his time in Bel Air ("it's my zone," he claims), walking along the roads and alleys, visiting family, meeting leaders. In some contexts he himself feels (and is seen as) a leader. Robert is a master in the arts of meeting and talking to people. He has various bases in the area, places where he sits to chat with friends, eat something or simply rest. Often someone may asks Robert for money. He knows how to distinguish people's motives and, when he judges it necessary, gives them a few gourdes, a mixture of loan and present that cultivates his relations with the people involved and alleviates urgent needs. Robert sometimes distributes small amounts of money to people, at other times he nominates them for jobs. Money issues become more complicated when it comes to women. Robert feels preyed on by women, a common feeling among those who, like leaders, have access to certain resources.

His day flies past quickly from the early morning phone calls to the meetings that finish late. Moreover Robert performs various tasks, participating in projects linked to different international agencies and NGOs simultaneously. He is convinced that peace is a precondition for development and invests time and energy working towards this aim. At the same time, he engages in other activities: he participates in the creation of a cooperatives project in the Le Caye region, where he would like to live, to have a small company, to provides people with work and enjoys being close to the sea.

## *5. From conflict to peace*

It was a Friday morning, a Viva Rio team was visiting the areas of Bel Air most affected by the earthquake to survey the damage and assess what could be done. At each point of the district where the NGO car stopped, its occupants were quickly welcomed by community leaders. When it stopped at the end of Rue Saint Martin, the team was welcomed by Toussaint. They

looked around the area where a few hundred families were sheltered. Suddenly, right in front of the group, a fight broke out between two young men. People rushed about and someone in the middle of the crowd fired a shot in the air. Toussaint said, calmly, observing the nervousness of the *blan* who were accompanying him, “don’t worry, nothing bad will happen with me here...”

Toussaint is 36 years old. He was born in Bel Air. He is the son of a former army member and a trader who migrated from the south of the country. When he was still small, his mother, a fervent Catholic, would take him to sermons given by Father Jean Bertrand Aristide in the Church of Saint Jean Bosco, in La Saline. When Aristide stood as a candidate for the presidency, he set up a youth organization and took an active part in the campaign, organizing demonstrations, sticking posters on the city’s walls, and persuading his neighbours to vote for the priest in the elections.

Following the ousting of Aristide from power in 1991, he withdrew to the interior of the country, fearing death in the wake of the violent military coup perpetrated by General Raul Cedras. He returned to Bel Air three years later when Aristide returned to power. In the second half of the 1990s, a period during which Haiti was governed by René Prével, Toussaint worked as a security guard for some of the politicians from Lavalas, the party of the former president.

In 2000 Aristide was again elected. Once more Toussaint played an active part in the street campaign. When the president assumed office, he won a job with the APN (National Port Authority), along with various other inhabitants and community leaders from Bel Air. “Only with Aristide can a guy like myself, black, Rasta and from Bel Air, get a job working for the State,” he says nostalgically. With the increasing pressure on the government from the opposition, Toussaint decided to assemble some friends to act in defence of Aristide’s mandate. They created the *baz Guinè*. Again he took to the street with demonstrations, always helped by *rara* groups that enlivened the events and attracted a large portion of the region’s population.

Following the fall of Aristide in the first months of 2004, the situation changed radically. Toussaint and other friends began a movement of demonstrations demanding the deposed president’s return to power. Soon after he and other leaders and inhabitants from Bel Air lost their jobs with the State. In parallel the police began to crack down more heavily on the demonstrations, people were imprisoned, shots were fired. On one of these occasions one of his friends was killed. They returned to Bel Air and united with other *baz* and organizations



from the region. They decided to begin a “movement of resistance and revolution,” Toussaint says, “a struggle for the people of the ghettos and for Aristide.” The movement comprised an army with a commander, generals and soldiers (*general, komandant, soldà*).

The new demonstrations emanating from Bel Air and Cité Soleil began to receive armed support in response to police aggression. The arms were obtained from individuals who worked as security guards, bought with money sent back from the US by party activists of the toppled president – money that was also redistributed by the movement’s bosses in the bases. Other weapons already belonged to the *baz* having been given by the former government.

The conflicts became more intense with the increase in police repression, including within Bel Air. In response some elements linked to the movement began to set fire to markets and carry out kidnappings. The press called the events ‘Operation Baghdad.’ According to Toussaint, who disagrees with the name given by the Haitian newspapers, “that wasn’t a movement of bandits, it was a political struggle, a revolution.” He adds, “but over time, and after a mass escape from the national penitentiary, more violent people infiltrated the movement, began the kidnappings... and there the struggle ended.”

In parallel disputes within the *baz* involved in the struggle led to the outbreak of conflicts between districts like Bel Air, La Saline, Delmas 2, Solinot, Cité Soleil, and so on. The killing of the ‘commander of the revolution,’ in 2006, by some individuals from one of these *baz* officially put an end to the struggle, Toussaint declares. “The situation was becoming more violent, some people only thought about money, our commander knew this... his death was a coup. I left the movement.”

At the same time various members of *baz* identified with the banditry – and included in the struggle or not – were imprisoned or killed during police operations or those of MINUSTAH, which had arrived in the country in 2004. Toussaint was arrested more than once, but as there were no formal accusations he was always released. However despite the repression MINUSTAH began a disarmament program led by the DDR and partner institutions. Community leaders from the region, some of whom were also *baz* bosses, thought it was best to join the program, which “would bring development opportunities to Bel Air.”

In 2006 Toussaint, once again accompanied by his friends from the movement and some young people from the neighbourhood, created another organization, this time “to promote peace.” They joined the disarmament program promoted by the UN and soon after accepted the Peace Agreement negotiated between the region’s districts, at that point in time marked

by internal conflicts, and which had been promoted by Viva Rio and the Haitian government (through CNDDR). “We were tired of war, politics had ended, it was time for development,” he reflects. Since then Toussaint’s organization has been carrying out sanitation, healthcare and conflict management projects in the district in partnership with a foreign NGO.

## V. Final considerations

Based on ethnographic research (the observation of everyday interactive situations), document analysis and the reconstruction of a set of life histories, our objective in this text has been to comprehend the social and cultural universe of leadership in Bel Air, producing a map of the social qualities, emotions and feelings, ways of being, acting and inter-relating with others that turn someone into a leader, recognized and identified as such in specific contexts.

As emphasized earlier, we have not looked to produce a generic definition of the leader or a typology of leadership. On the contrary, we have shown how, from the viewpoint of local people, the social universe of leaders in Bel Air is populated by a range of different figures with whom leaders can be identified, sometimes simultaneously and sometimes sequentially over the course of a person’s life: the artist, the organization spokesperson, the committee member, the translator, the *ajen lieson*, the armed leader, to name some among many others. We have seen too that these figures are associated with the various terms composing the semantic field of leadership and used to name leaders: *boss*, *chef*, *samba*, *lidè*, *lidè kominete*, *lidè amè*, etc.

We have also shown how the figure of the leader involves a series of interconnected characteristics:

- Most leaders are aged between 20 and a little over 40; in general people become leaders in their 20s.
- Traditionally leaders were always men; today female leaders are starting to emerge, generally with technical and university diplomas and a knowledge of other languages.
- All possess a level of school education well above the local average, irrespective of their generation, gender or leadership profile, both those close to armed actions and those who, for example, work towards ‘development.’
- Leaders have a wealthier family origin than most other people from the area, typically from families with few resources. Most of the mothers of the leaders are traders,

while some of the fathers were employed by the government or army and performed remunerated activities.

However leaders are more than simply the sum of a series of personal attributes. Over the course of the text, we have shown how one of the main characteristics of leadership is its contextuality, its insertion in the flux of social relations, emerging from diverse situations and subject to variations determined by different points of view. A person may be recognized as a leader in one context and not in another; someone may be a leader for some people but not for others. Leaders are recognized in different ways and intensities over the course of their life.

The basic social unit of leadership is the *baz*, a territorial space of sociability, protection and influence that can assume various dimensions – it may refer to the house, the circle of friends, the committee, part of a district, or even Bel Air as a whole. Leaders depend on (and exert an influence over) the *baz*. But leaders do not inhabit a space separated by clear boundaries between *baz*, like the political boundaries between states, which present a continuous succession of territories and borders. Depending on the context, a *baz* may be contained within, opposed to or allied with another *baz*. Likewise people (and leaders) may belong to more than one *baz* simultaneously.

Additionally, though, we have also seen that leaders are recognized to possess and cultivate unique skills, such as an instinct for opportunities and an ability to speak, mediate conflicts, help others and make friends. We have seen how leaders represent their *baz* vis-à-vis outside agencies and distribute resources from outside within the *baz*. These fact that leaders simultaneously represent the community (for the outside) and distribute to the community (on the inside) helps explain why the social universe of leadership is traversed and destabilized by the expectations of various agents: the expectation of *baz* members – the population of the district or *güeto* – that the leader will help improve their lives; the expectation of international or government agencies that the leader will exert an influence on the area's population; and the expectations of the leaders themselves for maintaining and cultivating their reputation.

Just as we have shown how leaders are the product of communities, we have also highlighted how they emerge in the interaction with entities outside their borders. Put otherwise: the leaders of Bel Air 'are made' in Bel Air, but at the same time they are also made in the interaction with other agents, especially the government and international cooperation agencies who need them to reach the 'target populations' and who, for this reason, work to identify and train leaders in the region.

However just as the intersection of different kinds of expectations can be a source of tension among leaders, so the simultaneous and consecutive initiatives of various outside agencies in the same territory and the same population (like Bel Air) can destabilize the older leaders in favour of new ones, provoking conflicts.

Various generations of agents and agencies can be recognized in the social universe of leaders and above all in the forms of association that produce them. In other words, various temporalities merge in the history of the leaders. The shortest temporality shaping the social context of the current research – which dates from the arrival in Bel Air of MINUSTAH, Viva Rio, various government institutions and the implementation of the DDR program – is inserted in other temporalities of longer duration: Haitian political history after the overthrow of the Duvalier dictatorship and the marked presence of local leaders at national level, like Jean Bertrand Aristide; and finally the even longer chronology of international aid associated with external military intervention and internal political instability, dating back, at least, to the period of US occupation between 1915 and 1934.

This longer chronology includes the actions of a legion of missionaries linked to churches and specialists linked to international agencies. In Bel Air, as elsewhere in the country, these actions are intrinsically intertwined with the history of local forms of association. Undoubtedly these associations were and still are effectively ‘local.’ But not only so: they were also continually formed in relation to outside agents at larger scales, including the Haitian government, foreign governments, churches, international agencies and NGOs.

In the collective actions of Bel Air’s population (the committees or *rara* groups, for example) we can therefore recognize forms derived from the rural Haitian world, such as *kombit*, *atribisyon* and *tètansanm*. These in turn were linked to the bureaucratic infrastructure of the State (the CASECs, for example), the forms of organizing home life around the extended family of the *lakou*, and the ways of building communities, identifying shared issues and shaping the fate of the collective that were introduced by missionaries or development agency officers. In sum, the social universe of leaders is a singular catalyzation of agencies and agents operating at various scales. Leaders thus effectively condense the local, national and international dimensions of social life.

By seeking to express and explain the viewpoint of Bel Air’s population and the leaders themselves, the present report critically distances itself from narratives that romanticize or stigmatize leadership – narratives that, as we have seen, are grounded in suppositions

concerning the scarcity of resources, the absence of the State and an association between poverty and violence.

Situating 'community leaders' in the wider universe of authority and associationism to which they belong has allowed us to delineate a field of variations, contextual figures, values and actions. As we have shown, this complex and nuanced field is itself traversed by suspicions and accusations relating, for example, to the embezzlement of funds or the perpetration of violent and criminal acts. The dynamic of accusations is fed by the fact that we are dealing with a relatively small universe in which people know each other and where the boundaries between reputations linked to criminal activities, political activism and pro-development initiatives are not always clear.

This research is inserted in a specific real-world situation in which stabilization and disarmament policies run side-by-side with the implementation of development initiatives – a combination that, as we have seen, forms part of the policies designed and implemented by Viva Rio in conjunction with a diverse set of leaders. The history of armed conflicts in the second half of the 2000s, followed by the presence or supposed presence of *gangs* linked to crime (especially drug trafficking, robberies and kidnappings) means that distinguishing between peaceful and violent forms of leadership is a key question for the people and agencies working in Bel Air.

The research has revealed a nuanced and processual view of the boundary between 'political violence' and 'crime' in which the lives of many people are literally at stake. Nuanced because, as we have seen, leadership is defined contextually and relationally: what is seen as a crime by some may be taken as a political act by others. And processual view because, as we have also seen, forms of leadership change over the generations and even over the life course of a single individual: for example, the meaning of using weapons was not the same in 2004 as it is today. Over this short period, former armed leaders have committed themselves to the disarmament process and today 'work towards development.'

In fact various leaders from Greater Bel Air are proud to have participated in the disarmament process and to have encouraged non-violent political action. For them, these represent turning points in their own personal trajectories, the conversion of some of their own attributes as leaders. At the same time as the leaders' initiatives made the Peace Agreements possible, their signing of the latter introduced changes to the universe of leadership in general.

We know that there is nothing ineluctable about social transformations, even more so when it comes to on-going processes that depend on a multiplicity of conditions involving innumerable actions and agencies of the government, international institutions and NGOs. Forms of collective action, including armed, that today appear relatively marginalized may become central in the future. Extreme situations like those experienced in Bel Air, combined with explicit or latent feelings of frustration, undoubtedly have the potential to destabilize this context of relative pacification. The point is that in one form or another, and irrespective of political desires, these figures of influence and respect, the leaders, were and remain actors essential to any attempt to promote social inclusion.

## **VI. Images**

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