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Analysis

Building peace from below— the potential of local models of conflict prevention in Haiti

Wenche Hauge, Rachelle Doucet and Alain Gilles

International media has established an image of Haiti as a disorganised and violent society. However, this article argues that—and reveals why—this characterisation is incorrect. The article explores how the structures and traditions of Haitian local communities react and respond to the needs of the communities and to the disputes that arise within them. It explores the causes of local conflicts and their relationship with the larger conflict picture in Haiti, and furthermore

investigates the challenges faced by local models of conflict prevention and how these are affected by national policies as well as by the presence of foreign actors in the country. The analysis is based on a survey and on fieldwork carried out in different regions of Haiti during the period 2007–2013. The article concludes with recommendations to pay more attention to the challenges that local conflict prevention efforts face—as a result of the larger liberal peace-building framework.

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Introduction

This article focuses on local models of conflict prevention in Haiti, with the concept *local* referring to the village or community level. It does so by first investigating the sources of local conflicts and the degree to which these may be related to the larger—national and/or regional—conflict fault lines in the country. Secondly, it seeks to identify the main challenges faced by the local models of conflict prevention in Haiti—both within the local context and as related to Haitian national policies and the presence of external actors in the country.

The article draws on the results of a research project at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) focusing on local models of conflict prevention in Haiti. The project was carried out in co-operation with Centre d'Études et de Recherche sur le Développement des Cultures et des Sociétés (CERDECS), Port-au-Prince, Haiti, during the period 2007–2013. It was structured around a survey and fieldwork on conceptions of—and preferred solutions to—conflict in Haiti. Together, the survey and the fieldwork cover the capital Port-au-Prince, the South, the South-West, the South-East, the Department of Artibonite, the North-East and Central Haiti. The first part of the fieldwork was carried out in Port-au-Prince during the period 2007–2008. This means that some aspects of the context have changed. However, the findings are relatively consistent over time.

The article is structured in the following way. The first section provides a short background to periods of violence in Haiti and to the current political instability. It furthermore explains the main conflict fault line in Haiti. Next, the article provides an overview of regional conflict issues and how these tend to influence local conflict patterns. It then discusses concepts and theories of liberal peace-building and conflict prevention in relation to local challenges. Finally the article provides an introduction to local models of conflict prevention in Haiti, and to some of the main challenges that these face, before it winds up with conclusions and recommendations.

Background

Strong characterisations of the situation in Haiti abound, and did so also before the earthquake that struck the country on 12 January 2010, which cost more than 230,000 lives according to the United Nations (UN), and an estimated 316,000 according to the Haitian government. Haiti has often been termed a fragile or failed state. In addition,

characterisations like ‘chronic political instability’, ‘violent culture’ and ‘disaster zone’ have been frequent.¹ The international response to Haiti’s problems has been a series of UN operations and adjustment programmes designed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. In addition, Haiti has been almost inundated by international non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

With the tools of conflict analysis it is possible to trace a pattern in this ‘chronic political instability’, which during some periods has taken the form of armed conflict. Armed conflicts are generally structured around fundamental fault lines or cleavages in a society. The fault lines are expressions of the social, political, economic and/or cultural structures that cause individuals to fall into the groups they do. In short, they explain the sources and the effects of the identities of the conflict’s participants.² In an armed conflict the fault lines often represent the division between—on the one side—one or more identity groups that are discriminated against and—on the other side—one or more identity groups that are not. The discrimination may be socio-economic, political, religious or have other forms, mostly in combination with one another.³

The causes of armed conflict play different roles. Fault lines fill one type of role, often also referred to as root causes or background causes. Triggers play other types of roles. A trigger can explain why a conflict starts at a particular time and in a particular place.⁴ Finally mobilisation plays another role—why is it that people become party to a conflict?

To understand how the most important fault line in Haiti has been ‘carved out’, it is necessary to take a look at Haiti’s history as far back as the rule of the Duvaliers. When Francois Duvalier in 1957, as head of the Party of National Unity, won the elections that the opposition never held to be legal or legitimate, he declared that ‘his only enemies were the enemies of the nation’, with which he thereby identified himself.⁵ As summarised by Gilles: ‘[h]e established a permanent form of violence which with its political police, internment camp, torture rooms, internal purges and summary executions, was akin to totalitarian violence. It was the “egocracy” of Solzhenitsyn’.⁶ During his period, Duvalier managed to decimate the higher ranks of the army and submit the army completely to his cause. Before he died in 1971, Francois Duvalier transferred power to his son, Jean Claude Duvalier, mainly referred to as Baby Doc, who stayed in power until 1986. When Baby Doc fled the country in 1986, what remained of the army did not any longer have the institutional capacity to re-establish the previous order. It had collapsed because of the popular uprisings that brought down the dictatorship, and also under the weight of its internal divisions. Although the army participated in some bloody events and coup efforts

in the period between 1986 and 1990, when Jean Bertrand Aristide was elected president, it was not in the same systematic way as under the Duvaliers. The army was finally dismantled by Aristide in 1994.

Although the period of the Duvaliers' rule was characterised by a high level of political violence, it was actually during the next period, during the 1980s—when the country was subject to foreign dominance over its economic policies—that the socio-economic cleavage in Haiti grew larger and became more segmented, particularly due to the rural-urban migration that these policies led to. The migration populated the urban shanty towns with poor, unemployed and discontented dwellers that were ready to rebel and demand a change of regime and economic policies.

The economic adjustment programmes that were imposed on Haiti by the IMF and the World Bank during the 1980s contributed to the destruction of the country's agriculture and led to massive rural-urban migration. The liberalisation of the economy led Haiti's government to remove almost all trade barriers. In accordance with the programme, all but seven of 111 quantitative restrictions were eliminated and the general level of import protection was drastically reduced.⁷ Rice imports from the United States to Haiti then increased from 7,400 metric tons (MT) in 1980–1982 to 74,200 MT in 1986–1988 and reached 109,200 MT in 1990.⁸ As the poor peasants—particularly in Artibonite—could not compete with the prices of American rice, they migrated to Port-au-Prince, and settled in the shanty towns.⁹ The population of Port-au-Prince increased from an estimated 720,000 in 1982 to two million in 1995.¹⁰ Even in 2010 the long-term consequences of these economic policies were noticeable. The earthquake destroyed most of Port-au-Prince, and as the government offered free transport out of the capital, more than 600,000 Haitians left Port-au-Prince, heading for rural areas—many of them for the Department of Artibonite and Plateau Central. However, because of even more precarious conditions in the countryside—lack of investment in agriculture and a general lack of employment opportunities—and due to cash for work initiatives in Port-au-Prince, many migrants returned to the capital.

It was among these groups in the slums of Port-au-Prince that Aristide, who was elected president in 1990, had his strongest support. The socio-economic fault line between the rich and the poor had been there earlier, but the rural-urban migration deepened it and the poor now also had their spokesman in the legitimately elected President Aristide.

Haiti has been plagued by political instability for decades, but the current problems began to intensify back in 2004, when President Jean Bertrand Aristide was ousted from

power, and violence increased. The election of René Preval as the new president in 2006, after an interim-government period characterised by instability and violence, created some new hopes in the country. The United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) was established by the Security Council in 2004.¹¹ This was the sixth UN mission in Haiti in the course of three decades.¹² The UN missions had different mandates, ranging from assisting the Haitian government in creating a separate police force, to co-ordinating activities of the United Nations system in promoting institution-building, national reconciliation and economic rehabilitation.¹³ When MINUSTAH was deployed in Haiti in 2005, the situation on the ground was chaotic. Aristide had been forced out of the country. His supporters were angry, and some of them used violence. However, violence also came from criminals and ex-militaries. The ex-militaries had representatives in the new non-elected interim government. As Aristide had dissolved the old army, Haiti only had the new small police force that had been established in the 1990s.

MINUSTAH has an ample mandate. It was originally set up to support the Haitian transitional government in ensuring a secure and stable environment, including monitoring, restructuring and reforming the Haitian National Police and helping to carry out disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes. However, it also had many other defined tasks, including assisting with the restoration and maintenance of the rule of law and protecting civilians under imminent threat of physical violence.¹⁴

International actors placed most emphasis on disarming and detaining gang leaders in the marginalised areas of Port-au-Prince. This was done through so-called stability operations, combining 'aggressive enforcement-led activities targeting gang-influenced areas (known as *baze*) with development activities and campaigns to restore law and order'.¹⁵ Thus, there has been little sensitivity to the history of these slums—to how they have come to constitute a core area of the larger socio-economic fault lines in Haiti—and how they have found ways of coping with extreme poverty and marginalisation. Among many former Aristide supporters and members of *Lavalas*¹⁶ these actions led to a perception of MINUSTAH as not being neutral, since its operations had mainly been concentrated in the areas of Port-au-Prince where Aristide and *Lavalas* had enjoyed strong support. Slow progress in the reconstruction process after the earthquake, and an outbreak of cholera in October 2010, intensified the discontent of the population.

Conflict patterns in Haiti

Those interviewed in the project tended to describe local conflicts in terms of the most frequent causes and the actors involved. This applied to inter-personal as well as group and community conflicts. Land issues—disputes about demarcation and borders—are quite common causes, as are disputes caused by animals grazing freely, entering into other people's property and destroying plantations.¹⁷ Other problems that sometimes lead to conflict are debt problems, disputes related to gambling, competition for women's attention (jealousy), insults, malicious gossip and slander leading to the undermining of honour and reputation, settling scores during carnival or *rara* and last, but not least, political rivalry and elections were mentioned.

In order to distinguish conflicts that are purely local in their origin and location from conflicts that are larger—national or regional—but that also play themselves out at the local level, it is necessary to explain the main conflict patterns in Haiti. In the Department of Artibonite—mainly in the city of Gonaïves—as well as in Port-au-Prince, in particular, the larger political conflict in Haiti *flows into* and influences the local context. Thus Port-au-Prince and Gonaïves have served as battle grounds for many of the violent clashes linked to the main conflict fault line in Haiti—explained earlier. There were uprisings in Gonaïves in 2003, and the rebels from the Gonaïve Resistance Front took control of Gonaïves in February 2004. The slum areas of the neighbourhoods of Raboteau, Jubilée and Descahos in Gonaïves have been the strongholds of armed groups and their leaders.¹⁸

Likewise, the slum areas of Port-au-Prince have traditionally been where former President Aristide had his strongest support, and where the fight against dictators and economic elites has had its stronghold.¹⁹ Port-au-Prince represents a core area of the larger socio-economic fault line in Haiti. The problem with the international approach to Haiti—or the 'security-first state-building' approach, as termed by Muggah, and its interpretation of the areas with conflict and violence in the slums of Port-au-Prince—is that 'it has been informed by the assumption that the popular areas are effectively "ungoverned" or under-governed spaces.'²⁰ However, these 'popular' areas are, in Muggah's words, 'anything but ungoverned or devoid of security and order.'²¹ As in many poorer internal settlements in Caribbean and Latin American countries, the problem is that security and welfare services have not been provided by state institutions, and several of these areas have developed their own systems of security and governance, although sometimes involving criminal activities.

The relationship between the border communities in Haiti and the Dominican Republic is also generally tense, and for several reasons. One reason is the economic asymmetry between the two countries. Another is the lack of presence of the Haitian state on the Haitian side of the border. The PRIO/CERDECS project fieldwork was conducted in 12 communities, two of which were located on the border with the Dominican Republic (Ouanaminthe in North-East and Banane in South-East), and four relatively close to the border (Mont-Organisé in North-East, Lascahobas and Belladère in Plateau Central, and Anse-a-Pitre in South-East). The study of these communities helped identify various sources of tension and conflict along the border. One of these is the asymmetry in trade relations, because the so-called ‘bi-national markets’ mainly function on the Dominican side, and on the premises of the Dominicans, making Haitians vulnerable to illegal taxes and different types of abuses.²² Haitians crossing the border to trade in the Dominican Republic experience many forms of violence and abuse, and rape and sexual abuse of women are particularly frequent.²³ Haitians that have jobs on the Dominican side of the border also complain that often they do not receive payment for their work by the Dominicans. The problems in the border communities are linked to the absence of the Haitian state, including the lack of a border patrol as well as the lack of Haitian police deployment in these areas in general. Interviews revealed situations of violence against Haitians by Dominicans, when MINUSTAH soldiers have been present, but have done nothing to stop it.²⁴

The Department of Nippes (in the south of Haiti), where the port of Miragoâne is located, is also affected by crime and violence, particularly through activities related to the functioning of the port.²⁵ In Miragoâne smuggling is a problem and the port town attracts a mix of different people. In such a place with few regulations, the risk of conflict is high. The availability of textiles, cars and electronics attract businessmen—and women—from all over.

Conflict prevention, liberal peace-building and local solutions in Haiti

Most of the work by international actors in Haiti has been guided by the ‘liberal peace’ approach to conflict prevention and peace-building, deriving from the long tradition of Western liberal theory and practice. Political and economic liberalisation are crucial elements of the liberal peace theory.²⁶ Peace-building programmes and projects mainly applied to post-conflict contexts have included multi-party elections, civil society

participation, promotion of the rule of law, gender equality, good governance, economic liberalisation and security sector reform. However, quite often the security aspect is given most attention, and this was the case in Haiti.²⁷

Before entering into the substance of how conflict prevention and peace-building strategies have been applied to Haiti, some clarifications about these concepts are appropriate. As to the concept of conflict prevention, different people associate different things with this term, and because of this, there is no agreed-upon meaning among scholars. Wallensteen and Möller argue that:

*there are two ways of understanding conflict prevention. One concerns the direct preventive actions: a crisis judged to be in a dangerous phase of military escalation, intensification or diffusion [...] A second concern is the structural prevention, where the idea is to create such conditions that conflicts and disputes hardly arise or do not threaten to escalate into militarised action.*²⁸

These two types of intervention tend to be called ‘light, direct or operational on the one hand, and deep or structural on the other hand, depending on the scholar’.²⁹

Conflict prevention is also peace-building. As the peace-building concept was widened to encompass not only post-conflict activities—but also activities carried out during conflict, and to prevent conflict from breaking out or recurring—conflict prevention and peace-building have come to be used more or less synonymously.³⁰ Thus, the conflict prevention discourse is—like the peace-building discourse—in general taking place within the framework of the liberal peace debate.

The problem with the liberal peace-building discourse is that it remains focused on the intervention and assistance of external actors and on ‘imported models’ of conflict prevention and peace-building rather than on the context that the conflict prevention activity will be undertaken in. As expressed by Lederach, ‘international intervention in protracted conflict held and unfolded with *a low view* of context and cultural resources’.³¹ The view of external actors has furthermore been that external aid was required ‘because few resources existed for conflict transformation within the societies experiencing conflict’.³²

Although the academic literature is now gradually paying more attention to local level conflict dynamics and the need to relate to local actors in conflict prevention and conflict resolution work, the perspective taken is still very much that of international actors and their need to co-operate with local actors in order to bring home success stories from their peace-building work. As pointed out by Da Costa and Karlsrud, efforts are needed to break

away from the one-sided focus on external actors ‘moving from studying a dominant peacebuilding culture to a more nuanced analysis of external and internal actors.’³³ Lederach similarly states that the focus on an infrastructure for peace—suggesting a longer-term view of change—requires a *high view* and a reconsideration of context, to be able to understand, encourage and support resources from within the setting.³⁴ The ‘low view’ is often held with regard to the national context peace-building is going to be implemented in, as well as with regard to the local contexts. However, the two levels are always related in different kinds of ways. Therefore, when discussing peace-building and external actors, it is necessary to take into account the relationship between national conflict fault lines and how conflict resolution at this level also affects different local contexts.

Because of the tendency within the liberal approach to put emphasis on security, democracy and good governance, other aspects of conflict prevention and peace-building—such as the socio-economic, which is important in Lund’s definition of conflict prevention, and the need for dialogue and reconciliation—tend to be neglected.³⁵ This is particularly noticeable in Haiti. As stated by Muggah:

*Central to donor’s recent efforts in Haiti has been the reconstitution of the authority and capacity of the security and justice sectors. In what can be described as security-first statebuilding, United Nations and bilateral donor efforts concentrated on technical service lines—strengthening and modernizing judicial and court systems and personnel, recruiting and training police, rebuilding the penal system, and buttressing border controls and customs between 1990 and 2004.*³⁶

More recently, efforts have focused on neutralising spoilers and securing urban slums through so-called ‘stability operations.’³⁷ However, international actors appear to lack a deeper understanding of the conflict fault lines in Haiti, as well as the will to address their sources.

Local models of conflict prevention in Haiti

The survey and the interviews reveal clear preferences for local solutions to conflict in Haiti, in particular, conflicts that are local in their origin, such as conflicts within the family and conflicts over agricultural and pastoral land. When asked whether the state

should intervene or not when a conflict had reached an impasse, the majority in the survey answered yes. The preferred state institution is the Haitian National Police, as people have little confidence in the tribunals (courts). The political conflicts are among those considered to need state intervention.

The methodology was important in identifying local models of conflict prevention functioning at the community or village level. Whereas the survey—conducted in 11 different towns and middle-sized villages across the country—in general was aimed at gathering knowledge about Haitian perceptions of insecurity, conflict, the causes of conflict and different types of conflict management, the fieldwork—conducted in 12 communities across the country—was in particular aimed at identifying the local traditions and structures of conflict prevention and peaceful conflict management.³⁸ For the survey, a standard questionnaire in Creole—with both open and closed questions—was distributed to the selected respondents in the communities included in the survey. The respondents, 3,523 in total, were systematically selected using housing units as the sample unit.

For the in-depth study (fieldwork) three criteria were central in the selection of the communities: (1) the selected communities should constitute part of a marginalised area; (2) they should be located in the proximity of ‘hot zones’; and (3) there should be relative tranquility (few or no incidents of violence reported in the media) in these communities. Four types of techniques were used to gather information: focus group discussions, non-participatory observation, individual interviews with key persons and written documentation. In the communities representatives from the following target groups were interviewed: notables, teachers, religious leaders, women’s groups, grassroots groups, sport associations, cultural associations and youth groups.³⁹ Interviews were conducted in Creole.⁴⁰

With this methodology we were able to identify some local communities that had—what there is substance enough to term—their own specific models of conflict prevention, in some of the marginalised areas of Port-au-Prince. However, we also found some of the characteristics of the model in other communities—in the South-East and South-West (Grande Anse) of Haiti and in the North-East and Central Haiti (Plateau Central)—although it appeared most clearly in Port-au-Prince. In general, the people in communities located close to the border with the Dominican Republic (Ouanaminthe in the North-East, Belladère in Plateau Central and Banane and Anse-à-Pitre in the South-East) had more difficult challenges to face than the people in the other communities, and they had a lower self-esteem.

Based on the findings from the four communities in Port-au-Prince, the different methods of conflict management in the communities may be structured around three pillars:

- Consensual Methods
- Adjudication Methods
- Sanctions

The nomenclature of consensual and adjudication methods applied here is widely used in the literature on the subject, but local terminology differs and people in Haiti use their own Creole terms to describe the different processes they use. The Haitian specificity is found at two levels: first through the cultural preference for one method over another; and secondly, through the cultural expressions and cultural codes used during the different processes.

Consensual methods

Consensual methods are considered to take place in three phases. The first phase consists of dialogue between the contending persons or parties with the assistance of a facilitator. First each party meets separately with the facilitator and then the protagonists come together to talk, with the help of the facilitator. In the next phase, the parties meet to negotiate assisted by the mediation of a commission or committee composed of notables or moral leaders of the community. During the third phase, a decision or solution accepted by both parties is found. There is sometimes also a follow-up mechanism.

A typical example of the consensual method is a case of robbery with an identified suspect in one of the local communities. In this case, *La Junta de Vecinos* (The Council of Neighbours) first met with each of the parties separately and then called together the suspect and the victims for a joint meeting. The suspect admitted his crime, and the victims were satisfied with the solution, and did not bring the case to a Tribunal.

In another case the local police directly intervened in a situation of fighting in which one person was hitting another and caused him to bleed. Violence that leads to bloodshed is considered a serious crime in Haiti. This time the fighting was between youths. In a situation like this, the perpetrator is normally brought to the police station, which means further stigmatisation. However, the local police—who knew the place and its community—was able to calm down the situation, and was furthermore—by talking to the parties—able to reach a solution that the youth and their families could live with.

Adjudication methods

In adjudication, both the community and state actors can be involved. When these methods are applied in the community, one of the parties in a dispute first approaches his or her association or religious group for some kind of opinion or verdict. The association then sets a fixed date for this, but there is no prior consensus-making process as there is with the consensual methods. The church often intervenes to help solve a conflict, and it enjoys much confidence.

Only in very rare cases do members of the four communities resort to state institutions for assistance. These include local state authorities, the police (deployed in the communities) or the tribunals. It happens very seldom, as it is in general considered an insult to bring a case against somebody to these institutions. The offender feels pre-judged. As expressed by one of the interviewed: ‘Tribunals cannot help us, they leave us—on the contrary—only with hatred’.⁴¹ If it is considered necessary, the police are preferred over the tribunals, partly because it takes less time to receive a decision on a case from the police. Interviewees in general explain their positive attitude towards the Haitian police in terms of the quick and—in their view—fair response of police intervention in crime. Seeing the offender handcuffed and arrested—if only for a few days—gives the victim(s) immediate and visible justice. People in the communities often also perceive this as enough, because they know that they will have to live together with the offender in the community in the future. Any further stigmatisation through a juridical process is often not considered necessary or meaningful.

One example here is a case that actually was brought before a Tribunal. However, before processing the case, the judge approached the perpetrator and the victims separately to see if they could agree on a solution. The next step was a meeting in the Council of Neighbours. In this way, the judge actually acted as a mediator and together with the two parties and the community was able to find an agreed upon solution/judgement before the case was to be formally processed in the Tribunal.

In two of the four communities in Port-au-Prince, consultation mechanisms have also been established between the moral authorities (called ‘leaders’) of the local community and state institutions. These mechanisms have two functions. First, legal state decisions are taken on the basis of prior negotiations with the moral authority of the local community in a consensual manner. Second, in some cases the state gives the local community a mandate to handle the case. The consultation mechanisms which constitute a synergy between two

types of justice (the formal and the traditional) capitalise on the experiences of the ‘tribunals of the wise’, and thanks to their inclusion, help to preserve the unity of the communities.

In some cases, the communities apply a series of sanctions to make the system of endogenous solutions work. These sanctions range from physical and social to symbolic and mystic. However, as these methods have proved difficult to get access to, the article does not go into any detail on them.

The local models are not practiced in a vacuum in Haiti, but in the midst of a massive international presence. The question is therefore how the local models co-exist with external actors of liberal peace-building. To discuss this we will first describe the main resources of the local models and then their primary challenges.

Peace-building and local challenges

The strength of the local models of conflict prevention lies in their ability to identify conflicts at an early stage and manage them before they escalate into violence. This is possible through the mechanisms already explained, such as advices involving elders in the community, trusted associations, the church and the local commissions established for this purpose, and through dialogue and mediation. It is furthermore possible because the people in the communities have trust in these personalities, groups and institutions. To get a better understanding of how and why these models work, it is necessary to take a closer look at the social structure and values of the communities. The inhabitants of the four communities in Port-au-Prince describe themselves as ‘good people’, honest and peaceful: ‘[n]ous sommes des gens de bien’ [we are good people].⁴² In their vision, what characterises their societies, are strong social relations and solidarity.

The basis is the family. The structure is quite hierarchical and men exercise much influence and power. The community also exerts quite strict control over the young people. All the adults in the community participate in the upbringing of the children and youth. In general, adults of the community—beyond the family—are even considered to have a right to instruct children and youth other than their own when necessary. In one of the communities those interviewed explained that while some parents were selling goods on the streets in Port-au-Prince, other parents and neighbours looked after their children and the adolescents so that they would not become involved in crime or recruited to the gangs.⁴³

In general, the youth expressed that they appreciate the role of the adults. They value the morals and discipline that this instils into them. In the view of the youth this helps them

to resist temptations of delinquency in a reality where they do not have access to employment, recreation or further education. The communities have many different cultural and sports clubs for the youth. The objective behind the youth associations is to develop talent, to empower each other and to help resist negative temptations.

In general, those interviewed stated that they perceive themselves living in a peasant community, where solidarity and the family are viewed as important. Some point to their African roots, where the role of elders, vice persons and the larger family is crucial.⁴⁴ In particular, this was the case in the communities studied in Port-au-Prince. This highlights the importance of understanding the organic character of conflict prevention and conflict resolution mechanisms in the communities. Some of the conflict prevention literature that focuses on local conditions has pointed out the importance of ‘insider-mediators’—or resource persons (often elders or religious persons) from the local community—who can be ‘used’ for conflict mediation and conflict resolution purposes.⁴⁵ However, this approach tends to neglect the organic character of local conflict prevention and conflict resolution work. It is not the mediator that prevents or resolves a conflict—it is *the whole community*. With this focus on ‘insider-mediators’ as a resource in conflict prevention work, international actors risk draining the community of their own resources—if not extremely carefully approached.

Having looked at the strengths or the resources of the local communities, it is time to focus on their greatest challenges. In Haiti this is often related to structural factors such as poverty and unemployment. The conflict prevention potential of many communities has been stretched to the utmost by hunger, unemployment and frustrations—especially as this hits the youth.

Before considering these aspects in more depth, it is useful to relate them to the larger peace-building discourse. One way of distinguishing peace-building activities—as done by Dan Smith—is to divide them into four main pillars: security, political, socio-economic and reconciliation.⁴⁶ This is of course not the only possible categorisation of peace-building activities. However, it serves as a tool to investigate where, or in which sectors, emphasis is put within the liberal peace-building approach and, furthermore, what the effects of this are for local conflict prevention efforts.

The most difficult challenges for local conflict prevention efforts in Haiti are hidden in the factors that the people in the communities have little control over, notably structures that maintain poverty and marginalisation and that lead to further inflows of rural migrants into the marginalised urban communities. Rural-urban migration is, as

mentioned earlier, linked to problems dating back to the adjustment policies of the 1980s, when peasants in Haiti lost out in competition with heavily subsidised imported goods.⁴⁷ As there have been no serious efforts to re-establish food production in Haiti since, rural-urban migration has continued and most of the migrants have ended up in the shanty towns looking for a better quality of life and employment opportunities.⁴⁸ As a consequence, these areas have become less homogeneous, with diminishing trust and social bonds, and the local conflict prevention mechanisms that have been proven to work in many communities have become strained. The results of a survey by Alain Gilles indicate some clear tendencies in this respect, as they show that the zones with the highest level of violence are found in the shanty towns.⁴⁹ There is much less violence in the residential areas of the towns—that also receive fewer migrants—and there is the least violence in the rural areas.⁵⁰

A serious problem with liberal peace-building is, as mentioned, the tendency to put emphasis on security and political issues, at the cost of socio-economic aspects and the need for dialogue and reconciliation. In Haiti the emphasis on security has been particularly dominant, and there have been fewer important efforts to improve the quality of life of the majority of poor Haitians.⁵¹ Efforts have at best been fragmented and aid has been mainly distributed through a large quantity of NGOs and, in this way, has not contributed to the establishment of social welfare through Haitian state institutions. That many of the development projects have been left in the hands of international NGOs has resulted in uneven development efforts. At the local level this has had some alarming signal effects, as for example observed in one of the local communities in Port-au-Prince included in this study. The youth in this poor and marginalised community observed that in the neighbouring community, where gangs operated, the international community had initiated development projects as part of a strategy to diminish violence and gang activity. However, as their own community—equally poor and marginalised as the violent community—did not receive such aid, their conclusion was that crime pays off. The elders in the community feared that in the future their own youth would also be tempted to get involved in crime.⁵²

It is quite symptomatic that during the food riots in April 2008, when the streets of Port-au-Prince were full of hungry and angry protesters—complaining about rising food prices and lack of access to food—MINUSTAH cracked down on these demonstrations.⁵³ MINUSTAH was in people's eyes the UN Mission that should have been there to support and protect them but that now instead acted quite brutally against them.

MINUSTAH soldiers have also directly harmed the fragile life-sustenance sources of poor Haitians by stealing their animals (mainly goats) and taking fruits from their trees. According to those interviewed, goats seem to be the favourite meal of the soldiers.⁵⁴ An animal that may seem wild to a foreigner belongs to a proprietary in the community, and everybody knows this. When a foreigner takes an animal, it is considered a theft, and this is a serious crime in Haiti.

With this emphasis on security, Haitians in general also ask themselves: security for whom? The survey and the fieldwork of the PRIO/CERDECS project revealed that the attitude towards MINUSTAH is mainly negative.⁵⁵ The general complaint is that MINUSTAH does not offer any sort of protection to the population. Its soldiers are never in place early enough to prevent a dangerous situation from escalating. Complaints range from criticising the soldiers for only being present during election time—or on the beaches during the weekends—to being responsible for sexual abuses of women, girls and boys. The people in the communities argue that the ‘foreign soldiers only think about satisfying their own immediate needs and with total impunity’.⁵⁶

One of the main pillars of peace-building is supposed to be dialogue and reconciliation. Whereas the community-based DDR strategy for Haiti, adopted by the Security Council in 2006, was first considered as radical and promising, it later met with considerable criticism from many civil society organisations in Haiti. An independent assessment of the DDR programme in Haiti by Derek B. Miller and Jean Mondésir identified a number of problems.⁵⁷ Firstly, contact between the DDR section of MINUSTAH and civil society organisations was ad hoc. Furthermore, the report also stated that the DDR section needed to consult with cultural experts on Haiti to succeed, and not only listen to disarmament, demobilisation, small arms and security sector reform experts.⁵⁸ Instead of identifying and co-operating with the local structures and models of conflict prevention that existed, new and parallel structures were created.

Yet another of the main pillars in peace-building is the political. In liberal peace-building much emphasis is put on issues like multi-party elections, good governance and the rule of law. However, in the academic literature, several voices have raised their concerns about the tensions related to the construction of democracy:

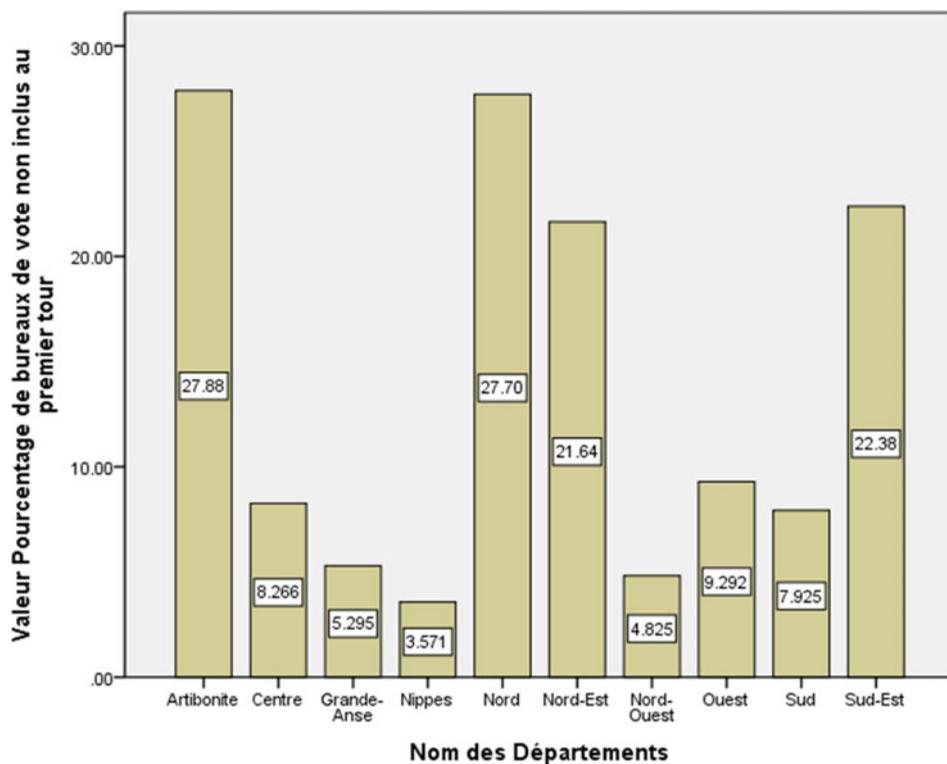
But while post-conflict elections have become an integral element of contemporary peace agreements, they can also themselves become an integral part of increasing tension and renewed violence [. . .] Post-war elections force

*difficult choices to be made between short-term versus long-term priorities, representation versus stability, domestic versus international legitimacy, and a range of other sometimes incompatible objectives.*⁵⁹

Despite the difficult situation after the earthquake in Haiti, the international community put pressure on the Haitian government to organise elections on schedule. The elections took place in the midst of a critical emergency situation and with an outbreak of cholera that added further difficulties. The general elections, supposed to be held on 28 February 2010, were postponed until 28 November 2010, but this was still less than a year after the earthquake. In addition to the first round of the presidential elections, 10 senators and 99 deputies were elected. There were several problems with the elections, but the most serious one was that Fanmi Lavalas, the party of deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was barred from standing.⁶⁰ In the second round of the elections on 20 March 2011 the two candidates were Mirlande Manigat and Michel Martelly, with Martelly coming out victoriously. However, serious questions were raised about how sustainable it is to carry out elections in such a situation.

A study of electoral violence in Haiti by Alain Gilles shows that long-term institutional and contextual factors—as well as the more immediate and situational context—play very important roles here.⁶¹ The elections in Haiti in 2010 were marred by violence and irregularities. [Figure 1](#) below shows that for the Departments of Artibonite and the North, more than 25 per cent of the returns by polling stations were not included in the calculation of the results of the 2010 elections. For two other Departments, the North-East and the South-East, non-included returns were in excess of 20 per cent.⁶²

On the basis of this, questions may be raised about whether the disadvantages of holding elections in such a context did not far outweigh the advantages, given the violence it triggered, the irregularities and people's perceptions that these were not free and fair elections. This study clearly reveals that in a country such as Haiti, where distrust in institutions already is high, and where socio-economic cleavages, polarisation and the fight for power is strong—as is the tendency to use violence to obtain such goals of power—being exceptionally careful and thorough in all procedures when planning for elections is essential. There is a strong possibility that the 2010 elections in Haiti will pass into the ordinary Haitian's mind and perception as yet another flawed and violent election, which further decreases their trust in institutions. The demonstrations against President Martelly and the government in December 2014 and January 2015 also point in this direction.

Figure 1. Percentage of polling stations invalidated by Administrative Department general elections 2010.

Source: Gilles, *The Difficulty of Institutionalising Elections*, 17.

The way peace-building is carried out tends to affect causes of conflict as well as the capacity to prevent and resolve them—at the national level as well as at the local level. The focus is most often on the immediate management of conflict and its consequences but—conscious of this or not—international actors through their peace-building policies also influence the sources of conflicts, in a negative or positive direction. To understand and support local models of conflict prevention and conflict resolution in Haiti it is therefore necessary to view them each in their own context. Without some initial knowledge about the larger national and regional fault lines of conflict—as well as the local context—it is difficult to imagine how external actors may—if not support—at least do no harm to local mechanisms of conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

In Haiti this means, as a minimum requirement, external actors should have an initial awareness about the areas where the overarching political conflicts have played themselves out and have spilled over into local conflicts (particularly in Port-au-Prince and in the

Department of Artibonite (Gonaïve). Secondly, it means having knowledge of the tensions and problems in the border communities between Haiti and the Dominican Republic and the particular challenges in the port of Miargoâne.

The most serious problem is how the combined effects of the different peace-building activities in Haiti have tended to strengthen the main conflict fault line in the country rather than weaken it. Security operations have been very much focused on gang activity in the areas of extreme poverty, where ex-president Aristide and the Lavalas movement traditionally had much support. In addition, Famni Lavalas was excluded from participation in the latest elections. For the population in these marginalised areas these signals come together to deepen their detachment from the governing elite, and to weaken the credibility of the democracy that international actors always advocate. Many of the same areas are also the ones that continue to receive influxes of rural migrants, which international actors have done nothing to diminish. Rather, the economic policies that Haiti has been advised—or more correctly pressured—to implement have strengthened this tendency. Finally, people in these areas observe, through the inconsistent way development aid is delivered by some NGOs, that crime seems to pay off.

The other serious problem lies in how international actors, through their activities in Haiti, tend to weaken rather than strengthen local communities' own capacity to prevent and resolve conflict. The study of local models of conflict prevention in Haiti has revealed that the strengths of the local communities lie in their organic way of approaching and trying to prevent emerging conflicts, with the help of the family, neighbours, elders and organisations, and through the use of solid procedures developed over time. The international community's lack of respect for already existing models and structures of conflict prevention—including through the introduction of parallel ones, as the UNDP did in Port-au-Prince—functioned as a disincentive for the local population. As observed, MINUSTAH has also been quite unpopular for various reasons.

However, one positive factor that can be identified is the training of the Haitian National Police, as the Haitian police is accepted and appreciated by local communities. Although there has been criticism of the Haitian police lately, the attitude of the population is still mainly positive. In general, this is again a reminder that more emphasis should have been placed on strengthening the Haitian state. This could have benefited local communities, for example, by contributing to a greater presence and visibility of the Haitian state along the border with the Dominican Republic, as demanded by the local communities. Furthermore, a stronger Haitian state could have contributed more

resources to the development of models of co-operation between state institutions and local mechanisms in the communities for handling crime and conflict. Not least, it is important to strengthen the Haitian state's capacity to respond to the welfare needs of the population. The enormous international humanitarian operation after the earthquake in Haiti was carried out largely without space for the involvement of the Haitian state. This needs to be changed in the future to give peaceful development a chance to break through at all levels of Haitian society.

Conclusions and recommendations

This article has focused on local models of conflict prevention and conflict resolution in Haiti. It is based on the results of a research project on local conflict management in Haiti. The project included both surveys and fieldwork that altogether cover North-East and Central Haiti, the Department of Artibonite, the capital Port-au-Prince, the South, the South-West and the South-East. The project has revealed the existence of local models of conflict prevention, and that these are functioning particularly well in some communities in Port-au-Prince—and also in other areas, although in a somewhat more fragmented form.

In the article challenges to and efforts of conflict prevention at the local level have been discussed in relation to the larger conflict picture in Haiti and in relation to the presence of external actors and a UN peace-building operation in the country. By considering the challenges and actions at the local level in relation to four central pillars of peace-building—socio-economic, political, security and reconciliation—some important lessons have been drawn from this study.

Local communities face two main challenges in their efforts to prevent conflict and violence from emerging in their communities. The first of these challenges resides in the sources of the conflicts. If these are not removed, weakened or at least prevented from increasing in strength, the communities may no longer be able to prevent violence from breaking out. The second challenge is to preserve the local communities' own capacity to handle the emerging conflicts. If international actors drain the local communities of intermediaries—or establish parallel structures of conflict management in the communities—this capacity will be weakened. The balance in this equation—between the strength of the conflict sources and the local communities' capacity to handle them—is delicate, and the minimum responsibility of international actors should be to pursue the principle of 'do no harm'.

This article has demonstrated that the balance in this local equation, in many ways, has been disturbed by liberal peace-building in Haiti. Development projects have come to some communities, but not to others, increasing social cleavages. Rural-urban migration has continued to strain the receiving areas and has decreased the homogeneity and social bonds in these communities. Security operations have highly stigmatised some particular groups and areas, whereas others have got away with crimes. Lack of respect for local culture and the introduction of parallel structures of conflict management in the local communities have decreased the communities' own capacity to prevent conflict.

The emphasis on security has come at the expense of work to diminish the structural causes of poverty, inequality and marginalisation in Haiti. The short-term goal of increased security has rather worked to undermine the longer-term goal of a sustainable and lasting peace. Local communities—whether taken into consideration or not—constitute an important part of such a sustainable peace.

Peace-building activities in Haiti have, however, produced one result that is viewed more positively by the population in general, and that is a larger and better trained Haitian National Police. This is actually the only state institution that has been considerably strengthened through the assistance of external actors, as the Haitian National Police has been mainly trained within the framework of MINUSTAH. The Haitian National Police is, as revealed in this study, generally well considered by the Haitian population, and—being Haitians—the police officers generally avoid making many of the basic cultural mistakes that the MINUSTAH soldiers themselves are accused of making. Examples in this article show that representatives of Haitian state institutions in several cases have contributed positively to preventing and resolving conflicts and disputes in local communities and with the co-operation of the community. Paying more attention to state-building and increasing the state's capacity to introduce welfare measures, as well as to care for the stability and security of its population, represents a peace-building policy that could have had positive effects at all levels—including at the local level—if *only practiced more*.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Endnotes

1. See, for example, Torgman, 'Haiti: A Failed State'; Taft-Morales, *Haiti International Assistance Strategy*.
2. Dessler, 'How to Sort Causes'.
3. Hauge, *Causes and Dynamics of Conflict Escalation*.
4. Ibid.
5. This section draws heavily on Gilles, *Conflicts in Haiti's Communities*.
6. Gilles, *Conflict in Haiti's Communities*, 22.
7. World Bank, *Trends in Developing Economies*.
8. World Bank, *Haiti: The Challenges of Poverty Reduction: Vol. II*, 11.
9. De Wind and Kinley III, *Aiding Migration*.
10. World Bank, *Haiti: The Challenges of Poverty Reduction: Vol. I*, 9.
11. UNSC, 'Resolution 1542'.
12. The UN missions include: International Civilian Mission in Haiti (MICIVIH), United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH), United Nations Support Mission in Haiti (UNSMIH), United Nations Transition Mission in Haiti (UNTMIH), United Nations Civilian Police Mission in Haiti (MIPONUH) and, finally, United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). Gilles, *État, Conflit et Violence*.
13. UN, 'MINUSTAH'.
14. Ibid.
15. Muggah, 'The Political Economy of Statebuilding', 293.
16. The Lavalas movement (meaning the cleansing flood) was a broad coalition of individuals and organisations, encompassing peasants, rural organisations and political representatives (spanning from Marxists to Christian Democrats), church groups, students and businessmen that supported President Jean Bertrand Aristide.
17. Doucet, *Local Models of Conflict Prevention*.
18. The Gonaïves Resistance Front used to be allied with Aristide, but turned against him after the brother of the gang's leader Amiot Metayer was killed in 2003, and the government was blamed for this. Gilles, *État, Conflit et Violence*.
19. Hauge, *Causes and Dynamics of Conflict Escalation*.
20. Muggah, 'The Political Economy of Statebuilding', 300.
21. Ibid.
22. Doucet, *Local Models of Conflict Prevention*; Doucet, *Conflict Prevention and Conflict Management*.
23. Doucet, *Local Models of Conflict Prevention*; Petroziello and Wooding, *Fanm Nan Fwontyé, Fanm Toupatou*.
24. Doucet, *Local Models of Conflict Prevention*.
25. Gilles, *Lien Social, Conflit et Violence*.
26. Hauge, 'A Latin American Agenda for Peace'.
27. Muggah, 'The Political Economy of Statebuilding'.
28. Wallensteen and Möller, 'Conflict Prevention', 6.
29. Ibid.
30. Lund, 'Preventing Violent Intrastate Conflicts'; Hauge, 'A Latin American Agenda for Peace'.
31. Lederach, 'The Origins and Evolution', 10.
32. Ibid.
33. Da Costa and Karlsrud, 'Contextualising Liberal Peacebuilding', 62.
34. Lederach, 'The Origins and Evolution', 10.
35. Lund, 'Preventing Violent Intrastate Conflicts'; Hauge, 'A Latin American Agenda for Peace'.
36. Muggah, 'The Political Economy of Statebuilding', 293.
37. Ibid.
38. Fieldwork was conducted in 12 communities, divided as follows: four in Port-au-Prince, two in South-East Department, two in the Department of Grande Anse, (South-West), two in North-East Department and two in Centre Department (Plateau Central). The survey was conducted in three towns in Artibonite Department—with a total of 1,018 respondents there—and in four towns and four middle-sized villages in Departments Nippes, South and Grande-Anse—with a total of 1,661 respondents. Gilles, *État, Conflit et Violence*; Gilles, *Lien Social, Conflit et Violence*; Doucet and Hauge, *Nous sommes des gens de bien*; Doucet, *Local Models of Conflict Prevention*; Doucet, *Conflict Prevention and Conflict Management*.
39. The methodological instruments developed for this part of the study were a questionnaire for personal data, a guide for open interviews and a scheme for observation of community life.
40. Total participants were 1,187 persons.
41. Doucet, *Local Models of Conflict Prevention*, 26.
42. Doucet and Hauge, *Nous sommes des gens de bien*, 34.
43. Doucet and Hauge, *Nous sommes des gens de bien*.
44. Ibid.
45. Ganson and Wennmann, 'Operationalising Conflict Prevention', 7; UNDP, *Fast Facts: Conflict Prevention*.
46. Smith, 'Towards a Strategic Framework'.
47. Hauge, *Causes and Dynamics of Conflict Escalation*; Katz, 'With Cheap Imports'.
48. Gilles, *Lien Social, Conflit et Violence*.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Muggah, 'The Political Economy of Statebuilding'; Zanotti, 'The UN Peacekeeping Operation'.
52. Doucet and Hauge, *Nous sommes des gens de bien*.
53. 'Food Riots Grip Haiti'. *The Guardian*, 9 April 2008. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/apr/09/11> [Accessed 4 October 2013].

54. Doucet and Hauge, *Nous sommes des gens de bien*.
55. For example in Nippes, the South and Grande-Anse interviews showed little confidence in external actors among the Haitians. Only 12.8 per cent of those interviewed answered that they have a high confidence in (international) NGOs and more than 85 per cent of the respondents answered that they have 'a little' (23.5 per cent) or 'no confidence at all' (64.6 per cent) in the UN force MINUSTAH. The confidence in the Haitian state is also low, but higher than for MINUSTAH and NGOs. The only institution that enjoys a really high confidence is the Church, with more than 80 per cent declaring that they have high (68.4 per cent) or 'a little' (15.9 per cent) confidence in the church. These results are in line with the first part of the survey undertaken in Artibonite Department. Gilles, *État, Conflit et Violence*; Gilles, *Lien Social, Conflit et Violence*.
56. Doucet, *Conflict Prevention and Conflict Management*.
57. Miller and Mondesir, *Independent Assessment of the DDR Programme*.
58. *Ibid.*, 13.
59. Reilly, 'Post-War Elections'.
60. Latin America Regional Report, 'Martelly Wins Weak Mandate'.
61. Gilles, *The Difficulty of Institutionalising Elections*.
62. *Ibid.*, 17.
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