

We Shouldn't be here.

The famous Haitian anthropologist Jean Price-Mars once defined *Haitians* as follows: “*ce peuple qui chante et qui souffre, qui peine et qui rit, et qui danse*” (“these people who sing and suffer, who sorrow, laugh, and dance”; Price-Mars, 1998, p. 20).

Abstract:

Anyone living in Haiti during the COVID19 pandemic will tell you, not much changed here. Life kept going on as usual, social gatherings never ceased, social distancing was merely an idea in some locations, mask mandates were never clearly reinforced. Life never stopped here, on record this is not the case but anyone's lived experience will tell you differently. The truth of the matter is that we as Haitians did not care about the pandemic we were watching take hold on the world. I returned here post mandatory quarantine and as such have witnessed the current state of Haiti. I chose to look into this strange phenomenon and asked myself how it was possible for a population to ignore a deadly pandemic while the world panicked. For that reason I chose the interview method. My project will be an auto ethnography based on my experience having moved back to Haiti recently, I believe my experience to shed some light on the reasoning behind this mass ignorance. I would like to point out that we are currently in the second wave and as cases continue rising, the mentality behind keeping our heads down becomes more and more obvious as well as it's repercussions.

Thesis:

based on the data I was able to collect, the majority believes that the reason people are ignoring the pandemic is simply because we have way too much to deal with as it is. within that majority we also have evidence that people believe we adapted in time to limit the damages. What is absolutely clear and recurring in almost every interview is that we as a population do not in. Fact care about COVID19. The participants of my study believed that COVID was not in fact something to worry about. I believe people are simply not informed nor educated enough to understand the gravity of the situation we find ourselves in, based on the amount and scale of social gatherings I have witnessed I believe the circumstances are dire and no one is addressing this. As stated above, I will be using my personal experience as a means to showcase the dangerous reality of ignoring the pandemic in an already fragile population.

Introduction:

In 2020 the world faced a global pandemic with the spread of COVID19.

All over the world countries closed their borders, ceased their everyday functions, institutions shut down and interactions were limited to attempt to contain the coronavirus spread. Haiti had a significant lock down at the beginning of the pandemic and eventually reopened. I moved to Haiti in the month of October during the period in which most countries were fearful of impending second and third waves. Arriving in Haiti I quickly realized a staggering disregard for safety precautions. Restaurants and bars remained open, group events were still being organized and social distancing was disregarded almost entirely. The baffling notion behind this phenomenon is that the COVID19 Cases are still extremely low. For my senior project, I will be conducting a series of interviews to shed some light on why people in Haiti seem oblivious to the COVID19 pandemic. I will be contrasting my findings with Marx' conflict theory as I fear this may possibly be is the most appropriate sociological theory in this context. Haiti has had a difficult past filled with catastrophe and strife. In the past few decade Haiti has faced an earthquake, several hurricanes, many diseases and a constantly growing crime rate. Institutional support is lacking at best, education though is rising, is still a commodity to most people. The socioeconomic context is very similar to Marx' theory of the owning classes and labor is heavily commodified as well. The majority of my project will be based on lived experience, both mine and the people I've interviewed. As far as the auto ethnographical portion of my project, I am 23 years old, grew up un Port-au-Prince Haiti, middle class with both a high school education and, a partially completed college level education in sociology.

Thesis: Through a continuous history of constraints and difficult life quality, the Haitian population has normalized the COVID 19 pandemic as just another cause of death in the streets of port au prince. The majority of the population continues to function as usual with little to no regard for the disease because it falls short on the list of pressing matters. Through a learned history of difficulty the Haitian population of port au prince has found ways of coping with the disease. Through my research I've observed this phenomena in all socio-economic context.

I left Haiti in 2016, returned every year since and finally came back for good in August of last year. Firstly, I will provide enough context to explain the current living situation as of 2021. Second, we'll take a look at institutional measures put in place to fight the spread of the COVID virus, for this portion I will be referencing photographic as well as interview data. Thirdly, I'll explain the findings of my interviews focusing on the current mindset of most of the Haitian citizens and the pressures that maintain that mindset. Nonetheless I believe understanding the cause for dismissal behaviors when faced with catastrophes would go far in understanding socioeconomic difficulties faced by populations in periphery countries.

To understand how life in Haiti is structured it's important to acknowledge the historical context behind modern day Haiti. Haiti is historically known for having been the first black country to gain its independence from a colonizing power. Today, American cultural influence is predominant in more affluent circles along with influences from all over the world. From music to consumed goods we see a plethora of US products at every socioeconomic levels. Local television channels play Hollywood movies, in fact most people you encounter are quick to use a comic book reference from their youths. Most of the people I'm referring to do not speak a word of English. Over the past decade Haiti has survived tropical storms, hurricanes, a magnitude 7 earthquake and a steadily deteriorating sociopolitical climate recently come to international attention on social media. Each of these catastrophes has left a lasting Impact on Haitian society. Among those we've also experienced quite a few diseases such as cholera, HIV epidemics, though the data suggests evidence

of exaggeration on the validity of some epidemics. In fact, according to the literature, “*Numerous media rapidly related the epidemic and the deadly earthquake that Haiti had experienced 9 months earlier. However, simultaneously, a rumor held recently incoming Nepalese soldiers responsible for importing cholera, along with accusations of illegal dumping of waste tank contents (3). A cholera outbreak was indeed reported in Nepal’s capital city of Kathmandu on September 23, 2010, shortly before troops left for Haiti (4,5). Two hypotheses then emerged to explain cholera in Haiti... ”*

Source: *Understanding the Cholera Epidemic, Haiti. Authors: Renaud Piarroux, Robert Barrais, Benoît Faucher, Rachel Haus, Martine Piarroux, Jean Gaudart, Roc Magloire, and Didier Raoult*

Though Foreign intervention has a role in the current stat of the country, international aid attempts, though have failed due to a number of reasons, have reached out offering support. The reasons behind these difficulties vary greatly depending on the institution supplying the aid. For some it’s population responses to natural disasters. An example of this is population displacement as the literature shows:

*“Most severe disasters cause large population movements. These movements make it difficult for relief organizations to efficiently reach people in need. Understanding and predicting the locations of affected people during disasters is key to effective humanitarian relief operations and to long-term societal reconstruction. We collaborated with the largest mobile phone operator in Haiti (Digicel) and analyzed the movements of 1.9 million mobile phone users during the period from 42 d before, to 341 d after the devastating Haiti earthquake of January 12, 2010. Nineteen days after the earthquake, population movements had caused the population of the capital Port-au-Prince to decrease by an estimated 23%. Both the travel distances and size of people’s movement trajectories grew after the earthquake...
..Another interesting finding is, again, the existence of weekly cycles in the reference data. These cycles were absent after the earthquake and then reappeared more than a month afterwards, indicating a return to normality.”*

Note: the timeline from a scattered social response to a return to normality was estimated at around one month. The quick return to everyday rituals and lifestyles is present in the majority of the phenomena we’ll be observing.

Source: *Predictability of population displacement after the 2010 Haiti earthquake Authors: Xin Lu, Linus Bengtsson, and Petter Holme.*

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As reported by the data, catastrophic events trigger mass reactions, often times these reactions are based solely on panic and habit. Institutions try their best to accommodate these reactions, we see that with Digital, the leading cellular company in Haiti expanded their network to accommodate the displacement. As far as the quality of life, having no impact on quality we focus on the quantity of survival tactics. Rumors and word of mouth are the main method of distribution of knowledge facing these issues. According to the literature previously cited we see the danger of the spread of misinformation with the rumors surrounding nepalese UN soldiers. Though there were many instances surround the rejection of the UN, the cholera outbreak is still one of the main missteps plaguing international support.

Looking at historical data populations migrate towards better access to capital and support. We see similar occurrence with the COVID pandemic not necessarily in terms of population displacement but rather in terms of consumption. We see food producers adopt new methods of prevention such as cleaning stations, gloves, masks and for the more successful, plastic screens between the client and the salesman. This is however not necessarily an attempt in curving the pandemic but rather one to attract a more sensitive clientele.

Looking at the interview data we see recurring themes in lifestyle adaptation to covid, not precautions but rather doctrines to support the notions of Devine intervention. Religious reassurance seems to be the most prominent factor in survival or rather in self assurance. In terms of the population, masks are rarely worn but sold everywhere, washing stations are only available in certain locations, usually the most affluent and often maintenance is not consistent.

“We shouldn’t be here”, How to weaponize hope. an Auto-ethnography:

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We shouldn't be here.

Growing up here we're always told to look towards future where we do not live in Haiti. We spend our whole adolescent lives being told living here is an option our adults do not recommend. "There's no future here, there is nothing to come home to or to come back for." Anyone growing up in Haiti has heard misery's many catchphrases over and over. It took me some time but eventually I realized we weren't being told to leave the island but to leave the circumstances we're born in. When I finally made it to the states I realized how jarring the contrast really is. Going from living in the center of one of the most miserable places on earth to living in a country with infrastructure and support for its population made it clear that I too had been miserable. It's a difficult concept to wrap your head around when you have never gone hungry, never needed shelter and never had to worry about survival. Now, looking back at the reality of my country and home life through the eyes of a sociology major hoping to graduate, I can't help but feel a sense of dread accompanied by a morose lens wherever I turn my eyes. Living here is not for the faint of heart, living here is not for the pure hearted. Living here isn't quite living at all, it's much closer to survival than anything else. Now with the new danger that is the corona virus things have only gotten more difficult. Still, whilst I've heard way too many excuses for ignoring the reality we find ourselves in, I understand my people a bit better now. I've spent the last 8 months collecting data and reviewing my life to document the modern day living experience of a Haitian middle classed male in the midst of a global pandemic. All I ask in return for this very intrusive look into this life of mine is to reserve judgement, Though I know the adversity I live in, know that if I were to expire before you'd reached the end of this testimony, I was content here.

Family

"Craan (2002) underlines the great importance of family in Haitian society, which is heightened in times of stress and difficulties. The family in Haiti is elastic and extended and usually includes a large network of relatives, neighbors, and friends (Dauphin, 2002)."

Culture and Mental Health in Haiti: A Literature Review Laurence J. Kirmayer, MD Montréal, February 2, 2010 *Culture and Mental Health Research Unit Institute of Community & Family Psychiatry Montréal, Canada*

My family sits in the middle class socioeconomic layer of Port-au-prince. My father, very conservative from his classic upbringing, is considered a successful businessman and electrical engineer, he is a self made man and carries the PTSD, morals and narrow mindset that comes along with the realities he grew up in. We don't get along too well, he believes me to be too liberal and too easy going. Post high school he gave me the directives most of my peers have gotten "go to college, get a job, get married, settle down" 6 tattoos and piercings later, he has little hope that I'll fit that frame. My father wakes up every morning at 5 AM, makes his coffee and toast before climbing in to his pick up and heading downtown. Downtown, for clarity's sake is around an hour and a half from his home, it is the center of chaos and violent outbreaks, usually by whatever gang is demanding media attention that week. He risks his life every day to provide for his family, that is the future I have to look forward to, it's just what you do as a Haitian man. She owns his own businesses, works in electronics and agriculture. I'm not too fond of my father but I have seldom met anyone I respect as much.

My mother never grew up with money, her passion is her family, not the immediate family pod but her entire family unit keeps her going. She now works from home but she used to work with my father. She has had multiple surgeries but meeting her you would never know. She is much more open minded but still very limited, still more than I could have asked for. Her passion is cooking and processing honey, she loves to bake and her dogs are her best friends, we have three of them. She occupies the role of the matriarch, she looks after the well being and coordination of the home. She does not see to these tasks but rather she makes sure the staff does. Her roles as a housewife are composed of budgeting, managing, planning, making sure we are always stocked wether it be groceries, supplies, gas etc... She hates these chores as do most women in her situation but as she puts it "if I don't do it, your father and you would destroy this house along with yourselves". She has a fascination with recycling, homemade alternatives and natural remedies. She

knows every plant in the garden that could help whatever ailment you are looking to remedy. From my experience, many young women are passed down this knowledge whilst young men are taught how to build resources. She only leaves the house to visit her sisters or to go to the supermarket, occasionally she has something to take care of but those are rare.

When looking at the literature on haitian family dynamics we realize this is in fact the norm. The literature reads: *“In rural Haiti, the family is organized around the lakou (courtyard), in which clusters of extended family units form an interdependent community sharing a common courtyard. Work and child-care are divided among the families sharing the courtyard. Urban families are described as less interdependent, except in shantytowns where lakous are numerous. Middle class families in urban centers are organized around a model combining Haitian and Anglo-American elements. While authority is said to be held by the father, who is often absent, the mother remains the pote mitan, the central pillar of the family. In general, mothers have responsibility for the spiritual and emotional life of the family; fathers are responsible for finances, although mothers take care of the details (Bijoux, 1990, p. 31). Female-headed houses in Haiti are very common, particularly in urban areas (Magloire, 2008)”*

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As I am an only child and grew up only hearing of my half siblings, I am the only one in my household under the age of thirty. I am 24 years old as of writing this I've lived in the united states as well as Haiti and I am relatively well traveled. Most of the immense Haitian population has actually never been on a plane, most will die having never left the island. I smoke, I drink, I am sexually active. None of those make my relationship with my parents any easier. Still, they love me, I promise. I am currently working in photography as a Photo Booth operator and have started certain business ventures. At the risk of sounding dramatic or ridiculous. In my line of work my clients are of a specific social class, the people I work for are often wealthier individuals with the means to spend US currency on leisure. The saddest truth about Haiti is that despite the level of poverty we experience, there is an obscene amount of wealth here. Affluence is quite selective however with heavily reinforced social barriers designed to keep the classes separate. Family plays an important role in this seclusion, last names open doors here. I was fortunate enough to inherit my father's along with my mothers features. Appearance is key in this dynamic and we will see why that is later on.

I never really understood the appeal of isolated social circles until I reached adulthood. On the subject of family, what a lot of wealthier families will do is open ventures together, the more successful fund the youngest and they in turn keep the tradition going. Inheritance is a key value to Haitians, that being said families often choose the people their kids are allowed to interact with, the stereotype of the Caribbean parent asking “Do I know their family?” Before agreeing to your plans is funded in truth, I am 24 years old and I still hear it from my family and my peers guardians. This inherited familiarity will eventually prove fatal for 2 main reasons. Often children inherit unresolved conflicts started by their elders and in the tense social environment that is Haiti, this can be volatile, I’ve seen guns drawn for conflicts involving the guilty party’s families, often it’s over money. Second, this level of familiarity transcends the current global climate and health crisis we’re facing as people will put their defenses and their masks down around people they don’t deem strangers, in fact it’s considered rude to approach an elder with a mask on. In the familial interactions it is also seen as good mannered to avoid wearing masks. There is a sense of respect that we are wired to keep in consideration at all times even going against common sense. That same sense of respect acts as a double edged sword as many of our values are old world conservative values complete with taboos ostracizing anything they deem abnormal. Notably homophobic for the most part, always with a hint of racism. It’s just an inherited sense of superiority.

Why is this relevant? Well the notion of familial pride accompanies certain rituals and events where social distancing and other safety precautions are not necessarily respected as the overall feelings at these gatherings are very warm and safe, for the most part. In these events as they are often displays of affluence and abundance, staff are usually doubled, they however will always take precautions. I elaborate on the family identity to not only give a bit of context for the auto ethnography but also to establish the existence of gatherings that occurred even during the lockdown months of the pandemic, in short people never stopped seeing each other outside of “peri lok” On the topic of “Peyi Lok” we’ll look at the constraints the Haitian population deal with on daily basis, My goal is to give a clear introduction to the environment I am currently living in.

Literature review

That being said we'll begin with political constraints, gang violence and overall insecurity. Insecurity is a broad term as it can range from a any level of crime from the pettiest theft to murder, on a social scale in Haiti It really just seems to melt into one word "insecurity". This refers to gang activity or political whiplash felt by the population. While I plan to go through each of the main factors we've normalized, I would like to point out that the image to first reach the minds of the public when asked about this topic, usually involves someone of a darker complexion. In Haiti there is a clear recurring racial narrative serving the fairer skinned and demonizing people of darker complexions. This racial bias will be it's own section in my paper but I needed to address it before painting the picture I'm attempting to convey. Most if not all of these are caused by poverty and lack of infrastructure. Thought they will be listed.

Kidnapping: There was once a time where kidnapping was a random event that occurred usually after someone had a falling out with a business partner or pissed off a long Time employee. I have never known a time in Haiti where kidnapping was a new idea, it's been here at least as long as I have. Still though, earlier on in my lifetime kidnapping was something people didn't necessarily worry about every time they stepped out of their homes or every time they noticed the same car in traffic once too many. Now, kidnapping is akin to sport hunting. Each person has a varying price tag depending on socioeconomic status, relationships and residential areas. People living further up the mountain tend to go for much more than people living closer to the shoreline. Kidnappings are pretty straight forward, you're targeted, stopped and taken for ransom. If your family can pay the amount, you're released with complimentary PTSD; much more scar tissue than you were found with and a shattered sense of safety that might never recover. If not, well then you end up like this young lady (Evelyn Sincere) The literature reads:

"4 days after the kidnapping (Thursday, October 29) of the young student Evelyne Sincère, (22 years old) who was passing her baccalaureate this year and after the failure of the negotiations (the kidnappers demanded \$100,000 US dollars but the family had only been able to raise \$15,000), the kidnappers called the family Sunday morning (November 1), to tell them that their daughter's body had been dumped in a

landfill in Delmas 24.” (When this happened, one of the most popular gang members delivered one of her assailants to the police station in Delmas 30, he was released hours later.)

For a while these acts seemed strategic and political in nature, as if they had a blacklist or a message they wanted to send. This was due to their victims being mainly high profile community figures and important leaders. There was of course the odd kidnapping of a younger poorer individual but usually they'd be released after a few days. For the most part, not just anyone could get kidnapped. Then in the past 4 to 5 years the attacks started seeming more and more random as the required amounts kept climbing. Finally an interview surfaced with a kidnap victim which shed some light on the way these events are orchestrated (transcription is attached and filed under *sources*).

The data reports: Essentially kidnappings fall under three categories, the first is the most specific and is named “engineer”. These are often ordered hits by someone very close to the victim who knows exactly how much money the person can give up. Often times that person is so close to the victim that they're in the room receiving demands alongside the family if they are not in fact a family member. This type is the most survivable and these prices range from 250 000USD and up, usually they are the quickest and the least painful for the victim. Looking at the data from reported kidnappings, the more the hit is worth, the less painful the process is.

Second is nicknamed “antenna” these occur once someone with ties to the assailants notices an economic growth in an individual (inheritance, a booming business or any type of obvious gain in wealth) and reports it to their higher ups, the target is then apprehended and often due to gross overestimation of capital, held for much more money than they can afford. Usually ranging anywhere from 100 000USD to 200 000USD. As these are none specific, the victim has a much higher chance of being wrongfully charged and sadly lower chances of survival.

Third is what is referred to as a “raboday” don't worry about the pronunciation as this is a fairly new word to enter the creole vocabulary and refers to a arrangement or assortment of random events or sounds. It is named after a musical genre that has been taking the Caribbean by storm.

This type is the most common type of kidnapping as it occurs completely randomly. This type occurs when the first mark either escapes or is simply not found. At which point the kidnappers will hunt for anyone they deem financially capable of supplying a large enough amount to make up for the time and gas they spent. These individuals are chose based on the value of the vehicle they are operating or their location. This is often how less affluent individuals are caught and condemned to death. Though it is worth noting that if a member of the impoverished working class is caught with a target that individual is released but not before being assaulted or raped.

All in all Kidnapping is one of if not the most prominent constraint simply because most individuals cannot afford to pay anything close to those ransoms. To give some perspective, most impoverished working class Haitians make less than 10USD a day and need most of it to survive. One US dollar is roughly the equivalent to 100gds, add two zeros to the aforementioned amounts and you can understand why most people would rather stay home than risk it. Sadly staying home does not guarantee ones safety as it's quite common for kidnappers to break into their targets houses. The literature states:

“On January 1, 2021, Haiti commemorated 217 years of independence. Instead of large celebrations or protests, the streets of Port-au-Prince were notably empty. Some posted videos of tires burning, blockading main thoroughfares, but mostly people were at home out of fear of being kidnapped. Abductions spiked dramatically in the last two months of 2020, coincidentally since the U.S. presidential election.”

Mamyrah Dougé-Prosper & Mark Schuller (2021) End of Empire? A View from Haiti, NACLA Report on the Americas, 53:1, 1-6, DOI: 10.1080/10714839.2021.1889846

Government: In Haitian day to day we live a life somewhat outside of the law, this is not to say that we do not have a constitution, we do. In fact that constitution is under review and about to be changed in the coming months. What I mean by living outside the confines of the law refers to the fact that our government is in essence none responsive. We are governed and we do have a collective of institutions that run and maintain certain infrastructures like the police force, fire fighters and maintenance. The issue is none of these are well rounded or well funded outside of the private economic sector. Majority of road maintenance comes from private funding and they charge

hefty fees to the government. It's much more like assigning projects to different actors in the hopes that they'll keep their word. With an exceptional amount of corruption and lack of accountability it usually does not get the attention it requires. In fact many of the resources keeping impoverished communities alive are privately owned yet richer neighborhoods designed to attract a superior level of income are maintained yearly. There is a clear sense of favoritism in the eyes of the government.

According to the literature:

“Haitian Tèt Kale Party (PHTK) gave rise to a bandi legal or “legal bandit” toxic masculinist state that has intensified a culture of rape and impunity. Several government officials, influential media personalities, and notorious gang leaders have been accused of (but not tried for) systematic sexual assault”

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“In addition to a generalized state of fear, activists have denounced increasing targeting, including legal persecution: President Jovenel Moïse issued a decree last year establishing that certain forms of protest constitute “terrorism.” According to the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), 944 people were murdered in the first eight months of 2020. Although Moïse’s term expired February 7, there isn’t even a pretense of an end in sight to the violence or the regime”

End of Empire? A View from Haiti Mamyrah Dougé-Prosper & Mark Schuller

Allow me to elaborate with my perspective. Drinking water is not accessible to the population as so, we are obliged to purchase water by the gallon. The current price is 150 Haitian gourdes per gallon or just under 2 dollars. Electricity is privately owned by an affluent few and thus electricity is distributed unevenly, most kids do not have electricity to do their homework when night falls. This creates the necessity for petroleum products to power generators or other means to generate electricity. This is not to say the government is inactive but rather that the role the government plays is minimal in the grand scheme of the situation. This of course is only a problem for the majority of the population, the impoverished working class. When one considers the level of neglect felt by the population in question, it's easy to understand how deviancy is not only prominent but often achieves public support. We know this through interview data with testimonies along the lines of “When we drove in to the village of god, the people were around the streets cheering and chanting as though someone had Brought home a soccer trophy”. According to the literature:

“Haiti has never had a tradition of governance that seeks to provide services to the population or create an environment conducive to sustainable growth. Instead, a small economic elite has supported a “predatory state” that has made only negligible investments in human resources and basic infrastructure (World Bank 1998). It ranks among the bottom 5 percent of countries in the World Bank Institute’s Aggregate Governance Indicators, which measure voice and accountability, political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption (Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2005) “ ***Social Resilience and State Fragility in Haiti***

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Healthcare:

Healthcare in Haiti is still, mainly composed of cultural healing remedies passed down from generation to generation. Voodoo, the mystified, often demonized religious entity serves mainly as a healing option for people who cannot afford staggering medical costs that come with western medicine. I’ll allow myself a short, very real, very depressing analogy, most doctors in Haiti drive foreign cars and maintain lifestyles that would rival the top layers of the American middle class. I understand a doctor is a higher level of income but considering these lifestyles are funded and maintained out of patients pockets, I feel it’s important to show how expensive these services become. Because of this most of our daily customs are built around maintaining as healthy of a lifestyle as possible. This opens the door for holistic medicine as well as superstitions we normalize and pass down to generations. These traditions are deeply rooted in herbal healing In fact, the literature shows:

“Individuals use resources pragmatically, and often hold multiple or hybrid models of health and illness. As a result, the same person may seek help from multiple sources, when available. Haitians divide illnesses into several broad categories, including: maladi Bondyè (God’s disease, or those of “natural” origin), maladi peyi (“country”, or common, short-term ailments), maladi moun fè mal (magic spells sent because of human greed), and those of supernatural origin, maladi bon lwa (‘disease of God’) and maladi Satan (Satan’s or “sent” sicknesses) (Sterlin, 2006; See Appendix A). Many Haitians also use a humoral theory of health and illness. Imbalance of hot and cold within the body are believed to be causes of natural illness. These imbalances can stem from environmental elements such as rain, wind, sun, and dew or emotional reactions to the physical environment (e.g., witnessing lightning strike) or to the actions of others. Health may be restored through the use of herbal teas, regulated diet, compresses, baths, and massages. The treatment must be in the opposite direction of the imbalance in order to restore equilibrium. Foods have hot and cold, heavy and light properties, such that heavy foods are eaten in the daytime to provide energy for physical labor and light foods are eaten in the evening (Miller, 2000; Nicolas et al., 2006). Moderate and chronic illnesses are often treated within the family or the naturally occurring social support system. However, infectious diseases such as AIDS and tuberculosis, as well as traumatic injuries and wounds, are considered to be best treated by Western biomedicine”

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The data I collected showcases this herbal phenomenon as well, interviewees repeatedly mentioned herbal medication as a means of protection for COVID. These herbal remedies are in the forms of teas, pomades, oils, infused alcohols and steam therapy. I have to say, these herbal remedies do work for some diseases. Personally, growing up I was very prone to the flue and the common cold, my family used herbal remedies instead of over the counter medication and relief was almost instant. I've attempted these remedies with ingredients in the united states, the effects were severely weakened. I believe nutrition plays a crucial role in our likelihood, the classic Haitian diet is composed of very little processed foods outside of spices and canned goods, most of our diets are composed of naturally grown ingredients as they are much more accessible and much cheaper than their processed counterparts. An interesting finding revealed itself during my interviews, medical professionals noticed a distrust for the western medical industry during the early days of the pandemic, people avoided hospitals and clinics out of fear of either being purposefully administered the virus or catching it in that environment. The literature argues:

“The earthquake laid waste to what was arguably already the hemisphere’s weakest public health system. Childhood mortality before the earthquake was already high at 171 per 1000, women died in childbirth at an unacceptably high rate, and Haiti was a hot spot for diseases such as malaria, filariasis, and rabies that were controlled long ago in most other countries in the Americas. Underpinning these challenges was the fact that public health work was underfunded and understaffed. Routine coverage for measles–rubella vaccination was only 58%, national surveillance systems were unable to provide the most rudimentary data for decision making, and the national laboratory processed an average of only four bacteriology specimens per month.” **Public Health in Haiti — Challenges and Progress Scott F. Dowell, M.D., M.P.H., Jordan W. Tappero, M.D., M.P.H., and Thomas R. Frieden, M.D., M.P.H. Organized crime:**

“Nevertheless, long-standing public health problems remain. Efforts to improve roads to reduce traffic injuries, provide life-saving community and obstetrical services, and repair, upgrade, or build safe water and sanitation systems are just beginning to be scaled up. For example, in 2008, only 63% of Haitians had access to adequate water sources and 17% to improved sanitation facilities,² so fecal contamination of drinking water was common, and diarrheal disease was a leading cause of childhood deaths.” **Public Health in Haiti — Challenges and Progress Scott F. Dowell, M.D., M.P.H., Jordan W. Tappero, M.D., M.P.H., and Thomas R. Frieden, M.D., M.P.H.**

Organized Crime:

Gang violence has steadily escalated from the Aristide era in the early 2000's. We are now at a point where gangs have become their own form of governmental power in Haiti. These groups have attained a level of firepower and influence that they are now considered militia, this means that many areas in Haiti, mainly port-au-Prince are fully under the control of these groups. These entities have gotten to a point where they receive protection payments from state officials and are influential enough to have police as foot soldiers committing crimes in full uniform with police equipment. These groups operate inside densely populated areas making intercepting their movements quite difficult, they have no issue overpowering government forces at the cost of bystanders lives. They are ruthless, extremely well funded, well organized and difficult to intercept. Currently the most dangerous area in Port-au-Prince is an area known as village of god in which highly volatile gangs have taken over, even forcing businesses to pay tolls as well as protection money. It's often said that the current president of Haiti Jovenel Moise is responsible for the funding and orchestrating of these violent groups. I have no tangible evidence of this nor is it the focus of my paper. The literature states:

“There have been allegations of several forms of corruption and administrative malfeasance in Haiti. These include corruption in the institutions responsible for upholding the rule of law—the police and the judiciary (as discussed below); embezzlement of public funds by political and private organizations; payments to government-associated individuals for goods that were not provided and services that were not rendered; abuse of discretionary accounts by government officials; and evasion of the licensing fees and import” ***Social Resilience and State Fragility in Haiti The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank 1818 H***

“rights organizations continue to identify serious human rights violations by police officers, including direct involvement in the past year's wave of kidnappings (Human Rights Watch 2005; RNDDH 2005a). According to the director of the HNP, “about a quarter of the force is involved in corruption, kidnappings or even arms trafficking” ***Social Resilience and State Fragility in Haiti The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank 1818 H***

Usually I would include kidnapping in the organized crime section but the scope I'm referring to is much more impressive than coordinated kidnappings or even the mob. I would rather focus on the concept that we call "Peyi Lock" this translates to a country lock, essentially it's a siege. In Haiti there's a thin line between Protester and Gangster, whilst a pedi lock is a form of protest one could make the argument that it crosses that line. I referred to a country lock as a siege but in reality it is much closer to quarantine than anything else, during a country lock the protesters set up barriers every few meters on all roads in the capital stopping any and all movement from place to place. In some instances people had barricades as tall as medium sized houses all made of rubble and debris. This happens without warning and in a manner so quick and efficient that people have no way of reacting. The first ever country lock occurred 3 years ago, I remember it clearly. During a soccer game, a Haitian favorite, Brazil V Argentina, the president announced the rise of gas prices by the time the players had saluted and walked off the field, all roads were already secured with militia stationed at key intersections ready and armed to take on any opposition. I remember watching thick, black lines of smoke rising from every direction. Two weeks later the barricades were taken down and people were allowed to return to work. Though as many rioters raided and destroyed a good portion of businesses, Many had no work to return to. The literature states that this might have actually been beneficial for Haitian society in terms of coping with COVID19 as we were already used to being in isolation:

"Prior to COVID-19, Haiti emerged from a political lockdown that lasted from September 2019 to December 2019. When the first case of COVID-19 arrived in March 2020, the country was just beginning to regain a certain sense of normalcy despite the socio- economical and psychological ramifications of being on lockdown. This violent civil unrest was initially triggered by an abrupt increased of fuel price, a movement that became known in Creole as Peyi Lòk ("country in lockdown"; Jerome, 2020). Peyi Lòk is considered as a new form of resistance in Haiti, where protesters blocked most of the streets, preventing people and vehicles from circulating, demanding changes at various levels of society. It occurred as the longest period of continued protests since the election of the current president, Jovenel Moïse. The first lock- down lasted 7 days in 2018. During the most recent Peyi Lòk, which lasted over three months, there were roadblocks and barricades in every corner of the country, with considerable repercussions for the education system, the transportation sector, and the economy. Thus, when COVID-19 was plaguing China and many European countries, the majority of Haitians continued to engage in their daily routines as if they were desensitized to effects of disasters and forced social distancing imposed by constant lock-down of the country with the Peyi Lòk movement." **What the World Could Learn From the Haitian**

Resilience While Managing COVID-19 Judite Blanc (New York University Langone Health); Jolette Joseph (Université d'État d'Haïti); Elizabeth Farrah Louis (Fogarty International Center, Harvard University); Chimene Castor (Howard University); Girardin Jean-Louis (New York University Langone Health)

There is a recurring public opinion stating the government took little to no precautions when it comes to the COVID pandemic, the above quotation explains that is not the case, there were safety precautions put in place but one must consider the unsustainable lifestyles of the population.

“Rumors posted on social media (e.g., Covid-19 is a government ruse to seek international funding; Covid-19 is transmitted by contaminated testing swabs; and hospitals are using patients with Covid-19 for vaccine experiments) travel faster than truths reported in the traditional media. Hospitals treating patients with Covid-19 have been physically attacked.”

Many believe the only way to save the dire COVID situation currently brewing over the horizon, I would like to refer to the above quote. The superstitions alone would make it almost impossible to bring the vaccine to the populations as they would not trust it. A great majority of the middle class is equally against being administered the vaccine, some fall pray to conspiracy theories others for religious beliefs. I've even heard it said that the vaccine carries the mark of the beast. My favorite however is hearing “the vaccine will mind control people into being zombies”.

Natural Disasters:

Haiti is most known for the earthquake we had in 2010 because it garnered international attention, we even had a few theme songs, most of which I highly discourage singing to your Haitian friends, yes specially that one. Though Haiti is prone to much more than just seismic tragedies, in fact Haiti has had more devastating hurricanes and suffered more damage from heavy rains and hurricanes than anything else. Every rainy season has it's tragedies, a. Number of deaths and number of floods. This is partially due to the tendency to build neighborhoods in dried river beds assuming the water would never run again. A heavy enough rain instantly floods these areas potentially killing many and aiding disease to rise. One might ask, who would build in a riverbed? Someone who can't afford to build anywhere else and someone who doesn't know any better will usually follow. The literature states:

“The next major disaster after the earthquake and the cholera epidemic was Hurricane Matthew hitting the southern peninsula of Haiti in October 2016. The hurricane killed more than 500 people, affected more than two million and brought about damage amounting to 2.8 billion USD.¹⁰ This disaster could have been an opportunity to prove what had been learnt from previous failures. A recent report however labelled the response as “underwhelming to say the least” (Hsu et al. 2019). Whereas in 2010 the capital of the centralised country was in the midst of attention, in 2016

inaccessibility was the biggest hindrance to the relief efforts. With many streets being submerged in and partially destroyed by water, the overland delivery of relief goods was nearly impossible in some parts of the peninsula. Additionally, international actors were hesitant to become involved, marked by the 2010 experience of failed and ineffective interventions”

HAITI TEN YEARS AFTER DOUZ JANVYE

Humanitarian perspectives and lessons learnt from the 2010 earthquake in Haiti Andrea Steinke January 2020

A dangerous element not always mentioned when speaking of natural disasters in Haiti is that we as a people have the gift of adapting to less than livable living conditions. We are able as a people to normalize the most severe living conditions we encounter. In the literature I've often seen it's benefits listed and praised but this comes with a deadly drawback. Because we are able to adapt to new harsher realities we are often quick to put rebuilding aside in order to continue the goals we had initially set out to accomplish. For example some of the refugee camps that formed after the earthquake, these “tent cities” still exist to this day. The only difference is that over time people built makeshift shelters out of sheet metal and whatever wood they can afford. Make no mistake this is openly squatting and eventually building whatever version of a shelter they could afford. The government offers little to no help and a good amount of gangs originated from locations such as these. I've seen firsthand how people live in these areas and how little aid they are offered.

Education: This is probably the saddest of our constraints as it affects children the most. The reality is that most people in Haiti are not educated most have some level of education, enough to get by but literacy rates in Haiti are a very low. This leads back to governmental incompetence and corruption, school budgets are almost none existent and even if they were, most teachers refuse to continue teaching for the low wages they receive, that coupled with the little respect the profession receives and the horrible hours, most competent teachers would rather go somewhere else to gain their livelihood. This is even heavier to cope with when you realize the majority of the population believes education to be the only way out of the miserable conditions we find ourselves in today. The literature states:

“Having faced much historical injustice and the continuous structural violence of global economic policies, many Haitians have learned to maintain hope in the face of severe adversity. Many believe that the future will be better and that education will help them get out of poverty.” Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Mental Health, Disabilities and Rehabilitation Unit © WHO, 2010. All rights reserved.

Education has declined since the years of the Duvalier regime and has always been one of the first victims of every other chaotic element added to the already volatile environment. Children and teachers have often been the most vulnerable and the most targeted of the demographics involved. Historically we've seen this on many occasions, some noteworthy cases are:

“During François “Papa Doc” Duvalier’s regime, Duvalier’s Tonton Macoutes imprisoned students who had supported secondary schoolteachers in a 1959 strike. The Tonton Macoutes, whose name means “boogeymen,” were a Haitian militia, controlled by Duvalier, that used brutal violence to suppress political resistance. The 1959 teachers strike was implemented to protest the embedding of Tonton Macoutes in the ranks of teachers. In response to this public show of resistance, Papa Doc not only arrested the students, he also abolished all youth groups, including the Boy Scouts; bombed education facilities; and surrounded the university and schools with police.”⁹

*“But François and his son, Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier, were not the only leaders to target educational institutions and individuals. Fanmi Lavalas, the party of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, formed grassroots organizations called organisations populaires. They were composed of party militants and had the original aim of community empowerment. Later they became heavily armed political gangs that terrorized the population. On December 5, 2003, pro-Aristide gangs, such as the chimères (ghosts), and police attacked the State University, where students were holding antigovernment protests. They ransacked buildings, gutted two departments, and injured dozens of students and administrators.” **Education and Conflict in Haiti. Rebuilding the Education Sector after the 2010 Earthquake. Ketty Luzincourt and Jennifer Gulbrandson***

When you consider the frequency at which political strife intervenes in the pursuit of education, it's no wonder the majority of the population is unable to access higher education, Add to that the low economic status plaguing the majority of the population and you can quickly realize the frail nature of the Haitian population. This is only a problem plaguing the poorer portions of the population as with most issues in Haiti, the most efficient cure to our ailments is financial stability.

The literature states:

“Students and teachers in many areas of Haiti have suffered and continue to suffer from a general lack of security. With Haiti’s ongoing political instability and widespread violence, going to school is not a safe journey for children.”¹¹ Even when students and

teachers do arrive at school safely, the general feeling of insecurity surely detracts from their ability to concentrate on school matters.” **Education and Conflict in Haiti.**

Rebuilding the Education Sector after the 2010 Earthquake. Ketty Luzincourt and Jennifer Gulbrandson

“The inequality and insufficiency of Haitian education leaves many Haitian families extremely frustrated, especially lower-income Haitians. As the World Bank report on Haiti notes, “Compared to their peers from upper income quintiles, Haitian children from lower income households get less and worse education,” even though their families pay a much higher percentage of their household revenues for schooling” **Education and Conflict in Haiti. Rebuilding the Education Sector after the 2010 Earthquake. Ketty Luzincourt and Jennifer Gulbrandson**

“Although Haiti faces daunting challenges, the rebuilding process already under way presents an excellent opportunity to address the largely dysfunctional education sector. It will be important to involve all stakeholders in the process. Working from that premise, the Prével– Pierre-Louis administration in 2008 created the Working Group on Education and Training to develop strategies and initiatives to increase access to and the quality of Haitian schools and to modernize the organization and function of the national education sector.” **Education and Conflict in Haiti. Rebuilding the Education Sector after the 2010 Earthquake. Ketty Luzincourt and Jennifer Gulbrandson**

In conclusion, according to the literature Haiti has a history of neglect and strife, the victims of which are public institutions such as healthcare and education. Living in Haiti comes with a plethora of constraints and risks but we as a people have learned to adapt to these hardships either through necessity or conscious effort. We are a people known for a resilience to the odds and hope is our number one source of motivation.

Autoethnographie

I landed in Haiti in late September of 2020 when the initial panic had settled in the U.S and people were much less terrified, or so I thought. As soon as I landed the first thing to catch my attention was the amount of people confined to a small space. A room full of eyes floating over face masks. The only thing that had changed from the last time I’d come home was the colorful cloth smiles everyone’s been wearing lately. Nothing had changed, the glass between immigration officers and general public was still the same, elevator to baggage claim still looked like the 50’s.

Good old Haiti, see the first thing anyone ever hoping to move here should know is very little ever actually changes.

I grew up here, from 1997 to 2016 I lived in the capital and now after the pandemic I'm here, half stranded half "exactly where I need to be". I am 24 years old now, there were a lot of opportunities for me not to be, each justifiable. Home is a three story house in the upper mountain ranges of the capital. Just like most middle class families, we have help. Three employees, the first is what one might consider a groundskeeper, a live in cook/maid and one clothing expert, I've seen that woman sew, iron, wash and sort better than anyone else. She lives in the area so she goes home everyday, the others sleep on location and go to the capital once a week to be with their families. See when I explain that to most people living in the US the immediate reaction I get is "you're living well", "you're rich", "wanna pay my tuition?" etc... I've always seen it as a reflection of poverty more than a sign of affluence. They take public transportation, most of them don't drink, none of them smoke, they're all religious (2 christian faith, one voodoo) and you would find very similar dynamics in most middle income households. The richer the household the more well trained the staff, some homes make me nervous because of that. The longer the person works for the family, the deeper the bond.

Coming back after having spent over three years in the United States the transition was anything but comfortable. Ironically it was not the lack of stable infrastructure or the constant fear of death or kidnapping. The most difficult transition to me was economic. More specifically, how we spend our money. Keep in mind, Haiti has no social security, for most people retirement rests on their children's shoulders, people barely make a solid living yet we as a population, love to spend money. Let me explain, I landed, went to a populated area and was immediately noticed an overwhelming amount of designer clothes (both originals and replicas) Imported. Groceries are sold at much higher rates than local production yet imported goods are in much higher demand. In social situations such as parties, weddings, baptisms etc... Budgets rival mortgages and car payments in

the US. We seem to have expensive tastes and we create social hierarchies based on who has access to these lifestyles.

Leaving Haiti to pursue a higher education would prove to be a gift as well as a curse, the life quality in the US was able to give me an idea of how institutions are supposed to function in order to keep a minimum for their populations to survive, it also gave the habit of comparing Haiti to other countries. I had no idea I was miserable until I went to the US. I can now acknowledge that Living in Haiti is corrosive. It is corrosive to a human beings health in many ways but it also sharpens a person's sense and sense of urgency. In Haiti we are always alert as we firmly believe we are always in danger. So when a new danger like COVID 19 reaches our midst it's a bit peculiar to notice no one around you make any realistic changes to their lifestyles. Parties never stopped, lavish social gatherings with little to no expense spared. Bars and what little we still have in terms of clubs still remained open. Marketplaces continued to operate without adopting social distancing precautions and ignoring the same health violations they ignored before I'd left Haiti. Coming home was like imagining a worst case scenario and learning that your imagination is still quite limited.

I've always seen Haiti and the US as two separate realities, the transition from living in the united states, you shift as well as well as the reverse. I wouldn't call it code switching as it's not a negative sensation and it also doesn't come from a place of racial identity but rather a sort of innate cage of theater. To explain it in Goffman's paradigm, In Haiti the stage is not as broad, the lights are much brighter, the audience triples in size and dissipates when it chooses to, you have no lines just reactions. To quote a Haitian play I was shown earlier this year, "Papam te... solda" (Translation: My father always said we were all born soldiers. That's how life in Haiti feels in a nutshell. From what I've seen most people here are still here either because of a sense of patriotism bordering on a hero complex or have found ways to exploit their environment long enough to survive and possibly even insight social change. The same roles I was expected to play as a son, as a friend and as a romantic interest were waiting for me as if nothing had changed. At least that's how it felt at first.

The more time I spend here the more and more I realize how hollow we really are as people. We look for reasons to be terrified, counter those with reasons to be hopeful and worry about both those scenarios coming true. I know this is vague but let me use an example to explain:

I mentioned previously that I work in photography, my job consists of bringing a Photo Booth to events that had booked us previously, assemble the booth and operate it taking as many pictures as the client wishes until the allotted hour at which point I am to back up, return the pictures to the client and leave. Very straight forward, on paper. In reality you face a number of stereotypical setbacks, every single time. Events don't start on time, social distancing rules are violated, we are often requested to stay longer than the previously scheduled time. Every, single, time. It's such a real phenomenon that catering companies account for it by sending their staff in waves. I'm aware this might seem like I'm complaining about something that happens everywhere, incompetence is geographically blind after all. What I want to point out is much more subtle, we as a people have a gift of normalization, I use this example because this ranges from the tiniest detail like an event not going as planned to being held hostage in our own homes. The official Haitian creed is strength in unity, the unofficial trending catchphrase I firmly believe to be "it is what it is" the collective must keep moving no matter the cost.

Socially, I would describe Haiti as radical capitalism which is defined by the urban dictionary as "All factors of production are owned privately, and people make all economic choices for themselves without any regulation". This sums up my experience in Haiti to a tee. There is little to no governmental intervention in means of production, open market where anyone can start any business and the government eventually taxes institutions. It's quite common to see money laundering and corruption run rampant. The main goal for Haitian society is economic affluence everyone wishes to make as much of a profit as possible, this instilled in our mindsets from an early age. This cut throat dynamic stems from the obvious wealth gap plaguing our society. Those on top

of the proverbial ladder live lavish lifestyles whilst those at the bottom fight to survive. Through years of selective cooperation Haitian society has become the equivalent to a higher power. Public opinion decides if you'll thrive or if you'll be cast out to fend for yourself. Classist divisions have reinforced societal roles as well as a tendency to see personality cults. Social media plays an important role in cultivating this mindset. Most people here focus on showcasing their talents or themselves as to gain public admiration and respect. In Haiti, everyone's a celebrity.

Keeping with this idea, from what I've experienced I can safely say we are a vain people, this vanity however stems from a colonial mindset, it's only recently that we a predominantly Afro population started acknowledging and praising African facial features and physicality. Growing up the narrative was insistent on the propagation of European features and lighter complexions. According to sources I've cited above this might have stemmed from the owning class being immigrants from European countries or beneficiaries of colonial inheritance. Lighter complexions were a sign of affluence, darker complexions were attributed to poverty and misery. In case you were wondering how superficial a social framework such as this one really is, allow me to give you an example. Most weekdays Haitians only go to work, physical exercise or other hobbies and interests before heading home or heading to their regular bars or restaurants for cocktails, usually happy hours. On weekends, everyone goes out, every location has some sort of event or some sort of preprogrammed activity they advertise on social media. These events are packed whilst the majority of them offer the same service over and over every weekend. Growing up I was always taught that these events existed to showcase how much wealth or how well one is living. Prices are doubled or even tripled and seating is made exclusive. Usually a known DJ will be booked to perform for the night and a preselected theme dictates the dress code and energy one would find at said event. Most of these themes stem from cultures with roots outside of Haiti, the prices are in US dollars and the menus are usually similar to those you'd find at events in Florida. We try to replicate

the sensation of not being in Haiti as much as possible so that we can charge as much as we can for that escape.

Our predominant form of escapism is rooted in social interactions surrounding capital. We drink heavily from what I've observed. Peace of mind isn't something you come across here often. Pair this with with heavily reinforced conservative values and you have a hyper sexual culture with culturally emotional roots. We are all extremely stressed at all times, even in our own homes as we are all In danger at all times. Each social class carries it's burdens, they are all life threatening.. Working class works bellow both these classes and if survival weren't enough to keep people worried there is also the history of abuse the working class suffers at the hands of both the owning and middle class. A word comes to mind "cocorat" which signifies someone of lower socioeconomic status and is often contextual implies "lesser than". There are atrocities here that would never make the news. It's easy to notice that life means very little in Haiti as death is always present. I've met so many people from either sides of the spectrum from the insides of "bidonvil" to eccentric multi millionaires making industries out of little. Though Bias, I've noticed is a common factor in both sides. As with anywhere, the "other" is always weighing way too much on the balance. "It's them." Usually followed or prefaced with a gesture either conversational or physical to someone of different economic order. In fact, the anti gang violence seems to be supporting an anti black agenda. It's a wildly accepted notion that most African traits are seen as derogatory, I am of mixed lineage and I am not allowed to wear a durag or a wrap to protect my hair, I'm told it looks like "one of them". This coming from the mouths of employers. Ironically the majority of the lifestyles of the wealthier class are directly built on the backs of the individuals they consider lesser than.

When you consider how small our island actually is, you might assume that these biases are trivial and more of a joke than anything else. The reality of the situation is, depending what area or even neighborhood you're from, you're assumed to be of a certain mindset, the reason for this

mindset is the difference in life quality. Some areas are much more affluent and hold much more prominent employment opportunities, as such, certain areas attract more people than others yet most of the time these are locations with more exclusive housing and lower population counts. What is known as “bidonville” is essentially a low income housing community usually with an immense population living in smaller, much more confined areas. The cost of these housing options varies by location, the closer they are to high traffic areas such as petion-ville the more expensive they are. These are not prestigious or even comfortable housing options, often times they don't have running water and a great number of them have no electricity and are shared by entire families, they are the size of a singular room. These living conditions are used against the population as they create prejudice I'd like to highlight these biases are mainly economic.

Money and pleasure reign supreme, hope fuels this nightmare and poverty weighs it down as much as possible while corruption keeps the wheels turning. We have no destination but down. When a new constraint like COVID19 begins to break havoc on the population it quickly added to the list of problems and swept under the rug. We rationalize the pandemic because we have no significant tolls on the population. This is mainly due to a lack of testing. A COVID test currently costs at least 60 USD, that translates to 6000 gourdes. The majority of the population literally could not afford to care about COVID add to that the fact that most people make less than 2\$ a day and need it to feed their families, one can understand how it's easy for the Haitian population to describe the corona virus as a rich man's disease and choose to ignore it. We are currently in the beginning stages of what we can describe as a second wave but few measures have been taken as to prevent the spread of the disease. Gatherings still occur, I can attest to that as I keep receiving contract offers for the following months.

The overall constraints we face make us stronger in a sense but it takes a severe toll on the psyche, we live very stressful lives and the way we are taught to deal with that stress is often through destructive lifestyles. Youths take to smoking and drinking early on and we

focus on bettering our personal lives rather than focusing on a general living quality, I am not critiquing haitian society but attempting to explain that the mindset allowing us to disregard clear and present danger comes not from a place of indifference but rather necessity. It feels like being hunted. Knowing that there are layers upon layers of constraints waiting at any turn to change your life. We don't trust our fellow man because our peers are often just as tightly wound as we are but have differing ideas on how to approach a situation, this difference cause disconnects among even the closest of friends. Still if there's one thing i can say for sure about us as Haitian people it's that even In the most trying of times we are a loving, passionate people full of hope and warmth even if we are selective about who we share them with. We are a resilient people who even when left to our own devices choose to continue fighting for what we believe in. We are a broken people dealing with levels of trauma we collected over the years but we are trying.

In coclusion, Living in Haiti is not a simple task, it takes a lot of mental and emotional strength, willingness to face odds you cannot fathom and a good level of crazy to survive this place on a good day. We are still dealing with pains from so many sectors that adding another worry to the list is simply not in our best interest and therefore we would rather ignore it until we can't ignore it anymore. "Yes but COVID19 is extremely dangerous" not as dangerous as stepping out of your house in Haiti. We've grown not to ignore death but to run from it as little as necessarily possible. Social dynamics are often warped or unjust, our conservative beliefs are steadily holding us back but we have hope, no matter what, we always have hope. I'd like to conclude with these two quotes from the literature

"Haitians' ability to create and make art from their suffering is their trademark. They are known as an artistic nation."

“Francois, a renowned expert in the field of disaster preparedness, did not seem to be concerned about the possible negative impact of COVID-19 on the mental health outcomes in the Haitian population, although he was unsure whether to call this resilience. Francois told us: “Haitian people have a specific vision of life. They are convinced that as long as there is oxygen, breath, movement, there is hope. When there is no movement, there is no hope. Therefore, because they are breathing, there is a way out. This is hope, this is the Haitian way of life! (R. François, personal communication, April 8, 2020; Saint-Juste, 2020) ” **What the World Could Learn From the Haitian Resilience While Managing COVID-19** Judite Blanc(New York University Langone Health); Jolette Joseph (Université d’État d’Haïti); Elizabeth Farrah Louis(Fogarty International Center, Harvard University); Chimene Castor (Howard University); Girardin Jean-Louis (New York University Langone Health)

Data and findings

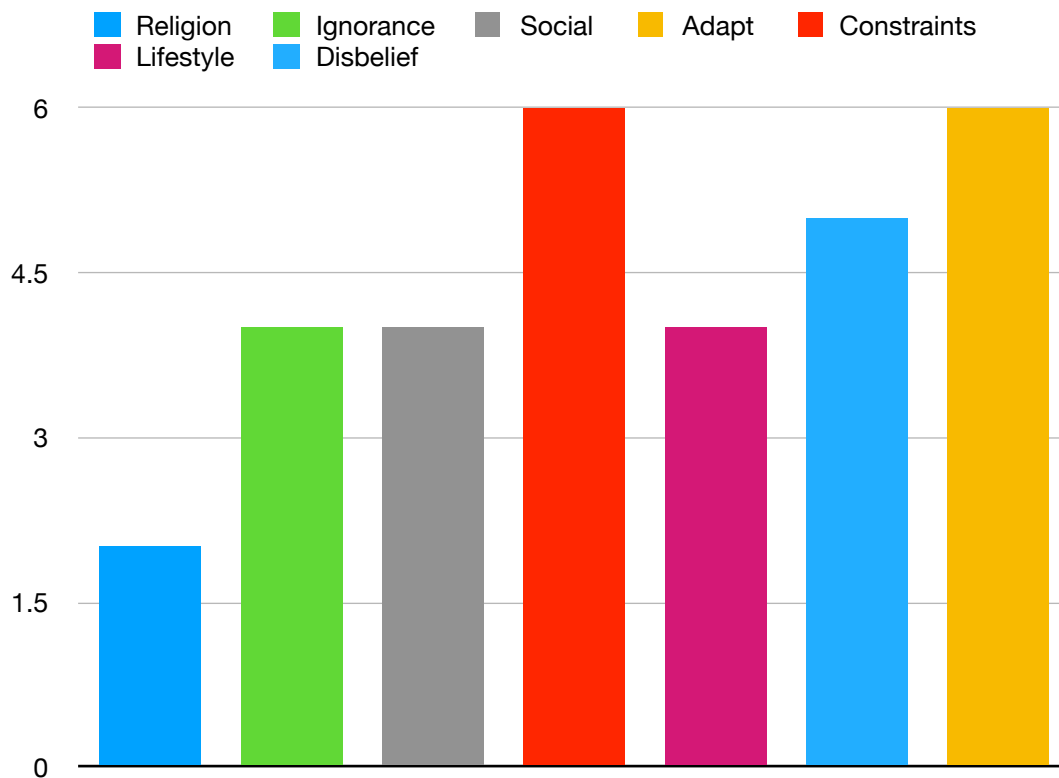
Why do you think people in Haiti are ignoring COVID19?

Methods:

I elected a qualitative data study comprised of interviews with various groups of individuals. My criteria were people aging from 18 to 35 who have lived in Haiti during the pandemic and who were aware of the pandemic. I required lived experience to trust the validity of these statements. The majority of the interviewees are people who have received high school level education and who have all lived outside the united states. I only had one question I would elaborate on based on the initial answer. For the most part, these answers only went as far as the first question. I chose that specific of an interview pool for a few reasons. The first as I mentioned before is quality, the perspectives coming from people who lived here allows for a more hands on perspective. The age requirement allows to ensure that the interviewees are old enough to have access to information as well as more realistic perspectives on COVID19

Findings:

Overall:



From 11 coded interviews we can easily establish the following pattern based on how many times the concepts reappeared in conversation. We have the following:

Adapt: 10	Mentioned 6 times
Religion/Belief: 2	Mentioned 2 times
Ignorance: 5	Mentioned 4 times
Social: 5	Mentioned 4 times
Constraints: 12	Mentioned 6 times
Lifestyle: 4	Mentioned 4 times
Disbelief: 7	Mentioned 5 times

Preliminary findings:

The first noticeable finding is that more than half believe Haitians have too many problems to already deal with to worry about the COVID19 pandemic. The majority believes that we adapted to the disease and the pandemic in time for COVID not to be an issue, though a majority still believe the disease is not actually real nor is it a real issue. Less than 50% acknowledge the lack of information supplied to the population and its validity. As many believe that social parameters and discrepancies are keeping the virus at bay. In conclusion, based on the interview findings, the main

reason people are ignoring the COVID19 pandemic is the overwhelming amount of constraints already faced by the Haitian population, this appears much more often in conversation and is a recurring notion for at least half the interviews.

Adaptation:

-Mentioned 6 times in 12 interviews

This theme refers to the belief that we have adapted past a dangerous point. This essentially is the belief that the safety precautions put in place by the government were efficient and fast enough to spare the majority of the population from devastation. Though this is very common In the interview data it is an unlikely conclusion or rather a hopeful conclusion.

-“Well, I would say adapting and ignoring because Haitians have this capacity to adapt to any situation specially hard ones”

-“people are observing certain hygiene rules, in particular Hand washing stations and certain places even respect social distancing. Even if the majority of the population does not adhere to these changes, there are changes in customs and rituals and habits that are directly due to COVID.”

-“Truth be told, when I was first presented with the strategy to fight COVID I was surprised in a good way. We had a strategy following the recommendations of the world health organization. the first understands what is current going on we see it in supermarkets and stores, reinforced social distancing, mandatory masks mainly in office buildings. Sadly this is a small minority that adheres to these newfound regulations”

From context and lived experience it's fair to speculate that this recurring belief is mostly optimistic. I only say this because as we are seeing now, the precautions we took were not sufficient as the rise in positive cases have not halted nor slowed down. Based on the content of the interview data we do however see a compliance with regulations. It's important to highlight the the fact that belief in this concept is based on the idea of an inherent biological resilience found in the Haitian

population. There is no scientific evidence of this being a factor though there are many speculations.

Religion:

-Mentioned 2 times

This theme refers to the belief that a higher power is protecting the Haitian population from devastation. This excludes no religious beliefs, the only criteria for this theme is a religious or supernatural protection keeping the population safe. I did not omit any belief systems or superstitions regarding the COVID19 pandemic.

“people thought the virus was an entity going around killing people, literally.”

“So they don’t believe it and at first Haitians even believed that COVID was an entity like a demon that could get you if you met in the streets.”

Religion is not a new element in Haiti’s tendency to adapt to morbid situations. It’s quite common to hear people refer to hardships as “god’s plan” or a course set by the universe. These beliefs reinforce the normalization of dangerous changes in Haiti. It’s worth noting that the majority of the population identifies as christian but other religions coexist here. The importance of religion is staggering but understandable when we realize how deeply we rely on belief to survive or to keep morale from sinking. An interesting finding is how little this concept was brought up in the interviews. Thought considering the age range and the fact that all of my applicants were somewhat educated I believe that might have played a crucial part in the sparse mention of religion.

Ignorance:

-Mentioned 4 times

This theme refers to misinformation or lack of information regarding COVID19. This can include acknowledgment of lack of information, recognition that we do not test as much as we should here and just general overall acknowledgment of how little we as a population were informed or prepared for this pandemic.

“I would put money down that Covid has been killing people and is here but we aren’t testing. Thing is we still don’t have free Testing and most people cannot afford one.”

“I can’t trust the numbers we’re reporting, I believe many people have died from it and no one knows.”

Mentioned only 4 times, the acknowledgement of how little we were prepared for the pandemic or how little information we actually have was not as prominent as I had initially believed specially considering the pool of interviewees education. Most group interviews showed a reluctance to accept the idea that we were not being informed of the gravity of the situation. In some cases interviewees even started disagreements with anyone who would suggest the biases in the data we are supplied

Constraints:

-Mentioned 6 times

This was the most present reasoning in all of the interviews it appeared in every single interview and often was treated as such an obvious answer that it actually swayed other interviewees to change their answers as soon as it was mentioned. This was the answer with the most influence in all of the interviews.

“Most people are going to ignore it simply because they have bigger issues to worry about, without COVID they already have to get out of bed and find a way to eat that day.”

“Peyi Lock is basically lockdown. it’s worse than COVID, people care about that much more than COVID. Peyi lock is literally risking your life.”

The focus on multiple life threatening situations at a time being the reason for people to disregard the pandemic is a concept that has a recurring presence both in the literature and the interview data. This is as common as the notion of normalization. From what I was able to assess, this is the only Time my interview pool actually mentioned reasons why they themselves were not focused on the pandemic in short, it was the most honest answer out of all of the answers I have documented.

Lifestyle:

Mentioned 4 times

Lifestyle refers to the belief that Haitian biological resilience is not only a real factor in our protection from COVID19 but also that it is due to the way we live. This includes diet, alcohol consumption, herbal remedies and other traditional health benefits from the way we choose to live. I would argue this was the most hopeful of the themes and the least contested.

“I realize vegetables ar extremem;y commonplace in our diet, in the states for example they don’t eat vegetables the way we do.”

“Microorganisms can’t kill Haitians, which is something said often meaning that something could fall on the floor and we eat it and we’ll be fine.”

“we drink tea, natural remedies, with cinnamon, alcohol every day”

According to the literature, this rationalization is to be expected as it is culturally engrained in us to believe in certain medications or protections supplied by more natural remedies. This is close to our roots as we began from herbal medicine and later adopted western medicine. This did not reappear as often as I believed it would, though it is commonly mentioned in conversations involving the COVID vaccine. It’s often said that we don’t need the vaccine, we have tea. A great number of interviews mentioning these remedies were in fact medical professionals.

Disbelief:

Mentioned 5 times

Theme referring to the full on disbelief and refusal of the COVID pandemic. A decent amount of people genuinely do not believe COVID is real. They firmly believe COVID is either a made up disease or a ploy to control the world. The fact that it reappeared 5 times out of 12, almost half should give a clear depiction of how prominent this theory is.

“When they would respond “no we don’t have COVID19 here, that only exists in other countries. It was crucial to remind the population we did in fact have the virus here within our borders and that we were not exempt from the disease..”

“Haitians do not believe the virus is real, we function normally, we go out, we have fun at parties, hell even I do it. My life did not change at all.”

This recurring theory that COVID does not exist is proof of how little information is actually supplied to and trusted by the Haitian population. this is a reflection of how little people trust their government and how little it actually had an effect on the day to day in Haiti. Though it would be plausible if anyone were to trust their first impressions of Haiti’s response to COVID.

Social:

-mentioned 4 times

Theme referring to a social obligation to continue to function or social division keeping portions of the population safe whilst others were at risk. This theme allows us to gauge the current social understanding of the population in question and the recurring class division acting as a deterrent.

“The statistics say the richer populations are more affected because these are people who are in contact with foreign countries and they are also the ones able to afford to go out to events, parties and other high risk gatherings”

“Some people are catching it and they’re living it like europeans or Americans with a lot of medication and medical intervention. They’re terrified.”

The financial gap and social separation of class play an important role in this theme, this is because in haiti we have prominent narrative of class being a crucial actor in our functioning. This

assumption that division is in a way what is protecting us is extremely present in radicalized separations and often at the detriment of darker complexioned individuals.

Concluding analysis:

through the interview data of a pool of roughly 20 individuals both in single and group interviews it becomes clear that we as a population have no idea why people are ignoring the pandemic, the goal of this study was not to prove why we aren't affected but rather an attempt to measure public opinion. The final consensus for this disregard for the pandemic is that most people assume the population in question does not include themselves. The majority of the interviews were quick to describe a mindset they themselves did not share and referred to the population as "they" or "Haitians". Ironically none of these interviewees were practicing social distancing nor quarantine protocols not because they did not want to but rather because they had to continue functioning to make ends meet. This disconnect from the general public shows how divisive the rationalizations really are. They were built around the narrative of "they" vs "Me" or us. Though never stated contextually It is obvious that this division is built on social class and access to information.

Conclusion:

Through literature and personal experience I have explained what living in haiti is actually like, what constraints and hardships we face daily and the stress levels of the population at all times, life in Haiti is difficult and though our morals are often misguided they keep us moving. We are a population used to struggle, used to pain and suffering with a gift of resilience and the curse of normalization. We are able to accept whatever reality comes our way and find ways to move forward regardless of the difficulties in front of us. We are neglected by our own government, often turned on one another based on prejudice and social factors we do not control. Our main focus is

survival and affluence. We are a resilient people with extreme conditions to face daily and traumatic experiences bind us to one another as we relate to each other's experience. We are heavily reliant on community and our sense of self is often inflated as a means of protecting ourselves from the constant reminder that we may expire at any moment,

A passionate people for sure with a knack for pleasure and necessary escapism to cope with the reality we are born into. As far as COVID19 is concerned most of us have no idea why we don't take this threat seriously, some speculate it's because we have too little information other believe it's because it cannot have a devastating effect on the population as we already used to hardship, many believe it is due to our impoverished lifestyle that we aren't getting sick and dying so we focus on the immediate threats whilst COVID lingers in the background. What we can safely say for sure is that we all acknowledge the way we live and that's about all we can agree on when it comes to the pandemic. The truth is no one knows for a fact why people are ignoring the Pandemic but we all acknowledge that we are ignoring the pandemic. It's a group response much like groupthink (Orwell 1984) where the collective is prioritized and dependent on the continued functioning and so, we will continue to function, no matter how we rationalize it to ourselves. The most obvious forms of rationalization is a separation of self from the ignorant collective as we assume we are either better educated or privy to a truth the others are not.

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