A communitarian solution for Haiti's security: Lessons from Rio de Janeiros' pacifying police

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Abstract Haiti, a small country in the Caribbean, is a symbol of violence and lack of state presence. The police forces operating in the country have long done little to restore peace and are seen as illegitimate by locals. Multiple international attempts failed to control an escalating trajectory of violence, which have long contributed to undermining the capacity of the Haitian government to build up its own structures to react to violence. This paper will offer tentative solutions to unite promising, but underdeveloped ideas experimented in Haiti to solve violent episodes with a communitarian approach to dealing with violence. It does so by analyzing the Pacifying Police Unit (UPP) program, adopted by the city of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil to counter structured violence and insecurity, and how its best practices can be adopted in the Haitian context. Rather than solving major structural problems driving violence in a weak state, the experimental solution put forward for Haiti works toward empowering part of local government's institutions to build up actions in order to alleviate immediate violent episodes that, if successful, could be scaled-up as policy solutions.

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Introduction

Following yet another American intervention in 1994 that overthrown a military government and restored the power of the first elected president of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, civilians welcomed their president with hopes: one of them regarded solutions for a violent society, oppressed by an overwhelmingly violent and official security force, wrote Eirin Mobekk in an article published in 2010.[1] By abolishing the Army in 1995 — creating a police force afterwards (with foreign support and influence) —, Aristide sought to eliminate the power of an institution used to promoting coup d'états, claimed the same author. The idea, welcomed by Haitians who wanted a communitarian police service, ended up achieving neither the first goal nor the latter.[2] Instead, what was left was an untrustworthy police force, seen by locals as illegitimate.[3]

This article will offer tentative solutions to unite an already existing and promising idea involving security databases for the use of a police service that promotes peace. In Rio de Janeiro's favelas, in Brazil, a similar police unit — the Pacifying Police Unit (UPP) — has had promising results in building peace in places used to violence.[4] In an experiment, a Haitian violent community could learn from this program's mistakes and achievements. After assessing the results, the idea can be tweaked and scaled up.

The solution neither has the scope nor the power to address all issues involving security in Haiti. The recipe for that requires a certain level of strength in the government's institution, as put forth by Francis Fukuyama, in which strength means the state's capacity to provide

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[1] E. Mobekk, "International Involvement in Restructuring and Creating Security Forces: The Case of Haiti," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 12, no. 3 (September 2001): 97–114, doi:10.1080/714005396.

[2] E. Mobekk, "International Involvement in Restructuring and Creating Security Forces: The Case of Haiti," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 12, no. 3 (September 2001): 97–114, doi:10.1080/714005396.

[3] James Cockayne, "Winning Haiti's Protection Competition: Organized Crime and Peace Operations Past, Present and Future," *International Peacekeeping* 16, no. 1 (February 2009): 77–99, doi:10.1080/13533310802485476.

[4] "BBC Brasil - Notícias - Três anos de UPPs no Rio: Entenda os avanços e desafios do programa," accessed May 19, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/portuguese/noticias/2011/12/111219_qa_upps_jc.shtml.

citizens with an efficient public service[5] — in our case security —, that Haiti does not yet have as a consequence of French colonization and succeeding international interventions[6].

A botched process

The negative outcome for Haiti's security was deepened by the abolishment of the Army in 1995, according to Mobbek.[7] The same author wrote that former officials received training by the US Army in military facilities in Haiti. Also, Mobbek explained that the future police officers would keep a tradition of using force rather than peacekeeping as a method. Without a legitimate, trained, and accountable police force, the Haitian National Police (PNH) would emerge in the country in 1996 made up by around 1,500 recycled members from the Army, some of them trained by the International Organization of Migration — , which sharpened the division between locals, who never received trainings, and the government.[8] Without a reliable source of information and data on previous Human Rights abuses committed by armies, the new PNH's management had no accountable ways of figuring out capable cops from abusers.[9]

The way the security forces were implemented was a signal, once again, of the international community failure in building a reliable and efficient police unit,[10] in a country that has been falling apart intervention after occupation: in the case of the US, first for almost two decades in the early 20th century, when its Marine troops arrived at the island aimed at

spreading American control over Haiti against European economic interests[11]; later in the middle 1990s to restore democracy and form a state that never was. If the latter interventions had aimed at building a nation-state in Haiti, what was left was a Republic of more 10,000 NGOs, a booming trend that began more than three decades ago.[12]

A violent consequence

The NGOs seemed unable to change the consequences that Haitians face: ever since the creation of the PNH, the Haitian National Police, in the end of 1995, they got used to feeling that they are less safe, and that there is an illegal cooperation between the police and local gangs,[13] the latter being able to accumulate what the police force has never had: trust and legitimacy in their local territories.[14] Homicides have been escalating year by year, reaching a rate of 10 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants in 2012, from 5,1 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants in 2007.[15] In Haiti, Civilians own 200,000 guns, while the government holds 13,000.[16] If guns should not be taken as tools to deal with violence, in Haiti gun-ownership highlight the government's challenges in competing with local militias.

There's also an international competition to provide Haitian with security. The UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) arrived in the country in 2004 with 6,700 units aimed at peacekeeping, but its methods are far from popular and its results misleading: it has

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[11] Edwidge Danticat, "The Long Legacy of Occupation in Haiti," *The New Yorker*, July 28, 2015, http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/haiti-us-occupation-hundred-year-anniversary.

[12] Robert Fatton, "Haiti in the Aftermath of the Earthquake: The Politics of Catastrophe," ed. Garvey Lundy, *Journal of Black Studies* 42, no. 2 (March 2011): 158–85, doi:10.1177/0021934710396369.

[13] J. Christopher Kovats-Bernat, "Factional Terror, Paramilitarism and Civil War in Haiti: The View from Port-Au-Prince, 1994-2004," *Anthropologica* 48, no. 1 (2006): 117, doi:10.2307/25605301.

[14] James Cockayne, "Winning Haiti's Protection Competition: Organized Crime and Peace Operations Past, Present and Future," *International Peacekeeping* 16, no. 1 (February 2009): 77–99, doi:10.1080/13533310802485476.

[15] Numbers were retrieved from: "UNODC Statistics Online - Logged in as Stats Testuserstats," accessed May 20, 2017, https://data.unodc.org/.

[16] "Guns in Haiti — Firearms, Gun Law and Gun Control," accessed May 20, 2017, http://www.gunpolicy.org/firearms/region/haiti.

been undermining an already fragile government in its attempts to combat criminals; it does not have citizens' support,[17] and has favored a flourishing black market.[18] In Havocscope's rank of world's most valuable black markets, Haiti is in the 58th position, ahead of Bolivia — a cocaine producer —,[19] with a black market based on drug trafficking and that's worth 500 million dollars.[20]

A communitarian remedy

Even though NGOs haven't achieved their goals of building a strong state in Haiti — of many of them indeed failed to legalize themselves[21] to take advantage of more than 6 billion dollars in foreign aid, already disbursed to NGOs after the country was struck by an Earthquake in 2010[22] —, their work can be crucial in helping the country establish a better security service, especially in the short run.

There are promising ideas arousing. The Catholic Relief Services (CRS), a humanitarian aid organization, has designed a system to track violent acts in Haiti.[23] The goal is to offer the police and other NGOs a better response in chasing down violent acts by areas. With a collaborative, real-time updated application, the organization has been able to identify areas in Port-au-Prince where criminality is rampant — "pins" are used to label types of crimes

[17] Geoff Burt, "The Battle for Haiti's Security Is Largely Political," *IPI Global Observatory*, accessed May 20, 2017, https://theglobalobservatory.org/2016/07/haiti-philippe-privert-minustah/.

[18] James Cockayne, "Winning Haiti's Protection Competition: Organized Crime and Peace Operations Past, Present and Future," *International Peacekeeping* 16, no. 1 (February 2009): 77–99, doi:10.1080/13533310802485476.

[19] "Country Risk Ranking – Impact of Security Threats to Countries," accessed May 20, 2017, http://www.havocscope.com/country-profile/.

[20] "Haiti Security Threats – Data and Information," accessed May 20, 2017, http://www.havocscope.com/tag/haiti/.

[21] Mark Schuller, "Seeing Like a 'Failed' NGO: Globalization–s Impacts on State and Civil Society in Haiti," *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 30, no. 1 (2007): 67–89.

[22] "Key Statistics | Haiti Relief," accessed May 20, 2017, http://www.lessonsfromhaiti.org/lessons-from-haiti/key-statistics/#toc-1-b.

[23] Sony Belizaire, "Haiti Security Risk Management in Red Area Project Development" (Catholic Relief Services), accessed May 20, 2017, http://proceedings.esri.com/library/userconf/proc15/papers/125_16.pdf.

committed in a map.[24] The existence of such a database can help the police chase down violent acts by areas, and international missions and other NGOs to channel their efforts toward peacekeeping and security assistance.

A parallel step is to establish a communitarian police base in regions where crime is rampant — the location can be decided according to the evidence collected by the Catholic Relief Services' database. This police service finds inspiration in a project launched in Rio de Janeiro in 2008. Called Pacifying Police Unit (UPP in Portuguese), its goal was to take over "favela's control from the organized crime, paving the way for establishing security and social services in these areas that count neither with social development nor proper infrastructure,[25] and that resembles many of Haiti's landscapes and shantytowns. A study on the UPPs has shown that the program was launched in a top-down approach with different phases of implementation.[26]

According to the report, a tactic military intervention was launched to "expel" criminals from the region with the use of force. That was followed by a stabilizing operation that paved the way for recently trained peacekeeping police officers to settle down in the region, offering social services to the community. They received bonuses in cash, were not tied to the military police structure in Brazil, and had recently "graduated" from the academia — the goal was to avoid allocating experienced police officers, whose mentality was rooted in the traditional use of force.[27] The model's supporters claimed it helped make the police less violent and closer to

[24] Sony Belizaire, "Haiti Security Risk Management in Red Area Project Development" (Catholic Relief Services), accessed May 20, 2017, http://proceedings.esri.com/library/userconf/proc15/papers/125_16.pdf.

[25] André RODRIGUES, Raíza SIQUEIRA, and Mauricio LISSOVSKY, "Unidades de Policia Pacificadora: Debates E Reflexoes.," 2012.

[26] RELATÓRIO FINAL, "'The Hill's Owners': An explanatory analysis of the impact of the Pacifying Police Unit (UPPs) in Rio de Janeiro," accessed May 20, 2017, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Eduardo_Ribeiro6/publication/292154457_Os_Donos_do_Morro_Uma_an alise_exploratoria_do_impacto_das_Unidades_de_Policia_Pacificadora_UPPs_no_Rio_de_Janeiro/links/56ab6 68308aed5a0135c1194.pdf.

[27] RELATÓRIO FINAL, "'The Hill's Owners': An explanatory analysis of the impact of the Pacifying Police Unit (UPPs) in Rio de Janeiro," accessed May 20, 2017, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Eduardo_Ribeiro6/publication/292154457_Os_Donos_do_Morro_Uma_an alise_exploratoria_do_impacto_das_Unidades_de_Policia_Pacificadora_UPPs_no_Rio_de_Janeiro/links/56ab6 68308aed5a0135c1194.pdf.

the community.[28] According to an article published by a Brazilian magazine, the rate of homicides fell 66% between 2008 and 2014, and crimes involving the police plummeted by 91%.[29] Critiques of UPPs declared that the bases were established without previous participation from the communities, leading to a lack of trust in the service in some more than 20 UPPs.[30]

A similar model can help Haiti diminish their rates of violence and empower local citizens with public services that otherwise would be unreachable. However, instead of imposing the police in the area as it happened in Brazil, the NGO should first identify local civil leaders who would be interested in participating in the service. With their support, potential young applicants to the PNH could be attracted, trained with a humanitarian and peacekeeping approach, in which they would be encouraged to believe that their power is to ease their neighbors' access to the public services (information on where to obtain a document) and social activities (such as sports or whatever activity that is liked by locals) and mediate local conflicts — acting as if they were local mayors supported by the community. The more such activities are done, the more bonuses could be offered to them in cash as awards as an incentive.

A local campaign in which the NGO stress the idea that these peacekeepers are citizens' allies and are there to help them is essential and was identified as a key component of the UPPs.[31] This trust-building process is supported by a study which says that in Haiti's streets

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[28] "BBC Brasil - Notícias - Três anos de UPPs no Rio: Entenda os avanços e desafios do programa," accessed May 19, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/portuguese/noticias/2011/12/111219_qa_upps_jc.shtml.

[29] "A Vocação Pacífica Das UPPs No Rio de Janeiro," *Revistaepoca.globo.com*, accessed May 20, 2017, http://epoca.globo.com/ideias/choque-de-realidade/noticia/2015/04/vocacao-pacifica-das-upps-no-rio-de-janeiro.html.

[30] RELATÓRIO FINAL, "'The Hill's Owners': An explanatory analysis of the impact of the Pacifying Police Unit (UPPs) in Rio de Janeiro," accessed May 20, 2017, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Eduardo_Ribeiro6/publication/292154457_Os_Donos_do_Morro_Uma_an alise_exploratoria_do_impacto_das_Unidades_de_Policia_Pacificadora_UPPs_no_Rio_de_Janeiro/links/56ab6 68308aed5a0135c1194.pdf.

[31] André RODRIGUES, Raíza SIQUEIRA, and Mauricio LISSOVSKY, "Unidades de Policia Pacificadora: Debates E Reflexoes.," 2012.

the "feeling" of having power plays an important role among citizens on the street.[32] Encouraging this feeling in the right way in a communitarian police force may convert potential criminals or bad cops into peacekeepers.

Conclusion

It's worth experimenting the idea in small scale, even if it is to alleviate part of a broader and more complex issue on security in Haiti. Without a revision in the criminal code in Haiti, that dates to the 19th century[33] — thus in effect before the Human Rights declarations was established in 1948[34] —; without protection to judges; without a long-lasting humanitarian training for all the police officers[35]; without prisons that offer the minimum rights to detainees[36] as defined by the UN,[37] like giving detainees the right to a public hearing right after an arrest, Haiti's rule of law will not be fully achieved. But as the country is needy for short-term solutions, a build-trusting communitarian police service backed up in a promising and innovative work done by local NGOs can be a first step in this direction.

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[32] Chelsey Kivland, "Becoming a Force in the Zone: Hedonopolitics, Masculinity, and the Quest for Respect on Haiti's Streets," *Cultural Anthropology* 29, no. 4 (November 10, 2014): 672–98, doi:10.14506/ca29.4.05.

[33] 1. "Haiti – Pretrial Rights International," accessed May 20, 2017, http://www.pretrialrights.org/haiti/.

[34] UN General Assembly. United Nations, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," 1948, http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf.

[35] E. Mobekk, "International Involvement in Restructuring and Creating Security Forces: The Case of Haiti," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 12, no. 3 (September 2001): 97–114, doi:10.1080/714005396.

[36] "Haiti – Pretrial Rights International," accessed May 20, 2017, http://www.pretrialrights.org/haiti/.

[37] "United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for Non-Custodial Measures (The Tokyo Rules)," accessed April 14, 2017, http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/45/a45r110.htm.

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