

Rank versus Normative Commitment among Haitian Peasants: A case study of Reciprocity in Agrarian Festive Labor

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Contrary to descriptions found in the literature on agrarian labor, this study reveals the existence of a stringent norm of reciprocity in a non-reciprocal labor event, festive labor, usually coined konbit in Haiti. By redefining the Haitian konbit as a work party exchange among cultivators with both food and labor as currencies, it uses a representative sample of 840 peasants in five watersheds of the Central Plateau to show how members of reciprocal labor groups (locally called sosye) sustain cultivators' commitment to the norm by putting pressure on their peers to contribute konbit, regardless of the latter's rank, as they expect to be hired for future jobs by konbit participants.

Keywords: konbit, agrarian labor, labor réciprocity, peasant economies, sosye

Introduction

As compared to other Caribbean and Latin American countries, the cultivation of small and diversely located agricultural plots with little financial and technological means stands out as an essential characteristic of the Haitian peasantry (Mintz, 1974: p. 275; Murray, 1977). As a consequence, Haitian peasants rely on the use of different forms of labor to cultivate their land.¹ Thus, to secure extra household labor, a peasant may choose to sharecrop his plot; buy labor either individually (on a daily basis or on a task basis) or collectively from a squad of laborers; exchange labor against labor with other agriculturalist peers on a rotating basis (or *sosye* in local lexicon); or organize a festive work party (locally coined *konbit*²) in which he has to buy food and beverages for his laborers-guests. In short, peasants exchange labor against labor, money, or any other material amenities or services, either individually or collectively³ (Laguette, 1975; Murray, 1977; Pierre, 1992).

The following essay focuses on reciprocity of festive labor work parties in the Central Plateau of Haiti. I have chosen this area because in addition to having data available for analysis, it is similar to other regions of the country. I focus on festive work party because it has been depicted in the literature on agrarian economy as being typically non-reciprocal (Moore, 1975; Patterson, 1984; Suchara, 1983), although students of peasant culture have maintained that reciprocity is “a central moral formula for interpersonal conduct ...” in peasant economies (Scott, 1976; Weller and Guggenheim, 1989, p. 24). In this vein, M.P. Moore's declaration about the non-reciprocal nature of *konbit* against that of a *well-off* peasant from the Central Plateau of Haiti is about its *typical* reciprocal nature:

Despite the multiplicity of the differences between exchange and festive labour...the essential distinction between them lies in the form of remuneration for attendance at work parties. In the case of exchange labour (and especially group exchange), the reward is simply reciprocal amounts of labor, and the reciprocity is precise; the immediate rewards for festive labour are food, drink and entertainment... and *reciprocity is weak or absent* (1975, p. 273; emphasis added).

For the well-off peasant:

Konbit establishes something like a communal link between people. It is like being associates (*sosye*). After a cultivator has participated in your konbit, whenever he organized one, you should go to his in return... (Translation of an interview as of February, 1991).

If it were not for social rank consideration, such a description would fit well with the one Michel Laguerre (1975, pp. 24-26) proposed in his stimulating essay on Haitian traditional work groups where he declared that:

The konbit is not a simple gift of one's labor to a landowner. This gift requires from the latter a reciprocal gift, effective or latent... *In the konbit, we are at the heart of a system of reciprocity*... The laborer who took part in a friend's konbit expects that the latter in turn will come and help when he organizes his own. Such expectations is understood and carried out *among peasants of the same social standing*⁴ (emphasis added).

Thus, to be sure, reciprocity in cultivators' expectations does not preclude konbit work parties from being asymmetrical. It all depends on the rank of the cultivators involved in such transactions, as Mitchell (1991, p. 205) reminds us: "Reciprocity relationships among even ostensible equals are also frequently asymmetrical..." In the same vein, studying the issue of rank and conformity or non-conformity to group norms, such as sociological theorist William Goode (1978, pp. 23-24) has observed that "people of higher rank can get away with more deviation... [because] they have more resources with which to protect themselves when they are accused of not conforming." Laguerre (1975: p.16) has explicitly made the case for the Haitian peasantry when he said that the low class had "no necessary means to organize konbit" but participated "in konbit organized by others;" the middle class organized konbit with little cash and went to konbit; and the high class only organized but did not go to konbit.

Contrary to Laguerre's evocative prolegomenon, food and drinks provided by the host to his guests for their labor have led many students of agrarian economy to retain erratically the konbit only as a punctual, unilateral and asymmetrical event, thereby overlooking its concealed reciprocal nature. In what follows, first, I will revisit the Haitian konbit by questioning its alleged non-reciprocal nature. Second, I will contrast the effect of the norm of reciprocity with that of rank on konbit transactions. Finally, in line with the declarations above, I shall see whether commitment to the norm of reciprocity, which is the core of agrarian reciprocal or exchange labor group (or *sosye*), ramifies itself out into festive work parties, regardless of the cultivators economic rank.

Festive Labor Party and Reciprocal or Exchange Labor Groups in Agrarian Economies

Students of various agrarian economies from Asia, Africa, and Latin America generally agree that the exchange of labor against labor, or food and beverages against labor are fundamental criteria of respectively reciprocal labor and festive labor (Moore, 1975; Ames, 1950; Herskovits, 1952; Siebel and Massing, 1974; Orlove, 1977; Patterson, 1984; Suehara, 1983). Thus, in the 1950s, Ames (1950, pp. 228-229) noted that among the Woolof of Gambia and Senegal, festive labor participants (*kompin*) performed agricultural work for a host for food, kola nuts, and cigarettes, while headed by a chief (the *bota*). Two years later, Herskovits (1952, pp.105-06) found the *hando* (a reciprocal labor group) and the *hawek* (a non-reciprocal labor organization) in Indonesia. Similarly, in the 1970s Siebel and Massing (1974, pp. 49-56) reported that in Liberia, reciprocal labor was practiced among the tribes of the western zones (Mano, Kpella, Gbandi) and festive

labor among the eastern ethnic groups (Kru, Sapo, Kran); and Orlove (1977: pp. 204-205) described how in the Andean communities labor was also exchanged against labor (*Ayna*) or against food (*Mink'a*). More recently, after studying the *Bidayuk* of Bau in Malaysia, Lynn D. Patterson (1984: pp. 55-56) observed that their labor exchange system was characterized by "cooperation between households" (festive labor) and "reciprocal exchange" which required "exact repayment in kind." For her, this system fostered a series of rights and obligations which embedded local households into a wider support network.

In the same vein, based on his field research in *Collectivé Buloho* in northeastern Zaire, Tatsuro Suehara (1983, pp. 67-70) presented a threefold description of labor exchange: the "*likilimba*" whereby labor was exchanged against labor with no formal contract (reciprocal labor); the "*lukoo*" which was a "gift of labor" that younger members of the village gave to the eldest; and the "*kwanza*" or an exchange of labor for food and drink exclusively (i.e., konbit). Although he described more extensive and various forms of reciprocity in *Quinoa* (Peru), William P. Mitchell (1991) also discussed the differences between *ayni*, "a form of balanced reciprocity used to obtain services and goods," and the *minka*, which is a festive work group used by large landowners against music, coca leaves, alcohol, and food to obtain labor. While predicting the decline of these two forms of cooperative labor on the basis of the monetization of local economies (Mitchell, 1991) or the communal shrinkage of such material resources as land and labor power (Erasmus, 1956; Swindell, 1985; Moore, 1975), students of agrarian labor contend that festive work parties occur mainly between well-off and poor cultivators whereas exchange labor takes place among economic equals (Moore, 1975; Siebel and Massing, 1974; Mitchell, 1991).

The Haitian Case

Students of Haitian culture have depicted festive work party (locally named konbit) generally with the same perspective, which is a non-reciprocal, nonsymmetrical collective labor event whereby a host (usually a well-off cultivator) provides obligatorily food and drink to his guests (usually poor cultivators) for a working day (Herskovits, 1952; Métraux, 1951; Erasmus, 1956). As opposed to the konbit work party, there is a much smaller and horizontal exchange labor group where reciprocity occurs on a rotating basis without any obligation of food and beverages (Erasmus, 1965; Métraux, 1951; Murray, 1977).

Contrary to this tendency, Laguerre (1975, pp. 24-26) maintains that reciprocity of festive work party exists even though he lacked data to support his view and did not specify in which types of konbit reciprocity occurs. He categorized four types of konbit according to the density of relations among participants under the labels of: "direct invitation," "opened invitation," "mixed invitation" and "indirect invitation" (Laguerre 1975: pp. 11-15).⁵ For instance, in the case of direct invitation, relations among participants are dense because the host invites his parents and close friends; whereas in the case of open invitation, the relations are loose because the guests usually bring along with them other non-kin participants. Moreover, to secure labor, a looking-for-labor-power host quite often accepts and hires an agricultural squad along with other guests while at the same time providing food and beverages for everyone (Laguerre, 1975, p.25).

As opposed to the konbit work party, there exist in Haiti small exchange labor groups of no more than seven cultivators, largely based on trust, where reciprocity of labor occurs on a rotating basis among cultivators without any obligation of food and beverages (Erasmus 1965; Métraux, 1951; Murray, 1977, pp. 280-290). Locally named "*sosye*" in the Central Plateau, these groups ensured labor reciprocity among their members by ostracizing those who deviated from the norm

of reciprocity. Selling labor collectively as a squad with the pay going alternately to group members is one of the main characteristics of those groups. Thus, their prime function is to rapidly raise an important chunk of cash for group members (Murray, 1977; Pierre, 1992, p. 146). “Networks of norms and trust, which tie members of those groups “facilitate cooperation for mutual benefits” (White and Smucker, 1998, p. 3). Hence, while redefining festive labor reciprocity, the following essay in accordance with Goodes’ role strain theory (Goode, 1968) that cultivators’ individual commitment to returning agrarian festive work parties is not enough to explain konbit exchange transactions as an ongoing process. Consequently, social commitment as expressed by pressure coming from reciprocal labor groups on their affiliated members¹⁹ also play a role inasmuch as it helps maintain conformity to the norm of reciprocity in konbit exchanges in spite of cultivators’ rank, which is a potential source of deviation from the norm (Goode, 1978, pp.23-24).

Festive Labor Party Revisited

In field observations that I carried out in the Central Plateau of Haiti during the years of 1987, 1992, and elsewhere in 1998, revealed that in a konbit, many of the guests expected not only food and drink but also labor in return from their hosts. Whoever was a host today was expected to become a guest tomorrow, regardless of his economic rank. I witnessed the continued declaration of the well off peasant:

Question: What if you don't show up [after someone has come to your konbit]?

Response: There is nothing wrong provided there was a good excuse beforehand. The host will not blame you; he won't say anything against you since you did not lie to him. He will realize you were willing... He did not see you; it wasn't your fault.

Question: What if you had lied to him?

Response: He will still invite you another time... just to see if you are reliable. If you lie a third time, he will never invite you to his konbit work party, you and he won't have anything in common anymore. And, whenever you organize a konbit, he will not show up... which means the two of you are no longer friends. You do not want to cooperate with him... He too will do the same (translation of verbal communication, Feb. 1991).

Such findings run against all expectations that one could draw from the literature on agrarian labor. A twenty-five year old cultivator weeded his red beans gardens in December 1989 with a small festive work party of ten workers, five of whom were members of his sosye group. Augustmé reciprocated five konbit, three of them to his sosye peers. He did not return konbit to the other participants because he claimed not to have been informed on time. This case is an illustration of many others. In the Central Plateau, in addition to receiving food and beverages, the guests also expected the host to provide him with labor at a future date. Therefore, a host most likely will end up providing not only food but also labor in the long run if only because he wants to obligate others to return labor he previously invested in their gardens.⁶ Laguerre (1975: p. 6) found the same tendency in other regions of Haiti: Mirebalais (Center Department), Léogane (West), Pont Sondé (Artibonite), Fonds-des-Nègres (South), and Ile de la Gonâve (West).

Such patterns of conduct in konbit exchange fits theoretically, on the one hand, with what Molm, Quist and Wiseley (1994: p. 102) noted recently about reciprocity:

Reciprocity consists of “three elements: (1) each actor's behavior is *contingent* on the other's (2) acts are repaid by *functionally equivalent* acts (good by good ...) and (3) the values of the outcomes received by each actor are approximately *equal*”.

On the other hand, it also fits empirically with what Laguerre (1975: p. 24) observed, that is: “[konbit] reciprocity can exist at four possible levels: labor-power, money, material amenities, or favors... The most important reciprocity is that of labor power against labor power...”

In light of the above, festive work party has to be seen as an event with another event as “functional equivalent,” both events being organized by two sets of cultivators whose level of commitment to the norm of reciprocity forcibly varies.⁷ Thus, Moore errs by equating social relations among people (as it occurs in reciprocal labor group and konbit) with their value orientation (people's commitment to the norm of reciprocity) across two different kinds of collective labor transactions: either konbit or exchange labor. His perspective goes against that of such theorists as Goode (1968, p. 102) and Wallace (1974). The first because he advocates that priority be given to the process of exchange transaction qua exchange over normative commitment (or value orientation) in explaining social conduct; the second because he considers as social “who is doing what with or against whom” and as cultural (or normative) “who is thinking, feeling or perceiving with or against whom⁸.” Following the above, one can see that the issue of reciprocity should be recast in such a way as to *not* be coterminous or fused with the nature of a particular group (sosye versus konbit). Whereas an exchange labor (or reciprocal labor) group can be used as proxy for *social* commitment to the norm of reciprocity, it cannot be used as a standard to measure the level of reciprocity in konbit.

Thus, rather than assuming that reciprocity is loose or absent in konbit and stringent in exchange labor groups as Moore suggested above, the perspective which is taken here will analyze konbit transactions by looking at what happens between actors with forcibly varying levels of *personal* commitment to the norm of reciprocity, *as expressed by their status as konbit organizers or konbit contributors*. Thus, instead of taking reciprocity in festive labor as a given, it becomes rather an emergent property of exchanges occurring between konbit organizers. This new perspective will search for the elasticity of the reciprocity process in konbit transactions among sets of cultivators with forcibly differing ranks and personal commitments to the norm of reciprocity. Therefore, one can talk about reciprocity proper in konbit where cultivators are both organizers of, and contributors to, konbit with food and beverages being exchanged against labor.

To what extent did commitment to the norm of reciprocity (as indicated individually by cultivators’ status as konbit organizers or konbit contributors) sustain konbit exchanges? Were konbit organizers more likely to contribute konbit after they had organized one, regardless of their rank? And, were well off cultivators less likely to contribute konbit than their counterparts if they had organized one, even if they were affiliated with a reciprocal labor group? Did group commitment to the norm of reciprocity (as indicated by sosye membership), countervail the potential subverting effect of rank upon konbit exchange?

This set of questions leads to the analysis of the dynamics interplay of konbit contribution and konbit organization in the light of local stratification system and local groups’ commitment to reciprocity. Thus, if, for example, one were to place organizers and non-organizers of konbit under different conditions with respect to their affiliation with sosye, and could show that both tended to contribute konbit less as non-members, one would be in a position to confirm definitely that sosye group pressure (which originated outside cultivators’ statuses as organizers or non-organizers of konbit) was responsible for konbit reciprocity or unilateral konbit contribution and not their personal commitment to the norm of reciprocity⁹ (Blau, 1983: pp. 76-98).

Working Hypotheses

From the above, I draw the following two hypotheses: Since members of *sosye* were the prime advocates of labor reciprocity, I expect those who had organized *konbit* to contribute *konbit* more than those who did not (H-1). Since people with larger material means can get by with more deviation than others, I expect them to contribute *konbit* less after they had organized one, even if they were members of exchange labor groups (H-2). As stated earlier, these hypotheses will be tested in the context of the Central Plateau of Haiti.

Research Setting

The Central Plateau, one of the nine geographical departments of Haiti, is located in the Center Department.¹⁰ Its population numbered some 485,725 inhabitants in 1987, that is roughly 8% of the country's total population of 6.4 million.¹¹ Of the seventeen watersheds delineated by the Organization of American States (OAS) mission in the Central Plateau of Haiti, I carried out field research in five of these: Cange, Félician, Thomonde, Rio Frio and Fond Bleu. The first four watersheds form the lowlands and Fond Bleu, the highlands. About 70% of the local residents lived in the lowlands (from Cange to Rio Frio) and 30% in the highlands, Fond Bleu. All of those watersheds regrouped many villages; one of the three villages located in the highland of Fond Bleu by the name of Figuier stood out as being a reservoir of sellers of labor. Figuier harbored a more extensive collective practice of labor and a larger pool of food staples as compared to the other villages; according to local residents, it was better off on the whole.

The data revealed that the heads of households cultivated an average of 1.71 *carreaux*¹² in the lowlands, and up to 2.64 in the highlands; cultivated, on the average, 2.27 plots in the lowlands, and up to 2.83 in the highlands. About one half of the respondents (N=840) were small peasant landowners with no more than two *carreaux* of land; one eighth of the sample was large landowners with more than two *carreaux*; however, a substantial minority of cultivators (14%) were owners and renters, or small owner-sharecroppers. Most of the watersheds' residents grew corn, sorghum, beans, sugar cane and coffee on small, scattered plots (of less than one hectare) using rudimentary technology such as hoes and machetes and sold their produce on three local markets of which two were located in the highlands, Madame Joie and Maissade, and Thomonde in the lowlands.

Research Methods

In 1987, I carried out a rural socioeconomic survey of 840 people over a seven day period in five of the above watersheds on behalf of a local organization (Haitian Center for the Development of Human Resources), which had selected them as being the most representative of the seventeen of the Central Plateau watersheds. After drawing a systematic sample from an incomplete listing of the heads of households, I led a team of 30 local interviewers that I had previously trained into conducting questionnaire interviews in the lowlands and in the highlands. To account for "interval deviations" in the sampling method, an experienced statistician weighted the sample according to type of soil and size of population. Thus, the team collected a total of 840 heads of household questionnaires with 60% in the lowlands and 40% in the highlands. Preliminary analysis of the data led me to carry out qualitative interviews on various labor transactions three years later in order to depict their inner dynamics.

A Creole questionnaire facilitated its use by the local interviewers whose level of education did not go beyond high school. All labor forms were measured over the agricultural season preceding the interviews and coded as dummy variables. For instance, for reciprocal labor and

festive work party, I directly asked the following questions: (1) did you participate in any *sosye* this season? (2) did you participate in any *konbit* this season? and (3) did you have people coming in any *konbit* this season? Positive answers received a score of one; negative answers a score of zero. I built an economic scale to analyze the data on the basis of land that cultivators bought and inherited¹³ and their main gardens because of the special "treat" they usually gave to that plot. Animals and tools¹⁴ that cultivators owned were added to the scale, after I dichotomized them as one (1) indicating ownership of a tool or animal and zero (0) non ownership. The access to cash scale built with those items had a reliability of 0.62.¹⁵ The scale varied from 1 to 12 with a mean of 4.84 and a standard deviation of 2.05. Values 1 to 4 (below the mean) indicate low access to cash (N=407). Values of 5 and 6 (up to one standard deviation above the mean) indicate medium access to cash (N=229), and the values of 7 to 12 (more than one standard deviations above the mean) high access to cash (N=191).

Findings and Discussion

Overall Labor Situation in the Central Plateau

Whereas about one-third of all cultivators (32%) sold labor, close to one half of them reported having bought labor (45%). Overall, there were locally more buyers than sellers of labor, the reason being cultivators could go elsewhere to sell labor. Those who bought labor were roughly equal in the highlands and in the lowlands (respectively 45%, N=335; and 42%, N=503). Those who sold labor in the highlands represented more than twice those who did in the lowlands (respectively 50%, N¹⁶=334; and 19%, N=494). The general availability of food in the highlands added to its "surplus" of manpower which led to a rather extensive practice of collective labor in one of the highland villages, Figuier. Of all the cultivators in the watersheds studied, about half (52%, N=837) had organized *konbit*; close to half (46%) were members of reciprocal labor groups; two fifths (42%) had contributed *konbit*. There again, the highlands differed from the lowlands: in the highlands, almost two thirds contributed *konbit* (63%), four fifths (83%) organized *konbit*, two thirds (67%) were affiliated with an exchange labor group, whereas in the lowlands, only one third (32%) organized *konbit*, one third were members of reciprocal and less than one third (28%) contributed *konbit*.

The Haitian Konbit

I will depict the Haitian *konbit* by contrasting it to the Haitian *sosye* since both are collective labor endeavors, which gives rise to the disbursement of material amenities. Melville Herskovits (1952: pp. 100-01), for example, provides a vivid description of the traditional Haitian *konbit* in the following terms:

A working party is organized when a person having a field to be cleared passes the word that he wishes to have a *combite*, as such a group is termed, to come do the work. At the same time the host prepares food for a feast... As the workers gather, their labor is supervised by one individual... The workers, each with his hoe, form a line, and there is always at least one, sometimes two and, in a very large *combite*, three drums to mark the rhythm for the songs and to set the beat for the hoes. In a single afternoon a field of several acres can be completely denuded... by a group of sixty-five workers (emphasis added).

The traditional *konbit*, as described by Herskovitz, was still in existence in the Central Plateau (CP) under the name of *gwo konbit* (large *konbit*). As a voodoo priest and traditional carnival band leader of 51 years of age who resided in the lowlands, Marc declared having organized in 1990 a *konbit* of 60 people. On the other hand, as a younger cultivator of 21 affiliated

with the Baptist Church, Jacques organized at the same time a small konbit with about 17 people in the lowlands, many of whom were members of his sosye group. These two konbit organizers reported having musicians playing in their festive work parties; they both hired *travayè*¹⁷ to polish up the job done by the konbit.

Whereas in the Central Plateau of Haiti a konbit was generally an occasional gathering of cultivators, a sosye was a group of no more than seven people who were exchanging labor among themselves. Participants in a konbit exchanged a day of labor for food and beverages; members affiliated with a sosye rotated days of labor among themselves *qua* cultivators with food and beverages being optional. In addition to raising cash, sosye members very often sold their labor as squad and rotated the total cash collected among them. The differences extended also to the functions these two labor groups fulfilled. Cultivators mobilized a konbit work party in the Central Plateau when they needed to rapidly remove hard weeds from their plots. They usually divided the workload among themselves by using a rope to ensure that all participants contribute their share to the total labor output needed for the job (*bay pak*). Such a strategy allowed them to control free riders and hangers on;¹⁸ nothing of that sort occurred in a sosye, since it had a small size and the work performance was based largely on trust. Thus, the contribution of the latter became readily visible as well as their skills and reliability as agriculturalists. The events, which took place during a konbit, also showed its difference with sosye. Sosye members cooked their own food and did not hire musicians while they were working, whereas konbit participants did not cook their own food but had women doing the job and usually hired musicians to mark the rhythm of their work. In spite of all the differences, there was still some common ground between reciprocal labor group and festive labor work party. Although trust was not as binding in konbit as it was in sosye, local informants maintained it also sustained the process of reciprocity in konbit. To be sure, for the exchange of konbit between cultivators to withstand, one can presume that it had to be based on a certain amount of trust and commitment; however, to what extent were these criteria enough? The following analysis will put such speculation to the test.

Testing Hypotheses about Konbit Reciprocity:

Hypothesis 1

To reiterate, H-1 stipulated that konbit reciprocity was a positive function of cultivators' membership in exchange labor. Thus, I expect members of sosye who had organized konbit to contribute konbit more than non-members.

Table 1: Percent Contributing Festive by Organizing Festive by Membership in Reciprocal Labor Group

		Members	Non-Members	Percentage Difference	
	M.			Total	Member-Non
Organizers		86% (289)	23% (149)	64% (438)	+63%
Non-Organizers		38% (97)	10% (305)	17% (402)	+28%
Total		74% (386)	15% (454)	41% (840)	+59%
Percentage Difference Organ.-Non Organiz.		+47%	+13%	+47%	
Gamma		.81	.44		
Chi square		.00	.00		

Table 1 column 3 shows that organizers of konbit contributed konbit almost four times as often as non-organizers (64% versus 17%; rows 1 and 2). The strong overall effect of being an organizer of konbit or contributing konbit is indicated by the total percentage difference between the two rows (+47%; see column 3, row 4). Such results support Laguerre's thesis about the existence of an *individual* commitment to the norm of reciprocity in konbit as well as the declarations of Central Plateau informants. However, factoring the sample according to whether people were members or non-members of reciprocal labor groups, one can see that the effect stays the same among the members (+47%; see column 1, row 4), whereas it declines sharply among the non-members (+13%; see column 2, row 4). Thus, the strong positive effect of organizing konbit on contributing konbit was highly conditioned by cultivators' being members in a reciprocal labor group. Such an effect is social inasmuch as it was the group commitment that reinforced cultivators tendency to return konbit (86% versus 38% as opposed to 23% versus 10%; see columns 1 and 2). That is the reason why, once the social effect is removed (via non-membership), the individual level of commitment to the norm of reciprocity (as expressed by cultivators' status as organizers of konbit) dramatically decreased (from 86% to 23%). The above considerations strongly support hypothesis 1 (H-1) which predicted that sosye members would act as advocates in ensuring konbit reciprocity.¹⁹

The fact that among non-organizers of konbit (row 2), group commitment to the norm of reciprocity (as expressed by affiliation with a sosye group) increased cultivators' contribution to konbit (38% versus 10%) had to do with the competitive edge that members of sosye gained on the rural labor market as agricultural workers who sold labor in squads. Indeed, group commitment to contributing konbit had a very positive substantial effect (+28%), holding constant individual status as non-organizers of konbit. On the other hand, looking at row 1 of table 1, one can see that the effect of being a sosye member on contributing konbit among organizers of konbit (in other words, konbit reciprocity) was very strong, as accused by the high percentage difference between members and non-members (+63%). This is due to the fact that members of reciprocal labor group contributed konbit almost four times more than non-members (86% versus 23%; row 1). This finding is an extension of Laguerre insofar as it takes the effect of labor exchange-group membership (i.e. social commitment) on konbit reciprocity. But what explained empirically such a result?

To be sure, being a member of sosye increased the chance of participating in konbit since the demands to do so could come from various close associates who themselves were contributing. Given the small size of exchange groups (no more than 5 to 7 members), the constraint to reciprocate konbit may have been very strong on each member to conform to the will of the group. After all, participating in a konbit was not an isolated act: as members of the same squad, participants joined their sosye group in contributing konbit because they probably expected to be hired as laborers by konbit organizers. This interpretation is valid insofar as the effect of membership in a reciprocal group upon konbit contribution, among konbit organizers, got stronger as their socioeconomic rank increased. To show such a pattern, I inserted the rank of konbit organizers in the original three-way relationship; this allows me at the same time to test the second hypothesis that reciprocity of konbit would vary with rank.

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis stipulates that reciprocity of konbit would vary with rank. More precisely, high ranked cultivators should be less likely than low ranked to contribute konbit after they had organized one, even if they were members of reciprocal labor groups. To test this hypothesis, access to cash was introduced into the original three-way relationship so that comparisons could be made across rank, while controlling for reciprocal labor affiliation.

Table 2a: Percent Contributing Festive by Festive Work Parties by Access to Cash and Reciprocal Labor

Panel A : Non-member of Reciprocal

	Access to Cash				5	Percentage Difference
	1	2	3	4		
	Low	Medium	High	Total		
1) Organizers :	33%	25%	15%	24%	-18%	
	(45)	(44)	(59)	(148)		
2) Non-Organizers :	11%	10%	10%	11%	-1%	
	(167)	(61)	(71)	(299)		
Total	16%	16%	12%	15%	-4%	
	(212)	(105)	(130)	(447)		
3) Percentage Difference: Non-Organizers	+22%	+15%	+5%	+13%		
Tau b:	.00	.04	.25			

Panel B : Member of Reciprocal

	Access to Cash				Percentage Difference
	Low	Medium	High	Total	
4) Organizers :	88%	76%	94%	80%	+6%
	(133)	(91)	(54)	(298)	
5) Non-Organizers :	55%	13%	0%	38%	-55%
	(58)	(31)	(6)	(95)	
Total	78%	60%	85%	69%	+7%
	(191)	(122)	(60)	(393)	
6) Percentage Difference: Non-organizers:	+33%	+63%	+94%	+42%	
Tau b:	.00	.00	.00		

Table 2a shows that, among members of reciprocal labor group (panel b), high ranked konbit organizers (contrary to hypothesis 2) contributed konbit *more* than low and medium ranked (respectively 94%, 88% and 76%; compare columns 1, 2, 3 and row 4). Such a pattern runs contrary to all expectations. Why would high ranked organizers of konbit end up contributing konbit more than low ranked, once they were members of reciprocal labor groups? Among members of reciprocal labor groups who had organized konbit, the effect of high rank increased but only slightly konbit contribution (+ 6%; row 4, last column of panel b), that is, konbit reciprocity. Such a conclusion gives a severe blow to hypothesis 2, which predicted that high ranked konbit organizers would be more prone not to reciprocate konbit, even if they were members of reciprocal labor groups. This conclusion stands out even more, when one looks at the effect of rank on contributing konbit among organizers who were *not* members of reciprocal labor groups (panel a). Indeed, one can see the opposite pattern prevailed: konbit contribution overall decreased as a result of rank differentials (-18%; row 1, last column). Thus, high ranked konbit organizers contributed konbit less than low and medium ranked (respectively 15%, 33%, and 25%), a pattern which supports hypothesis 2. Thus, as expected, access to cash had a negative effect on konbit reciprocity, but only among non-members of reciprocal labor groups. Indeed, the more organizers of konbit had access to cash, the less they contributed konbit, provided they were not members of reciprocal labor groups. The declining level of konbit reciprocity (not the effect as indicated by percentage differences), however, tended to be low as compared with that of panel b (see 15%, 25%, 33% versus respectively 94%, 76%, 88%). Such a finding helps specify the key place that reciprocal labor groups have in the understanding of konbit reciprocity dynamics; they seem to have made all the differences. Still, why would high ranked cultivators reciprocate konbit more than low or medium rankers, once they were affiliated with an exchange labor group? This finding goes against *all* theoretical expectations in view of the fact that high rankers should resist pressure on contributing konbit. To interpret such findings, one has to contrast the *effects* of membership in sosye versus that of rank on konbit, and the contributions among organizers and non-organizers of konbit, as indicated by Table 2b.

Table 2b: Percentage Differences between Members-Nonmembers of Reciprocal in Contributing Festive

	Access to cash		
	Low	Medium	High
Organizers	+55%	+51%	+79%
Non-organizers	+44%	+3%	-10%

Table 2b shows that in-group pressure and rank tended to have different effects depending on whether cultivators were organizers or non-organizers of konbit: when cultivators were organizers of konbit, the principle of konbit reciprocity got reinforced by being members of reciprocal labor groups, particularly at the extreme height of the socioeconomic ladder. The effect of membership in those groups on konbit reciprocity was intense in all strata but intensified progressively with rank level (+55%, +51% and +79%; see row 10).²⁰ Thus, deviation from the norm of konbit reciprocity, which should have been induced by higher rank according to hypothesis 2, was severely curtailed by sosye peers who acted as third parties in fostering the return of konbit. Reciprocal group members seemed to have done so more strongly against those

organizers whose rank dictated not to reciprocate konbit. One plausible interpretation relies upon the following: as sosye members could also sell labor as squads, they tended to promote the return of konbit in direct relation to the land resources controlled by konbit organizers, thereby increasing their own chance of getting hired as laborers in future agricultural endeavors. On the contrary, when cultivators were not organizers of konbit, the effect of sosye membership on their contributing konbit declined sharply with increasing rank (+44%; +3%, -10%). In-group pressure coming from sosye peers to contributing konbit was reinforced among low ranked cultivators and dampened among medium and high ranked cultivators since the latter, contrary to the former, were not potential laborers when better off cultivators could be hired for agricultural jobs. Thus, since low cultivators, as sosye members, were most likely to be sellers of labor in squads, the effect of membership in sosye on contributing konbit was strongly reinforced among them (+44%)m even when they did not organize konbit. Therefore, group pressure to contributing konbit faded away with high rank (-10%) in accordance with Goode's theory of deviation from social norms as being a direct function of rank.

Discussion: The Effect of Rank versus Normative Commitment on Reciprocity in Konbit

Subsuming the pattern of konbit reciprocity under theoretical principles, one may reason the following: "given the lack of role differentiation in a peasant society like Haiti, role relations would tend to be unspecific" (Goode, 1968: p.15). Therefore, cultivators who were members of reciprocal labor groups will tend to carry over into konbit the same expectations about reciprocity which permeates those groups. Consequently, they would put pressure on those who had organized konbit to contribute. Hence, the spread of reciprocity should occur in konbit, regardless of rank level. Still, in-group pressure would explain why konbit organizers- qua members of particular sosye group- contributed konbit more than non-organizers, but not why they did so unexpectedly, even much more once their economic rank was on top of the ladder. Therefore, another explanatory principle should be called upon to deal with this contradictory pattern.

The data revealed that whether they were members of a sosye or not, organizers of konbit bought labor more than non-organizers.²¹ The competition between various sosye groups for agricultural jobs coming from organizers of konbit induced each group to exhibit the same behavior as its competitors in order to avoid losing an edge to them; contributing konbit was a typical behavior to ensure such an edge. Thus, whenever a sosye group contributed konbit, another group would do the same because all groups expected to be hired as squads by organizers of konbit.²² As Laguerre (1975, p. 25) reminds us, such hiring occurred also in konbit work party endeavors and not only in agricultural jobs. Thus, the fact that organizers of konbit bought labor more than non-organizers helps to explain the contradictory patterns presented in Table 2b. Among contributors of konbit, who were also members of reciprocal labor groups (that is, where the norm of reciprocity prevailed), the competitive struggle for jobs between structurally equivalent²³ actors was fiercer as one moved up the economic ladder. Therefore, sosye members tended to reinforce the norm of konbit reciprocity because contributing konbit created job opportunities for them, and these opportunities increased with the rank of their potential providers of labor.

Since the above interpretation relies on the fact that konbit contributors, as members of sosye, had a better chance to sell their labor in squad to other agriculturalists, it is rather convenient now to test the relation between the sale of labor, konbit contribution, sosye membership, and konbit organization. Given their potential relevance, I have included these other variables in the analysis:

age, context and number of plots. Age because it can determine the energy output of cultivators; context, because sale of labor varied greatly with the dichotomy lowland/highland; number of plots, because I presumed cultivators would prefer to work on their land (to discharge their own workload) rather than sell labor if they could raise enough cash to live.

Effects of Contributing Konbit on Labor Sale

The above analysis holds insofar as the data revealed that konbit contribution and membership in sosye positively determined the sale of labor. Indeed, looking at the logistic regression of labor sale on the variables²⁴ in Table 3, one can confirm the above interpretation:

Table 3: Coefficient for the Logistic Regression of the Sale of Agricultural Labor on Selected Predictors

Predictors	Coefficient	Standard Error	Odds
1. Contributing Festive	.533*	.21	1.70
2. Reciprocal Labor Group	.951***	.21	2.58
3. Age	-.01	.10	.98
4. Context	1.24**	.18	3.47
5. Land Owned	.361	.21	1.43
6. Tenancy	.769**	.20	2.15
7. Sharecropping	1.03***	.27	2.79
8. Number of cultivated p lots	-.499**	.09	.60
Intercept	-2.49***		
Chi square (d.f.=8)	209.1***		
-2log likelihood	824.0		
Initial log likelihood	1033.1		
Number of Cases:	833		
** =p<.01			
*** =p<.001			

Cultivators who contributed konbit were almost one time more likely (odds=1.70) to sell labor than those who did not. Such findings lend credence to my analysis which sees contributing konbit as opening up opportunities for cultivators who wanted to sell their labor. Because contacts among cultivators in contributing konbit were looser than among sosye members, I can presume with Granovetter (1973), that it generated extensive connections with other cultivators and facilitated cultivators 'quest for agricultural jobs. Individuals as well as groups participated in konbit and were given a chance to prove themselves as laborers by their peer participants. Those who were suspected of being lazy were assigned a piece of grass to till by themselves (bay pak). Therefore, participants had occasions to gauge one another as agricultural workers. This process of reciprocal evaluation was one of the best ways that laborers had to market their skills while contributing konbit.

When cultivators were affiliated with a sosye they sold their labor about one and a half time more easily than otherwise (odds=2.58). Thus, affiliation with a sosye was much more important in securing a job than contributing konbit, probably because sosye members also sold their labor as squads, even though konbit at times (Laguerre, 1975) as indicated above. Cultivators of the highlands were about two and a half times (odds=3.47) more likely to sell their labor as compared with those of the lowlands. This was due especially to Figuiere, one of the highland villages which, as I mentioned earlier, harbored a "reservoir" of sellers of labor.

Finally, all land related variables, which indicated poor access to cash (tenancy and sharecropping), had significant effects on the sale of labor. This finding confirms a generally accepted view in the literature on peasantry that poor or medium cultivators were more prone to sell their labor powers than high rank cultivators (Laguerre, 1975; Murray, 1977). It also supports our interpretation of reciprocal group effects on contributing konbit being the strongest upon low ranked cultivators because they were potential sellers of labor.

Conclusion

By recasting reciprocity in konbit as a result of an exchange between two konbit events, this paper discloses the existence of a stringent norm of reciprocity in konbit, in accordance with Laguerre's perspective. Thus, unlike what has been described in the literature on agrarian labor, reciprocity does exist in konbit, once it is seen not only as an isolated event but as an exchange between two sets of konbit transactions, each one including one konbit organizer and many konbit contributors. The fact that organizing konbit determined contributing konbit, and vice versa, this research also supported the existence of reciprocity in festive work party.

The indirect effect of konbit organization (via reciprocal labor) on konbit contribution, however, indicates that individual commitment was not enough to sustain the norm of reciprocity in konbit, but pressure coming from sosye acting as a third party also played its part. Thus, both external constraints from sosye peers and cultivators' commitments were responsible for konbit reciprocity. Whereas individual commitment was curbed by rank in explaining konbit reciprocity, group commitment did not, insofar as it reinforced a rank effect upon konbit reciprocity. Since reciprocal group members sold labor as squads, by contributing konbit they increased their chance of getting hired for agricultural jobs. Members of reciprocal labor groups, therefore, contributed konbit not so much because they owed konbit, but because by doing so, they created obligations on the part of konbit organizers to hire them for future agricultural jobs. Generating obligations in a partner to increase one's chance of getting rewarded by another person is indeed one of the fundamental principles of social exchange (Blau, 1983: pp. 205-31). With no employment agency in the Haitian countryside, cultivators seized the opportunity to prove directly to others how good they could be as agricultural workers in contributing konbit with the expectation of getting hired for future agricultural endeavors.

ENDNOTES

1. That is owned or occupied as renters (for example).
2. Local lexicon varies per region for labor forms.
3. After the Haitian Revolution against the French in 1804, some Haitian Generals tried unsuccessfully to mobilize labor for agriculture via force. For a full description of such cases, see Paul Moral (1978, pp. 17-40) ; they are not included in the following analysis because they seem to occur rather incidentally.
4. 'Le combite n'est pas un simple don de son temps de travail sans réciprocité de la part du propriétaire. Ce don exige de la part du propriétaire un contre-don effectif ou latent... Dans le combite nous sommes au cœur d'un système de réciprocité... Le travailleur qui prend part au combite de son ami s'attend à ce que cet ami vienne l'aider quand il organisera son propre combite, Cette attente se fait et est comprise quand les paysans sont de même statut social.'
5. There are: 'Invitation fermée', 'invitation ouverte', 'invitation mixte', 'invitation par le bouquet'.

6. The commitment is social in view of the fact that primary group is 'characterized by intimate face-to-face association and cooperation... The result of intimate association, psychologically, is a certain fusion of individualities in a common whole, so that one's very self, for many purposes at least, is the common life and purpose of the group' Cooley ([1909] 1962: 23ff) cited in Burt (1982, p. 37).
7. Thus, obviously, there has to be a limit on the quantity of festive a host could return to his guests due to time constraints on agricultural cycles. Thus, not all the hosts will return labor to their guests; neither could all the guests expect labor in return.
8. All things being equal, what Moore and the other students of agrarian labor cited above have depicted as reciprocity in festive labor would be according to Alvin Gouldner (1960, p.169) a mere case of complementarity and not of reciprocity because whereas the former requires that "...one's right" [say, in this case food and beverages] are another's obligation [labor]," the latter connotes that "...each party [the host and the guests] has both rights and duties [that is, the host should give food and beverages to the guests for labor and receive the same in return]..."
9. Wallace (1983: pp.54-132) refers to the first as "interorganismic physical behavior regularities"; and, to the second, as "interorganismic psychical behavior regularities.
10. This consideration draws upon Blau's "structural effects" (Blau; 1983, pp. 76-98).
11. Administratively, Haiti is divided into four concentric units: the Département, the Arrondissement, the Commune, and the Communal Section. The latter counts several unofficially recognized abitasyon which represent small compound of peasant households. Plateau Central, one of the nine Départements, is located in the center between the West and the Artibonite Départements.
12. Unofficial data from the World Bank reveals a similar figure for 1998.
13. 1 carreau=1h29 or about 3 acres.
14. I coded land inherited and bought after adding them up under three categories: 0=none; 1= up to 2 carreau; 2=more than 2 carreaux. Main garden gained a score of 1 for up to one half of a carreau ; a score of 2 for larger size.
15. Animals retained in the scale after I had conducted a reliability analysis included goat, chicken, horse, donkey, and mule; tools included pickaxe, axe, mattock. I coded goats as follows: 1=up to 2, 2=more than 2; chickens: 1=1-12; 2=more than 12. Horse, donkey and mule was coded as dummy variables with zero (0)equals none and 1 equals at least one.
16. That is the relationship between that scale and all other possible 8 item scales that one can build.
17. N=335 represents the total, which is those who bought and did not buy labor in the highlands. It is the same for all the Ns.
18. Agricultural worker working on a daily or a task basis.
19. Free riders would be those who managed to put in less of their labor power ; hangers on, those who just came along with friends. Note that passersby could also get into a work session. My personal observations in the countryside revealed that people usually tended to do that, particularly when the food was ready.
20. When the table was run with festive organization as the dependent variable, the same pattern was obtained (Data available upon request).
21. These figures are the percentage differences in contributing festive between members and non-members of reciprocal group across rank (Table 2a, row 4 minus row 1).

22. Available upon request.
23. According to Burt (1987: p. 1291), "The more similar egos and altar's relations with other persons are-that is, the more that alter could substitute for ego in ego's role relations...-the more likely it is that ego will quickly adopt any innovation perceived to make alter more attractive as the object or source of relations."
24. Burt (1983, pp. 362-363) has established the difference between patterns of interaction which focus on the reciprocal feelings of actors in a network (cohesion) versus that which describe common position of a dyad with respect to a third party (structural equivalence). For him, similarity of behavior and attitudes can occur even among people having no relation with one another as a result of their competition for rewards coming from a third party (Burt 1987, p. 1291). Therefore, when it came to selling their labor, all sosye members were structurally equivalent players insofar as they were enmeshed in a similar relational pattern vis-a-vis festive organizers who could also buy their labor. They all depended upon festive organizers because they had to compete as sellers.
25. Age is introduced because old cultivators cannot contribute festive as much as young cultivators ; context because the highlands were more fertile than the lowlands, they could facilitate participation in cooperative endeavors more than the latter ; number of plots are used because they represented cultivators' workload. Age has three categories : -35, 35 to 50, 50+. Number of plots vary from 1 to 8. Context is a dichotomy with highland equals 1. Cultivators receive a score of 0, if they did not have any land of their own (inherited or bought) ; a score of 1 if they had up to 2. 50 ha ; a score of 2 if they owned bore than 2.50 ha. Tenancy receive a score of 0 for cultivators who had no rented land ; a score of 1 for those who had up to 1ha 29 ; a score of 2 for those who had more than that. Sharecropping was coded as dummy, with 0 indicating no sharecropped land and 1 some sharecropped land.

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