DePaul University

From the Selected Works of John Mazzeo, Ph.D.

1999

On Becoming an Anthropologist

John Mazzeo, *DePaul University*

Available at: <https://works.bepress.com/jmazzeo/2/>

Notes

1. I go to Borgne at least twice a year for two or three weeks at a time. I often go on shorter trips in between to take care of administrative details related to the project.
2. The per capita income for Haiti is \$250.00. In Borgne it is much lower.
3. Recently a public phone was installed in Borgne. It has already made a big difference. People report that they no longer feel isolated and marginalized. Prior to this new development, the nearest telephone was at least a three-hour walk away. In times of flood, the town was completely isolated.
4. Corpus Haiti is a voluntary organization based in Rochester, NY. It has recently become an independent not-for-profit corporation funded through donations from several churches and community groups. I have served as Director of the project since 1996.
5. The training was conducted by a professional organization that has a long history of training and working with grassroots organizations in northern Haiti.

References

- Anderson, Barbara Gallatin. 1990. *First Fieldwork: the Misadventures of an Anthropologist*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Barriteau, Eudine. 1995. Postmodernist Feminist Theorizing and Development Policy and Practice in the Anglophone Caribbean: the Barbados Case. In *Feminism/Postmodernism/Development*, Marianne H. Marchand and Jane L. Parpart, eds. New York: Routledge.
- Bowen, Elenore Smith. 1954. *Return to Laughter*. New York: Doubleday.
- Chambers, Robert. 1997. *Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications.
- Chierici, Rose-Marie. 1991. *Demele: "Making it": Migration and Adaptation among Haitian Boat People in the United States*. New York: AMS Press.
- Dombeck, Mary Therese B. 1999. Editorial: the Mentor Relationship. *Research in Nursing & Health* 22: 1-2.
- Dumont, Jean-Paul. 1992. *The Headman and I*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture. In *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Ginsburg, Faye and Rayna Rapp, eds. 1997. *Conceiving the New World Order: the Global Politics of Reproduction*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Heggenhougen, H. Kris. 1993. Joining Community Struggles for Health. In *A New Dawn in Guatemala: Toward a Worldwide Health Vision*. Richard Luecke, ed. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Kuper, Adam. 1983. *Anthropology and Anthropologists*. Boston: Routledge.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1967. *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Marchand, Marianne H. and Jane L. Parpart, eds. 1995. *Feminism, Postmodernism, Development*. New York: Routledge.
- Maguire, Robert. 1979. *Bottom-Up Development in Haiti*. IAF Paper No. 1. Rosslyn, VA: The Inter-American Foundation.
- Pigg, Stacy Leigh. 1992. Inventing Social Categories Through Place: Social Representations and Development in Nepal. *Society for Comparative Study of Society and History* 34 (3): 491-513.
- Powdermaker, Hortense. 1966. *Stranger and Friend: The Way of an Anthropologist*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.
- Rabinow, Paul. 1977. *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Riemer, Frances Julia. 1999. Participatory Research in Basarwa Settlements: Shifting Development Paradigms. *Practicing Anthropology*, Vol. 21, No. 1: 35-39.
- Scott, James C. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

On Becoming an Anthropologist

John Mazzeo

Introduction

Becoming an anthropologist has been a gradual process of personal transformation filled with moments of frustration, but made forever memorable by the excitement and joy of learning in the field. I consider each of my trips into the field a rite of initiation, a personal journey from being a student of anthropology to a novice anthropologist. This article is a reflection on two of my trips to Borgne, Haiti, and is the product of careful observation, mindful reflection and

dedicated involvement. Living in Borgne was an ideal way to learn more about rural Haitian culture, systems of production, and the dynamics of how grassroots organizations work to improve the quality of life through participatory development. Each trip posed new challenges of doing anthropology and made me question my views of development and how it should be approached.

First Fieldwork

I remember my first trip to Borgne in the summer of 1996. I was 19 years old and a sophomore in the Anthropology program at the State University of New York at Geneseo. I traveled to the commune of Borgne located 15 miles west of Cap Haitien in the Department of the North. The road to Borgne passes through the town of Limbe, crosses the shallow water of the L'Estere River, over the narrow Pon Bac bridge, and winds up and over the 'Orese mountains. Heavy rains can make rivers impossible to cross and flood the road. This

John Mazzeo is a Master's student in the Applied Anthropology program at the University of Arizona in Tuscon. He works as a research assistant in the Household Livelihood and Food Security component at the Bureau for Applied Research in Anthropology. Next summer he plans to return to Borgne to continue working with MODIEB and other local grassroots organizations.

completely isolates Borgne from the traffic of *tap-taps* that transport precious goods, passengers and information to and from Cap Haitien.

The narrow road, gutted by erosion and excessive use, neared the commune of Borgne, and we descended into the lush coastal valley. I began to feel the isolation as my connection with the outside and what was once familiar rapidly disappeared behind me. The steep slopes along the side of the road were covered by dense tropical growth. In some places portions of the slopes were fenced off and planted with plantain, yam, taro and other types of crops. Pedestrians made their way along the side of the road carrying goods on top of their heads. Small farm animals scattered as we approached, and an occasional vehicle carefully tried to pass between us the precariously steep ledge. Adjacent to the road I could see household yards fenced with an intimidating hedge row of cacti to keep intruders out and goats from wandering away. In the middle of the yard were small homes for an entire extended family made of wattle and daub and decorated with vibrant designs or sayings. The strong smell of smoldering charcoal made me aware of the smoke of cooking fires burning somewhere behind the homes. As we passed, small children playing in front of the homes would chase after us yelling "*Blan! Blan!*"

I first saw the town of Borgne from the hilltop road as an isolated collection of rusty tin roofs in the shape of a grid. The town is situated along the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, to the west of the *Riviere du Borgne*, and in the middle of a vast range of high, forested mountains. Downed electrical poles and corroded water pipes lined the route as we made our way into town. It was apparent that the infrastructure of the town had been neglected and was victim to the forces of decay, the winds and the rains of hurricanes. A small sign nailed to an old electrical pole read, "*Bienvenue au Borgne*" (Welcome to Borgne) and was signed by a local development organization named MODIEB.

Our truck rolled carefully through the narrow streets of town, and people waved or shouted greetings through open windows. The homes were mostly built of concrete, topped with a corrugated tin roof, and some proudly wore a bright coat of fresh paint. We pulled up in front of St. Charles Borromeo Church, where a crowd of spectators had already begun to gather. As we unloaded the truck and greeted our hosts from the local Catholic parish, the staring eyes of children surrounded me, and their unintelligible talk made me immediately and uncomfortably aware of my status as a foreigner, or "*blan*."¹

Culture Shock

At first I was overwhelmed and paralyzed in my new environment. It took me several days to begin feeling comfortable. The climate exhausted me, and it was a daily struggle to learn the Haitian language and to participate in a way of life foreign to me. In spite of the lack of electricity and modern plumbing, the greatest obstacle I faced at the beginning of my stay was overcoming my initial fears and the self-imposed isolation symptomatic of severe culture shock. I struggled to break down barriers of communication and tried to find my niche within the dizzying activity of daily life in

town. My intention of gathering a general understanding of the local culture and participating in a grassroots development initiative were complicated by unforeseen challenges of doing fieldwork for the first time. Even though I had prepared a detailed research agenda that was supposed to serve as a framework for my fieldwork over the next six weeks, my expectations of the field did not fit the reality I had encountered. I made an effort to venture outside to learn about life in Borgne and begin to acquire some language skills. Slowly, I reoriented myself and was able to focus clearly on a set of new research questions.

The support of my professor and mentor, Dr. Rose-Marie Chierici, was invaluable during my pivotal introduction to Borgne. She helped me through the difficult process of cultural transition. Rose-Marie served as an example of what I could accomplish. I admired her close involvement with the local grassroots development organization, rapport with members of the community, and understanding of the culture that enabled her to move gracefully among the people around her. Thanks to her continuous guidance and support, I built up the determination and courage to connect with people around me.

I was fortunate to have been extended warm hospitality and assistance by the people of Borgne. This helped to strengthen my courage to persevere in light of my personal struggle to regain a sense of direction. As a volunteer member of Corpus Haiti, I was the guest of the Catholic parish of Borgne. Father Pierre, head priest of the parish, was my first contact and helped to introduce me to the town, talked to me about the history of Borgne and the church's efforts to mobilize the population for social change. He and the people of Borgne treated me with kindness, invited me into their homes, and slowly introduced me to their world. In their footsteps I traveled the countryside, through them I met new contacts, and with them I reflected on their lives and the situation of Borgne. Most importantly, I discovered that learning to live and work in another culture takes patience, the humility to make mistakes, and the courage to continue anyway.

My initial feelings of culture shock gradually began to diminish as I developed a social identity and purpose within the community. Working with Corpus Haiti and having specific responsibilities helped me to feel comfortable and to find my direction. I was communicating with new people each day, making a recognized contribution to the community, and beginning to make sense of the activity around me. After breaking out of isolation and recovering from culture shock, I was optimistic about the potential success of the cooperative efforts between Corpus Haiti and the people of Borgne. I had faith that together we could make a lasting contribution. I did not yet realize the great difficulties we would have to overcome in order to bring about small changes.

Teaching and Learning

My first steps into the community were as a volunteer English teacher. Each day I looked forward to teaching English at the church's secondary school. Teaching was an excellent opportunity for me to meet people close to my own age. Since it was summer, class was an informal place where

students and I could exchange ideas and talk as peers. As they learned English, I asked them to help me learn Haitian Creole. By the end of the summer, I had learned to speak some Haitian Creole and had an appreciation for the situation that teens face while growing up in Borgne. With them I became less self-conscious and shed much of the cultural baggage I was carrying. Together we began to break the barriers of ignorance and misunderstanding that separated us. As we recognized our differences, we also began to see our similarities and began relating to each other as teenagers. The students became my friends, and in times of need I would not hesitate to ask for their help. On the last night of my stay, they invited me to a private dance. That night, as I danced and ate, I felt as if I belonged. My status as an outsider quietly faded into the background and no longer hindered me.

When I was not teaching English, I assisted with patient intake and preparation at a primary health clinic. The clinic was the first project built and organized through the cooperation of Corpus Haiti and local development organizations. People from rural locales across the commune visited the clinic for various illnesses, such as malaria, worms and respiratory infections. Performing intakes, I came in close contact with the patients and in this way made a positive impression on the community. Also at the clinic, I learned about folk beliefs and concepts of illness. It was apparent that these beliefs and practices clashed with the conceptions held by the resident physicians trained in biomedicine. I asked Monique, the head physician, how she dealt with patients who used a folk model of health to describe their condition. She responded by saying that these ideas are the product of ignorance and backwardness common to the uneducated people of the countryside. She believed that it was part of her duty as a physician to eradicate these potentially harmful practices through education about the body and disease.

Tensions between patients and physicians were common in the clinic, and I believe they were representative of other social divisions in the commune of Borgne. These divisions were not always apparent. Gradually I was able to recognize the language that differentiated one group from another. I learned through discussions of past events that these divisions were historically embedded in the social fabric of Borgne. They separated the community politically, socially, religiously and morally. Sometimes opposition, jealousy and animosity would suddenly erupt into arguments, sabotage and even violence. Some of the more significant divisions drawn by locals were between urban and rural folk, Catholic and Vodou believers, the developed and the backward, and the

peasants and the elite. I was told that these divisions also play into the dynamics of development planning. "They can't expect us all to work together. Sometimes the people don't always get along, and trying to force people to work together can be a big mistake." Understanding the implications of these divisions was critical in working with local groups to organize development initiatives.

Grassroots Development

The first grassroots development project I worked on in Borgne was a water sanitation project. It was intended to provide clean wells and an adequate supply of drinking water for several rural localities in the commune. The idea of the project came from discussions with representatives from different rural locales about the basic needs in their areas, as well as the social and capital resources they had available to improve the situation. The initial concept for the project seemed simple, but communication problems between first-time volunteers of Corpus Haiti and local representatives made organizing tasks, making decisions and coordinating construction schedules frustrating. Finding the right materials, the resources to transport these materials, the locations of the wells and spring caps, and finally the skilled labor to build these structures was a challenge. Besides these physical concerns, there were social issues of local rights to water, competition between localities over assistance, and the willingness of localities to work together. Before the project was begun these social factors were not adequately addressed. As a result, the project seemed to fall apart and dialogue broke down.

From this project I learned the importance of valuing local knowledge in the planning phase of a project. Also, I should not assume that a project is going to be simple just because of the technical requirements or physical size alone. I learned that having respect for the various parties involved and being able to listen to and accommodate the views of others is central to the process of participatory development.

Leaving the Field

By the end of July my first trip to Borgne was over. I was glad to be going home, but regretted that I had to leave just as I was beginning to feel comfortable and think of so many good questions to ask. That morning I left for Cap Haitien with a few of my close friends. When we arrived at the Hotel Christophe I felt out of place. The city and the hotel I stayed in before seemed foreign to me now, and I wanted to return to Borgne with my friends. Electricity, warm water and television were extravagant luxuries I had done without for the previous six weeks. I felt guilty for having all of these

John Mazzeo and Friends
(from the collection of John Mazzeo)

amenities while most people in Borgne did not. After talking with some American guests also staying in the hotel, I became angry with their assumption that rural people were not capable of progressing on their own. I was irritated to find that development, to them, was something to be imposed by foreigners to elevate the consciousness of the peasantry and lift them out of poverty. I felt isolated and alienated from the other guests and returned to my room. The next day I decided that I would miss Borgne, but I was excited to fly home. On the plane I began the process of sifting through my notes and my memories, looking back fondly on my trip and realizing all that I had learned.

Second Fieldwork

Classes at my college began in the fall and I was focusing my learning on development theory, models and methods. I learned the language of applied anthropology, the tools anthropologists use, and began thinking about how I could apply them in the context of Borgne. The next year I returned briefly to Borgne, but it was not until January of the following year that I returned for a three-week stay.

In January 1998 I returned to Borgne for a three-week stay to work on formulating ideas for a micro-economic development project for Corpus Haiti. The moment I arrived in Borgne I noticed changes in myself. I had become familiar with the area and the local culture. I was also more professionally prepared to conduct my work. I quickly rebuilt my communication and social skills and immediately began to collect information on the economic situation in Borgne and the key people that I should contact. I was anxious to put into practice what I had learned from the previous summer and during my semester at the university.

Working with MODEIB

Within a few days I was working with MODEIB (Movement Development Integral du Borgne), a local grassroots development organization. At our first meeting one member of MODEIB questioned the relevance of doing an assessment. "In the past people have done surveys, but nothing has come of them." His point was well taken by the group and myself. We decided that the survey should be designed to collect data relevant to the needs of the rural locales. The questionnaire we designed was constructed for an easy and rapid analysis of the data. The information we collected was to be placed directly into practice and was not for research purposes alone.

I collaborated with MODIEB to design and administer a survey of economic needs related to agricultural production. The cooperative effort linked the institutional capacities of Corpus Haiti with the local knowledge and expertise of MODEIB. The survey was a learning tool, enabling both parties to define questions and become informed about issues that were important to them. During this time we exchanged our views on the goals for an economic assessment and possible micro-economic development projects for the future. Since I already knew most of the group's participants, it was easier for us to establish a mutual sense of trust and respect quickly.

Our intent in administering an assessment was to clarify the causes of economic underdevelopment linked to agricul-

ture and to help stimulate a range of possible solutions. We designed a household-level survey to collect a broad range of data on commerce and agriculture. Our sample was drawn from the surrounding rural areas and the town of Borgne. A total of eighty households in four of the seven communal districts was administered surveys by MODIEB and me. The specific goals of the survey were to understand (1) the relationship between land, labor and capital within agricultural production, (2) the needs and problems facing peasant farmers, and (3) the patterns of exchange within Borgne and between neighboring urban markets.

Agricultural Production

Several salient issues emerged through data analysis. Central to the issue of agricultural production were land use, land size, soil quality, agricultural capital, land distribution, land tenure and the mobilization of labor. In addition to production, the flow of agricultural products through market exchange was an integral part of the economy in Borgne. The following first analysis briefly outlines the relationship between land, labor and capital within the agricultural economy, and the obstacles to agricultural production. The second part explores the exchange of goods in the marketplace and the unequal relationships between the rural and urban markets, and peasants and speculators.

Through a tour of his garden, my friend Ben demonstrated to me his strategies for utilizing the land for maximal production. He said that other peasants also strategized the most effective way to use a limited supply of land. It was common for households to plant several crops in several garden plots sometimes located in different ecological zones. Household-ers made careful decisions regarding the use of land, because it was one of their most precious resources and was diminishing rapidly across the countryside. On the average, households had at least two gardens. At least one of these gardens was close to the household yard. Each garden or variety of crop requires specialized capital and labor inputs. Growing several products in each garden created the benefit of having a mixed productive base. A variety of crops were planted to edge one's best bet in case of crop failure or unfavorable market prices for a particular crop.

Through our analysis we discovered that variations in the types and proportion of crops planted between and within household gardens made it difficult not only to characterize agricultural production among peasants, but even for a single agricultural producing household. As a result, peasants had a broad spectrum of needs that could not be met by a standard development package, but demanded a wide range of specialized assistance simultaneously.

Land Issues

On my frequent walks in the countryside I noticed the small size of individual gardens. I asked farmers how this affected them and they told me that limited land holdings were a critical factor determining agricultural productivity. They cited the progressive shrinking of land through inheritance as a cause for the small size of gardens and total land holdings. With each passing generation, the increase in population and claims to inheritance placed greater pressures

on the land and led to splitting of family land into smaller and less productive pieces.

Many householders told us about the diminishing quality of land in their gardens. One of the reasons for the low productivity was that most of their land was located on steep and rocky mountain slopes. The closer a garden was to the summit, the thinner the soil, and the greater the erosion. Another factor that contributed to decreasing land productivity was the fact that households had few economic alternatives to exploiting the land and planting on the same piece of land until production fell drastically.

The most commonly expressed obstacle to agricultural production was the lack of agricultural capital. This includes access to technical training, fertilizers, tools, or credit, and limits households' ability to restore the fertility of soil or improve production techniques. The only channels of credit available to households are through exploitative moneylenders who charge exorbitant interest rates. The absence of agricultural capital results in more aggressive farming practices that inevitably take a greater toll on the land's long-term productivity. Peasants are aware that these practices are not sustainable, but have no alternative but to continue. They know through experience that if agricultural production is not improved, and the harsh exploitation of land is not curbed, they will cause irreparable damage to their environment and its capacity for future production.

There have been significant changes in land distribution and average total size of household land holdings. Increasing landlessness and shrinking plot size are important concerns for rural households, whose primary means of production is agriculture. Compared with data collected in 1979 by Maguire, our assessment revealed a dramatic increase in rural landlessness, and a decrease in the average size of privately held land. Table 1 provides a comparison of the percentage of households according to land size for 1978 and 1998. Since 1978 there has been a significant decrease in the percent of land owned privately. Data suggest a potential 36 percent increase in levels of peasant poverty based on this measure.

Table 1

Furthermore, our data suggest that recent changes in land distribution have influenced the proportion of land tenure agreements in Borgne. Since 1978 the total amount of privately own land has decreased, while rural landlessness and the amount of leased land have increased. Households with little or no land or few non-agricultural skills were more willing to lease additional plots to increase productivity. Households who owned little or no land held the greatest proportions of lease tenures.

Peasants often talked about the risks associated with leasing land from private individuals. Leasing land is a risky venture, but is the only way some households can secure an adequate income to pay for medical care and schooling. Many households face the risk of producing an insufficient harvest. Failing to pay for leased land quickly mounts onerous financial debts that must eventually be repaid with interest.

Those householders who own land have the option of leasing portions on a seasonal basis. This way, they can bring in additional cash without expending either time or labor. Households rarely lease all of their land; on average, they lease about half of their total holdings. Leasing land is a way for households to move out of agriculture and into commerce or the urban labor sector.

On a walk through the countryside with a good friend and guide, I watched a group of rice workers clear and plant a paddy. I observed how the mobilization of labor was another important aspect of agricultural production. Most households worked the land collectively and relied upon extended family links for additional labor. This method provided a number of advantages for an area with high labor, low capital, and high chances for crop failure. A family member is compensated by a share of the harvest produced, in exchange for favors or out of obligation, rather than by cash payment. Working alone was cited as risky in an unstable and unpredictable economic and ecological environment. A group can pool resources and cushion each other in times of crisis.

Labor Issues

Although the total amount of land owned per household is decreasing, households still find it difficult to gather enough labor within the household to perform key agricultural tasks such as clearing, planting, harvesting and miscellaneous garden maintenance. The need for additional labor stems from the large amount of work to be done in a short period of time. The migration of labor from the countryside to urban or international destinations, as well as the perception of agricultural labor as low-status work, limits the availability of household labor and encourages the hiring of laborers. When the amount of work in the gardens exceeds the household labor capacity, additional wage laborers or peasant associations are hired. According to the assessment, 88 percent of households who engaged in agricultural production hire additional labor, either as contract labor, day labor, or labor associations. On the average, hired agricultural contract and day laborers are paid 4 Haitian dollars, equivalent to 1.30 US dollars a day.

The majority of crops produced in the countryside are destined for exchange in local markets. What a household consumes varies according to the current market prices and

the financial needs of a family. Agriculture is not geared toward subsistence. Households do not always produce all that they consume, nor do they consume all that they produce. The relationship between production and consumption at the household level is closely tied to the nature of the market at the time of harvest.

Markets

In the local market I noticed that women had the primary responsibility for selling and buying. I was told that the women of the household sell whatever produce a family does not choose to consume. The money earned is used to purchase food and household necessities, while the remainder of the profits is returned to the household. Women are usually allowed to keep a small portion of the profits from their business without the direct approval from their partners.

There are two markets in the commune of Borgne, *Petit Bourg de Borgne (Ti Bouk)* and Borgne. Markets are held in Ti Bouk three days a week and twice a week in Borgne. Political conflicts between the two towns result in little exchange between the two areas. On each major market day in Borgne I surveyed the goods being sold in the marketplace and interviewed a sample of the market vendors on where they acquired the goods that they sold.

After speaking with many market women and recording their responses, I drew the following conclusions. The economy of Borgne operates on an exchange of goods from rural to urban. Borgne transports agricultural produce to urban markets. Yams, varieties of bananas, coffee and cacao bring higher prices in the urban markets of Cap Haitien than in Borgne. Transporting goods to market quickly by *tap-tap* (local transport) is important because of the perishable nature of most crops. In exchange, sellers from Borgne bring imported manufactured goods and processed foods for resale in Borgne. Most of the imported goods—gasoline, clothes, supplies, and food products like rice, grains, flour, sugar—are bought and resold by market women.

In contrast to agricultural goods, export crops, such as coffee and cacao, are marketed through licensed speculators. These speculators act as middlemen between peasant growers and international exporters. I learned that most speculators live in the town of Borgne and are from fairly wealthy families. Males exclusively handle this share of the market. Nearly all the peasants I talked to relayed stories about being underpaid or cheated by speculators. Individual households try to bargain for the best prices, but they are out-powered by the economic and social influence of speculators. The majority of speculators purchase coffee and cacao in advance and provide credit to peasants who use their crops as collateral. In the past, coffee and cacao growers tried to organize against the speculators, but their efforts were prevented through violence and sabotage. Growers now are hopeful that the agricultural cooperative can be trusted to represent them and to provide them with organization and support to demand fair prices.

Participatory Development

My discussions with people about their gardens, trips to market, and agricultural needs were enlightening. We collected

80 surveys within 2 weeks of conducting interviews. Corpus Haiti and MODEIB were satisfied with the above analysis and agreed that the survey of economic needs had provided a rich source of information for the decisions about the type of micro-economic project that would be planned for the future.

Data from the assessment informed and shaped subsequent project design and implementation, clearly reflecting a shared understanding of, and a commitment to, participatory development. A workshop was planned with the help of a Haitian rural development expert, Father Yvon. All parties—growers, speculators, market vendors and store owners—met to discuss the possibility of building a grinding mill and organizing an agricultural cooperative. Father Yvon stressed that the first step was "to make a bed for the mill," or to establish a set of social networks within which the mill would rest. He led the group carefully, step-by-step, to understand the project's larger context, including administrative and production concerns at the regional level, consumer needs, and the anticipated impact of the mill on the local economy. He challenged participants to question their own assumptions and to recognize that they can conduct their own analysis.

The workshop brought the vision of an agricultural cooperative into clear focus. The primary goal of the cooperative is to create a strong peasant support network of cooperation and mutual assistance. It will also provide training to peasants in specific agricultural skills to increase their productivity rates and help them better utilize their land. A corn and rice mill was considered an ideal first project for the cooperative, because it would require little capital input, be managed by the community, and eliminate the need to transport grain to the mill several miles away. Processing agricultural products will increase their market value and make locally grown rice more competitive with rice imported from the U.S.A. One of the most popular aspects of the cooperative is its ability to bypass exploitative coffee and cacao speculators and to offer peasants fair prices.

The end of my second trip was nearing and it would be time for me to leave Borgne again. After some final conversations with MODEIB about the mill and agricultural cooperative, we decided that MODEIB should write a project description for Corpus Haiti. Using information discussed at the workshop, MODEIB prepared a formal proposal to Corpus Haiti requesting a grant and a loan. I brought this proposal back with me to Rochester and proudly presented it to Corpus Haiti. The terms of this proposal were discussed in Rochester and agreed to by the Board. The formal contract signed by the Board and MODEIB stipulated that Corpus Haiti would grant MODEIB part of the sum and lend the remaining portion, to be repaid in seven years. The loan would be repaid into a community fund that would be used as seed capital to start a micro-lending project.

Lessons Learned

During my last visit to Borgne I did not have as much free time to enjoy myself in the community as I did on the previous trip. The majority of my time was spent working with MODEIB, visiting rural localities to collect surveys and focusing on the issue of agricultural production. I left feeling proud of the work we had accomplished and was confident

that MODIEB and I had made a contribution toward the effort of improving the standard of living in Borgne.

By actively engaging in the research process, I learned that the people of Borgne are confronted with a narrow range of economic opportunities that limits their ability to meet their own basic needs. Peasants understand the complexity of the agricultural problems they face and know some of the necessary solutions, but they lack the resources to act. I felt that the grassroots development initiative in Borgne worked as a catalyst for change by providing technical assistance, education and some financial support for projects that were conceived locally. This approach to development focused on social rather than material change as fundamental to the development process.

Writing this article allowed me to reflect on the obstacles and achievements of doing fieldwork as an anthropology undergraduate. I am grateful for the kindness and guidance

extended to me in the field by the people of Borgne and by my mentor and professor, Rose-Marie Chierici. My work in Borgne prepared me well for graduate studies in Applied Anthropology at the University of Arizona. As a graduate student I plan to return to Borgne and become more closely involved in grassroots development efforts. Finally, a field-work opportunity, enabled and sustained through a strong mentoring relationship with my professor, helped me to find my voice as an anthropologist and to construct a vision of what anthropology can contribute back to the people with whom we live and learn. ■

Note

1. *Blan* means "white" but is used to describe all foreigners.

Reference

Maguire, Robert. 1979. *Bottom-up Development in Haiti*. Inter-American Foundation. Occasional Paper No. 5.

The Importance of Carrying Water: Building Relationships for Research and Development

Pierre Minn

Introduction

Recent emphasis on the active involvement of target populations in research and development projects has led to greater concern over the relationships that exist between these populations and the outsiders who work with them. This article will discuss the role physical labor can play in creating a relationship conducive to successful research and development projects. Based on four months of fieldwork in a Haitian town, I will argue that participating in basic tasks such as preparing food, cleaning, and agricultural work can have a wide range of benefits for social scientists and development workers as well as the people with whom they work.

Physical Labor and My Role in the Community

People in developing countries carry out a vast amount of physical labor as part of their daily routines. I became acutely aware of this fact during the two summers teaching and conducting research in Oboy, a small town on Haiti's north coast. Like many people around the world, the residents of Oboy depend on their bodies as their principal source of energy. In a country of limited infrastructure and oppressive poverty, daily tasks such as obtaining water, cooking, doing laundry, and simply getting from one place to another consume a great deal of both time and energy.

Pierre Minn received his BA in anthropology from Yale University in May of 1999. His paper on the environmental factors which shape illness experiences in Oboy received the Society for Applied Anthropology's Peter K. New Student Research Award for 1998. He has been awarded a Fulbright grant to South Korea, and hopes to pursue graduate studies in medical anthropology and development.

Although I knew about conditions in Oboy before my arrival, I was not prepared for the ways in which the area's poverty would affect my role in the community. Much to my surprise, I found myself at the apex of a social system that valued, among other things, education, wealth, and access to resources. I was particularly shocked by the fact that I would have a personal staff. Having been raised to regard self-sufficiency as an important virtue, the idea of relying on other people to cook my food and wash my clothes disturbed me. Little did I know that preparing a simple lunch in Haiti can take five people all morning, and that a small load of laundry translates into a whole afternoon at the river. My project director explained to me that if I were to be teaching classes and conducting interviews, there would be no way for me to live independently. Besides, if I were going to be living in the town, its residents would expect me to provide some opportunities for employment.

The staff consisted of six women, ranging in age from seven to thirty years old. Among these was Saintanise, a fourteen-year-old girl who lived in town with the head cook, Nanoune, so that she could go to school. Such children are known as *restavek* and are at the bottom of the Haitian social hierarchy. Although Saintanise's mother was a good friend of Nanoune's and the cook was the girl's godmother, Saintanise was always given the hardest work. In addition to scrubbing cooking pots, cleaning the yard, and running countless errands, Saintanise was responsible for the house's water supply. She appeared at my door every morning at six o'clock with a large basin of water on her head, which she left for my bath.

One day, Nanoune told Saintanise to go get the water in the afternoon, as she would not be able to come the following morning. I told her I'd follow along, and although