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"There is no institution stronger than the church:" Situating evangelical actors in the institutional landscape of development practice in the Dominican Republic

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“There is no institution stronger than the church:” Situating evangelical actors in the institutional landscape of development practice in the Dominican Republic

by

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Dedication

For Mom—In all the ways I've learned, grown, changed, and found my identity in this world since your passing, the spirit of love and resilience that you instilled in me has remained my steadfast anchor. Your light shines on.

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Abstract

"There is no institution stronger than the church:" Situating evangelical actors in the institutional landscape of development practice in the Dominican Republic

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This research centers on understanding the networks shaped by American Evangelical Christian non-governmental organizations as a particular subset of actors that influence community development practice in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. I aim to provide a more nuanced understanding of what may make these organizations unique in terms of social service delivery and develop an analysis of the networks they shape. I use three case studies of organizations operating in Santo Domingo and show that there are different models these organizations adapt in order to carry out their initiatives. Drawing on seven weeks of fieldwork, as well as on interdisciplinary scholarship, I highlight the importance of a nuanced understanding of how evangelical entities actually operate as development actors. In short, the core of my argument is that faith matters when it comes to both approaches and responses to development work, and that American evangelical development organizations are increasingly prominent, yet persistently understudied, institutions performing development.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I would like to start this thesis by asking a broad question. What does religion have to do with urban planning? At first glance, the answer to this question may appear deceptively simple: not too much. Planning is about public space. It's about thinking about where and how to accommodate different land uses. It deals with practical concerns related to land, space, and communities. It's spearheaded by the public sector. Religion, on the other hand, is a private matter. It's something decided by individuals for individuals. It deals with ideas of life, death, spirituality, and existential meaning. It is not concerned with ideas of land use and development. On a superficial level, these two spheres may appear to be quite disconnected, but we should not be so quick to overlook what sits at the intersection. In fact, as I will argue in the following chapters, understanding the place of religion in shaping communities is central to developing a holistic comprehension of planning and development practices as they actually occur, especially as they occur in communities across the Global South.

In this vein, this study is a testament to the importance of interdisciplinary scholarship and praxis. Both as scholarly disciplines and as fields of practice, religious studies, international development studies, and urban planning largely occupy separate silos. As I will argue, the lack of engagement between these disciplines is problematic when it comes to developing a complete understanding of the landscape of institutional actors operating in the field of international development. My research aims to reconcile this gap and put forth a greater understanding of how two giants of the development

field—religious institutions and NGOs—actually work together to shape urban landscapes of the Global South in powerful ways.

It is important to be specific with terminology in this study, as speaking in general terms can lead to a misperception of the actors I am interested in understanding. While international development literature has historically examined faith-based organizations (FBOs) as development actors, rarely do these analyses specifically consider distinctions in faith traditions, size, scale, structure, and institutional status of FBOs. In other words, the prevailing understanding of FBOs in this literature is oversimplified: any organization or entity that is motivated by faith, or that explicitly cites religious affiliations in its work, is often understood as an FBO. In this approach, a local church is not necessarily distinguished from an international NGO. Perhaps more importantly, denominational affiliations are at best an afterthought from the mainstream development studies perspective. While most works in development studies are concerned with FBOs that are largely Christian in nature, this specification is not generally articulated. And within the larger category of Christian organizations, there is rarely a distinction between Catholic and Protestant or Protestant evangelical groups. This is where an interdisciplinary perspective becomes paramount, because a religious studies approach would be astutely focused on the deep and meaningful distinctions between Catholic, mainline Protestant, and Protestant evangelical ideologies, as well as the implications of those distinctions for how adherents live out their faith.

So in the name of specificity, my argument centers on an analysis of a particular actor within the development world. The organizations I am concerned with meet the following four criteria:

1) They are non-governmental development/aid organizations (not just churches) based in the United States

2) Faith is central to their organizational mission, vision, and programming.

3) Their religious perspectives align with Protestant evangelical Christianity, which highlights the ideas of salvation and biblical inerrancy[1]

4) They use short-term missionary teams as a component of their development work

I will refer to these organizations as American evangelical development organizations, or AEDOs.[2] This acronym is certainly applicable to other contexts where "NGO" or "FBO" have been used instead, but since specificity matters I find it necessary to distinguish AEDOs from the more general NGO and FBO categories. These organizations are certainly familiar actors to anyone working in international development. Members of these groups are often caricatured as parading through airports with brightly-colored matching t-shirts proclaiming a mission or a call, and development experts may write

[1] I use Emerson & Smith's (2000) definition of evangelical Protestants in the U.S. as a guiding framework for understanding this type of Christian. Although evangelical Protestants can belong to many denominations, as Emerson & Smith outline, this particular subset of Protestants is defined by a propensity to "…hold that the final, ultimate truth is the Bible. Stemming from this, evangelicals believe that Christ died for the salvation of all, and that anyone who accepts Christ as the one way to eternal life will be saved. This act of faith is often called being "born again" and is associated with a spiritually, and often more broadly, transformed life…evangelicals believe in the importance of sharing their faith" (3).

[2] I recognize that "American" as an identifier to designate being *from the United States* is complicit in colonial projects of erasure of *the Americas*. My use of "American" here is chiefly in the interest of simplifying an otherwise unwieldy acronym.

them off as ignorant, unaware, and misguided in their intentions, suffering from an idealistic "savior complex" that more well-seasoned practitioners have overcome. I am not arguing that these characterizations are wholly unfounded or entirely off-base, but I am arguing that it is time for the development field to take AEDOs seriously as a major part of the institutional landscape of development actors. Development practitioners can be critical of AEDO approaches and skeptical of their intentions, but they cannot fail to recognize the presence, the wide-scale involvement, and the acceptance of AEDOs in communities across the Global South. Using such a focused lens to analyze this specific actor is necessary to understanding the particular dimensions of a phenomenon that is increasingly prominent across the Global South: U.S-based, short-term evangelical Protestant "missionaries" as social-service providers.

1.1 ARGUMENT & CONTEXT

With this being said, the central goal of my research is to gain an understanding of how U.S. evangelical Christian development organizations influence community development practices in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, which is an appropriate context for this study, as I will later describe. I aim to understand 1) what AEDOs do in the Dominican context, 2) what is unique about their approach to development, and 3) how AEDOs shape the nature of evangelical church participation in development. I will describe how these actors are influenced by particular ideologies that make them distinct from other organizations, underscoring that they should be studied separately. Moreover, I will show that AEDOs operate as institutional actors contributing to community development practice in the Dominican Republic.

Ultimately, this thesis aims to show that *religion matters when it comes to community development*, specifically in low-income, marginalized neighborhoods in places like Santo Domingo. Evangelical entities are key institutional actors dictating development approaches and programs in Santo Domingo. More specifically, I argue for an increased recognition of the importance of international religious actors in shaping the nature of how these entities contribute to development. Through ethnographic research, I analyze three examples of AEDOs involved in community development work in Santo Domingo. By considering these three cases, I show that there are various models to this work, and that these models differ on 1) their engagement with the state, 2) their program structure and goals, 3) the way their religious convictions influence their work, and 4) the nature of the interpersonal and institutional networks they operate within.

In terms of contextualizing my research, a 2008 study by two missiologists (scholars who study theology and missions through the lens of anthropology and sociology), found that short-term missionaries are very active in the Dominican Republic, with an estimate of one short-term missionary for every 1-500 people in the country.[3] Their analysis also found that the Dominican Republic is the second most popular destination globally for short-term Protestant mission activities, though it does not even rank among the top 15 destinations for long-term Protestant missions. This reveals that mission interventions in the country are frequent yet transitory, with new actors cycling through communities at high rates. The study also found that around the world, 84% of short-term missionaries go to places where churches are already heavily present, in what

[3] Priest & Priest (2008)

the authors classify as the "most evangelized regions." With an estimate (from 2005) of more than 1.5 million U.S. Christians traveling abroad on short-term mission trips each year, the study claimed that short-term missionaries are "among the overlooked globalizers of our world." On average, trips cost participants around $1,400 each, netting more than $2 billion annually spent just on financing short term missionary activities around the world.

It is worth clarifying here that missions are increasingly framed as more than just evangelization: social service provision and community development work have become defining factors of short-term U.S. evangelical interventions across the Global South. What is it about the drive to "do something" that has made service provision an integral aspect of mission activity, and how do these development projects fit into understandings of evangelical Christianity as an active, influential force in the larger field of international development? Furthermore, while in recent years there has been a movement among missionary groups to become more mindful and critical of their positionality and the impact of their work, I question whether this mindfulness has been effectively translated into the actual programmatic, financial, and structural changes necessary to make the process and product of missions any different.[4] In other words, I am skeptical about whether mission practitioners are critical enough, or if we are simply seeing traditional, top-down and paternalistic forms of mission activity operating under a different rhetoric.

[4] See Corbett & Fikkert (2009) and Lupton (2011) for examples of works that missionaries frequently cite as influential in their critical thinking processes.

1.2 METHODS

Building on the UTSOA Community and Regional Planning program's ten years of partnership with the community of Los Platanitos, an informal settlement located in the Los Guaricanos sector of Santo Domingo Norte, Dominican Republic, I use the greater Santo Domingo area as a case study for my project, relying on qualitative data analysis and ethnographic research at both the community and institutional levels to perform my analysis. This study relies primarily on three different research methods: semi-structured interviews, discourse analysis, and participant observation.

The primary research method involved in this study is the semi-structured interview. I conducted a total of 26 interviews during seven weeks of field research in Santo Domingo. My interlocutors included American and Dominican AEDO representatives, AEDO short term mission trip participants, Dominican pastors, community members, local and national government officials, and representatives from a national evangelical advocacy organization. The semi-structured interview allows for more flexibility in the data collection process, as my interviews were conversational dialogues more than structured question-and-answer sessions.

In addition to semi-structured interviews, my study pulls from an analysis of the written and promotional materials from various institutions and organizations. Here, I was able to use qualitative analysis to identify themes in the discourse, or rhetoric, these entities use to represent themselves. In analyzing these texts, I looked at the language and conceptual frameworks from different bodies in order to analyze their perspectives and ideologies.

Finally, while I was in the Dominican Republic I had the opportunity to observe one group of short-term missionaries working under an AEDO. I used participant observation methods to shadow the group while they were at their mission site for two full days of their six day trip. I was able to observe how the group members interacted with Dominican community members in their work, how they discussed community development issues, and how they facilitated dialogues and workshops. This participant observation forms an integral part of my analysis of one AEDO, but due to the time constraints of a master's thesis project I was unable to observe short term missions teams working with the other two AEDOs I profile in this study.

1.3 LIMITATIONS

Another important caveat merits a discussion: this study is not a theological analysis, and it is not about faith as a phenomenon. While I draw heavily from works in religious studies to contextualize the particular history and dimensions of evangelical Christianity in the United States and the Dominican Republic, I am not aiming to provide a theological assessment or position in this study. Rather, I am concerned with how the church and international church-based groups act as institutional actors in development projects. In other words, I am assessing what religious actors *do* more than what they profess to *believe*, though understanding those beliefs is part of understanding their actions. Nonetheless, it is a believer-centered study rather than a belief-centered study.

As a master's thesis with fieldwork conducted abroad, time is another limitation that deserves mention. I spent seven weeks in Santo Domingo conducting fieldwork for this project. While I was able to collect enough data to compile my findings, I firmly

believe that a study like this merits a longitudinal approach with more in-depth ethnography than I was able accomplish within the limits of my project's scope. Likewise, there are certain limitations in terms of access to sources that affected my study. As I learned about the dense institutional networks that each of these three AEDOs belonged to, I realized that I would be unable to access all of these second- and third-degree actors as data sources, though I am certain that such access would have enriched my analysis. Despite these limitations, however, I trust that the findings and discussion included here offer a representative analysis of different models of AEDOs with the Dominican context and demonstrate the importance of understanding evangelical Christian institutions as development actors.

1.4 POSITIONALITY

My personal background plays no small role in shaping this study. As the daughter of a medical missionary, I spent my childhood and teenage years travelling to one of the largest informal settlements of Lima, Peru to participate in medical campaigns and other community development initiatives led by an AEDO. Through these experiences, I saw first-hand how American evangelical Christians that participated in these trips interacted with the local communities and interpreted the intense poverty they witnessed. I also gained insight into the complex interpersonal relationships developed between mission participants and local community members, and how the presence of missionaries and the development projects and public interventions they sponsored interfaced with the everyday urban life of the community. In seeing how these interactions shaped the community over the course of more than a decade, I developed a

keen interest in the role of evangelical Christianity and international NGOs in manipulating urban physical and social landscapes in Latin America.

It is also important to disclose that for many years I have not identified with evangelical Christianity, or any faith tradition, in terms of my personal beliefs and religious commitments. While I grew up "in the church," in my adult life I have made the (profoundly personal) decision not to continue in this tradition. Although I do not associate myself with this line of belief, I still have a deep respect and admiration for the benevolence of many religious actors. I believe that faith is a powerful conviction for many individuals, and in many ways it is my respect for people of faith that has motivated me to understand how they are shaping development practice through religiously-motivated interventions.

While I am aware that my personal history with (and subsequent distancing from) the American evangelical church inevitably injects some bias into my research, I have made a conscious and mindful effort to approach this study with objectivity in mind (though under no illusions that *true* objectivity is ever really possible for social science researchers). In other words, while on a personal level I may not share some of the positions and beliefs associated with the evangelical Christian movement, this thesis does not serve as a platform for me to explore and dwell on those differences in belief. Rather, it is about using the framework and perspectives of critical development studies to analyze AEDOs as institutional actors in the landscape of development work.

Chapter 2: Theory

As discussed in the Introduction, my thesis is a thoroughly interdisciplinary project that sits at the intersection of critical development studies, international planning, religious studies, and Latin American Studies. Moreover, these areas of inquiry are all interdisciplinary as well. While such an approach offers an opportunity to consider the phenomenon of AEDOs in the Dominican Republic from a unique and novel perspective, it nonetheless sacrifices some depth in the name of breadth. That is to say, using this interdisciplinary lens means inevitably limiting some of the in-depth theoretical and conceptual discussions that a more narrow focus would allow. However, engaging with different literatures that involve different theoretical assumptions provides a deeper understanding of the ways in which ideas of faith and development intersect to shape international development and planning policies and practice. Drawing on these different bodies of work helps compensate for what might otherwise become disciplinary blindspots that limit a holistic understanding of how and why international development projects are actually carried out in places like Santo Domingo. While religious studies perspectives allow us to distinguish between faith denominations and understand the importance of faith for practitioners, a more critical perspective from development and planning literature places focus on normative ideas of social justice and questions of equity. Putting the two perspectives in conversation with each other can illuminate how religious involvement in development may challenge or further those normative ideas.

This chapter aims to establish the bodies of theory and existing scholarship that my research engages. Specifically, I will explore how ideas from three different

categories of academic literature can be used to situate my research findings and analysis. First, I look at works from scholars of religion who consider issues of development; i.e. what I refer to as the subfield of "religion and international development." Second, I turn to works from critical international development studies. This is a vast body of literature, so I focus my review on scholarship that considers non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as issues of faith and religion, what I refer to as "international development, NGOs, and religion." In reviewing this second category, I aim to understand how experts on international development and NGOs tend to address religion. Finally, I will outline a few key concepts from the scholarship on critical international planning that I employ in my analysis. Throughout this literature review, I ask: how have scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds considered the intersection of these fields, and what may have been overlooked because of disciplinary blind spots? While sincere efforts have been made on all sides to understand the role of religion in development, I suggest that international development (including critical international planning) and religious studies largely talk past each other and consequently miss key insights into the phenomenon of AEDOs.

2.1 RELIGION & INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Religious Studies is inherently an interdisciplinary field. Catherine Albanese (2007), Robert Orsi (1985), and other prominent scholars in the field have called for an interdisciplinary approach in order to study religious movements in the holistic way that they deserve. My work similarly takes this approach. This section aims to assess the range of understandings about international development organizations in the religious

studies literature, focusing on the ways in which researchers who are informed by a religious studies perspective have tended to think about development work.

Religious studies works that address development tend to fall into three broad camps. The first category is work by mission practitioners that defends short-term missions as a mechanism for service delivery in international contexts.[5] These perspectives mainly come from journals on missiology and the International Mission Bulletin, so many times they represent the voice of missionary-academics and discuss ideas about mission, religion, religious motivations, and mission impact, with a specifically Christian perspective. Although these perspectives are often ripe with calls to reshape mission practice to a more mindful approach (on the back of works such as the popular *When Helping Hurts* from Brian Fikkert & Steve Corbett), there is little in the way of deep critique to be found here. That is to say, these perspectives have not typically tried to fundamentally question the idea of short term missions; rather, they focus on providing an internal assessment of best practices and areas for improvement. Most notable here, especially for my research, is Brian Howell's work on short term missionaries in the Dominican Republic.[6]

Howell, an anthropologist of religion, explores short term missionary motivation and discourse through an ethnographic lens. His analysis found that U.S. churches tend to promote trips to the mission field as "…a key means through which average church

[5] In the past few decades, "missionary work" has made a slow but steady transition from a primary focus on proselytizing to a primary focus on social service delivery. See King (2012) for a discussion of the history and evolution of humanitarianism in mission practice. See Howell (2008); Priest & Priest (2005); Morgan (2016); Myers (2015); Boan et. al. (2016) for examples of practitioner-focused research on short-term missions as vehicles for service delivery.

[6] Howell (2009)

members can become involved in mission outreach and by which they can make a direct, even sacrificial contribution in the foreign missions work of the church."[7] In a way, this means that missions can be framed in light of how they resonate with trip participants, rather than exclusively how they resonate (or impact) community members in the community that the mission serves. Moreover, Howell also found that U.S. missions often tend to underplay or overlook the specific cultural context where teams will serve, instead embracing what he calls a "discursive commonality," or a more general idea of the foreign mission field as not culturally bound (206). Regarding the trip participants he worked with, Howell comments,

> …in retrospect, their memories of "Dominican culture" became paved over with the gloss of "poverty." Given that the stated purpose in going was to meet the needs of "the poor," it is not surprising that the entire culture would become characterized as poor, providing little in the way of language or conceptual framework for identifying or recalling the evidence of economic inequality.[8]

Although mission trip participants may often perceive their participation as a response to the call (the great commission), it seems that often the great commission to which they respond is one in which the realities of the "mission field" become homogenized ("go ye into *all the world*"), raising questions about the ability of these missionaries to truly collaborate in partnership with the local churches. This concern is further explored in international development literature, where some scholars have pointedly considered how

[7] Ibid., p. 206.
[8] Howell (2008), 210.

mission practice and service motivated by a Christian sense of compassion can contribute to a misleading (and often misinformed) "other-ing" of peoples across the Global South.[9]

The second main category of religious studies perspectives on development comes from anthropologists and sociologists of religion that analyze faith networks in international contexts as a means of social capital. These works tend to look at individual actors and communities on a micro scale to consider how shared religious common ground can strengthen communities by building social capital. There are some notable critical perspectives here, but many of these works tend to see religion generally as exerting a positive force on communities. For example, Kevin O'Neill's work on Guatemala offers a critical perspective on U.S. evangelical actors, but a more positive perspective on how religious affect can build meaningful spaces.[10]

In this category, Brendan Thornton's work on evangelical identity formation in the Dominican Republic shows how religious affiliation can lend legitimacy and status to individuals in marginalized communities, illuminating "the ways in which the urban poor put their religion to work in their everyday lives."[11] Thornton's argument centers on an analysis of identity formation within and in reference to evangelical forms of Christianity. He argues that the propensity to leverage religious identity, specifically a Pentecostal identity, is a characteristic feature of the lived experience in many Dominican communities. Thornton also provides a detailed analysis of the engagement with spirits,

[9] Bradley (2005) and O'Neill (2013). Also see Trinitapoli & Vaisey (2009) for a discussion of how this compassion relates to trip participants religious experiences. It is worth mentioning too that this "other-ing" is complicated when we consider the increasing prominence of devout Christianity in the Global South, as a shared religious perspective may blur previously stark distinctions between "others."
[10] O'Neill (2013)
[11] Thornton (2016), 216.

demons, and other supernatural forces in everyday life of Dominican barrios.[12] In short, he states: "Much of everyday life for many Dominicans is committed to the spiritual realm… [it is] an enchanted world, one where magic and miracles exist. Where angels, demons, and spirits visit the living. A place where the powers of good and evil are real but are not always recognized or understood".[13] Thornton's work is a critically important contribution towards understanding the particular and locally constituted ways in which evangelical Christianity shapes Dominican communities, but it does not consider international actors or development practice within the context of this religious presence.

Finally, the third broad category within this body of literature from a religious studies perspective looks at the intersection of faith (as a general concept) and community development.[14] This category most closely informs my own analysis, as scholarship in this area tends to engage with scholarship from international development studies, NGOs, and religion. However, by frequently considering all religious development actors as one homogenous category, this literature tends to gloss over differences that I am trying to highlight. For example, many of these works will look at grassroots churches, small faith-based organizations, and large multi-million dollar budget organizations as all belonging to a category of religious organizations involved in development. I want to challenge this approach and call for more clarity in distinguishing types and scales of religious institutions in the development field, differentiating between community, local, national, and international operations. Instead of only distinguishing

[12] Thornton (2011), 52-56.
[13] Ibid., 54
[14] Alkire (2006); Deneulin (2009); Wuthnow & Offutt (2008)

actors by religious affiliation, we need to also distinguish actors by organizational form and the geographic scales at which they operate. A perspective from international development studies on NGOs could help address this issue, because this literature allows us to see how different actors fit into the overall institutional landscape of development. Tamsin Bradley's work, along with Matthew Clarke and Vicki Ware's 2015 study, begin to make progress towards reconciling this gap.[15]

However, while Clarke and Ware have made a (much needed) effort to examine current development literature and analyze if and how faith-based organizations are distinguished from the larger sector of secular NGOs, their conclusions still lack a critical lens that other disciplinary perspectives could provide. The authors posit that in some ways, FBOs can be understood as forerunners to the contemporary structure/methods of NGOs, and they argue that development literature and practice has failed to recognize the increasing prominence of FBOs. Their analysis aims to fill this gap by proposing six major approaches to defining FBOs in relation to NGOs in development literature.

Clarke and Ware propose four broad categories of FBOs: "1) FBOs directly linked to a local congregation or religious leader; 2) FBOs directly linked to a religious denomination, sect, or branch and formally incorporated within the institutional organization of that religious body; 3) FBOs directly linked to a religious denomination, sect, or branch but are incorporated separately from that religious body; and 4) FBOs that self-identify themselves as falling within a broad religious tradition from which they

[15] Bradley (2005) & (2009); Clarke & Ware (2015)

draw their motivation."[16] They then go on to outline six predominant categories of how to understand FBOs in relation to NGOs that they see in the literature.[17] Of these six categories, two are helpful for my analysis: FBOs as organizations at the intersection (FBOs have a dual-identity by sitting at the intersection of NGO and sectarian religious organizations, and they can strategically use this to engage with diverse stakeholders) and FBOs as subset organizations (FBOs are a distinct category within the larger overarching class of NGOs).

Though I applaud Clarke and Ware for giving the FBO/NGO intersection much needed attention, I do disagree with their argument that despite assertions to the contrary, it is not clear how FBOs are distinct from NGOs, given that both categories have similar aims and methods related to poverty alleviation.[18] While there may be vast similarities in organizational structures and types of development programming between secular and faith-based organizations, my findings reveal that the nature of evangelical Christianity is nonetheless paramount to understanding how AEDOs work in the Dominican Republic. Moreover, as Bradley has found and as my findings indicate, dense and committed interpersonal networks set these organizations apart from their secular counterparts.[19] In the following chapters, I show that, in many ways, AEDOs are a distinct institutional actor contributing to community development.

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[16] Clarke & Ware (2015), 5-6.
[17] Ibid., 6-14
[18] Ibid., 5
[19] Bradley (2005)

2.2 INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, NGOS, & RELIGION

Switching gears to consider literature in international development studies that studies NGOs and religion, I find that these perspectives tend to fall in this same last category described above. That is to say, when international development scholars consider religion as a factor affecting development, or religious actors within the landscape of NGOs and other development actors, they tend to stop at the categorization of "religious" and provide little further specificity in terms of imporant distinctions between denominations. Religious movements and actors are discussed in general and optimistic terms with an implicit assumption that religious communities are a source of social capital and empowerment in many underdeveloped spaces. Such optimism is reflected in some of the "mainstream" religious studies literature, particularly the (highly influential) scholarship of Rodney Stark, both his seminal 1996 work (*The Rise of Christianity*) and his 2008 analysis of survey data on American beliefs.[20]

However, as postcolonial scholarship has come to the foreground in development literature, more critical voices have emerged that see religion (again, in general terms) as a hindrance to social activism. Ideas about justice, decolonization, community engagement, participatory planning, and rights-based concerns are prevalent in this field, but are not often put in direct conversation with how they might be reflected, furthered, or challenged through different expressions of religious belief. To this point, and perhaps unsurprisingly, international development literature rarely delves into any analysis, or show much understanding of, theological differences and the implications of theological

[20] Tyndale (2003), which specifically looks at religion and development and Fukuyama (2001) which focuses mostly on development, also represent this "optimist" perspective.

positions within development. This is a place where international development scholars could stand to diversify their perspectives and deepen their understanding.

There are several studies that have specifically considered faith-based groups *as* NGOs in the international development field, but their titles indicate the current state of the literature about this topic. Articles such as "A call for clarification and critical analysis on faith-based organizations" and "the invisible NGO" show that this niche is understudied (and perhaps underappreciated) from both disciplinary perspectives.[21] Assessing the state of the literature reveals that works from international development studies do not tend to provide a nuanced understanding of faith-based NGOs, particularly the "faith" component of these organizations. I also found that religious studies tends to focus on how American evangelicals act within the U.S., without much literature assessing these actors in an international context that takes into account the realities of international politics. While there is scholarship providing an excellent U.S.-based analysis of evangelical Christianity and NGOs, a similarly thorough international perspective is lacking.[22]

One important theme that comes to the foreground in reviewing the literature on international NGOs and religion (both generally and with a Christian focus) is the way that scholars have identified the idea of *compassion* as a central, defining characteristic of faith-based development interventions.[23] Understanding how a religious notion of

[21] Bradley (2009); and Hearn (2002), respectively
[22] Hackworth (2010). Wuthnow & Offutt (2008) also recognize the necessity of showing this perspective in their analysis of transnational religious networks, but the task remains for scholars to respond to their call by thoroughly studying how North American evangelical NGOs operate in the Global South.
[23] Bradley (2005); Hackworth (2010); McAlister (2008); O'Neill (2013)

compassion can serve as a motivating force for development actors is a crucial step towards distinguishing AEDOs as a specific subset of development actors, but it is not the only step. Because this particular type of compassion has been interpreted by some scholars as furthering the "othering" of marginalized peoples, particularly people of color in the Global South, it should not be analyzed without engaging ideas of race and gender that add nuance to the way scholars understand the implications of compassion.

2.3 CRITICAL INTERNATIONAL PLANNING

Scholarship on critical international planning is the third body of literature that informs (albeit somewhat tangentially) my analysis and argument. Critical (or insurgent) planning is a relatively recent development in planning scholarship that seeks to unsettle, question, and reimagine that status quo of community planning praxis. These perspectives foreground critical analyses of colonialism, power, gender, race, identity, and equity as they are expressed through planning. Although there is a wealth of literature in this area, here I aim to only briefly introduce some particularly pertinent works that highlight these critical perspectives on planning. Because of the history of the U.S. as a dominant political, economic, and social force of power in the Global South, these ideas must inform any understanding of how U.S.-based actors operate in low-income Global South communities. Ideas of critical planning inform the rest of my analysis as a sort of undercurrent; my analysis of the impact of evangelical development actors is grounded in this framework, while literature on religion and international development studies is what I use to *characterize* and *contextualize* the phenomenon of AEDOs as development actors.

Faranak Miraftab is one of the most influential voices involved in defining critical, insurgent planning in the Global South. Her work considers counter-hegemonic planning efforts in colonial and post-colonial societies. Miraftab's articulation of the realities of neoliberal governance, while informed through her work in South Africa, is applicable to the Dominican context. As she describes,

> …insurgent planning [is] radical planning practices that respond to neoliberal specifics of dominance through inclusion. It highlights the hegemonic drive of neoliberal capitalism to stabilize state–citizen relations by implicating civil society in governance, and it stresses the importance to radical planning of the contested terrains of inclusion and dominance.[24]

Miraftab's work helps us establish which priorities are central to a critical perspective on planning in the Global South. She also comments on how the "NGO-ification" of community organizing has tended to depoliticize the struggles of marginalized communities, and in other works she has explored the ideological shift of NGOs over the course of the 20th century.[25] While her analysis of this shift is an important contribution to the field, it nonetheless includes far too little mention of religion (especially evangelical Christianity) as a monumental force in this shift. In this way, she falls in line with other development and planning scholars that tend to regard religion in broad terms, if at all.

Arturo Escobar similarly makes profound contributions to critical perspectives on development and planning.[26] His seminal work *Encountering Development* provides one of the most widely cited critiques of development practice and the legacy of colonialism

[24] Miraftab (2009), 32.
[25] Miraftab (1997)
[26] Escobar (1995)

in Latin America. Escobar sees the standard approach to "development" as represented by institutional practices. In exploring ideas of subjectivity, knowledge, and power as they are expressed in development, Escobar fundamentally critiques the concept of development itself as a Western economic and political "ensemble" of control. He also raises critical concerns about how institutionalized development practice enacts drastic change in the communities it aims to "help."[27]

Katharine Rankin follows in Escobar's line of thought, but with some useful additions of more contemporary examples and a more intersectional view on post-colonialism.[28] She argues for a new understanding of the role of critical development theory in planning practice, identifying commonalities between the two (often disconnected) fields and highlighting the ways in which current theories of planning can be informed by critical development theory in order to reorient the field toward a new normative goal based on ideas of social justice. Rankin helps provide a framework that translates Escobar's critiques into standards for development practice. In this way, her work is a useful example of the type of interdisciplinary thought that is necessary in planning and development.[29]

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[27] "[L]ong standing cultural practices and meanings—as well as the social relations in which they are embedded—are altered. The consequences of this are enormous, to the extent that the very basis of community aspirations and desires in modified. Thus the effect of the introduction of development has to be seen not only in terms of its social and economic impact, but also, and perhaps more importantly, in relations to the cultural meanings and practices they upset or modify." Ibid., 438.

[28] Rankin (2010)

[29] "In critical development studies the reflexivity in relation to post-colonial geopolitics would seem to have produced a reticence toward praxis, and an understanding of critique as taking place at a necessary distance from the work of 'programming' (Li, 2007). Planning theory refuses this distinction and is thus well positioned to put the critical resources of critical development studies to good practical use." Ibid. (220).

Rankin calls for an approach to planning that "catalyzes collective critical consciousness" as a way of bringing critical development theory out of its formally institutionalized, isolated world and into the day-to-day realities experienced in communities across the globe. For Rankin, pursuing these new normative goals of planning is the explicit role of the international planner. Speaking to "the fundamental feminist principle that change begins with everyday practice and experience," Rankin finally provides three strategies for practice for the international planner: reflexively historicizing differences, building solidarity, and generating new modes of political agency.[30] These strategies create a new, more nuanced role for the international planner, but nonetheless there is still little discussion of how religion, and specifically the proliferation of evangelical Christianity across the Global South, may inform such critical praxis. In places like the Dominican Republic, may local churches play a role in efforts to "generate new modes of political agency" through a pragmatic negotiation with development actors? In other words, while we can (and we must) still look at churches with a critical eye in light of issues of power, inclusion, and equality, we nevertheless cannot afford to entirely overlook religious networks, even evangelical Christian networks, as bodies of solidarity that people actually flock to in order to get things done in their communities. These are nuanced, at times contradictory, but constantly present and powerful forces in communities across the Global South.

It is also important to note here the tension between insurgent planning/postcolonial studies and religious studies regarding the idea of Christian faith

[30] Rankin (2010) p. 227

and the spread of Christianity. Sanneh, Steingega and Cleary, Jenkins, and Tweed (among others) understand religion (Christianity in particular) as boundary-crossing, adaptive, locally situated, and, in the case of Sanneh in particular, untethered to any one culture.[31] So, for these scholars, Christianity and de-colonialism are not mutually exclusive. Because Christianity is adaptive, communities in the Global South can (as Sanneh argues) and have (as Jenkins shows) exercise agency to make it their own and thus detach it from the colonizer. On the other hand, while critical planning literature does not overtly address Christianity in parallel ways, there is an implicit undercurrent across planning literature that gives a negative connotation to Christian faith, assuming it is inevitably linked to the colonizer. This literature thus does not tend to make space for locally-grounded, grassroots expressions of Christianity in the Global South.

In general, very little has been written explicitly at the intersection of planning and religion, though there are some notable exceptions.[32] By and large, references to religion in planning works are fleeting and incomplete. As Gale astutely notes, planning scholars tend to regard religion as an "epiphenomenon" of ethnicity.[33] This oversight not only conflates two complex ideas, but it also fails to consider how nuanced expressions of religious practice tangibly impact the ways that humans interact with their spatial environments and craft imaginaries about their communities. By drawing on literature from critical international planning, religious studies, and development studies, I aim to

[31] Sanneh (2015); Steingenga & Cleary (2007); Jenkins (2011); Tweed (2009)
[32] Luz (2015) contributes to reconciling this gap with a thesis that argues for planners to begin addressing the multiple forms of religion that are taking place worldwide (with a focus on the Global South) and that shape the ways people understand their spatial geographies.
[33] Gale (2008), 19.

put forth an analysis of AEDOs that takes into account the main theories and concerns from these different bodies of scholarship.

2.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

An important shortcoming I noticed in assessing this literature is an inconsistency in language and specificity. Many works will cite "faith-based actors" in development, without specifying which faith tradition and what type of actors. This becomes problematic when the assumption is evangelical Christian actors (as in Hackworth's work), but no specific analysis is provided as to what about evangelical Christianity contributes to a specific outlook on development praxis and why evangelical Christian actors merit more consideration than other faith-based actors. To address this concern, I have made an intentional effort to specify the types of actors I am considering, namely AEDOs, in order to avoid conflating the terms "faith-based actors" and "evangelical Christian actors."

Scholars have generally done well to recognize the importance of religion in development, demonstrating how faith influences the way in which people live and perceive their communities and their world. A lot has been written about the nuanced and at times contradictory expressions of evangelical Christianity in the United States and the specific histories that gave rise to these expressions.[34] The next step now is to bring this analysis to the ways that North American evangelicals act out their faith in the Global

[34] There is a plethora of scholarship on evangelical Christianity in the U.S., more than I can do justice to here. Some notable works to consider: Moreton (2009), arguing that evangelicism and capitalist enterprise in the rust belt are mutually reinforcing ideologies; Noll (2001) for a thorough historical analysis of the evangelical movement in America; Griffith (1997), arguing for centering the agency of American evangelical women despite apparent contradictions; and Finke & Stark (1992) for a seminal argument on "rational choice theory" in American religion.

South while also considering, through the lens of critical planning, the specific implications of what it means for a U.S.-based NGO to furnish social services in low-income, marginalized and often informal communities.

The task before these disciplinary fields is, therefore, one of specificity. We have to begin to characterize North American, Protestant evangelical non-governmental organizations that work through short-term missions and long-term programming in international contexts to deliver social services as a specific type of actors in the field of international development. Religious studies would do well to borrow some of the critical perspectives from international development literature to examine these movements and actors with more of a critical lens in light of issues of power, colonialism, and neoliberal politics. Similarly, international development scholars would do well to nuance their understandings of how these actors impact development work through the particular perspectives offered from their faith. In sum, it is time to bring in the outsiders, and this is exactly how my work hopes to intervene.

Chapter 3: Context

With an understanding of the scholarly perspective where my work is situated, we can now turn to an analysis of the particular context where my research takes place. The nature of the church, the state, and the overlap of church and state in development practice in the Dominican context has unique characteristics that directly inform how development practitioners can understand AEDOs in this setting. Through discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews with government officials, I was able to gain a nuanced perspective of how Christian churches and faith-based actors (of various denominations) are regarded in government-led development projects. As part of this work, I interviewed Dominican pastors, local and national government representatives, and NGO representatives to understand the landscape of religiously affiliated development actors so that I could later situate AEDOs within this landscape. These interviews provided a great deal of insight as to how Dominican churches engage with the state from positions of "informality" in the context of neoliberal politics.

In this chapter, I aim to provide a baseline understanding of the Dominican context. The particularities of this context matter in dictating the religion-in-development landscape that the AEDO actors I analyze in the next chapter navigate. Here I will demonstrate the importance of faith as leading to a significant role of the church as a semi-state, social and political actor. To this point, I draw from both Chelsey Kivland and Yarimar Bonilla, who work in Haiti and Guadeloupe respectively, to apply different notions of "sovereignty" in my analysis of the Dominican church/state context. In the Dominican Republic, there is a significant blending of the roles of the state and church

that in turn provides context for understanding the different roles of churches in development work.

3.1 FAITH IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The Dominican Republic has a deeply rooted religious history, and it is difficult to miss the very present references to Christianity in everyday Dominican life. Corner stores called "Jehovah es mi Redentor" (*Jehovah is my redeemer*) and bumper stickers that proclaim "Dios es misericordioso" (*God is merciful*) are among countless examples of the ways in which religiosity inundates public space in Santo Domingo. Religious vocabulary is similarly omnipresent in colloquial speech. Unexpected occurrences are not infrequently met with an exclamation of "gloria a Dios" (*glory to God*) or "aleluya" (*hallelujah*). "Dios te bendiga" (*God bless you*) is as common a goodbye as any other phrase. As one government official concisely put it, "el Dominicano cree *mucho*" (*Dominicans believe [in God] a lot*). My perception of the profound Christian presence in the Dominican Republic was not an isolated experience. In his work, anthropologist Brendan Thornton found a similarly dense religious presence in the nation:

> As a feature part and parcel of Dominican culture, Christianity (broadly defined) forms the central organizing referent for Dominican moral worlds. Central to virtually every significant historical event in the country from discovery and colonization of the island to its struggle for independence, to political reform and rhetoric today, Christian culture is the frame within which the Dominican Republic has realized both its own identity as well as its historical and national agency…To not take account of the meteoric growth in popularity of the evangelical movement here or anywhere throughout the Western Hemisphere is to ignore an important, if not central course in the social and cultural history of New World societies and peoples.[35]

[35] Thornton (2011), p. 1-2

In painting the picture of Christianity in the Dominican Republic, there are several key ideas worth highlighting: the Catholic/Protestant divide, neoliberalism, and informality. Understanding how these concepts shape Dominican evangelical churches and religious identity forms the basis of understanding the power of evangelical entities as institutions.

Before diving into this discussion, a note about terminology is useful. In discussing Dominican religious actors, I use the term "evangelical" to refer to a multitude of charismatic, Protestant forms of Christianity, including (most notably) Pentecostalism, but also charismatic expressions of other mainline Protestant denominations.[36] While evangelical may be a loaded term in a U.S. context, my use of the term evangelical as a general descriptor for these expressions of Christianity aims to mirror the way that Dominicans discuss these groups and identify themselves as part of a religious community (*los evangélicos/yo soy evangélico*), facilitating a certain clarity across cultural contexts. I employ David Bebbington's classic definition of evangelicalism as encompassing four key dimensions: 1) biblicism, or centralizing the Bible as the ultimate truth and inspired word of God; 2) conversionism, or a concerted effort on proselytizing/evangelizing to win converts to the faith; 3) activism, or engagement with social and political issues from the position of religion; and 4) crucicentrism, or a central

[36] The more mainline, non-evangelical Protestant denominations (Presbyterian, Episcopal, etc.) are distinguished both in belief and practice from evangelical Protestantism. It is worth noting that these denominations tend to take more socially progressive positions and be much more concerned with acts of social service than with confession of faith and repentance. They are also active in the Dominican Republic as civil society actors contributing to community development work, but they are not my focus in this study.

"obsession" with ideas about Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.[37] What matters most in understanding these actors in the Dominican context is noting the charismatic evangelical nature of their religious expression.

Like much of Latin America, the Dominican Republic has seen a dramatic increase in numbers of converts to these charismatic, evangelical forms of Protestant Christianity (especially Pentecostalism) in recent decades.[38] While Catholicism remains the predominant religion, it is experiencing an overall decline in adherents while numbers of evangelicals are soaring. Trying to understand this phenomenon leads to intriguing questions about freedom, regulation, and hierarchy in this context. Evangelical churches have been especially successful in lower-income, marginalized communities, as the lack of institutional regulation allows for anyone with a "call from God" to start a church while Catholicism has stringent theological training requirements in place for clergy.[39] In this way, some people embrace the evangelical Church because they perceive a sense of freedom from hierarchy within it. God becomes the judge of holiness, so otherwise disenfranchised populations can achieve a certain status and respect within the four walls of the church.

For example, take the case of Blanca Quevedo. A middle-aged woman who just learned to write her name in the last several years, Quevedo is a key member of a

[37] Bebbington (1989) qtd. in Noll (2002) p. 5
[38] Steigenga & Cleary (2007); Stoll (1990); Jenkins (2007). While Pentecostalism, a charismatic, revivalist denomination that centralizes ideas of "baptism in the Holy Spirit" and the embodied *experience* of God is prominent in this context, it is not really the central point of interest in my study. Though there are exceptions, many traditional Pentecostal churches do not employ a theology that motivates them to be involved in development work; the spiritual realm is priortized above the physical realm.
[39] Personal Interview, Director of the Department of Church Affairs, Santo Domingo Norte. July 2017.

women's community group, Mujeres Unidas, in the self-built, "informal" neighborhood of Los Platanitos in Guaricanos, Santo Domingo Norte. When discussing the significance of her faith and how it influences her participation in the women's group, Quevedo said:

> Oh, this means so much. So much. Because I really like to congregate in my church. I don't like to miss church. Because in my church, when I'm there, I'm an active member. I got baptized a long time ago, and they give me the pulpit [so I can speak]. I take the time to clean my church, and to stop to do the work of the church. When I go to a hospital I always bring a pack of tracts, where the sick people are, I tell them "God bless you, Christ loves you, Christ is the only one who heals and saves," and I start there. That Christ is who heals and who gives freedom. Because I am proof that he does it. Look at where I am. I'm an example. *I am an example*. ("*Ay eso significa mucho, Mucho. Porque a mi me gusta congregarme en mi iglesia. No me gusta faltar en mi iglesia. Porque en mi iglesia, cuando este, soy una miembra activa. Yo me he bautizado hace tiempo, me dan el pulpito. Yo saco tiempo para limpiar mi iglesia, como pasarle hacer la obra, cuando voy a un hospital siempre me llevo un paquete de tratado, donde los enfermos, les digo Dios les bendiga, cristo te ama, cristo es el unico que sana y salva, y empiezo por ahí. Que es cristo quien sana y quien liberta. Porque yo soy una comprueba de que lo hace. Mira donde yo soy. Soy un ejemplo. Yo soy un ejemplo"*).[40]

Quevedo's account demonstrates the capacity for the church to act as an empowering institution for otherwise disenfranchised people. She found identity within the church, and as part of congregation of believers she has been able to earn respect for her dedication to the church's work. The social function of the church in this case is unique to the evangelical sector. In large regional Catholic dioceses, a woman like Quevedo would be one among many in the crowd (see image 1).

Moreover, Dominican evangelicals often perceive and present themselves in opposition to Catholicism. Rather than existing as separate belief systems that find common ground in their Judeo-Christian roots, or even as "types of Christians," as some development practitioners may assume, Dominican evangelicals and Catholics tend to

[40] Personal Interview, Blanca Quevedo, Santo Domingo Norte. June 2017.

Image 1: Celia Montero's Catholic Church (left), and Blanca Quevedo's evangelical Pentecostal church (right) in Los Guaricanos, Santo Domingo Norte. The way these two church structures interact with public space and community fabric is indicative of some of the differences in their theology.

perceive themselves as belonging to clearly distinct, unique belief systems. Even between neighbors, there is a noticeable "othering" of those outside one's own belief system. As Quevedo stated in response to an inquiry about her faith,

> I am a Pentecostal evangelical Christian. I have faith; it's not religion what I have. Us evangelicals pray for the whole world, for those who aren't Christian; for Catholics (*Yo soy Cristiana evangélica Pentecostal. Yo tengo fe, no es religión lo que tengo. Nosotros los evangélicos oramos por todo el mundo, por los que no son cristianos, por católicos*).[41]

For her part, Celia Montero, a Catholic neighbor from the community, stated,

> They [the evangelicals] have their God that they call Jehovah. I don't know who he is, but I don't pray to Jehovah. He is not my God. *(Ellos [los evangélicos]*

[41] Ibid.

oran a su dios que le dicen Jehova. Yo no se quien es, pero yo no oro a él. No es mi dios).[42]

As evangelicals are concerned with salvation through prayer, "praying for Catholics" implies a concern for the souls of Catholic believers. Dominican evangelicals like Quevedo thus do not perceive Catholic belief as sufficient for salvation. Moreover, Montero provides an interesting theological distinction between the two groups. In saying, "I don't know who Jehovah is" (Jehovah, which first appears in the Old Testament, is a Hebrew name for the Christian God), she shows how despite a shared holy text, these two groups perceive themselves as distinct. As these anecdotes serve to show, Dominican evangelical Christianity is a uniquely constituted belief system. If Dominican evangelical and Catholic believers regard themselves as so fundamentally distinct, are development practitioners not bound to do the same?

To further clarify these distinctions, many scholars have commented on the evangelical focus on the individual in terms of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, prayer, sin, and salvation.[43] The decentralization and focus on the individual in evangelical Christianity mirrors the decentralization and focus on the individual that is central to neoliberal politics, so neoliberalism and the "protestant turn" across Latin America can act as mutually reinforcing phenomena.[44] Neoliberal politics often employs a rhetoric of "responsibilization" that makes the individual responsible for his/her own wellbeing, while evangelical belief stresses individual professions of faith (salvation) and

[42] Personal Interview, Celia Montero, Santo Domingo Norte. June 2017.
[43] Bebbinton (1989); Stoll (1990); Jenkins (2007); Steingega & Cleary (2007); Moreton (2009)
[44] Stoll (1990) famously asks, "Is Latin America turning Protestant?" which many scholars have since answered in the affirmative (Freston 2008)

confession of sin (repentance).[45] In both cases, the onus of responsibility for prosperity and well-being falls more on the individual (the evangelical believer; the neoliberal subject) than it does on the institution (the church; the state).

Moreover, within this neoliberal context, the retreat of the state as a social service provider has given way to the rise of non-state actors, particularly humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as powerful forces performing state functions under the guise of developmentalist politics.[46] NGOs are especially prominent in the context of "informal" neighborhoods that are not officially recognized by the state and therefore excluded from many social services. Many of these NGOs have international ties to the United States, and the vast majority of these are historically or currently affiliated with Christianity.[47] With the distinct nature of Christianity in the Dominican Republic, the political framework that reinforces certain ideas present in that Christianity, and the forces of globalization that have opened the island to international faith-based NGOs, a particular landscape of evangelicalism has begun to take shape.

3.2 LANDSCAPE OF THE CHURCH AS AN INSTITUTION VIS-À-VIS THE STATE

As Christianity in the Dominican Republic has begun to take on these increasingly charismatic forms, the ways in which the church engages with the state as an institution have also changed. With the "protestantization" of the country has come a demand from evangelical leaders that the state offer them the same recognition it gives to

[45] See Sletto & Nygren (2015) for a discussion on neoliberal "responsibilization" in the Dominican context. Other critical development scholars have called this *neoliberal subject formation.*
[46] Escobar (1995)
[47] Werker & Ahmed (2008)

the more traditional Catholic authorities. This pressure has led to the formation of the Consejo Dominicano de Unión Evangélica (CODUE), a national organization that represents evangelical voices in local and national governmental processes.

CODUE was founded in 1992 as the evangelical community's response to the prominence of the Catholic Church in Dominican politics and governance. The evangelical community wanted equal representation, so they organized and lobbied in order to make that happen. Its institutional structure is made up of a hierarchy of entities, including assemblies, associations, councils, ministries, foundations, and movements. In total, there are more than 18,000 institutions (including churches and NGO groups) that are affiliated with CODUE. According to the CODUE representative Leonardo Moreno, the organization's purpose is to "represent the non-Catholic voice with the Dominican state" (*representar lo no católico con el estado Dominicano*) and to forge a connection between the state and the broader evangelical community.[48] This initiative is rooted in Constitutional Law 122, which regulates non-profit entities.[49] Moreno explained that by way of this law, the state now designates tax dollars to a fund for CODUE and then CODUE uses those funds for events and projects that are supposed to benefit evangelical churches (not individual evangelical believers). In Moreno's words,

> …our [CODUE's] purpose is to unify the evangelical churches of the country by way of activities and events, such as concerts (*nuestro propósito es unificar a las iglesias evangélicas del país a través de actividades y eventos, como por ejemplo los conciertos y las conferencias*).

[48] Personal interview, Leonardo Moreno. July 2017.
[49] http://www.fondomarena.gob.do/images/docs/mediateca/leyes/ley-122-05.pdf

However, reviewing the organization's materials and rhetoric readily reveals that a central aspect of their "mission" is to sway public moral opinion on political issues, specifically to oppose same-sex marriage and gender identity politics. Their opposition to same-sex marriage employs a violent rhetoric, claiming the LGBTQ+ community is intrinsically immoral and acts against the intentions of God and the Dominican state. The influence that CODUE is able to leverage with evangelical churches across the country means that this stance on certain social issues poses serious implications that trickle down into communities, which I will address in the last chapter.

CODUE also has an agreement with the state to provide after-school educational programs that include a curriculum called "constitutional formation" (*formación constitucional*) which is designed to teach students (in public schools, with public funding) how to interpret the national constitution. Another initiative that Moreno described involved the organization working with churches to help them become "fiscalías," or informal public prosecutors, so that "people can go to the church [to solve problems] and not the public prosecutor office, in order to reduce conflicts and not have to go to the supreme court" (*para que la gente puede ir a la iglesia y no a la fiscalía, para reducir conflictos y no tener que ir al tribunal superior).*[50] He also said that CODUE does not intervene in terms of encouraging or discouraging church consolidation, but rather leaves congregations "to themselves." These changing tides in Christianity within the nation, with the proliferation of evangelical churches and their unification through CODUE, have shaped a new dynamic of how individual churches and

[50] Personal interview, Leonardo Moreno. July 2017.

churchgoers interact with the state. As a whole, the evangelical sector operates as a fragmented institution that has influenced the way development processes occur in low-income, marginalized communities across Santo Domingo.

Church groups can also act as partners or subsidiaries of state agencies responsible for many social services, including hospitals, schools, adult education programs, public health initiatives, and beyond. In the Ministry of Education, for example, official representatives confirmed the blending of church and state jurisdiction in public schools. As Arsenio Díaz, a planner working on education programs, described, religious education is officially sanctioned by the state because it is given in public schools in the form of religion classes and through a required "morality and civics" class.[51] His colleague, Antonio Rivas, added that with some private schools in the process of becoming publicly managed through a special agreement, the Ministry of Education is financing schools while religious institutions manage them. He also said that the constitution mandates that Dominican education should be Christian.[52]

Of Evangelical Christians, Díaz said they are "more fanatical but also more democratic" (*mas fanáticos pero también mas democráticos*) and that given former dictator Rafael Trujillo's affiliation with the Catholic Church, it is unsurprising that the evangelical movement has attracted so many converts here. Although the Catholic Church is anecdotally the majority, Díaz suspected that the number of practicing evangelicals now rivals the number of Catholics who regularly attend mass.

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[51] Personal interview, Arsenio Diaz. Santo Domingo. June 2017.
[52] Personal interview, Antonio Rivas. Santo Domingo. July 2017.

Dominican evangelical churches ultimately engage in nuanced and complex relationships with the state, working both within and against state sovereignty towards ends "that they hope will improve their individual and collective lives."[53] In this way, and borrowing from Chelsey Kivland's work, they "make the state" by performing state functions through a uniquely *evangelical* form of sovereignty.[54] There is thus substantial overlap between the spheres of church and state in the Dominican Republic.

3.3 THE NATURE OF THE EVANGELICAL SECTOR

Given this understanding of the religious and political context of the Dominican Republic, it makes sense that this conflation of neoliberalism and evangelicalism produces a fragmented governance landscape that in turn shapes urban development processes. There are government entities dedicated to managing church affairs, political lobbying groups that represent evangelical interests, internationally based NGOs with multi-million dollar budgets, smaller internationally affiliated NGOs that act as subcontractors for larger organizations, and a plethora of evangelical churches. Many smaller NGOs act as liaisons between community-based churches and larger NGOs, specifically World Vision and Plan International. Funding to these larger organizations therefore trickles down through the institutional network to arrive to individual churches

[53] Bonilla (2017) presents an idea of sovereignty that expands to include more "grassroots," or non-traditional, performances of sovereign power. Central to her argument is this idea: "I do find that despite a deep skepticism toward the traditional means and ends of modern politics, contemporary political actors throughout and beyond the Caribbean continue to engage in social practices that they hope will improve their individual and collective lives. These actions might not resemble the nationalist struggles of a previous era. In fact at times they are hard to assess, or even recognize, since they do not involve grand gestures of state overthrow, the rise to power of charismatic leaders, or the development of the large-scale social projects characteristic of modernist statecraft. Yet they still manage to have profound impact, even in their moments of purported failure" (202).

[54] Kivland (2012)

via smaller intermediary NGOs.[55] As one of my interlocutors put it, everything is based on a chain of relationships between organizations, churches, and individuals, with Dominican churches operating both alongside and against the Dominican state.[56]

Similarly, the evangelical body as a group of churches is also fragmented. In Santo Domingo Norte alone, a 2016 census estimated a count of more than 800 evangelical churches in the jurisdiction, a staggeringly disproportionate amount compared to other denominations (see Figure 1). The lead organizer on this census was Sergio Pascual, the director of the Department of Church Affairs in Santo Domingo Norte's City Hall. [57]

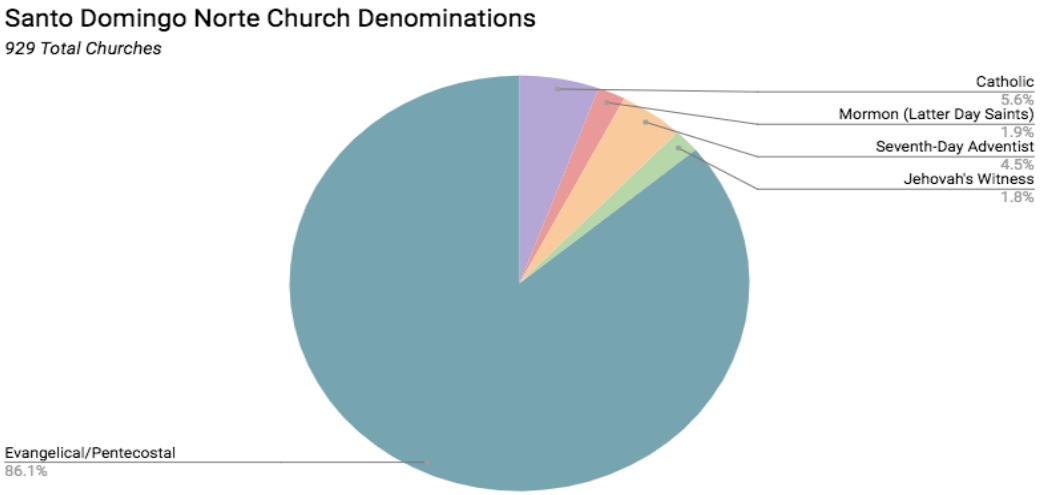

Figure 1. Data Source: Santo Domingo Norte City; Graphic from author

[55] Personal interview, World Vision Dominican Republic Representative, June 2016
[56] Personal Interview, Mateo Matamoros, June 2017
[57] That this department even exists is testament to the power of the evangelical church as an institution.

Pascual explained the prominence of evangelical churches in language that reflects agreement with religious rational choice theory:[58]

> We have seen that there are so many [evangelical] churches more than anything because of disagreement. Disagreement in terms of leadership. Because if there is a person, a member of a congregation, who doesn't adapt or adjust themselves to the beliefs and rules [of that congregation], then that person can just go and plant their own church. Now, in a neighborhood there can be 30 different evangelical churches and only one Catholic church...why is this so? The Catholic Church is regulated by the archdiocese of Santo Domingo. But the evangelicals aren't, because in evangelical churches there are people that say they have the "call [from God] to pastor" in poor communities, so they go and they start their church. So I come in, there's another church, and you're four blocks away from it, so I'll put my church three blocks away from it. One of these churches can have 10 members, another can have 20, another can have 15. Now I say, why don't they get together and form one church? But they're not going to do this, because they're from different belief systems. Even within the same Christian denomination, there are a lot of beliefs.

Yet although the evangelical sector is dispersed and decentralized in this way, it is not entirely without a sense of cohesion. CODUE's hierarchical structure allows it to act as an umbrella organization for evangelical churches and lends legitimacy to the "evangelical voice" in state policymaking processes, effectively serving as an evangelical lobbying group. In this regard, as I will show later on, Dominican evangelical churches perform a certain evangelical sovereignty through CODUE.

Echoing the perspectives that Pascual articulated, the director of the Dominican chapter of an AEDO, Mateo Matamoros, offered an analysis of evangelical churches in low-income Dominican communities that perceives them as uniquely powerful

[58]Rational Choice Theory is a (somewhat) controversial idea in the study of religion. Popularized by Finke & Stark (1992), this theory argues for an economic supply & demand-based understanding of how religions experience growth. So in the case of Latin America, as more religions became avaiable through increased "supply," "consumers" of religion began to "shop" for new belief systems. Gill (2008) explores this idea in the Latin American context.

institutions, astutely nothing that "there is no institution stronger than the church."[59] Matamoros' analysis of the power of the church as an institution is crucial to understanding the Dominican context. Despite its fragmented nature, the evangelical sector exerts a particularly strong influence as a social institution. These churches are embedded in (most often low-income) communities, operating on a small scale and through interpersonal relationships. And, perhaps most importantly to note, people *believe* in these institutions. They donate their time and resources for the work of the church. Whoever sets the agenda for this work therefore taps into what is arguably, in practice at least, the strongest organizing framework in Dominican communities.

3.4 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN DOMINICAN CHURCHES AND AEDOS

Evangelicalism in the Dominican Republic is fragmented yet pervasive, and its actors form a dense network across (especially low-income) communities. Recognizing the strength of this network, it is unsurprising that entities such as the city's Department of Church Affairs and CODUE have come to exercise the power that they do. Yet even as "outsiders" (in the sense that they have international ties), AEDOs also enter into this context—in fact, they play a crucial role. Connections between Dominican evangelical churches and AEDOs are often rooted in partnerships between churches or affiliations with larger faith-based NGOs, but at their core all of these connections depend on interpersonal relationships between individuals. As non-governmental organizations operating in the civil society sector, AEDOs rely on the strength of interpersonal relationships for their continuity. The fact that a shared faith is a foundational aspect of

[59] Personal interview, Mateo Matamoros, June 2017.

these relationships plays no small role in the longevity of many AEDOs. In one case in particular (which I will discuss in the next chapter) this sort of relationship is what, for all intents and purposes, built a community. The unique nature of relationships based on a shared evangelical identity can certainly be problematic, but the importance of recognizing the power of these relationships to shape communities cannot be overlooked.

Nonetheless, as other examples show, relationships between AEDOs and Dominican communities can also be fragmented and shifting. Some partnerships are rooted in a 30-year relationship between two dedicated individuals, while others evolve from new actors meeting and developing projects that exist tangentially to the original initiative. In some cases where the original "point person" or contact between an American short-term mission group and a Dominican church moves onto other work, a certain void arises that needs to be filled. These voids can lead to complete ruptures in partnerships, where Dominican communities stop receiving funding they need because one key actor left the network. Some AEDOs, however, eventually become formally incorporated and start building bridges between American evangelical churches and their Dominican counterparts. As these relationships become more institutionalized, new interpersonal relationships start on the basis of new shared visions, and the process repeats itself. In this way, AEDOs and their Dominican affiliates build actor networks that act as *de facto* community development institutions in the Dominican Republic.

Because there are different perspectives on the most appropriate nature of the relationships between AEDOs and Dominican partners, different models of AEDO work have emerged. These models are characterized by differences in perspectives on

appropriate funding structures as well as ideas about the "experience" of American evangelicals visiting Dominican communities via AEDOs. In all cases, however, the idea of pragmatic partnerships emerged as a regular narrative from Dominican evangelical churches. As I will explore in the following chapter, the three AEDOs I profiled represent three different models of AEDO work through Dominican churches. The first model is characterized by its focus on facilitation. It leverages the AEDO status to facilitate transfers of funding, resources, and learning experiences between other already existing groups. The second model is characterized by its focus on pragmatism and its dependence on relationships. It uses AEDO capacity to bypass state inaction. Finally, the third model is defined by its focus on group experience and its trickle-down logic. It mirrors the ideas of neoliberal subject formation and uses AEDOs to (unintentionally) further us/them distinctions between American evangelicals and Dominican community members.

Chapter 4: Findings

In my fieldwork I examined three different international partnerships between Dominican churches and U.S. evangelical short-term mission teams. To respect each organization's confidentiality, I refer to them with pseudonyms based on where their U.S. headquarters are located: the Washington group, the Florida group, and the Capital group (from Washington D.C.). I chose to reach out to these particular organizations based on their size, the nature of the communities where they work, and the fact that they represent different models of how North American short-term, evangelical mission groups work in the Dominican Republic. My analysis is based on semi-structured interviews, document review, and in the case of the Capital group, participant observation. Reviewing this data, my findings reveal that there is no one way to "do" international AEDO partnerships, and that the different models are context and actor dependent. The external partner-Dominican partner relationship is significant in determining continuity of AEDO activities. Across the three contexts, there are prevailing themes of fragmentation and pragmatism. Finally, I show that approaches to community work through the church depend on the theological positions of the actors as well as on the structure and status of the institutional networks that they belong to.

4.1 CASE 1: THE WASHINGTON GROUP

"Sometimes you see that the North American leaves, and the relationship ends." ***A veces ves que se va el norteamericano, se va relación.*** **–Mateo Matamoros**

History

The Washington group is a ministry that works in various urban communities within Santo Domingo. They have been active in the Dominican Republic since the early 1990s, and they are affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRCNA). Their Dominican country director, Mateo Matamoros, has led the organization's initiatives in the Dominican Republic since 2006. I originally discovered this organization through online research prior to arriving in Santo Domingo for my fieldwork. My analysis of the Washington group focuses on their involvement in the community of La Mina, located in the Los Guaricanos sector of Santo Domingo Norte.

Matamoros explained that his exposure to mission work came from his upbringing in a *batey* (a very low-income rural agricultural community usually comprised of Haitian migrant workers in sugar cane fields), as his father was a pastor and he saw the church as a vehicle for organization and collaboration for the community to fight against common struggles. It was originally the CRCNA that sent missionaries to the batey in the late 1970s/early 1980s, primarily to provide theological training for local church leaders. Yet although the outreach was focused on giving leaders a theological foundation, it soon became clear that a lot of people in the communities could not read, so the missionaries began performing more "social work." He said that this leadership training started with church leaders and eventually expanded to include a broader selection of community

leaders outside the church. The missionaries then started sponsoring projects related to health, like building latrines and water purification plants that would benefit the whole community.[60] As the CRCNA grew as an international actor, it eventually institutionalized this branch of its ministry, forming an entity that acts as an international relief and development organization.[61]

In its work in the Dominican Republic, the Washington group operates as a sort of dispatcher organization, connecting U.S. church groups looking to have a short-term mission experience with Dominican churches that have "needs" for specific projects, usually involving physical labor. The Washington group has partnered with a particular U.S. church youth group from Iowa, what I refer to as the Iowa group, for seven consecutive summer mission trip experiences in La Mina.

Networks

In the case of the Washington group and the Iowa group, relationships between organizations are key to the ongoing development work taking place. The Washington group acts as a sort of facilitator organization that connects groups like the Iowa group to communities like La Mina. As Matamoros grew up around missionaries in the batey, he began attending international conferences hosted by the CRCNA and eventually came to lead the Dominican chapter of the Washington group. It was at one such conference where he met representatives from the Iowa group and learned about their desire to "serve" through international mission work. Matamoros knew church leaders from La

[60] Personal interview, June 2017
[61] https://www.crcna.org/ministries/world-renew

Mina through his domestic church networks, as the church is La Mina belongs to the same reformed denomination as his own church, so he saw the opportunity to connect this Iowa group with La Mina via the facilitation of the Washington group, whose Dominican chapter he had come to direct. The Iowa group is predominantly affiliated with one church in their home state, and the church in La Mina has spurred the development of several affiliated organizations that serve the community, namely a housing development program called *Mejorando mi techo* (Bettering the roof over my head). Effectively, there is a chain of relationships that stretches from a church body in the Midwest to a housing improvement organization in a remote corner of Santo Domingo Norte, with several entities acting as intermediary "stops" along the way. In Matamoros' words,

> The church is also an intermediary, because the church is a global institution. So through relationships, believers from other countries come here to support [our work]. So RISE Ministries arrived to La Mina by way of the Washington group, the organization I direct, but the community in La Mina has the primary relationship with the Washington group, and it's one of various relationships. It's a chain of relationships. So the question is, without these relationships, would the funds that the North Americans give arrive to the communities? Not without the relationships. So relationships are the way that resources are made available. Local resources as much as international ones.
> (*La iglesia también es un intermediaro. Porque la iglesia es una institución global. Entonces a través de relaciones, creyentes de otros países vienen aquí a apoyar. Entonces RISE Ministries llegó a La Mina a través del grupo de Washington, que es la organización que yo dirigo, pero La Mina, que es la que tiene la relación primaria, con la iglesia con el grupo de Washington, fue una de varias. Es una cadena de relaciones. Entonces la pregunta es, sin estas relaciones, los fondos que dan los norteamericanos llegarían a la comunidad? No sin las relaciones. Entonces las relaciones son la manera en que se hacen disponibles los recursos. Tantos locales, como de afuera).*

These relationships are not necessarily hierarchical, but this structure raises interesting questions about how agendas are set and at what level decisions are made. Matamoros was careful to emphasize the Washington group's focus on participatory work. He shared that the Iowa group has always been good at asking what the community needs rather than prescribing what they think the greatest needs are. Nonetheless, he mentioned that they often prefer projects that involve physical labor. As short-term mission teams like the Iowa group always inject economic resources into the communities where they work—through sponsoring project construction costs, paying for team meals, etc.—there is a certain financial imbalance between actors in the network that may impact how and by what means decisions are made. Yet the role of the Washington group as a sort of third party facilitator may help equal the playing field, because they operate as an intermediary between the funder mission group and the recipient community.

Activities & Programs

In La Mina, the Iowa group, like many short-term evangelical missionary organizations, is generally involved in projects with a physical labor component. Short-term groups visit the community for around one week and contribute to a project by providing labor and donated funds for micro-loans that the local church manages. The Dominican Republic is the only international project site where they currently work. The group organizes annual summer mission trips for American youth, which it describes as "life-changing, culturally immersive experiences" that are chiefly focused on physical interventions. As their website describes, projects generally take three to four days and

tend to involve physical labor and light construction work. These projects are done for "*Christian* schools, churches, and/or families in need" (emphasis added).[62]

The local church in La Mina that serves as the "host" for Iowa short-term teams is called Iglesia Cristiana Reformada Dios es Mi Pastor. One of the church's deacons, Domingo Reyes, has a background in construction work and serves as the (unofficial) project coordinator for Iowa group activities in the community. Reyes explained that the church already has a program in place (Mejorando mi techo) through which they provide funds, materials, and labor for home improvement projects in the community, which is a largely self-built informal neighborhood. Matamoros and Reyes met through their mutual affiliation with the Christian Reformed Church, and in his capacity as the Washington group Country Director for the Dominican Republic, Matamoros began to coordinate short-term missions for the Iowa group to partner with Reyes' church and participate in the projects that the local church is already developing through Mejorando mi techo. The Iowa group provides funding and labor as part of their partnership with the Washington group, but Mejorando mi techo exists independently from the Iowa group. While the funds from AEDOs like the Iowa group can be a huge source of help (as Matamoros described), Reyes was confident in assuring that Mejorando mi techo is ultimately in control of every project. As he stated,

> When they (the missionary teams) come, they all work. The church, together with them, we all work together. One person carries bricks, another person the machines, and we go there and all mix together while we're working [at the site]. But the labor really comes from us here in the community. If the missionaries don't come, we can still get things done on our own. We have a fund set aside to

[62] The Iowa group website

> make loans so that we can continue with the work. Because look, if we get together with the members of the church, and we say we need to collect X amount of funds for X project, we collect it. It gets done. *(Cuando ellos (los equipos misioneros) vienen, ellos trabajan todos. La iglesia con ellos, trabajamos todos juntos. Uno carga bloque, electro, y vamos ahi y nos mezclamos todos abajo. Pero la mano de obra sale de nosotros mismos de la comunidad. Si no vienen los misioneros nosotros igual lo podemos hacer. Nosotros tenemos un fondo para ir prestando, para seguir trabajando...Porque oye, si nosotros nos ponemos con los miembros de la iglesia, y decimos que vamos a recaudar X fondos para X trabajo lo hacemos, se hace).*[63]

Reyes also described the microloan process that the church uses in the Mejorando mi techo program, explaining that they decided on a loan structure because it would allow for funds to cycle through the community and reach more people, "so that the project doesn't die" (*para que no se muera el proyecto*). While the original funding came from international support via Matamoros and the Washington group, financial support from local church members has also allowed Mejorando mi techo to be able to distribute no-interest loans to community members that are interested in receiving support and that "qualify" for a loan. The local church operates as a financial lender in the sense that they determine, through a semi-formal evaluation, how much money a community member would be able to repay over time. Reyes emphatically explained that Mejorando mi techo is not interested in holding people in debt; they provide loans in accordance with the recipient's ability to repay. Tithes and offerings to the church thus become the investment for a type of community bank.

[63] Personal interview, Domingo Reyes, July 2017

Results & Products

In the past seven years of the Iowa group's involvement in La Mina, mission teams have typically contributed to home improvement projects for community members that have received a loan from the Mejorando mi techo initiative in the local church. Matamoros emphasized the importance of loans as empowering and sustainable (since people have to repay them) as opposed to what he described as the disempowering process of simply providing "a handout."

Projects in La Mina have ranged from adding a small addition to a house, like a raised entryway to help prevent flooding, to demolishing a tin house and rebuilding with concrete blocks on the same lot (see images 2 and 3 below).

Image 2. A self-built house made with zinc panels sits behind a cinderblock wall and doorframe that an AEDO helped develop. In this case, the homeowner got ill halfway through the project development and had to stop taking out loans. The intention was to rebuild her whole house, but the project remains in hiatus until she is able to start taking out and repaying loans again.

Image 3. A *Mejorando mi techo* project that an Iowa team contributed to several years ago. The house was raised from the street level in order to avoid inundation from heavy rains. They also developed a small stall outside the house for the homeowner to sell goods.

People request loan funds for the type of projects that are most urgent and that correspond with the amount of money they are able to pay back into the Mejorando mi techo funding pool. In addition to supporting in these home improvement projects, Iowa mission groups have also contributed to improvement projects in the church's school

building. In all projects, however, Reyes explained that the work is never completed during a given team's one week visit. Rather, church members already involved in Mejorando mi techo will prepare and complete work that the Iowa teams contribute to. Project timelines are thus dependent on when the Iowa group arrives, because the project can neither be in the very beginning or very end stages. There are certain stages of a construction project where it is most feasible to involve unskilled labor, so Reyes and other foremen have to ensure that projects are "ready" for teams when they arrive to "serve." For the community in La Mina, the line therefore is somewhat blurred in terms of showing the "results" from the church's partnership with the Iowa group. Home improvement projects are taking place on a regular basis through the work of Mejorando mi techo, and every now and then a group of North American high schoolers arrives to contribute to a portion of a project's development.

But for the Iowa group, demonstrating concrete results is much more of a priority. They uses a quantitative approach to show the impact of mission trips, putting numbers to every part of the service experience. According to their website, since 2008 the Iowa group has seen the following "results:"[64]

- 7 states
- 2 countries
- 21 outreach events
- 32 communities
- 108 nights of worship and small groups
- 130 projects
- 1,036 participants
- 5,350 people heard a message of hope

[64]The Iowa group website

- 19,437 volunteer hours of labor and service

This sort of "by the numbers" approach of quantifying impact is mirrored both in the development industry and in the evangelical church. Development industry NGOs are often encouraged to adopt this rhetoric in order to compete for "results-based" grant funding, while evangelical churches, through their emphasis on conversion and salvation are driven to quantify numbers of converts, "souls reached," new church plants, etc. Using this language helps the Iowa group resonate effectively with both sectors.

Ideology & Self-Perception

Matamoros described the specific partnership with the Iowa group as a service-learning experience. He talked about how short-term mission trips provide participants with the joy of participating in community development projects, as well as a learning experience through exposure to extreme poverty. He gave anecdotes of past partnerships with North American missionaries who had an "imperialistic" approach to their work by trying to prescribe solutions and failing to appreciate local context. For example, he told the story of an organization that had a mission of providing lunches to children in a rural community, but when the community expressed that their needs had changed and lunch was no longer a concern, the organization decided to leave rather than adjust their service delivery to the community's needs. In another example, after the initial North American contact in a community left, there was no sustained institutional presence by the individual's church.

To this point, Matamoros said, "sometimes the North American leaves, and the relationship is over…we want the resources, but we want them for what we *need* most"

(*a veces ves que se va el norteamericano, se va la relación…queremos los recursos, pero para lo que <u>más</u> necesitamos*). In this regard, the emphasis on institutional presence through entities like the Washington group and the Iowa group helps ensure continuity for development investments in communities like La Mina. For Matamoros, the current dynamic of the the Washington group-Iowa group relationship is positive because the Iowa group only asks rather than prescribing. As he said, "[they] come to converse and to learn." The Washington group maintains local autonomy through their ongoing relationship with the La Mina church, so if the Iowa group stops taking mission teams, the Washington group will still exist as a dispatcher organization that can facilitate another North American group's work in La Mina. Matamoros' and the Washington group's primary relationship is with Dominican communities in this way, and they identify opportunities for groups like the ones from Iowa to have short-term interventions that contribute to development work.

In terms of ideology, one salient point that was emphasized in this case is the importance of the church addressing physical suffering "in the here and now." As Matamoros described,

> And in the church we aren't going to see [the example of] Christ in the people that follow Christ if it is not in a tangible way. Although this doesn't ensure salvation, giving someone a house doesn't save them, it is still a testimony of the blessing of God. That God wants you to have this safe home. It's a testimony that God is interested in people being healthy. That people can trust in God in the here and now and in the future as well. Because the faith that gets to people through the programs that we do, the goal is that they see Christ.
> *(Y en la iglesia no vamos ver a Cristo en la gente que siga a Cristo, si no es de una forma tangible. Aunque esto no salva, el darle una casa a una persona no lo salva, pero es un testimonio de la bendicion de Dios. Que Dios quiere que tengas esta casa segura. Es un testimonio que a Dios le interesa que una persona tenga*

> *salud. Que pueda confiar en Dios en el aqui y ahora y en el futuro tambien. Porque la fe que llega la las personas a traves de los programas que hacemos, la meta es que ellos vean a Cristo.)*

Reyes echoed this point, saying that the purpose of the church is to bring people to Jesus, but it happens through acts of service that show that God cares about suffering. Both Matamoros and Reyes explained their positions through theological terms—their faith yields their acts of service, but acts of service are not enough for salvation. The evangelical position emphasizes the necessity of confession and repentance of sin through a "personal relationship with Christ" as the defining component of salvation. Although acts of service in the community are seen as important and necessary for Christian living, there is still an ultimate focus on evangelism. When AEDO groups like the one from Iowa enter this context, they are thus also part of an evangelizing force. They walk around La Mina to talk with people about their experiences and to "spread the message of hope," as their results page describes. Yet, when asked if he thought anyone in La Mina had not heard of the Christian God or of Jesus Christ before, Reyes laughed and said it would be difficult at best. Turning on the radio, walking through the streets, he said, "you hear it everywhere" (*dondequiera se escucha*). This validates the studies (discussed in chapter two) that showed how short-term missionaries often operate in the "most-evangelized" regions. If the communities where organizations like the Iowa group visit are devoutly Christian themselves, there seems to be little necessity for the evangelization component of a short-term mission team, other than offering young mission trip participants the opportunity to have a meaningful cultural experience filtered through the lens of their evangelical Christian faith.

In terms of organizational self-perception, the Washington group considers its role to be part of a larger institutional network, connecting American church groups with communities like La Mina where Christian Reformed Churches are active in community development projects. When asked whether he thought the local church could have accessed the funds for these projects without the support of the Iowa group, Matamoros offered an interesting insight into the institutional status of churches like Reyes':

> One of the tasks of the leadership of the church is to use their creativity and discernment to find ways to provide financially for their programs, and the main mechanism that the church has to finance its programs is through contributions from its members. People contribute their time, their talents, and also their money through tithes and offerings. There is no institution in this community that receives more support from its members than the church. Because the people that go to church see this is a Christian duty, that every week, they take out their wallet, without someone having to tell them, and give towards the work of the church. **There is no other institution like that. If all the institutions around here got together, and combined their funds, there is no institution stronger than the church.** When you add up all of the collective work, there is no institution bigger than the church.
> *Una de las tareas del liderazgo de la iglesia es usar su creatividad y su discernimiento para encontrar la manera de proveer financiamiento para sus programas, y el mecanismo principal que la iglesia tiene para financiar sus programas es a traves de la contribucion de los miembros, La gente contribuye su tiempo, contribuye sus talentos, y tambien su dinero a traves de los diezmos y las ofrendas. No hay ninguna institucion en esta comunidad cuyos miembros aporten mas que la iglesia. Porque los que vienen a la iglesia lo tienen como un deber cristiano, que cada semana, sacan su cartera, sin que alguien se lo diga, y depositan para la obra de la iglesia.* ***No hay otra institucion asi. Si todas las iglesias por aqui se unieran, y unieran sus fondos, no hay institucion mas fuerte que la iglesia****. Cuando tu calculas todo el trabajo colectivo, no hay institucion mas grande que la iglesia.*

In this sense, the Washington group sees the local church as a particularly powerful institution, both for its capacity for fundraising as well as the social capital that it generates through providing a collective identity under the banner of Christian duty.

Finally, for Matamoros and the Washington group, the church cannot be the only actor at the table for effective community development. They must look to (or form) other community organizations like Mejorando mi techo, and churches must even negotiate with the state, though they may perceive the state as a thoroughly corrupt institution. Both Matamoros and Reyes emphasized that international funds are preferable to state funds for projects because there are fewer strings attached: to receive funding from politicians, churches and church groups are expected to publicly campaign for the designated candidate. Nonetheless, they acknowledge the role of the state in failing to provide social services and community amenities in places like La Mina. While Matamoros emphasized the importance of the local church taking ownership over projects in its community, he also recognized the importance of social activism and using church programs to unite community members to advocate for themselves with government representatives. With the emphasis on chains of organizational relationships and the power of local churches to organize and fund themselves, this case study represents a specific type of approach to AEDO work. Projects are designed and carried out on small scales across many communities that the Washington group works with, such as La Mina. The Washington group leverages relationships to benefit from the resources and camaraderie of groups like the Iowa group, but the ultimate focus is on supporting local initiatives along the lines of Mejorando mi techo.

4.2 CASE 2: THE FLORIDA GROUP

"An American group came, and with this group we formed a very profound friendship. And this is the way we've gone on working, little by little" ***Vino un grupo americano, y con este grupo se hizo una amistad muy profunda...Y asi hemos ido trabajando, poco a poco.*** **—Pastor Fernando Torres**

The second case study I analyzed is a small AEDO from Sarasota, Florida. This example represents an approach that is primarily dependent on international interpersonal relationships, rather than on connections between entities like we saw in the first example. Of all three organizations, the Florida group operates on the smallest scale. The only Dominican community where they currently work is in El Centro, an informal neighborhood in Los Guaricanos. While resources matter in all three cases, the Florida group's model is more centralized around the flow of resources whereas the Washington group and the Capital group provide more of an emphasis on short-term missionary trip experiences and service.

This case also highlights the role of pragmatism in relationships with AEDOs. For Iglesia Asamblea de Dios Adonai, the Dominican church partner of the Florida group, the relationship with the Florida group is built on a deep friendship and on a flow of resources for services that would otherwise be difficult for the community to access given its position of marginality vis-a-vis the state. The Dominican partners of the Florida group see their relationships with people in the organization pragmatically as a means to improve their community, but also emotionally as profound friendships strengthened by a shared faith. While it is not a pragmatism that looks to sneakily exploit the AEDO, and while the bond of friendship is key to this case, it is clear that the church pastor in El

Centro is strategically leveraging his interpersonal relationships with Florida group members in order to accomplish community development projects that would otherwise be too ambitious for the church to fund alone.

History

The Florida group's focus is on approaching community development through the strengthening of local churches. The group was founded in Sarasota in 1997 and currently operates in India, Ghana, Russia, and the Dominican Republic. Their model involves direct partnerships with local churches that focus on funding and supporting the visions of evangelical, Christian leaders in low-income communities.

In the Dominican Republic, the Florida group works in El Centro, another informal neighborhood in Los Guaricanos, Santo Domingo Norte, with Pastor Fernando Torres, who leads the Iglesia Asamblea de Dios Adonai. The executive director of the Florida group, Lynn Johnson, originally came to the Dominican Republic in the 1980s as part of an inaugural mission trip with World Servant's International, an organization founded by a Mr. Jeff Carter, who at the time was the Caribbean Director of an initiative called "Project Serve" through another organization, Youth for Christ. In the early 1980s, Torres was at a conference of Dominican pastors that were preparing to receive the team Jeff Carter had organized, and someone asked "Does any pastor here have an available land for the team to build a school on?" Torres replied that he had a lot available for construction and he also was experienced as a construction worker. Because of this, he met Carter and the World Servants team in 1986, and continued to work with them in the

following years because of his construction knowledge. In 2001, Torres stopped working with World Servants but still had a relationship with Lynn Johnson, who had founded her own AEDO, the Florida group, in 1997. To this day, he continues to work with Johnson through a partnership between the Florida group and his church.

Networks

For Iglesia Adonai, the Florida group is a cornerstone in a network constituted by AEDOs and other organizations that help fund development projects through the church. The original connection between the North American Assemblies of God congregation and the Dominican community is what established Torres within the larger Assemblies of God church network, giving him a certain clout with others in the same denomination. When Carter first arrived and brought a team, he formed an entity (World Servants International) as a result of interpersonal relationships with Dominican pastors like Torres. Johnson and Torres then met through this AEDO. When Jeff Carter stopped working with World Servants, the organization did not cease to exist. However, Torres' connection with World Servants was premised on his relationship with Carter, illustrating that the interpersonal relationships are the key to this type of network. Johnson had a desire to continue working in the Dominican Republic because of her exposure to communities through World Servants and her friendship with Torres, so she founded the Florida group as a new AEDO. Torres has been able to rely on his relationship with Johnson and the Florida group to receive funding for development projects in the community, but he has also tapped into other organizations that focus on different types

of projects. For example, two of the largest international development organizations, Plan International and the faith-based Compassion International, both give funding to Iglesia Adonai for nutrition and health care related programs. There is also a Dutch organization, Mano a Mano con Adonai, which supports the church's clinic through financial donations.

Because of the patchwork nature of the network of organizations that support Iglesia Adonai, any one project or program in the community can involve funding from various sources. Torres uses this network in lieu of government funding in order to support development and planning related initiatives in El Centro. Yet although the network is intricate, Torres' friendship with Johnson has been his most consistent and reliable source of funding for more than three decades, starting with the very early stages of informal settlement in El Centro.

Activities & Programs

Torres' vision is to "put the church in the community" through the development of technical training programs, a school, a microfinance organization, a clinic, housing improvement programs, a water purification plant, and other related services that are organized through the church (see image 4 below). The Florida group primarily supplies funding for these initiatives in the form of direct loans given to Torres, and most loans are used to cover the physical construction costs to develop facilities for these programs. The Florida group also coordinates short-term mission teams for occasional assistance with construction projects and to facilitate summer youth retreats. Additionally, they use a child sponsorship model to raise funds for the church's school.

Image 4: (Picture taken from the roof of Iglesia Adonai) The community in El Centro, where the Florida group works. All buildings with the peach color paint were constructed with funding from the Florida group. The three-story building at the end of the street is the children's clinic and the one in the bottom left corner houses the bakery and youth technical training program.

Florida mission teams tend to be smaller groups (5-10 individuals) and they come on an irregular basis: when there is funding for a project, a team is recruited, or if a team is recruited, a project can be identified. They tend to send teams three to four times per year. The child sponsorship system that the Florida group uses, which has been active for nearly ten years, allows North American church members to "sponsor" a child from the church's school by making a monthly donation that goes towards the child's tuition.

Since many of the North American donors feel invested in their sponsored child, they are often the participants in the Florida group's mission trips. As a staff member, Elisa Carmen, who works with the child sponsorship program in El Centro said,

> The child sponsors send letters, gifts, they come to visit or if they can't come to visit, they send gifts for their child with the other team members…there are children that grew up within the sponsorship program, and for some of them the sponsors also pay university tuition—we have five students on sponsorship in universities right now. When these kids leave school and see that they have a sponsored scholarship, they are more likely to go to the university, to study what they want and go to a better university. *(La gente que patrocina manda cartas, regalos, vienen a visitar o si no vienen, mandan con los del equipo para su niño...hay niños que crecieron dentro del programa de la beca, y algunos de ellos les pagan la universidad también, tenemos cinco que son becados en la universidad. Cuando estos niños salen del colegio y ven que tienen una beca, entonces pueden ir mas a la universidad, estudiar lo que ellos quieran e ir a una mejor universidad.)*

Child sponsorship programs like that of the Florida group reveal a manifestation of the Christian notion of compassion, and Carmen and Torres realize this. They both acknowledged how sponsors from Florida are moved to donate based on sad stories that they hear about a child's circumstances or home life. But questions of whether sponsorship models perpetuate the "othering" of children of color did not appear to be on their radar. Relationships were discussed in terms of the distinctions they illuminate between "sponsors" and "children," allowing sponsors to exercise compassion by realized what the children lack.

In general, Carmen highlighted the organization's emphasis on "working with children." She said that every mission team always sets aside time to play with the children or provide bible study lessons in the nearby *villa* (rural community) where Iglesia Adonai has founded a church. However, she also showed how the Iglesia Adonai

gives continuity and structure to the Florida group's desire to work with children, explaining that donations for child sponsorships are managed locally through the church, and that the church has historically had a focus on working with children. Carmen indicated that the resources that sponsors send for children are the primary "presence" of the mission teams in the community. In describing the child sponsorship system, Carmen indicated that sometimes Florida group members seek particular circumstances for an ideal donation opportunity:

> Well there are people that join [the Florida group] program, and they say 'I want to sponsor a child that is like this and that,' so then we send them a child to sponsor with the characteristics that they are looking for, and they sponsor them. For example, that they be of a certain age, in a certain grade, male or female, etc. *(Pues hay personas que se unen al programa, y dicen yo quiero becar un niño así y así, entonces uno le manda un niño con las características que ellos buscan, y lo becan. Por ejemplo que tenga cuantos años, que este en cual curso, que sea hembra o varón, y así).*

This approach gives a fair amount of deference to the AEDO participants to have input on which children receive sponsorships to cover their tuition costs. Whereas more centrally-managed child sponsorship programs (World Vision being the primary example) tend to pool monthly donations into a general fund that supports projects in the sponsored child's community, the Florida group's program has a one-to-one model that allows donors to give directly to the children they support, even going beyond the school tuition to send other gifts and resources.

Torres echoed this point on deference given to the Florida group in discussing the church's willingness to let them have input on project decisions:

> So they come to ask what can be done, and I can tell them this project and that project. But one thing I don't do is tell them 'we are going to do this' or say no

> [to their idea], or that "we are going to do this instead." Because if you come, and you come with money, and I don't have money, how can I tell you no?
> *(Entonces ellos vienen a preguntar que se puede hacer, y les digo esto esto esto y esto. Pero una cosa que yo no hago es que yo no les digo que 'vamos hacer esto' o que 'no esto es lo que vamos hacer.' Porque si usted viene y usted viene con dinero, y yo no tengo dinero, como le puedo decir que no?)*

In this way, Iglesia Adonai is willing to accommodate the Florida group's input on project decisions and funding needs, so as an organization the Florida group could leverage significant influence over the way projects are developed in the community (and they have supported many projects over the years). However, Torres maintained that he ultimately has significant authority to communicate community needs and recommend projects to the Florida. Through the support he receives from this group, Torres, as an evangelical leader, exercises substantial discretion in determining how funding is allocated for a wide array of community services that are operated through the church.

Results & Products

Over the decades, Iglesia Adonai has overseen the development and administration of facilities such as a K-12 school, a children's clinic, a financial co-op, a bakery, and a water purification plant with the help of funding from the Florida group. However, although the Florida group is a key actor in providing funding for the construction of these community facilities, they are not much involved in the actual activities taking place the facilities. The church independently operates the co-op, the clinic receives funding from Mano a Mano con Adonai and Compassion International, and the water purification plant is regulated by government entities.

Image 5: Inside the water purification plant developed in the villa by Iglesia Adonai with support from the Florida group

It is really only the school where the Florida group has a direct day-to-day presence, as Carmen works there to help coordinate the child sponsorship program as the only in-country Florida group staff. But nevertheless, according to Torres, the results of the group's work are visible everywhere in the community. "The Florida group built everything for me," he told me one day, explaining that through loans that he and Lynn negotiate, he is able to make incremental improvement projects and start new initiatives in the community.

> We've been at it a long time this way, with her lending me and me paying her back. We've never fallen on bad terms, and I don't plan to fall in bad terms thanks to the Lord! Day by day, day by day. Sometimes I fall a little behind [with payments], but God is merciful with me. He does really strong things.
> (*Tenemos mucho tiempo, ella (Lynn) prestándome y yo pagándole. Nunca nos hemos caído mal, ni le voy a caer mal gracias al señor! Día a día, día a día. A veces me retraso un poquito, pero Dios es misericordioso conmigo. Hace cosas muy fuertes*).

In this regard, Torres sees his partnership with Johnson and the Florida group as mediated by his faith in God. Their decades-long interpersonal relationship, as well as their shared evangelical Christian faith, allows for Torres and Johnson's partnership to operate on relatively flexible terms. This sort of allowance, to fall behind a little bit on a loan repayment, is unlikely to be accessible for someone of Torres' stature in other funding avenues.

Ideology & Self-Perception

As evidenced by his vision to "put the church in the community," Torres sees the local church as a service-provider and as responsible for addressing practical needs. As he described,

> The example of Jesus is to go to the poor, help them, heal them, give them medical help, give them food, give them sight. The example of Jesus is a practical example, it's technical, it's about doing good things...Here people from the community as much as from the church are welcome. People can come from any church, they can come from the street, it doesn't matter to us. We are working for the community. Here I have a special type of respect from everyone. We show love to everyone, and everything we do here is to serve the whole community. (*El modelo de Jesús es ir a los pobres, ayudarlos, sanarlos, darles salud, darles comida, darles la vista. El modelo de Jesús es un modelo práctico, técnico, de todo lo que es bueno… De la iglesia y de la comunidad están bienvenidos. Pueden venir de todas las iglesias, pueden venir desde la calle, no nos importa eso. Estamos trabajando para la comunidad. Aquí con todos yo tengo un respeto único.)*

Torres is a man of humble origins from a rural farming community, and his pragmatic, no-frills perspective is evident in his discourse about the church and in what he sees as priorities. He has a passion for providing technical education for youth to "be able to work with their hands," and as such the technical training school was the first major project he developed with the Florida group. Similarly, when I asked what it meant

for him to be in the Assemblies of God, or why he identifies with this denomination, he replied in a strangely pragmatic discourse that differs from the often-intellectualized theological distinctions and debates between different denominations in the United States:

> For me, the Assemblies of God is a place where I have a consolidated network and I have a lot of respect, and I do everything through them. They taught me, they dedicated time to teach me, because I was a very unorganized preacher. And so I said, 'well, it's not like I am idolizing the Assemblies of God, because I love all the brothers [of Christ], and I love them the way they are, I don't need to say that something is good or another thing is not good because God can also talk to them. But they [the Assemblies of God] instructed me [as a preacher], so I say, why wouldn't I go to the Assemblies of God? And what if I didn't affiliate myself with them, but I went to the conferences and I benefit from their respect? Their name has helped me, because the Assemblies of God has a certain honor. It's not like an independent church.
> (*Para mi, la Asamblea de Dios es un lugar al que tengo una gran consolidación, un gran respeto, y yo hago todo con ellos. Y entonces ellos me enseñaron, dedicaron tiempo para enseñarme, porque yo era un predicador muy desorganizado. Entonces así, yo dije bueno, no es porque hay una idolatría con las asambleas porque yo amo a todos los hermanos, y los amo con su manera de ser, no tengo que decir que esto no es bien, no esta bien, porque Dios también les puede hablar. Pero ellos me instruyeron, y yo digo, a que no voy para las asambleas? Y yo que si no voy allá, pero yo voy a las conferencias, yo tengo el respeto de ellos. Su nombre me ha ayudado, porque tiene un honor las asambleas de Dios. No es como una iglesia independiente.)*

In this sense, Torres sees his denominational affiliation primarily as a status symbol that lends legitimacy to his church while also showing respect to the individuals and institution that trained him. He also perceives his relationship-based partnership with the Florida group for funding as a much better alternative to negotiating with the state and engaging in party politics. To this point, he expressed significant frustration from his repeated, unsuccessful efforts to bring state funding and programs to the community:

> We try to speak with the authorities, for example to get their help for a project, we go to city hall to get ask for support, but we don't get involved in party politics. There are lots of people that do, but we here don't do that. We look to get them to help us, because what I think is that what we are doing here, with the church in the community, is a national issue, it's an issue of the government. If the government wanted, because I've invited them thousands of times, I've told them 'come, invest in what I'm doing, help me…I've looked to everyone [in the government] for support, but they're in another world. If the government comes to help, we won't reject it, because they're here for the country, they work for the country. But we've looked, I've gone to the President's office, I've knocked on all the doors. It's just that they don't come.
> (*Tratamos de hablar con los autoridades, por ejemplo para una intervención, en el ayuntamiento para que nos ayuden, pero no nos involucramos en asuntos políticos, de partidos políticos. Hay muchos que lo hacen, pero nosotros aqui no lo hacemos. Buscamos que nos ayuden, porque lo que yo pienso es que lo que estamos haciendo aqui, con la iglesia con la comunidad, es un asunto del país, es un asunto del gobierno. Si el gobierno quisiera, porque yo los he invitado miles de veces, vengan, inversionen en lo que yo estoy haciendo, ayúdeneme...yo he buscado a todo el mundo, pero ellos están en otro ambiente. Si viene el gobierno no los rechazamos, porque están para el país, trabajan para el país. Nosotros buscamos, yo he ido al palacio a buscar, yo he tocado todas las puertas, solo es que no vienen.)*

Even in the event that the state does provide for projects in the community, Torres prefers his relationship with the Florida group because of the more flexible nature of funding and the consistency of his transactions with Johnson, with three decades of proof that the Florida group can deliver for the community's development needs. In the words of one worker in the community clinic that the church administers, Johnson and the Florida group "*comparten la visión*" (share the vision) of the community. So in the absence of the state, a church in an informal neighborhood has leveraged international relationships based on a shared faith to develop an impressive repertoire of community services and amenities. What is perhaps most intriguing about this case is the degree to which this

work, taking place through interpersonal relationships and small church groups, flies under the radar of the larger international development community.

4.3 CASE 3: THE CAPITAL GROUP

"We have a theological conception of where poverty comes from, and understanding that, we've developed a model." ***Nosotros tenemos una concepción teológica de donde viene la pobreza, y entendiendo eso, hemos construido un modelo. —Jorge Palacios***

The third case my research considers is a Washington, D.C.-based AEDO that works across the Dominican Republic and Haiti. The Capital group was founded in 2012, making it the youngest of the three organizations. This case provides an example of formal institutionalization of a faith-based approach to aid. Of all three organizations, the Capital group most closely mirrors the structure of traditional NGOs in the development sector. It draws on neoliberal rhetoric of international development, and in its work as an AEDO, it replicates us/them distinctions between American evangelicals and Dominican community members.

History

The Capital group was founded in 2012 by a contingency of North American missionaries from a "mega church" in the Washington, D.C. area. The Executive Director, Chris Pederson, explained to me that he had originally visited the Dominican Republic on several short-term mission trips organized by the church. These trips were led through a third party organization, SCORE International, which coordinates short term mission experiences for churches across the United States. Pederson was motivated to found the Capital group in order to formalize the mega church's involvement in

missionary work in the Dominican Republic independently from SCORE. Specifically, he had the vision of "combating spiritual and physical poverty through partnerships with local churches."[65]

In explaining the evolution of the organization, Pederson said, "a few years ago, we were doing everything that they say you're not supposed to do as missionaries. Everything they talk about in When Helping Hurts and Toxic Charity is what we were doing...the paint is still wet on me in terms of thinking about things in a different way."[66] By "what you're not supposed to do as missionaries," he implied ideas like going to a community to "help" for a week without making a long-term commitment or thinking that giving money and resources is enough to "solve poverty." In terms of rethinking these approaches, the Capital group now has the goal of supporting individuals and communities to achieve "sustainable development" and independence from foreign aid by "helping people help themselves." In this way, Pederson explained that they aim for a holistic approach to community development through helping individuals that are plugged into the support system and network of the local church, because just "giving a house or a handout to someone without ensuring that they are part of a larger network of support" is not a sustainable way to provide aid. The Capital group has thus developed as an organization that, for all intents and purposes, delivers development resources to community members based on their affiliation with a local church congregation.

[65]Capital group website
[66] Personal Interview, July 2017.

Networks

Similar to the other AEDOs discussed here, the Capital group is part of an intricate network of organizations. While there is a direct connection between the organization and the D.C. mega church, where its founders congregate, the Capital group is not a *direct* affiliate or subsidiary of the mega church. It exists independently and though it receives some financial support from the mega church, it is not dependent solely on this one church for support. The Capital group recruits short-term mission teams from the mega church congregation but also from other congregations around the United States. As their website describes,

> One of the ways U.S. churches can partner with [our group] to address the immediate and long-term needs of the poor is to allow us to host their short-term mission teams, which enables us to resource our partnership network—by leveraging the gifts, talents and abilities of the visiting teams. We work hard to make our trips easy on leaders by offering a "full service" missions experience, handling all in-country logistics, as well as assisting with pre-trip preparation and follow-up, to maximize in-country ministry effectiveness and spiritual impact on trip participants.[67]

The Capital group is thus focused on providing a meaningful experience for trip participants from U.S. churches, with a "full-service" approach that allows individual church groups to drop into Dominican communities to which they otherwise have no direct connection. This is similar in some ways to the first case discussed (the Washington group).

Unlike the case of the Florida group, where the Dominican community has more or less parted ways from the original AEDO it worked with and instead strengthened its relationship with the "spin-off" AEDO that subsequently formed, the Capital group is

[67] The Capital group website

still closely associated with Score International, which is the original AEDO that connected Capital group founders with the Dominican Republic.

SCORE International is a U.S. based mission organization founded in 1984. Its name stands for "Sharing Christ Our Redeemer Enterprises," representing a type of business-oriented language. It was originally founded as a sports ministry that used baseball and other sports programs as avenues for evangelism, and baseball was the basis for launching its work in the Dominican Republic. SCORE acts as a sort of dispatcher organization that coordinates short-term mission trips for American evangelical churches. They require nothing more from trip participants than a desire to "just go," which seems to indicate that their mission programs focus more on trip participant experience than on the exact needs of communities they serve. Their website discusses how interested parties can participate in a short-term mission trip through SCORE:

> All you have to do, is to decide to go and we will plan the entire trip for you! We have planned trips for churches, sports teams, medical groups, construction groups, senior class trips, choirs and more. We would love to plan a trip for your group too! We make it easy for you to JUST GO! [Checklist for Getting Started]:
> 1. Choose location and dates
> 2. Call our Trip Advisors
> 3. Secure trip with deposit
> 4. Application/Medical Release forms for all travelers
> 5. Parental Consent forms for minors
> 6. Secure Airfare[68]

Through a trip like this, Pederson was able to enter into the particular network of AEDO partners operating with SCORE in the Dominican Republic. In founding the Capital group, he expanded this network by maintaining direct affiliation with SCORE as well as

[68]https://scoreintl.org/trips/

establishing new affiliation with a host of other AEDOs that focus on different areas of community development work.

In addition to the network of international actors that it is part of, the Capital group has also developed a large network of evangelical churches that it supports through its programming in the Dominican Republic. Jorge Palacios, the country director for the D.R., is mostly to thank for the access to this network. Before joining the Capital group, Palacios directed a nationwide microfinance organization, Esperanza International, that works through churches to provide low-income individual entrepreneurs with small business loans to "[equip] them with tools that move them toward hope-filled futures."[69] Palacios' existing relationships with churches across the country formed the foundation of the church network that the Capital group was able to access in order to launch its church-based programs.

Both internationally and in the Dominican Republic, the Capital group operates as one entity among many within vast networks. The common thread connecting the missions and visions of these entities, however, is their shared evangelical perspective. Mission and vision statements for SCORE, the Capital group, the microfinance organization, and other affiliated organizations all express agreement with the "great commission" to evangelize and "spread the good news of Christ." Moreover, these organizations share a similar outlook on what constitutes sustainable development. There is a consistent theme of ideas of "helping people help themselves," or "empowering

[69] https://www.esperanza.org/about/who-we-serve/

communities" that give insight into this network's position on ideas of welfare and resource redistribution.

Activities & Programs

The Capital group has two main dimensions to their programs: short-term mission trips and a 16-week church-training program. The training program is directly influenced by the work of International Care Ministries, a larger-scale, international faith-based development agency that is part of the the Capital group network. An ICM director consulted with the Capital group to develop this program after visiting the Dominican Republic and, in Pederson's words, "seeing the fervor of the Dominican church." This program is designed with a sort of pyramid structure that reflects a business or sales-influenced rhetoric. Pederson used similar rhetoric when discussing the organization's mission, as he said the Capital group's "customers" are churches, rather than individuals. The training is structured to ask pastors to identify four engaged church members to each invite four community members that aren't from the church to attend a 16-week "poverty reduction" program, where they discuss community development topics—including recycling, nutrition, education, and maternal health—through a biblical lens.

Pederson explained that the theological position of the Capital group regards poverty as a product of sin across the world, and that God does not desire to see people living in poverty but rather that He cares about the suffering of the here and now and cares to see people come around to salvation and come out of poverty. In this sense, the Capital group's training program aims to "combat spiritual and physical poverty" by

addressing physical concerns within a Christian framework. As briefly mentioned above, the Capital group also facilitates short-term mission experiences for U.S. groups that are part of its vast network. One such group was visiting during the time I was performing fieldwork, and I was fortunately able to join them for two days of their mission trip in order to observe the work they performed.

Observing an AEDO Group

The mission team I met was a group of two adult supervisors and ten college students studying special education and occupational therapy. They were all participating in a summer internship with an evangelical ministry that primarily focuses on providing wheelchairs for people with disabilities in the Global South. As an affiliated organization of the Capital group, this disabilities ministry was able to connect its interns to a "mission experience" in the Dominican Republic. During their weeklong visit, they worked with two Christian schools affiliated with the Capital group network. The site I was able to visit with the team was a school for disabled children in San Pedro, a community outside of Santo Domingo East. This school's original relationship was with SCORE International, and there were also short-term mission teams from SCORE visiting while I was there with the Capital group. The school projected its evangelical Christian identity into the surrounding public space with bible verses painted on its outside walls, visible at the pedestrian scale to anyone passing by. One such verse seemed to serve as an admonition for community members who had not repented their sin to Christ (image 6).

Image 6: Bible verse on the wall of the school for disabled children where the Capital group short-term missionary team worked during their visit. The verse reads, "Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:15)

During the three days that this group spent with the school, their focus was on capacity building for teachers working with children with special needs. Each day involved facilitating workshops with teachers and school staff on strategies for special education. The college students—mostly sophomores and juniors—led workshops to "teach" the school's professional staff, most of whom were middle-aged women who had many years or even decades of teaching experience. Some of the student interns spoke beginner level Spanish, but none were competent enough in the language to maintain a complex conversation without the support of an interpreter. The Capital group thus coordinated for three Dominican interpreters (all also college students) to support the team. None of the interpreters had professional experience in special education.

The first day the group did little; they did not seem to have a lot of specific activities or discussions planned. They opened with an introduction that led into an icebreaker activity. During the activity and introductions, all of the interns stood at the front of the room while the teachers and staff sat in rows of chairs facing them. The power dynamics of this arrangement seemed to position the interns as the authority or those with knowledge, while the teachers and staff were positioned as those who came to learn. In introducing themselves, many of the students referenced "having a heart for children" or that God put it "in their heart" to work with the disabled. For their part, most teachers mentioned excitement to learn more because the students were bringing "strategies" for working with disabled children.

After introductions, the room split into small groups where student interns sat with teachers and staff to discuss learning goals for the week. This was an unstructured discussion time, and the students asked open-ended questions about what the teachers hope to learn. The responses from teachers were targeted and specific, such as "do you know of any strategic games that can be used to teach math to a fourth-grade child with autism?" but the interns were lacking expertise to provide specific answers. From what I observed, the teachers and staff were hoping to be trained (*capacitad@s*) in specific techniques, but the interns were not adequately prepared or experienced to provide the insight the teacher's sought. During these discussions and a subsequent Q&A session, there were no clear efforts at co-learning or co-production of knowledge in the space. Rather, there was a distinct teacher/student dichotomy where the student interns were acting as teachers for the professional educators. The interns posed questions such as

"what questions do you all have for us?" and "what do you want to learn?" but they did not ask participants to share expertise from their experience or contribute to producing knowledge in the discussion space.

On the second day I was with the team, I was able to observe their facilitation of a workshop for mothers of children with special needs. The meeting was presented as a sex education workshop, and it involved a curriculum called "circles of intimacy" that the workshop facilitators (the two middle-aged American women supervising the interns) presented as a program that addresses "who can touch your child." The facilitators distributed a diagram with a circle in the middle representing "me" and concentric circles around representing increasingly distant relationships, like family, friends, teachers, acquaintances, and strangers. The seating arrangement for this activity had chairs set up in an inner ring and outer ring, and the mothers were instructed to sit in the inside ring while the teachers and school staff sat in the periphery. The student interns were also scattered around the periphery, with the main facilitator standing at the front to teach the curriculum. This arrangement put a lot of spotlight on the mothers in the middle.

The facilitator jumped straight into the training without an icebreaker or other activity in the way of introduction. It seemed assumed that the audience should trust the training she was going to provide, as the speaker did not reveal any professional trainings or certifications that made her qualified to teach about topics related to sexual education for children with special needs, other than being a mother of a special needs child herself. There appeared to be an assumption on the part of the mission team that it was necessary to point out to these mothers that strangers should not touch their children, but it was not

clear why this assumption was made. During the workshop, the facilitator suggested that if anything inappropriate ever happened to a child, that mothers should "first call the police, and then call their pastor." In this sense, there seemed to be a lack of awareness about the violence of police culture in the Dominican Republic, as well as an implicit assumption that pastors are trustworthy. Throughout the training, the facilitator firmly repeated the idea that "strangers shouldn't touch our children at all," which made me wonder how the idea of "stranger" was conceptualized. Mission groups from the Capital group and SCORE International as well as other organizations cycle in and out of this school on (literally) a daily basis during the summers, thus contributing a regular presence of strangers wanting to play with and take pictures with the mothers' children. I wondered about the portrait of the "dangerous stranger," as I did not see any student interns ask permission before hugging children.

One of the mothers seated near me commented on a design flaw in the diagram, where the "stranger" circle was painted green but she thought it should be painted red to represent "stop." When she said this, I recognized that the facilitator never asked for feedback from the audience about the training materials she had used during the workshop. I told the facilitator what the mother said, and she replied, "Oh, well there wasn't any red highlighter, and I wanted to do it in highlighter so that it would be transparent and they could write inside the circle." This response indicated a lack of thoughtful preparation of training materials. To this point, as part of the training, she asked the mothers to write the names of people in their lives and which circle they belong in. This request could be rather problematic when considering the complex interpersonal

relationships at play, as one woman may not trust the husband or brother of another, but the mission group did not take this into consideration in their planning.

In general, my observations of the mission short term mission group working through the Capital group revealed that the organization's focus on ensuring trip participants have a meaningful experience may be at the expense of what is actually beneficial for communities. In the case of the intern group, many of them commented on feeling encouraged or inspired by the teachers in the school. They were also excited about opportunities to facilitate activities and practice their presentation skills. Yet the "training" offered to teachers was general and vague at best, even though they arrived to the workshop seeking to learn helpful pedagogical strategies. There are also important social implications about the team's work that were seemingly overlooked in their planning; for example, how they organized the space to further dichotomies between North American "knowledge producers" and Dominican "knowledge consumers." Nonetheless, people related to each other based on their evangelical faith (they even shared worship sessions together at the end of each day), and they all reported exceedingly positive experiences from the workshops despite the dearth of actual new training offered. It was challenging to observe the unbalanced power dynamics involved in these workshops and still understand that the Dominican participants seemed to find that interactions positive and useful. Their embrace of this experience was perhaps rooted in their shared faith, but perhaps also in their understanding of the lack of investment in their community and the necessity of leveraging any form "training" experience to lend legitimacy to their work.

Results & Products

The Capital group's annual report uses traditional NGO rhetoric to quantify their deliverables and impact through ideas of empowerment, sustainability, and capacity-building. They also employ the Grameen Foundation Progress out of Poverty index in order to measure the impact they have in terms of poverty reduction.[70] In many ways, the activities that the Capital group carries out reflect the same ambitions as the larger NGO and development sector. However, the fact that their programs are housed through churches and framed through an evangelical theological perspective sets them apart.

The 16-week church training program, the main component of the Capital group's work, addresses practical community-development related issues in each week's curriculum. Some sample topics include composting, waste collection and reuse, entrepreneurialism, and public health practices like hand washing and breastfeeding. The sessions are designed to provide participants with takeaway knowledge related to the development topic of the week—how to start a compost, launch a small business—but each session closes with a bible verse that frames work in the community through an evangelical Christian perspective. The curriculum revealed ideas, such as framing the nuclear family as consisting of one man and one woman and providing abstinence only sex education, that reflected evangelical priorities first and foremost. Throughout the training materials, ideas about empowering individuals to "pull themselves up from their bootstraps" and help themselves out of poverty were prevalent. This perspective

[70] https://grameenfoundation.org/what-we-do/strengthening-organizations

reproduces neoliberal ideas about subject formation and citizen responsibility. Relative to the other two groups I observed, the Capital group viewed the state most positively.

The two days of teacher training with the mission group I was able to observe primarily yielded what the Capital group seeks out of its mission program: a meaningful experience for trip participants to be "exposed" to this kind of work. In this sense, the results of the Capital group's work might be difficult to tangibly assess in the short-term, which makes sense given their interest in pursuing long-term sustainable development. Promotional materials for the organization reveal that over time many such small interventions, in collaboration with the ongoing church training program, have resulted in "serving over 20,000 poor through a network of over 1,000 churches."[71]

Ideology & Self-Perception

The Capital group's perspective on international development argues that by prioritizing support for the local church, AEDOs can have a farther reaching impact than they would by just supporting individuals or by just providing foreign aid. Their models of top-down flows of resources and ideas, as well as the pyramid structure used for the church training program, also highlight the idea of reaching individuals via trickle-down flows of knowledge and resources through evangelical organizations and institutions.

Pederson used a toolbox metaphor to describe how he categorizes the impact of the Capital group's work: everything "fits into one of three drawers in the toolbox: strengthening character, theological training, and ministry capacity." He said the group

[71] Metrics from the Capital group website

asks how they impact rather than if they impact, and that a main purpose of mission trips is to expose U.S. church members and potential future missionaries (as well as potential donors) to the conditions of the Dominican Republic and encourage people to be involved in the mission field in one way or another for the rest of their lives. Interestingly, in this discourse, the mission field was implicitly referred to as a foreign location.

Moreover, the Capital group's theological understanding of the causes of poverty is essential to how they define their work in communities. They see their development of the local church network as crucial to addressing what they call "spiritual poverty," or an incorrect understanding of God and the church. The Capital group sees suffering and lack in the world as products of sin, which creates "broken" relationships between humans, their environment, and their creator. In this sense, understandings of poverty are tied to individual repentance of sin and acceptance of Christ as a "personal Savior" in line with evangelical Christian belief. As Palacios put it,

> We call this transformational sustainable development. Our faith inspires and directs our practice. We don't separate it. And we don't do evangelism in the sense of saving people from hell. It's so that people manage to develop the potential and the eternal life that God has given us through Jesus Christ. Not just for heaven. Eternal life starts now. And new heavens and new hearths are the complement of all of this, where God is united with his people.
> *(Nosotros llamamos esto desarrollo transformador sostenible. Nuestra fe inspira y dirige nuestra practica. No la separamos. Y no hacemos evangelismo como para que la gente sea salva del infierno. Es para que logre desarrollar el potencial y la vida eterna que Dios nos ha dado por Cristo Jesus. No para el cielo. La vida eterna comienza ahora. Y los cielos nuevos y las tierras nuevas es el complemento de todo esto, donde Dios se une con su pueblo.)*

Furthermore, the mission trip component of the Capital group's work is largely focused on the trip participant experience. Trip preparation materials highlighted the potential of short-term missions to "1) create deeper understanding of missions and effective poverty alleviation approaches; 2) foster appreciation for diversity and cultural differences; 3) instill deep respect for the global Church; 4) support the long-term work of missions and poverty alleviation in communities; and 5) develop humility in comparably affluent churches and individuals as we recognize the universal dependence on the healing work of Jesus Christ."[72] Of these five objectives, four of them focus on the trip goer experience. While the goals of fostering cultural appreciation, instilling respect for Global South churches, and developing humility in recognition of positions of privilege are laudable, and while Pederson expressed sincere interest in wanting to "do missions" from a place of mindfulness and sustainability, it is not evident that these intentions from the Capital group are being effectively translated into actual programmatic change.

The trip I was able to observe involved a group of student interns who saw themselves as "bringing" knowledge into an area that lacked certain knowledge—in this case, knowledge related to special education. They all spoke of how impactful it was to see the conditions of extreme poverty in communities, so the trip fulfilled some of its purpose from the perspective of the Capital group. Yet the way their activities were facilitated heavily reinforced ideas of an us/them divide between (mostly white) AEDO missionaries and the black and brown Global South communities where they work. The

[72] The Capital group, online mission training material, provided by Director Pederson.

racialized nature of these interactions is even more disconcerting in light of a comment Pederson made comparing the work of the Capital group to the "work" of Christopher Columbus colonizing the Americas, saying that just as Columbus came to the Dominican Republic first before spreading throughout the region to "conquer the new world," the Capital group is similarly starting in the D.R. and hoping to spread their work across Latin America, as they've already begun expanding into Haiti and Cuba. This perspective fully lacks a critical analysis of the violence and destruction associated with the colonization of Latin America and the colonial systems of oppression that have perpetuated throughout the region for centuries. From the perspective of an international development scholar especially, the ignorance with regards to this analysis is glaringly disturbing.

Yet in some ways, there are internal contradictions in the work of the Capital group. Pederson stated that the organization is trying to move away from a model of instant gratification for mission trip participants to instead focus on a relationship-oriented approach that sees value in conversations, humility, and learning, and the organization's promotional materials also indicate a desire to make this shift. This latter approach sounds promising, but the group I observed did not seem to be following this path. With regards to their work in churches through the 16-week training program, the Capital group aims to address everyday suffering that impacts people in the "here and now." For example, there are training modules that address ways to develop trash collection systems and ways for community members to launch informal entrepreneurial activities to generate income. But there is no recognition or analysis of the failure of

systems—of the state, of the market— to provide people with these basic needs. The message from the Capital group is that individual effort and hard work can allow people to "pull themselves up from their bootstraps," and that some support from AEDOs in the forms of knowledge, prayer, and resources can "help people help themselves." Yet in addressing the root cause of why Dominican communities need this help to begin with, the Capital group simply looks to the concept of sin and "man's fall from grace." This theological conception of poverty seems to contradict the reality of many Dominican experiences, however. Evangelical faith is strong and pervasive in the Dominican Republic, as earlier examples from chapter three show, so it is not clear how or why broken relationships caused by sin plague these communities more than, say, their North American counterparts. Ideas of "creating dependency" and "providing handouts" are presented as undesirable and misguided approaches to international community development work, but these critiques are not accompanied by an awareness of the political and economic systems of oppression that have fully marginalized some Dominican communities.

What is perhaps the most impactful aspect of the Capital group's work is their emphasis on the importance of networks for sustainable community development. They are concerned with connecting individuals to the network of their local church, connecting churches to each other, and connecting themselves to other AEDOs. They understand and celebrate the role of the church as the strongest institution in many communities, and call for the church to address poverty because of this status. In this way, the Capital group has a great deal influence, since the priorities they set and the

ideas they support trickle down into the churches and the communities where they have a presence. When regarded collectively, the projects that the Capital group is affiliated with across the Dominican Republic reveal how this organization operates on an institutional scale to shape what happens on the ground in communities.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this final chapter I seek to analyze the discourse emerging from the institutions and actors that I encountered during my fieldwork. I hope to tie together the ideas revealed in my theory chapter with the observations from my findings chapter in order to discuss the overall impact of evangelical actors as a *de facto* institution operating in the field of community development and planning in the Dominican Republic. In particular, I highlight a key idea from my research: faith-based actors performing development work operate through shifting, often unstable networks that typically depend on the strength of interpersonal relationships for continuity. Moreover, the AEDOs working in these Dominican communities have significant influence over development practice because of their alliance with local churches and the strength of shared evangelical belief systems. Together, these realities shape AEDOs and their community partners as powerful institutions that are strengthened by the powerful status of the evangelical church vis-à-vis the Dominican state. The fact that evangelicalism is the common thread in this sovereign network has significant implications for communities and for international planning and development praxis.

5.1 ANALYSIS

All three AEDO examples reveal that personal relationships are the central building block to their work. As these organizations operate largely outside state regulation but with state support, it makes sense that relationships would matter so much. In one case in particular, that of the Florida group, the interpersonal relationship between two key individuals forms the foundation for generations of development projects in El

Centro. While the other two examples have stronger and more intricate institutional networks to reinforce the relationships between individuals that launched them, the Florida group primarily relies on the presence of two key actors who have been working together for decades. Relative to more mainstream NGOs in the development world, this sort of enduring relationship is largely unheard of. I was struck by how a simple, strong friendship between two people who share a faith was powerful enough to develop a community in a place the state had ignored. There is a real endurance to the work of AEDOs like the Florida group, yet they operate largely in the shadows of the state and of the greater NGO sector.

Organizations like the Washington group and the Capital group are not as relegated to the shadows as the Florida group, but they still offer unique insight into how development projects and community work takes place through networks tied to the evangelical church. The Washington group's work of facilitating connections between organizations, with an emphasis on the needs of Dominican community partners, is representative of a more enlightened approach to faith-based development partnerships. The way this group sees itself, as an advocate and an activist on the basis of the model of Christ, allows it to make space for recognition of systemic injustices that pervade communities. The Capital group, for its part, sees injustices in the world through a distinctively theological lens, understanding poverty as a product of sin. Their model of "empowering" individuals to help themselves out of poverty through their connection with a local church community is premised on a logic that sees sustainable development as a product (and responsibility) of individual action rather than as a duty of the state.

It is difficult to pass a definitive value judgment on the phenomenon of community development work through evangelical Christian networks, and perhaps that is a good thing—it prompts us to consider the contradictions and nuances involved in this work. From the perspective of critical international planning, there are positive and negative dimensions to what evangelical churches are doing in Dominican communities. On the one hand, in the context of neoliberal governance, grassroots actors are strategically leveraging resource networks available to them to develop the services their communities need. On the other hand, some of this work could be seen as reinforcing the ideas of neoliberal subject formation. Moreover, reconciling the idea of Christianity—what is often regarded as the impetus behind the violent and destructive colonization of the Global South—with political activism that challenges (albeit indirectly) the failures of a privatized state is a difficult step. This process is fraught with nuances, which is what makes the interdisciplinary approach to understanding this work that much more necessary.

For all intents and purposes, one could argue, the *de facto* institution made up of evangelical networks functions as a reliable and powerful vehicle for accessing and building solidarity across low-income communities in places like Santo Domingo. But there is a caveat: who is left out of the notion of community that these networks construct? While all of the organizations I worked with emphasized their acceptance of and service to all people—believers and non-believers alike—the way that certain groups are perceived alienates them from truly being accepted as part of the community these

evangelical networks serve. One way to understand these more nuanced questions of how evangelical actors operate in communities is to employ the concept of "sovereignty."

5.2 AN "EVANGELICAL SOVEREIGNTY?"

Chelsey Kivland's work on NGOs and sovereignty in Haiti offers another lens through which to analyze these evangelical churches and the institutional networks to which they belong. As Kivland argues,

> Any actor, organization, or institution can be said to "make the state" insofar as they attempt to position themselves as more powerful than or in control of the people: in short, as sovereign agents. Spanning malevolent and benevolent incarnations, to say someone "makes the state" can articulate the social role of the bully or the tyrant as well as that of the godparent or God.[73]

Thus, by way of the vast institutional networks that they construct and through which they assert an (arguably benevolent) incarnation of power, Dominican evangelical churches and their AEDOs (which would not exist without churches as their partners) perform a type of sovereignty in informal neighborhoods in the absence of organized state provision. They "make the state" by funding and delivering social services such as education, housing, healthcare, and infrastructure projects via their religious networks that are constituted on a shared evangelical identity.

Oftentimes, the state's own inaction prompts this performance. State failure is a key aspect of what provokes many churches to strengthen their domestic and international networks and make the state. In the case of Torres and his work with the Florida group, the state was seen to be fully inadequate in delivery services for the community.

[73] Kivland (2012); 253.

> We've offered for [the Dominican government] to come visit our initiatives thousands and thousands of times, we've really been on their back about coming to our community, to see the children, to see the services we're lacking. I know you are recording this interview, but I have no problem saying it: *We've tried*. We've knocked on every door, but they haven't come. Why won't they come? This is a large population, it's enormous, and the door is open. *(Les hemos ofrecido que vengan miles y miles de veces, y le hemos caído atrás ellos para que vengan miles de veces, y vengan porque aquí están los niños, y pueden ver lo que nosotros no tenemos. Yo sé que esto esta grabado allí, pero no tengo ningún problema, porque esto lo hemos trabajado. Hemos tocado todas las puertas, pero no han venido. ¿Por qué no vienen? Es una población grande, es enorme, esta abierta la puerta, pero no han venido.*)

Torres' performance of making the state therefore takes a fundamentally pragmatic approach, and it's an approach that he attributes to his faith. He strategically uses the evangelical networks available to him to make the state in a practical sense by providing services for his community following the model of Jesus. His concern is accessing resources for the community, and his relationship of trust with an AEDO allows him to depend on the continuity of funding for development projects. Although actors like Torres are not directly calling the authority of the state into question, their actions in bypassing the state through connections with AEDOs nonetheless reveal how evangelical churches can exercise power on an institutional scale.

Similar to Kivland's argument, anthropologist Yari Bonilla argues for an new, "unsettled" notion of sovereignty that sees political actors more for what they *do* than for what they *are*. Based on research in Guadeloupe, Bonilla observes that

> The notion of a sovereign state, and its attendant sovereign individual who speaks and acts autonomously, is thus giving way to the recognition of the non-sovereign nature of most social relationships—political, intimate, and affective—all of

> which require brokered and negotiated forms of interdependence and a relinquishing of autonomy.[74]

In this way, adopting more flexible and unsettled notions of sovereignty in order to truly understand its nuanced dimensions in practice helps us conceptualize the institutional power that evangelical actors in the Dominican Republic in yield. This perspective rethinks and problematizes traditional dichotomies of state/civil society to account for the multifaceted institutional network of evangelical actors, who are simultaneously concerned with matters of public and private life—matters of the world *and* matters of salvation.

Beginning to hint at a regional perspective on the dimensions of sovereignty, Bonilla writes,

> I do find that despite a deep skepticism toward the traditional means and ends of modern politics, contemporary political actors throughout and beyond the Caribbean continue to *engage in social practices that they hope will improve their individual and collective lives.* These actions might not resemble the nationalist struggles of a previous era. In fact at times they are hard to assess, or even recognize.[75] (emphasis added)

The idea of "engaging in social practices that they hope will improve their individual and collective lives" is evident in all three cases I analyzed. In La Mina, the Mejorando mi Techo program was developed to provide dignified housing for people who cannot access traditional financing mechanisms for home improvements. For Fernando Torres, a friendship based on shared faith has led to three decades (and counting) of lending from a dedicated international partner, providing resources that have developed an array of

[74] Bonilla (2017b); 333
[75] Bonilla (2017a); 202

necessary community services in a neighborhood the state has ignored. And for the schoolteachers in San Pedro, participating in workshops provided by an AEDO was seen as a way to build capacity and acquire knowledge that would help them in their day to day work with disabled children. Yet while Bonilla suggests that an unsettled approach can lead to creative, alternative imaginations of sovereignty, we may also recognize these evangelical performances of sovereignty (what Kivland calls making the state) as impostion of a sovereign power. Although it is often produced (as argued above) by grassroots actors challenging state failures and working towards "ends that they hope will improve their individual and collective lives," this sovereignty is uniquely problematic because of a form of violence implicit in evangelical theological understandings of a metaphorical spiritual "battle" between perceived "good" and "evil." As Thornton's work astutely notes about the Dominican context,

> In a study of the worldview of the public throughout Latin America it was found that 80.4% of the Dominican population sees Dominican politics as a battle between good and evil (From Vanderbilt University's "Latin American Public Opinion Project"). That was the highest of any Latin American or Caribbean country polled. This is a particularly striking example of the powerful influence of Christian thought on the Dominican Republic. The tendency to see politics as a battle between good and evil is indicative of a society that tends to see relations of power as having both righteous and wicked aspects. The tendency to divide social life into two opposing values, to perceive reality in terms of good and evil, is indicative of a deep and pervasive Christian worldview that permeates Dominican cultural and social worlds. This sentiment represents a profound orientation toward binary models of perception and explanation that figure everyday life in the Dominican Republic.[76]

[76] Thornton (2011), 2.

In the case of Dominican evangelicalism, this political struggle yields a violence that is most pointedly channeled towards the perceived evil of the LGBTQ+ community. CODUE is the most vocal entity on this issue. In 2016, this organization used its lobbying power to force the removal of the former, openly gay U.S. ambassador to the Dominican Republic, Wally Brewster, by circulating a petition citing his disrespect of the Dominican constitution and the United States' violation of Dominican sovereignty by allowing a gay man to hold this official position with a public profile. CODUE's official Facebook page and print promotional materials are also exceedingly homophobic, citing concerns of defending the Christian nuclear family from "imperialistic agendas of gender ideology" that are "immoral, corrupt, and anti-Dominican."[77]

Perspectives on evangelical notions of spiritual warfare can shed light on how and why the religious orientations of these grassroots evangelical actors can raise disconcerting implications for an understanding of their sovereignty. Within evangelical Christian belief, there is a tension between the Biblical rhetoric of love ("love thy neighbor;" "For God so loved the world") and of spiritual warfare ("good vs. evil;" "whoever is not with me is against me"), with the latter being aptly represented in the bible verse from the book of Revelations quoted outside the school in San Pedro. Elizabeth McAlister explores this language of warfare in the context of American missionary movements in Haiti, arguing that in these contexts, "...the enemy is Satan's army and the goal is to 'win souls for Christ.' [Missionaries] talk about 'taking land' for

[77] https://www.facebook.com/CoduePaginaOficial/

Christ and winning territory for Jesus. They speak in a military-inflected language."[78] This militarized language can further colonialist distinctions of civilized/barbaric and thus provide a framework through which evangelical groups can justify projects of othering and dehumanizing LGBTQ+ individuals in the name of a higher power or God-given mandate of justice. Talal Asad echoes this analysis in his book, *Formations of the Secular,* arguing that Western state powers have interpreted Christianity, specifically ideas about the crucifixion, to condone the othering and dehumanization of non-Western (non-Christian) peoples.[79]

However, interpretations of spiritual warfare are not one-dimensional. Another perspective on spiritual warfare from anthropologist Rosalind Shaw sees this mindset as a coping mechanism for disenfranchised or marginalized peoples, providing a sense of agency in responding to difficult circumstances.[80] In the context of the Dominican Republic, while grassroots evangelical actors do employ a militarized language like the one McAlister discusses, it is nonetheless true that people are profoundly dedicated to their churches, and most evangelical churches are similarly profoundly dedicated to addressing needs in their communities. Churches can help build bonding social capital and provide an avenue for individuals experiencing extreme poverty and marginality to cope with their circumstances collectively.[81] In assessing evangelical rhetoric, it is important to see actors holistically and appreciate these nuanced, at times contradictory, expressions of religious identity.

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[78] McAlister (2015)
[79] Asad (2003), Chapter 3.
[80] Shaw (2007)
[81] Woolcock & Narayan (2000)

Dominican evangelical churches can also provide an avenue towards gaining and consolidating social status for residents of low-income, "informal" communities. This status is constituted not only on positions of authority and leadership within the church, but also on affiliation and evangelical identity formation. Thornton's work shows that evangelical Christians assert moral authority through their church membership. In this way, evangelical identity offers church members, leaders, and networks a means through which they can set a moral tone for the nation.

Mike McGovern's work on the intersection of charismatic Christianity and politics in the context of Côte d'Ivoire and the United States further explores the articulation of evangelicalism with politics. McGovern argues that a specific evangelical theological perspective on ideas about the "end times" helps dictate lobbying and political action through transnational charismatic Christian networks. In discussing some of the apparent contradictions involved in this case study, such as Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo's marriage to a Muslim woman alongside the virulent Islamophobic movements championed in his name, McGovern articulates a key point regarding how theology can be enacted through politics. Citing Susan Harding's 2001 analysis of American evangelical ideology, McGovern states:

> Such inconsistencies, or "gaps," as Harding (2001) calls them, stand as rebukes and demystifications in the eyes of secularists. For the born-again evangelicals she calls "dispensationalists," they are something quite different. The leap of faith required to bridge these gaps is in fact proof of the authenticity of the believer's position.[82]

[82] McGovern 2012, 251.

Seeing these inconsistencies from the perspective of believers can help us understand how evangelical actors could simultaneously profess ideals of Christian love while expressing social violence against the LGBTQ+ community through politics of dehumanization and exclusion. It is important to stress here that my call to understand this theological perspective is not a call to defend it. Yet, the evangelical networks promoting this violence are not one-dimensional. Their engagement with issues of social justice is deeply inconsistent because of the good/evil theological divide that their faith privileges. And as McGovern asserts in his poignant conclusion,

> When politics is conceived as a pitched cosmological battle between good and evil, the sense of the necessity of political compromise becomes the quaint practice of another era...As Asad has emphasized, it is very difficult for most academics or journalists to take this position at face value, given our own secularist cultural blind spots. Consequently, a great deal of journalistic and other discussion of such Charismatic politics tends to assume ulterior political or economic motives are involved [Elliott 2011]. The notion that people actually mean what they say is in some ways far more threatening than the idea of a hidden conspiracy motivated by greed.[83]

In the Dominican context, top level evangelical actors, specifically and most vocally in CODUE, fervently believe what they say about the battle against LGBTQ+ "evil." The call to set the crosshairs of evangelical spiritual warfare on this target thus trickles down through the dense evangelical institutional network to land in communities and to be enacted through interpersonal relationships by way of local evangelical churches.

Understanding the dualistic role of Dominican evangelical churches as service providers and moral arbiters in Dominican low-income communities allows us to

[83] Ibid., 254.

conceptualize a new notion of sovereignty: an evangelical sovereignty. The power that evangelical churches and larger evangelical networks in the Dominican Republic embody as institutions making the state is made possible through neoliberal politics of decentralization and responsibilization. Simultaneously, the power that evangelical entities embody as institutions setting moral guidelines is made possible through particular theological notions of good and evil that have been reformulated as interpretations of the Dominican constitution. In this way, although these evangelical actors are performing what Kivland calls "benevolent incarnations" of sovereignty by making the state through service provision, they are also performing "malevolent incarnations" of sovereignty by enacting violence through the moral power of exclusion and dehumanization of the LGBTQ+ community.[84] Evangelical sovereignty is thus neither benevolent nor malevolent. Instead it sits at a strange intersection of these ideals that is ultimately predicated on contradictions within evangelical theology. Moreover, the fact that this sovereignty has international connections through the evangelical institutional network raises important questions about colonial projects of exclusion that merit further discussion and analysis than I have provided here.

Recognizing evangelical sovereignty ultimately paints a more holistic understanding of sovereignty in action, or the performative project of sovereignty, in the Dominican Republic. An unsettled perspective allows us to see how and through whom expressions of power are enacted in this context. And despite the benevolent incarnations of this evangelical sovereignty, it must ultimately be challenged on normative grounds.

[84] Kivland (2012), 253.

Because if individuals that do not ascribe to heteronormative sexual orientations and gender identities are perceived throughout the dense evangelical institutional network as less than human and relegated to a condition of "bare life," then evangelical actors will continually fail to address, whether through affiliation, inaction, or direct exclusion, the needs of their *entire* communities.[85] In this sense, the idea that "there is no institution stronger than the church" has troubling consequences. The sovereign power of the evangelical church as a pragmatic, grassroots political actor that can fill the state's absence and provide needed social services becomes entangled in normative questions of equity and justice.

5.3 IMPLICATIONS

The evangelical networks involved in community development work in the Dominican Republic may be fragmented in the sense that they are built on a relationship-by-relationship logic, but they are nonetheless pervasive and powerful. The way communities like El Centro and La Mina leverage international resources to develop housing, schools, clinics, small businesses, technical education programs, water treatment plants, and other services is successful in many ways. These informal communities are marginalized in the eyes of the state, but they are tapping into international networks that they have access to because of a shared faith. There is, effectively, an "underground" network of AEDOs (especially organizations like the Florida group) that are determining priorities for how and by what means communities are being developed. They might be

[85] See Edelman (2014) and Cobb (2006) for discussions of how queer bodies can be rendered as "homo sacer."

by and large disconnected from the mainstream development world because they are tapping into funding sources, such as American mega-churches, that the rest of this sector does not access, but they are still very much present "on the ground." This has to be taken into account for any policies that aim to regulate the NGO sector and international planning and development organizational partnerships. This model of community development is not likely to disappear any time soon, partly because of the frequency of new relationships being formed that later spur the formation of new AEDOs and, perhaps most importantly, partly because this model is built on a foundation of a shared faith that has transnational reach. If the fundamental position of any given church and AEDO were to be solely one of love, acceptance, and non-judgment—of a true belief in and commitment to the ideals of justice, equity, and dignity—then there is an immense amount of potential to be found in these partnerships. They are powerful. In places like these informal communities in Santo Domingo, the way that many people identify themselves and understand their purpose in the world and in their immediate communities is through their faith. This is especially true for evangelical Christians. They live their faith in everyday actions, in everyday work in their communities. The two are not separate spheres.

The examples discussed here show that the work performed by evangelical faith networks merits recognition as part of how development and planning practice is actually carried out. International development and planning practitioners must therefore acknowledge and pay attention to *all* of the work happening in these networks, understand the profoundly nuanced implications of that work, and recognize that these

networks are intrinsic features of the neoliberal development and planning landscapes in places like Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. If we as practitioners hope to comprehend what matters most in developing and strengthening community in these places, we cannot fall into our secular biases and overlook faith networks, perhaps especially the charismatic faith networks that make us uncomfortable.

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Vita

Caroline Daigle was born in Atlanta, GA and has resided in Austin, TX since 2015. She attended Georgia College, a public liberal arts university in Milledgeville, GA, where she graduated Summa Cum Laude with a B.A. in Spanish in December 2013. She also spent extensive time volunteering with small scale NGOs in Peru, Argentina, and Nicaragua during her undergraduate years. After leaving Georgia College, she worked as an AmeriCorps VISTA service corps member at an Atlanta area nonprofit social services agency from 2014-2015, where she learned a great deal about the ins and outs of nonprofit service delivery. Her time in Austin has mostly focused on her graduate studies, and in this dual degree program she has developed a keen interest in different mechanisms of social service delivery for marginalized communities. Beyond her professional and academic interests, Caroline also enjoys exploring the Texas State Parks system, baking bread, and reading science fiction novels.

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This thesis was typed by Caroline Daigle.