CHAPTER 1

Mòd Leta

Haitian Understandings of Crises Past in Present

MARK SCHULLER

Haiti typically garners attention from media, policymakers, philanthropic organizations, and activists in the US and other countries within the global north only during crises. Building on the excellent analyses from Haitian scholars like Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1990) and Gina Ulysse (2010) examining the ideological work that representations of Haiti do, this chapter focuses on how disasters are understood and commemorated as *events*. Disaster scholarship often disaggregates disasters from triggering events. This chapter interrogates events in another sense, as media construction. The earthquake of 12 January 2010 in Haiti inspired an unprecedented media signature, which as I argued earlier in this series (2016b) shaped the response. This signature continued in a ten-year commemoration as media event. As this chapter was edited in summer 2022, Haiti again returned to public conversation following the *New York Times*'s publication of "The Ransom," an interactive, in-depth look at Haiti's 1825 independence debt, which the *Times* modelled after the highly successful 1619 project. The *Times* has unparalleled resources for creating media events.

Between the time this chapter was drafted in 2020 and edited in 2022, a devastating series of disaster events beset the world's first free Black republic: in addition to COVID and its economic crisis, Haitian people have faced a constitutional crisis, state-sanctioned violence and human rights violations (both in Haiti and along the US-Mexico border), the assassination of the president, two earthquakes, and a deadly hurricane, with several more months in the hurricane season extended because of climate change. Outside Haiti, the public conversation either fused these crises in "exceptionalist" terms that denigrate Haiti or portrayed them as discrete, mutually unintelligible crises that are disconnected from foreign intervention.

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By contrast, Haitian scholars, activists, aid professionals, and community leaders understand these events portrayed in isolation, the *kriz konjonktirèl* ("conjunctural" or intersecting crisis), as manifestations of the *kriz estriktirèl* (structural crisis), which has its roots in the brutality of plantation slavery and slaveholding powers' punishment for the Haitian Revolution that first ended it. As many in Haiti tell it, the past lives on in the present. These events all highlight the *mòd leta*, or "governance strategies," which is also a pun on the words *mò deta*, meaning deaths resulting from state violence, and an aspect of Achille Mbembe's (2003) necropolitics.[1] Haitian understandings thus challenge the focus on disasters as events, instead foregrounding the *longue durée* crisis of global racial capitalism.

This chapter centers Haitian understandings of disasters. I have been working alongside scholars, activists, and community leaders since 2001 as both a scholar and activist—as a visiting professor with a formal affiliation and as a member of activist collectives. My commitments to communities and movements have shaped and in many ways defined the formal research I have conducted. Since the 2010 earthquake I have led four large mixed-method studies focusing on various aspects of the international aid response and its hegemonic vehicle, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In addition to data from these formal research projects, this chapter is informed by relationships with Haitian professionals and activists developed over the decades, which have led to conversations and invitations to present and conduct further research. In particular, I was in Haiti on 12 January 2020, to offer solidarity. All quotes not otherwise attributed come from conversations with the author, and following disciplinary convention and to protect the confidentiality of individuals, people listed as only a first name in this article are pseudonyms.

Specifically, contrasting the foreign media event, this chapter shares how various groups within Haiti commemorated the 2010 earthquake. For people in Haiti the memory of the earthquake of 12 January 2010 is hard to forget. But decades of foreign intervention cast a large shadow, blurring the lines of what is a disaster. Under a thirteen-year UN occupation, activists referred to postearthquake aid as a humanitarian occupation,[2] what several foreigners called the "republic of NGOs" (Klarreich and Polman 2012; Kristoff and Panarelli 2010). The enormity of the catastrophe and the ways in which catastrophes are layered atop one another make it hard to talk about in any more than fragments, in Caribbean Nobel laureate Derek Walcott's sense.[3] This is how it was experienced, how it is understood: as fragments, still-uncleared rubble. And fragments in the other sense: Haitians are not homogenous. Honoring this humanity and complexity, this chapter presents analyses as fragments.

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The Mainstream Disaster Narrative

This complexity was definitely flattened in what can be called the disaster narrative, structured by what's framed inside the story, what is not, who is positioned as victim, and who as hero (Schuller 2016b). The tenth anniversary of the earthquake provided an opportunity to reflect on failures of the international aid response. For for-profit capitalist media and many "alternative" media, the ten-year milestone centered on the question: where did the money go? The story got quite a bit more media play than I had initially thought, perhaps because of two of the main protagonists. Predictably Bill and Hillary Clintons' long shadow prevents other issues from being seen and discussed. Make no mistake: Haitian people are not huge fans of the world's pre-eminent power couple, whom Jonathan Katz dubbed the "King and Queen of Haiti,"[4] now dethroned.

But focusing on foreign failure once again relegates Haitian people and their analyses to the margins. Any discussion of the 2010 earthquake and the failed response needs to be grounded by the material realities, theorized by people's own mixed, complex, and at times contradictory understandings and analyses.

As Gina Athena Ulysse tweeted in 2020 as the tenth anniversary of the quake approached, "the world cracked open and once again Haiti was asked to lead change in the world." One clear example was resilience. After the earthquake, "resilience" was trotted out in a racialized, postcolonial context to either justify sending less aid because Haitian people need less, because of their extraordinary "resilience" (Ulysse 2011), or as cover for disaster capitalism, embodied by Bill Clinton's slogan of "building back better." Clinton used this cheerful phrase following the 2004 earthquake and tsunami in Aceh, Indonesia, whom humanitarian agencies widely regard as a success and the model for "humanitarianism 2.0." Perhaps signaling the importance of Haiti in a new era of increasingly frequent "natural" disasters—what some call the Anthropocene—the next Democrat to take over the White House, Joe Biden, used this same term to gain support for post-COVID investment in public infrastructure. The "better" in Haiti's case only became clear after tens of millions of dollars was spent on projects that favored Clinton donors in areas not affected by the 2010 earthquake, such as an industrial park and mining in the north and tourist development in the south.

Yes, let's talk about disaster capitalism (Klein 2007; Schuller 2008)[5]. Let's also talk about these obviously broken promises. But let's also look at what work this narrative is doing on the ground. The more we make it about the Clintons, the less it is about Haiti and Haitian people. Furthermore, the Clintons' failure in Haiti exemplifies the contradictions of doing well by doing

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good. The global capitalist system—and the racial order that its foundation in plantation slavery created—broke Haiti in the first place. Only the most naïve, most gullible—or those with the greatest personal interests at stake—could have believed that this very system could repair it.

People in Haiti knew better. A mainstream social democrat and future presidential candidate from the OPL (the Organization of People in the Struggle), Sauveur Pierre Etienne (1997), working out of an NGO, called the proliferation of NGOs an "invasion." Defining the radical position, UEH (State University of Haiti) professor Janil Lwijis—murdered minutes before the earthquake—argued that NGOs are a form of government, implanting foreign capital on Haitian territory (2009). The Haitian proverb expresses this so well: *rat mode, soufle.* The rat bites, and then blows on the wound, what Michel Agier (2003) called the "left hand of empire."

Not "Built Back Better"

Let's be crystal clear: Haiti was not "built back better."

It's the night of 11 January 2020, the day before the media circus. It's a little cooler than usual, with an occasional breeze. People are walking up and down the street. The bread merchant comes by, looking for a sale. Motorcycles zoom in the distance. As it's Saturday, there's not too much traffic on the main arteries.

Street merchants are *chèche lavi* (literally looking for life, making a living) today, the stands a little more stocked than they have been with seasonal produce. The *ti boutik* (mom and pop stores) selling soft drinks or beer as well as imported goods—literally everything else from cooking oil to soap, cornflakes, or bleach—are still empty. Proprietor after proprietor explained the same thing: they don't want to take chances going out to buy more merchandise. More importantly, *pa gen kòb*—there's no money circulating.

Occasionally a private water truck rumbles by, followed by the sound of the pump used for its delivery. Neighbors tell me that the public water utility hasn't provided water since the *gwo peyi lòk*—the countrywide lockdown or general strike—that began in September and lasted for over two months.

The goings-on in the neighborhood of Kriswa,[6] in the capital city of Pòtoprens, are instructive. The house next door lies empty, just its foundations showing where weeds aren't overgrown. All that remains of the structure is the reservoir. Neighbors from up the street come down to fill their five-gallon buckets. One by one, the large trees like the *flanbwayan*, over sixty feet tall, with bright reddish-orange blooms, have been cut down for charcoal. The *jeran*, the domestic workers of the house, have now set up

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shop in one faded plywood "temporary" shelter and two homemade tin dwellings. The family who lived there, Dr. Charles's, abandoned it to them long ago. Not only did the Charles family not have funds to reconstruct their house, as a family of ten children they couldn't agree on ownership.

Across the street is Lise's house. She comes by the neighborhood from time to time on her motorcycle, which another neighbor taught her to drive after the earthquake. She was here yesterday. Her house wasn't destroyed on 12 January 2010 but during an aftershock eight days after, killing her father. Unlike the Charles family she doesn't own another home, so she can't afford to let this house go. Of the original house, two rooms are still standing, which she can live in once she finishes fixing it up, reconnecting the plumbing and electrical systems. Like Sisyphus, Lise has been steadily working on the house since six months after the earthquake, ten years ago. She fought to get her house tagged "green"—habitable. But like most people here, she doesn't have a steady job; she lives from contract to contract with youth- or education-oriented NGOs. NGO contracts and therefore money to people like Lise have dwindled to almost nothing. But she, like everyone else around, is *degaje l*—getting by. Mostly she's worried that if she didn't come back from time to time someone else would take it from under her, like the house I lived in before the earthquake.

After the 2010 earthquake, my landlady, a Christian pastor, adamantly refused our assistance to repair her house, saying that only God could protect it. She only very reluctantly allowed another neighbor, a structural engineer who still shines a streetlamp for neighborhood students to study by, to evaluate her home and make recommendations. In the summer of 2019 a group of individuals, some of whom were affiliated with the state via the court and police, tagged the house and others in the neighborhood. Several years ago, my landlady disappeared, failing to pay the annual property tax. As of November, a few weeks ago, someone else has lived there. I'm not sure how long I can afford to stay here because my landlords—caring for a frail and aging father—attempted to double the rent last summer. Rents in the neighborhood have more than quadrupled over the past ten years. This is not only because of houses destroyed but a process of what Andrea Steinke (2012) called "humanitarian gentrification," wherein aid and aid workers inflate housing prices. After the earthquake several NGOs offered $2,500-per-month housing contracts for their foreign employees (at the time my monthly rent for a three-bedroom dwelling was $175), triggering a domino effect wherein foreign NGO workers displaced higher-paid Haitian professionals, who displaced lower-paid professionals, and so on down the system. Artificially inflated, rents did not go down again.

It's been ten years since *Goudougoudou*, the earthquake that ripped through Haiti's nerve center, leveling houses, schools, hospitals, and government buildings, trapping and killing many—the "official" count is

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230,000, but that's been contested. The fact that there is still a question mark speaks volumes: not only about the enormity of the quake but also the incapacity of the Haitian state to conduct a census, not to mention the extremely low value granted to Haitian lives, particularly those in the majority of the population who have been impoverished. This very low value was evidenced in the mass grave site, with people thrown away like garbage into a big pit in an area called Titanyen, without a name, without an official identity card.

Titanyen is now the northern border of Kanaran, the so-called "promised land" where 250,000–300,000 people live, all since the earthquake, by some accounts the third largest city in Haiti. In many ways, Kanaran is a "bastard child" of the state and international NGO response to 12 January, in direct contrast to the planned relocation site aptly named Corail Cesselesse—endless coral. International NGOs like Oxfam negotiated a resettlement of 20,000 people from the Pétion-Ville Club, a symbol of opulence and exclusion. Managing the Pétion-Ville Club camp—which housed over 60,000 residents at its peak—was an organization cofounded by Academy Award winner Sean Penn. One of the most poignant images from Raoul Peck's film *Fatal Assistance* (2013) was people being loaded onto a bus and sent away. The look of disappointment on people's faces as they saw their destination, a desert, overcame the look of apprehension and fear as they boarded the bus.

As bastard child, Kanaran was shut out of resources. NGOs and international agencies promoted the idea that NGO camp management led to more aid. Indeed, in a quantitative study of indicators such as water, sanitation, and clinics in 108 camps, camp management proved the most statistically significant variable. However, NGOs only agreed to manage around 20 percent of the camps (Schuller and Levey 2014). One reason for this is NGOs' inability to control these spaces. Antonio, a career humanitarian who came to Haiti in 2010, said, "When you are looking at the camp in the middle of nowhere, it is a very closed environment you can control. When you are dealing with an urban environment you don't have as much control: it keeps changing and it keeps moving, and it's very different." While certainly not plentiful, the resources sent to Corail were in direct contrast to Kanaran's nothing. NGOs created a border between "have littles" and "have nots." This is the way aid is designed to be: a patchwork, fragments.

The "promised land" had been twice previously zoned by the government, in the 1940s and 1971, for an industrial park and even tourism (Louis 2013). Dusty, windswept, exposed to the hot Caribbean sun, the land was never developed and rarely even visited, with a few exceptions. On top of the mountain, a small group of Christian believers used it as a site for prayer rituals, naming it Canaan/Kanaran.

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Following the earthquake, even such marginal space was at a premium. Whether because of the planned Corail pulling people and aid, or the prayer site, Kanaran became a refuge for people seeking shelter. A persistent rumor held that this land was available for people to squat on, and an estimated thirty thousand people pitched bedsheets right after the earthquake. Churches built out of scrap wood also sprung up almost immediately in the disaster's wake. Abandoned by both the state and international aid agencies, Kanaran became a space of refuge for people displaced by force, like Jean Fils. Before the earthquake, Jean Fils lived in a popular neighborhood close to Haiti's industrial park. He was a sewing maching "operator" when he found factory work and offered his service as a mechanic when the factory closed, which occurred not infrequently. Born in a rural section of the Central Plateau, Jean Fils joined two million people of his generation in moving to the capital because of neoliberal push and pull factors (DeWind and Kinley III 1988; Dupuy 2005). When his cinder block house crumbled in the earthquake, he joined many of his neighbors, taking his family and whatever belongings they could salvage to the nearest open space. He, like a million and a half others, became a statistic: an "internally displaced person." This legal definition came later, after an aid NGO came by to do a census. The camp bore a name, Mozole, in Cité Soleil, which grew up to accommodate Haiti's working poor. PAPDA (Haitian Platform to Advocate for Alternative Development) director Camille Chalmers said, "Cité Soleil is a child of the industrial park" (Bergan and Schuller 2009).

In other words, ten years later, many people in Haiti lived this humanitarian occupation as a continuous legacy. As Laura Wagner (in this volume) writes, "the Earthquake hasn't ended."

Humanitarian Aftershocks

In addition to the ways in which it focuses disproportionate attention on the intentions—"good" or "bad"—of foreign actors, another concern I have with seizing upon this ten-year marker is the common sense—in Gramsci's (1971) definition—that the stories spun by international media and agencies appeal to, taking for granted the position of "Haiti as fucked up." Setting aside partisan swiping at the Clintons, images of the still-unbuilt National Palace or the uncleared rubble seem to do the work all by itself: nothing functions here. Sixteen billion dollars and nothing to show for it. Ergo, Haiti must somehow truly be beyond saving, as right-wing commentators, some less openly white supremacist than others, have long argued, from Moreau de Saint-Mery and Faustin Wirkus to Pat Rob-

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ertson and David Brooks. This is an opportunity to examine the disaster narrative: Whose story is being shared? What is the disaster?

Foreign failures after the earthquake demand more serious interrogation of the long-term impacts of this "Fatal Assistance" (Peck 2013) or "Humanitarian Aftershocks" (Schuller 2016a).

Haiti *is* a graveyard of failed NGO projects. This is especially visible in the capital of the "republic of NGOs," Leyogann (Baguidy 2020), where faded and torn placards proudly announcing a still-incomplete project stick out like gravestones. However, in addition to asking where did the money go, we should be asking what did it do? Looking at what is missing prevents us from seeing the ruptures triggered by the aid.

Solidarity

What struck me most about 12 January 2010 was the enormous outpouring of solidarity from within Haiti itself, limitless and unparalleled. Even if foreign media didn't see it, many Haitian authors like Edwidge Danticat (2010), Yanick Lahens (2010), Gary Victor (2010), and Michèle Montas (2011) witnessed the same story: the Haitian people were the real heroes of the time. Neighbors shared their daily bread, clothing, water, cooking utensils, and household tools. People whose houses weren't destroyed welcomed family members, neighbors, organization members, and students, while community brigades pulled people out from under the rubble. People created an inventory of who had what quantity of oil or rice, what capacity their buckets or pots had to collect water, and teams offered first aid and reconnected electricity wires. Families in the provinces made many sacrifices to welcome more than 630,000 people who fled the "Republic of Port-au-Prince" (Bengtsson et al. 2011; Jean-Baptiste 2012).

What happened to this outpouring of solidarity? NGOs offering humanitarian aid encouraged the creation of the internally displaced persons camp, creating the identity of "IDP." People who lived in the camps outlined the process, such as Rose-Anne at Hancho: "Well, the camp committee, how it got here, it was when someone came here, a lady, she told us if we want to benefit something here there must be a committee here."

Humanitarian Subjects

Whatever process of community organization existed before the earthquake, now as IDPs Haitians ceased to be citizens and became humanitarian subjects. They had to follow the rules set out by the NGOs in order to

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receive their aid. The existing civic infrastructure was systematically and deliberately replaced by camp committees, creations of NGOs to "check the box" for "participation," in foreign aid professional Andrea's words. NGOs gave these unelected camp committees, who owed their existence to the NGOs, power to determine who received aid and who was a "legitimate" IDP. This was done "in order to avoid chaos," according to Antonio, a foreign camp management specialist. The discourse from many NGO and international aid staff at the time was one of fear or blame; when it was becoming patently obvious that the aid wasn't working, the first reflex was to blame local residents for being unruly or "faking it." Hillary Clinton's chief of staff, Cheryl Mills, echoed racist comments from Barbara Bush after Hurricane Katrina, saying that Haitian people were "better off" in the camps. Timothy Schwartz added fuel to the fire by declaring that less than a fifth of IDPs were "legitimate."

Almost immediately following publication of the news story that quoted this declaration, Delmas mayor Wilson Jeudy authorized violence to force people out of the camps on the public squares in the town, in his words to "liberate" the spaces. In rapid succession, beginning 12 May 2011, two days before President Michel Martelly took office, armed individuals ripped and set fire to people's tents in a camp called Orphe Shadda in Delmas 1 and in the public squares in Delmas 3 and in Kafou Ayewopò (the "airport corner," also the name of a plaza, where the main thoroughfare intersects the road to the airport). Fifty-one-year-old Thelucia Ciffren was killed in such a brutal act of state violence (Dupain 2012). Again, at the ACRA 2 camp in Juvenat, just before midnight on 16 February 2013, in advance of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) summit at the nearby Caribe Convention Center, Anel Exeus was assassinated as an armed group set fire to thousands of people's dwellings and belongings. The fire killed a five-year-old.

This violence highlights what many in Haiti and particularly in the camps have deplored, namely that Haitian lives don't matter: *Se paske nou pa moun pou yo. Se bèt nou ye pou yo. Yo trete nou pi mal pase chen.* "It's because we aren't people to them. We are animals to them. They treat us worse than dogs."

"Mini-me"

Camp committees were in effect a mini-me of NGOs, created by them, in their image, reproducing their bureaucratic structure, authority, and top-down governance structures. Camp residents had mixed understandings of the committees; at some camps, such as CAJIT (the Youth Action

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Committee of St. Thomas Court) or Kolonbi, a majority identified that they knew the strategies and that they could participate in meetings, and that they knew when they were. But many others were in the dark; for example, no one at the Nan Bannann camp knew how the committee was selected. Committees were overwhelmingly led by men. In the Hancho camp, the NGO required there to be a woman at the head. In every interaction my team and I had with this camp president, she displayed a clear lack of knowledge about the workings of the camp. These interactions were few because she didn't even live there. Camp committees were deputized with the power to distribute ration cards to the IDPs and maintain lists of worthy recipients (see Minn 2016). As the local representatives, fluent in their native language, they accompanied NGOs in their regular census of the population. This was done out of fear of disorder but also fear that somehow someone would slip through and game the system. The most animated a foreign aid worker would get during interviews was to retell such a "gotcha" moment. To put that in context, a $500 annual rental allowance for a Haitian IDP camp resident is only two *days*' worth of a foreign aid worker's per diem. But let's be honest with ourselves, flipping James Ferguson's (2005) phrase: perhaps we scholars are the "evil twin."

Often, camp committee members were members of a church hierarchy, led by a pastor. The NGO managing the Plas Lapè camp, where thirty thousand people lived for a time, was a religious NGO. The Salvation Army had established a base of operations in Haiti in 1950, in the neighborhood. The director handpicked the committee, who were members of his church. Nearly all were men, and *none* lived in the camp; most didn't even live in the neighborhood. Eventually—when foreign money for food aid ran out—the Salvation Army abandoned the camp, leaving two NGOs to duke it out for control. Camp residents disparagingly called the committee *pòch prela*, pockets of tarps. They were so corrupt in pocketing the aid, and their pockets were so big—like tarps—that Josselyn said, "when you are filling it, it never fills up." The language that people used to describe other camp committees clearly demonstrates their distance from the community: *chèf* (chief), *gwo nèg* (big man), and even *gang*. Exceptions to this distance from the population were instructive: CAJIT was literally "off the grid" until April 2010, not officially recognized in the Displacement Tracking Matrix and therefore shut out of aid. Having relied on their own efforts and not having an NGO boss, the camp committee was held in high esteem by residents.

With the attention of foreign actors on state corruption since the PetroCaribe scandal, the humanitarian occupation offers important historical context. While it is true that these actions were completed by Haitian people, the sets of local actors were created as groups, given rules to

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follow, and sometimes absolute authority on distribution decisions by international agencies.

Demobilization

Another problem with the "mini-me" camp committees is that these foreign creations displaced existing civic infrastructure (Schuller 2012b). Camp committees were in effect "genetically modified" organizations (Schuller 2012a).[7] For example, also in the Plas Lapè camp, this committee staffed by nonresidents displaced a people's organization with several thousand members that had been in the neighborhood since 1990, twenty years at that point. This was not unique to Plas Lapè; all over Port-au-Prince, NGO-created committees were put in direct competition with existing organizations and community leaders. For example, in CAJIT, even the elected local-level government council (CASEC), was excluded from the process. In 2012, an NGO began a process of constructing T-shelters and so created another committee to facilitate this distribution, casting CAJIT aside. Immediately people began talking about corruption of this NGO-created, top-down committee in terms of who received the construction, including the new president who reportedly had three shelters built for himself.

NGO aid and these genetically modified organizations demobilized the population. People's organizations, OP in the French or Kreyòl, had a long and sometimes contradictory history in so-called "popular" neighborhoods (where low-income people resided). The history of OPs began with the popular uprising against Duvalier and the iron fist he represented, against social exclusion, and against extreme poverty triggered by the then-new experiment with neoliberalism. At the core of OPs' *raison d'être* is protest, making demands (Dubuisson 2021). Whether through sit-ins, *bat tenèb* (banging on pots and pans, making noise to demonstrate their anger), or street marches, OPs changed the political landscape in Haiti's swelling capital. In addition to this *militant* approach demanding state services (the Kreyòl word – in this case gendered feminine, to refer to women activists – is more direct than *activist*), OPs also engaged in collectivist self-help projects like street cleanup, managing public water taps, fixing infrastructure projects, and having *ti sourit*, block parties. Central to OPs' civic infrastructure, their ability to transform the social landscape, was the ethos and practice of *kotizasyon*, members' voluntary contribution.

Foreign NGO aid after the earthquake disrupted this in several ways. First, creating (comparatively) well-resourced organizations—the camp committees—created new leaders and challenged the legitimacy of and

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public confidence in the OPs. Second, a humanitarian logic, often managed by explicitly evangelical NGOs, displaced the discourse of rights. NGO aid became charity, turning active citizens into "mouths to feed" or grateful, "worthy" recipients (Minn 2016), as demonstrated by a young woman living in the Hancho camp: "A foreigner, an NGO, comes to our aid here when God touches its/her/his heart. When that happens, we feel happy." Third, the practice of "cash for work" was the final nail in the coffin for the practice of voluntary, self-help collectivism. Marcel Mauss's *The Gift* (1990) discusses the problems inherent to power relations when a gift cannot be reciprocated. Called the "yellow T-shirt" phenomenon because of the highly visible teams wearing matching NGO garb, the expectation of being paid—albeit at or even less than Haiti's minimum wage—got people out of the practice of *kotizasyon* and volunteer labor (Ayiti Kale Je 2010). Sometimes called in Kreyòl *rèt tann* (lying in wait), the French word for this phenomenon, discussed at least in scholarly circles, is *assistancialisme*, the state of being a spectator, watching instead of acting (Thomas 2013). A neologism used by former French president Nicolas Sarkozy, decidedly not a fan of public assistance, the term translates into a "culture of dependency."

In Haiti people spoke of these genetically modified organizations as *wete trip, mete pay,* literally taking out one's guts to replace with straw—that is, as hollowed out. These committees, created by NGOs to be their deputies, are not able to speak up, nor do they even think to question the aid. Within social movements after the earthquake, one of the biggest insults is to be accused of *fè ONG*—"NGOing" (Schuller 2018). Seen in light of the commodification of projects and their visibility, some activists call out the fragmentation and stalemate of Haiti's current mobilization.

Increasing Violence

David Oxygène, the leader of one such OP (and currently one of the most visible) called MOLEGHAF—the Mouvement de Liberté d'Egalité des Haïtiens pour la Fraternité (Movement of Liberty and Equality of Haitians for Brotherhood)—identified divergent tendencies within popular neighborhoods and the OP sector. In a context of extreme poverty and horrible material conditions—Oxygène kept returning to these, which he names as products of imperialism and the inequalities and social exclusion that it engenders—people identified as "leaders" can either have democratic or "banditist" tendencies. For good or ill, armed individuals—call them "gangs" if you aren't concerned about the racialized connotations—are able to offer material resources and "security" (Kivland 2020). The prob-

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lem according to Oxygène is that NGOs have systematically propped up this type of leader to the exclusion of democratic, bottom-up people's organizations. And this is not just in the Fònasyonal neighborhood where MOLEGHAF is based. Djems Olivier has documented this in other "red zones," such as Sitesolèy, Belè, and Kafou Fèy. Olivier's painstakingly researched dissertation (Olivier 2020) demonstrates specific ways in which NGOs create *gwo chèf,* fragmenting communities and reifying "turf," a process he calls "archipelization" (Olivier 2021).

Foreign actors seize upon the trope of "gangs"—not only journalists but the US government, the Organization of American States(OAS), and the so-called "Core Group"—the US, Canada, France, Brazil, the European Union and the OAS. Drawing on these racist stereotypes, President Jovenel Moïse attempted to cover up the November 2018 massacre in Lasalin, where Haitian human rights organizations reported seventy-three casualties at the hands of state affiliates seeking to suppress dissent.[8] While reading accounts of violence, it's important to remember their roots in the humanitarian occupation.

Disrupting the Family

NGO aid also disrupted the family. The traditional Haitian rural household structure survived the massive rural exodus triggered by neoliberal push-and-pull policies, which saw Port-au-Prince's population quadruple in two decades (Dupuy 2005). The *lakou*—an extended family compound with clustered sleeping spaces surrounding common outdoor living spaces—obviously had to be modified to adapt to popular neighborhoods and shantytowns, where families often live in single-room dwellings as small as ten feet by ten feet. But before the earthquake, Port-au-Prince households had, on average, 5.37 members, including cousins, aunties, and grandparents. This multigenerational household was a backbone of survival (Bastien 1961; Laguerre 1973). This flexible family unit facilitated security, with one person able to be home to keep watch on the space and children. Larger households also meant that resources could be pooled, with multiple people *chèche lavi*—again, literally "looking for life" or livelihood. Given the precarity of poor families and the volatility of the small formal labor market in the industrial park, most families—59 percent—engaged in commerce. This *lakou*-style family was the nucleus of solidarity. As was often explained to me: "When one of us has food, we all eat." Neighbors sent plates of cooked food as common practice.

Once in the camps, household size decreased to an average of 3.36, a reduction of two people per household. This decrease is greater in camps

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with more NGO aid. In CAJIT, which as noted earlier missed the train because they were invisible, the average household size went from 5.6 to 4.8, a 15 percent decrease, which approximates the official earthquake death toll. By contrast, households from one of the most NGOized camps, Karade, decreased from an average of 6.1 people before the earthquake to 3.6 after, over 40 percent.

While there may well be important local differences, foreign humanitarian practice offers an explanation. Despite its pretentions to "universality" humanitarian aid is rooted in so-called "Western" culture. Provincializing NGOs reveals the attachment to the patriarchal "nuclear" family that is the norm—if increasingly not the practice—in postindustrial nations like the US, Canada, France, the UK, and other donor countries. The same ration bag of rice beans, and cooking oil went to a family of two or eight. Given the rules of the game, families split up to maximize their chances of receiving a distribution. This division was magnified in the official relocation process of the approximately one in six camp residents who received some sort of relocation assistance. In a follow-up study in four neighborhoods in Port-au-Prince, almost half (47 percent) of people lived with different family than before the earthquake. Almost a third (32 percent) of people lived in a different neighborhood (Schuller 2012).

In Western Europe, the nuclear family evolved hand in hand with the Industrial Revolution; when families worked the land, more children and intergenerational households meant more hands to work. When crowded in cities, the household divorced from the unit of production but remaining the unit of consumption meant more mouths to feed. This cultural shift occurred over two or three generations in the UK and the US. This occurred over two *years* in Haiti. This has profound consequences considering that Charlene Desir (2011: 282) argued that the *lakou* is "a theoretical and social framework and integral part of the social fabric of Haiti."

Increasing Violence against Women

Among the most perverse outcomes of foreign humanitarian policies was an increase of violence against women. One of the gains of second-wave feminism was the promotion of Women in Development, or WID. In WID, women became primary beneficiaries of NGO aid. Not everyone shared the goal of women's empowerment, as voiced by Alain, who worked at USAID: "You give money to a man and he's as likely to spend it on beer or a lover as on his family. But if you give to a woman, you're guaranteed that she will prioritize feeding herself and her children." Specifically, af-

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ter the earthquake, agencies followed the World Food Program guidelines that food aid be sent to women. This in effect solidified the role of women as *poto mitan,* or pillars of the family (N'Zengou-Tayo 1998). Caribbeanist scholars since Edith Clarke (1957) have noted that households are "matrifocal," which Hortense Spillers (1987), Angela Davis (1983), Saidiyah Hartman (1996), and Christina Sharpe (2010) argued has its origin in the brutality of patriarchy on the plantation. Giving food aid to *only* women not only encouraged families to split to give a seventeen-year-old the status of head of household to double their food aid, it also created the opportunity for "transactional sex."

NGOs set up the rules and empowered the perpetrators. Had the camp committees been democratic, or had NGOs encouraged or supported spaces for deliberation or participation in the camps, a system of distribution to women might not have created problems. However, NGOs employed a system of ration cards, in effect deputizing their committees to distribute the cards. Committees were dominated by men, including those whose power was gained by the gun—or Bible. This was a recipe for abuse.

Kolonbi camp resident Evrance, in her fifties, never received food aid. When asked why, she theorized, "It's because the guys in the committee choose young women with large buttocks." The researcher conducting this interview asked for clarification, making sure of what she heard. Evrance replied, "You heard me! Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful asses." This was not unique to Kolonbi, as Plas Lapè camp resident Fabiola details. She didn't get a cash-for-work job digging canals: "This is a job for men. I didn't work in the project. We must have sex with them. Such an old woman like me, what can I do for them?" In the St. Louis camp, the Red Cross gave the camp committee president Esaie, a male, the responsibility to give the official list of who was a "real" resident and therefore eligible for relocation assistance valued at $500 or more. According to Sandy Nelzy (2013, 22), Esaie used this as leverage over at least two mothers, one of whom, Josiane, was married, to demand sex: "Because she refused the offer, [Esaie] stopped informing [Josiane] about the Red Cross visits to the camp and refused to include her name in the list he gave the Red Cross as to who would receive official relocation assistance." A study by Poto Fanm+Fi revealed that 37 percent of pregnant women reported performing transactional sex as a survival strategy (d'Adesky et al. 2012). For these reasons and others, violence against women was endemic in the camps. According to Small Arms Survey, two percent of women reported gender-based violence in Haiti 2010. In the camps, this figure jumps over tenfold, to 22 percent (Muggah 2011).

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Haitian Understandings

Various collectives of artists, scholars, NGOs, and activists had their own commemoration of the 2010 earthquake. It's difficult to capture ten years, in no small part because of the magnitude of the earthquake. As noted above, this media event often seems like fragments. A loose coalition formed as the anniversary approached. Calling itself *Amouni,* "harmony," the group called for dispersed, decentered, local commemorations of the disaster. Beginning with the conception that *moun* (people) are the heart of *amouni* (harmony), the fuller name included *semans limyè,* seeds of light. Their declaration began by acknowledging the solidarity after the earthquake as the "foundation of the nation." Underscoring the spiritual dimension of harmony, the call for resistance took a cue from the musical term, acknowledging that harmony always is accompanied by *dezòd* (disorder) or a cacophony. From here the statement denounces the disorder of the capitalist system, "which is devouring people as well as the planet," and which prevents people from living in harmony with another, creating a wake of false consciousness. On the night of 11 January, the evening before the anniversary of the quake, dozens of young people, mostly men, gathered at a platform in the Fort National neighborhood. On the twelfth, events were spread from Kanaran to Plas Jeremi in the Kafou Fèy neighborhood.

At all the events I attended, at least one speaker mentioned the importance of people's material conditions. Centering conditions of the impoverished majority in Haiti (all of the speakers and events were in Pòtoprens) reprimands foreign media's focus on the political stage. Haiti's 1987 constitution guarantees the right to housing in Article 22, but the state has neglected its duties. People commented on the *lavi chè*, the rapid inflation and devaluation of Haiti's currency. On 6 July 2018, when the country stood up in revolt against the planned hikes in gas prices that the IMF had arranged with the government, the exchange rate was sixty-five gourdes (Haiti's currency) to the dollar. Less than a year later, on 9 June 2019, during a massive nationwide protest following the publication of a partial report of the PetroCaribe investigation, it was ninety-one to the dollar. Many speakers foregrounded education, health care, water, and electricity.

Commentators questioned what constituted the disaster. Human rights attorney Mario Joseph pointed out that Haiti has been hit with earthquakes before, including Port-au-Prince in 1751 and Cap Haïtien in 1842. Joseph defined the lack of state preparation and response as the disaster. As David Oxygène of MOLEGHAF and others said, "It didn't begin with January 12, and it didn't end with January 12." A leader with KOD-15, in

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Kanaran, called this neglect a form of state violence (Garza 2014; Darbouze 2021; Dougé-Prosper 2021), to which Ilionor Louis, my colleague at the Faculté d'Ethnologie and director of Sant Egalite, added, poverty is also state violence, a violation of our rights. The activist collective Sèk Gramsci's commemoration was, as per their usual, street theatre. The title of their performance highlights the many faces of the same disaster: *mòd leta* (modes of the state or governance strategies, but also a play on words, since *mò* means the state's "dead"). The performance began minutes after 4 p.m., when activist professor Janil Lwijis was pronounced dead in General Hospital after being assassinated, and continued through 4:53, when Goudougoudou struck. The culprit in both was state violence, engineered and directed by the neoliberal troika of International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and Interamerican Development Bank. Performers poked fun at a pastor profiteering from the "act of God" and later making unwanted advances on a female congregant. Characteristically not shying away from current commentary, Sèk Gramsci denounced the current government of Jovenel Moïse for being in league with both gangs and the UN military to kill the population in order to quell dissent, including the massacre of November 2018 in a popular neighborhood of Lasalin and the high-profile murder of three journalists – and this is before other high profile murders, including a week before the assassination of Moïse himself.

Several analysts noted a continuity in the oppression faced by Haiti's poor majority as well as in organized protests. Referring to the nine-week *peyi lòk*—the "lockdown" or general strike—in September, MOLEGHAF's Guy Lauore Rosenez, as well as other activists such as Guy Numa of the coalition Konbit and anthropologist Mamyrah Dougé Prosper, placed the mobilization in the context of a long-term struggle and current outcroppings of the 6 July 2018 uprising. Rosenez called upon the resistance of the ancestors, saying that the tenth anniversary of the earthquake should be the second Bwa Kayiman, the Vodou ceremony that set the Haitian Revolution aflame on 14 August 1791. Oxygène, using the opportunity of the earthquake for reflection about the impasse of the popular movement, said activists should add the question *#KòtKòbCIRHla?*—that is, where is the money from the Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission?—to activists' quiver.

Dignity and humanity rose to the top of activists' demands, from the *Amouni* text to formal presentations to commentary from audience members. The president's motorcade of over eighty vehicles zooming from Titanyen to pay homage to the mass grave—leaving behind trails of dust residents had to sweep up—didn't erase the everyday practice of state dehumanization for many Kanaran residents like KOD-15 coordinator

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Laguerre. Speaking to candidates' instrumentalizing the belated visibility of Kanaran and its now 250,000 residents, Rosedite concluded, *lè nou fin vote, nou pa moun ankò* (when we're done voting, we cease being people). The audience erupted in a hearty *ayibobo* (amen): We're not sacks. We are people. "For the state, there are no citizens here."

Despite this structural violence, the tone of the conversation, both prepared remarks and comments from participants, was defiant. People are *degaje,* getting by, and several spoke of a new opportunity. Collette Lespinasse applauded Kanaran residents for taking initiative and showing what Haitian people can do when they take the lead: "We don't need foreigners." Speaking back to the discourse of Kanaran being the *pitit san papa leta ak ONG* (bastard child of the State and NGOs), UEH professor Odonel Pierre-Louis also drew inspiration from Kanaran residents for *fè papa two renmen w* (making papa so proud that he claims you). Sabine Lamour, sociology professor, feminist, and director of Solidarity of Haitian Women (SOFA), spoke of the ongoing struggle by Haitian feminist organizations. Rather than using the language of "waves," which erases Haitian women's history of struggle against imperialism and inhumanity since 1915, the commencement of the US occupation. Lamour proposes *sekous:* ripples, shocks, or shaking. Rather than mourning, Lamour encourages activism: *Nan aksyon nou, chak jou nap fè dèy la* (In our actions, every day we honor the dead).

Toward a Caribbean Epistemology of Disaster

Disaster scholarship in the US and other areas within the global north is dominated by political ecology. While this paradigm is essential to unpacking the nexus of geography and political economy in the natural and built environments, and to divorcing hazards from disasters, the lived experience, response, and analysis of Haitian people demand more. Insights from Haitian artists and literary figures tap into the deep wisdom of Vodou and its resistance to slavery. Building on recent scholarship—in this series—on "repeating disasters" (Hoffman and Barrios 2019), insights of Caribbean literary theory offer useful centering of the fragmented experience of (post)plantation societies, such as Antonio Benítez-Rojo's (Benítez-Rojo 1997) concept of "repeating island," and the Haitian literary and artistic genre of spiralism (Glover 2010). Indeed, many other brilliant essays in this present collection make the case for the importance of bringing postcolonial theory to the study of disasters.

The Caribbean was the birthplace of plantation slavery and global capitalism (McKittrick 2013). This violence and dehumanization engendered

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unequal exchange that still hampers the region. The Caribbean is disproportionately beset by hazards: the word "hurricane" is a transliteration of a Taino concept long predating colonization (Moreira 2010; Ortiz 2010; Ramos Guadalupe 2010). Currently, the Caribbean disproportionately pays for warming sea temperatures (Taylor et al. 2012). Seen from the Caribbean, climate change is a violent continuation of slavery and displacement (Sheller 2020). Local folk theories long disaggregated "hazards" from "disasters," and community mutual aid and survival, adaptations to slavery, are precursors to "resilience"—in all its contradictions—long before it became popularized.

Haiti's experience and Haitian people's analyses push at the edges of received scholarship on disasters. From whose point of view do events become "disasters," and what is the "disaster" itself? A typical disaster narrative focuses media, and therefore philanthropic and agency, attention on the disaster event, iconically captured in the photo op. Douz Janvye was the archetypical photo op: testifying to how much money media agencies made off of images of the suffering of Haitian bodies, Haitian photographer Daniel Morel received a settlement in his lawsuit of $3 million. A generation of political ecology–oriented disaster social science has argued for moving away from events and toward process to understand disasters. The experience, lived realities, and analyses of people in Haiti and the Caribbean go further: the disaster is not merely impacted by global capitalism but the violence inherent to global racial capitalism is itself the disaster.

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Notes

The author would first like to thank the activists, scholars, neighbors, colleagues, students, and organic intellectuals in Haiti for the inspiration and wisdom. Also I would like to thank the organizers of Florida State University's Winthrop-King institute's con-

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ference, "From Katrina to Michael" for the invitation as keynote, and the participants for the productive and engaged conversation and critique. Especially acknowledged are volume editors Vincent Joos, Martin Munro and John Ribó. Feedback from NIU writing group Dana Bardolph and Micah Morton was invaluable, as well as anonymous reviewers. This research was made possible by a grant from the National Science Foundation Early Career program, grant# 1455142, and by Senior Research Grant # 1122704. The views expressed in this piece are solely the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of the NSF.

1. See also Braziel, in this volume, for a discussion of necrocapitalism.
2. See Mark Schuller, "Humanitarian Occupation in Haiti," North American Congress on Latin America website, 28 July 2015, https://nacla.org/news/2015/07/28/humanitarian-occupation-haiti.
3. Derek Walcott's Nobel Prize for Literature speech on December 7, 1992, was subtitled "Fragments of Epic Memory," also the main title of a 2021–22 exhibit at the Art Gallery of Ontario. See https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1992/walcott/lecture/ and https://ago.ca/exhibitions/fragments-epic-memory.
4. Jonathan Katz, "The King and Queen of Haiti," *Politico Magazine*, 4 May 2015, https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/05/clinton-foundation-haiti-117368/.
5. See also Ansel Herz and Kim Ives, "WikiLeaks Haiti: The Post-Quake 'Gold Rush' for Reconstruction Contracts," *The Nation*, 15 June 2011, https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/wikileaks-haiti-post-quake-gold-rush-reconstruction-contracts/; and Isabel Macdonald and Isabeau Doucet, "The Shelters That Clinton Build," *The Nation*, 11 July 2011, https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/shelters-clinton-built/.
6. As part of a larger commitment to decolonize research on Haiti, place names are referred to in Haitian Creole (Kreyòl)
7. Haitian activists decried the other "genetically modified" organisms when it was discovered that Monsanto seized upon the disaster to make a stealth donation of GMO seeds.
8. National Network for the Defense of Human Rights, "The Events in La Saline: From Power Struggle Between Armed Gangs to State-Sanctioned Massacre," 1 December 2018, https://web.rnddh.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/10-Rap-La-Saline-1Dec2018-Ang1.pdf.

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