

# The Power of the Story

## *Writing Disasters in Haiti and the Circum-Caribbean*

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Big data is of no help when it comes to tracing the memories of the dead. It cannot record the voices of the deceased. But isn't that what humans have their imagination for?

—Kiyoshi Shigematsu, writing about  
the Fukushima earthquake, 2013

Right after the 2010 earthquake that rocked the Port-au-Prince region and killed many people, a big data competition began between states and international organizations involved in the relief effort. The journalists Robert Muggah and Athena Kolbe, a year and half after the disaster, wrote that “in Haiti, fewer than 46,000 people were killed in the January 2010 earthquake. Or perhaps the death toll was more than 300,000” (2011). The Haitian state issued a high toll number of 230,000 deaths days after the quake. Aid agencies and states “allied” to Haiti criticized the flawed methodology of Haitian experts and waited a few months before announcing their own mortality count. The United States Agency of International Development, in May 2011, stated that between 46,000 and 85,000 people died in the disaster. This much smaller number had consequences: it minimized the need for assistance at a time when the \$10 billion pledged by international donors had not been disbursed. Obliquely, it pushed nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to reassess and sometimes shorten their missions in Haiti. In brief, the numbers battle was an academic exercise between different experts that directly and indirectly fueled ideological and logistical debates linked to the amount of aid needed. In a cynical fashion, we could now say, more than ten years after the earthquake, that these debates did not really matter. Despite the disbursement of billions of dollars, most of the reconstruction of infrastructures and buildings has

not yet happened, and Haiti is today battered by overlapping political, economic, and environmental crises. However, the fact that gang violence resurfaced in 2018 or that some international NGOs' reconstruction projects failed spectacularly are not a matter of how much funding was disbursed. It has more to do with the fact that Haitians were silenced during the relief and reconstruction processes and that most aid actors did not take their desires and needs into account (McAlister 2012). It also has more to do with forms of structural violence that have increased disaster vulnerability since the beginning of the colonization of the Americas in 1492. Big data and quantitative analysis are poor frameworks to assess disasters. Numbers do not talk. It is only by listening to Haitian voices or to people who have lived in Haiti for many years that a fuller understanding emerges of the structural conditions that transformed an earthquake into a megadisaster.

In her recent work, Mimi Sheller writes similarly of how the earthquake made visible the “highly uneven interdependence and fragility of the complex mobility systems and infrastructural moorings that create the possibility for people to weave together everyday life” (2020: 1). Sheller is further critical of the “militarized and carceral response” to the “unnatural disaster,” which deprived Haitian people any meaningful role in deciding how, or indeed where, their postdisaster future might be, as one of the primary aims of the US military was to make sure that there was no mass migration from Haiti to the United States (1–2). As such, the vast majority of Haitian citizens were unable to leave the country for medical care, or to visit family members, and many had no choice but to go to the camps hastily constructed for “internally displaced people,” as if, in Sheller’s words, “displacement were their identity” (2). As the response played out in a series of failures—the inability to move people from temporary shelters into transitional housing, the slow progress in shifting rubble and rebuilding housing—it became clear that such failures exposed what Sheller calls “the institutional scaffolding of mobility regimes that govern spatial mobility, including all the purposeful gaps and uneven distributions of mobility rights and ‘network capital’ that leave some groups most vulnerable to harm” (2). Focusing on another Caribbean site—Guyana following the disastrous flood of 2005—Sarah Vaughn is also concerned with the ways in which national and international agencies’ reactions to disasters shape people’s experiences, specifically in the case of a large-scale project to enhance irrigation and drainage infrastructures and the way such a project “alters understandings of settlement or the multilayered processes that contribute to dwelling and the habitation of a place” (2022: 1). Adapting to climate change, Vaughn insists, is for the people “a lived reality of settlement” rather than an “abstract risk” (1). This volume

goes beyond quantitative debates to explore how race, gender, and class disparities fuel unequal and inefficient disaster responses that tend to lay the groundwork for crises rather than offer sustainable solutions. Following Vaughn, contributors use “counter-racial thinking”—an acknowledgment of race-based practices that takes distance from race-based politics and allows new engagements with the environment. As Vaughn writes, “counter-racial thinking not only offers a way to trace the racial political orders that lurk in the shadows of scientizing debates about climate change but also brings to the fore practices that insist on action across a variety of scales” (23).

This multidisciplinary edited volume focuses on narratives often hidden behind the “abstract risks” of academic and governmental discourse or obscured by statistical battles and planning strategies that are anchored in a crisis mindset. In the recent past, Haiti suffered many disasters—and hurricanes, political violence, earthquakes, and droughts continue to devastate this country. Not surprisingly, many scholars in this volume analyze the current situation in Haiti. They do so because studying Haiti—the region in the Americas that has suffered the most from (neo)colonial intrusions—reveals, to paraphrase the anthropologist Greg Beckett, the processes and structures that enable the repetition of disasters (2020: 252). The governmental debacles that follow hurricanes or earthquakes in Puerto Rico and the lack of sustainable postdisaster reconstruction in this island echo the structural issues that plague Haiti: the absence of centralized state institutions able to intervene during disasters; a lack of budgetary autonomy at all levels; and the systematic dismemberment of public education, health, and other institutions. As in Haiti, despite their many protests, the people of Puerto Rico are still treated as neocolonial subjects—second-class US citizens who remain placed under the tutelage of federal institutions that continue to impose forms of austerity that led to disaster vulnerability in the first place. As Mark Schuller recently wrote, what seem to be disparate regional disasters are structurally linked to one another and happen on a global scale. Indeed, we “risk reproducing a defensive, single-issue individualism, atomization, and compartmentalization—a ‘whack-a-mole’ approach to resistance”—if we cannot explain how racial capitalism and neoliberal abandonment of public services engender slow and fast, small and large disasters at once (2021: 4).

The list of disasters could unfortunately go on. Every disaster is unique, yet similar processes of gentrification and privatization of public services in postdisaster periods are to be seen in many areas of the Greater Caribbean region. Puerto Rico, Dominica, the Bahamas, or the US Gulf Coast, to take a few examples, did not recover from recent disasters. Instead, as in the Puerto Rico and Port-au-Prince examples, postdisaster periods in

these regions have seen the intensification of neoliberal reforms. It is not only the physical landscape that bears the brunt of these catastrophes. Public services and the basic welfare dwindle with every postdisaster reconstruction phase while states act as police and actuary of corporations and large estate owners. Social scientists have well described these processes and have also explored how the slashing of state regulations and public investments render these areas of the world vulnerable to disasters. The Caribbean offers a case in point, as it was the first region in the world to be globally managed and as it has long served as an experimental platform for neoliberal reforms (Mintz 1974; Girvan 1975). As Yarimar Bonilla reminds us, the majority of Caribbean polities are nonsovereign societies, and “even those that have achieved ‘flag independence’ still struggle with how to forge a more robust project of self-determination, how to reconcile the unresolved legacies of colonialism and slavery, how to assert control over their entanglements with foreign powers, and how to stem their disappointment with the unfulfilled promises of political and economic modernity” (2015: xiii–xiv). The colonial legacies in this region, including what Bonilla calls the “common disenchantment with the modernist project of postcolonial sovereignty” (xiv), weigh heavily and call for historical insights on present crises.

Beyond restating the well-known ravages of neoliberalism in the Caribbean, this volume brings together cultural and literary critics, historians, and anthropologists to open a dialogue on the (neo)colonial legacies that constrain the sovereignty of Caribbean regions and that make disasters more forceful there than anywhere in the Americas. As this introduction demonstrates through the example of Hispaniola, these (neo)colonial legacies are rooted not only in historical dynamics of the Caribbean but also in discourses about disaster in the region. While Hispaniola is susceptible to seismic activity and hurricanes due to geology and geography, European and US colonial interventions created, exacerbated, and entrenched conditions that make the island particularly vulnerable to disaster still to this day. These catastrophic colonial interventions include but are not limited to the genocide, displacement, and enslavement of Indigenous and African peoples; the disruption, destruction, and reconfiguration of local ecologies, economies, and governments; and the establishment and maintenance of racial capitalism as the dominant socioeconomic system structuring the exploitation of labor and the extraction of natural resources on the island, in the region, and beyond. Moreover, the prevalence in Hispaniola’s and Haiti’s histories of disasters—natural, man-made, and both—have contributed to global discourses that characterize Haiti particularly and the Caribbean more generally as inherently disastrous. As this introduction and multiple chapters in this volume illustrate, such dis-

courses have tangible material effects because they inform the strategies, policies, and actions of governments and NGOs, foreign and domestic. The purpose of this volume then is to acknowledge and grapple with the historical, discursive, and material aspects of how these (neo)colonial legacies shape disaster throughout the Caribbean and its diasporas. Given the broad historical, geographic, linguistic, and cultural scope of such an undertaking, this volume is necessarily a limited and not exhaustively representative selection of scholarship on disaster in the circum-Caribbean. The goal is that the work included in this collection will catalyze further collaborative research and interdisciplinary debate on the topic.

### The Colonial Anchors of Disasters

As Bartolomé de las Casas made clear in his *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, published in 1552, the colonization of the Americas is a history of genocide, plunder, and barbaric violence. The atrocities committed against Indigenous people of the Americas, along with the diseases brought by Spanish colonizers, decimated entire communities. The death toll was so great that cultivated land started to disappear, paving the way for a massive forest expansion that would cause the first worldwide human-induced climate change: a global cooling (Koch et al. 2019). They started the process that would link localized, yet massive, genocides to global economic and so-called natural disasters. Columbus and his men started to destroy Hispaniola from the moment they reached the shores of today's Haiti in 1492. Diseases rapidly devastated local populations and the barbaric Spanish enslavement and killing of Indigenous people led to their almost total disappearance in a matter of fifty years. Once Columbus returned to the island in 1493 to find his sailors at the settlement La Navidad, he discovered that Indigenous people had destroyed the colonial compound and, not surprisingly, killed his men. As archaeologist Clark Moore states, “[the Spaniards were] invaders. They made slaves of the Indians, stole their wives. That’s why the Indians killed the Santa María crew and burned La Navidad” (Maclean 2008). However, because the Taíno cacique Guacanagarix received Columbus and his men after the Santa María wreck and gave him gold presents in exchange for mirrors, brass objects, and clothing, the mirage of El Dorado floated over the Americas, making the region a prime destination for Spanish colonizers (Floyd 1973; Columbus 1960). During his three-week stay in 1492, Columbus forged a bond with Guacanagarix, who authorized the sailors to settle in one of the villages he controlled. When Columbus came back in 1493 and found that rival tribes had killed his men, he and Gua-

canagarix made a military alliance. The minor cacique saw this alliance as a way to gain political power. In 1495, Guacanagarix and his three thousand soldiers helped the Spanish army of twelve hundred men wage a ten-month war against other Taínos in order to “pacify” them (Palmié and Scarano 2011: 119). At the end of this war, Columbus negotiated a settlement with Guarionex, the most important cacique of the region defeated by this new hybrid army. With this agreement, Taínos over the age of fourteen became “obliged to pay quarterly as much gold dust as filled a hawk’s bell. This was the first regular taxation of the Indians and served as precedent for other exactions still more intolerable” (Almeida 2011: 29). People who did not comply could be killed, brutalized, or sold into slavery in Spain. Yet, as Joselyn Almeida mentions, the Taínos never completely submitted to the Spaniards and starved their oppressors, and sometimes themselves, by refusing to produce food. This short summary of Columbus’s first major war in the Americas sheds light on the modus operandi for extracting resources and producing disasters in the Americas: coerced labor and taxation, enslavement, barbaric violence, and measured productivity would be the hallmarks of European colonialism, especially in the Caribbean.

This first colonization effort shaped economic, social, and religious interactions between Europeans and peoples of the Americas by instituting new human hierarchies that would become crucial to the extension of global capitalism. However, even though Spanish soldiers had major technological advantages, the Taíno population of Hispaniola never fully submitted to the Spanish crown and established practices of marronage and guerilla warfare. Maroon societies mastered subsistence agriculture and relentlessly fought against the nascent sugar plantation economy started in Hispaniola by Columbus. This is a key point for scholars writing in this volume: while it is important to describe the processes of colonial theft and destruction, it is equally important for us to point to the networks of resistance and solidarity that formed first in response to colonialism and later to imperialism and neoliberalism. Yet, as many scholars note here, life in the Caribbean could not be reduced to the binaries of oppression and resistance or of disaster and recovery. For instance, on islands like Dominica, Hispaniola, or Saint Lucia, societies of peasant farmers have managed to live outside of capitalism on their own terms.<sup>1</sup> Describing these alternative ways of life, these different epistemologies and cosmologies, is key to this volume—and again, these cannot be reduced to mere reactions against (neo)colonial forces. By combining anthropological texts that use ethnographic insights with analyses of literature, music, or art, we aim to go beyond disaster narratives by exploring the multiple ways people engage with death, violence, and also with political action and hope.

Some of the analyses that follow track how racial capitalism has wreaked havoc in Caribbean worlds in the postcolonial era. Following Cedric J. Robinson and other luminaries such as Eric Williams, C. L. R. James, Walter Rodney, Sylvia Winter, Norman Girvan, and Lloyd Best, it is clear that the form of colonial capitalism that continues to fracture Caribbean societies and to render them vulnerable to disasters by forcing them into cash crop agriculture or industrial “development” is anchored in what Robinson calls racial capitalism—defined here as the process of making profits off nonwhite bodies. Racial capitalism well predates the transatlantic migrations and the slave trade beginning in the sixteenth century and is rooted in the forms of blood-based social differentiation that stratify labor and hierarchies in medieval societies. As Robinson writes, it is “important to realize that with respect to the emerging European civilization whose beginnings coincide with the arrivals of these same barbarians, slave labor as a critical basis of production would continue without any significant interruption into the twentieth century” (1983: 11). Our ensemble of texts enables historical comparisons that anchor large movements of people, forceful transformations of the landscape, and simple labor exploitation in colonial ideologies and practices.

Conquests, reshuffling of borders, expulsions, kidnapping and enslavement, and forced labor driven by extractive economies marked the “millennium” of European civilization and continue to shape the (post)colonial Caribbean. Sidney Mintz (1974) argues that the basis of the plantation economy—slave labor, monocrop agriculture, organized work tasks, and an ideology of economic growth—took form in the Mediterranean world before Columbus exported this model to Hispaniola at the end of the fifteenth century. The rupture of modernity is rather a reactivation of centuries-old practices and a powerful growth of an exploitative mode of production already present in Europe. What Europeans brought to the Caribbean, beyond diseases and genocide, is a particular mode of production based on chattel slavery (and later on racialized hierarchies of labor) that makes these regions vulnerable to social upheavals and political struggles, and to environmental disasters.

Privileging export monocrops such as bananas or coffee is detrimental to subsistence agriculture and local food security. Haiti presents a clear-cut case in this regard. Politicians and experts alike have repeatedly accused Haitian peasants of being the agents of the mass deforestation of the island. Likewise, many scholars have reproduced the myth that only 1.5 percent to 2 percent of Haiti is covered by trees, which makes the deforestation crisis seemingly irreversible. There is a deforestation problem in Haiti: from the harvest of precious woods in the colonial period to the mass deforestation engendered by land grabs during the 1915–1934 US

occupation, (neo)colonial powers have transformed parts of the country into semideserts (Anglade 1981). It is not the peasant's production of charcoal that is driving deforestation, but *longue durée* cash crop agriculture. As Alex Bellande has astutely shown, 30 percent of Haiti is covered by bushes and trees (2015). Bellande demonstrates that peasants are essential actors when it comes to the environmental well-being of Haiti. Peasant farmers have contributed to recent reforestation efforts and know how to work with sustainable methods; they cut invasive trees and bushes for charcoal production and protect trees that are beneficial to subsistence agriculture. Bellande argues that “reboisement”—a strategic and concerted planting of trees, such as avocado, mango, or breadfruit, that are prized by farmers—should be the key method for reforestation efforts. In brief, Bellande, by arguing for reboisement, proposes a method that includes the needs of peasant farmers and of local ecosystems. Agricultural polycultures in the Caribbean are crucial for food security—it is a risk-adverse form of agriculture that is far more beneficial to local populations who export monocrops that are subject to diseases and to global price fluctuations. Bananas, for instance, are an instable and dangerous monocrop that puts Caribbean populations at risk. Beyond global market instabilities brought by distant and varied crises, banana plantations are today threatened by fungal diseases that could halt the economy of many regions relying on this crop worldwide (Cohen 2011). Moreover, the production of bananas in the French colonies of Martinique and Guadeloupe brought new health crises to the fore. As Malcolm Ferdinand has shown, the widespread use of chlordecone as a pesticide in banana plantations from 1972 to 1993 contaminated 90 percent of the inhabitants in those islands. Many are now at risk of having cancer and other major diseases linked to the state-sponsored French use of chlordecone (Ferdinand 2022). The racialized modes of production favored in plantation economies continue to ruin the Caribbean today and set up this region for upcoming disasters. Our goal with this volume is to bring historical complexity and to reckon with racist and exploitative systems that continue to devastate our planet and to create false categories of “natives” that are pitted against one another.

## Writing about Disasters: The Power of the Story

Nothing, writes Mark Anderson, “shakes one’s worldview more than the experience of a natural disaster.” Disaster is by definition “conceived of as a rupture or inversion of the normal order of things; natural disaster denotes that moment of disjuncture when nature topples what we see



as the natural order of human dominance” (2011: 1). In the case of an earthquake, the metaphorical solidity of the land, fundamental to the construction of identity, is uprooted, “sweeping the ground from beneath our feet and reducing to rubble our literal and conceptual edifices” (1). The effects of natural disasters depend not only on the inherent forces of nature but also on the economic, social, and cultural conditions in which human communities exist.<sup>2</sup> Traditionally invested with divine or supernatural meanings—as messages from God or nature—natural disasters call for interpretation, and these interpretations are largely determined by the culture of the human community, as the events themselves have “no inherent meaning discernable by humans outside that which we assign them” (3). These meanings change according to the particular place, but also over time, and in places like Haiti that are prone to natural disasters, it may be that meanings not only change but dissipate, to the extent that they become relatively meaningless, or at least impossible to decode in any coherent way.

In the five centuries since its colonization by the Spanish, the island of Hispaniola has had a particularly long and periodically intense history of seismic activity. The Enriquillo fault in southern Hispaniola forms a continuous geomorphic lineament with the Plantain Garden fault in eastern Jamaica, and the history of human settlement on the island shows that towns have often been built close to the fault: in 1579 there were five towns located within 10–20 kilometers of the fault; in 1628, 1630, and 1633 there were five; and in 1725 there were fourteen (Bakun, Flores, and ten Brink 2012: 18). There were nine hurricanes reported in Hispaniola between 1494 and 1548, but the first reported severe earthquake, on the north of the island, was on 2 December 1562 (18). The first recorded earthquake in southwestern Hispaniola (modern-day Haiti) was in 1701, and this was followed by two major earthquakes in 1751, and a further event in 1770. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries were by contrast relatively quiet periods: in the time between 1770 and 2010 there was only one recorded earthquake, measuring 6.3, in 1860 (19).

One of the fascinating aspects of the prerevolution earthquakes is that they appear to be shadowed by significant changes in colonial society, and to track the gradual movement to the outright revolution of 1791. In 1670, Louis XIV authorized the French slave trade, and in 1685 he signed the *Code Noir* (Black Code), the notorious law that was an attempt to regulate all aspects of slavery, and which, for example, prescribed three levels of punishment for runaway slaves: “branding with a fleur-de-lis, cutting the hamstring, and finally, death” (Miller 28). In between these dates, there were two earthquakes that devastated some plantations, and which thereby reduced economic gains. Subsequently, even the most minor of constraints

against brutality in the Code Noir were ignored in the interests of restoring profitability, and by 1697 slaves “imitated a revolt” (Benson 2010: 87). “Small and failed for the moment,” Benson writes, “It was a sign of things to come: Makandal’s revolt and the ultimately successful revolts of Toussaint and Dessalines” (87). Of course, these “revolts” were complex, drawn-out events that culminated in the major revolutionary war of 1791–1804 and constituted some of the most significant acts of anti-imperial, anti-racist resistance in human history.

The 18 October 1751 event was described by Moreau de Saint-Méry as a “furious earthquake . . . which began at 3 o’clock in the afternoon,” and which, among other effects, led to the discovery of “mineral waters that spurt from several sources” (94). The earthquake dealt a “deadly blow” to the town of Azua, “by overturning houses and bringing the sea up to the point where the town was built” (Moreau 96). In fact, the town was destroyed and thereafter moved northward to its present location, while the city of Santo Domingo also suffered severe damage. Contemporary accounts described “such a strong earthquake . . . from its impulsive subterranean roar felt and violent motion on all the churches and buildings, such that all of those of masonry in this city reached their total ruin” (Bakun, Flores, and ten Brink 2012: 24). There were also reports of a tsunami associated with the earthquake, but these may have been confused with the effects of the five Caribbean hurricanes of 1751 (25). There was a second major earthquake the following month, on 21 November 1751. This event caused severe damage to Port-au-Prince and the plain of Cul-de-Sac (25). Around the same time, François Makandal’s campaign of liberation began. Accused by colonizers of making poison from harvested plants, Makandal coordinated attacks against slaves considered to be enemies, and slave masters. By developing an extensive network among slaves in the northern province, Makandal in effect “helped set in motion a cycle of paranoia and violence that continued in Saint-Domingue for decades” (Dubois 2004: 52).

On 3 June 1770, an earthquake was felt across the entire island and destroyed Port-au-Prince. The major quake had in fact been preceded by ten smaller events between 1765 and 1770. The plains of Léogâne, Port-au-Prince, and Petit Goave suffered considerable damage (Bakun, Flores, and ten Brink 2012: 26). More than five hundred people were killed in Port-au-Prince, the sea rose dramatically, and on the affected plains all the sugar works were destroyed (Southey 1870: 407). The historian Georges Corvington wrote of the effects on the stratified population: “Blacks, soldiers, settlers rich and poor were all turned into mere people, leveled by common misfortune” (1970: 88). Moreau describes this as a “terrible earthquake,” which caused serious damage to property and led to a

small river's level rising by nine feet and overflowing onto surrounding fields (Moreau 714). He also reports further quakes on 20 September 1770, 29–30 September 1786, 2 December 1787, and 5 January 1788, only a few short years before the beginning of the slave revolt. Moreau also writes of extremely wet rainy seasons between 1782 and 1785, of a very dry year in 1786 (713), of hurricanes in 1775 and 1788, and of a comet that was visible in the sky for seven days in 1766 (714), so that one has the sense of a particularly turbulent time of natural disasters and other extrahuman events echoing, mirroring, and perhaps to some extent creating the rising spirit of revolt among the slave population. Nature, one imagines, revealed the fallibility of the colonial system and the limits of the whites' control over the land, and offered powerful images of destruction that were to be repeated and intensified across the cities and plantations of Saint Domingue during the long revolutionary war. In this sense, perhaps we can talk of Saint Domingue in the late eighteenth century as a “culture of disaster,” one where natural disasters are not only physical events but also “agents of cultural formation.” In effect, cultures of disaster come into being when “frequently occurring natural hazards are integrated into the schema of daily life” (Anderson 2011: 8).

Between the late eighteenth century and 2010, the only significant earthquake in Haiti occurred on 8 April 1860 and was accompanied by a tsunami (Bakun, Flores, and ten Brink 2012: 26). The 2010 event is considered to be a rerupture of the 1701 earthquake source zone and may herald a new period of seismic activity along the Enriquillo fault system (28). In the history of earthquakes in the region the 7.0 magnitude quake of 12 January 2010 was not particularly large, but it was certainly the most destructive and deadly, due in large part to inadequate building practices (28). The 2010 earthquake had in fact been predicted by a Haitian seismologist, Claude Prepetit, who wrote in 2009 of his “worst nightmare” that there would come earthquakes that would cause far greater damage and loss of life than in the past (2008: 8). He also makes a telling connection between different kinds of natural events in his argument that the catastrophic floods in the years preceding 2010 might well have triggered the seismological process that resulted in the 2010 earthquake (9). This is important as it suggests that natural catastrophes of different kinds can create the conditions for further disasters, and that the 2010 event is but part of a contemporary experience of ongoing, relentless disaster.

This experience is termed a condition of “permanent catastrophe” by the Haitian sociologist Laënnec Hurbon. Recognizing the apparent contradiction in the term, Hurbon writes that if every disaster supposes a rupture in time and experience, one should also be aware of the “before and after of the catastrophe” (2012: 8).<sup>3</sup> Disasters strike so often in Haiti—from the

floods in Gonaïves in 2004 to the 2010 earthquake to the cholera epidemic to Hurricanes Sandy and Isaac in 2012—that the population “risks taking as natural every calamity” (9). One effect of living in permanent catastrophe is that the memory of the most deadly of these events, the 2010 earthquake, fades quickly and the event loses its distinctiveness. One has the impression, Hurbon wrote in 2012, that nothing happened on 12 January 2010, and that a “leap has been skillfully made beyond that date” (8). The constant denial and annulment of the disaster leads to the general “permanent installation in catastrophe” (9).

This condition of permanent disaster has important political dimensions, for as Hurbon argues at the heart of the situation “the leaders of the State seem to worry only about how to stay in power” (9). Disasters are moreover “godsend[s]” for those in power in that they give the politicians a source of legitimacy, which otherwise they would not have (9).<sup>4</sup> There is even a “desire for disasters” in government, as these events allow the leaders to present themselves as victims to the international community, and to discharge their responsibilities in the economic, social, cultural, and political life of Haiti (9). To live in a state of permanent disaster means that individual events are not memorialized in a way that would consign them to the past and allow a sense of time other than that characterized by catastrophe: people live, Hurbon says, “without a perceptible future” and “in the condition of being superfluous (floating between life and death)” (10). Hurbon points out that the government has no interest in a memorial for the 2010 earthquake, and as such the disaster is not considered past but part of the catastrophic present (9). This in turn has serious consequences for notions of reconstruction, as to be in a permanent state of catastrophe is to forget any time in which disaster was not a daily reality, and to lose awareness of what was there before to be reconstructed.<sup>5</sup> As Hurbon puts it, the causes of permanent disaster are as much political as environmental (10). Indeed, the various signs of environmental degradation—deforestation, pollution, and so on—can be read as “the expression of the failure of the Haitian State” (10).<sup>6</sup>

Robert Fatton Jr. is similarly interested in the “politics of catastrophe,” the roots of which he traces to colonial times, and in the authoritarian tradition generated by the French and subsequently mirrored in the “patterns of despotism” that have shaped Haitian political history since 1804 (2011: 158–59). In this regard, Fatton’s concerns are similar to those expressed by Millery Polyné, who writes of the history of race and development and the particular ways in which that history determines the relative impact of similar natural events in the Americas, such as the earthquake in Chile in 2010 (2013: xviii). Analyzing print media following the events in Haiti and Chile, Polyné says that such writing “entrenches the reader into a dis-

course of Haitian life as antimodern, violent, and perpetually ill-equipped if one properly situates Haiti in the historical and regional context of anti-black, anti-Haitian prejudice” (xix). Nick Nesbitt largely echoes Polyné in his argument that the earthquake was “no mere natural event,” and he denounces the “political catastrophe wrought from forcible underdevelopment and structural precariousness,” which is for him the fundamental reason for the extent of human and material damage that followed the Haitian event (2013: 5).

Lamenting the historical and contemporary impotence of the state, Fatton further argues that the creation of a new and responsible state is crucial to any strategy of reconstruction (2011: 175–76).<sup>7</sup> Fatton’s ideas are in turn echoed by the political scientist Jean-Germain Gros who states that “the destruction of January 12, 2010, was certainly caused by nature, but the scale of the destruction speaks to generations, if not centuries, of ineffectual government” (2010). In *State Failure, Underdevelopment, and Foreign Intervention in Haiti*, Gros shows how foreign economic interventions and the influx of international capital produce benefits for certain members of the elite but create obstacles to the building of a more equitable system of resource redistribution (2012). If Gros argues that internal constraints such as deforestation, demographic pressure, or the economic elite’s disregard for the well-being of a majority of Haitians contribute to the failure of the Haitian state, he nonetheless argues that building a more just and democratic state is necessary and possible. “Working states save lives; failed states cannot. Thus, state making is a matter of life or death” (1).

Writing on the immediate postearthquake period, Patrick Sylvain considers the failure of a particular Haitian politician, President René Préval, to articulate the state vision of how Haiti should react to the disaster (2013: 87). Sylvain critiques the “executive silence” that followed the earthquake, most notably that of Préval himself, whose silence is judged to be unethical at a time of a catastrophic challenge (90). Such silence and inaction on behalf of the state’s representatives is far from new. As Sylvain argues: “The landscape of indifference is so deeply rooted in the nation’s history that silence by Haitian executives has created a political culture of ineptitude and passivity” (91).

In the absence of a functioning state and a coherent state discourse, Haitian intellectuals such as Hurbon have a particular prominence, and bear a particular responsibility. Indeed, intellectual discourse to a large extent compensates for the virtual lack of state leadership and the “executive silence” on issues of citizenship, politics, and human rights. Haitian literature in particular has traditionally functioned as a site in which are debated and explored many of the issues that the state ignores and

appears unable to act on. As Dash writes, this is not a new phenomenon, as “literature served the function of critical consciousness in nineteenth-century Haiti” (1998: 49). Literature may also be one of the most privileged means for the outsider to gain direct access to Haitian ways of thinking and being. In her postearthquake memoir, Amy Wilentz writes of her relationships with various Haitian acquaintances, and how first appearances can be deceptive in that initial impressions of insiders being “available and transparent” are not always confirmed by subsequent exchanges. Wilentz writes of how she has “gotten beyond this barrier” with many of her Haitian friends. But with others she has not, and she has “stopped trying to get past the ramparts of the citadelle” (2013: 86). One might say that reading Haitian fiction and poetry offers one way of going beyond these kinds of interpersonal and intercultural barriers and establishing an intimate bond with a Haitian voice. However, at the same time, even literature remains at times opaque and impenetrable to the outsider (and perhaps also to the insider), and authors do not always, if ever, expose fully or directly their personal thoughts, nor should they be expected to. Nonetheless, as Anderson argues, natural disasters involve “human interaction with the environment and as such must be mediated through culture” (2011: 1). In Haiti literature has often been a privileged mediator in registering and memorializing natural and other disasters. Literature may also be related to forms of power in that “culture is never apolitical; rather politics represents the process by which cultural trends are formalized and institutionalized as political power” (2).

In effect, Anderson’s ideas are similar to the arguments proposed by Michel-Rolph Trouillot in the first chapter of *Silencing the Past*, which is entitled, tellingly, “The Power of the Story.” Trouillot challenges the “storage model of memory-history,” the view of “knowledge as recollection” (1995: 14). Arguing that the past is never truly over, and that it cannot exist independently of the present, Trouillot contends that historical knowledge involves both the social process and the narratives of that process, and that theories of history “rarely examine in detail the concrete production of specific narratives” (22). Trouillot’s argument that history and fiction are related in all societies effectively elevates the importance of literature, and it places a new emphasis on the concrete narrative processes through which history is told. Trouillot’s interest lies less in determining what history is than in understanding how it works, for the definition of history changes with time and place, or as he puts it, “history reveals itself only through the production of specific narratives” (25). This in turn leads Trouillot to privilege the ordinary, the unexceptional, what he calls the “heroism of anonymous men, women and—too often forgotten—children going about the business of daily life” (2002: 205). The ordinary sto-

ries of such historical actors are important to Trouillot's effort to imagine a broader view of historical production than that acknowledged by most theorists, and to valorize what he calls the "field laborers" of historical production, the disparate groups and individuals "who augment, deflect, or reorganize" the work of professional historians and who include, crucially, artists of all kinds, including fiction writers (1995: 25). As such, fiction is a valid and dynamic means of creating historical knowledge; indeed, it is indispensable in acquiring the kind of deep, broad, and at times contradictory understanding of history that Trouillot writes of.<sup>8</sup>

### Circum-Caribbean Disasters: Haiti and Beyond

Haiti is far from isolated in its experience of disaster; indeed, the idea of a dystopian present in the Caribbean at large is suggested in the visual art project undertaken in 2011 by the journal *Small Axe*, entitled "The Visual Life of Catastrophic History."<sup>9</sup> The project responds to the prominence of the theme of catastrophe in contemporary critical thought and artistic practice. The reasons for the prominence of catastrophe in contemporary thought and culture include the "wars without end" unleashed by "emperor-like sovereigns"; the personal and social effects of systemic financial collapse; the destructive force of natural events such as tsunamis, hurricanes, and earthquakes; and the "terrible spectacle" of the most vulnerable people fleeing in fear before "the total power of men and gods" ("Visual Life" 2011: 133). Together, these calamities create the "pervasive haunting sense" that we are living in "a perpetual state of emergency, not only in the very midst of seemingly uncontrollable disaster but also in a constant expectation of disaster" (133). Within this global catastrophic present, the Caribbean is "a measureless scene of catastrophe," a site particularly susceptible to calamities, to various natural disasters, and social and political atrocities (134). The statement further argues that the Caribbean was "inaugurated in catastrophe," in the "founding colonial catastrophe," which manifests itself still in societies structured with "tiny rapacious elites" at one end and "impoverished masses" at the other, and through "cynical, unresponsive governments given to authoritarian rule and corruption" (134). While Haiti is far from alone in living in a time of catastrophe, it may be considered, as the *Small Axe* statement argues, as perhaps the "limit-instance" of catastrophic history, of a "hard experience familiar to all our Caribbean" (134).

This edited volume brings new questions and new stories to the fore by exploring the aftermaths of disasters in a broad historical frame in order to shed light on the structural frameworks of pre- and postdisaster periods,

with a special emphasis on the popular and sometimes intimate responses catastrophes generate. The activation or constitution of solidarity networks; the resurgence of political and social movements fighting against industrialization, gentrification, and institutions that foster displacement of local populations; the creation of new grassroots organizations meant to preserve local ways of life and cultures; and processes of grief, commemoration, and collective trauma are important features of postdisaster landscapes. Believing, like Trouillot, in the power of the story, our book offers a dialogue between social scientists and scholars who study contemporary literature and arts to help us reflect on the political, economic, social, and cultural shifts and structures that render regions vulnerable to disasters, shape recovery efforts, and transform collective memory.

Why should we connect the efforts to understand disasters made by humanities scholars and social scientists? What does this dialogue bring? In short, even when doing ethnographic work, it is difficult for anthropologists to account for the grief and trauma a disaster creates. Social science methods may convey the depth of an environmental and political crisis, but they rarely account for the aesthetic crises spurred by disasters in the domain of literary and artistic representation. Literary works, for instance, reveal less visible cultural shifts that change societies in the long term through processes that form collective memory. Many literary works published in the aftermath of the Haitian earthquake show, for example, how people tapped into religious and economic systems forged after the country's independence to commemorate their loved ones and to activate solidarity networks. Grasping these transformations in the human understanding of one's surroundings is crucial for social scientists and policy makers alike, as they convey a sense of who communities want to be and how they want to manage their environments and livelihoods in the future. As many recovery efforts show, experts on the ground often fail to understand local cultures and operate with abstract plans that are disconnected from the social and cultural norms of the places where they work. Analyzing aesthetic productions allows us to think about the lived dimensions of reconstruction periods. The Berghahn series *Catastrophes in Context*, anchored in the social sciences, is a fitting place for such a dialogue. The chapters that follow explore at once the structural and cultural dynamics of disasters. These texts offer accounts of the neocolonial violence that constitutes the framework in which disasters unfold and, in the meantime, provide reflections on the large and small changes that affect everyday people and their response to disasters. These responses framed in aesthetic works provide, in turn, fruitful accounts of postdisaster periods where alternative visions of the future can emerge.



The aim is to encourage debate and collaboration between scholars working on disasters from various disciplinary perspectives so that the volume will offer a rich and diverse set of arguments and analyses on the ever-relevant theme of catastrophe in the circum-Caribbean. The chapters are a selection of the most innovative papers presented at a conference held at Florida State University in February 2020 on the theme of disaster in the 21st-century circum-Caribbean. The conference was held to mark the ten-year anniversary of the Haitian earthquake, and the volume proposes a regional approach to disaster that draws connections between twenty-first-century experiences of catastrophe in the region. This comparative, regional perspective allows the volume to consider, for example, how different forms of disaster capitalism and colonial legacies encourage replacement of populations, displacing people who have longer histories in a place with others who will have temporary and surface relationships to that place, transforming them into sites of skimming visitation. Such population replacement has taken place in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, is being put in place bureaucratically in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria, and is a major concern for the small coastal communities in the Florida panhandle after Hurricane Michael. Likewise, megadisasters open new opportunities for political experimentation such as the complete wipeout of public education in New Orleans or the possibility of a permanent federal shutdown in Puerto Rico.<sup>10</sup>

This is a cross-disciplinary volume that combines and puts into dialogue perspectives on disaster from fields such as anthropology, history, cultural studies, sociology, and literary studies. The volume opens with three chapters written by cultural anthropologists committed to long-term ethnography in Haiti. Mark Schuller offers a broad overview of past and present disasters in Haiti in the first chapter of the volume. In “*Mòd Leta: Haitian Understandings of Crises Past in Present*,” Schuller shows how the violence and dehumanization of the plantation world and of global capitalism engendered unequal exchanges that still hamper the region. The Caribbean is disproportionately beset by hazards and suffers for warming sea temperatures. Seen from the Caribbean, climate change is a violent continuation of slavery and displacement. Local “folk” theories long disaggregated “hazards” from “disasters,” and community mutual aid and survival, which were adaptations to slavery, were precursors to “resilience”—in all its contradictions—long before it became popularized. From whose point of view do events become “disasters,” and what is the “disaster” itself? Weaving ethnographic insights with a deep analysis of Caribbean theoretical and aesthetic practices, Schuller opens the volume by proposing to move toward a Caribbean epistemology of disasters based on the lived

realities and experiences of Caribbean people and reflective of processes anchored in a long and violent past.

In the second chapter, Laura Wagner examines the relationship between two catastrophes: the earthquake of 12 January 2010, which struck Port-au-Prince and the surrounding area, and 2016's Hurricane Matthew, which struck Haiti's southern peninsula, particularly the Grand'Anse province. The former was an unprecedented urban disaster, which unleashed a massive, if failed, international aid response. The latter was a rural disaster, which received far less media coverage and humanitarian aid. The two events are connected, however, through patterns of centralization and rural-to-urban migration. This essay revisits Wagner's writing from shortly after the earthquake, which focused on Melise Rivien, a woman from the rural Grand'Anse who was a domestic worker in Port-au-Prince, and who died when the home in which she lived and worked collapsed during the quake. By following the lives of some of her family in the Grand'Anse, through Hurricane Matthew and beyond, this essay explores how things have, and haven't, changed in the ten years since the earthquake, and it asks what recovery means when the disaster never ends.

In the third chapter, Vincent Joos revisits the notion of *malediksyon* (curse), which journalists and experts often use to describe Haiti's cycles of disasters. Televangelists and economic experts often depict Vodou (and, obliquely, peasant cultures) as being an obstacle to modernity and progress. More secular versions of a cursed Haiti circulate as well. Indeed, by silencing the history of colonization and imperial domination that led to the massive deforestation of the country or the demographic centralization of its people in Port-au-Prince, it seems that an endless series of disasters strike Haiti randomly. Using ethnographic insights, Joos analyzes the blank-slate discourse that erases a violent history of nefarious foreign interventions that transformed Haiti into a region prone to disasters. In this chapter, Joos takes historical vignettes to show how the blank-slate mentality of explorers and experts of all kinds have transformed and, ultimately, ruined northeastern Haiti. Thinking of the island as a blank space is not only a tool to develop nefarious industries but also a powerful narrative strategy that is used to silence Haitians and to destroy the counterplantation systems upon which peasant farmers founded viable lives.

Chapter four shifts the attention to another key twenty-first-century disaster, as Shearon Roberts tracks how, fifteen years since Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans remains an important case study of how postdisaster recovery can be persistently unequal. This chapter examines how post-Katrina gentrification of African American neighborhoods impacted historical and cultural traditions that are both a source of currency (livelihood) and community building for Black residents. This chapter therefore exam-

ines 2019 social media and alternative media discourse by New Orleans residents around intrusions to cultural traditions by primarily new white residents, described as “transplants” residing in historically Black wards in the city. While mainstream media in the city have largely framed post-Hurricane Katrina gentrification of Black neighborhoods as a debate between “progress versus preservation,” this study describes how native African American residents saw outsiders as increasing hostile law enforcement through profiling. The cultural tensions brought on by gentrification provide a window into how postdisaster recovery impacts marginalized groups. While native white populations in New Orleans have returned to the city close to their original levels, the same has not occurred for native African American residents fifteen years later. More importantly, cultural intrusions impact the livelihood of Black residents, whose informal and formal traditions are an economic means for these communities in a city that sells its culture, primarily Black culture, as its primary revenue draw for tourism.

In chapter five, Jana Evans Braziel furthers the analysis of the privatization and financialization of entire regions of the circum-Caribbean by focusing on the impact of catastrophe (cat) bond trading in Haiti and Puerto Rico. Braziel examines the collision of natural disasters and unnatural “structural adjustments” in the Greater Caribbean by interrogating neoliberal approaches to so-called “disposable” economies, for-profit debt refinancing, externally imposed austerity measures, and postdisaster rebuilding (or not) in the wake of Caribbean natural disasters. Taking the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, referred to in Kreyòl (Creole) by the onomatopoeiac term “Goudougoudou,” and the 2017 fallout of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico as the two primary case studies, but also pointing to salient postdisaster parallels in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, Braziel dismantles the inhumane policies and dehumanizing impacts of contemporary necrocapitalism—the debased international trading in death and disaster stocks, or the for-profit investment in death capital. Braziel argues that the Caribbean, long the all-inclusive resort for the rich and famous, then the all-too-frequent site of offshore banking for corporate wealth, has now entered a perilous period of absolute necrocapital destruction before (and perhaps for) profit.

In chapter six, John Ribó tracks how people defend the dead in postdisaster landscapes. In her incisive meditation on black culture in the long afterlife of slavery, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Christina Sharpe asks, “What does it mean to defend the dead?” (10). Sharpe turns to the autobiographical to undiscipline her study, to validate the quotidian lived experiences of black and brown people, and to illustrate the numerous, labor-intensive manifestations of defending the dead from all manner of

neglect and mistreatment—from the anodyne, slow violence of bureaucratic negligence, to the outright, state-sanctioned murder by police and military forces, to the symbolic oblivion of erasure. In response to these various modes of violence, tactics for defending the dead take different forms throughout the African diaspora. This chapter interrogates strategies for defending the dead in the neocolonial context of Puerto Rico through close readings of literary and cultural productions that stand as forms of “wake work.” Here, Ribó argues that wake work cultivates an active, symbiotic, cyclical relationship in which the dead empower the living to defend the dead; this interdependent and dynamic relationship of the living and the dead alloys cultural production and political protest, suffusing popular culture with historical import and communal purpose.

In chapter seven, Vanessa Selk asserts that when a hurricane hits a country, a tsunami swallows an island, or an earthquake destroys a city, the priority of political authorities generally remains security, so as to ensure the safety of the population. The notion of emergency, resulting from a disaster, is hence commonly linked to that of safety: to avoid a crisis, an emergency alert mobilizes hundreds of government forces and services to protect a population. This applies not only to government forces within their own borders but also to diplomatic services in a foreign country, who have to collaborate with local authorities to ensure their citizens are safe. But what actions, Selk asks, are taken during a disaster by government or diplomatic services that usually do not deal with security or safety matters. Are culture and education relegated to nonpriority status during a catastrophe? Can cultural diplomacy play a key role in a humanitarian crisis? Can cultural diplomacy be led by nonofficial art organizations or artists themselves? Is art a matter of emergency? This chapter focuses on the limitations and opportunities for art and culture to thrive in spite, or as a result, of a disaster, thanks to political or diplomatic decisions abroad. Several pan-Caribbean examples and comparisons explain how political decisions related to culture can affect in different ways the perception of belonging to a region or a territory in a postcolonial context, and how disaster politics and communication can increase the value of artwork in the short term.

In chapter eight, Martin Munro asks: What are the effects of a catastrophic earthquake on a society, its culture, and its politics? Which of these effects are temporary and which endure? Are the various effects immediately discernible, or do they manifest themselves over time? What is the relationship between natural disasters and social change? What roles do artists, and writers in particular, have in witnessing, bearing testimony to, and gauging the effects of natural disasters? These are some of the fundamental questions raised by the Haitian earthquake of 12 January

2010, a uniquely destructive event in the recent history of cataclysmic disasters, in Haiti and the broader world.<sup>11</sup> The sheer scale of the destruction caused by the earthquake posed an unprecedented challenge to authors, as well as other artists. Although many authors expressed initially their feelings of helplessness and of the futility of their art, virtually all established and many new and original voices published works soon after the earthquake, some of whom write directly of the event, while others make no reference to it at all. There was and has been no single, unifying literary reaction to the earthquake; rather, there is a proliferation of works that share certain thematic preoccupations but which insist on the freedom to express those themes in original ways, thus making new and daring explorations of form a crucial part of the meaning of the event as it is processed through the workings of the individual text. If, as many authors initially said, art is useless in the face of catastrophe, that uselessness has a paradoxical value, in that it can be used to liberate an author from the potentially restrictive expectation to act as a faithful chronicler of a social event. In this chapter, Munro engages with a unique piece of writing: Marvin Victor's *Corps mêlés*, a quite brilliant first—and to date, only—novel that was hailed as one of the first “postearthquake novels,” but which today is rarely discussed by scholars and risks being forgotten, itself a kind of tragically neglected ruin.

In chapter nine, Alex Lenoble furthers the literary analysis of disasters by analyzing *Melovivi*, a play written by Frankétienne, who was rehearsing his latest theater play on the day of the earthquake. In the play, against a background of disaster, two characters, A and B, talk and ramble in Frankétienne's unique language. In this postapocalyptic vision of a world in peril, the characters ponder the global ecological situation and the emptiness of grand discourses mouthed by pseudoexperts and international institutions. It is a world that goes around in circles, and where language reveals its vanity. In this chapter, Lenoble explores how Haiti, which is not named as such in the play, is in fact inscribed in a broader eco- and geopolitical space, where everything is interconnected. For the first time Frankétienne's work addresses issues pertaining to our current environmental crisis. Lenoble also argues that *Melovivi* is not a representation of events that happened or were about to happen; it does not deliver any intellectual knowledge or political analysis. The text of the play, the chapter argues, is only a support for a performance where living bodies express and transmit affects to other living bodies, in ways that suggest the transhistorical, transnational, transgenerational nature of Caribbean experiences of disaster.

Ultimately, without suggesting that disaster is the only way through which to approach the contemporary circum-Caribbean, the volume rec-

ognizes the importance of disaster in lived reality and seeks to deepen and broaden understanding of the theme by juxtaposing work from scholars across disciplines. Such collaboration and dialogue are rare, but we feel they are necessary as we address the multiple ramifications of living in and with contemporary disasters.

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**Martin Munro** is Winthrop-King Professor of French and francophone studies at Florida State University. His publications include *Writing on the Fault Line: Haitian Literature and the Earthquake of 2010* (Liverpool University Press, 2014); *Tropical Apocalypse: Haiti and the Caribbean End Times* (University of Virginia Press, 2015); and *Listening to the Caribbean: Sounds of Slavery, Revolt, and Race* (Liverpool University Press, 2022).

**John Ribó** is assistant professor of English at Florida State University, where he specializes in contemporary Latinx literatures and cultures. His work has appeared in *Chiricú*, *The Journal of Haitian Studies*, *Cuban Studies*, and *ASAP*. He is currently completing his first manuscript, tentatively titled *Haitian Hauntings*.

## Notes

1. See, for example, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Peasants and Capital: Dominica in the World Economy* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), and Jean Casimir, *The Haitians: A Decolonial History* (Chapel Hill, NC: the University of North Carolina Press, 2020).
2. See, for example, Susan Bassnett's essay "Seismic Aftershocks: Responses to the Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755" on the various interpretations of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, which range from religious questions on the existence of God to Enlightenment-inspired rationalist understandings. Bassnett, Susan. 2006. "Seismic Aftershocks: Responses to the Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755." *Sites of Exchange: European Crossroads and Faultlines*, edited by Maurizio Ascari and Adriana Corrado, Rodopi, pp. 177-88.
3. See also David Scott's interpretation of the collapse of the Grenada Revolution as "merely one significant episode in a larger story of generations of conflict in what is now imagined and represented as the cyclical pattern of a general history whose generative logic is catastrophic" (2014: 74–75).

4. Jonathan Katz suggests that disasters are also godsend for donors, who by late March 2012 had delivered less than half of the long-term funding pledged for 2010 and 2011. Donor countries, he argues, let President René Préval carry the blame for the lack of reconstruction (207). He also says that with the huge logistical costs of the relief operation, “much of the money was a stimulus program for the donor countries themselves” (206). He further critiques the overall achievements of the foreign relief programs: “Having sought above all to prevent riots, ensure stability, and prevent disease, the responders helped spark the first, undermine the second, and by all evidence caused the third” (278). Raoul Peck’s 2013 film *Assistance mortelle* presents a cutting critique of humanitarian and development aid in Haiti. For a critique of “military humanitarianism” in postearthquake Haiti, see Jennifer Greenburg, “The ‘Strong Arm’ and the ‘Friendly Hand.’”
5. See in this regard the excellent “Haiti Memory Project,” an online archive of testimonies about the earthquake. The project, somewhat unlike Hurbon, “assumes that earthquake is a point-zero in the lives of individual Haitians and in Haitian history; it is a moment that divided time into ‘before’ and ‘after.’” (The Haiti Memory Project website, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries, accessed 24 October 2013, <https://web.archive.org/web/20131222134939/http://haitimemoryproject.org/the-haiti-memory-project/about/>>)
6. See also Hurbon’s (2012) critique of the “privatization of the state.”
7. See also the other articles published in the March 2011 special issue of *Journal of Black Studies* on the theme of “The Haiti Earthquake of 2010: The Politics of a Natural Disaster.”
8. J. Michael Dash explores these ideas further, and suggests that Trouillot in some regards did join the “family business” of writing fiction in his anthropological work. (“Neither Magical Nor Exceptional: The Idea of the Ordinary in Caribbean Studies,” paper for Haitian Studies Association annual conference, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 8 November 2013.)
9. In an early postearthquake article, Yanick Lahens insists that Haiti and its challenges are far from peripheral to global modernity: “In spite of those limits, despite its poverty, its political vicissitudes, its meager existence, Haiti is not a periphery. Its history makes of it a center. I have always lived it as such. As a metaphor for all the challenges that humanity must face today and for which this modernity has not delivered on its promises” (“Haïti ou la santé du malheur,” *Libération* 19 January 2010, [https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2010/01/19/haiti-ou-la-sante-du-malheur\\_605105/](https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2010/01/19/haiti-ou-la-sante-du-malheur_605105/) accessed 23 November 2022).
10. See, for example, Katherine Browne, *Standing in the Need: Culture, Comfort, and Coming Home After Katrina* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Vincanne Adams, *Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith: New Orleans in the Wake of Katrina* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); Steve Kroll-Smith, Vern Baxter, and Pam Jenkins, *Left to Chance: Hurricane Katrina and the Story of Two New Orleans Neighborhoods* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2015); Lynn Weber and Lori Peek, eds., *Displaced: Life in the Katrina Diaspora* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2015); Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol LeBrón, eds., *Aftershocks of Disaster: Puerto Rico Before and After the Storm* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2019); Hilda Lloréns, *Making Livable Worlds: Afro-Puerto Rican Women Building Environmental Justice* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021); Ricia Anne Chansky and Marci Denesiuk, eds., *Mi María: Surviving the Storm* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2021); Marie T. Mora, Havidán Rodríguez, and Alberto Dávila, eds., *Hurricane Ma-*

*ria in Puerto Rico: Disaster, Vulnerability & Resiliency* (Blue Ridge Summit, Pennsylvania: Lexington Books, 2021)

11. Among the effects of the Haitian earthquake listed by the Disasters Emergency Committee are 3.5 million people affected by the quake, 220,000 estimated deaths, 300,000 injured, and nearly 300,000 homes destroyed or badly damaged. (“2010 Haiti Earthquake Facts and Figures,” Disasters Emergency Committee website, accessed 9 November 2021, <http://www.dec.org.uk/haiti-earthquake-facts-and-figures>.)

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