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*Humanitarian Aftershocks in Haiti* by Mark Schuller (review)

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In *Les Grandes dates de l'histoire diplomatique d'Haïti*, Arthus reminds us of the Chemins de la Croix Haiti has had to endure, and his vignettes, followed by a short bibliography for each, are most welcome as a reference.

Wien Weibert Arthus, a new and important voice in scholarship done by Haitians, follows in the footsteps of his predecessors, most notably the Haitian foreign ministers and Haitian diplomats who wrote eloquently in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but whose works remain obscure to foreigners working on Haiti. His work reveals that much more needs to be done in this area. Arthus's connection of the domestic to the international confirms that this is the only credible approach in the study of a smallish society and a marginalized state that is still a giant in world historical terms. A Haitian saying comes to mind: *Ti peyi, gran nasyon*—small country, great nation!

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> I must add immediately that I do hope that he will be hard at work on a second volume on the 1964–1986 period, which would delineate Haiti's interaction with the world until the bitter end of the Duvalierist dynastic rule, arguably the most severe contemporary dictatorship in the Western hemisphere. That second volume is needed, but, even so, the current book provides conclusions that would apply for the remaining twenty-three years of that dictatorship.
- <sup>2</sup> For the 1934–1957 period, I advise reading the work of the Caribbean's foremost modern historian of Haiti, Matthew J. Smith.

***Humanitarian Aftershocks in Haiti.* By Mark Schuller.** New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016. ISBN 978-0-8135-7423-3. 312 pp. \$27.95 paper.

*Review by Sophonie Milande Joseph*

In *Humanitarian Aftershocks*, Mark Schuller describes the human-created disaster that followed the natural disaster in Haiti from the perspective of the survivors of the January 12, 2010, earthquake. Schuller studies the impact of what he dubs the “humanitarian aftershocks” of the post-quake period, defining these aftershocks as the earthquake victims' experience of “the multibillion-dollar aid response, which triggered a range of negative unintended consequences, including rupturing Haitian sociocultural institutions and even increasing violence” (3). Endeavoring to

counter prevailing narratives, Schuller spends the entire length of the book prioritizing the voices and situated perspectives of Haitian respondents on the humanitarian-development question. One of the ways he accomplishes this is by giving voice to the earthquake victims themselves, beginning each chapter with a quoted passage from a longer interview. In this way, Schuller speaks back to the mainstream media's tendency to tell the story of the earthquake response's failure from the perspective of foreign experts and elite Haitians without giving due credit to the real first responders on that day: the ordinary Haitians who stepped in to assist their compatriots. In fact, one of the principal findings in the book is that the huge humanitarian response of importing seemingly intelligent foreign expert workers constituted an intervention that not only failed but also harmed Haitians, increasing their vulnerability to disaster while disrupting local, cultural traditions of resilience.

Schuller uses a mixed-method approach of survey data, ethnographic interviews, and participant observation to tell deeply intimate stories of individual survivors' attempts to rebuild their lives. The author's applied anthropology comes through his commitment to engage "in fundamental critique while attempting to grapple toward solutions" (226). So, while describing the obvious and nuanced issues of the international development sector, he is not afraid to lend the lens of critique to his literal self: his white, male body. Schuller partners with Haitian researchers and students as an integral part of field data collection. He advances Haitian respondents' voices in the texts that result, taking care that Haitian experiences are always at the forefront.

*Humanitarian Aftershocks* begins with a review of core questions that have been on the minds of everyday Haitians and the mainstream media. Who was responsible for the disaster? (Schuller pushes his readers to nuance the post-disaster reality and acknowledge that there were actually two disasters: the natural disaster and the failed foreign response.) How were the international aid agencies evaluated for their response to the Haiti earthquake? Schuller notes that the NGOs' self-prescribed measurement for success was the number of people still living in tent camps as IDPs (internally displaced persons), as defined officially by the International Organization for Migration. This indicator became a pernicious incentive to find ways to violently kick people out of camps.

In practice, Schuller finds that the search for whom to blame for the failures led to "a blame the victim mantra" asserting that Haitians' breakdowns at self-organizing led to the failures in the earthquake response (8). It also served as a pejorative campaign to negatively portray lower-class camp residents while simultaneously absolving the massive international

campaign of the systematic failures in aid delivery that negatively impacted the supposed beneficiaries. Schuller shuts down “moral shortcomings” critiques by writing, “The issue is not whether or not people who work for aid agencies are good people or bad people but the impact they had on the ground. Good people, even with good intentions, can do bad things. Or better for some. Or have bad side effects” (9). In the chapters that follow, the author chooses to focus on systemic explanations, starting with the first chapter’s focus on neoliberalism’s long-term role in depressing Haitian development.

Chapter 1, then, provides a broad historical and literature overview to set up Schuller’s argument that “centuries of exploitation and isolation from foreign powers benefited kleptocratic leaders” and that this history serves as the primary cause of Haiti’s underdevelopment (43). However, the author pushes into a deeper analysis with his additional, layered argument that “neoliberalism triggered a massive urban migration and slumification of Port-au-Prince” that pressured those root causes, creating a system of push factors that have enabled humanitarian aftershocks (43).

In Chapter 2, the focus is on comprehending the cultural impacts of humanitarian responses on Haitian norms and behaviors, notably in terms of resilience and solidarity. Questioning how the earthquake as a natural disaster and the international response as a humanitarian aftershock impacted Haitian sociocultural relationships and solidarity institutions evolves into a paramount, nuanced line of investigation for the author. By focusing on the process by which Haitian survivors became identified as IDPs, the author again provides stories of survival from the perspective of Haitian actors.

Chapter 3 focuses on the familial and economic impacts on Haitian households of humanitarian interventions’ norms for practice. From the beginning of the relocation phase, the humanitarian aid distribution guidelines ethnocentrically favored nuclear families instead of the traditionally multigenerational and extended Haitian family units. This separated families and often left women in more vulnerable situations. These familial separations exacerbated the loss of social capital and threatened the social ties that formed the backbone to solidarity and social sharing activities that fuel Haitian resiliency tools such as “tet ansanm” and “youn ede lòt.”<sup>21</sup>

In Chapter 4, Schuller discusses how humanitarian agencies’ good intentions to equitably distribute aid to vulnerable women led to further victimization (104–105). The post-earthquake shift to distribute food aid only to women increased rates of physical (and structural) violence against

them. Schuller paints a vivid reality of how Haitian women's intersectional and complex realities are ignored when "an understanding of gender-based violence as both embodied and structural/intersectional" does not inform response strategies (118).

In Chapter 5, Schuller delineates how camp committees, which were given the food aid ration cards to distribute among camp residents, became dominated by men. Camp committee members used their gatekeeping role to impose demands such as transactional sex requests upon women. Gender mainstreaming "policies of aid were thus technically followed, but the almost entirely male committee members used their positions to benefit themselves" (145).

In Chapter 6, Schuller analyzes what Haitians think of NGOs. Camp residents grew tired of the lack of information regarding delayed aid distribution. Furthermore, they became increasingly incensed by NGO performances of helping (163). They began to feel that their misery and struggles were being used by external actors to make money. Furthermore, the NGO invasion furthered their perception that the Haitian government lacked responsibility for addressing their needs while also contributing to dependency on NGO intervention.

In Chapter 7, Schuller describes an "internal colonialism" of NGO structures after the quake by a cadre of foreign, younger, and less experienced NGO workers with lucrative employment contracts (173). The "cultural imperialism" imported by the influx of these new workers led to the sidelining of more experienced Haitian NGO professionals, middle managers, and local frontline workers (185–186). Ultimately, this experience became a pattern of invasion by NGOs at the expense of Haitian beneficiaries and staff.

In Chapter 8, the ongoing imposition of "foreign values, worldviews and structures" illustrated the higher importance accorded to NGOs' audit culture as opposed to the best interests of Haitians (191). For example, Haitians learned that NGOs prefer to work with committees, and thus they copied "these hierarchical bureaucratic structures, these 'mini-NGOs,'" in attempts to lure aid (222). Schuller's inclusion of off-the-record perspectives from foreign aid workers who describe the good, the bad, and the ugly of witnessing imperialism's carbon copy unfold before them is a powerful scholarly contribution. For example, Schuller writes about an informant's reflections on the humanitarian impulse to "just do something":

Jessica described: "You put your finger on it earlier, the humanitarian mentality is that you have to do something. And they measure themselves like that." Immediately

following the earthquake, the speed of delivering medical assistance was the difference between life and death. But this emergency medicine may not be the most appropriate model or metaphor for all aid. This pressure to just do something can often lead to doing for, not working with, the beneficiary population. (212)

*Humanitarian Aftershocks* falls squarely into the category of anthropological texts analyzing international development, while specifically addressing the niche topics of disaster capitalism and NGO invasion. The author provides a candid follow-up to environment and place writer Rebecca Solnit's studies of disaster: in particular, the human possibilities that disaster provides for mass change toward transformative action.<sup>2</sup> Schuller picks up on the ongoing critique of the structural violence in *Dead Aid* as discussed by Dambisa Moyo and others.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, the scholarly contribution of Schuller's *Humanitarian Aftershocks* is remarkable.

Furthermore, Schuller persistently shifts his arguments away from the emotional tendency to focus on the moral concerns of the earthquake response's failures and toward explicitly deconstructing the components and norms of the humanitarian system. In this way, he can maintain his two-purpose objective to not only critique the problem but also provide recommendations for alternative, less destructive actions for future disaster responses in Haiti and similar contexts elsewhere. The clearly delineated research questions and findings assist the academic reader in learning how to implement systematic and rigorous mixed-methods research.

This book should be required reading for any and all who seek to intervene in the Haitian context regarding natural disaster, humanitarian aid, and long-term development. It is essential for donors and those who are funded by donors to come to an understanding of when their sincere desire to be of assistance to the Haitian population is causing more harm than good.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Tet ansanm" literally means "heads together" or unity. The country motto—"L'Union Fait La Force," or "Unity Is Strength"—states that communal unity is integral to the Haitian nation-building project. "Youn ede lòt" refers to the Haitian sociocultural tradition of "one helping the other," which was demonstrated in the immediate aftermath through the "story of how the Haitian people put away their economic and political differences and worked together, in dignity and solidarity, to collectively survive" (3).

- <sup>2</sup> See Rebecca Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster* (New York: Penguin, 2010).
- <sup>3</sup> See Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is Another Way for Africa* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009).

***Toussaint Louverture: Repensar un ícono.* Edited by Mariana Past and Natalie M. Léger. Translated by David González and Jorge Luis Hernández.** Santiago de Cuba: Editorial del Caribe, 2015. ISBN 978-959-7235-01-9. 235 pp. Price unspecified.

*Review by John D. Ribó*

The goal of Mariana Past and Natalie M. Léger's edited collection *Toussaint Louverture: Repensar un ícono* is stated in the title: to rethink the iconography of Louverture, *en español*. As a work of translation, this volume exemplifies two contrary yet intertwined realities. Although Louverture's legacy clearly transcends national and linguistic borders, collections such as this one are crucial bridges across these divides. Accordingly, this collection complements María Teresa Ortega's English translation of Cuban scholar Emilio Jorge Rodríguez's *Haiti and Trans-Caribbean Literary Identity* (2011), which serves as a connection across the same borders—both linguistic and geopolitical—and promises to catalyze future scholarship on the importance of Haiti and Louverture in the Hispanophone Caribbean, its diasporas, and beyond.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to Past's and Léger's contributions, the collection includes essays by Marlene L. Daut, Victor Figueroa, Charles Forsdick, Doris L. Garraway, Deborah Jenson, Paul B. Miller, and Nick Nesbitt. Editorial del Caribe, an imprint of Casa del Caribe in Santiago de Cuba, published the book. Figueroa's essay originally appeared in Spanish. David González and Jorge Luis Hernández translated the remaining pieces from English and French. And Past—herself the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts grant for translation—acted as liaison between contributors and translators. Although English, Kreyòl, and French editions of the volume would certainly prove valuable, there are currently no plans to publish the collection in other languages.

The nine pieces collected represent extant, revised, and new scholarship. Past's essay originally appeared in the *Journal of Haitian Studies* in 2004. Garraway includes her contribution to *Tree of Liberty* (2008). Daut and Forsdick revise and expand essays already in print: Daut's chapter first