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Disaster capitalism

The term “disaster capitalism,” launched in 2005 by activist journalist Naomi Klein, still has resonance within social movement circles. Yet its proliferation in media and social movements risks a confusion and weakening of the core concept and critiques. As anthropologists who value local communities’ understanding of their own social world, how do we confront such a concept? What are our roles, both in clarifying and understanding the concept? More importantly, what is and should be our praxis, our responses to stemming the worst abuses of disaster capitalism? This chapter presents a sketch of a definition and model for disaster capitalism, followed by examples from ethnographic work on the 2010 earthquake in Haiti and the 2010 British Petroleum (BP) Deepwater Horizon Oil Disaster in the Gulf of Mexico to illustrate the phenomenon of disaster capitalism in practice. We follow this with discussions of the limitations of the disaster capitalism concept and the roles of anthropologists in confronting the issue. [disaster capitalism, neoliberalism, disaster response, 2010 BP Oil Spill, Haiti, reflexivity, critical anthropology]

Introduction

Hurricane Katrina, which made landfall on the U.S. Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005, is estimated to have impacted approximately 90,000 square miles throughout southern Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, displaced between 1 and 1.5 million people (with nearly half of those coming from New Orleans), killed more than 1,800 people, and exceeded \$80 billion in costs (Button and Oliver-Smith 2008:123; Cutter et al. 2006:8; Elliott and Pais 2006:302). Twenty-eight levee breaches in the first 24 hours after the hurricane struck resulted in 80 percent of New Orleans flooding as Lake Pontchartrain and the Industrial Canal emptied into residential areas. This flooding was the result of a multiplicity of human systems that failed catastrophically. What is most significant to consider here is not the disaster event itself, but rather the disaster *after* the event that reproduced social inequalities, in large part through the process of disaster capitalism.

Pre-Hurricane Katrina social inequalities in New Orleans were maintained and reproduced after the storm through neoliberal housing policies and the tenets of “disaster capitalism,” highlighted by Congressman Richard Baker when he stated, “we finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn’t do it, but God did” (Klein 2007:4; see also Button and Oliver-Smith 2008:143). As Adolph Reed Jr. explained, “the people who were swept aside or simply overlooked in this catastrophe were the same ones who were already swept aside in a model of urban revitalization that . . . is predicated on their removal” (2008:148). Two different communities emerged in New Orleans post-Katrina. One community was the Bechtel or Fluor built trailer camps for low-income evacuees, administered and patrolled by private security companies (Klein 2007:524). By contrast, the other type of community emerged in the economically wealthier areas, where residents had water and emergency generators within weeks after Katrina hit, people were treated in private hospitals, and children attended new charter schools (Klein 2007:532). During Hurricane Katrina, Walmart famously sent 1,500 truckloads of free merchandise and food for 100,000 meals. The sight of so many clearly marked Walmart trucks helping in this disaster was public relations gold for the corporation. Such a public display is

commonly referred to as an example of corporate charity in the form of disaster capitalism.

This raises questions about the uses of the term “disaster capitalism,” and how different actors understand it. The term, launched in 2005 by activist journalist Naomi Klein (2005, 2007), still has resonance within social movement circles. In January 2016, six years after the earthquake that rocked Haiti, a teach-in was held at the State University of Haiti on the concept. As anthropologists who value local communities’ understanding of their own social world, how do we confront such a concept? What are our roles, both in clarifying and understanding the concept? More importantly, what is and should be our praxis, our responses to stemming the worst abuses of disaster capitalism? This chapter presents a sketch of a definition and model for disaster capitalism, followed by examples from ethnographic work on the 2010 earthquake in Haiti and the 2010 British Petroleum (BP) Deepwater Horizon Oil Disaster in the Gulf of Mexico to illustrate the phenomenon of disaster capitalism in practice. We follow this with discussions of the limitations of the disaster capitalism concept and the roles of anthropologists in confronting the issue.

Disaster capitalism defined

Does corporate charity represent a form of disaster capitalism? This depends on how the concept is defined. One way to define the concept would be: *National and transnational governmental institutions’ instrumental use of catastrophe (both so-called “natural” and human-mediated disasters, including postconflict situations) to promote and empower a range of private, neoliberal capitalist interests.* Essentially, there are two components of disaster capitalism. The first, what can be called “(non)profiteering,” is the more widely reported, particularly by journalists. While nonprofits and increasingly for-profit corporations are receiving no-bid contracts for reconstruction—justified by a systematic undermining of state capacity that neoliberal policies portend, at least until the 2005 Paris Declaration acknowledging that there needs to be some role for states—disasters are opportunities for radical policy reform. These reforms constitute the second and more long-term element of disaster capitalism, what Antonio Donini (2008) calls “world ordering.”

Public institutions’ funding streams are increasingly *directed toward private entities*, including transnational corporations. For example, not includ-

ing the Halliburton Army contract that USAID did not administer, according to its website, USAID allocated approximately \$5.2 billion from fiscal years 2003–2006 to Iraq, with \$4.16 billion categorized as “reconstruction.” For-profit corporations headquartered in the United States received more than 80 percent of these reconstruction funds, many in no-bid contracts. Some of the largest recipients of Iraq reconstruction funds—politically connected firms such as Bechtel, Blackwater, and Halliburton—also found themselves with billion-dollar no-bid contracts following Katrina. This (non)profiteering is the focus of many journalistic accounts, including by Jeremy Scahill (2005) and a series of excellent books on Katrina (see, e.g., Adams 2013; David and Enarson 2012; Dyson 2005; Johnson 2011; Woods 2010).

Anthropologists and other disaster researchers have long pointed out that disaster events can trigger profound social change (e.g., Davis 1999; Dyer 2002; Hoffman 1999; Hoffman and Oliver-Smith 1999:9; Middleton and O’Keefe 1998; Scheper-Hughes 2006). Looking at the similarities within several cases demands going deeper than just following the trail of disaster profiteers. In addition to the direct transfer of funds through contracts to private corporations, disaster capitalism is distinguished by the *instrumentality of catastrophes* for advancing the political, ideological, and economic interests of transnational capitalist elite groups. Often in postconflict countries the local government owes its existence to foreign intervention; examples include the creation of new states such as East Timor or Kosovo as a part of United Nations peacemaking processes or transition governments following foreign invasion, such as the Transitional Authority in Afghanistan or the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq. Such pliant governments are often called upon to serve foreign interests.² In Iraq, the International Monetary Fund imposed a series of unpopular measures in its December 2005 Standby Arrangement between national elections and the new administration’s inauguration, effectively shielding them from voter scrutiny.

So-called “natural” disasters are also fertile ground for implanting particular neoliberal policies because of an acute temporary crisis that demands quick action and usually an infusion of emergency assistance. Following a disaster, local governments need a quick response and usually large sums of financial assistance to respond. To refuse the aid in this circumstance—like in Myanmar following

the April 2008 cyclone—is to risk international censure, and even internal rebellion. And a local government in desperate (if temporary) need of assistance is not in a good position to negotiate the conditions under which the aid is given. Local government sometimes seizes the opportunity to shut down participation, implementing decisions without debate, such as the Honduran government declaring a state of martial law following Hurricane Mitch (Stonich 2008). More often, following natural disasters, cash-strapped local governments are dependent on the goodwill and generosity of donors, creating fertile ground for promoting neoliberal policies (e.g., privatization of public sector resources, austerity measures, foreign-directed fiscal and monetary policies, and reduction of barriers to so-called “free trade”) through conditionalities.

As just illustrated, *neoliberal policy agendas* are facilitated by shifts in donor flows that advance the interests of private constituencies and the stage set by “windows of opportunities” provided by disaster. Privatization is a key policy that development institutions usher in following disasters. In a document titled “The Investment Climate in Afghanistan: Exploiting Opportunities in an Uncertain Environment,” the World Bank praised the interim government for privatizing state-run facilities but argued more must be done, aggressively promoting further privatization (Bray 2005). In Iraq, the International Monetary Fund’s December 2005 Standby Arrangement included privatization of state-owned enterprises and national banks, costing 100,000 civilian jobs (International Monetary Fund [IMF] 2005:14). Privatization was also a key plank in several post-disaster contexts, such as in Haiti through a process called the Interim Cooperation Framework (*Cadre de Coopération Intérimaire*, or “CCI”) and the Plan Puebla Panama’s privatized energy grid for Guatemala (Sandoval-Girón 2008). In Belize following Hurricane Iris, the government even privatized roads, cutting off local access (Alexander 2008).

Conditions that used to be known as structural adjustment measures imposed by multilateral institutions as conditions for receipt of aid are typical responses to catastrophes. For example, price subsidies for staple goods were ended in Iraq; prices for oil and kerosene shot up 400 percent and diesel 800 percent following the International Monetary Fund’s Standby Arrangement see Klein 2007). One particular component to structural adjustment is liberalization. Following the U.S. invasion in Afghanistan, the interim Afghani

government created the Afghanistan Investment Support Agency, enabling it to become “one of the most open economy [sic.] in the region,” but the World Bank advocated for further liberalization, including access for foreign companies to land, undoing waves of land reform, and nationalization (Bray 2005:x). Similar moves were made in Iraq, especially Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) Orders 39 and 40, with similar praise for being one of the most open economies. Hurricane Mitch provided the backdrop for a Constitutional amendment in Honduras that allowed foreigners to own land (Stonich 2008). Reconstruction packages for Sri Lanka and Haiti proposed in U.S. Congress in 2004 contain several identical conditions, including “elimination of barriers to United States trade and investment.” Other neoliberal measures include low-wage export-oriented jobs. Low wages are not an accidental byproduct of postdisaster intervention but part of deliberate strategy, as a World Bank report candidly notes: “employment is likely to be scarce, and almost any kind of job opportunity will therefore be welcome” (Bray 2005:23). This is especially the case in Haiti, where even before the earthquake the unemployment rate was 70–85 percent, depending on estimates.

Disaster capitalism and neoliberalism

Exactly how does disaster capitalism differ from or build upon capitalism generally, or neoliberalism more specifically? In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), David Harvey defines neoliberalism as an ideological model and belief in the free market as both the best engine for growth and most efficient system of distributing it. Harvey argued that neoliberalism had its intellectual origins in Austrian theorist von Hayek and his Mont Pelerin Society circle, always waiting in the wings to challenge the then-hegemonic “embedded liberalism”—Keynesian state-regulated capitalism aimed at full employment. Internal contradictions within advanced capitalist societies, such as the competition between London’s financial traders committed to the strong pound against Britain’s manufacturing centers fueled by coal, seeking to lower real wages, provided fertile ground for implantation of neoliberalism, through the election of Margaret Thatcher. With the notable exception of Deng Xiopang’s transition to state capitalism in Communist China, neoliberalism

was often imposed following crises—“shock therapy.”

Naomi Klein centered her analysis in *The Shock Doctrine: the Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007) on Chicago economist Milton Friedman’s revolution, and neoliberalism’s dependence on the other “shock doctor,” McGill psychologist Ewan Cameron. One of the book’s key theoretical contributions is not only pointing out the similarities between this “shock therapy” and neoliberals’ use of this analogy, but also the central role that CIA *Kubark* manual tactics, including torture, played in neoliberalism’s implantation and growth. Klein cites the 2003–2013 War in Iraq, and particularly Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, as contemporary examples of this violence embedded within the promotion of neoliberal policies.

Looked at in this particular light, Klein’s addition is the use of violence and torture, but as a core economic policy and practice it differs little from Harvey’s understanding of neoliberalism, which as he noted always advanced exploiting crises (2005). The first such “crisis” is the 1973 coup d’état in Chile, providing Friedman his first laboratory, run by his “Chicago Boys” in field testing his neoliberal economic doctrine. This does not assume or require a conspiracy: actors involved are merely doing what they do best, extracting profits. Several global studies theorists discuss the blurring of the line between national bourgeoisies and states (e.g., Robinson 2004; Sklair 2001)—so much so that the metaphor of the “revolving door” is no longer appropriate since there is not even a wall: James Baker was on Bechtel’s payroll as he was negotiating the Iraq debt deal as Bush’s special envoy, and Vice President Dick Cheney was still on the board of Halliburton, receiving financial benefits. This is merely the expression of the neoliberal shift in the formerly “statist” Bretton Woods organizations that Harvey and Klein detail in the 1980s with the formation of the so-called “Washington Consensus”—the belief in market forces’ ability to solve social problems. This hearkens to theorizing since Karl Marx, wherein the state’s primary function is to facilitate this empowerment of the bourgeoisie. In more recent years, what might be called a “Post-Washington Consensus,” states’ roles in development and humanitarian aid, especially “ownership” and “coordination,” have been affirmed in several international declarations (e.g., Busan 2011; Paris 2005).

Considering the similarities of neoliberalism and disaster capitalism, why is the latter still in use?

First, as many commentators note, “neoliberal” has been overused to the point of having little meaning, alluded to in the introduction to this article. Second, neoliberalism has attracted a growing resistance movement: from the Zapatista Rebellion to the Chipko Movement to the World Trade Organization protests in Seattle to the gathering of leftists in the World Social Forum to Greece’s recent rejection of austerity. The profile of the IMF has shrunk dramatically, following Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela’s paying down their debt—even in India, the World Bank’s portfolio is dwindling. The leftist turn in Latin America and the rise of an alternative hegemon in Chavez’ ALBA (in English, Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas) seem to have withstood the 2009 coup in Honduras, with left-of-center governments recently reelected even in Colombia, traditionally a staunch U.S. ally. Petrocaribe funds have been pumped to support left-leaning governments, however with the dip in oil prices and a rocky transition in Venezuela, the future is a little more uncertain. Following Chávez’s 2013 death, Maduro narrowly scraped by to be elected to his own term,³ and it remains to be seen what will come of President Obama’s moves to open relationships with Cuba. True, in places like Haiti wherein foreign institutions provide between 65 and 90 percent of the government’s budget, the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) still exert powerful influence. But disasters create (at least the illusion of) the blank slate, *terra nullius*.

Case examples

As anthropologists, our primary entrée into disaster capitalism is through our local field sites. In the case study examples that follow, the disasters unleashed similar discourses and policy framework. In this section we discuss the two cases in greater depth, testing the limits of the concept of “disaster capitalism.”

In Haiti, there are three recent moments of disaster capitalism. In 2004 was the regime change against Aristide that Schuller had already detailed (Schuller 2008). The other two were linked institutionally and in terms of policy: in 2008, four hurricanes devastated the island, and in 2010, the earthquake. Following the 2008 hurricane season, celebrated British economist Paul Collier spent three days in Haiti and found solutions to Haiti’s problems, including off-shore apparel assembly, high-end export crops like mangoes, and tourism (Collier 2009). This was also the document that hailed Bill Clinton as United

Nations Special Envoy. Naturally this was the blueprint used for Clinton's term as UN Special Envoy to Haiti, representing a ready-made plan following the earthquake. After the earthquake, the telecommunications industry was finally privatized (Jean Michel 2012). In the year 2000, public services were worth a half a billion dollars a year as potential wealth to be extracted (Schuller 2006). Also following the earthquake was the creation of an industrial park in 2012 in Caracol, on Haiti's north coast, which was supposed to create 60,000 jobs, but by the beginning of 2014 only 2,590 had been created (New York Times Editorial Board 2014). Many more agricultural jobs were taken as land used by peasant farmers was "cleared" for the project. Prospecting for gold and other precious metals advanced in secret following the earthquake, until a journalist unearthed contracts, inspiring Parliament to intervene (New York University School of Law and Happel 2015). News stories estimated the gold wealth to be \$22 billion. One story in particular "raised eyebrows," a no-bid contract granted to Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton's brother (Sullivan and Helderman 2015). Land rights are also threatened with the development of high-end tourism in Ile-a-Vache, a small island off of Haiti's south coast. A community organization mobilized to stop the expropriation for a project that was also shrouded in secrecy. All three multinational corporate projects: mining, high-end tourism, and offshore apparel factory were outlined in the Collier Report, all beneficiaries of a postdisaster context in which Bill Clinton and Haitian president Michel Martelly claimed that "Haiti is open for business." It is true that humanitarianism is big business: in 2013, it was 21 billion dollars around the world and in 2012 it was 17 billion dollars (Development Initiatives 2014). However, considering the ongoing wealth for foreign capitalist interests, this "world ordering" phase is more important and certainly longer than the nonprofiteering.

Similar phenomena occurred during the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Disaster, when eleven men were killed off the coast of Louisiana when the Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded and sunk on April 20, 2010. Nearly five million barrels of oil spilled into the Gulf of Mexico, affecting approximately 1,100 miles of coastal wetlands (National Academy of Sciences 2013; National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling 2011). BP initially estimated that 1,063–

14,226 barrels of oil were spilling into the Gulf of Mexico per day (Markey 2010). The 1972 Clean Water Act applied penalties for each barrel of oil and gas spilled, thus it benefited BP to underestimate the spill's size (Juhasz 2011:58). At the time of the spill, BP was the largest oil and gas producer in the Gulf of Mexico and the United States and was the fourth largest corporation in the world by revenue (Juhasz 2011:213). In 2011, BP spent US\$8.43 million lobbying to U.S. Congress to influence legislation, including working to block a bill that would have raised the liability cap oil corporations are responsible for in the event they are accountable for a major disaster (Stein 2012). During the first quarter of 2011 alone, BP spent US\$2 million on federal lobbying for issues such as capping its contributions to the restoration of the Gulf Coast (Baram 2011).

Immediately after the spill, for the first time the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved using dispersants—Corexit 9527A and then Corexit 9500A—below the surface of the water (Center for Biological Diversity 2014). BP and government disaster-relief agencies applied approximately 1.84 million gallons of dispersant to the Gulf waters by boats and airplanes (U.S. Coast Guard 2011). Dispersants do not entirely remove oil from the water, but rather work in conjunction with the wind and waves to accelerate the dispersal of the oil by allowing the oil to mix with water.

Prior to the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Disaster, of the 18 dispersants approved by the EPA, 12 were found to be more effective on southern Louisiana crude oil than Corexit, and the toxicity of these 12 was either comparable to Corexit or even 10–20 times less toxic in some of the cases (Quinlan 2010). Even though Corexit was on the EPA's National Contingency Plan Product Schedule, the testing required to be listed did not consider the long-term impacts. Corexit 9527 and 9500 contains propylene glycol and Corexit 9527 contains 2-butoxyethanol (2-BE), both of which are toxic and accumulate up the food chain (Center for Biological Diversity 2014; Subra 2010). 2-Butoxyethanol was identified as a cause of chronic health problems and even several deaths among cleanup workers after the 1989 Exxon Valdez Oil Disaster (Center for Biological Diversity 2014; Juhasz 2011:100).

There is limited information on the full potential health damage of Corexit because Nalco, which manufactured the dispersants, refused to reveal all of the ingredients, citing their proprietary nature (Center for Biological Diversity 2014). A University

of South Florida study found that the Corexit broke the oil droplets down into smaller drops and created a plume that caused the die-off of foraminifera—amoeba-like creatures characterized as the basis of the Gulf's aquatic food chain (Pittman 2013). Oil elements can then be transferred through the food chain (National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling 2011). In a 2013 study, one group of scientists found that adding Corexit 9500A to the oil spill in the Gulf made the mixture up to 52 times more toxic than the oil itself (Rico-Martínez et al. 2013).

Nalco included in its portfolio “technologies that increase production, reduce operational costs and protect assets in challenging environments like Deepwater & Ultra-Deepwater, Oil Sands, and High Temperature High Pressure Corrosion. We also have chemistries designed to treat the heaviest crudes and oil spills” (Nalco 2014). Thus, Nalco is offering products for companies drilling under precarious circumstances, while also selling products supposedly designed to clean up the spills caused by such drilling. Furthermore, Nalco counts among its executives a BP board member (Quinlan 2010).

In a related matter, less than two weeks before the Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded, Halliburton—the contractor responsible for cementing the rig's well—made a deal to purchase the firm Boots and Coots, which focuses on oil spill prevention and response to blowouts. Following the Deepwater Horizon blowout, this same firm was hired, under contract to BP, to assist with the Deepwater Horizon relief well work (Rocheleau 2010).

One thing to note is the media campaign around the disaster capitalism, attempting to influence the “disaster narrative” (Schuller 2016b). BP spent nearly \$93.5 million on advertising between April and July 2010, more than three times the amount BP spent during the same period in 2009 (Waxman and Stupak 2010), working to make the disaster—along with the oil—disappear from the public's mind.

The deeply engrained industry–government relationship is reflected in policy and regulation over the past several decades. The U.S. Department of Interior has historically adopted as formal regulations the practices and standards developed by the American Petroleum Institute (API)—the largest U.S. trade association for the oil and natural gas industry and the industry's principal lobbyist (National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling 2011). Every major oil company Chief Executive Officer is on

the American Petroleum Institute board (Juhász 2011:282), raising the question as to whether these practices and standards make operations safer or encourage industry sovereignty without government oversight impinging on the industry's profit margin (Jalbert et al. 2017).

The oil and gas industry is exempt from major provisions of seven major federal environmental laws, including the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, and the Toxic Release Inventory of the Emergency Planning and Community-Rights-to-Know Act (Environmental Defense Center 2011). One example is that storm water discharges from oil and gas drilling and production activities are exempted from the Clean Water Act's permitting requirement for all discharges of pollutants to rivers, streams, creeks, and wetlands (Environmental Defense Center 2011).

As anthropologists, while we appreciate the similarity across the cases—similar to what coeditor Nandini Gunewardena and Schuller (2008) aimed to do with their volume, assessing and delimiting disaster capitalism—we also recognize that each location has its own cultural logic and realities. Like other grand theories or concepts such as neoliberalism, the contours of disaster capitalism are shaped by local populations, cultural frames, worldviews, language, and priorities.

Limits of the concept

The concept of disaster capitalism is not without its critics (e.g., Simpson 2014; Wisner 2009). One of the first rejections of the term is that it is a “flash-in-the-pan” (Wisner 2009). Ben Wisner also argued that if the term cannot distinguish between “the grocer's daughter”—small business—and the “men in suits”—large corporations, it is not useful. In addition, for the term to mean anything, it cannot simply conflate any benefit from disaster with “disaster capitalism.” Schuller, who coedited a book on the subject (Gunewardena and Schuller 2008), found it increasingly less useful in his own work even and especially as foreign journalists proliferated its use to express a moral outrage at the large sums pledged for the 2010 earthquake, much of which went to the U.S. military or large, foreign, international nongovernmental organizations.

Institutions and individuals within institutions are differently positioned within a postdisaster setting, with a cacophony of intentions, interests, experience, and consequences. Schuller found the brush of “disaster capitalism” increasingly too broad to capture the nuance of local analysts, who still nonetheless had forceful critiques of the foreign-led humanitarian response (Schuller 2016a). Ransford Edwards (2015) also deconstructed the supposedly universal category of Haitian business elites or “business interests.” To turn to the example that led the article, is Walmart’s donation an example of disaster capitalism? So-called “corporate good will”—even if offering a “dividend” of good press and free advertising is not the same as Bechtel’s or Halliburton’s billion-dollar no-bid contracts in Iraq, or Friedman’s promotion of charter schools and dismantling of public housing following Hurricane Katrina.

In addition to critiques, disaster capitalism has several theoretical limitations. It does not and cannot address the long-term structural reasons for a given area’s vulnerability. In fact the term can only address the aftermath of a disaster. Similarly, disaster capitalism focuses on the recent past and as such does not address the long-term formation of capitalism, and the long-term impacts of plantation slavery in the incubation of capitalism (Beckles 2013; Mintz 1977, 1984; Trouillot 2003; Williams 1961). Given its theoretical trajectory as a variant of Marxian theorizing, the concept of “disaster capitalism” is silent on questions of race and racism. Neither Harvey’s nor Klein’s books examine the rise of neoliberalism in the United States (Collins et al. 2008; Rozario 2007), except after neoliberal policies had been field tested in the global South and come back to haunt the U.S. post-Katrina, the “boomerang” effect (George 1992). Any understanding of the advances of capital in the United States would have to discuss race, and more than just as epiphenomenal or expressions of class. The New Deal and postwar Keynesian economic platform, notably the G. I. Bill and the Federal Housing Authority loans, were directed to a white population, who fled cities in a “white flight,” draining inner-city public resources. Resistance to the New Deal was strongest in the U.S. South, the site of a protracted violent struggle over confining Blacks to near-slave status. When the Supreme Court finally handed down its landmark *Brown* case that was the first challenge to Jim Crow, school boards actively fought this. Prince Edward County in rural Virginia responded by closing down *all* public schools. While motivated by fear and racial hatred

rather than an ideological commitment to a small state, the assertion of white supremacist views shared a rejection of federal authority, from the Civil War to the poll tax. So the reflex of a large segment of the white working class in the U.S. South included the erosion of public goods. To comply with federal desegregation mandates, some white-controlled jurisdictions simply deinstalled drinking fountains and defunded public transportation. Public assistance programs often lumped together disparagingly as “welfare” are targeted for being cut or underfunded when they are stereotyped as benefiting the so-called “welfare queen”—unmarried Black mother—when these services still disproportionately benefit white elderly people and working class families (Collins 1990; Davis 1983, 2003). Therefore, race and racism were and are powerful motors of neoliberal advancement in the United States.

Roles of anthropologists

As this is an article in *The Annals of Anthropological Practice*, it is imperative that we interrogate our roles as applied anthropologists. One essential question we need to ask ourselves is, are we “capitalizing on catastrophe,” like the entities that we analyze and sometimes critique? What are the solutions to this problem? What are our relationships to disaster responders? What are our relationships to social movements?

What are our tools as anthropologists that we can do really well? We hear stories. We collect stories. We share stories. Trying to give local communities in Louisiana some voice, Maldonado worked to counter the barrage of corporate rhetoric everyone was hearing by creating digital stories so local people could tell their own stories and, with permission, share the stories at forums across the country with audiences ranging from citizens to policy makers. While this approach may seem simplistic, it is personal: people hear someone’s voice, see their home. And whether someone has ever been to a particular disaster impacted area, people remember the stories. Schuller had a similar experience in Washington, DC, taking students who had gone to Haiti to conduct research in the camps. Busy Capitol Hill staffers put away their Blackberries when students began sharing stories of their experiences in the camps, and especially stories shared by camp residents.

That said, in many instances we anthropologists also benefit from disaster capitalism. In addition to the media, aid agencies, reconstruction contractors, and NGOs, academic researchers,

particularly anthropologists, rush to the scene. Anthropologists who are honest with themselves and aware of the power imbalances inherited through colonial and later imperial circuits of power and access to anthropological engagement often struggle with this. Maldonado began her dissertation fieldwork in coastal Louisiana a year and a half after the Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded. She struggled with the notion that academic research is just another part of that extraction process: we come to an area, we leave, we get jobs, we write books, and we get invited to talk about it. Schuller similarly grapples with his privilege as a U.S. based, white male with a PhD, especially when granted the opportunity to present to policy makers. Like a muscle, privilege gets stronger with every use (Checker et al. 2014). Exclusionary policies and practices to obtain a U.S. visa limit the number of Haitian people who can speak about the country. One way around this is through documentary film. Like NGOs, it is easier for scholars to document *outputs*—number of articles on *Huffington Post*, number of times invited to Washington—than *outcomes*—changes in recipient communities' lives.

Anthropologists (as well as other social scientists), particularly those of us who consider ourselves “applied,” bear striking similarities to people working as disaster responders, or NGOs more generally. James Ferguson (2005) identified development as anthropology’s “evil twin.” We both depend on the grace of local communities, where we generally come uninvited and are more powerful. The exceptions to this, of course, are community members themselves as “first responders.” Rebecca Solnit (2009) documented the extraordinary communities—“utopia”—that arise from disaster. Building on sociological scholarship on disasters, Solnit’s discussion throws the gauntlet equally challenging to disaster scholarship: how do we document and evaluate the contribution of local communities? Applied anthropologists, as well as others who engage in continued work within communities, building and maintaining important long-term relationships, have much to offer in terms of helping to reframe the disaster narrative to include local actions, activism, perspectives, and priorities.

Challenging disaster capitalism requires an organized movement, or “movement of movements” as the World Social Forum was once called. By beginning with the belief that indeed “another world is possible,” social movements imagine into being these communities. An “anthropological imagina-

tion” tracking back and forth between local and global, rooted in convictions of justice while all the while acknowledging its context-specific nature, might be useful, however fragile and difficult it is to attain. While working alongside social movements is also a form of “applied” anthropology, the relationships being tended are often mobile, as the aim of social movements is to “move.” Social movement activism shifts with the ground underneath them and also may lead into questions of self-critique, identity, power, and privilege. Anthropologists wishing to engage at this level, particularly those who criticize others’ capitalization of catastrophe must be willing to be open to critique. If anything in anthropologists’ toolkit prepares us for the task, it would be a focus on radical empathy. Especially as our discipline and profession are increasingly under pressure to document results, including this simple lesson in our 101 courses may in the end be our most important contribution.

Notes

1. This special issue and each contribution within it is based on a question considered in the plenary panel, *Continuity and Change in the Applied Anthropology of Risk Hazards and Disasters*, at the 75th Annual Meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology in Pittsburgh in 2015.

2. True, this strategy does not come with a 100 percent guarantee of success, as Afghanistan’s Hamid Karzai’s turning on the U.S. exemplifies.

3. Maduro’s party lost parliamentary elections in December 2015.

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