

# *“Yon Lòt Ayiti Posib”: Glimmers of Another Haiti Following the 2010 Earthquake and 2016 Hurricane Matthew*

Mark Schuller, Bette Gebrian, and Judy Lewis

Research, mainly within sociology, demonstrated that disasters can be stages for extraordinary human growth and solidarity. However, research documenting and specifically theorizing local communities as first responders has had limited impact within official disaster response policy and practice, and it is still relatively uncharted within anthropology. Policymakers and journalists alike tend to dismiss local initiatives. Ethnographic research is poised to evaluate the hypothesis of pro-social behavior following disasters and explore ramifications for policy and practice. This article aims to correct this erasure: documenting, analyzing, and theorizing the contributions of Haitian communities as first responders to two disasters, the 2010 earthquake and Hurricane Matthew, in 2016. Analyses from survivors offer glimpses of another Haiti imagined and temporarily brought into being following these events. An estimated 630,000 people left the capital following the earthquake for the provinces. This article focuses on the Grand’Anse, one of the most isolated provinces yet where a large number of people returned. The Grand’Anse was also one of the most affected by Hurricane Matthew. This article documents Haitian people’s roles in saving their own and their neighbors’ lives in an attempt to inspire disaster researchers to focus more attention on this critical if underacknowledged aspect of disaster response.

**Key words:** Disasters; Haiti, Haiti-2010 earthquake, Hurricane Matthew; Resilience, Disasters-Community Response, Vulnerability, Solidarity

Sociological research has demonstrated that disasters can be stages for extraordinary human growth and solidarity (Dynes 1970; Quarantelli 1984). Anthropological research (e.g., Browne 2015; Zhang 2016) documented local communities’ responses to disasters. However, research documenting and specifically theorizing local communities as first responders has had limited impact within official disaster response policy and practice. Policymakers and journalists alike tend to dismiss local initiatives within the mainstream “disaster narrative” (Schuller 2016).

Using examples of two recent disasters in Haiti, the 2010 earthquake and Hurricane Matthew in 2016, this article provides documentation of significant contributions by local communities. This is a first step in valuing local communities’ contributions. In Port-au-Prince after the earthquake, communities organized to meet basic needs. Far away from the media spotlight and foreign aid, people from the Grand’Anse

welcomed family and strangers from Port-au-Prince, creating innovative solutions to help rebuild livelihoods. These collectivist traditions were in full force after Hurricane Matthew; however, the disaster affected the entire area, making first responders survivors and vice-versa. Communities’ experiences after Matthew thus challenges the dichotomy between “survivor” and “responder.” Local responses to Matthew in the Grand’Anse also challenge the often-assumed distinction between vulnerability and resilience.

Understanding—and attempting to assess the monetary value of—local communities’ own efforts can lead to better disaster response. Preparation for future disasters requires consideration of community resources. Local initiatives can be supported, locally identified priorities can be addressed, and aid can be more effective, culturally appropriate, and equitably distributed with fewer negative effects.

The 2010 earthquake that ripped through Haiti’s nerve center, killing as many as 316,000 people, generated one of the most generous responses in history. Foreign agencies pledged \$13 billion, and private citizens gave \$3 billion. Left out of this discussion was the enormous outpouring of solidarity from within Haiti itself. This article aims to correct this erasure: documenting, analyzing, and theorizing the contributions of Haitian communities as first responders to the disaster. Analyses from survivors offer glimpses of another Haiti imagined and temporarily brought into being following the event.

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This community self-help response to the earthquake was not a unique event. The Grand'Anse has also seen its share of disasters including the post-earthquake migration from Port-au-Prince, Hurricane Thomas, the cholera epidemic, and most recently Hurricane Matthew. Hurricane Matthew destroyed crops, livestock, and over 80 percent of structures in large portions of three provinces in Haiti. It was also the occasion for another wave of local solidarity. Unfortunately, research on local communities acting as first responders to disasters remains limited (Browne 2015; Vélez-Vélez and Villarrubia-Mendoza 2018; Zhang 2016). This article documents Haitian people's roles in an attempt to inspire disaster researchers to focus more attention on this critical aspect of disaster response.

## Methods

All authors have worked in Haiti for at least two decades, blending scholarship and real-world engagement, mostly with the NGO sector and aid accountability. Schuller is affiliated with the Université d'Etat d'Haiti (State University of Haiti), conducting research with student research assistants. Following two largely quantitative studies of a sample of 108 internally displaced persons (IDP) camps (one in eight in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area) in 2010 and 2011, Schuller conducted a four-year, mixed-method ethnographic study, beginning the summer of 2011 in eight camps. A team of five Haitian American students at York College were paired up with a team of eight students at the Faculté d'Ethnologie to conduct the five-week fieldwork. In total, 791 families responded to a fifty-six-question household survey. Following this was a semi-structured interview with eighty-eight camp residents. Teams conducted observation, noting the economic activity, social organization, leisure activity, aid distribution, conflicts, or anything particularly noteworthy. Schuller visited the camps on nine separate occasions over the next four years. In addition, he conducted fifty-seven interviews with people from the front lines to "LogBase"—the UN logistics base where the twelve humanitarian clusters met and were headquartered.

Gebrian and Lewis employed a mixed-methods approach of qualitative and quantitative data collection for all events in the Grand'Anse. Research they conducted during the earthquake included participant observation, interviews with returnees and their families, use of census data to identify homes with returnees, home visits, surveys of displaced people, and continuous monitoring of the new population for one year. Hurricane Matthew research included observation, interviews with those affected, home visits by local community members, identification of most vulnerable families, tracking of needs, materials provided, and outcomes.

## Disaster Solidarity

While for-profit media accounts often highlight individualistic, violent behavior following disasters, disaster researchers have shown that disasters also represent stages

for emergent pro-social behavior. Peter Kropotkin (1904) assembled evidence of mutual aid in modern societies, arguing that this tendency in human nature moves society forward. In an early exploration in *Human Organization*, a 1957 special issue on the topic, editor Nicholas Demerath concluded that following initial shock—what co-editor Anthony Wallace (1957) called the "disaster syndrome"—disaster events set the stage for solidarity. Drawing on Victor Turner's (1969) notion of *communitas*, the collective spirit emerging within times of "liminality," as well as Durkheim's (1997) mechanical and organic solidarity, sociologist Louis Zurcher (1968:295) argued that "ephemeral roles" and new collectivities, what he called an "ad hoc group, are markedly functional for the psychological recovery of the individual and the social recovery of the community following a disaster." In this functionalist article also published in *Human Organization*, Zurcher did not discuss Durkheim's (1995) "collective effervescence," an early theorization of solidarity. Disasters force people to "think outside the box" as it were, temporarily suspending social norms and conventional wisdom. They also encourage people to create temporary bonds in the collective will to survive.

Sociological research on disasters continued this social psychological approach. Allen Barton (1969) discussed communities' responses to individual stress, and Russell Dynes (1970) examined how individuals organize collective behavior. One of the most influential disaster sociologists, Enrico Quarantelli (1984), sharpened the analysis of "emergent behavior," which by definition is temporary. Disasters can inspire both anti-social and pro-social behavior (Quarantelli 1998). A later work elaborated the distinction between a local "disaster" and a large-scale "catastrophe," with the former more likely to induce anti-social and the latter pro-social behavior (Rodríguez, Trainor, and Quarantelli 2006). Rebecca Solnit's 2009 book details post-disaster solidarity, what she called utopia. Drawing primarily on five major North American cases, Solnit (2009) details how disasters can be the platforms for extraordinary communities, outpouring of solidarity, and glimpses into utopia. Further exploring the temporality of this solidarity, Steve Kroll-Smith (2018) concludes that within capitalist societies, the market logic requiring inequality and private property is quickly re-established in the post-disaster order, beginning with media demonization of urban poor that serves to justify a militaristic response.

The mainstream disaster narrative (Schuller 2016) is often colored by isolated incidents of looting and violence: one case in Haiti was triggered by the team of journalists who threw aid on the ground and rolled the camera, according to a Haitian cameraman. This racialized coverage is not unique to Haiti: following Hurricane Katrina, journalists described white families "finding" and Black families "looting" food (e.g., Dyson 2005; Ethridge 2006; INCITE! Women of Color against Violence 2012; Lubiano 2008; Tierney, Bevc, and Kuligowski 2006). Seen from the ground, from the eyes of survivors, a more complex picture emerges.

## Haiti as Case Study

This conversation provides useful foundations for understanding contemporary Haiti, following two recent catastrophes using Quarantelli's schema. However, particularities within Haiti move the conversation forward. Haiti covers the western third of the island of Hispaniola which it shares with the Dominican Republic. It has the 2nd largest population in the Caribbean and is densely populated (400/km<sup>2</sup>).<sup>1</sup> The average GDP per capita was \$766 in 2017, and this is much lower in rural areas.<sup>2</sup> 2018 saw high inflation resulting in more economic hardship.

Haiti's history began with the genocide of the indigenous Taino population and importation of African slaves by the colonizers, first Spain and then France. Haiti became an independent nation in 1804 after a slave revolution. In exchange for their recognition of the *fait accompli*, in 1825, France extracted an indemnity of the equivalent of \$22 billion in today's economy and imposed major trade reductions for many years. These debts triggered severe long-term consequences for Haitian economy and stability. Haiti has had forty-six leaders in its 204-year history. In addition to invading the country twenty-six times before, the United States occupied Haiti from 1915-1934, setting up the conditions for authoritarian regimes (Plummer 1988; Renda 2001). Most notorious was François Duvalier who was succeeded by his son, Baby Doc; the Duvaliers were in charge from 1957-1986. Foreign intervention—including debt accumulated by the Duvaliers, structural adjustment programs, an embargo, and aid conditionalities—applied financial and political pressure, reinforcing dependency, a weak state, and authoritarianism (DeWind and Kinley 1988; Diederich 2011; Dupuy 2010; Trouillot 1990). This political environment has resulted in poor infrastructure in most areas, including education and health care.

Solidarity is understood and practiced differently in Haiti than in the United States, calling into question the model derived from contemporary North American cities. Ethnographic evidence suggests a more nuanced understanding of the temporality of the solidarity, as well as the challenges to it. With Haiti renamed the “Republic of NGOs” (Klarreich and Polman 2012; Kristoff and Panarelli 2010; Schuller 2017), post-disaster aid is framed by a strong dependency on international aid. Given this, we are interested in shifting the focus from social psychology toward policy and the disaster response. These moments of solidarity also express collective priorities and an emergent vision of society to be rebuilt. We are interested in exploring communities' responses in this process, in order to maximize and support local collective action.

## The Earthquake

Haiti's 2010 earthquake inspired an enormous outpouring of solidarity, including within Haiti itself. The earthquake disproportionately impacted the capital of Port-au-Prince, resulting in 1.5 million people living in 1,200+ internally displaced

person (IDP) camps across the country. An estimated 630,000 people fled the capital to return to rural areas and provincial cities (Bengtsson et al. 2011). These communities of origin welcomed their urban family members, offering temporary shelter and other necessities such as food, water, and clothing. In addition, urban communities responded, with neighbors offering temporary assistance. Community organizations sprang up, including camp committees, the only recognized vehicle for international humanitarian assistance.

Haitian intellectuals documented people's survival stories. Not surprisingly, solidarity played a central role. Michèle Montas-Dominique (2011), a journalist who was United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's spokesperson,<sup>3</sup> led a campaign, “*Si M Pa Rele*,” Haitian Creole for “If I Don't Speak Out,” which the UN translated as “voice for the voiceless,” later the title of an International Organization for Migration program (see Kausen 2012). The purpose of the project was to document Haitian people's perspectives in advance of a March 31, 2010, UN donors' conference. Several Haitian novelists of varying ideological stripes published accounts, including Gary Victor (2010), Yanick Lahens (2010), and Edwidge Danticat (2010). Gina Ulysse (2011) edited a special issue of *Meridians* called “*Pawòl Fanm sou Douz Janvyè*” (“Women's Words about January 12th”). Several people used their artistic talents to share these stories, including Ulysse, Myriam Chancy, Lenelle Moïse, and Kantara Souffrant.

Reading people's stories reminds us that survivors—often called “victims”—of disasters are also its first responders, challenging accepted dichotomies. Many State University of Haiti students lived in shantytowns, and later camps (Louis 2018). One such student, Carine Exantus, (2010) at the Human Sciences School, blogged about her experience in the large camp by the National Palace, in Champs-de-Mars.

Remène who lived in the “*Hancho*” camp outside a shantytown between the industrial park and Cité Soleil recalled, “I'm still going through difficult times. When we cook some food, we share it with them, and when they have some food, they give us some. That's what we did to get by. That's how we lived after January 12.” In this retelling, we don't know whether Remène lived like this before January 12. Some changes in people's living situation seemed to engender a greater social bond, and people used different language, like Anne, who also lived in *Hancho*: “Ever since [the earthquake] happened, we have been living here; we're like a family. That means, for example when a family cooks some rice, they share it with us, but we don't complain if they have nothing.” Several people used similar expressions to describe relationships within the camp, that it was like a family.

Nadège, who took residence on the school grounds of St. Louis de Gonzague, detailed solidarity at many levels:

I have many friends, you know? I sold dishes in the street [before the earthquake]. Some of my friends gave me a stockpot, others buckets. And people even gave me beds. They gave me covers. Even clothes, even though they don't fit me. They gave me dishes. The day after, I

borrowed a stockpot to cook my meal. I borrowed plates, I borrowed spoons....

A woman whose name is Nadège, my namesake, generally gives me something to eat. She just...didn't give me anything last June. She didn't have anything. There's also a brother at the church. He used to provide a lot for me. When he gives me stuff, he gives me some rice, beans. He also used to give me clothes. He told me if I don't want to wear them, I can donate them. I'm a generous person. If a person doesn't have anything, I share. This woman, she's a friend of mine. I used to give things to her children. For example, I used to share with other people around as well.

Nadège explains how her many friends enabled her to slowly regain her livelihood. Nadège described both people sharing resources with her as well as sharing resources with others. In this, she is a lot like Paul, who lived in the Kolonbi camp: "I can tell you that sometimes I get a gift of 50 [Haitian] dollars<sup>4</sup> [250 gourdes, around \$6 at the time] thanks to good friends, according to the way I used to live with them. Because I wasn't a stingy person. And more, God says, 'When you give you will receive.'" Both Paul and Nadège describe a situation of reciprocity (Polanyi 2001), but Paul's is more "balanced" (giving with at least a minimal expectation for getting in return—the original Kreyòl phrase attributed to the Almighty was *fòk ou rekòlte*, "You need to harvest"). Nadège is both the giver and recipient of generalized reciprocity (Sahlins 1972), in part because of a difference in status. Interestingly, Nadège's social relationships span boundaries of *kouch sosyal* (a local term nuancing "class"—best translated as status group). She acknowledges Mr. Louis, who was also a government minister who had a house near the St. Louis camp. The church brother is also someone of professional status. Her namesake's class situation is not clearly situated in Nadège's story, but one can surmise a more egalitarian sharing relationship, with sharing plates of cooked food as opposed to uncooked food rations from Nadège's religious community (see also McAlister 2013). Sending plates of food for neighbors was common practice before the earthquake.

### Long-Distance Solidarity in the Grand'Anse

The Grand'Anse is a province in the southwestern peninsula with a population of approximately 400,000. It is one of the remote provinces (see Figure 1), which until recently was a journey of twelve to eighteen hours from Port-au-Prince. Outside of the town of Jérémie, the provincial capital, the area is rural and mountainous. Villages are spread out, and subsistence level agriculture and fishing provide the main economy.

While the epicenter of the earthquake was far from the Grand'Anse, many aftershocks were felt there. Some structures were damaged, but the biggest impact was the outflow of people from Port-au-Prince. The community response was immediate and continued beyond the short-term crisis.

Jérémie and the Grand'Anse played an important role Haiti's development. In the late 1800s, Jérémie was an active port of call in the trade between the Caribbean, North America, and Europe with as many as five steamships anchored

in Jérémie Bay. Goods for Europe included hides, coffee, cacao, hardwoods, cotton, and other products. Agricultural goods shipped to Cuba included yams, rice, sugar cane, and manioc. Jérémie was known as the City of Poets, home of many of Haiti's intellectuals.

The 1915-1934 United States Occupation began the process of political and economic centralization in Port-au-Prince (Dupuy 1989; Plummer 1988; Robleto-Gonzalez 2012; Tèt Kole Ti Peyizan 1991). Until the 1960s, residents of the Grand'Anse traveled freely to Europe and around the Caribbean and Latin America. Shops brought goods from Europe until trade stopped under President François Duvalier (1957-1971). The Haitian army responded to a youth-driven rebellion against the repressive Duvalier regime with a 1964 massacre. Most well-off families were affected, and those who survived left the country. Since that time, commerce has been limited. Until recently, roads connecting Jérémie and Port-au-Prince were poor, forcing a twelve- to eighteen-hour trip.

Health infrastructure is limited. There is one government hospital for a population of 400,000, which experiences frequent staff, medication, fuel, and equipment shortages. There are multiple dispensaries in rural areas, but these face similar problems. Rural Grand'Anse has many traditional health practitioners including Matwon (traditional birth attendants), Doktè Fèy (herbalists), and traditional Vodou faith leaders, oungan and manbo.

Noted above, one survival strategy after the earthquake was to leave the capital. The Grand'Anse had the 2nd highest return migration of almost 100,000.<sup>5</sup> These numbers are clearly under estimates because as public transport estimates, they did not include people arriving on private boats, buses, trucks, or on foot, so actual migration was much higher. Most of these people were originally from the Grand'Anse or had family there.

### Migration after the Earthquake

January 17, 2010. It was relatively cold in Jérémie. The sun was rising, and smoke filled the air as dozens of people set up charcoal cooking stoves, preparing coffee and rice. While hundreds of people stood at the port entrance, a somber silence filled the air with the smoke. Trucks from all over the province were waiting. Everyone who owned a truck volunteered to transport people. Doctors, nurses, and midwives stood ready. A couple of agencies had emergency rations such as high-protein bars and water packets to hydrate the passengers.

The only large motor-driven boat to shuttle people between Jérémie and Port-au-Prince was Trois Rivières (Three Rivers). It had been making a weekly trip since 2005. This morning, Trois Rivières carried passengers fleeing the earthquake. The Waf Jeremi in Cité Soleil, a poor, often maligned community in Port-au-Prince, was a homing beacon. People's reflex was to return "home" to their provinces. The main roads were impassable as the concrete was torn up, huge boulders and slabs of rubble hurled into the path, so

Figure 1. Map of Haiti, Highlighting the Isolation of the Grand'Anse



travelling by boat was the only option at the time. The Waf Jeremi had been badly damaged by the earthquake requiring a rowboat to access the Trois Rivières, slowing the loading and limiting who could get on. The boat arrived in Jérémie after the twelve-hour overnight trip. Approximately 1,500 passengers were crowded together, standing up to save space.

The first passengers off the boat were newborn babies, carried by hand (see Figure 2). Next were the pregnant women and the ill or infirm. Those in need were triaged by nurses and Red Cross volunteers. Some were treated on the dock, others transported directly to the hospital. The process was somber, orderly, and efficient. People were fed (often rice and beans from local families), covered up in fresh clothes and blankets, received rations of sugar and hygiene kits, and loaded up in trucks to return to their families (see Figure 3). Clean drinking water was distributed, and infants were given formula. Over a hundred were sent to the hospital. Within four hours, the boat was empty, with people on trucks or in

the hospital. A second boat, the Conformity, a cement cargo ship, pulled up, carrying an additional 1,500 people, and the same process occurred. In stark contrast to Port-au-Prince, people went into homes, not tents.

In addition to yams that people sent back to feed their families, scores of people decided to take the overnight twelve-hour trip back to Port-au-Prince, hoping to find family members. Some entire families were in Port-au-Prince, seeking better educational opportunities, as the capital has most high schools and three quarters of higher education institutions. The boats continued to bring people, and as soon as the roads opened, people also started to arrive by bus, truck, and other forms of transportation. There were more buses arriving than usual, and volunteers tried to meet them and triage pregnant women and injured to the hospital.

With the addition of relatives from Port-au-Prince, families had as many as twenty people in a house. They slept on mattresses made of banana leaves or improvised sleeping

**Figure 2. Newborn Carried Off the Vessel**



Photo by Bette Gebrian

bags. Many people donated breadfruit, sweet potatoes, yams, and beans. If someone was in need, they received food and other goods from their families and community.

For people in the Grand'Anse, perhaps unlike their Port-au-Prince cousins like Remène, these sharing practices are longstanding and traditional: in general, if someone is cooking and doesn't have salt, they borrow some. It is the same with kerosene: if someone runs out, they would visit a neighbor and ask, "Mouye mèch pou mwen" (put liquid on my wick). These sharing practices were common before but even more so following the earthquake. They also share a live coal from their fire or what clothing they had with neighbors.

A census of four municipalities by Gebrian and Lewis illustrates the impact of this mass migration. The pre-earthquake population was 117,047 in 16,281 households, significantly larger households than the national average of 5. Post-earthquake migrants in this same area were 18,066 people who resided in 29 percent of the registered households (4,711). This paralleled the 20 percent increase in the Grand'Anse population estimate. The Mayor of Abricots documented an increase of 25 percent. Fifteen hundred of the increased population were children under five who required vaccinations, vitamin A, and many treatment for pneumonia and diarrhea. Many rural houses were partially or completely damaged by the earthquake as well as many subsequent tremors, including a 5.6 level earthquake in Santiago, Cuba, on February 27, which was felt in the Grand'Anse. In spite of damage to their homes, resident families took in extended family and friends. Most returnees were happy that their families' rural structures did not have cement roofs.

Most migrants stayed for the remainder of 2010, however 201 left by July and 483 left between July and August, while eleven new migrants were registered in the last six months of the year. This put a stress on the receiving households and health care providers, but the local families bore this burden with good nature and generosity. Registration of new migrant

**Figure 3. Waiting for Loved Ones at the Exit of the Jeremie Warf**

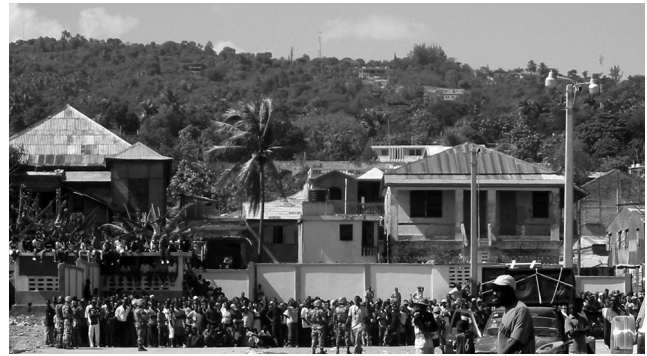


Photo by Bette Gebrian

families provided critical information for immediate and intermediate relief and development, health, and educational support. Some migrants had previously lived in the registered area and were connected with the health information already collected to provide better care and avoid unnecessary revaccination. Pregnant women were referred for prenatal care, and children under five years old were weighed. During the migration registration, family member deaths were also reported. Four hundred twenty-one deaths and death certificates were completed. Another benefit of this process to participants was having people listen to their stories and provide therapeutic support.

The migrants were more likely to be working in the Grand'Anse as merchants (34%) and masons (7%) than local residents: merchants (10%), masons (1%). Local residents were more likely to be farmers (37%) than migrants (10%). Ninety-five percent of migrants had been employed in Port-au-Prince, but 71 percent of them were not working in the Grand'Anse. Migration placed women at a distinct disadvantage for employment in the Grand'Anse: while 95 percent were working in Port-au-Prince, only 22 percent of women compared to 57 percent of men were employed in the Grand'Anse. Similarly, most children had been in school in Port-au-Prince, but 40 percent of girls compared to 67 percent of boys were enrolled in school in the Grand'Anse.

People's social ties played a role in their survival and reintegration; migrants who had travelled back to the Grand'Anse (three times or more since they left) were more connected to family and more likely to find work. Common responses from focus groups explained that these individuals "were used to life here," "have more family," and "can generate more income from farming." A woman from a remote village said, "Before January 12th, it was better for merchants to go to Port-au-Prince. After the 12th, things were not good at all for anyone. Before you could find someone to help you, and now you don't find anyone easily."

Participants were asked about why they would return to Port-au-Prince, and the most common responses were

“there is no work in the Grand’Anse,” “I just can’t stay here,” “poverty is worse in the countryside than in Port-au-Prince,” “we’ve heard there’s work in Port-au-Prince,” “we don’t live well in the Grand’Anse,” and “we’ve heard things are getting better in Port-au-Prince.” In terms of what would keep young people (ages fifteen to twenty-five) in the Grand’Anse, education (secondary/professional/trade and university) was the major priority, followed by work. This was similar to findings in Schuller’s Port-au-Prince study: of 458 people in a 2011 study of IDPs who moved to the country’s capital, 222 (48.5%) left the provinces for economic reasons, and 128 people (27.9%) left because of schools.

Immediately following the earthquake, three things happened. Through a variety of sources, funds were secured for immediate action. First, food was distributed to families who had received many people from Port-au-Prince, based on established infrastructure. Second, by April, the registration of migrants was funded, becoming the foundation for all other future interventions. Third, a local NGO was able to use the migrant census to secure funding to assist about 100 women employed as street vendors in Port-au-Prince who had returned. NGO staff asked rural leaders what type of goods the market ladies had experience selling. The NGO used this list to put together allotments of wares and distribute them to help the women establish a business in the Grand’Anse. These included pots and pans, beauty supplies, recho (charcoal cooking grills), caldrons, rice, beans and oil to cook and sell on the street, big bales of pèpè (used clothing), shoes, and goats.

The full extent of the earthquake’s impact on the countryside has never been fully documented. Almost everyone lost someone in the Port-au-Prince area, and people all over the country took in relatives, including distant ones with whom they had little previous contact. It was a communal impact and a communal response. In one small NGO employing about 350 Haitians, each staff lost at least one relative; the average was two, and one lost twenty-two family members. They also took in an average of five migrants from Port-au-Prince.

The community response to the immediate evacuation and longer-term support of family members by people already living in poverty is testimony to the collective spirit and resilience of Haitian people. The responses described here are examples of the ways people helped each other. This was to become even more important in a disaster that attracted far less foreign aid.

### **Tables Turned: Hurricane Matthew**

Hurricane Matthew touched down on the southwestern shores of Haiti the evening of October 4, 2016, blowing through the peninsula over the next day before heading to the Northwest province and the eastern tip of Cuba. Over 80 percent of structures and all of the crops and fruit trees were destroyed. According to official statistics, 546 people were confirmed dead, and 128 people were missing. One thousand sixty-three schools were damaged, affecting 490,000 children. In all, 2.1 million people were affected by the hurricane.

Matthew was destined to be a forgotten disaster, in the shadow of Haiti’s 2010 earthquake and overshadowed by the United States elections. With official UN appeals at \$139 million as of November,<sup>6</sup> reaching \$291.3 in 2017, pledges were less than two percent of aid promised following Haiti’s 2010 disaster. And that only refers to pledges: as of July 4, 2017, nine months after the hurricane, only 19.2 percent was committed.<sup>7</sup> Aside from *Miami Herald* reporter Jacqueline Charles, there was almost no international news follow-up.<sup>8</sup>

Two days after Hurricane Matthew, Jean-Luc, a thirty-five-year-old mechanic coming from Les Cayes rode his dirt bike alone over the mountains to the Grand’Anse. Traversing mudslides and downed trees, he was among the first to witness an entire roof on the road. The normally 1½ hour trip took 2½ hours. No larger vehicles, including regular motorcycles, could have made this trip.

Jean-Luc described a scene that looked like a bomb had exploded. Trees were twisted, then ripped off their trunks; avocados littered the ground; coconuts scattered, their fronds sheared off the trees; crumpled tin lodged in broken branches. The Ministry of Agriculture estimated that the tree cover was reduced by 33 to 51 percent including 74 percent of breadfruit trees.<sup>9</sup> Centuries-old cottonwood (mapou) and tropical mahogany trees lay on their sides, completely uprooted. Plantains and bananas, staples of Haitian families, were down and would not recover for 9+ months after replanting. Cows and goats were dead or dying.

Though repeated cell phone texts warned of the coming Category 4 storm, urging people to take cover and get away from the ocean to higher ground, many families stayed put, worried about their crops, often planted in more remote areas. Civil agents and community health workers traveled on foot from house to house to warn families to move to buildings (churches and schools) with cement walls, however most people said they had heard these warnings before, and it usually wasn’t that bad. Some families who lived closer to roads and town were already out in their secondary *jaden* (gardens) in the highest mountains to tend to their crops. They were killed by the storm, and their bodies were never recovered.

The 145-mph winds made confetti out of leaves and jammed them into small spaces. Concrete buildings were a chartreuse color from the pounding of vegetation and salt water. Damage was extensive because most of the *komin* (municipalities) have a boundary with the sea. Eighty percent of the Grand’Anse has been classified by Haiti’s Ministry of Public Health and Population (MSPP in the original French) as “difficult to access.”<sup>10</sup> In an evaluation of eighteen localities judged to be “hard-to-reach,” 98 percent of houses were severely damaged or destroyed.<sup>11</sup>

There are countless stories of families running to neighbors, people packed into small bathrooms since they were the only cement structures around or huddling beneath what was left of their thatched roof until the winds stopped. Then six weeks of rain added to their suffering and hunger. Jean-Luc arrived in Jérémie covered in mud looking for his family. He said, “My uncle was on crutches and could not do the work of cutting branches and large trees or moving all of the tin and garbage that landed on his land. So, I stayed on.” Two years later, he remained, having started two businesses.

A long-standing church with 600 members was destroyed. The pastor took several families into his cement house during and after the hurricane. The church was slowly rebuilt. Five tarps covering the roof made church services possible immediately, with service time changed to 5:00 A.M. so people could avoid the hot sun (or pouring rain).

In general, people who lost their clothing and household items were given some by those who had not lost everything. Families shared the food they had. Jolienne and her four children lived in an antiquated house built by her father; she owned the house and the land. Jolienne supported her family working as a seamstress and teacher's aide in the local nursery school. As the hurricane intensified, the house started to collapse, so the family ran across the road to a neighbor's cement house. Jolienne's family lost all their clothing, important papers, kitchen items, shoes, and school books from the hurricane. They suffered additional losses from a few young men who were scavenging the destroyed houses during the storm. Jolienne's church mobilized to help her: an elder provided clothing and food, another gave tarps, and a team built a wooden frame to attach the tarps so the family could return home.

Eighty-five-year-old Maddy survived Hurricane Hazel in 1954 with two babies. She remembers the terrible famine and walking eight hours to Jérémie to put her babies in St. Antoine Hospital so they could be fed. The damage from Hazel was so extensive that international NGOs such as CARE<sup>12</sup> and Catholic Relief Services came to Haiti for the first time and stayed to provide long-term relief and recovery support. Maddy lived in a modest home on land she owned. She had worked as a market vendor buying produce from local women and walking from market to market to sell. By age seventy-five, she stopped working. She uses a cane to get around and walks to a nearby church.

When Hurricane Matthew's winds began, part of her tin roof blew away with a piece hitting her head. She ran to a neighbor's house where she lived for a month. She was able to buy some cement and received a donation of tin, nails, and cement from a local NGO, the Grand'Anse Health and Development Association. Neighborhood men, grateful for Maddy's years of generosity and sharing cooked food, worked in a collectivist work team (*kòve*) to put up a roof frame from found wood, nailing tin on top and using the cement for a wall.

With a much lower media profile, and around two percent of the aid, Hurricane Matthew inspired much less attention than the earthquake. As this article is being written, the response is still ongoing. Following the hurricane, especially in the hard-to-reach areas of the remote Grand'Anse province, among the most important sources of aid were community members themselves.

## Policy Implications

Ethnographic research offers rare glimpses into actual survival and solidarity following disasters. Haitian sociologist and NGO professional Chenet Jean-Baptiste (2012) offers a sense of the magnitude of the solidarity.

First responders were people's extended families in rural Haiti, more impoverished and with fewer economic and educational opportunities. Instead of using seeds for harvest, rural Haitians in the Grand'Anse and elsewhere fed their urban cousins. A methodology could be developed to identify specific food stocks, cooking oil, clothing, and dry goods that rural communities in Grand'Anse and elsewhere donated to Port-au-Prince survivors. This would require a census, like the one conducted in four municipalities discussed in this article. This methodology could also identify and value people's in-kind contributions. Even if reimbursed at Haiti's minimum wage, this would be far more effective than the much more expensive international NGO employees, and certainly expats. Immediately following the 2010 earthquake, it was not uncommon for foreign specialists to receive \$1,000 per day.

In Karade, an IDP camp in Port-au-Prince, leaders were frustrated with a particular agency. Although the population appreciated the hygiene kits this agency provided, the committee requested higher priority items. "They came with only two bars of soap, two tubes of toothpaste. Do we really need those things? No, we already had those things. They're supposed to give to you what you don't have. You can't always brush your teeth, you need food, too! Every day, it's always bathe, bathe, and bathe!" Many people, certainly all committee members at a meeting with Schuller, interpreted the foreigners' focus on hygiene as paternalistic, even racist. Sociologist Ilionor Louis (2012) termed these humanitarian practices infantilizing. Residents suggested "useful" jobs, not like most cash-for-work in Port-au-Prince, which was widely criticized as demeaning the value of work (Ayiti Kale Je 2010). Residents put two and two together: because camp residents needed housing, why not give jobs to residents who had that skill? "Because people have different kinds of talents here. There are bricklayers, plumbers, carpenters. Giving jobs to us will enable many people to earn a living, to pay for their children's school." People also pointed out that the camp had nurses or schoolteachers. More than falling on deaf ears, this idea of self-help was anathema to the international NGO, as Karade leaders noted: "As soon as a population says that we don't need what you're giving to us, that we need something else instead, they leave. They're gone forever!"

An example of a "useful" job creation after the earthquake was in the Grand'Anse, far away from the spotlight. An international NGO contracted with a local organization with decades of experience and relationships with the community. Using the census data collected, and particularly identifying people in need of work, the community decided to rebuild roads and build foot bridges, long-term "development" projects prioritized by the community. The community-led cash-for-work project started in July and was planned for six months, but unfortunately, it was cut short by Hurricane Tomas and the cholera epidemic in early November. This program provided employment for 3,600 new migrants (half women) in four *seksyon kominal* (rural districts). About four teams of twenty-five people were employed for two weeks at any given

time. Then another team took over the work, using simple hand tools (wheel barrows, axes, picks, shovels, and mallets). Through this initiative, 54 km of roads were improved, including planting vetiver or bamboo along the road sides to prevent erosion. This was a major community initiative with visible and lasting results in terms of roads and family income.

When cash-for-work funds expired, communities fundraised to complete the projects themselves. However important, this small project could not address the two major push factors away from rural areas: educational and job opportunities. A strategy of development that incorporated jobs and education in the Grand'Anse and not just rebuilding in Port-au-Prince might have resulted in more migrants staying. Further, supporting this dynamic could have reversed the rural exodus that swelled Port-au-Prince, rendering it more vulnerable to disasters in the first place. In addition to the lack of opportunities in the Grand'Anse, returning migrants cited international aid as another reason to return to Port-au-Prince.

A closer look at this data shows that bonds to family and village of origin were important. Employment opportunities were more available to those who had been back and forth between Port-au-Prince and the Grand'Anse: 70 percent of those who had visited three times, compared to 30 percent for those who visited less. If Haiti had been built back better with a decentralized model of job creation, it could have reduced the rate of return to Port-au-Prince, but it never materialized.

## Conclusion

The stories shared in this article are definitely not unique. They suggest that a closer ethnographic examination of disasters reveals a complex set of human behavior, which includes solidarity, self-help, mutual aid, and community organization (Vélez-Vélez and Villarubia-Mendoza 2018; Zhang 2016). Ethnographic research is poised to take this analysis further. A methodology like the one employed in the Grand'Anse after the earthquake could be replicated to document and quantify local communities' participation as "first responders" to disasters: how many material goods were given? What were they? How many people contributed their time and capacity—skills and resources like transport and gas? How many people were sheltered, and what would have been the cost of doing so within the international humanitarian effort such as the IDP camps? Seen in this light, it is possible—indeed, likely—that Haitian people's contribution even outstripped the \$16 billion foreign response. This is significant for at least a couple of reasons: first, it acknowledges Haitian people's role, correcting a bias and erasure. If local communities—even in a resource-poor country like Haiti—contribute at least as much as foreign humanitarian agencies, they deserve to have a seat at the table.

Secondly, local communities know better what material and human support to offer. Preparation for future disasters requires consideration of the resources (human, organizational, geographic) of these communities. This would include documenting all the existing community organizations, services, skills, and capacities. Local initiatives can be supported, locally

identified priorities can be addressed, and aid can be more effective, culturally appropriate, equitably distributed, and with fewer negative effects. One example in the Grand'Anse following the earthquake was supporting street vendors, restocking their inventory with specific goods actually valued in the market. Through a concerted effort by several women's NGOs following the 2010 earthquake, there was some consultation in Haiti's Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) documenting women's gendered needs. However, only a few NGOs included Haitian women or even those in the Haitian Diaspora. The resulting Gender Action Plan was, while detailed, lacking in culturally specific, experience-near, intersectional solutions. And most of the ideas remain un-implemented.

These collectivist traditions were in full force after Hurricane Matthew; however, the disaster affected the entire area, making first responders survivors and vice-versa. Communities' experience after Matthew thus challenges the dichotomy between "survivor" and "responder" (Vélez-Vélez and Villarubia-Mendoza 2018). People like Remène and Jolienne were both at once: while they were recipients of generosity, they also contributed what they could. Some like Nadège and Maddy lost everything, at least their material possessions. But they could still activate their social network and their community leadership to help themselves and others. People who are differently situated, because of access to education, outside contacts, or material resources, might have more "resilience" than others, but they are still "vulnerable." As the messy local details attest, particularly following a catastrophe such as Matthew, one who is a "responder" today may also be a "survivor" tomorrow, and vice versa. Understanding this, humanitarian agencies could implement more flexible support responses, centering on human capacity and beginning with the understanding that local people are not only victims, but they can contribute in meaningful ways.

Reconstructing community contributions might still be possible, and it would certainly be a lesson for future disaster policy and practice elsewhere. This would be a more constructive conversation than the sensationalist "where did the money go?" journalism. We still hold hope that another Haiti is possible. However, to paraphrase activists at the United States Social Forum, another way to conceive disaster response is necessary.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup><https://population.un.org/wpp/dataquery/>

<sup>2</sup><https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ny.gdp.pcap.cd>

<sup>3</sup>Her journalist/agronomist husband, Jean-Leopold Dominique, was murdered in 2000, in a high-profile and as-yet uninvestigated case.

<sup>4</sup>There is no such thing as a "Haitian" dollar; the concept refers to the many years of the gourde being fixed as five to one United States dollar, before Leslie Delatour floated the currency in 1987.

<sup>5</sup><https://reliefweb.int/sites/rreliefweb.int/files/resources/5EF74442E EF38FE1852576CE00826DB4-map.pdf>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.usaid.gov/matthew/fy17/fs14>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/humanitarianfundingoverview-4july2017.pdf>

<sup>8</sup><http://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/haiti/article161397653.html>, <http://www.bradenton.com/news/nation-world/article161670898.html>

<sup>9</sup>MARNDR. Rapport d'évaluation rapide des pertes et dommages agricoles causés par l'ouragan Mathew du 03 au 05 octobre 2016. Octobre 27, 2016.

<sup>10</sup>UNICEF. DSGA—Etat des lieux de la situation du département: Rapport final République d'Haïti Ministère de la Santé Publique et de la Population UNICEF Octobre 2011.

<sup>11</sup>Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (United Nations). OCHA. Évaluation rapid des localités difficilements accessibles (hard to reach) Département des Grand'Anse Haïti. Février 2017.

<sup>12</sup><https://reliefweb.int/report/haiti/care-international-calls-humanitarian-access-haiti>

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