



## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# “Maintaining hope for a better future”: An interview with Dr. Crystal Felima

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## Abstract

While anthropologists have played roles speaking out for marginalized groups, formalized to combat Antisemitism, racism, and xenophobia, they have also aided in the marginalization and oppression of communities, justified colonialism, and put the communities they have studied at risk. In recent decades, anthropologists have rethought the way research is conducted, presented, and justified to reduce harm to communities. Despite these shifts, anthropological training has been slow to include activist work by women of color and other marginalized people, leaving anthropologists-in-training with limited concrete guidance on how to apply their anthropological lens to social justice. Addressing this gap, this article centering a Black feminist analysis offers an interview conducted between anthropology students and a professor of anthropology, giving insights into how anthropological thought can be applied to activism and advocacy. Centering Black feminism is not only important to redress historical marginalization within the discipline. By centering the lives of marginalized people within an intersectional lens, Black feminist analysis provides a mandate to rethink theoretical models, such as political ecology, the dominant frame anthropologists have used to address disasters and climate change. Also importantly, centering Black women's bodies and embodied experience uncovers the urgent necessity for self-care during fieldwork. Prof. Felima embodies both these challenges, and offers candid advice to students, inspiring a two-way dialogue.

## INTRODUCTION

Anthropology has a complex and ambivalent past: while anthropologists have played roles speaking out for marginalized groups, formalized to combat Antisemitism, racism, and xenophobia (Stocking, 1979), they have also aided in the marginalization and oppression of communities, justified colonialism, and put the communities they have studied at risk (Asad, 1979; Deloria, 1988 (1969); Said, 1979). However, in recent decades, anthropologists have worked to rethink the way research is conducted, presented, and justified in an attempt to reduce the amount of harm done to communities (Allen & Jobson, 2016; Burton, 2015; Harrison, 1991; Rosa & Bonilla, 2017). While this is an important step, for many it is not enough. Instead of simply reducing harm, anthropologists have a moral duty—and the theoretical basis—to see the mosaic of issues as interrelated, to practice radical empathy and solidarity (Schuller and foreword by Cynthia McKinney, 2021), and to step up as an advocate for marginalized communities (Low & Merry, 2010; Willow & Yotebieng, 2020). Unfortunately, this “advocacy anthropology” remains under-discussed in academic circles (Hale, 2008), and certainly work by women of color and other marginalized people (Berry et al., 2017; Cox, 2015; Williams, 2009), leaving anthropologists-in-training with limited concrete guidance on how to apply their anthropological lens to social justice. In an attempt to remedy this educational gap, this article centering a Black feminist analysis provides a transcript from an interview conducted between anthropology students and a professor of anthropology, giving insight into how anthropological thought can be applied to activism and advocacy.

Centering Black feminism is not only important to redress historical marginalization within the discipline (Bolles, 2013; Cox, 2018; Gilliam, 2001; McClaurin, 2001). By centering the lives of the most marginalized within an intersectional lens, Black feminist analysis provides a mandate to rethink theoretical models, such as political ecology, the dominant frame anthropologists and other social scientists have used to address disasters and climate change. Also importantly, centering Black women’s bodies and embodied experience uncovers the urgent necessity for self-care during fieldwork (e.g., Berry et al., 2017; Cox, 2015; Williams, 2009). Prof. Felima embodies both these challenges, and offers candid advice to students, inspiring a two-way dialogue.

On November 16, 2021, students at Northern Illinois University’s “Anthropology and Contemporary World Problems” class were fortunate to have the chance to interview Dr. Crystal Felima regarding her personal experiences working in the anthropological field as an activist and advocate. Modeling the importance within applied/activist ethnography of active listening, at least temporarily suspending hierarchies of status and power, the conversation becomes a true dialogue with students sharing their experiences. Dr. Felima worked with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)<sup>1</sup> until she was hired as an assistant professor at the University of Kentucky, where she currently works. Dr. Felima has conducted fieldwork in Haiti and Puerto Rico, focusing on environmental justice and the social construction of vulnerability as it relates to ‘natural’ disasters and climate change. What are called “natural disasters” around the world are not as natural as media accounts encourage us to believe (Blaikie et al., 1994; Oliver-Smith, 1996; Quarantelli, 1998). There are many different ways humans have shaped and instigated natural disasters. One specific example, as talked about by Dr. Felima in her first article, is that disasters can be caused by social vulnerabilities integrated in human systems. These actions have made a profound impact on the communities that have taken the brunt force of such results. Dr. Felima is also the co-editor for the *Catastrophes in Context* series<sup>2</sup> and has recently been elected to the board of the Haitian Studies Association<sup>3</sup> for her work. In the interview below, with questions written and transcribed by Schuller’s students, Dr. Felima discusses her studies and how she balances anthropological work with activist work.

The questions also reference her first published article from the *Journal of Haitian Studies* (Felima, 2009) and a chapter from her dissertation (Felima, 2017) regarding reflexivity and positionality.

**Did you always want to work in the field of anthropology, and if not, how did you gain interest in it?**

I did not pursue anthropology as an undergraduate student. I majored in African American Studies as an undergrad at the University of South Carolina, and then I went to Cornell University for my Master's in Africana Studies. For my Master's, I wanted to gain a multidisciplinary perspective to approach my research on vulnerability and disaster risk in Haiti. During my graduate studies, I yearned for a broader approach to further my research. I talked to my former professors at my alma mater at South Carolina. They said, "You know, you should consider pursuing anthropology because the methodology will provide you with what you need." With their advice, I considered anthropology. I also researched other disciplines, such as sociology and geography. But after looking more into anthropology and what I wanted to accomplish with my research, I realized anthropology offered what I needed. So, I pursued a Ph.D. in anthropology at the University of Florida.

For me, I came to anthropology based on methodology. Anthropology took my multidisciplinary perspective to the transdisciplinary perspective. A transdisciplinary perspective allows you to incorporate Indigenous and local perspectives and insights to help you investigate and understand broader questions about specific inquiries a researcher pursues. Due to my interests in vulnerability and risk, I wanted to know how local people perceived their risk, and I needed to understand their experiences regarding disasters. So, the methodology drew me to this field. In many ways, anthropology has advanced my research questions and enriched my work on disasters, and not in a technocratic way. I can integrate people's experiences and voices within my research, so I appreciate anthropology for that.

**How did you first start thinking about the intersection between anthropology and climate disasters/climate change?**

As I stated, my journey to anthropology started when I was a MA student. I had research questions that required me to go to Haiti instead of relying on textual analysis. I had to figure out: What discipline allows me to go to Haiti for a long time and hopefully get it paid? And I found that anthropology would support that. Conducting fieldwork and participant observation helped me understand that disasters and the impacts of climate change emerge from processes. And for anyone to understand hazards, risk, and vulnerability, you need to be immersed in those processes. The immersion allows you to survey society's political, socio-cultural, environmental, and historical issues. Fieldwork also provides a holistic perspective to understand processes and structures. I think, for me, anthropology provided that for me: the level of engagement I needed to do for my research.

**What unique perspective do you think anthropology offers to the topic of climate change, and do you think an anthropological perspective should be included when implementing policies for climate change action?**

Those unique perspectives would be anthropology's methods of ethnography and fieldwork. Anthony Oliver-Smith and Suzanne Hoffman stated that anthropology's contribution to disaster studies is using ethnographic methods to conduct research (see Hoffman & Oliver-Smith, 2002; Oliver-Smith & Hoffman 1999). I think anthropologists provide a different layer of context to climate change and disaster research. For example, an anthropologist would approach disasters differently than journalists. Both professions may connect with

survivors and witness the aftermath of a disaster. But anthropologists link their witnessing and observations to theory. Anthropologists can talk to people to collect their perspectives and insights *and* engage ideas and concepts to explore topics such as climate-related risks, environmental disasters, and displacement.

So, should the anthropological perspective be included in climate action? Absolutely. More anthropologists and other social scientists must participate in the conversation because it's so important. As I stated, climate change, disaster, or development research can be technocratic, scientific, and void of people. When social scientists are part of the conversation, you can humanize research and studies. You add depth that is needed. I think that was one thing that was very frustrating for me during my Master's program. I read so much stuff and thought, "What? Where are the people here? How do you integrate people? How do you ensure that you won't reproduce statistics?" During undergrad, I read about the casualties of Hurricane Jeanne [2004] and other hurricane events. You see numbers of those who died; however, there's no context. I think social scientists help bridge this gap in context.

### **What are your thoughts on COP26 (the Glasgow Climate Change Conference)?<sup>4</sup> Was anything of actual value accomplished?**

I guess the conversations were valuable; we will see. These conferences are great for discussion, but we must determine: What is the action plan? What commitments are followed through? What does shared responsibility look like? I'm teaching an anthropology of environment class, and we discussed this. It's great that we have leaders in climate conversations [specifically G20 member countries]; however, I hope they are intentional in climate action and policy. I wonder if these leaders are the right people to have at these conferences. I also consider if delegates from small islands nations of the Caribbean and Pacific are taken seriously.

I think I have a little bit of this eco-pessimism (e.g., Desrochers & Szurmak, 2019). I feel slightly pessimistic about the leaders at the forefront of climate change policy and action, and I am unsure what will come from these talks and large meetings on climate change. We all know that climate change efforts must be collaborative and participatory. These efforts must include people who will bear the brunt of climate change impacts; they must be part of this conversation and, honestly, need to be the loudest voices. So, despite my eco-pessimistic attitude, I hope we will be more proactive.

### **How do you manage the distress and sadness that can come from studying people and natural disasters? How do you maintain hope for a better future?**

Therapy. Yes, therapy.

Studying in Haiti was very difficult for me. One reason is my cultural ties; my father is from Haiti. When you're in Haiti, you may see a lot of suffering. Of course, Haitian art, dance, protest, and activism are found throughout the country. However, sometimes it can be challenging to be in Haiti because you may witness trauma or suffering in real time. When I witnessed flooding in Haiti, I also had to recognize my privilege as a global citizen. I am a Ph.D. holder with an American passport, and I could take a flight back to the United States whenever I wanted to when I was in Haiti. Talking to my advisor and friends helped me navigate my feelings in Haiti.

The second part of the question is tough for me to answer. A couple of months ago, the president was assassinated.<sup>5</sup> Now, gangs<sup>6</sup> have caused insecurities across the country—specifically in Port au Prince. Yesterday, I told my brother in Cap-Haïtien, "I want to come to visit." He said, "Okay, cool, Cap-Haïtien's okay; the northern part of Haiti is not as crazy as the capital." So, that was reassuring. But I think when people think about Haiti, they do think

of suffering. And as someone who studies in Haiti, it can be very stressful to the point you don't know what to do as someone who is witnessing, but not experiencing, suffering. You try to maintain hope. However, as someone has cultural ties to Haiti, it's very difficult in some situations. So, therapy has been great for me.

I think more anthropologists who research disasters and ecological crises need to have more conversations about managing the stress and emotions experienced when witnessing suffering and trauma.

**How do you negotiate talking about the global scale of things while also looking at individual stories? You've mentioned that specific stories and individual narratives are very important for offering this human perspective. How do you manage both of them? On top of that, do you find that individual stories ever get dismissed as isolated cases?**

I recognize the individual and collective voices in my research. I don't see individual stories being dismissed. In my dissertation, I discussed the collective and individual experiences of suffering. These experiences were understood by my research participants, who ranged in age, occupation, and socioeconomic background. Global experiences shape local experiences, such as personal trauma and community suffering. I think about the collective narrative of suffering in Haiti. From my research and discussions I had in Haiti, I found that there's a shared sense of collective suffering or trauma that people experience in Haiti. In some ways, to even be Haitian, you need to know what suffering is and how it operates in Haiti. I soon thought about my positionality as a daughter of my Haitian father. From my fieldwork, I soon realized that I am not from Haiti because of the lack of collective experience I did not have. Diaspora, I am; however, Haitian, I do not know if I am. Sometimes, I heard, "Oh yeah, you're not necessarily Haitian because you are from the United States" (see also Bernard, 2013; Semé, 2013). So, I say in terms of individual and collective stories, I privilege both because I can learn about the macro and micro-structures that shape risk and people's experiences. In addition, I can also know more about myself as an anthropologist with cultural ties to Haiti.

Conducting research can be an eventful experience. During informal conversations I would have with people about their flood experiences, it was common for people to join in the storytelling. Someone could be walking by, carrying a basket of food on their head, or rolling a wheelbarrow and could overhear someone narrating their flood experience. The person would come to the conversation and listen and join the discussion. "Oh, this happened to me," they said. So now we have this individual story transformed into a collective storytelling process. So, in some ways, I can't separate the individual from the collective. The personal experience provides greater context to these different global structures. People discussed how the US government is intricately a part of the Haitian state processes. Folks discussed economic insecurities. People also shared how they saw during protests people having signs saying, "China, come save us."<sup>7</sup>

So, there's not necessarily a process of negotiating between individual and collective narratives... or switching between the two because they're integrated. Other disciplines may not value or privilege individual stories, but narratives are like gold for anthropologists. You receive so much rich knowledge just by talking to people. You won't necessarily receive this from a reading book like some of the forefathers of anthropology, armchair anthropologists, did before fieldwork. So overall, individual and collective stories are so important. I hope that makes sense.

**Thank you. It does make sense. Obviously, Haiti is a particular case, and in your dissertation, you talk about Haitian exceptionalism (see, for example, Clitandre,**

**2011; Trouillot, 1990) as a counter-discourse. Can you expand on what that means, and how is it related or implemented in your work, particularly about climate and disasters?**

When I think about Haitian exceptionalism, I consider how I represent Haiti in my writing, teaching, and research. I ask, “How do we ensure we don’t exceptionalize Haiti as a country where everyone eats dirt cookies or is suffering?”<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, I do avoid romanticizing Haiti as this rich, cultural utopia with African elements. It is important to consider how you share the complete story of Haiti. Yes, there are moments of suffering, but there also are counternarratives that provide additional context to the multiple experiences in Haiti (cf. Ulysse, 2015). Everyone in Haiti isn’t wallowing in sorrow. It’s common to see people protesting inequalities or enjoying their time participating in festivals and cultural events. There is beautiful art and delicious food in Haiti. So, for me, I think balancing out that narrative is important. I am conscious of my writing, speaking, and representation of Haiti. I don’t talk about insecurity and violence all the time. Balancing the narrative is a delicate task.

I would also say that discussing hope is also a delicate task. It is a term for interrogation, mainly when we’re talking about Haiti. From my fieldwork, some people in Haiti shared, “I don’t have hope.” As an anthropologist, I think it is important to recognize this sentiment. So instead of thinking about “hope” in Haiti, I think about those dominant counternarratives. In my dissertation, I call it “vernacular agency” because I consider all of the public ways in which people resist and protest in their everyday lives. Agency must be a part of the disaster narrative because disasters are processes. Narratives highlight structure and agency—this agency and self-determination may be visible or unnoticed.

**In your dissertation, you talked about your position not necessarily as a native anthropologist—I think you use the term “halfie” (Abu-Lughod, 1987). Do you ever feel judged for studying in a place that you have personal connections to? Is your objectivity ever questioned? And what are the strengths or drawbacks in studying a place that you have connections to?**

No, I don’t feel judged for studying in Haiti because anthropology as a discipline recognizes that that’s what many of us do; some of us research our community. It is not unheard of for a queer anthropologist to develop a research project related to a topic focused on the LGBT+ community. Many anthropologists identifying as women have projects on gender and women’s issues. So, for me, at this time, I think the discipline does not judge anthropologists for studying communities they’re part of.

Regarding objectivity—and I don’t know how Mark teaches this—but I teach my students that it’s okay not to feel like you have to be objective. In my research, I say I’m not objective at all. This whole idea of me separating my personal opinions or feelings from my work is very difficult for me because I’m studying in Haiti, and it has real implications for my current family members in Haiti. I have my siblings, sister, nieces and nephews, and cousins in Haiti. So, no, I don’t remain objective. In my research, I share my data, interpretations, and feelings. Some anthropologists with the “you have to be objective” stance may judge my work. However, my research lens is based on the traditions of Black feminist theory. Black feminist anthropology (McClaurin, 2001) and decolonization of anthropology (Harrison, 1997, 2008) allow me to center my feelings and positionality. I can consider reflexivity, which is essential to my research questions.

My research framing that avoids reifying and perpetuating stereotypes of Haiti reflects my cultural sensitivity and personal connection to Haiti. And I think that’s okay. I recognize my lens, and research goals may be very different from someone else. I teach my students

that depending on their research site and topic, they may have a reflexive lens. That is okay, and it's okay to acknowledge and recognize our positionality. More anthropologists highlight their positionality in their research to offer additional context, which is vital. I think taking an anthropological approach to research your community is great. Your questions may differ from someone else's who shares no cultural or social ties to the community; however, different perspectives and lenses provide a rich opportunity to document the human experience.

**You just said that you have very strong relations to Haiti, obviously because your family is there. In your dissertation, you stated that you often become perplexed about your role and moral duty. Do you ever feel like you're not doing enough? And if you do, how do you navigate those feelings? How do you navigate the balance of the moral call to activism with your anthropological practice?**

Well, yes. I feel like I'm not doing enough. I think to myself: What else should I be doing? Is writing and teaching sufficient? Should I be working for an NGO to support initiatives and projects in Haiti? These are some of the questions I think about often. Even with the idea of working with an NGO, I wonder if I genuinely want to be a part of that NGO machine in Haiti. So yes, I have a variety of questions that I ask myself about what my role should be or what more I can do. I try not to be so hard on myself, but I constantly grapple with the thought of doing more.

**Another question about your role: How have narratives or interviews shaped your work, and what valuable insights and tips have you learned from them that you think will be important for student researchers to know?**

Narratives are the highlights of my work because that's how I learn about the human experience. In my dissertation, there is a particular disaster narrative from Manoucheka, and she shared how she did not have her birth certificates for her kids because they became wet due to the floods. I thought, "I didn't even think about that!" You won't capture this information if you only focus on the hazard or a disaster. You must document people's experiences and understand how these experiences speak to structures and agency. If a parent does not have their children's birth certificates months after a hazard, does this offer insights into the processes of the local government? Are there any administrative and bureaucratic issues that prevent people from getting important documents after flooding?

If you are interested in doing an honors research project, I encourage you to collect narratives and interviews. You would need some training, however. For example, I developed a summer undergraduate research project and took three students to Puerto Rico<sup>9</sup> to conduct research with me post Hurricane Maria. We stayed in Puerto Rico for four weeks collecting narratives. I first spent one week teaching them anthropological methods, disaster anthropology, and the impacts of Hurricane Maria. We also reviewed various issues: trauma, corruption, citizenship, and climate change. My students had to consider how to collect interviews and narratives on a post-disaster site. There's a method to it. For example, you have to back off if you interview people who don't want to be interviewed. You will learn social cues to know if someone is uncomfortable before, during, or after an interview.

So, I encourage students to take courses on methods and ethics. It is critical to learn how to do and navigate research. But importantly, if *you* feel uncomfortable, *you* may have to pull back because you may experience someone crying during your interview. When I was doing research with Mark after Hurricane Matthew, I interviewed a woman. We were just talking about NGOs, and then she pivoted to talk about Hurricane Matthew. She started crying as she narrated her experience of loss after the hurricane. I began to tear up because I empathized with her.

So, if you're interested in disaster anthropology, I think it requires training. While this is rewarding work, you *will* feel overwhelmed and need to learn how to manage your feelings regarding what you witness and document.

**Moving on, you focus on international affairs and stories from other countries. How do you think we as students at NIU can apply anthropological thought to local climate change initiatives?**

Your application will depend on what you want to find out or what you want to do. From an applied perspective, you must consider specific questions related to the community. How do climate change initiatives impact communities? Who benefits? Who are at a disadvantage? Did the local community participate in these initiatives? Sometimes there are conversations about climate action, but we must consider who is at the table and who is invited to develop and lead these projects. Applying anthropological knowledge requires thinking about the community, local voices, collaboration, and partnership. You must also consider a cost-benefit analysis of a climate action project: consider the benefits, disadvantages, or risks shaping the human experience and life outcomes.

**In your article “Haiti’s Disproportionate Casualties After Environmental Disasters” (Felima, 2009) you mentioned several key factors that created vulnerability in the Haitian population. Do you see many of the same factors affecting the population of Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina and the more recent Hurricane Ida?**

No, not necessarily because the factors mentioned in that article are very particular to Haiti. As a disaster anthropologist, I need to contextualize vulnerability and risk by considering the specific factors that impact a community or population. Due to the historical, cultural, geographic, socioeconomic, and political differences, I do not see the same factors. In the United States, institutions like FEMA, the American Red Cross, or even local community organizations provide individual and public assistance in times of need. These institutions and agencies make up an established machine in terms of disaster management. Also, in the United States, people can buy insurance to help mitigate the consequences of disasters and emergencies.

Haiti is a different case. I think of Haiti by drawing from Robert Fatton (2014), who talks about Haiti being an “outer periphery.” Significant differences exist between Haiti and Louisiana, so I wouldn't put Louisiana in the same context. Are there vulnerabilities and risks that impact people, whether it's due to environmental racism or environmental inequalities? Absolutely. But we must acknowledge that different contexts, structures, and vulnerabilities exist... across geographic locations and populations. I am always interested to learn more about what others may think of the connections.

**You talked about giving some tips for anthropological research and how to get narratives. What other tips or tricks do you have for people that want to go into the anthropological field to do anthropological research?**

One tip is just to be flexible; anthropological research can change. When you start your research, you usually have an idea of what you want to do. However, while you're researching or out in the field, you may develop different thoughts, or another knowledge is revealed that you previously did not think of. You may need to adapt during fieldwork because sometimes things do not go as planned. You may have a mapped-out research plan, but remember your plans and objectives may shift. So, strive for flexibility, be open to the experience, write rich field notes, and enjoy the process.

Another tip is to look for funding experiences to support your fieldwork research. I completed my research with the Boren Fellowship,<sup>10</sup> which awarded me \$27,000 to study abroad and research in Haiti. In exchange for this fellowship, I was provided special hiring authority<sup>11</sup> to work for the federal government, which is how I became a federal emergency manager at FEMA. So overall, just have fun. Anthropological research can be rewarding, and I think anyone interested in learning more about the human experience should consider the discipline.

### **You don't have any questions for us? Of the class?**

I would love to know more about your class! What have you guys been studying? What class is this?

### **Anthropology and Contemporary World Problems**

Okay. So yeah, what have you all been studying? Is it just reading and then talking to different anthropologists? Is that the basis of the class?

**I would say it is a decent amount of reading. We've read two or three different books and lots of different articles, but we're looking at applying the anthropological imagination and anthropological thought to world problems that we see today. The past week—and then the rest of this week as well—we are interviewing different anthropologists, like yourself, that have done activist-style work using their anthropological expertise. So it's just kind of exploring how anthropology can be applied to the things we see in the world today.**

Okay, very good. And what do you guys see right now as the role of anthropology in climate change initiatives?

**I personally think that the role of anthropology, in terms of climate change, is to understand how we've gotten to this point. We've been discussing a lot about how we've gotten to the point of the tactical killing of our planet. We're also talking about: How do we solve that? And one of the things that we came across in asking those questions of how we solve such a huge issue is determining the root of it. And we found that the root of it is systematic racism. A lot of it is built into that. We've been trying to come up with our own solutions to deal with smaller situations. How do we fix this in this community? How do we fix it in that community? Climate change, I believe, is a melting pot for all of the issues that we face today. That is, it is one of those things that is not just your problem because you live on that side hemisphere, or it's not just my problem because I live where I live. It's all of our problem because the weather on this side affects the weather on that side and back and forth; it's a connection. We're analyzing those connections, and then we're also trying to figure out: How do we fix what's been torn apart? How do we bring those back together? So, we shift from this mindset of going, "Oh yeah, I'm different from you because I'm Black and you're white and so our problems are entirely different." And looking at each other and going, "we're human." We're dying. We're suffering, and we're suffering all over the place. How do we change that from suffering to prospering?**

Very good. And overall, how is your reaction to climate change? Are you eco-pessimistic? What's the approach there? Are you optimistic about the future? Because I know climate change can be very difficult to read once you learn about the different communities being impacted. I think the climate change clock<sup>12</sup> is seven years and 200 days, highlighting the

time we have left until we reach catastrophic climate levels. But overall, how are you feeling? Hopeful?

**Individually, I am on the fence. I'm not necessarily hopeful. Due to the advancements we have made so far, I'm proud of that, and it makes me feel hopeful for the future. But I'm also looking at the situation and I don't think we're going to get far. I'm in this place where I could fall into optimism and pessimism. It is a huge issue, and there's that possibility of... We have to face the fact that this might be too big for us. But I don't think that should be the reason why we don't address it anyway. Just because something's big, that doesn't mean that we can't break it up into parts to address it.**

**I would say sometimes I personally feel a little bit hopeless because a lot of the things that I feel like we should be doing, I can't make it happen myself. And as a student, I'm doing a lot right now. I'm managing a lot of different things. I don't have the time to go out and lead activist things. I feel like I'm not doing enough to make a global difference. I can reduce how much water I'm using. I can turn off the lights when I'm not in the room. I can recycle. I can do all these small actions, but by myself—and even with a few other people that are doing it, too—I feel like I'm not really making enough of a difference. And that's something that stresses me out a lot of the time. My therapist hears about that a lot.**

Yeah, I absolutely, totally understand. I asked that same question to my students and they're like, "I don't know." Our whole semester is on the anthropology of the environment and global issues. So we're talking about the environment every week, and this week we're talking about environmental health. Last week was climate migration, so it's like a constant reminder that our Earth is changing, is impacting people. What are we going to do? So, yeah, I totally understand.

**For me personally, I think I'm also hopeless. Mostly because as an individual, I feel like I can't really do much. There are small things that you can do, but really, I feel like it's the government and also companies that should be held responsible because they're the ones with the real power and the real impact. I'm hopeless because they're [not] going to change willingly, unless they can make a profit from it. So that's why, for me, I'm kind of hopeless, but a small bit of me is like, "I hope I'm wrong because we only have one planet." I know that people are going to Mars, but those are only the rich people who are going. People tend to forget that. No one's special except the rich people. So, I hope we do something about that.**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*We greatly appreciated the time that Dr. Felima afforded us. Her work in Haiti focuses on the impact made by environmental issues as a result of environmental injustices and climate change. This has provided a reliable first-hand experience for all people, not just her own students, to learn from. Through her insightful responses to our questions, we were able to learn about her experiences in the anthropological field and how she has made her own impact. Anthropology's vast and collective past is full of strife and injustice towards marginalized communities and anthropologists now strive to rework their methodology to not harm those they seek to study. With Dr. Felima's experiences in advocacy and the field of anthropology, she provided insightful information as to how anthropological thought can be applied to modern-day efforts in activism.*

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> <https://www.fema.gov/>
- <sup>2</sup> <https://www.berghahnbooks.com/series/catastrophes-in-context>
- <sup>3</sup> <https://www.haitianstudies.org>
- <sup>4</sup> This is the annual Conference of Parties (COP) for United Nations member states to deliberate climate change policy. The Glasgow conference was held in November 2021.
- <sup>5</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/07/07/world/jovenel-moise-assassinated-killed>
- <sup>6</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2021/07/20/1018275532/haitis-slain-president-presided-over-the-collapse-of-security-in-his-country>
- <sup>7</sup> China had threatened to pull its funding to the United Nations mission to Haiti, the second largest donor. In addition to the failures of the UN, which triggered people's anger, Haiti is one of the last remaining nations in the region to recognize Taiwan.
- <sup>8</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s3337cj4sJQ>
- <sup>9</sup> <https://crystalfelima.wordpress.com/puerto-rico/>
- <sup>10</sup> <https://www.borenawards.org/>
- <sup>11</sup> Recipients of the Boren fellowship are prioritized in hiring among U.S. Federal agencies
- <sup>12</sup> <https://climateclock.world>

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