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A Critical Discourse Analysis of Haiti Earthquake Recovery in New York Times Articles: Implications for Social Welfare Policies, Practices, and Education

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Abstract

The social constructions of the media after the 2010 Haiti earthquake arguably influenced disaster recovery, especially how and what projects were conceived, implemented, and evaluated. In this study of *New York Times* articles, we sought to learn how Haitians and foreign actors who are engaged in recovery are portrayed in print media. Our findings suggest the presence of hegemonic, disempowering discourse through themes that emphasize the expertise of outsiders and the proliferation of disaster capitalism. A counter-hegemonic, empowering discourse is evident through the acknowledgement of post-colonialist realities and the participation of Haitians in recovery. We discuss the meaning of these findings for social welfare policies, such as those set forth by the United States Agency on International Development (USAID), as well as social work practice and education.

Keywords: disaster; media; social constructionism; Haiti; disaster capitalism

On January 12, 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti, destroying most of Port-au-Prince and its environs. Immediately, the disaster unleashed the global humanitarian aid industry whereby countless foreigners descended on the vulnerable Caribbean state. Granting the importance of external aid provided by outside actors, research indicates that the majority of disaster relief work is actually conducted by local survivors (Mulligan & Nadarajah, 2012; Solnit, 2010a). This research-based finding was lost on the mass media, as many media outlets highlighted the heroics of foreign first responders and silenced the activities of local Haitians (Schuller, 2012).

Throughout the recovery period, which can last for up to 10 years after a disaster, media (through explicit images or by sin of omission entirely) continued to emphasize the weaknesses, ineptitude and lack of civility of Haitian people and their government. Media coverage highlighted the efforts of such actors as the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission, an effectively parallel state co-led by former President Bill Clinton. Such frames are akin to historical representations of Haiti throughout the post-colonial period (Smith, 2001; Ulyssee, 2010), as well as the general approach to humanitarian aid and development in the Global South (Haslam, Schafer, and Beaudet, 2009).

Schneider and Ingram (1997) propose that certain frames emerge from imaginations and critique in media coverage, political deliberations, social science, and other forms of writing. Potter (2009) argues, "Unlike most academic publications, newspapers have a broad audience and tend to write about topics with greater frequency, thus generating a large impact on knowledge" (p. 209). In this regard, previous research has shown that representations in the media can significantly impact conventional wisdom and legitimize social inequalities. For example, it has been suggested that the portrayal of disaster victims as looters and criminals serves to legitimize and prioritize military over humanitarian interventions (Davis & French, 2008; Hartwig, 2010). Studies of media reveal social constructions of issues, such as disasters, disaster recovery, and development thereby influencing public agenda setting and social practices (Balaji, 2011; Potter, 2009). Another line of research has concentrated on the role of media in promoting or deterring the well-being of individuals, families, and communities (e.g. Brown & Bobkowski, 2011). While the social work profession has not studied the relationship between media and disaster response and recovery, there have been a few studies that focus more generally on critical media analysis and its role in social work education and practice, as well as studies that analyze media constructions of specific issues such as homelessness and child welfare (Jayasankar & Monteiro, 2000; Zuffrey, 2008).

Such studies (Davis & French, 2008; Potter, 2009) are important because the media create mechanisms for the social constitution of reality that may serve to legitimize certain interventions over others as well as subordinate and sustain marginal roles for oppressed people. The meaning and significance of dominant discourses create and reproduce the hegemony of the larger social order and political economy that largely exclude the voices of local people and by extension, have an impact on social work policy and practice in meaningful ways. Such discourses may serve to reinforce what has been come to be called "disaster capitalism," (Klein, 2007, p. 6) a policy orientation that perpetuates inequality divides by such practices as creating special incentives for corporations and lowering wages for workers engaged in recovery and re-development. In this case, we believe that the frames that media put forth about local Haitians,

foreign professionals, and other outsiders may influence the substance and approach of disaster recovery, including how, and what projects are conceived, implemented, and evaluated. We believe that this is particularly relevant in the case of policy-making by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) as well as by the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission.

In this study of media discourse, we sought to learn about the ways that Haitians and foreign actors are portrayed, inquiring into what extent such constructions contribute to the current social order and into the possibility that they make space for Haitian subjectivity and thus for participation in their own recovery. In this article, after reviewing and analyzing the theoretical literature that frames this study, we review past and current development discourse in the context of Haiti, as well as the role of participation in disaster recovery projects more generally. After discussing the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses uncovered in our research, we conclude by offering suggestions for social welfare policy and practice in disaster settings like post-earthquake Haiti, as well as the ways that social work education can prepare practitioners for strengths-based practice after disasters.

Literature Review

Theoretical Orientation

Discourse has been defined as structures and practices that reflect human thoughts and social realities through particular collections of words and that simultaneously construct meaning in the world (Fairclough, 2003). Social constructivism, as a postmodern epistemological perspective, is concerned with the construction of knowledge and deconstructive examination. Constructivists understand human knowledge through the notion of multiple realities and the indefinite and arbitrary essence of meaning as it is mediated through the perspective of the knower (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Fook, 2002). For social constructivists “meaning is determined through the manipulation of words and symbols done in negotiation with the environment and the individuals who people the environment” (Rodwell, 1998, p. 26). Social, historical, and cultural processes, through communication and interpretation of meaning, create contextually based and situated knowledge (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Rodwell, 1998). In short, human reality is socially constructed and constituted, and this understanding of knowledge generation and circulation may serve both oppressive and liberatory purposes (Schneider & Ingram, 1993).

Consequently, if reality is socially constructed, it can also be de-constructed and re-constructed by means of deconstructive inquiry. One possible outcome of such a critically informed deconstruction and reconstruction may be leading one from compliance to transformative action. According to Wood and Tully (2006), deconstruction is one of the postmodern tools “for seeking and exposing” power relationships veiled by dominant discourses (p.17). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a research methodology for deconstructing discourses and embedded power relationships. From an epistemological standpoint, it presupposes the multiple possibilities of knowing and interpreting the world (Yanow, 2000).

Furthermore, social constructivism seeks to expose connections between knowledge and power. It suggests that knowledge we hold about the world is linked to the ways in which power

is generated and exercised (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Fook, 2002). Theorists drawing from critical traditions, including Foucault, suggest that power relationships are constituted through language and they “explain, sustain, and reproduce current, inadequate, and reluctantly provided social resources, marginalizing social practices and controlling pathology-based social work” interventions (Wood & Tully, 2006, p. 18).

Furthermore, stemming from the critical tradition, a neo-Gramscian dialectical approach affirms that civil society rests within the fabric of transnational class hegemony whose dominance is legitimized through the state and other institutions. Hegemony here refers to the ways that power is exerted over vulnerable groups, without physical force, but through more subtle social, cultural, and economic forces, including media. Thus, civil society is subject to cooptation (hegemony potentially carried out by international non-governmental organizations [NGOs] themselves), which assures civil society’s acquiescence to the norms and discourses of transnational class. The counter-hegemonic side of this dialectic is that civil society actors, especially subaltern groups, in this case local Haitians and grassroots actors, can emerge and counter this hegemony, creating the possibility of altering society (Katz, 2006). This understanding of power relationships may be revealed in the discourses regarding recovery in the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti. In what follows, we present the production of post-earthquake recovery discourse by the *New York Times* as such a contested terrain. We suggest that through CDA past and current disaster practices and discourses may become unveiled and turned into subjects for re-construction.

Past and Current Post-colonial Development/Disaster Discourses

Previous research has revealed the negative ways that disaster victims have been portrayed. For example, they have been portrayed in the media as helpless, hopeless, criminal, and otherwise inadequate or powerless actors (e.g. Davis & French, 2008; Hutchison, 2010). With regard to Haiti, according to Ulysee (2010), the representations of the victims in the aftermath of the earthquake can be traced back to the 19th century and 20th century. She argues that Haitians are typically portrayed as “representatives of or synonymous with poverty, backwardness, and evil”; and as “always...in need of an intermediary” (Ulysee, 2010, p. 39). Further, Potter (2009), in her analysis of five different newspapers in 2004, finds that the United States paints a picture of Haiti as a failed state, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. These frames are exemplified through the portrayal of Haiti’s poverty, disease, and illiteracy, representing Haiti’s nation as inept at governing itself, as a “politically unstable place, full of violence, turmoil, chaos, corruption, and a multitude of other problems” (Potter, 2009, p. 216). That being said, counter-frames exist in the scholarly literature, which highlight the historical and contemporary resistance of Haitians beginning with the Haitian Revolution of 1804 and including its grassroots movements in both the rural and urban areas of Haiti (Schuller, 2012; Smith, 2001).

In the case of the 2010 earthquake, Haitians are further framed as poor, helpless, and powerless, “passive and desperate,” violent and uncivil, and submissive to aid workers and security troops (Balaji, 2011; Mason, 2011; Solnit, 2010b). Balaji (2011) finds that Haiti is characterized by “chaos, dysfunction, violence and hopelessness” (p. 50) after the earthquake, represented as a “tragic and dysfunctional Other” (p. 52); and its disaster victims are portrayed as

“objects of pity” (p. 55). These previous findings point to some signs of a hegemonic recovery discourse put forth in media representations.

Other research has shown that U.S. political discourse about post-earthquake recovery in Haiti has positioned the U.S. as heroic with “do-gooding” and order sustaining practices, while leaving local actors discursively invisible and incapacitated in the wake of their tragedy (Svistova & Pyles, 2012). We should also note that many other disaster victims are also portrayed in this way throughout the globe, but it is especially true with socially marginalized people and people of color. This was the case after hurricane Katrina when African-American New Orleanians were portrayed as looters as compared to Caucasian New Orleanians depicted as “looking for food” (e.g. Sommers, Apfelbaum, Dukes, Toosi, & Wang, 2006).

We posit that such representations and constructions of recovery actors structure the levels of community participation of these actors and hence long-term disaster recovery. No such research of media disaster discourse has been completed within the social work field and indeed the link between framing and social construction of disaster recovery and its actors and actual long-term recovery is scarcely alluded to by social work practitioners and researchers alike. Thus, this is what we seek to accomplish in this paper.

Role of Participation in Disaster Recovery

Some disaster recovery scholars suggest that building the resilience and capacity of communities “to cope with the emergency, to rebuild, and to learn from the experience, such that the new physical, social, and political structures are better adapted to the environment” (Ride & Bretherton, 2011, p. 7) is one of the major pathways to recovery. For this to happen, Ride & Bretherton (2011) and many others (e.g. Miller & Rivera, 2011; Schuller, 2012) assert, local communities must be regarded as having agency and being capable of leadership. They must be brought to the forefront of disaster response, get engaged, and take responsibility through their *own* actions in the face of calamity. In fact, local voices, knowledge, and action are widely discussed as necessary foundations of sustainable post-disaster recovery (e.g. Mulligan & Nadarajah, 2012; Ride & Bretherton, 2011). For example, based on their cross-case analysis of communities recovering from the 2004 tsunami, Mulligan and Nadarajah (2012) conclude that the sustainable disaster recovery must bring local participation to the center of recovery interventions involving and strengthening local knowledge and capacities. Likewise, interdisciplinary disaster management scholarship contends that in order for the hardships that natural disasters bestow upon people to become sources of resilience, the interventions must be targeted towards working *with* people, not on their behalf.

Other scholarship on disaster recovery (Groscurth, 2011; Pyles, 2011; Sliwinski, 2009) emphasizes participatory interventions that center on the needs and strengths of local people rather than external actors. Further, local ownership, participation, and accountability are core principles of the Humanitarian and Minimum Standards of the Sphere Project and the Red Cross Code of Conduct (Telford & Cosgrave, 2007). These recommendations are concerned with promoting individual competencies and both organizational and community capacities to take active roles in the rebuilding of their own lives and being able to face and resist future natural catastrophes. Disaster risk reduction and preparedness, water sanitation and maintenance,

literacy, budgeting and small business skills, environmental protection and soil conservation are examples of capacity-building interventions. With this extensively promoted power of participation and importance of capacity building, this study seeks to understand how media may construct disaster recovery in Haiti with potentially important implications for the participation of Haitians in their own recovery. By extension, we believe this study can have implications for the roles that social welfare policy, practice, and education can play in facilitating such local participation.

Methodology

This inquiry is a part of a larger study funded by the National Science Foundation in the United States that compares and contrasts disaster recovery and citizen participation in two sites: The U.S. Gulf Coast and Haiti. The larger study involves surveys in rural communities on the subject of their participation in community recovery as well as key informant interviews with local actors and NGOs on perceptions of participation in actual disaster recovery projects. To explore the media discourse around post- earthquake recovery in Haiti specifically, we delimited our study. We analyzed one kind of mass media—newspaper coverage, specifically the discourse of *New York Times* articles. The primary research goals of this study were: (a) to learn about the overall social construction of disaster recovery as articulated by this internationally-renowned newspaper; (b) to critically analyze this discourse via deconstruction; and (c) infer implications from this deconstruction as it relates to recovery participation of Haitian citizens and the role of social work policy, practice, and education in that participation. The research question that guided this inquiry and analysis was “What images, roles, responsibilities, and relationships concerning disaster recovery are portrayed in the *New York Times*?” We are concerned with how the media may facilitate or constrain Haitians’ participation in their nation’s recovery. By identifying such discourses and deconstructing their meanings, we seek to identify the implications for social justice, specifically local participation, collective action, empowerment, and sustainable disaster recovery.

Sample and Data Collection

We completed a search using the words “Haiti earthquake” in the Lexis Nexis database focusing on articles published in the *New York Times* between January 12, 2010 and January 12, 2012. Initially, this search yielded 375 articles. The general criteria for selection were articles or editorials that have a primary focus on some aspect of the disaster. Articles that only made a passing reference to the disaster were excluded. Thus, the sampling efforts yielded 235 articles total for analysis, excluding 140 articles. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze if reporting was different based on who wrote it, we must acknowledge that there might exist a reporting bias toward different cultural groups or countries. Most of the 235 articles were written by eight different *New York Times* journalists, with one journalist writing the most articles (23), followed by the next three most published journalists writing 19, 17, and 14 articles respectively. The most prolific author has been writing about Haiti for many years and is a female of Latina origins.

Data Analysis

To deconstruct the discursive constructions of the *New York Times*, we used tools of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2003; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Critical discourse analysis is an interpretive approach that allows a researcher to reveal socially constructed meanings that lie behind everyday realities, allowing a researcher to decode generally agreed upon meanings that may be veiled by taken for granted everyday language (Yanow, 2000). CDA permits the researcher to unearth beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, and meanings conveyed by cultural and local discourses, as well as explore various frames of the issue under study across communities of meaning (Yanow, 2000).

We used NVivo 9 software to identify basic themes and organize the discourse. The second author coded the articles for themes, some of which were deductively determined based on the theoretical framework and literature analysis, and others emerged from the data itself. In the tradition of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2007), throughout the coding process the second author wrote extensive memos. These efforts led to the development of a preliminary set of codes. To facilitate what Lincoln and Guba (1991) referred to as credibility, the first author coded sample sections of the data. In addition, both authors met regularly to discuss the codes and coding process. We used peer review and debriefing with colleagues as an external check of the research process and one of the validation strategies promoting “agreement between competent others” (Creswell, 2007, p. 204). For this study, we engaged in further analysis, focusing on the interpretive categories of participation, roles, and relationships in the post-colonial Haitian context.

Findings

Both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives dominate these findings. That is to say, that there is some discourse (hegemonic) that seems to reinforce existing social relations, such as portrayals of Haitians as helpless or top-down approaches to re-development. There is also significant discourse (counter-hegemonic) that disrupts the social order, such as critiques of the political economy in Haiti and emphases on the strengths and recovery efforts of local Haitians. Regarding hegemonic discourse, we identified four categories under this theme: (a) Experts/expertise; (b) Haitians as victims, “the other”; (c) the ineptitude of the Haitian government; and (d) Recovery, development, and disaster capitalism. There were also four dimensions to the counter-hegemonic discourse: (a) Acknowledgement of colonialist and post-colonialist realities; (b) Critique of current aid structure and importance of public investment; (c) Participation of Haitians in recovery; and (d) Resilience and resistance.

Hegemonic Discourse

Experts/Expertise. Many of the news stories and editorials emphasize the role that outsiders, especially outsiders with a particular form of professional or technological expertise, play in the relief and recovery efforts. These actors are generally referred to as “foreign aid groups” or “foreign aid workers.” Hailing from all over the globe (e.g. Dominican Republic, France, Britain, Canada, Israel), including the United States, these actors cancel Haiti’s bilateral debts, bring technologies and other forms of expertise, including, but not limited to: medical,

telecommunications, green energy, and school reform. Not only are these actors experts, they are “heroic.” As one article stated:

Aid workers have been heroic in keeping people relatively safe and healthy since the Jan. 12 earthquake. And the truth is that many of the hundreds of thousands of people who are now living in camps are in some ways better off than the millions more in Haiti's slums, because they have better access to services. That is not very comforting. And it is not sustainable.

Venezuela appears 3 times and Cuba appears 11 times out of 164,761 total words. In one of the instances, both countries appear together as Haiti's allies criticizing the U.S. “for its heavy use of soldiers in its humanitarian aid effort.” Otherwise, Cuba is only mentioned indirectly because its air space is used to airlift injured people to the U.S. and Venezuela is mentioned once as forgiving Haiti's debt. It is important to notice this silence because, for example, Cubans in fact played a very significant role in relief and recovery efforts, as part of long-term solidarity and presence training Haitian medical personnel.

One of the major concerns with the emphasis on such outside expertise is that local, Haitian expertise is often overlooked. This is especially true and problematic with regard to the medical profession, as there were many local Haitian doctors and nurses who lost their jobs after the earthquake and could have contributed their skills.

Haitians as victims, “The Other.” Rather than experts, local Haitians are largely portrayed as victims. Indeed, they are patients, not doctors; and, there are many (arguably sensationalized) stories about being buried alive, amputations, the plight of children, and the plight of the elderly. Women and girls are said to live “in constant fear.” While the situation after the earthquake was certainly terrible in many respects, the descriptions tend to be exoticizing and overly dramatic as Haitians in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps are said to be “toiling” and “languishing.” There is a voyeuristic quality to this discourse, which has an “othering” effect. For example:

A few yards away, hundreds of families displaced by the earthquake languished under tents and tarps, bathing themselves from buckets and relieving themselves in the street as barefoot children frolicked on pavement strewn with garbage.

In addition, another article stated, “In old Haiti there is still mostly horror. It is a nation of the homeless and maimed.” Furthermore, there is a racialized dynamic of intervention, whereby white American troops drop out of helicopters to save the cheering and hungry masses of black Haitians.

The “othering” of Haitians manifests through not only the “Haitians as victims” storyline but also the “Haitians as criminals” storyline. The situation in Haiti is portrayed as one of sheer lawlessness, emphasizing looting as well as stories of individuals who had counterfeited rice ration tickets, illegally immigrated to the US after the disaster, looted from local businesses, and squatted on land illegally. In this storyline, they become de-civilized savages, and must be kept ordered by Others. Jiwani calls this a “doubling syntax” where targets are both “pitiable

and pejorative, or exoticized and threatening . . . designed to reaffirm white superiority” (2006, p. 35 as cited in Mason, 2011). Overall, this “Haitians as criminals” storyline can be summarized in the following passage that the *Times* offer:

Post-quake Haiti is a dangerous place. . . Hundreds of thousands of displaced people still live in poorly policed camps where they fall prey to rapes, robberies, and other violent crimes. Prison escapees have regrouped in urban slums; drug traffickers and armed gangs are back in business.

Even attempts to show Haitians’ abilities to survive such harsh conditions are arguably overused and “othering,” thus furthering the narrative of Haitians as objects, rather than subjects, as they are described as “impressively resilient.”

Reinforcing the ineptitude of the Haitian government. There is no doubt that the Haitian government is a weak one relatively speaking and there are many reasons for this that goes back to colonial times. In the articles, the discourse emphasizes the absenteeism, weaknesses, ineptitude, and corruption of the Haitian government. One *Times* journalist offers an explanation of Haitian despair or helplessness:

But with the government of President René Préval largely out of public view and the needs so huge, many Haitians are shunting aside their concerns about sovereignty and welcoming anybody willing to help -- in camouflage or not.

The following are examples of words used in the *Times* to describe the Haitian government: “ineffective,” “unstable,” “absent,” “corrupt,” “dragging its feet over decision-making,” a “bureaucracy, which has fallen back on its somnolent ways,” and “overwhelmed.” The phrases “notoriously ineffective and corrupt government” and “infamously corrupt and hapless government” reinforce the idea that the ineptitude and corruption are common knowledge that should not be questioned. It was also suggested that unless new sustainable solutions are found, “Haiti is in danger of becoming what it always was, a nagging blot on the conscience, a neglected project that never gets done.”

Furthermore, not only is the ineptitude of the government unquestionable, but its behavior requires external modification. An example from a *Times* article captures this idea: “In a country scarred by endemic corruption and waste, relief funds and projects need to be carefully monitored.” Discussions of the need to monitor the government and make them accountable for the funding it receives was common, and the quotation below echoes the expertise theme by emphasizing the need for outside experts to help hold them accountable:

The I.M.F. has lent its vote of confidence and committed to helping create new mechanisms for accountable government spending. The fund had begun that effort even before the quake, working with Haiti and donors to peg direct aid to benchmarks of performance and transparency, and sending experts there to train officials in the basics of managing cash and accounts.

In sum, this discourse perpetuates the status quo by failing to acknowledge the origins of the problems of the Haitian government and affirming the necessity of outside intervention and accountability.

Recovery, development, and disaster capitalism. As in any disaster, the discourse around re-development is strong and former President Clinton's affirmation that the global community will help Haiti "build back better" reflects the sentiment that disaster represents an opportunity to change the pre-disaster status quo, presumably for the better. Articles emphasized private capital investment as a way to grow the economy where investment in garment factories is one such example. In the post-earthquake environment, the articles highlight new hotel chains being built, such as Best Western and Choice Hotels. While these hotels may bring some local jobs, these hotel chains are foreign companies that are largely catering to other foreigners who are coming into Haiti to forge business opportunities or implement the projects of international NGOs. Overall, when a local workforce is hired, it is because they can be paid less than their U.S. counterparts, as was revealed in an article referring to a U.S. based garbage/debris removal company. Indeed, the articles speak to the surge of business that restaurants and casinos had experienced due to the influx of relief workers. In addition, the reconstruction process, according to some articles, provides an opportunity for the American construction industry (which has been in a recession) to meet Haiti's needs for housing, roads, and bridges.

The journalists in these articles harken back to the local investment booms, financed by "enthusiastic outsiders," of the nineteenth century American West as a model for development in Haiti. All of these phenomena together comprise what has become known as "disaster capitalism," a pejorative term that journalist Naomi Klein and others have used to critique the legacy of policies and practices embraced by conservative economist Milton Friedman. Disaster capitalism affirms that capitalism flourishes and indeed requires disasters to propel economic growth (Gunewardena & Schuller, 2008; Klein, 2007). In order to facilitate this kind of development, it is necessary that media, politicians, advertisers, and others in positions of power present Haiti as a good place to do business. According to one author, the "theme of protest, crime and instability are an anathema to business development." Thus, a development approach steeped in a disaster capitalism model is affirmed through these discourses thereby further entrenching the current social order.

Counter-Hegemonic Discourse

Acknowledgement of colonialist and post-colonialist realities. While there is plenty of silence about Haiti's history in these articles, there is also meaningful recognition of Haiti's political economy and history in a global context. Some of this discourse was concerned with "the convergence of economic, political, and cultural forces that rendered the country so vulnerable to this catastrophe." This type of discourse exposes the reasons for Haiti's poor development and weak infrastructure. The articles engaged in discussions of the following issues: debt, foreign occupation, dictatorship, trade embargoes, post-colonial abandonment, and deterioration of the public sector. One editorialist cleverly writes:

Haiti isn't impoverished because the devil got his due; it's impoverished partly because of debts due. France imposed a huge debt that strangled Haiti. And when foreigners weren't looting Haiti, its own rulers were.

In addition, another article references Haiti's past experiences with foreign occupation as a way to understand the post-disaster relief environment: "Haiti's long history of foreign intervention, including an American occupation, normally makes the influx of foreigners a delicate issue." While articles make important references to Haiti's "brutal colonial origins," despite these counter-narratives, it is worth noting that the words "slave" or "slavery" is used only 12 times and "colonial" or "colonialism" is used only eight times (out of 164,761 total words).

Critique of current aid structure and importance of public investment. The articles offer critiques of the current aid structure and the lack of investment in the public sector and call for re-investment and re-building of Haiti's public infrastructure, including roads, electricity, and the government itself. However, because either a significant amount of recovery dollars have been targeted for the private sector or money pledged to the government had not yet appeared, the authors point out that "there is no chance of building even a minimally effective Haitian government without some direct cash." Similarly, they are also critical of the structure and practices of the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission. Importantly, the *Times* reports on President Clinton's regret about how global trade policies that he promoted helped Arkansas rice farmers, at the expense of Haitian ones. This discourse originates from an elite person in Clinton (arguably making it all the more powerful), and serves as an important counter-balance to the prevailing, neoliberal ways of thinking about trade and development that have been so detrimental to countries like Haiti.

There are other significant ways that the discourse critiques the system such as by contrasting the conditions between rich and poor and noting how there are IDP (internally displaced persons) camps right across the street from a fancy restaurant where aid workers go to eat. The articles offer critiques of the model that relies on external actors to implement aid, including the negative impact that medical aid has on the opportunities for local doctors. Finally, there is discourse that is critical of famous people using the disaster as an opportunity for showboating, such as Dr. Sanjay Gupta or Katie Couric heroically "saving the children."

Participation of Haitians in recovery. Despite the voluminous discourse concerning experts and expertise, an important counter-narrative focuses on the participation of Haitians in their own recovery. This includes stories noting current efforts of participation as well as that declaring the importance of meaningful Haitian participation (including the most marginalized, such as women) in the recovery. Such stories include those of neighbors digging a man from the rubble and similar stories that focus on local rescue efforts (as opposed to foreign, professional first responders). There are references to camp leaders self-organizing IDP camps and community organizers who are coordinating the clearing of rubble and lobbying aid groups. Discussions of the ways that the local economy was recovering was an important theme here; for example, there are stories of merchants selling goods on the rubble of destroyed businesses, as well as ways in which a new informal economy emerged in the tent camps, like setting up restaurants and beauty salons. In addition, there are stories of how the *timachann* (street merchants) have rebuilt their small businesses. Other activities that local Haitians engaged in

during the relief and recovery process were: 1) Local micro-credit programs providing loans and grants for business recovery; 2) Haitians serving as volunteer translators; and 3) Haitian workers engaged in major rebuilding projects.

Some discourse in the articles revealed local Haitians' plans for a new, decentralized, sustainable Haiti, though it should be noted that some of those visions were put forth by Haitian elites that ignore the voices of vulnerable Haitians, replicating internal hegemonic dynamics in Haiti. Overall, a quotation of Jean-Bertrand Aristide that was printed in the *Times*, in response to externally conceived re-development plans and efforts, sums up this theme of participation:

An exogenous plan of reconstruction -- one that is profit-driven, exclusionary, conceived of and implemented by non-Haitians -- cannot reconstruct Haiti. It is the solemn obligation of all Haitians to join in the reconstruction and to have a voice in the direction of the nation.

Resilience and resistance. Similar to the previous theme, this category amplifies the ways in which Haitians act in their communities exemplifying their own agency. This means not only the ways that Haitians survive a clearly traumatic event, but also the ways in which they counteract the oppressive conditions through activism, art and the like. The discourse around resilience emphasizes not the victim-hood of Haitians in the way that the hegemonic discourse does, but the way that survivors are coping with their losses, moving forward, and adapting to circumstances, such as losing a home, loved one, or a limb. In addition, we see people banding together and standing guard to protect each other (from sexual assault in the camps), family members taking care of each other and holding vigil for them as they recover in the hospital, and honoring the dead through local memorial services. The uses of spirituality and religion are highlighted as coping mechanisms, including group prayer and services, rebuilding makeshift churches, and individual practices such as prayer. The following passage exemplifies some of the discourse around resilience: "...Children can be seen in every devastated corner resiliently kicking soccer balls, flying handmade kites, singing pop songs and ferreting out textbooks from the rubble of their schools."

The articles highlight the efforts of Haitians to affect their own culture through artistic and creative endeavors that emerge from the post-earthquake environment. This includes documentary filmmaking, music, and songs written about the earthquake, mixed media art renderings of the devastation, and Creole neologisms (e.g. *goudou goudou*, which is an onomatopoeic word for the earthquake). Another story explained how Haitians were coming together to preserve historic books at risk of loss after the earthquake.

Furthermore, the articles acknowledge Haitian efforts to critique, protest and engage in advocacy, from more formalized organizing campaigns to the graffiti that appeared throughout Port-au-Prince. Some of the key critiques were of: 1) external governments and the UN showing a preference for military aid over food/housing aid; 2) the lack of governmental coordination and oversight of the contracting of recovery projects; and 3) questioning the media's approach such as publishing sensationalized photographs of Haitians. Several articles discussed efforts of local Haitian groups to engage in advocacy related to sexual assault prevention and intervention.

Finally, there was discourse that praised the faith that many Haitians continue to have in the democratic process, particularly voting.

Discussion

As is common in post-disaster discourse (Solnit, 2010a) as well as discourse about development in Haiti (Schuller, 2012), the *New York Times* journalists emphasize the expertise of outsiders and the inadequacy of locals to affect recovery projects. Rounding out this picture is the view that the Haitian state is weak, unstable, and corrupt. Moreover, while some of the descriptions of the Haitian government certainly are not groundless, there is a sense from the articles that external actors need to control, discipline, and rehabilitate the Haitian government much like a criminal or wayward juvenile. Such attitudes are arguably an extension of other forms of post-colonialist discourse used in the Haitian context, emphasizing the need for civilizing and rescuing.

It is also worth noting that perhaps the media's role here is to perpetuate U.S.-Haitian governmental relations. This asymmetrical relationship dates back to post-revolutionary Haiti, continuing through the U.S. military occupation of Haiti from 1915-1934, and resumed into what many have interpreted as a U.S.-backed coup of Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1994. Thus, one could argue that the hegemonic discourse of the *NY Times* is perpetuating the paternalistic relations of the U.S. and Haiti. Compare this to a *NY Times* article published after the 2011 Japan earthquake and tsunami where the U.S. is presented more as an equal "friend" to Japan trying to rebuild diplomatic ties (Fackler, 2011). The article emphasizes that the U.S. was trying to maintain a balance of offering whatever support they can while also avoiding "embarrassing the Japanese or suggesting that they are running the show."

Nonetheless, the articles revealed meaningful counter-narratives to this traditional post-colonialist development and disaster narrative – stories of the Haitian government doing some things right, Haitians mobilizing themselves (organizing and resisting), critiques of NGOs, and critiques of the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission. The strengths and resistance of Haitians, politically and culturally, are revealed through these articles. Such frames reinforce a counter-narrative of Haitians as real subjects with choices and the abilities to be central actors in their own recovery efforts, a counter-narrative that indeed reflects the reality that Haitian people have been organizing around political issues, food justice, violence against women, and many other issues for decades. The discourse shows how Haitian disaster survivors are, together with family and community, recovering from the disaster by rebuilding homes and businesses and mobilizing themselves to affect change in their environment.

We believe that these findings have important implications for understanding the participation of local Haitian actors in their own recovery. The ideologies and practices of the humanitarian industries often frame disaster victims as having limited capacities to cope and actively participate in redevelopment initiatives. Evidence suggests that local actors have different perceptions of their roles in disaster recovery projects compared to the perceptions of NGO actors. Indeed, literature reveals that actual participation of local actors, including Haitians, in recovery projects initiated by some NGOs, tends to be tokenistic and rhetorical (Schuller, 2008; Schuller, 2009). This research supports this phenomenon and highlights the need for

strengths-based framing of Haitian people, policies, and interventions that center them in the recovery process. The following excerpt from one of the *New York Times* articles captures a strengths-based understanding of Haitian people: “To visit Haiti is to know that its problem isn't its people. They are its treasure -- smart, industrious and hospitable -- and Haitians tend to be successful in the United States (and everywhere but in Haiti).”

The identified counter-hegemonic discourse (and also hegemonic) appears to reflect another post-earthquake research initiative known as “The Voices of the Voiceless” project, initiated in preparation for the 2010 Donor’s Conference (HELP, KOZEPEP, ATD Quart Monde, Partners in Health, The Office of the Special Envoy, and MINUSTAH, 2010). This series of focus groups (156) in Haiti’s ten departments, conducted with 1,750 Haitian citizens, sought to capture citizen opinions on development and reconstruction. The key findings of this inquiry point to Haitian resilience and renewed solidarity, and suggest that Haitians demand participation and inclusion, investment in people and capacity building activities, reinforcement of Haiti’s sovereignty, and being treated equally and with dignity.

Schneider and Ingram (1997, 1993) and other social scientists have attempted to establish a link between social construction and participation, where participation is defined as political and civic behavior integral to citizenship. For example, they propose that more disadvantaged types of target populations may not participate “because the messages received by these target populations encourage withdrawal or passivity” (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, p. 334). They speculate that groups socially constructed as dependents or deviants do not mobilize and get involved civically due to the stigmatization and labeling by the policy process. They further propose that people in the disadvantaged category of the social construction do not consider their problems to be of a broader public interest, and therefore discard government and policy as solutions for themselves. Furthermore, they may not perceive “themselves as legitimate or effective in the public arena” (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, p. 344).

In a similar vein, we propose that the social construction of recovery actors through discourses that are evident in our analysis may promote or delimit participation and engagement of Haitians in their own recovery. While this research is limited by the fact that we only studied discourses and not actual practices or interventions, we argue that without local participation sustainable recovery will remain elusive. Haitian voices and the counter hegemonic discourse identified in the *Times* needs to be leveraged to create a strengths-based framing and discourse counter to one of passivity and incapability. Taking discourse as reflective and constitutive of recovery practices and interventions, we argue that positive and strengths-based social constructions matter for the sake of sustainable disaster recovery.

Implications for Social Welfare Policy, Practice, and Education

While we acknowledge the limits of these findings, we see a value and some possible meanings that this research has for social policy and the social work profession. From a policy perspective, government policies as administered by such agencies as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) as well as the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission have tended to embrace interventions that channel funding to for-profit companies or international NGOs, circumventing the opportunity for government capacity building and disregarding local

articulation of needs. Importantly, new USAID policies and implementation protocols are requiring recovery projects to build Haitian government capacity and public infrastructure, as well as require more meaningful levels of local participation and accountability of projects (USAID, 2011). Nonetheless, USAID's plans for recovery in Haiti tend toward economic re-development that favors large multi-national corporations, and thus promotes disaster capitalism. Social workers could become more empowered to critique such policies and advocate for changes that affirm local participation and social justice.

Further, the social work profession tends to conceive of disaster recovery as an intra- and interpersonal process and outcome, specifically concerned with re-normalizing functioning, developing resilience, overcoming trauma, and stabilizing mental health (e.g. Galambos, 2005; Mathbor, 2007; Soliman & Silver, 2003). Informed by critical and postmodern social work traditions, the literature on sustainable disaster recovery, and our own findings, we propose to conceive of recovery as a macro-systematic process that may be explained and determined by language, discourse, and framing. The understanding of recovery through discourse and social construction matters because it may affect inclusion of local knowledge, participation, and capacity building, which have been extensively argued as critical and integral preconditions for sustainable recovery (e.g. Philips, 2009). These are also deemed as points of departure, building blocks, and goals of social work practice.

Moreover, without analyses and deconstruction, dominant discourses remain dogmatic, may become institutionalized, and are further perpetuated, reproducing a particular set of social relations. Arguably, social workers have largely failed to engage in meaningful critical analysis of hegemonic relations that perpetuate the neoliberal status quo. Thus, traditional social work practice, in both disaster and non-disaster settings, has further entrenched hegemonic social relations by giving primacy to micro-level interventions, homeostasis in systems, and normalizing clients. This lack of engagement in such analyses presents an inherent danger of accepting dominant, "expert" hegemonic discourses as given and absolute, and therefore there is an ethical duty to uncover them and offer alternatives that are more suitable. For this reason, language and discourse as tools of social inclusion and exclusion need to receive more attention from social work professionals.

The capacity to engage in such analysis must start with the social work educational process. Unfortunately, social work education is still only minimally engaging its students in the study and analysis of the historical and contemporary processes of globalization and neoliberal economics (Reisch, 2013). It is indeed unfortunate for a profession that makes claims of working towards progressive social change. We, therefore, invite social work educators to engage students in developing the skills of critical analysis and deconstructive inquiry as both a method of macro social work practice and a research technique. In support of our invitation, critical analysis of media discourse in the social work classroom has been shown to be a valuable exercise in the development of social justice-oriented practitioners (Jayasankar & Monteiro, 2000; Zuffrey, 2008).

Disaster and recovery discourses reflect, produce, and perpetuate recovery policies and practices. In the contemporary globalized world, mass media has a powerful role to play in such operation of discourses locally and globally. When decoded, media accounts, as we have shown,

can be indicative of the power contestation at work. Social work, with its values and orientation towards social justice, has a critical role to play in resisting/challenging and/or perpetuating hegemonic discourses and, by extension, policies, and practices. With the increase of disasters (Guha-Sapir & Hovois, 2012) across the globe and the impact that this has on marginalized people (Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon, & Davis, 2003), there is an urgent moral imperative for social work engagement in analyzing and deconstructing discourses about disasters and their victims, in a way that is decolonizing, anti-oppressive, and emancipatory.

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