

# Securitization, racial cleansing, and disaster capitalism: Neoliberal disaster governance in the US Gulf Coast and Haiti

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## Abstract

Through a critical discourse analysis of news media after the US Gulf Coast hurricane Katrina and the Haiti earthquake disasters, we draw from Soss et al.'s (2011) ideas about US poverty governance - neoliberal paternalism - to identify how a similar phenomenon of 'neoliberal disaster governance' (NDG) operates in these contexts. NDG is a set of discourses, policies, and practices, we argue, which endeavors to control disaster survivors in order to further the ends of neoliberal capitalism. Specifically, we find several key story lines that legitimate and perpetuate NDG, namely disaster capitalism, securitization and militarization of disaster settings, discourses of racial cleansing, and displacement.

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**Introduction**

Disasters are sites where people who are marginalized in society, especially poor people of color, may be secured, controlled, displaced and capitalized on (Hannigan, 2012; Saraçoğlu and Demirtaş-Milz, 2014; Timms, 2011). Through post-disaster relief and recovery policies, practices, and discourses, their bodies and movements are monitored and disciplined, as their freedoms and destinies are governed. This discipline and governance transpire through the media, government, military, business, and even civil society itself. The restraining mechanisms include securitization of 'lawless' disaster survivors, disaster opportunism and profiteering, post-disaster racial cleansing, and displacement of survivors. We argue that these discourses and actions are reflective of a larger set of practices by policy-makers, developers, street-level bureaucrats, and other practitioners that has been referred to as neoliberal paternalism (Soss et al., 2011). This policy agenda has been exerted by means of monitoring and disciplining poor people through contemporary neoliberal poverty governance, supplemented by police violence against, and penalization of, people of color who are poor (Wacquant, 2010). These practices are particularly prevalent in the USA, though it is arguably spreading globally in a kind of 'neoliberal policy convergence' (Savelsberg, 2011). We introduce the term 'neoliberal disaster governance' (NDG) as a way to identify this phenomenon in disaster settings.

Through a critical discourse analysis of news media after both Hurricane Katrina and the Haiti earthquake, we argue that disaster sites are extensions of everyday life in that the forces of economic neoliberalism require, in the words of Foucault, a 'disciplinary society' (cited in Wacquant, 2010). Towards this end, we introduce the two contexts under investigation – the US Gulf Coast and Haiti. We then discuss the ways that the themes of securitization, racial cleansing, and disaster capitalism have played out in other disasters. After a brief discussion of the methods utilized to conduct this research, we present the three key themes of the study, namely securitization and militarization of disasters; displacement, deconcentration of poverty, and racial cleansing; and disaster capitalism. We conclude with further discussion on this emerging neoliberal framework of disaster management, governance, and humanitarian practice.

**Background**

Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the Gulf Coast of the USA on 29 August 2005, devastating both urban and rural communities in Louisiana and

Mississippi. There were approximately 1,300 deaths and \$135 billion damage caused in part by the Category 3 hurricane itself, but mostly by breaches in the US Army Corps of Engineers surge protection and levee systems in the New Orleans area (Plyer, 2015). These levees failed, partially, because of the very high storm surge, but also due to design and construction shortcomings in the levees, caused in part by insufficient federal funding for flood protection, and in part by pressure to develop in lands at risk of flooding (Seed et al., 2006). The disaster displaced hundreds of thousands of people, damaging more than a million housing units (Plyer, 2015). Prior to the hurricane, the racial disparities and marginalization of poor people in the Gulf Coast, particularly New Orleans, were heavily documented (Brunsma et al., 2007). However, for many witnessing the events on television there was complete shock over the ways in which poor Black people were abandoned in the relief efforts (Macomber et al., 2006).

About 1,300 miles to the south, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake hit Port-au-Prince, Haiti and its environs on 12 January 2010, killing an estimated 200,000 people, and leaving 1.5 million people homeless (OxfamAmerica, 2010; DesRoches et al., 2011). The earthquake caused catastrophic damage to buildings and infrastructure, including the destruction of many government buildings and schools (Cavallo et al., 2010). The death toll among workers, members of the UN mission, and the devastation to public buildings had significant negative impacts on an already fragile public infrastructure and its ability to administer an effective relief and recovery process (Green and Miles, 2011). With a human development index ranking of 163 out of 187 countries ranked, the entrenched poverty in Haiti was well known, though the causes of such low development remain largely hidden from popular discourse and public knowledge (United Nations Development Programme, 2015). These two very distinct disaster contexts representing developing and developed nations reveal profound similarities in disaster management and governance mechanisms as reported by the *New York Times*.

## ***Securitization and militarization of humanitarian efforts***

Chandler (2001) has proposed that a shift in the humanitarian agenda from a needs-based to a rights-based approach resulted in the 'politicization of humanitarian aid'. This politicization of humanitarianism, he argues, led to 'even greater leverage over non-Western societies as NGOs and international institutions increasingly assume the right to make judgements about what is right and just, about whose capacities are built, and which local groups are favored' (2001: 700). In the past decade scholars have observed that the newly emerging humanitarian framework increasingly embraces and employs securitization/military interventions at the same time that it becomes detached from core ethical humanitarian principles (Chandler, 2001; Hannigan, 2012).

According to Hannigan, a partial explanation of this securitization/militarization tendency lies in the nexus of 'strategic interest, ideologically motivated economics, and muscular humanitarianism' (2012: 109). Specifically, some scholars have argued that actors of militarization and securitization operate as marionettes of self-interested nation states and, beyond security concerns, serve as a 'political-economic weapon' for cultivating and implanting disaster capitalism/neoliberalism in devastated and vulnerable post-disaster or post-conflict settings (Bello, 2006; Hannigan, 2012). One example of this argument is the extensive role of the US military after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami that coincided with the revocation of restrictions on US arms sales and US-led military training that the Indonesian army was subjected to (Bello, 2006). We observe the reporting of similar dynamics in post-Katrina Gulf Coast and Haiti.

### ***Displacement, deconcentration of poverty, and racial cleansing***

It is well-known that natural and human-caused disasters tend to create extensive population displacement, whether it is internally displaced persons seeking temporary shelter after a disaster or refugees seeking asylum in times of war and conflict (Chamlee-Wright and Storr, 2009; Saraçoğlu, and Demirtaş-Milz, 2014; Timms, 2011). Adams and colleagues (2009), through their study of 180 New Orleans residents displaced by Katrina, identified four dimensions of displacement that essentially cluster along the lines of homeownership, class, and race: (1) evacuation and literal displacement; (2) 'ongoing sense of displacement from the community'; (3) 'displacement' from normal life in the sense that some people were able to return to their 'place of residence' but their lives never returned back to their pre-Katrina state; and (4) permanent displacement and 'deliberate and permanent eviction of the poor from New Orleans' (2009: 616). Understood this way, displacement can be 'simultaneously recognized as a cause, symptom, and, ultimately, false cure for disasters' (Adams et al., 2009: 616). The 'cure' aspect of displacement is noteworthy for our purposes.

Disaster sites, their surroundings, and survivors are most often mediated through 'polluted images' that set in motion 'purifying discourses' and practices (Grano and Zagacki, 2011: 201). In other words, to remedy the chaos, filth, and negativity of the disaster scene, 'cleaning up' interventions are necessary in both literal and metaphoric terms. In New Orleans, for example, the agenda of purification, and essentially racialized purging, began through mandated evacuations and was strengthened by tearing down publicly subsidized housing units, developing mixed-income residences, and evicting poor residents of New Orleans (Adams et al., 2009). Indeed, the rapid disappearance of profitless public housing units reinforced the logic that people who are

poor somehow occupy and pollute places (Grano and Zagacki, 2011). Adams and colleagues (2009) aptly note that, ‘the poor, it seems, were to be evicted from New Orleans as a way to “cleanup” the city and help it recover once and for all’ (p. 626).

Displacement as a remedy for social ills has been prescribed in a variety of contexts but seems to be particularly prominent when poverty is the obstacle to overcome. For example, eradication of concentrated poverty has been dealt with through ‘slum clearance’ projects, the HOPE VI program in the USA, poverty deconcentration, and national decentralization – all efforts requiring dislocation or dispersion of large numbers of poor people (e.g. Navez-Bouchanine, 2008).

Race appears to play a particularly important role in displacement as a remedial and ‘cleaning up’ tool. According to Grano and Zagacki (2011), Black poverty has infiltrated public consciousness as a ‘place of terror’ that is to be feared and that needs to be purged. Disasters expose these, usually invisible or distanced, realities of structural inequality and racism, and open urgent opportunities to clean and purge the ‘places of terror’ and ‘Blackness en masse’ (Grano and Zagacki, 2011). Both disasters – Hurricane Katrina in the Gulf Coast and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti – presented such unprecedented opportunities ‘to clean up the mess’ that concentrated Black poverty, according to some perspectives, produced in these two locales (Adams et al., 2009; Klein, 2007).

The promise of resolving and fixing poverty through displacement and racial cleansing actually just disperses and makes poor people of color even more invisible, arguably, so that the clean, blank slate can be capitalized on. Then, the act of displacement itself and the internalized sense of perpetual displacement – of home, community, and a ‘normal’ life – jointly serve as a form of destabilization or ‘shock therapy’ (Klein, 2007), a necessary precondition for disaster capitalism.

## ***Disaster capitalism***

Disaster capitalism denotes the use of disasters as opportunities to capitalize on vulnerability and to push for policies and practices that would unlikely be approved of in times of social and moral order (Klein, 2007). We, and others, have argued that disaster capitalism is a logical extension of capitalism itself, but especially neoliberalism (Klein, 2007; Schuller and Morales, 2012). While scholars have debated about what globalization and neoliberalism are and what they are not (e.g. Lechner and Boli, 2015), we draw from David Harvey’s (2007) definition, which states that neoliberalism is:

a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and

skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. (2007: 2)

Thus, we argue that in times of disaster these neoliberal forces are unleashed through media discourse, and transnational policy-making and social practices in collaboration with both the for-profit and not-for-profit private sectors.

The execution of disaster capitalism and the fulfillment of economic gains and political agendas tend to operate in very subtle ways. Agendas, sometimes only remotely related to disaster recovery, are framed as providing direct gains to the disaster-stricken nation and its public (Klein, 2007; Schuller and Morales, 2012). Through the lens of disaster capitalism, catastrophic events function to create opportunities for profiteering and privatization that benefit business, corporations, and other elite interests while retrenching government intervention (Klein, 2007; Perez and Cannella, 2011). This neoliberal agenda is further bolstered by recovery policies and efforts that emphasize the values of individual responsibility, self-sufficiency, and efficiency (Adams, 2012; Tierney, 2015).

Numerous prior cases of disaster capitalism in action have been documented in both developing and developed countries. Some examples include privatization of public goods and social programs, strong presence of foreign investors to boost economies and develop industries, use of public spaces for commercial purposes, and importing supplies and labor from other nation states (Adams et al., 2009; Klein, 2007; Schuller and Morales, 2012; Timms, 2011). Another disconcerting component of disaster capitalism has been noted by Schuller and Morales (2012). They use the term 'non-profiteering' to denote how non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are also complicit in disaster capitalism as they tend to gain profit or interest from disasters through the procurement of large public and private grants and extensive transnational fundraising efforts; some of them have been charged with misusing raised funds. We have detected this outgrowth of disaster capitalism in the *New York Times* reporting from both the Gulf Coast and Haiti.

## Study methods

This research is part of a larger study funded by the US-based National Science Foundation that is concerned with comparing the social production of disaster and recovery of Hurricane Katrina (2005) and the Haiti earthquake (2010). The larger study analyzed media, policy, and NGO discourse, along with surveys and focus groups of disaster survivors. In this article, we analyzed media discourse from the *New York Times*, a mainstream US publication with a substantial global reach and impact. It is an often-studied media outlet in

the identification of discourse frames as it is considered a 'gatekeeper' (Kioussis, 2004: 77) of news coverage and a national 'paper of record' (Benoit et al., 2005: 360). The analysis of media after disasters has proven to be an important method for further understanding the forces at play in disaster relief and recovery efforts (Pantti, et al., 2012).

To obtain the newspaper articles from the *New York Times*, we conducted a search in the Lexis Nexis database using the words 'Haiti earthquake' for the dates 12 January 2010 through 12 January 2012, and 'Hurricane Katrina' and 'relief' or 'recovery' for the dates 29 August 2005 through 29 August 2007. Initially, this search yielded 375 articles and 1,305 articles respectively. We reviewed these articles for eligibility and excluded articles that had only passing references to the disaster, and included articles that offered substantial coverage of the topic. From the Katrina sample, due to the large amount of coverage, we further de-limited the sample to every third article, so that we could have a sample size that was equitable to the Haiti data for comparative purposes. This selection process yielded 233 articles about the Haiti earthquake and 224 articles about Hurricane Katrina.

## **Data analysis**

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2003), an interpretive approach that allows a researcher to reveal socially constructed meanings that lie behind everyday realities, guided our analysis. CDA allows a researcher to decode generally agreed upon meanings that may be veiled by taken for granted everyday language and reality (Fairclough, 2003). CDA permits the researchers to unearth beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, and meanings conveyed by cultural and local discourses. Fairclough (1995) regards discourse through a three-dimensional conception, that is text, discursive practice (production, distribution, consumption), and social practice. Analysis of discourse seeks to uncover textual meaning, as well as practices of production, dissemination, and consumption to understand text in its social context and in relation to other texts and discourses (Fairclough, 1995; Herrera and Braumoeller, 2004). Thus, when we came across a phrase like 'build back better', rather than taking the phrase at face value, CDA allowed us to explore what hidden truths lie behind it, particularly as it relates to power and the maintenance of existing social relations, compelling an inquiry into whose perception of 'better' is tendered. Thus, we were able to trace the dominant discourses that dictate social relations and structures and the recovery process in general.

We used NVivo 9 software to organize the news stories and identify basic themes. The second author coded the articles for themes, some of which were deductive (e.g. disaster capitalism) and others inductive (e.g. securitization/militarization). In the tradition of qualitative research (Charmaz, 2011), throughout the coding process, the coder wrote extensive memos. These efforts

led to the development of a preliminary set of codes, including securitization/militarization, disaster capitalism, and displacement. Secondary analysis by the third author focused on the interpretive categories of neoliberal paternalism and disaster governance, ideas that emerged from critical social welfare policy scholarship. Throughout both the primary and secondary analytic processes, the authors met regularly to discuss the codes, the coding process, and interpretations that were emerging from the data in relation to the theoretical frameworks and empirical literature on disasters and humanitarianism.

## Findings

NDG is manifested through three key discourse frames in the media documents we analyzed for the Gulf Coast and Haiti disasters. The first and most central frame of interest and noticeability is securitization of disaster survivors and militarization of disaster settings. The second frame is displacement, deconcentration of poverty, and racial cleansing. We view these two dimensions as key tools or mechanisms for the third dimension to manifest, namely disaster capitalism.

### ***Securitization/militarization***

Securitization and militarization necessitate a narrative that the disaster setting is a dangerous place, whether it is danger posed by some material aspect of the disaster itself, e.g. unsafe housing conditions or loss of safety nets, or danger posed by predators and 'lawless' masses (usually survivors themselves). This text about post-earthquake Haiti from the *New York Times* (NYT) epitomizes the latter dimension of this theme:

Post-quake Haiti is a dangerous place, as a new report from the International Crisis Group makes clear. 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.

This 'danger' narrative is closely linked with the 'chaos' narrative, which, in the case of the Gulf Coast, reads like this:

Americans were shocked by images of families huddled on rooftops and stranded on highway overpasses. The flooding produced a toxic swirl of sewage, chemicals, rats, snakes and bloated corpses. Fires raged because there was no water available in a drowning city. Looters stripped stores of CDs and Nikes as well as bread and diapers.



These narratives thus legitimize military and police action that brings order to chaos and security to those in danger. For example, the *NYT* reports on prisoners who were massacred by Haitian police and United Nations forces in the aftermath of a riot triggered by unsettling post-earthquake conditions, wounding 40 prisoners, and killing a dozen others who were buried in a mass grave.

The militarization of relief and recovery and policing of survivors cannot be disconnected from the economic and political context in which they transpire. Securitization and militarization are arguably the handmaidens to, and perhaps a manifestation of, disaster capitalism, as 'lawlessness' and other unsafe conditions are viewed as deterrents for re-development, business interests, and economic growth opportunities. Retrenchment of public services is another tool in the logic of neoliberalism and disaster capitalism and it is important to keep in mind that Hurricane Katrina occurred just shortly after the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) had been down regulated from its own freestanding agency to one under the umbrella of the Department of Homeland Security. The *NYT* reports: 'Mr. Bush said in his address to the nation from New Orleans on Thursday night that the military would play a new role in federal disaster relief.'

In both Haiti and the Gulf Coast, the use of outside military and police interventions played a central role within the fabric of the relief and recovery efforts. In Haiti, United Nations military personnel, whose peacekeeping mission in Haiti prior to the earthquake was known as MINUSTAH, had a strong presence from the initial impact of the earthquake. MINUSTAH had been previously viewed by some Haitians, as, according to the *NYT*, 'heavy-handed outsiders'. Nonetheless, both UN police and peacekeeping troops were mobilized, according to the *NYT*, to 'maintain public order and to guard [aid] deliveries' and to handle 'unrest'. The *NYT* reports: 'So far, violence has been scattered in Port-au-Prince. But senior United Nations officials said it might boil over at any moment as the difficulties of living without water, food and shelter mounted.' During the presidential election in Haiti, which occurred at a tense time in a Haiti that was in the midst of recovery efforts, extra UN troops were brought in to respond to 'violent protests' and 'unrest', in order to 'maintain order' and to 'end demonstrations and potential riots'.

The US military took immediate control of coordinating flights at the airport after the earthquake in Port-au-Prince. However, their efforts were heavily criticized in part because in the early days of the earthquake relief, they prioritized bringing US troops in and rescuing and evacuating US citizens and other foreigners, at the expense of bringing in aid. While technically the 'Americans remain focused on delivering aid, while the United Nations handled peacekeeping', the powerful presence of US military has both a historicized (e.g., US marines occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934) and a current geo-political meaning. Importantly, a memorandum that was signed between the UN and the US did not put US military troops under UN command; they

remained autonomous, a reflection of American exceptionalist values. While the *NYT* described how American troops ‘rolled through the capital’s battered streets’, they downplayed the historical significance and message that armed soldiers might have played to vulnerable Haitian citizens:

Haiti’s long history of foreign intervention, including an American occupation, normally makes the influx of foreigners a delicate issue...But with the government of President Rene Preval 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.

To be sure, this is a problematic, if not unverifiable, statement. And, it is echoed by other discourse by a UN official who emphasized that their missions are focused on ‘humanitarian aid, not security’. And yet, elsewhere, the *NYT* reports on a group of young Haitian men who shouted at UN Secretary-General Ban-Ki Moon during his visit to Haiti. ‘We don’t need military aid’, said one. ‘What we need is food and shelter.’ To be sure, the relationship that Haitian disaster survivors may have had with the UN, US and other military troops there was complex at best (Dupuy, 2014). To further complicate matters, the UN and MINUSTAH came under severe public scrutiny after they were implicated in setting off a cholera outbreak that continues to afflict Haiti to this day.

Military intervention played a significant role in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina as well, in what would be the ‘the largest and longest domestic relief mission ever undertaken by the military’, according to the Pentagon, as reported by the *NYT*. The military engaged in relief, such as distributing food, water, and medical supplies, as well as search and rescue missions. Alongside these missions, their charge was to securitize the environment and evacuate residents. Because many National Guard troops from Louisiana were deployed in Iraq at the time, troops from other states were brought in ‘to help combat looting and help restore order’. Military deployment means not just troops, but also material technology and supplies, such as ‘high-wheeled, five-ton trucks that can traverse floodwaters’, ‘hand-held radios’, tanks, meals-ready-to-eat (known as MREs), water, medical supplies, and, of course, weapons. Thus, the disaster setting becomes akin to a military zone, in this case coordinated by a three-star Army general, Russel Honore, who had a ‘special command set up at Camp Shelby, Miss[issippi]’.

In the early days of the Katrina disaster, when most of the city was evacuated (some had also stayed, too), securitization would become a dominant objective of authorities. An official with the New Orleans police department ‘described the central business district as being “locked down.” Soldiers and police officers have taken up positions on street corners, he said, and police cars and military vehicles are cruising the streets.’ Like in Haiti, the discourse

of authorities was to 'stabilize' and 'secure' the city. The *NYT* reports on an interview with then Governor of Louisiana, Kathleen Blanco: 'some 300 National Guard members from Arkansas were flying into New Orleans with the express task of reclaiming the city. "They have M-16's and they are locked and loaded," she said.' The final sentence of this quote by Governor Blanco, not reported in the *NYT*, was: 'These troops know how to shoot and kill and I expect they will' (Incite, n.d.:49).

Struggling with a hobbled police force, the New Orleans Police Department was largely 'in the hands of National Guard troops and active-duty soldiers', even though many of the troops and resources were in Iraq 'to support the homeland security mission'. Months into the recovery after Katrina, the *NYT* describes New Orleans: 'Garbage is piled up, the crime rate has soared, and as of Tuesday the National Guard and the state police were back in the city, patrolling streets that the Police Department has admitted it cannot handle on its own.' Here we see an example of how these narratives of securitization of lawless people, and filth ('garbage has piled up'), appear side by side. This theme around filth will be further developed in the next section on racial cleansing. For now, we can point out how, in New Orleans, troops were needed to secure people from 'toxic' and 'hazardous' materials.

Highlighting the criminality of disaster survivors serves to further the need for policing the disaster context, with the articulated goal of 'restoring order'. In Haiti, these criminals included detained illegal immigrants in Florida, counterfeiters faking food ration tickets, rapists, marauding escaped prisoners, kidnappers, and the ubiquitous meme of 'looters'. In New Orleans, it was the 'roving gangs' and rapists in the Superdome and Convention Center in a 'city being run by thugs', identity thieves who tried to get free aid, online swindlers, scammers, the 'lawless', and again, 'looters.' An additional thread of discourse highlights the criminality of internally displaced persons after Katrina, discussing the rise in crime rates in Houston, for example, a city to where thousands of New Orleanians had evacuated. And these discourses exist alongside stories of verified police and military violence in both the Gulf Coast and Haiti, as the *NYT* reported on several cases of 'looters', prisoners, and other survivors being shot and/or killed by police. One infamous case in New Orleans was the Danziger bridge incident where New Orleans police killed two and wounded four unarmed Black civilians.

An interesting difference between Haiti and the Gulf Coast in terms of identifying looters concerns the complex role that race and class play. The *NYT* refers to survivors who are salvaging or procuring goods from businesses as 'looters' in both settings; it is not always clear what the race of the individuals in question are from the articles, though certainly it is self-evident that they are Black in Haiti (the country is 95% Black) and, in our minds, an implied connotation that they are Black in New Orleans, where the pre-Katrina population was two-thirds Black. Interestingly, in the case

of Haiti, a *NYT* reporter writes: 'Its stores have been cracked open like piñatas, leading owners, scavengers and thieves – it is often hard to tell which – to scurry in and out at all hours, grabbing what they can.' This confusion of identity is likely the case because Haiti's population is mostly Black and thus the economic location of the person is not as clear as it might be in New Orleans where White implies a higher economic status and Black necessarily implies poor.

Our objective in highlighting these themes around criminality is most certainly not to diminish or downgrade the experiences of crime victims in the aftermath of these disasters. Indeed, it is not uncommon that sexual assault prevalence rates increase in disaster settings (Enarson and Morrow, 1997) and there was indeed evidence of sexual assault incidents on the rise, for example, in the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Port-au-Prince (Schuller, 2010). However, we argue that the racialized criminalization of disaster survivors, most of whom are innocent, justifies policies and practices that not only clearly violate their rights as citizens and ignore their real material and psychosocial needs, but furthers the NDG agenda.

The security measures around the delivery of food aid is another dimension of this securitization discourse as the *NYT* reported on 'scuffles' over the distribution of food and water. This theme dominates the Haiti data more so than the Gulf Coast, though stories about the delivery of water for people waiting to get into the Superdome reinforced this theme on the Gulf Coast. The UN World Food Programme spokesperson reported that the agency 'wanted "a formal system in place"' in Haiti to ensure security arrangements for the distribution of food.' While lack of infrastructure was one impediment to distribution of aid in Haiti, officials remarked that lack of security was also a reason for scaling back some of the aid.

Securitization in the camps in Haiti and FEMA trailer parks on the Gulf Coast was also a salient issue identified in our analysis. One *NYT* article describes the trailer parks in Gulf Coast communities: 'In these FEMA towns, with so many highly stressed people living on top of each other, officials worry about tension and crime.' In Haiti, this emphasis was on the IDP camps where there was theft, poor lighting, unlockable latrines, and violence against women and girls. While few UN, public, and NGO resources were devoted to these camps and the dire needs and poor conditions of the camps were well-documented (e.g. Schuller, 2010), several officials focused their efforts instead on strengthening police presence to address the issue.

Coerced and forced evacuation as the disaster was transpiring was a dominant theme on the Gulf Coast. Though there is no evidence of forced evacuations in Haiti in our data, there were stories of coercive tactics used to get people to abandon the IDP camps. For some time in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, official discourse from authorities was that, even though the state had the authority to do so, they would not utilize forced evacuations.

Instead, by continuing to reinforce how ‘unlivable’ the city was – nails in the street that would poke tires, packs of roaming dogs, lack of drinking water and electricity – the authorities sought to deter people from returning and to encourage the last remaining holdouts to finally leave. According to one *NYT* article:

It was not clear how widespread the forced evacuations were. But earlier in the day the city’s police superintendent said that while his department would concentrate first on removing those who wanted to leave, the hazards posed by fires, waterborne diseases and natural-gas leaks had left the city with no choice but to use force on those who resisted.

To be sure, in the weeks following a disaster’s impact, risks continue to abound, but our contention is that there was an undue fixation on these risks. And though not necessarily intentional, we believe this fixation is part and parcel to the internalized apparatus of NDG.

### ***Racial cleansing and displacement***

One of the mechanisms for controlling people in a disaster is the construction of an image of the environment as dirty, unsafe, or unhealthy. This discourse offers a rationale for the actions of policy-makers, humanitarian aid workers, and business interests that often result in displacement of vulnerable people from their geographic location, culture, and social networks. While this theme was peripherally addressed in the previous section on securitization, here we go deeper into the data and analysis with this idea as we make connections to issues of racism, displacement, and cultural imperialism.

In both Haiti and the Gulf Coast, racial cleansing plays out through the descriptions of the horrors of Port-au-Prince, coupled with proposals for decentralization of the country away from Port-au-Prince, and in the case of the Gulf Coast, descriptions of filth, alongside justifications for policies that prohibited largely Black New Orleanians from returning to their homes, including policies based on the deconcentration of poverty thesis. We also discuss the humanitarian parole program that expedited adoptions of Haitian children.

To narrate the story in the aftermath of the earthquake, the *NYT* uses dramatic language, as post-earthquake Haiti is described as a horrific ‘war’ scene, a place with disaster victims who are ‘jaw-droppingly poor’, ‘homeless and maimed’, and ‘languishing’. The unbearable stench of dead corpses and bodies being thrown into the mass graves complete the snapshot of the disaster scene. Such sensationalized images of disasters are not uncommon for media to employ after a disaster, and it tends to especially be the case when reporting on the developing world (Franks, 2006). The descriptions clearly conjure the frame of Black people associated with horror and filth.

Similarly, New Orleans was described as a 'fetid', 'filthy', and 'toxic' 'wasteland', where mold, reeking corpses, swamp waters, and sludge reigned. These kinds of descriptions were coupled with a wide range of justifications and policy proposals for why poor Black residents should not be allowed to move back to their communities. These ideas were also wedged amidst the discourse of the de-concentration of poverty, proffering the highly contested theory that concentration of poverty 'is harmful to cities'. According to an economist interviewed by the *NYT*, 'Where there are high concentrations of poverty, people can't see a way out ... Maybe the diaspora is a blessing.' In this same vein, a now infamous quote from the *Wall Street Journal* reported the words of a Louisiana Senator: 'We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did' (Babington, 2005).

There were temporary bans on redevelopment of properties for those hardest hit by the disaster, along with a proposal that the 'lowest lying areas would have to be elevated.' The largely African American Lower Ninth Ward, in particular, is described as 'an utter wasteland where virtually no cleanup effort had begun. City officials, citing safety concerns, had barred residents from visiting their homes.' The mold in houses was said to be dangerous for African Americans, in particular, because of their high rates of asthma.

These discourses of 'dirty' and 'unsafe', coupled with policies that prohibit rebuilding in hard hit African American communities reinforced racial cleansing, arguably in service to the practices of disaster capitalism. Notably, several stories reported in the *NYT* reveal that imposed, coerced, or economically driven displacement was prevalent among African American evacuees, and lack of resources stymied their return. By contrast, interviews with White evacuees reveal voluntary displacement and intentional decisions to not return, rebuild, and keep themselves safely away from the changed New Orleans.

Decentralization of Haiti has long been a rallying cry of many observers of Haiti, policy-makers, and citizens, even prior to the earthquake (Oxfam America, 2010). After the earthquake, this proposal was renewed, as the disaster gave the situation a sense of urgency and opened a window of opportunity to do so. According to a *NYT* editorial, 'Haitians need to get out of disaster-prone areas, and well-placed development could enable them to lead sustainable lives in rural areas and new small towns instead of as the huddled, jobless urban poor.' Thus, the chaotic, cramped, devastating conditions could be transformed and cleansed in favor of a bucolic life in the countryside. While this sentiment and policy thrust is not divorced from real needs, research on previous disasters reveals that post-disaster displacement can occur in the name of environmental sustainability, as happened when residents were relocated from Celaque National Park in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch at the detriment of residents. At the end of the day, this policy worked against the 'proclaimed goals of nature preservation through exclusionary national park policies' (Timms, 2011:11).

The evacuations of children in Haiti who were perceived to be ‘orphans’ were carried out, according to a spokesperson for the US Department of Homeland Security, as reported by the *NYT*, in the ‘best interests of children who faced “an uncertain and likely dangerous situation that could worsen by the day, if not by the hour”’. In an apologist’s tone, a *NYT* editorial explains:

There is no evidence to suggest that the evacuations were driven by anything other than the best of intentions. And with untold numbers of unaccompanied children in Haiti, the hemisphere’s poorest country, left fending for themselves or languishing in institutions, it is not hard to make the case that those who were evacuated are better off than they would have been in the hemisphere’s poorest country.

This attitude of paternalism, i.e. children will be saved and ‘better off’ in the developed USA, is reinforced by a discourse of Haiti as ‘the hemisphere’s poorest country’. Evangelical churches, both international and local, which play key roles in adoptions worldwide, were major actors in this evacuation of children from Haiti. The story is layered in moral righteousness and religious humanitarianism that reeks of the earliest days of cultural imperialism (Pyles, 2016). It echoes discourse in New Orleans about how IDPs were likely ‘better off’ in other cities that had better schools and resources. These narratives also replicate paternalistic contemporary US policies and practices about what is best for Black welfare recipients, such as job readiness programs and low-wage work (Soss et al., 2011). Indeed, it continues the legacy of control of Black bodies for the benefit of White people.

The *NYT* aptly offers counter-discourse to these justifications of transnational adoptions, noting that some of the adoptions were ‘expedited whether or not children were in peril and without the screening required to make sure they had not been improperly separated from their relatives or placed in homes that could not adequately care for them’. The *NYT* interviewed child protection specialists and advocates who noted that taking children out of their familiar environments in a crisis can worsen their trauma and leave them at risk of trafficking. The individual and collective trauma of displacement has significant historical precedent whether it is the African slave trade or when child protective services remove low-income Black children from their homes.

### ***Disaster capitalism and neoliberal disaster governance***

In both Haiti and the Gulf Coast, the stories of many actors profiteering after these disasters are abundant. In coverage of Hurricane Katrina, a prime example is large out-of-state corporations that won no-bid contracts with FEMA to



carry out cleanup and reconstruction work. The *NYT* reports that because of the need for a speedy response to the disaster, several giant engineering companies, were poised to make a considerable amount from hurricane-related work. For some local developers, the disaster is described as an 'unparalleled opportunity' and 'the chance of a lifetime' to make a lot of money. For instance, local hotel operators captured the opportunity by providing temporary shelters post-Katrina. To describe them, the *NYT* invokes the images of 'scallywag' and 'carpetbagger', derived from the legacy of the Civil War and Reconstruction eras in the US South. The latter is an outsider and the former is someone local, both taking advantage of a bad situation. A critical point here is that such recovery assistance funneled by the private sector replaces core functions of government and thus arguably reinforces neoliberal paternalistic governance (Klein, 2007).

In coverage of Haiti, the *NYT* repeatedly labels Haiti as a place that offers 'considerable economic advantages' and encourages US or foreign investments in industries like construction, garment-making, and tourism in the name of macro-economic development for a 'new Haiti'. Such discourses were made evident through stories about US companies exploiting the disaster to revive their construction industry that was mired in a recession. Another notable finding is the fact that not only for-profit organizations, but non-profit organizations also benefit from disasters through 'non-profiteering' (Schuller and Morales, 2012). For example, the earthquake in Haiti is described as an 'aha moment for non-profits, demonstrating within hours the vast potential to raise money by text messaging', which can also be an effective tool for building long-term relationships with donors. Innovations in fund-raising efforts are certainly commendable and encouraged, yet the reporting of how the raised money was spent – projects unrelated to the disaster, luxurious lodging and transportation for humanitarian staff, imported humanitarian supplies – are red flags of disaster capitalism in action.

Highlighting an investment value in Haiti does not guarantee that local people will benefit from it. The *NYT* routinely refers to Haiti as 'the poorest country in the Western hemisphere' and underscores that the 'moral obligation to address extreme poverty is not charity in the old-fashioned sense of handouts, but rather helping people find their own ways to support their families'. The creation of local jobs through foreign investment is believed to be an effective way to achieve Haiti's integration into the global economy. One *NYT* article states that 'Haitians need something more fundamental than relief from the present situation; they need jobs that they can count on for years ahead. For this, the private business sector is essential.' However, from the view of disaster victims, the question still remains as to who is creating the recovery plan and for whose benefit is it. A criticism from former Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, as cited in the *NYT*, exemplifies this concern:



An exogenous plan of reconstruction for the ‘new Haiti’ – 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.

The idea of promoting Haitian integration into the global economy is certainly not altruistic, given that many outside businesses have, in the neoliberal era, been making enormous profits by harnessing cheap Haitian labor (Dupuy, 2014).

Another discourse frame is disaster survivors as social entrepreneurs, with an understanding that the market can meet social needs in lieu of public assistance. This echoes the logic of US neoliberal poverty governance, claiming that individuals have a moral and political obligation to act as disciplined entrepreneurs, planning to meet their own needs and accepting personal responsibility for their problems (Soss et al., 2011). The Road Home Program, which was the privatized Louisiana state grant program for homeowners to rebuild, operated by the consulting firm ICF International, is a clear example showing how victims of a disaster should behave if they wish to receive benefits. The *NYT* reports on stories about homeowners who had to prove their qualification for assistance through extensive documentation, and fingerprinting to prevent fraud, but ultimately failed to receive or gave up on the grant. The *NYT* points out that:

The program’s low-speed beginning reflects an urgent need to avoid the kind of waste and fraud that plagued federal programs after the hurricane. The government is demanding that applicants produce details of insurance policies and payouts, proof of title to a house, and, if possible, official assessments of a home’s pre-storm value. Many New Orleans residents lost such paperwork in the flood, or never had it in the first place.

This narrative reveals that the assistance is not offered to dependent people looking for a handout. Rather, disaster survivors are required to be disciplined customers in order to receive the assistance they need to get on with their lives.

## Discussion

Foucault wrote that ‘surveillance ... becomes a decisive economic operator both as an internal part of the production machinery and as a specific mechanism in the disciplinary power’ (1977: 174). In these two disaster contexts we find that this surveillance and discipline are carried out by militarized securitization, imposed displacement and paternalistic and inaccessible disaster recovery programs, all in service of larger neoliberal economic agendas.

Neoliberal disaster governance supported by increased military-led relief operations has arguably come to overpower or replace a traditional humanitarian framework that would otherwise prioritize basic human needs and community capacity-building to prevent, prepare for, and respond to natural disasters. We see this as problematic because the immediate humanitarian rights of marginalized victims, who were largely poor, were suspended in the name of securitization and stabilization. The media justifies the militarization of aid by highlighting the racialized criminalization of disaster survivors, converges with a historically constructed negative racial stereotype of poor black criminality. We find that NDG in these two disaster settings intensifies pre-existing societal and economic inequality based on racial and socioeconomic privilege, perpetuates colonialist structures of power that marginalize people of color, and robs people and their governments of democratic decision-making authority. These issues are especially salient in light of the fact that racism and xenophobia are at the forefront of social policy issues globally.

Given how NDG appears to operate, we must question who indeed the real predators and looters in these two disaster contexts are. Klinenberg and Frank (2005) note that the abundance of post-Katrina private contracting and the replacement of public sector with private sector services epitomize a looting of government infrastructure or what they call 'looting Homeland Security' (cited in Adams et al., 2009). In the Haitian context, similar charges have been made against corporations, multinational organizations, and international NGOs for looting the Haitian people and government by means of derailed funds, empty promises, and hidden agendas (e.g. Dupuy, 2010; Schuller and Morales, 2012). In this sense, NDG is not just a mechanism of social control that is exerted by disciplinary power. It transforms the state as a site for the application of market principles that center on costs and benefits, investment and returns, and legitimates the benefits that privileged groups receive from the neoliberal economy (Perez and Cannella, 2011; Soss et al., 2011). An antidote, which one might call a people's or democratic disaster governance, must address the negative consequences of widespread privatization of relief, including mismanagement, corruption and profiteering, and a loss of transparency and accountability, especially for the most vulnerable.

## Conclusion

Through critical discourse analysis of media narratives after two significant disasters in relation to other recent disaster and policy literature, we have offered an interpretive explanation of the ways in which NDG takes shape in disaster settings. We have proposed that militarization and displacement are mechanisms of NDG that create conditions for and give rise to disaster

capitalism as a manifestation of the neoliberal economic system. We have also shown how the most vulnerable survivors of both disasters, particularly people of color who are poor, were paternalistically governed through securitization, pacification, de-politicization, retrenchment of government support, and imposed displacement. It stands to reason that when people are traumatized and displaced from their roots, neoliberal paternalism and disaster capitalism may prevail to further disadvantage and marginalize them. One cannot expect or request the victims of disasters to stay alert and resistant to the exploitative, opportunistic forces in the time of such distress; and so it becomes the duty of advocates, humanitarians, policy-makers, and scholars to be alert in detecting such forces and acting to disrupt them in the name of the most vulnerable. We envision that through joint, interdisciplinary and grassroots action, a people's or democratic disaster governance can prevail.

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