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Mark Schuller, Humanitarian aftershocks in Haiti

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Rich in ethnographic detail and rigorous in interpretation, *Plastic Bodies* is a deeply researched, complex, and innovative exploration of an important topic. The organization of the chapters could have supported the development of major threads better, and Sanabria makes some critical claims about the wider context of bodily interventions in Brazil, such as situating hormonal therapies alongside other interventions, that she can only touch upon. Despite these minor critiques, this book is a fascinating analysis of gender, the medicalization of the body, and the socialization of biochemistry that has wide applicability across disciplines.

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Humanitarian aftershocks in Haiti, by Mark Schuller, New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 2016, 295 pp., USD27.95 (pbk), ISBN 978-0-8135-7423-3

In *Humanitarian Aftershocks in Haiti*, anthropologist Mark Schuller investigates the nature of global humanitarianism and development through a case study of the international response to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. The book, which expands on Schuller's previous studies of aid in Haiti, focuses on how aid organizations working in Port-au-Prince dealt with the post-disaster homelessness crisis. Schuller urges us to look beyond the question of aid's "good intentions" by analyzing its consequences on the lives of its supposed beneficiaries. Ultimately, he contends that the international response to the disaster became a disaster itself, harming Haitian society through unintended consequences produced by the field's unexamined assumptions, internal logics, and professional practices. Schuller argues that humanitarian work is rooted in a set of Western cultural particularisms masquerading as universalism that are at odds with Haitian culture. He is particularly critical of the way that local forms of grassroots solidarity and community organizing are damaged by the influence of a neoliberalism that he argues underpins humanitarian work.

Schuller's findings are based on four years of extensive mixed-method research that he carried out in eight different internally displaced persons (IDP) camps with the help of a team of Haitian and Haitian-American students. He draws from qualitative and quantitative household surveys and interviews with camp residents as well as dozens of interviews with aid professionals.

Schuller prioritizes Haitian perspectives of their encounter with aid organizations throughout: each chapter begins with an excerpt from an interview from which he draws the chapter's main themes. *Humanitarian Aftershocks in Haiti* offers insightful observations about intimate aspects of IDP camp dynamics, including family structure, gender dynamics, and power relationships between camp residents and leaders, and between Haitians and the expatriate aid community. By focusing on Haitian perspectives of the disaster and letting them guide his analysis, this study counters the tendency to view the IDP camps and their residents as undifferentiated symbols of Haitian poverty and dysfunction.

The book is divided into three main parts. First, Schuller briefly provides an overview of Haitian history that builds towards an explanation of Port-au-Prince's vulnerability to natural disaster, which Schuller attributes to neoliberalism. Chapters 2–5 offer ethnographic analysis of how the ideologies and practices of international aid influenced life in the camps. In Chapters 6–8, Schuller assesses international aid through the lenses of different groups

associated with the aid delivery process: recipients living in the camps, low- and mid-level Haitian employees, and expatriate professional staff.

He reveals how the camps' initial formation and internal dynamics were socially constructed, emerging primarily in response to the professional practices of aid organizations that organized the camps and supplied basic goods and services essential to survival. For example, in his chapter on Haitian households and families in the camp, he demonstrates how aid delivery transformed the structure of the Haitian family unit for those living in the camps. Aid organizations distributed food aid and shelter assistance based on the idea of the small nuclear family, rather than Haitian family formations such as the *lakou*, which is a multi-generational household of extended family. Consequently, Haitian families had to split up into smaller residential units to receive adequate aid during distributions of food. Aid delivery, organized around implicit assumptions about the structure of family rooted in Western worldviews, were out of touch with Haitian realities and weakened social networks.

Schuller also exposes how aid industry labor practices manifest a hierarchy of human value. The system privileges foreign employees, both by paying them higher salaries and benefits than local hires and by prioritizing professional expertise over local knowledge. Haitian employees occupy a subservient position. Residents of the IDP camps sit at the bottom of this hierarchy. Most live in horrifying conditions in which they struggle to meet their most basic needs, and they are often viewed with suspicion by aid organizations that have been known to make deliveries in the company of armed United Nations soldiers. Aid organizations frequently gather information about their needs and make promises, but he claims that this rarely amounts to more than a cynical performance of community participation.

Schuller traces the structural inequalities and quotidian indignities of humanitarianism in Haiti to the profound influence of neoliberalism. Considering the centrality of this concept to his broader analysis, readers would benefit from a more precise definition of the term. Without a doubt, post-Duvalier policies of privatization and the reduction of trade barriers devastated the Haitian economy and society, but neoliberalism sometimes seems to function in the book as a catch-all cause of Haitian ills. Initially, it is defined as "the ideology and practice based on the assumption that the free market, unfettered by regulation or government interference, is the best engine for growth and the fairest distributor of wealth" (p. 28). But elsewhere it serves as a watershed moment fixed in time or a disembodied force of nature: urbanization in Port-au-Prince reached crisis-level during "the two decades since neoliberalism" (p. 36); rural migrants to Port-au-Prince were "displaced by neoliberalism" (p. 30). In the chapter on Haitian employees of international organizations, Schuller describes with sensitivity the social hierarchies that exist among college-educated Haitian employees and the recipients of aid in the camps, but he ultimately he attributes these complex social tensions to neoliberalism (p. 176).

However, this does not overshadow the book's many strengths. Schuller's research provides a wealth of detailed information concerning the political economy of humanitarianism and the unintended consequences of aid. His analysis presents a necessary cultural critique to a process usually framed in moral and economic terms. This book is essential reading for anyone serious about understanding the international response to the Haiti earthquake. It will also be of great interest to students of aid and development interested in moving beyond the cliché of good intentions.

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