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A Comparative Study of Culture and Cultural Heritage in Humanitarian Aid Efforts:  
Post-Earthquake Haiti and Post-Tsunami Aceh

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of Social Sciences  
University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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by  
Natalie K. Ruhe  
June 2017  
Advisor: Esteban Gomez

Author: Natalie K. Ruhe  
Title: A Comparative Study of Culture and Cultural Heritage in Humanitarian Aid  
Efforts: Post-Earthquake Haiti and Post-Tsunami Aceh  
Advisor: Esteban Gomez  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how cultural knowledge, beliefs, and practices affected the humanitarian aid response to disasters in Haiti and Aceh Province, Indonesia. It examines the importance of local knowledge in post-disaster response situations and how aid workers' "expertise" interplays with local knowledge, decision-making structures, and leadership. I questioned how knowledge of cultural practices could contribute to a more effective humanitarian aid approach and identified housing, social institutions and local leadership, economic systems, religious belief and practice as primary focuses. Examples detail how cultural beliefs and practices—as well as cultural heritage—may be vehicles for social stability and advance recovery in the social and economic spheres.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Haitian earthquake of January 2010 left the cities of Léogane and Port-au-Prince in ruins and compounded the poverty and instability of the Caribbean nation. Beyond the fractured infrastructure, the human toll was staggering: an estimated 200,000 were dead and millions displaced. The aid response was swift as international agencies—some of them long-established in Haiti—developed strategies to distribute aid. Monetary pledges poured in from around the world as funds were solicited to provide essential services and goods and for reconstructing hospitals and schools.

Four years prior, on December 26, 2004, an earthquake triggered a tsunami in the Indian Ocean. A reported 167,000 lives were lost in the Aceh province of Indonesia alone, equivalent to 4 percent of the population (Hyndman and Waizenegger 107). The power of the wave was evident in the extent of the physical destruction. Water reached far inland, destroying man-made structures and erasing natural coastal features.

Rapid response is necessary following natural disasters like those in Haiti and Aceh, meaning cultural complexities are often a secondary concern. Once emergency measures have been taken, humanitarian organizations may consider their role in the long-term recovery process and consider the consequences of aid projects and development programs. Aid may be disruptive and ultimately delay recovery if it is not culturally appropriate or rooted in cultural practice, and certain approaches may not be suitable based on a population's cultural values and historical experience.

Numerous examples detail how government agencies and foreign NGOs take part in post-disaster recovery processes and determine community needs and priorities with little or no consultation with the affected population. Despite the efforts of well-meaning individuals and aid organizations, a lack of cultural understanding and meaningful participation by local stakeholders often leads to misguided programs that are unwelcome or unsuccessful in the short- or long-term. Standardized aid approaches can be ineffective because local cultural forces, traditions, and beliefs are frequently disregarded.

It is prudent to define the term “culture” as there are numerous definitions that may be applied based on a particular theoretical approach. UNESCO explains culture as a “complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society” (“Learning to Live Together”). It is also described as “a dynamic force for renewal and creativity,” hence its use as an asset or tool for post-disaster reconstruction and development (Bokova “The Power of Culture for Development” 3). The definition of culture as “sets of learned and shared attitudes, beliefs, and value characteristics of a particular society” is also applicable because of its emphasis on transmission through and by people (Sidky 421).

For the purpose of this thesis, I have elected to view culture as the beliefs, values, attitudes, and practices that a group of people adheres to, as well as the social institutions and relationships in which they participate. Culture is transmitted by people and through people. I am interested in how beliefs, attitudes, and practices are negotiated in the aftermath of disaster and during response efforts, but also in the impact of disaster and humanitarian response on social institutions such as families, religious groups, and

economic systems. I believe an understanding of culture that embraces both short- and long-term change is especially important because of the rapid changes that may occur following a natural disaster.

In an article written for the Journal of the Prince Claus Fund, anthropologist Anthony Oliver-Smith defines cultural heritage as,

...the historical memory of a community, to that which links people to others and to their environment throughout time. Cultural heritage is constituted in objects, resources, and practices that locate a people in the universe, giving them a sense of identity through time. (“The Centrality of Culture in Post-Disaster Reconstruction” 20)

Thus, cultural heritage can refer to material culture, communal practices, cultural performances, and significant sites. It has been proposed the destruction or loss of any of these cultural heritage assets can bring about a loss of collective identity, “erasing cultural memory and severing links with the past” (Silverman and Ruggles 5).

The natural disasters in Haiti and Aceh wreaked havoc on cultural heritage sites, devastating museums, places of worship, and other culturally important locations. The Haitian National Cathedral and the presidential palace crumbled, and the Nader Museum—an important collection of Haitian folk art—was leveled. In Aceh, the tsunami waves decimated mosques and *meunasah*, crucial community and religious structures, in coastline villages. Cultural heritage has also been targeted in times of conflict to inflict emotional and psychological damage. The inadvertent destruction of culture due to a natural disaster can have a similar emotional effect. It has been suggested that the protection and preservation of cultural heritage—both tangible and intangible—can help a community regain a sense of meaning and control and support the recovery process.



This thesis is a comparative study between disaster response efforts in Haiti and Aceh. It explores the importance of local knowledge—and the role of anthropologists—in post-disaster response situations and in understanding the human, social causes behind a disaster. This thesis contributes to the field of anthropology because it details an application for the study of cultural systems. It also makes a contribution to cultural heritage and museum studies because it explores post-disaster approaches to cultural heritage and the ways in which its symbolic importance can support a community in recovery. Examples detail how cultural practices—such as religion, economic systems, housing, family structure, and community leadership—and cultural heritage sites may be vehicles for social stability and cohesion.

Humanitarian aid efforts typically address visible damage and the need for food, water, and shelter, but I questioned how knowledge of cultural practices could contribute to a more effective humanitarian aid approach. The two disasters detailed in the following chapters shed light on how cultural values and practices may factor in human-centered aid and sustainable development programs. I elected to use a case study approach to understand the particular cultural features of both Aceh and Haiti and how they were or were not leveraged as part of the aid response. I also conducted a comparative study of the post-disaster response in both locations to aid in the identification of more general guiding principles and recommendations for humanitarian aid organizations.

To guide the development of the case studies and comparative study, I focused on particular aspects of culture and developed a set of research questions, introduced in Chapter Two. I identified housing, social institutions and local leadership, economic

systems, religious belief and practice, and cultural heritage as the primary focuses and developed questions to direct my research. I was interested in how housing and habitation patterns were impacted by the disasters and if aid organizations addressed shelter in a way that met cultural needs. I sought to understand how aid workers' "expertise" interplays with local knowledge, decision-making structures, and leadership. I developed research questions to examine how disaster survivors and aid organizations sustain the economic system in a post-disaster period. I questioned how aid organizations supported religious practice, even for beliefs that were controversial or different than their own. My research questions also inquired into how the protection or restoration of cultural heritage may advance social and economic recovery.

Chapter Two introduces the specific set of research questions and explores the methodological basis for the Haitian and Acehnese case studies and the comparative study of the humanitarian aid response. It also introduces theoretical foundations upon which this thesis is built and establishes vulnerability as a central concept. The chapter highlights the psychosocial challenges that survivors face after a disaster and how culture can provide stability and psychological support. The chapter investigates the problems that arise when culture is not integrated into disaster response or work is done without local consultation. It also explores how emergency humanitarian aid is linked to long-term development efforts and the importance of culture at all stages of assistance. Cultural heritage is defined and several examples put forth as to how it has been threatened during times of conflict but also how it has been leveraged for tourism. Finally,

the chapter briefly notes how gender is also an important consideration in humanitarian aid work.

Chapter Three explores the historical factors contributing to vulnerability in Haiti and Aceh. The concept of vulnerability posits that disasters are the result of human, societal factors that impact a population's ability to cope with earthquakes, tsunamis, and other natural forces. With this idea in mind, this chapter delves into the roots of Haiti and Aceh's susceptibility to natural hazards.

Temporary camps are common in a post-disaster landscape. Chapter Four explores the challenges associated with displaced and disrupted communities. The chapter examines how local knowledge can be used to construct environmentally appropriate housing and to design homes that take into account cultural practices.

In Chapter Five, I explore the tensions that can arise when humanitarian aid workers and survivors meet in a post-disaster context. Conflict can surface because of a lack of cultural understanding, feelings of distrust, language barriers, religious differences, and aid workers living apart from the everyday realities of survivors. The chapter also underscores the benefits of working through local cultural and community structures.

Chapter Six inquires into the need for culturally appropriate and sustainable employment. In the chapter, I investigate temporary employment models, like "Cash for Work," and how outside investment does or does not create sustainable economic growth. The chapter emphasizes investment in training and leveraging local and informal economies to support development.

Religious beliefs can both support and complicate the recovery process. Chapter Seven delves into faith-based needs post-disaster and how religion can be a lens through which a disaster is processed and understood. Survivors' religious beliefs, however, can conflict with the worldview of responding agencies and complicate the work of aid workers.

Chapter Eight focuses on cultural heritage and how heritage loss was addressed in Haiti and Aceh following natural disaster. The chapter profiles several organizations with different approaches to heritage protection and restoration. The chapter concludes with an example of how cultural heritage production is sparked by natural disaster, and how the value of cultural heritage is communicated to a museum audience.

As historian David Lowenthal is quoted, "beleaguered by loss and change, we keep our bearings only by clinging to remnants of stability" (6). Lowenthal refers to change in the 20th century, but the same sentiment may apply to the changes that take place post-disaster. Placing an emphasis on culture and cultural heritage can create more sustainable solutions and may help a community regain a sense of meaning and control.

## CHAPTER TWO: METHODS AND THEORY

In this chapter, I introduce my primary research questions and explain the methods utilized. The following sections also introduce the foundational concepts I have applied to a study of the humanitarian response in Haiti and Aceh. To better understand the human role in natural disasters and why disasters impact populations unequally, I first introduce the idea of societal vulnerability. Disaster can cause psychological distress and delay recovery. I explore how disaster survivors process trauma and establish several strategies for post-disaster psychosocial aid.

The role of culture in humanitarian aid is a central theme in the following chapters. I provide several examples of how cultural values and practices have and have not been addressed in other post-disaster contexts and how cultural values and practices can support long-term development goals. Cultural heritage is a significant focus of this thesis. Several sections of this chapter explore the links between cultural heritage and identity—both personal and collective—and how it may be leveraged for economic growth as well as community healing. The chapter concludes with a section to explain how disaster impacts men and women differently and how the recovery process can keep women's needs at the forefront.

## Research Questions

The primary questions that guided my research were: How are cultural factors considered as part of a humanitarian aid response? Are there benefits to factoring cultural values, beliefs, and practices in humanitarian aid decisions? Conversely, are there consequences for disregarding cultural values and traditions in the aid response?

There are many parts to a post-disaster humanitarian response, such as healthcare, housing, and food distribution. For the purpose of this thesis, I focused on housing; social institutions and local leadership; economic systems; religious belief and practice; and cultural heritage as key factors in a humanitarian response. I chose these areas of focus because they surfaced in other post-disaster accounts as either important considerations for survivors, areas that aid organizations addressed, and needs that went unfulfilled.

I developed a set of questions to guide further inquiry into specific components of post-disaster humanitarian work:

- How are habitation patterns and social relationships impacted by disaster?
- What is the role of shelter in the recovery process?
- Did aid organizations approach rebuilding homes in ways that support local cultural needs and environmental constraints?
- To what extent do cultural differences present a challenge to disaster recovery?
- How do aid organizations and disaster survivors negotiate cultural differences?
- How do aid organizations work with community groups and social institutions to address needs?
- In what ways does natural disaster impact livelihoods and the economic system?

- Can aid organizations support economic recovery through employment opportunities without creating new dependencies?
- How did aid organizations support or ignore religious practices, beliefs, and institutions and integrate them into their efforts?
- What is the impact on a community when heritage sites are destroyed, heritage is threatened, or heritage practices suspended after a disaster?

### Methodology

I chose the case study method and the comparative method to address the research questions I proposed above. At the time I began my research, it was not feasible for me to travel to either location because of safety concerns in a post-disaster environment. Therefore, I sought out different resources to help me understand the situation after the earthquake. These resources included: accounts written by Haitian and Acehnese museum and cultural heritage professionals; post-disaster analyses conducted by anthropologists, sociologists, disaster researchers, psychologists, and humanitarian policy professionals; articles written by government personnel; surveys and studies conducted by NGOs; news articles and journalistic pieces; online posts by community and grassroots organizations; and disaster situation updates and briefs. The case study method allowed me to compile detailed accounts of the complex pre- and post-disaster situation in Haiti and Aceh and independently identify significant concepts. I utilized the comparative method to further explore conceptual similarities and relationships.

## Case Study Method

Education researcher Helen Simons defines a case study as the documentation of “a particular situation or event in detail” and from multiple perspectives (Simons 1). I chose to use the case study method because I believed it was essential to study the humanitarian aid response in both Aceh and Haiti in depth. As Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion, and Keith Morrison write in *Research Methods in Education*, one of the benefits of a case study is that they “report the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance” (181). Therefore, the case study method can be beneficial to describing and analyzing key events that unfold post-disaster, understanding the whole of the situation, and appreciating its complexity.

Cohen, Manion, and Morrison explain that case studies are often “concerned with a rich and vivid description of events relevant to a case” and “[blend] a description of events with the analysis of them” (Cohen et al. 182). By utilizing the case study method, I aim to layer the accounts of disaster survivors and aid workers—among others—to create a nuanced description of the post-disaster situation and aid response. Case studies provide an opportunity to build upon the description of events with analysis. However, the case studies I utilize in this thesis were based on written accounts rather than firsthand experience, so they may not illustrate the reality of the disaster response in a way that provides a richly detailed, “vicarious experience” for the reader (Simons 5). This is not necessarily unique. There are case studies for international development programs and nation-wide projects that are less experiential and more focused on sharing information (Simons 5).



The strength and weakness of case studies lies in their particularity. Case studies have been criticized because they examine only one instance—albeit with great depth, detail, and insight—and findings may not be applicable to other cases (Cohen et al. 184). Haiti and Aceh were impacted by different natural events and faced unique circumstances and constraints during the reconstruction process. Insights from one case study may not be applicable to the other because of their distinct cultural factors. Simons supports the idea that generalizations can be made from finding connecting themes between multiple case studies—a “cross-case generalization”—as well as from a single case (21). Concept generalization, for example, supports creating a theory from the interpretation of a single case and identifying concepts that “have equal significance in other cases of a similar kind, even if the contexts are different” (Simons 22). A case study of the post-disaster response in Aceh may bring to light general concepts or inferences that may be relevant to the post-disaster response in Haiti.

### Comparative Analysis

In addition to the case study method, I also elected to conduct a comparative study to identify similarities between the humanitarian response in both Haiti and Aceh. Comparison can be a valuable tool, especially for anthropologists. As Peter van der Veer comments in *The Value of Comparison*, “social and cultural analysis always takes place within a comparative frame” (van der Veer 32). A comparative study approach provides an opportunity to compare the qualitative information gathered in the case studies. In the article “A Purposeful Approach to the Constant Comparative Method in the Analysis of

Qualitative Interviews,” Hennie Boeije notes that comparison features prominently in a variety of approaches to qualitative research. Comparing and contrasting allow a researcher “to develop a theory...namely categorizing, coding, delineating categories and connecting them” (Boeije 393).

Peter van der Veer provides a critical look at comparative studies in *The Value of Comparison*. Van der Veer suggests, “comparison should be conceived not primarily in terms of comparing societies or events...but as a reflection on our conceptual framework” (van der Veer 41). Consequently, I must acknowledge that the comparisons that I make—and the categories that I identify to compare—are based on my own Western assumptions and conceptual and linguistic framework (van der Veer 27). Such conceptual categories may include the idea of an informal economy, religious institutions, and state structures. My particular way of viewing the world, affected the categories that I identified and led to my own assumption the two disasters are comparable (van der Veer 150).

As Uwe Flick explains, “comparisons can be related to cases as a whole or to certain dimensions in the case” (40). In this thesis, I chose to compare case studies of the humanitarian response to the 2006 tsunami in Indonesia and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Particular cultural traditions, values, beliefs, and practices were conceived of as the “certain dimensions” Flick mentions. Peter van der Veer alludes to a similar idea when he comments that comparative studies with an anthropological lens can help us “gain a holistic insight into how things (ideas, flows, objects) are configured in historically evolving, open configurations” (van der Veer 147). Comparison can help draw attention

to the similarities and differences in the processes and relationships present in various socio-cultural environments.

The intended outcome of a comparative study is not a universal recommendation or blueprint for how to approach cultural practices or values in a humanitarian emergency. Rather, the comparison was intended to highlight how similar challenges were approached in both locations. The comparison was also intended to provide some insight into “differences among the cases...coming from one or the other cultural background” (Flick 41). Flick notes the importance of context when conducting a comparative study in order to understand the variables present in each case (41). Additionally, van der Veer calls attention to the kind of generalization that can occur when conducting a comparative study. He explains that the goal of comparison is not to come “to some general truth but to highlight something that is not general, something specific without any pretense of general truth, but definitely of broader significance” (26). Thomas Gibson explains in the foreword to *The Value of Comparison* that “van der Veer advocates the intensive study of fragments of social life” rather than trying to make general statements on behalf of whole societies (van der Veer viii).

### Vulnerability and Disaster

As noted by anthropologist Susanna M. Hoffman, “there is no such thing as a ‘natural’ disaster. They are all caused by humans at one level or another” (Hoffman 4). In this view, disasters are not isolated incidents; they are a product of complex social and environmental vulnerabilities that build up in communities over time. Those with the fewest resources feel its effects most acutely.

In *Catastrophe & Culture*, anthropologist Anthony Oliver-Smith suggested vulnerability is,

...generated through a chain of root causes ideological, social, and economic systems, the dynamic pressures of a demographic, socioeconomic, or ecological nature, and specific sets of unsafe conditions that, when combined with a natural hazard, produce a disaster. (“Theorizing Disasters: Nature, Power, and Culture” 28)

Vulnerability can surface in a variety of different forms—economic, political, physical, educational, cultural, and ecological among them (Oliver-Smith, “Theorizing Disasters: Nature, Power, and Culture” 29). It can manifest as an ineffective political structure, a weak economic state, an imbalanced or centralized population, and inadequate infrastructure. A powerful natural event could wreak havoc on a population facing these types of challenges. In summarizing the tie between vulnerability and disaster, it is important to bear in mind that “societal factors affect the impact of disasters,” and it is individuals in low-income, non-democratic countries that often fall victim (Strömberg 200).

Anthony Oliver-Smith notes that more people worldwide are susceptible to natural disasters because of increasing population and communities living in more dangerous areas, such as along fault lines and in the shadow of volcanoes (“Theorizing Disasters: Nature, Power, and Culture” 43). A central tenet of vulnerability is, “the natural forces present in any environment have enormous power to affect society, but it is society that actualizes the potential of a hazard” (Oliver-Smith, “Theorizing Disasters: Nature, Power, and Culture” 42). The effects of an earthquake in the United States will vary greatly from the effects of an earthquake of the same size and intensity in a country

like Haiti or Indonesia. A disaster can manifest in a variety of ways depending on the vulnerabilities present in a society.

### Communities and Psychosocial Needs

In Kimberly Maynard's study of humanitarian intervention, mainly in cases of violent conflict, she comments that addressing only the physical suffering or discomfort of humans does not rectify all post-disaster needs (52). A crisis situation may result in profound personal suffering that comes with the death of a spouse, separation from family and community, homelessness, and the inability to resume a profession or livelihood. The loss of collective identity due to the destruction of communities and the dispersion of community members can affect survivors psychologically. The collapse of social institutions and intergroup relations can further the feeling of disorder beyond the physical destruction and visible chaos, exacerbating psychological vulnerability.

The loss of collective identity can have harmful, long-term ripple effects on the psychosocial health of entire communities and has the potential to disrupt social networks far beyond the area of immediate physical destruction (Maynard 119). The psychological effects of a disaster may spread beyond those directly impacted—the victims and first responders—to family members, neighborhoods or communities in which victims live and work, to media personnel that experience the scene and “extend the experience of the trauma to the entire nation” (Breslau 185).

Consider post-disaster displacement, which often correlates with relocation into temporary camps. Guglielmo Schininà and his colleagues at the International

Organization for Migration assert that within this unfamiliar setting, individuals must realign their “personal, interpersonal, socioeconomic, cultural and geographic boundaries” (158). Survivors in temporary camps may have to process the loss of family and key community members, live among strangers in housing lacking in privacy, worry about access to food, find an interim livelihood, and depend on the guidance of unfamiliar camp leaders. Internal displacement necessitates certain adaptations on the part of the affected population, including a redefining of “individual, familiar, group, and collective identities, roles and value systems” (Schininà et al. 158). As referenced in many post-disaster accounts, emotions run high and conflict occurs in camps for displaced persons, as the cultural and social systems and standards of pre-disaster life are often incompatible within the temporary settlements. Despite the natural resilience of many communities, these disruptions are all potential contributors to psychological distress.

Many survivor accounts describe a spell of “post-disaster utopia” in which a sense of solidarity and unity overtakes the affected population immediately after a disaster. Individual concerns social disparities also seemingly disappear in the subsequent period of chaos. For example, during the Haitian quake of 1770 that decimated Port-au-Prince, Haitian historian Georges Corvington wrote, “blacks, soldiers, settlers rich and poor were all turned into mere people, leveled by common misfortune” (qtd. in Katz 55).

Natural disasters may be an example of a shared “heritage of victimization” in which the perpetrator—in this instance, a natural disaster—inspires a sense of solidarity among those affected (Ashworth 232). According to Anthony Oliver-Smith, this period typically ceases with the influx of outside assistance (“Voices in the Storm” 14).

Socioeconomic concerns and class differences may reappear rapidly as aid is distributed, especially if it is allocated unevenly or is not given to certain groups. Susanna Hoffman observed that despite an initial sense of solidarity, community members drift apart and realign in ways much different than before the disaster (Hoffman 4).

One theory is that communities go through similar psychological changes and phases of disaster summarized by Norman Faberow and Norma Gordon. The model begins with the “Heroic Phase,” the time immediately following the disaster when survivors act altruistically and emotions run high. The second phase is the “Honeymoon Phase” embodied by camaraderie and high hopes for outside assistance and recovery. Community members then enter the “Disillusionment Phase” in which prior promises of assistance are unmet and the community focus fades in favor of individual concerns. The model concludes with the “Reconstruction Phase.” Victims realize they cannot rely on outside assistance and must address their own problems (Breslau 185).

Anthony Oliver-Smith advises the psychological distress that may accompany a disaster—a diminished sense of self and community identity—can contribute to a loss of meaning among those that survive the disaster (“The Centrality of Culture” 22). Displaced, removed from cultural context and social circles, survivors may feel disconnected from their place and purpose in life. For survivors, this abrupt change in social life and surroundings can “challenge people’s worldviews with profound existential questions” (Oliver-Smith, “Theorizing Disasters: Nature, Power, and Culture” 38). In this instance, shared cultural practice can also promote social cohesion as well as resilience in the face of such challenges.

Following a 1995 earthquake in Kobe, Japan, that claimed more than 5,500 lives and displaced another 320,000, an unprecedented number of psychologists and psychiatrists offered their services to disaster victims (Breslau 178). While Kobe stands in contrast to Haiti and Aceh for a number of reasons—including the high proportion of psychiatrists to the population—many of the psychological concerns remain the same. The earthquake impacted areas of the city in different ways. Psychologists and psychiatrists were key because they were centralized gatherers of information about the needs in the various communities. Mental health professionals went to community sites such as schools and temporary shelters. They spoke with survivors who had “intrusive thoughts and memories of the events, anxiety, and/or feelings of guilt about having survived while others died” (Breslau 180). They also talked about how they suffered because of the grief and sudden instability in their lives. This approach, which came to be known in Kobe as “care for the heart,” was widely supported as essential for recovery alongside physical rebuilding (Breslau 181). As a behavioral and social scientist, Joshua Breslau advocates for group therapy—like the “care for the heart” model—shortly following a disaster in order to process the trauma and avoid hampering long-term community recovery (185).

International Organization for Migration staff members addressed psychosocial needs through the “Emergency Psychosocial Assistance” project that was mobilized in Haiti following the 2010 earthquake (Schininà et al. 159). In the first stages, teams—consisting of a psychologist, social worker, animator-artist, educator and a team leader—went into Haitian communities to provide “psychological first aid” (Schininà et al 159).



The teams counseled survivors both individually and in groups and led problem-solving workshops in temporary camps to tackle earthquake-related concerns. They addressed the increase in post-earthquake domestic violence and conflicts related to food distribution. The teams were also trained in providing art-based interventions for residents of the camp, especially children.

### Culture in Humanitarian Aid

Following a disaster, numerous voices tend to chime in with opinions on emergency aid efforts as well as long-term reconstruction and development projects. These include individuals directly impacted by the disaster looking to share local knowledge, experts in the field of post-disaster redevelopment, and NGOs with preexisting information to share. The lack of success in many reconstruction efforts may be a result of a “failure to develop tools that can cope with...dynamism and complexity, compounded by a lack of understanding of the local contexts” (Oliver-Smith, “Voices in the Storm” 14). The cacophony of voices and opinions can create tension and make it difficult to align aid priorities.

The issue of creating strategies for aid post-disaster is not a challenge limited to Haiti or Aceh. As Haitian filmmaker, political activist, and former Minister of Culture Raoul Peck notes, “nowhere in the world has the international community shown itself to be capable of managing crises in a sustainable way. Sticking plasters in an emergency, yes. But long-term nation building for the benefit of the population? No.” (Peck, “Dead-end in Port-au-Prince” 44). In order for emergency humanitarian relief efforts and

potential long-term development projects to be effective, some cultural organizations have suggested that they should be designed with culture as a central concern from the outset. Communities experience disasters differently because of cultural variation and different degrees of vulnerability, a concept defined and discussed previously. Although respecting the culture and traditions of a particular region may cause discomfort or controversy among international aid workers or donors, ignoring or defying cultural foundations may compound difficulties and render efforts ultimately unsuccessful.

Non-local aid agencies responding to a crisis situation, as explained by Mary Anderson in a chapter of *Hard Choices: Moral Dilemmas in Humanitarian Intervention*, often revert to a mindset that “assumes victims of crises can do little or nothing for themselves” (139). Certain default modes of distribution rely on outside experts, imported infrastructure and the identification of the most deserving of assistance by non-community members. Existing social and cultural frameworks are often circumvented, and efforts are concentrated on “delivery of things *to* these people, rather on problem solving *with* them” (Anderson 140). Anderson notes that all people “have materials, social systems, attitudes, and beliefs that enable them to survive” and move forward with their lives in productive ways (142). It may be more beneficial for outside aid to tap into local knowledge and resources in order to develop sustainable solutions.

UNESCO endorses culture as essential in creating resilient communities that rebound from natural disaster or conflict. A quote from Haim Omer and Nahman Alon summarizes this concept:

Social support will be less effective if supplied ad hoc and by external sources than when provided through the abiding social network; problem-

solving skills will be more effective if they match the person's usual and familiar activities than if they are perceived as extraneous; and preservation of old roles is more promising than acquisition of new ones.... Disaster and trauma mean disruption: prevention and cure should therefore aim at developing continuities at all levels. (Omer and Alon 275)

It follows that in post-disaster chaos, leveraging the familiar cultural and social systems may better serve community needs than a multitude of different agencies and voices attempting to institute new structures and procedures (Daly 235).

One example of leveraging familiar social networks is religious institutions embedded in disaster-affected communities. These institutions can also be a useful conduit for humanitarian aid when they work on behalf of the population and are entrenched enough in a community to know what is appropriate to place and culture. A study of a 1998 tsunami in Papua New Guinea examined the role of Combined Churches Organization (CCO), a group of Christian organizations dedicated to providing a “distinctive form of relief aid, informed by the local Melanesian culture and the Christian faith of its workers” with an eye on longer-term development work (Fountain et al. 321).

Christian churches in Papua New Guinea were historically at the heart of other development projects in the area, achieving greater success—in some cases—than the local government (Fountain et al. 325). The CCO filled voids left by the government and other secular aid groups after the disaster by organizing a Sunday School, providing “personal interaction (including prayer, encouragement, support, and Bible Studies)...as well as the distribution of items such as Bibles and other religious tracts” (Fountain et al 337). The grassroots response of the CCO may be seen as supporting the “abiding social network” and the “usual and familiar activities” mentioned by Omer and Alon (275).

When a community is separated and dispersed by disaster, existing social and cultural systems are challenged and may not be effectively utilized in aid efforts. Although vastly different from the situations in Haiti and Aceh due to the relative breadth of resources available in a wealthy nation, flooding due to Hurricane Katrina made it difficult for people to stay in their New Orleans communities due to the significant amount of property damage. John S. Petterson and his colleagues at Impact Assessment, Inc. noted that in the aftermath of the hurricane, “ethnic tensions have surfaced, net psychological effects are beyond measure, and even cultural identity and expression have been threatened, as many people have been separated from their home communities” (Petterson et al. 643). In order to maintain social relationships, many of the estimated 1.5 million people displaced by the hurricane sought to live near familiar neighbors in their new cities. However, Petterson and his colleagues surmised that the physical destruction of communities and dispersion of the residents may have “accelerate[d] the cultural deterioration of bayou existence” (655) as many of those displaced did not return to their New Orleans neighborhoods.

Disregard for the local context of a disaster, misunderstanding the local beliefs and value systems, or working outside the social and cultural frameworks, may generate relief that is ineffective and unsustainable. Worse, it may result in efforts that offend or further detract from the wellbeing of the population (Oliver-Smith, “Voices in the Storm” 14). It may be advantageous for aid responders to understand the ideologies that guide a population, especially in considering plans for long-term support and programs.

In the Philippines, the “concept of *bahala na*...implies both a passive acceptance of fate, and a sense of risk-taking and courage” (Samuels 218). Guided by this concept, many Filipinos return to areas that are affected time and time again by disaster. An awareness of principles like *bahala na* can help external aid agencies better understand the population they are working with. What outsiders may see as fatalistic—a desire to repeatedly return to sites of disaster—can also be viewed as a valuable coping method. *Bahala na* is rooted deeply in local culture and encourages people to get back to daily life as quickly as possible.

As will be discussed later in this thesis, in the wake of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the reconstruction effort was challenged by the reluctance of foreign aid agencies and workers to integrate Islamic beliefs into their efforts. The flaunting of Islamic tradition was also cited as a concern of Pakistanis affected by a 2005 earthquake. A few specific instances also surface in an editorial written by Andrew Wilder, an international researcher, and anthropologist Tim Morris titled “Locals within locals?: Cultural sensitivity in disaster aid.” Wilder and Morris mention general instances of alcohol consumption and dancing at parties as examples of cultural and religious insensitivity (Wilder and Morris 2). Cuban medical workers in particular were cited for inappropriate dress (shorts and t-shirts) and for men and women cohabitating in tents (Wilder and Morris 1). It was non-local Pakistani women that drew the most ire from earthquake survivors for their “immodest” dress because they were held to a higher standard than international staff (Wilder and Morris 2). The Pakistani earthquake response is a reminder that conflict can occur not just between foreigners and locals. Aid

organizations may need to be responsive to urban and rural divisions, ethnic groups, and socioeconomic differences within the same community, region, or country.

As Oliver-Smith explains, when locals, relief workers, military personnel, journalists, and politicians come together in the wake of a disaster, “the tensions among the social concepts, morals, ethics and goals” (“Voices in the Storm” 15) of all stakeholders can shape the resulting aid efforts and society—for better or worse—for a protracted amount of time. Some humanitarian agencies may find themselves in situations in which they may “need to make difficult choices between their principles and what is considered to be acceptable within a local culture” (Özerdem and Rufini 60). Local practices that marginalize women often fit into this area of concern. In a chapter of *After the Conflict*, Alpaslan Özerdem and Gianni Rufini specifically make mention of efforts to involve women in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. Some donors and NGOs elected to end their assistance programs in the country because of the strict limitations on women, but in doing so, left some women without vital support (Özerdem and Rufini 60).

James K. Boyce suggests, “aid is not like water, which sprayed on the flames or embers of conflict invariably helps to extinguish them. Indeed, it can be more like oil. Appropriate aid can diminish the risks of conflict, but inappropriate aid can fuel it” (Boyce 367). A number of examples support this idea that inappropriate external responses may worsen or prolong the effects of a disaster and delay reconstruction. In 1970, the 7.9 magnitude Ancash earthquake caused a subsequent landslide in Peru. The earthquake and landslide left an estimated 70,000 dead or missing in North Central Peru (Oliver-Smith, “Traditional Agriculture” 108). In the response efforts, government and

international agencies addressed infrastructural damage but did not appear to understand local, cultural needs.

In the hard-hit town of Yungay, the Peruvian government fought to relocate the surviving residents from a temporary camp to a new site 15 kilometers away. The government believed the location was safer should another earthquake strike. In 1977, Oliver-Smith noted that the survivors were in a state of “intense shock and emotional disintegration” (“Traditional Agriculture” 110) following the disaster. The Peruvian government’s relocation plan did not anticipate that many of the survivors had a strong emotional connection to the town. There was socio-cultural importance in remaining near loved ones buried by the landslide. The survivors united against the relocation plans because they feared their community would not survive if it lost its cultural roots. The relocation debate delayed redevelopment of Yungay for several years and tempered the flow of resources.

Relief agencies in Yungay did not anticipate the problems that arose as they distributed resources. As supplies were given to various groups, the survivors’ initial sense of solidarity diminished because the region was divided along ethnic, social and economic lines. The distribution of essentials like food and clothing “reawakened the sharp lines of ethnic differentiation between Indian and non-Indian peasants and middle- and upper-class urban survivors” (Oliver-Smith, “The Brotherhood of Pain” 158). The egalitarian allocation of temporary housing—which conflicted with established class stratifications—caused a great deal of turmoil. The elites were most aggrieved by the loss

of established social order and insisted, “We are not equal!” (Oliver-Smith, “The Brotherhood of Pain” 159).

Considering even this select number of instances in which aid efforts were unsuitable to lack of cultural understanding, it is evident that there is still much to be learned. In the role of United Nations Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery, former U.S. President Bill Clinton, notes that as an international community,

... we must do better at utilizing and working alongside local structures.... Local structures are already in place and more often than not the ‘first responders’ to a crisis. The way the international community goes about providing relief and recovery assistance must actively strengthen, not undermine, these local actors. (3)

Oliver-Smith makes the case that the anthropologist may be well positioned to serve as a “culturally knowledgeable mediator” in disaster response situations and to assist in aligning outside assistance with local realities and frameworks (“Voices in the Storm” 14).

Beyond immediate, emergency assistance, the efficacy of development programs in the months and years after a disaster varies widely, and, according to some experts, can be more destructive than helpful. Understanding the cultural nuances of an affected society may be key to providing appropriate emergency aid that supports long-term stability and ensuring that existing vulnerabilities are not perpetuated or worsened. A cooperative, culturally responsive distribution of emergency aid has also been shown in certain instances to reduce the ongoing dependency on aid.



## Cultural Heritage, Identity, and Conflict

It is prudent at this juncture to present a definition of “heritage” in order to understand how it has been connected to the concept of identity. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett defines heritage as “a mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past” (*Destination Culture* 150). Heritage may be understood as the product of shared beliefs, history, knowledge, and experience, tied to the past and performed in the present. Heritage may also be valued because it can function as a carrier of collective memory shared with future generations. For the purpose of this thesis, the term “heritage” encapsulates both tangible heritage sites—such as a monument or building of historical value—and intangible cultural practices.

As Ian Russell states, “heritage and identity are not essences within any single person. They are manifested and performed through interpersonal relationships and behavior” (Russell 33). Heritage exists because of an intentional choice to care for it and requires community participation in the present to sustain it. It follows, then, that destruction of a heritage site and the dispersion of a population can disrupt the behaviors and relationships that support it.

Discussions around the value of heritage often center on the protection and perpetuation of identity. As Ian Russell explains, heritage may be conceived of as “shared identifications with stories, objects, symbols, performances [through which] one generation of a group can install the values of the group’s identity in the subsequent members of a group” (33). The emphasis on heritage protection to create “cultural solidarity” and perpetuate a group identity forms the basis from which cultural

organizations—like UNESCO—operate (McDowell 41). As Richard Palmer notes, “objects and places are not, in themselves, what is important about cultural heritage. They are important because of the meanings and uses that people attach to them, and the values they represent” (8). A threat to heritage may be seen as a threat to identity because it can interrupt the “transgenerational transmission of experiences,” meanings, and values (Russell 33). Therefore, protection of cultural heritage has been equated with the defense and continuation of group identity.

Cultural heritage projects emerge in discussions of post-disaster relief because of their perceived community benefits. Heritage has been credited with creating solidarity and societal cohesion by linking communities with the past and creating social capital in the present (Lowenthal xiii). Generally speaking, cultural organizations are of the opinion that preserving the educational, economic, spiritual, aesthetic, communal, or historical value of cultural property can generate a sense of belonging and solidarity among disaster survivors. Heritage may also be called upon in support of a national identity. During a March 2010 conference convened to examine the long term rebuilding in Haiti, Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive expressed his concerns in saying, “look, I don’t want my country to look like the Dominican Republic or Indonesia or some other place. We’re searching for a genuinely Haitian way of rebuilding” (qtd. in Farmer 152).

As heritage may be considered a source of collective identity and base for social cohesion, it may also be a target in instances of conflict. The intentional destruction of cultural property during warfare supports the principle that heritage is a critical component of personal and collective identity. The destruction of cultural property—

whether intentional or incidental, as in the case of natural disasters—can erase cultural memories and challenge personal and collective identities (Hoelscher 200). There are numerous examples of cultural heritage sites strategically targeted in times of war as a tactic to demoralize and destabilize a population.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, a number of ethnic and religious conflicts led to the intentional destruction of cultural property. The Bosnian War (1992-1995) is frequently mentioned because of the extensive destruction of cultural property, despite the protections established by The Hague Convention of 1954. Cultural heritage sites in Bosnia and Herzegovina were intentionally attacked in an attempt to destroy symbols of religious and cultural identity. Snipers damaged the façade of the National Museum of Bosnia. Serbian and Croat forces specifically targeted Bosnian mosques and other Islamic sites. Serbian anti-tank mines destroyed the historically significant Ferhad Pasha mosque in Banja Luka, dating to the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Maass 110).

In the village of Mostar, Stari Most—a bridge hailed as a masterpiece of Islamic architecture—was reduced to rubble by Catholic Croat forces. The bridge was of minimal strategic importance but carried great cultural and historic significance for Muslims, in particular. The Old City of Dubrovnik in Croatia, designated as a UNESCO world heritage site, was shelled solely for its rich cultural tradition; its attack served no greater military purpose.

Conflict in Kosovo (1998-1999) was rooted in conflicting views of national cultural identity. This contributed to the purposeful destruction of cultural property, namely historic architecture. Structures representative of Kosovo's Albanian

population—including mosques, Islamic schools, monuments and libraries—were damaged (Herscher and Riedlmayer 112). The targeting of Islamic sites was indicative of the Serbian aim to attack Albanian cultural foundations. Albanians returning to Kosovo enacted revenge by damaging historic Serbian Orthodox sites such as monasteries, churches, and historic monuments (Herscher and Riedlmayer 112).

The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict was passed in 1954 as a reaction to the destruction of cultural heritage in World War II. As the above examples illustrate, it has not been universally signed on to. Although this thesis examines examples of unintentional cultural heritage destruction, the same principles hold true. It is also important that the cultural heritage of minority religious or ethnic groups is given equal consideration and attention in order to support the interests of all community members.

### Culture and Heritage in Development Work

In the aftermath of a disaster, emergency humanitarian assistance and development activities can collide. Once the first wave of emergency aid has ended, the goals of short-term response programs and established development agencies may begin to align. One definition of international development characterizes it as “the processes and policies through which various actors seek to improve the living standards of societies that are not their own” (“(International) Development”). Development is often discussed in economic terms, but there are also social considerations. Development work may also focus on international objectives—such as eliminating “extreme poverty and

hunger,” reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS, and striving for “universal primary education”—and establishing standards to help guide development efforts (Basu and Modest 10).

There are both local and non-local agencies working to achieve these objectives through various means—such as monetary output—and approaches. Anthropologist Maia Green describes the system of development organizations as,

...existing in order to achieve whatever are currently defined as international development objectives.... The international development system includes a range of agencies and organizations, from small scale civil society organizations to international organizations with a global purview. Policy in development is contested and constantly changing. Implementation of development objectives is achieved through dissemination of policy through influence and the brokering of policy ideas, and through spending. (399)

Development efforts may involve various NGOs, but governments have also used development programs as part of their approach to international relations. The involvement of states and organizations may prompt questions around their interests and how they benefit from their participation in development initiatives.

Development approaches are not necessarily incongruous with humanitarian aid efforts. For example, one development approach looks to empower people to participate instead of being passive recipients, a stance echoed in many humanitarian aid programs. Researchers Ian Christoplos and Treena Wu explain that there may be disagreements about the “relative importance that should be given to sustainability versus speed” (44) when working to provide assistance. Humanitarian agencies may be focused on providing emergency solutions in difficult post-disaster situations in which quick response

outweighs any potential repercussions of their involvement, such as creating new dependencies or introducing unsustainable solutions.

One concept that considers the continuum between emergency relief and long-term strategies is the Linking of Relief, Reconstruction, and Development (LRRD). Both humanitarian aid and development organizations often look to alleviate chronic poverty and vulnerability—an issue in both Aceh and Haiti—but their approaches differ. Whereas a humanitarian organization addresses poverty by providing direct aid and social protection to the poor or those in greatest need, a development program may focus on reinforcing infrastructure in order to drive economic development.

Both strategies have value because they meet initial needs and provide a foundation for sustainable solutions and opportunities. In order for LRRD to produce favorable results in a community, it may be essential for the response be fully considered in light of the local and broader cultural context. International organizations may also be challenged to determine how short-term aid and development programs can support communities in eventually reaching their own long-term goals without international assistance.

In the article “Shifting Perspectives on Development,” Christoph Campregher makes a case for integrating local customs and cultural practices in aid and development activities. Western cultural practices or outsider, “expert” knowledge is not given preference over local knowledge and “culturally constrained beliefs” in aid or development programs (786). Campregher opens a discussion about what reconstruction, development, and the desire for change really mean, and questions who is driving the

process. The push to “build back better”—a phrase introduced during the Indian Ocean tsunami recovery and recycled following the Haitian earthquake—perhaps questions the capacity of a community to take care of itself or suggests that culture hinders its ability to do so. The concept of “building back better” can also be construed as an indictment of what a country, state, or community has failed to do, suggesting that an “externally-driven top-down reconstruction effort” can rectify those failings (Daly and Rahmayati 59).

Anthropologist Christina Kreps comments on post-disaster humanitarian response following a 2005 earthquake on the Indonesian island of Nias and introduces the idea of ‘cultural humanitarianism,’ which suggests that aspects of culture and cultural heritage can be used as a resource during the reconstruction and recovery process (“Cultural Heritage, Humanitarianism and Development” 252). Nias’ vernacular architecture demonstrated resilience to the seismic forces, but foreign NGOs pushed for homes to be constructed using concrete and other modern materials. Most houses were rebuilt with concrete—an environmentally inappropriate material—and were modeled after single-family Western dwellings. However, the Museum Pusaka Nias (Nias Heritage Museum) was a proponent of Nias’ traditional architecture because it supported many aspects of the island’s cultural and social life. Kreps notes that the museum was only able to contribute a small number of traditional houses to the reconstruction effort, but the quality of the homes “modeled culturally appropriate, community-based approaches to housing” (Kreps, “Cultural Heritage, Humanitarianism and Development” 266). Homes rebuilt in the traditional style supported cultural and social practices—such as extended families living

together—and could be built and repaired with local resources and techniques. Although Nias’ vernacular architecture was utilized sparingly in the recovery effort, this example demonstrates how cultural heritage can be a resource that meets both cultural and basic post-disaster needs (Kreps, “Cultural Heritage, Humanitarianism and Development” 267).

Culture has been perceived as inimical to development efforts in years past as it was “associated with traditions and customs that were sometimes seen as obstacles” to modernization and development (Bokova, “The Power of Culture for Development” 1). The very idea of “development” is “synonymous with concepts of advancement, change, evolution, and progress” (Basu and Modest 4). Foreign interventions in the name of development assume that some states lag behind the modern world, and various programs and projects can help them draw level. This belief may also reinforce a colonial mindset and inequalities in the name of progress. Uma Kothari writes that these interventions—by virtue of trying to achieve some stated development goal—may “[ignore] the steps and strategies that people use to imagine and realize their own futures” (Kothari 68-69).

UNESCO argues that culture is essential in both humanitarian and development activities, and it is crucial to creating sustainable solutions. Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, discusses the “transformative power” of culture in a 2013 article aptly titled “The Power of Culture for Development” (3). Culture is cited as the “key” for achieving stability and security, creating socially inclusive development programs, fostering economic opportunities that improve living conditions, and protecting the environment (Bokova 12). UNESCO supports the view,

...no development can be sustainable without a strong culture component. Indeed only a human-centered approach to development based on mutual



respect and open dialogue among cultures can lead to lasting, inclusive and equitable results. (Protecting Our Heritage and Fostering Creativity)

In addition to supporting a population's creativity and innovation, UNESCO believes that cultural values and practices can guide economic growth and infuse reconstruction with local knowledge, technology and labor. As Paul Basu and Wayne Modest note, cultural knowledge "has generally been employed to support the achievement of...more fundamental objectives," such as those initiatives described at the beginning of this section (11).

Calling upon locals to take ownership of reconstruction efforts may allow cultural knowledge to be utilized in favor of imported structures and keep long-term development programs relevant. However, this positioning of culture as a tool for achieving development initiatives has been criticized for perhaps artificially dictating "the futures that its 'beneficiaries' should aspire to" (Basu and Modest 4). Furthermore, Basu and Modest write, little is understood or known about how—or if—culture can impact the progress toward the expressed development goals. There are insufficient tools in place or methods established to measure these claims (11).

#### Heritage Preservation and Cultural Tourism

According to a UNESCO report, "The Power of Culture for Development," culture can be a "powerful contributor to economic development, social stability, and environmental protection" (2). As many communities worldwide suffer from widespread poverty, environmental destruction and natural disaster, capitalizing upon cultural

resources is one way to create economic opportunities. UNESCO holds the belief that culture can act as a renewable resource when it is given attention and care, but it can also be lost or destroyed by human or natural forces when neglected.

Cultural tourism can be a driver of economic development and turn a location into a destination. According to a UNESCO report, cultural tourism accounts for forty percent of tourism revenue worldwide (Bokova, “The Power of Culture for Development” 2). In *Destination Heritage*, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett comments, “heritage is a way of producing ‘hereness’”—or an escape from “sameness”—that can turn a location into a tourist destination (153; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Theorizing Heritage” 371). In addition to revenue from visits to heritage sites, cultural tourism can also power sales of local crafts and products, drive the need for improved infrastructure, and create employment opportunities (Di Giovine 20). Despite the potential draw of unique heritage and experiences, politically unstable locations and destinations with insufficient infrastructure—such as commercial airports, hotels, and restaurants—are likely unable to produce or support a tourism industry.

Despite the potential economic benefits, there are challenges and criticisms that come with treating cultural heritage as an investment opportunity. In Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s *Destination Culture*, she examines the action of turning cultural heritage sites into tourist destinations, in which heritage converts “locations into destinations and tourism [makes] them economically viable as exhibits of themselves” (151). On one hand, the presentation of cultural heritage sites as exhibition and entertainment turns locations that could not survive otherwise into economically

profitable sites. However, they become a commodity as “representations of themselves” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture* 151).

The display and performance of heritage for economic gain—often outside of its intended context—can often be conflated with historical reality or idealized. The resulting destination may be a “heritage production” that is parts both recycled from the past and new (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture* 7). Although participants may benefit financially from heritage performance, the experience may also be built around the desires of the tourist, the consumer. The sites and performers essentially become “players in a show written by international tourist discourse” (Bruner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 467). As Basu and Modest note, this version is often “safe, sanitized and simplified” (7).

Tim Winter, in *Post-Conflict Heritage, Postcolonial Tourism*, urged caution when creating the narrative presented to heritage tourists and locals at cultural heritage sites. At locations with difficult or contested histories, it is important to consider that there is not only “one way of telling or experiencing” (Winter 13). Winter emphasizes the importance of a democratic approach in weighing the experiences of minority groups at heritage sites. Stephen Hoelscher writes that the heritage sites most often remembered and preserved are those of the elites or the ruling class (207). John Urry comments it is important to integrate the lived histories and values of marginalized groups into heritage site interpretation to “avoid a one-sided history which under represents the poor” (57).

UNESCO’s approach to heritage entails the addition of physical sites and intangible practices to various lists intended to give heritage symbolic value and

protection. Heritage protection or preservation is positioned as a responsibility or civic duty. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett critiques the conversations around heritage preservation in saying, “heritage is not lost and found, stolen and reclaimed. Despite a discourse of conservation, preservation, restoration, reclamation, recovery, recreation, recuperation, revitalization, and regeneration...” that is frequently echoed by UNESCO and other cultural organizations (“Theorizing Heritage” 369). However, these “decisions about what to preserve, what to develop and what to destroy provoke questions concerning value to whom, and at what cost?” (Palmer 7). UNESCO’s lists and policies may also shape national heritage policies and may inadvertently guide governments into valuing and valorizing one type of heritage over another.

### Gender in Humanitarian Aid and Development

Gender is a critical variable in emergency humanitarian relief efforts and development programs, especially as the role of women has changed in an increasingly globalized world. Globalization has created new economic opportunities, but it has also impacted women’s household status and responsibilities. Janet Momsen, in the introduction to the book “Gender and Development,” refers to the duties that women often fulfill. Within a family, women are likely responsible for raising children, taking care of the home, assisting with subsistence food production, and taking on paid employment outside of the home (Momsen 2). Female vulnerability continually comes to the forefront in post-disaster situations because of the “gendered systems that precede disasters” (Egert 89).

Gender roles and expectations vary greatly by country and culture. A universal approach is ineffective because each gender—as well as gender relationships—must be understood in a specific societal or cultural context. Women in a single country are “differentiated by class, race, ethnicity, religion, and life stage” and education level (Momsen 8). Gender equality is frequently cited as a development goal, but it does not mean the objectives or day-to-day needs of men and women are the same. As Momsen notes, gender equality “recognizes that men and women often have different needs and priorities, face different constraints and have different aspirations” (Momsen 8).

Gender-specific needs and interests are important considerations in humanitarian relief efforts. As Philip Egert writes, the different culturally based roles and needs of men and women before a disaster “foreshadow the differences in roles, responsibilities, and accesses to resources that women and men experience after disasters” (75). Egert notes that disasters disproportionately impact women, citing “historic disadvantages” as the reason why women encounter greater suffering in post-disaster situations than men (Egert 86).

In general, women have disproportionately higher mortality rates than men when a disaster occurs. Egert cites a 1991 cyclone in Bangladesh in which women died in their homes because they were waiting for their husbands to return home and decide in favor of evacuation (87). Disasters also spur increased rates of domestic and sexual violence against women, especially in a temporary camp environment. Egert notes that increased violence against women following a disaster is “not limited to developing countries” (87). The incidence of reported rapes rose following events like Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and

the Loma Prieta earthquake that hit San Francisco in 1989 (Egert 87). Men dominate disaster response, from emergency responders on the ground to NGOs and emergency management agencies. The participation and voice of women in emergency relief planning and response helps to ensure that specific female needs are addressed or gendered cultural practices considered (Egert 88).

Similarly, development programs and planners have come under fire for “assuming that any new resource will be good for all women” without understanding the roles of women in the home and in the community (Momsen 16). Since the 1970s, development programs have approached women in different ways with variable success. Early programs assumed that women would directly benefit if their husbands had greater economic opportunities. The assumption was proven to be inaccurate; in general, male income is less likely to be spent on the family (Momsen 1). Subsequent development programs focused on income-generating opportunities for women. The programs were largely unsuccessful because women did not have extra time—outside of their household duties—in which to pursue those opportunities. The goals of later development programs converged in the early 1990s. The approach emphasized the importance of understanding each gender’s respective roles and responsibilities to ensure greater program success, focused on the concept of “empowerment” to drive participatory approaches, and included women’s concerns at all stages of the project (Momsen 14).

While women’s needs are most frequently mentioned in discussions of gender in humanitarian aid and development, men also face challenges after disasters. There are few studies on masculinity and how the male role changes following a disaster. Some

men are forced to migrate out of the disaster zone to find work (Egert 82). In many cultures, men are the head of the household and the family provider. After a disaster, men may experience “feelings of helplessness, loss, inadequacy, and stress” when their role is subsumed by NGOs and camp organizers (Egert 81).

### Discussion

In this chapter, I presented the research questions and methodologies for this study of post-disaster humanitarian response in Haiti and Aceh. I also introduced a series of concepts and supporting examples that touch upon the complex nature of a disaster situation. These topics included societal vulnerability; the potential psychological impact of disaster; the link between culture, humanitarian aid, and development; the symbolic value of cultural heritage and its tie to identity; challenges around the idea of cultural tourism; and gender as a variable in aid efforts. The concepts explored in this chapter include both the conditions that may precede a disaster as well as the socio-cultural outcomes. Although not an exhaustive list of the issues that aid organizations may encounter or choose to consider in a post-disaster situation, this chapter endeavored to lay a foundation for how cultural beliefs, values, and practices may factor in a humanitarian response, as well as long-term development programs. The next chapter examines Haiti and Aceh specifically in order to understand the environmental, social, and cultural context of each disaster.

## CHAPTER THREE: HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS

To understand why natural disasters impact places and people differently, it is important to explore the historic and cultural factors that contribute to social and physical vulnerability. Disasters are at the intersection of “biophysical systems, human systems, and the built environment” (Masterson et al. 2). Disasters occur where there is socioeconomic inequality, poorly functioning government, inadequate infrastructure, and people living in hazardous areas like “coastal areas, floodplains, earthquake fault zones, and steep slopes” (Esnard and Sapat 67).

This chapter explores the historical roots of the social and physical factors that contributed to vulnerability in Haiti and Aceh. These factors impede a population’s ability to both prepare for a natural event and recover from it. As detailed in this chapter, the vulnerability present in a location depends on “the different histories of particular places in combination with ongoing features of current political culture and social policies” (Bolin and Stanford 97).

### Haiti: Historical Vulnerability

The 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck in the afternoon of January 12, 2010, around the time of the evening rush hour. In the space of 35 seconds, buildings collapsed to their foundations, claiming thousands of lives outright. The scene, described by both Haitian and foreign survivors, was one of chaos and confusion as Haitians looked for friends and



families in the rubble and tended to those rescued and wounded. International organizations and foreign governments moved quickly to mobilize supplies, search and rescue teams, and medical personnel. As the scale of the disaster was realized, a sum of around \$2.21 billion was allocated for emergency relief efforts by foreign governments, and private donors contributed billions in turn.

American physician and anthropologist Paul Farmer comments in *Haiti After the Earthquake* that more medical aid was available in urban Haiti than ever before. Doctors, nurses and other personnel poured into the city (Farmer 14). The USNS *Comfort* docked in the Bay of Port-au-Prince and functioned as a floating hospital. Journalists and news organizations clamored to the island to cover the unfolding story for the world. The Haitian Diaspora waited for news from their relatives in the capital as downed phone towers limited communication. New challenges emerged after the initial crisis subsided. An early February 2010 Port-au-Prince situation update by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that of the 3.7 million individuals living in the earthquake-affected areas, 1.1 million were homeless and 2 million were in need of food (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs).

The earthquake devastated both the poor and the more affluent of Haitians, as the latter's more expensive concrete homes collapsed with the swaying earth (Kurin 18). Some estimates indicate that 86 percent of the homes destroyed in the earthquake were constructed between 1990 and 2010—new buildings that sprung up as the city grew (Etienne 29). In comparison, an earthquake measured at 500 times the strength of the

Haitian quake hit Chile a month later. Although the epicenter was not located in an area of high density, the relatively few deaths were the benefit of a strictly enforced building code (Oliver-Smith, “Haiti’s 500-Year Earthquake” 20).

All institutional and governmental critiques aside, the Haitian earthquake, registering a 7.0 on the Richter scale, would have been damaging even in a more developed country. The infrequency of earthquakes must also not be discounted. Prior to 2010, the last major Haitian earthquake was in 1770. Neither earthquake warning systems nor response procedures were in place at that time.

Haitians faced many challenges prior to the earthquake. A post-disaster needs assessment, conducted in collaboration with the Haitian government, disclosed chronic malnutrition in 30 percent of children and an illiteracy rate of 38 percent in Haitians over the age of 15. Haitians are also affected by widespread poverty. Before the earthquake, 67 percent of the population survived on less than two USD per day (World Bank 5). Overpopulation in Port-au-Prince contributed to the high number of casualties because of the dense, unsafe housing structures. Two-thirds of the Haitian population is still rural, and many lack access to basic services like health care and running water (Kurin 30). The earthquake compounded the challenges faced by aid workers already working in the country and required new approaches to address post-earthquake needs.

Although the earthquake served as a catalyst, the disaster was a result of Haiti’s vulnerability. Contributing factors to vulnerability include Haiti’s poverty, limited economic opportunities, insufficient infrastructure, urban centralization, and lack of building codes. Combined with the physical risk associated with living on a fault line,

these social factors may have left Haiti especially vulnerable to the January 2010 earthquake.

### Exploring Root Causes

Anthropologist Anthony Oliver-Smith explained in a chapter of *Catastrophe and Culture* that vulnerability is “generated through a chain of root causes” (“Theorizing Disasters: Nature, Power, and Culture” 28). Oliver-Smith linked the historical roots of Haiti’s vulnerability to the decimation of the native Taino population by European disease after the Spanish settled the island in 1493. In the early sixteenth century the Spanish turned to the import of enslaved Africans to provide labor and fuel the plantation economy. Additional slaves were brought to the colony during the seventeenth century, then called Saint-Domingue and under French control, to labor on the sugar and coffee plantations. As noted by Anthony Oliver-Smith in *Tectonic Shifts*, the Saint-Domingue slaves “were producing 40 percent of all the sugar and 60 percent of all the coffee consumed in Europe” by the end of the eighteenth century (“Haiti’s 500-Year Earthquake” 18). The economy of the important and lucrative French colony was entirely dependent on slave labor.

The establishment of slave labor as the driver of economic production was a key contributor to Haiti’s economic vulnerability and social inequalities. Although independence from France was finally acquired in 1804—when Napoleon mounted a military effort to take back the island and was ultimately defeated—Haiti was not welcomed on the world political stage as the first black republic. Haiti’s isolation from

the international community resulted in a sense of self-reliance among Haitians and propelled inward social and cultural development (Kurin 30). In 1825, under threat of invasion, France demanded the new Haitian republic to pay reparations for the monetary loss of slaves and land. The United States and Britain instituted embargoes to pressure Haiti into delivering the reparation payment. The fresh debt crippled the new Haitian republic. It inhibited its development and impoverished its citizens, establishing historic roots for Haiti's economic instability.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Haiti's government and elites profited through the extraction of the nation's resources—sugar, coffee, and indigo—to France and the United States (Oliver-Smith, "Haiti's 500-Year Earthquake" 19). Haiti's leaders and elites failed to construct viable infrastructure "while impoverishing the population with brutality, militarism, mismanagement, and corruption" (Oliver-Smith, "Haiti's 500-Year Earthquake" 19). The systemic underdevelopment of infrastructure and the loss of resources hindered economic growth in Haiti and left the majority of the population in a sustained state of impoverishment. The United States invaded Haiti in 1915 in an attempt to institute political and economic stability in Haiti and the Caribbean region. The United States oversaw the nation until 1934. Its exit led to a series of brutal dictatorships during the twentieth century, which severely worsened Haiti's delicate financial footing.

Although foreign involvement in Haiti's affairs contributed to economic, political, and social vulnerability, Haiti has also been unable to create stable economic or political systems in more recent years. The successive father-son dictators "Papa Doc" and "Baby Doc" Duvalier, increased Haiti's foreign debt through misappropriation and theft. In

power from 1957 to 1986, the dictators further impeded the development of a stable Haitian state. The election of Rene Prével in 1996 was noted as the “the first peaceful, democratic transition of leadership in Haiti’s history,” but many Haitians found his leadership to be lacking in the aftermath of the earthquake (Kurin 30).

Misguided global practices in the twentieth century also made Haiti’s path to stability more difficult, which former U.S. President Bill Clinton acknowledged in an address before the Senate’s Foreign Affairs Commission in 2010. In his speech, Clinton referenced trade policies established in the 1990s that made Haiti the Caribbean nation most open to trade. A dramatically lower tariff on rice imports—plunging from 35 percent to 3 percent—allowed for American rice imports to overtake domestically produced Haitian rice varieties because of the comparatively low cost. Haitian rice production was rendered useless as cheaper American rice flooded the markets. Clinton noted in his speech that,

Since 1981, the United States has followed a policy, until the last year or so when we started rethinking it, that we rich countries that produce a lot of food should sell it to poor countries and relieve them of the burden of producing their own food...so they can leap directly into the industrial era. It has not worked. (qtd. in Farmer 150)

Prior to these changes, Haiti imported only 19 percent of its food and was able to export both coffee and rice (Peck, “A Common Search for Greater Humanity” 26). With limited job opportunities in rural areas and environmental degradation due to deforestation, former Haitian rice farmers—unable to earn a living through rice production—relocated to Port-au-Prince to seek out other employment.

## Haiti and Foreign Involvement

Haiti is not unfamiliar with foreign involvement. Years of instability, both political and economic, left Haiti largely reliant on the aid of foreign nations. USAID has been referred to as “Haiti’s biggest donor,” providing grants to smaller NGOs to carry out a variety of social projects independent of the Haitian government (M. Pierre-Louis, “Restoration and Social Value of the Historic Gingerbread Houses” 93). The United States and the United Nations both intermittently established a military presence in Haiti under the premise of humanitarian intervention and stabilization. Despite the necessary and vital aid provided to the country, there is also concern that a constant stream of humanitarian aid results in a dependent population trapped in a cycle of poverty (Gros 2). The same concerns apply to humanitarian aid that comes in the wake of natural disaster when responding agencies try to create locally sustainable solutions for long-term recovery.

Haiti experienced natural disasters before the 2010 earthquake that prompted international aid organizations to respond. In *Tectonic Shifts: Haiti since the Earthquake*, Rachel Beauvoir-Dominique discusses the response to Hurricane Jeanne in the northwestern port city of Gonaives. The situation in post-earthquake Port-au-Prince paralleled the problems that arose in the densely populated area of Gonaives.

In the initial aftermath of Hurricane Jeanne in 2004, Haitians invited displaced neighbors into their own homes and provided drinking water from their own wells. NGOs offered residents tents and tarps as a short-term solution for structural damage to their homes. The tents were initially well received by the population, as an opportunity to

“[restore] one’s family...as part of the fundamental rights relating to human dignity” (Beauvoir-Dominique, “Humanitarian Assistance in Gonaïves after Hurricane Jeanne” 15). However, thousands were still using the temporary tent shelters five months later, unintentionally creating makeshift camps and shantytowns with overcrowding, water, and trash disposal problems (Beauvoir-Dominique, “Humanitarian Assistance in Gonaïves after Hurricane Jeanne” 15). In Gonaïves, foreign help was promised and engineering projects planned, but few new protections were actually put in place. Just four years later in 2008, river flooding claimed nearly 800 lives in the city as it “flooded past its rooflines” (Katz 8).

The security situation in post-Jeanne Gonaïves was also a point of critique. The UN forces deployed to the city, numbering around 750, were accused of simply “strolling around,” unable to effectively protect the city’s residents (Beauvoir-Dominique, “Humanitarian Assistance in Gonaïves after Hurricane Jeanne” 16). Beauvoir-Dominique suggests that this perception of the UN forces was due to cultural unfamiliarity and a lack of clarity in the purpose of the security forces’ presence. In direct violation of Red Cross guidelines, Haitian Vodou practitioners were excluded from certain humanitarian distributions, their culture less favored for aid than nearby Protestant communities (Beauvoir-Dominique, “Humanitarian Assistance in Gonaïves after Hurricane Jeanne” 16). The purposeful allocation of resources away from equally needy communities on the basis of religious practice only served to heighten divisions in the community. The issues in Gonaïves mirror some of the prominent issues that emerged in the aftermath of the

earthquake and highlight what is lacking between delivering an emergency response and developing effective long-term solutions.

Apart from emergency disaster aid, international development projects also illustrate the serious repercussions that can accompany cultural misunderstanding. In 1978, during the tenure of “Baby Doc” Duvalier, Haiti’s pigs were diagnosed with African Swine Flu. USAID, concerned about the spread of the disease to the United States and Canada, oversaw the eradication of all Haitian pigs by 1984 and led the ensuing effort to repopulate.

In rural Haiti, pigs act as savings accounts and have been referred to as the “pillars of the peasant economy” (Jean-Baptiste 98). They may be bartered for goods or services, and are an important source of nutrition. The Haitian peasantry was financially devastated by the mandatory slaughter as infected pigs were quickly sold at less than a quarter of their value. Repopulation of the swine was a long-term project, and no financial assistance was provided to peasants in the interim to account for their losses. In short, the decimation of the pigs, as a result of foreign involvement, left the rural poor even more impoverished.

A 1985 study cites great concern about the breeds selected by USAID to replace the infected pigs. The study cited that, “since these improved breeds require heavy capital investment (clean water, pig sties, etc.), high maintenance costs (feed, vaccine, medicines) and skilled veterinary care, they have no place in the Haitian peasant economy” (Ebert). These concerns were well founded: a 1994 article written about the project claimed that the search for a breed adapted to Haitian conditions continued a



decade later. The lack of knowledge about pigs' role in the culture and livelihood of rural Haitians contributed to the failure of the project. The unsuccessful foreign plan increased vulnerability among some of Haiti's poorest. The peasantry's financial loss as the result of the pig slaughter has been estimated at \$500 million (Jean-Baptiste 98).

### The Concept of Haiti as a Failed State

At various points in its history, Haiti has been referred to as a failed state, defined as “a state that does not protect against risks” (Gros 18). Haiti's persistent underdevelopment and a perceived inability to protect its citizens from disease and natural disaster contribute to this assessment (Gros 169). In an essay, Laura Wagner suggests that Haitians, “irrespective of class or politics, they largely concur that the government isn't helping anybody. Their lives have always been their own responsibility” (18). While there may be disagreement around the definition of a “failed state,” or whether or not Haiti should or should not be classified as such, the designation prompts discussion around some of the challenges that faced the Haitian people and government at the time of the earthquake.

The overpopulation of Port-au-Prince may be seen as an indication of a failed state. The concentration of goods and services in the capital city is a response of the leadership and elites to ensure the centralization and control of wealth and assets in order to maintain political control. The number of inhabitants in Port-au-Prince rose steadily in the decades prior to the earthquake. Impoverished rural Haitians flocked to the core to find work and access basic services. In a nation of an estimated 9 million people, between

2.5 and 3 million people lived in Port-au-Prince (Gros 174). The city was only equipped to handle a population of around 250,000 with its pre-earthquake infrastructure (Etienne 28). The centralization of services ultimately exacerbated the devastation in the capital city. Unaffected areas outside of the urban core did not have basic resources—food or medical personnel—to send because supplies were concentrated and inaccessible in Port-au-Prince (Gros 178).

Haiti is also referred to as a failed state because of its inability to implement building codes. Dense, ramshackle housing grew on the unstable hills surrounding Port-au-Prince to accommodate the exploding population (Oliver-Smith, “Haiti’s 500-Year Earthquake” 21). The homes were constructed haphazardly and without any safety oversight. Corruption in the formal building sector enabled construction to be completed with little to no engineering supervision. State corruption and lack of oversight allowed for substandard construction materials to be sold and used.

In a discussion of the idea of Haiti as a failed state, Jean-Germain Gros believes that a significant overhaul of the state system is required before long-term development can proceed (188). Longtime Haitian aid worker and humanitarian Paul Farmer believes there is need for a “Marshall Plan” for Haiti, referring to the financial and development plan for the rebuilding of Europe after World War II (37). As Haiti has habitually suffered from a lack of trust between the government and the people, its reconstruction may benefit from being thought of as a “re-foundation” (Vigilante 30). In an article in the September 2010 UNESCO Courier, Antonio Vigilante notes that the first step in the “re-

foundation” process would be to strengthen the political leadership structures on a national level (30).

Furthermore, what role would foreign organizations play in the process? There are still questions around how long-established aid organizations best work with Haitians in the rebuilding and development process. Vigilante also warns against the theories of cultural determinism. Any failures of development work in Haiti cannot be ascribed to “inherent flaws in cultural traits” (Vigilante 29). The examples of the rice tariff, the failed pig eradication project, and the misguided response to Hurricane Jeanne highlight the potential repercussions of ill-advised foreign involvement and how it can contribute to vulnerability. In an essay written for the Smithsonian Institution’s Saving Haiti’s Heritage Project, Elizabeth Préval, the former First Lady of Haiti, appealed to the international community to think of Haitian recovery in the long term, to help the nation “[rebuild] differently and [create] solid, accessible, and efficient public services” (E. Préval 17).

A disaster like the 2010 earthquake does not have a singular cause. As noted by Anthony Oliver-Smith in “The Centrality of Culture in Post-Disaster Reconstruction,” a number of forces, including “cultural, social, environmental, economic, institutional and political” combine in a disaster (20). These forces are at play in Haiti because of its history of colonialism, slavery and subsequent independence, geography, and urban centralization. Whether or not it is accurate or fair to describe Haiti as a failed state, the chaos following the earthquake was a result of social vulnerability and governmental failure, not just the result of environmental or geographic challenges.

## Aceh, Indonesia

Halfway around the world, and just over five years prior to the 2010 Haiti disaster, a high-magnitude earthquake triggered a devastating tsunami that claimed an estimated 150,000 lives in Aceh alone. Striking on December 26, 2004, the tsunami became known as the “Boxing Day Tsunami” by many news outlets. Tsunamis are not an unheard of phenomenon in Indonesia—created by both earthquakes and volcanic eruptions—but the swiftness with which the waves arrived on shore was particularly devastating due to the lack of warning. The tsunami waves up to 40 meters high hit Indonesia’s Aceh Province 30 minutes after an earthquake triggered the withdrawal of the sea (Rand et al. 87).

The three waves that hit Aceh rolled inland as far as 3 miles, destroying both coastal fishing villages and homes farther into the interior. An estimated 10,000 kilometers of roads were destroyed in Aceh, and there was significant damage done to ports and airports, essential infrastructure to respond to a disaster (Rand et al. 187). While power plants in Aceh were not seriously damaged, the aboveground power distribution system was largely destroyed, as were many roads and bridges. The loss of this crucial infrastructure in many cases delayed both immediate rescue and humanitarian response and left some communities isolated (Cluff 16). Other structures that were well-constructed and made with quality materials experienced far less damage. The La Farge Cement Plant, a cluster of steel, industrial structures outside of Banda Aceh, moved with the earth and withstood the waves with only superficial damage.

Hyndman and Waizenegger note that nearly 500,000 people were displaced by the tsunami (around 15 percent of Aceh’s population) and 250,000 houses were destroyed.

Grass-roots reconstruction efforts began immediately after the tsunami to handle tasks such as cleaning out houses and burying dead bodies, a time-sensitive Islamic practice (Samuels 211). People displaced by the tsunami were sheltered in the homes of neighbors, friends, and family members. Just as in Haiti, basic services and infrastructure were destroyed: roadways, drinking water supply, schools, places of worship, and, in Aceh's case, mosques, and health clinics.

In response to the disaster, donors pledged 13 billion in USD, and within a few days, 60 international NGOs arrived in Indonesia to offer assistance (Kenny et al. 4). The number of NGOs grew to 200 in the following weeks. The Indonesian government also established the Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi (Agency of the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction for the Region and Community of Aceh and Nias), more simply referred to as BRR. The BRR was the primary coordinator of the reconstruction effort in Aceh and the nearby island of Nias.

### Context of Disaster

To understand the response in Aceh at the time of the tsunami, it is important to understand the “geographical and historical context in which disaster strikes” (Hyndman 21). Aceh province is located at the northwestern point of the Indonesian archipelago on the island of Sumatra. So positioned, it has long been a point of contact between Indian, Europeans, and Arabs on trade routes. Buddhism first gained a foothold in the 8th century before trade networks introduced Islam to the inhabitants in the 13th century. Because of

this history, present-day Acehnese are majority Muslim and live under Islamic law, but they continue to abide by some animist practices.

Throughout its history, traders from a number of different European powers visited the sultanate of Aceh and attempted to set up trading settlements in the area. During Aceh's golden age, which coincides with the rule of sultan Iskandar Muda from 1604 to 1637, Aceh controlled a significant portion of the island of Sumatra and was an important trading center for spices, cloth, precious metals, and pepper (Cleary and Chuan 93). After 1641, the sultanate's political and economic influence and importance declined as the Dutch East India Company established a presence in the region. In an attempt to control the shipping lanes, the Dutch conquered nearby Malacca—now a part of Malaysia—and the kingdoms of the island of Java. Despite the Dutch presence, Aceh retained economic importance through its trade connections with local indigenous groups.

By the late 19th century, in an era of rising colonialism, the Dutch attempted to conquer Aceh. The hostile action led to 25 years of open warfare until the surrender of the sultan in 1903. The Acehnese were oppressed, terrorized, and psychologically defeated by decades of war. The Dutch struggled to turn the damaged region into a functioning, profitable colony after years of physical destruction and cultural deterioration.

Aceh was occupied by Japan during the Second World War, but after the Japanese defeat, the Dutch recaptured Indonesia in 1946 before the Federal Republic of Indonesia was established in 1949. The first president of the centralized Indonesian government, Sukarno, gave Aceh a distinct provincial status in 1959 in order to pacify Acehnese

murmurs of rebellion (Hyndman 25). This status gave Aceh relative autonomy on matters of religion, education, and culture in the province, but it carried little weight otherwise. Because Aceh province didn't have control over its own natural resources, its citizens were subject to "economic domination" by the centralized government in Jakarta (Kenny et al. 8). Valuable resources, like liquid natural gas, were exported and Aceh province received little revenue.

### Acehnese Independence and the Indonesian State

The Free Aceh Movement (otherwise known as Gerakan Aceh Merdeka or abbreviated as GAM) was established in 1976 as an agent of Acehnese independence. It "waged a low intensity separatist campaign" against the Government of Indonesia (GoI) in Jakarta over the ensuing decades (Daly and Rahmayati 59). The armed conflict was characterized by the presence of Indonesian security forces stationed in Aceh as part of counter-insurgency operations. The conflict resulted in the death of between 10,000 and 26,000 people in Aceh, many of them massacred civilians (Kenny et al 8). Repeated attempts at a ceasefire and peace agreement, notably in 2002, did not hold.

The tsunami did serve as a catalyst for peace in Aceh. It influenced the signing of a 2005 peace agreement between the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement. This "disaster diplomacy" saw a peace treaty agreed upon that still persists to this day. The Indonesian government and its military forces and the GAM came to understand that in order for Aceh to recover following the tsunami, the conflict could not continue (Hyndman and Waizenegger 107). Although peace talks had been agreed to in

the lead-up to the tsunami, arrived at through secret negotiations, the disaster created the need for expedience to allow for international aid to reach Aceh. The devastation and suffering in Aceh necessitated that all the involved parties work to find a way to peace and sustain it.

There is a strong sense of nationalism among the Acehnese because of its history of struggle against the Indonesian government. Efforts by the government to send Javanese to settle in Aceh province “was seen as a tactic by the central government to ‘Indonesianize’ its rebellious province” and could be seen as an affront to the unique culture and religious practices of Aceh (Hyndman and Waizenegger 108). As a result, distrust and resentment was established between the Acehnese and the government of Indonesia and fueled secessionist movements.

The concept of vulnerability, discussed in the previous chapter, has also been brought up in relation to the involvement of the Indonesian government in Aceh. As discussed by Jim Glassman in a 2005 editorial entitled “Tsunamis and other forces of destruction,” the Indonesian state may be partially to blame for increasing Aceh’s susceptibility to natural disasters. Aceh is natural resource-rich, including deposits of natural gas and oil. Glassman argues that Indonesian government, centralized in Jakarta, “redistributed wealth from the periphery to the core” (165). This flow of revenue and resources out of the province led to the Acehnese leading “marginal lives” (Glassman 166).

The rate of chronic poverty in Aceh before the tsunami was estimated at nearly 30 percent of the population. In comparison, the poverty rate in the rest of Indonesia was



estimated at 17 percent (Christoplos and Wu 43). Years of conflict led to high rates of corruption in the province, a sense of distrust, especially of the centralized Government of Indonesia and foreign agencies, and underdeveloped local resources (da Silva 26). Because of the military conflict that was occurring in Aceh at the time of the tsunami, martial law was in full effect, complicating the entry of international NGOs.

Aceh's colonial history and struggle for independence—first from the Dutch and then from the Government of Indonesia—are contributing factors to its vulnerability to natural hazards. The contentious, distrustful relationship between the province and the Government of Indonesia is a recurring complication in Aceh's history. Resources from the semi-autonomous province disproportionately benefited the GoI and weakened the Acehnese economy. Ongoing violent conflict increased Aceh's political and social vulnerability and limited the province's ability to provide assistance for its residents following the tsunami.

### Discussion

Why compare the humanitarian response to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti and the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami? There are plenty of incongruities. Haiti is less than half the size of Aceh and did not have the additional challenge of a long-term separatist conflict to complicate relief efforts. However, by comparing the two natural disasters that occurred in particularly vulnerable states—as defined by Oliver-Smith—certain aspects of cultural consideration come to the forefront. Aceh's history of foreign involvement, natural resource exploitation, and strong sense of nationalism provide interesting parallels

to Haiti. Both disasters spurred enormous donations from around the world and an influx of international relief agencies. The mantra of “build back better” originated with the Indonesian tsunami recovery and was later invoked in Haiti, perhaps without full agreement on the meaning of “better.”

As Jonathan Katz writes, the Indian Ocean tsunami response also served as a model for some of the Haitian response and organization. For example, the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission (or IHRC), an independent entity established to oversee reconstruction, was based on the Indonesian BRR. In both Aceh and Haiti, these reconstruction agencies were formed in response to the NGOs’ unwillingness to work with various levels of government, alleging corruption. The IHRC and BRR were in place to coordinate efforts among NGOs that would not have contact otherwise, either for simple logistical reasons or because “they view other agencies as competitors for favored projects, labor, or supplies” (Katz 151). However, the Haitian entity was considerably weaker than the Aceh model.

Five years separate the Southeast Asia tsunami and the Haitian earthquake, but similar issues and cultural considerations arose in both disaster responses. In a critical comparison of both disaster responses, the following general areas of cultural concern for responding international agencies rose to the surface: displacement and relocation; insider/outsider relations as foreign organizations attempted to work with locals; employment and development of local economies as part of relief programs; implications of religion and religious practice; and efforts directed at preserving and restoring cultural heritage sites.

As Hyndman points out in *Dual Disasters*, specifically in a chapter entitled “Siting Conflict and Peace in Post-Tsunami Sri Lanka and Aceh,” it is important not to oversimplify and overstate the similarities between two sites hit by natural disasters. Haiti and Aceh have distinct histories, and while both include struggle against colonial powers, their challenges and cultures are ultimately different and result in different post-disaster responses. A successful approach in one location may not be applicable in a secondary location due to cultural nuances.

The lack of attention to the local cultural forces, customs, and complicated histories can impact the long-term efficacy of aid efforts. Haiti’s frequently ineffectual central government, and Aceh’s complicated quest for recognition as an independent Islamic province, are fundamental considerations when determining how to formulate a culturally appropriate disaster response. In their efforts, many foreign agencies and volunteer groups come in direct contact with the local population. However, working with locals directly does not guarantee success in the short or long term. International aid organizations may benefit from knowledge of the historical factors and cultural nuances that contribute to vulnerability.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DISPLACEMENT AND RECONSTRUCTION

The disruption of a community after a disaster can cause a great deal of distress because survivors are separated from their homes, social networks, and livelihoods. In Chapter Four, I examine the challenges of displacement from home communities, often into the stressful environment of a temporary camp or new communities lacking the resources to provide support. Two questions guided my investigation into post-disaster shelter: How are habitation patterns and social relationships impacted by disaster? What is the role of shelter in the recovery process? While temporary camps are often fixtures of post-disaster response, I evaluated how their resources and organization could either jumpstart or delay the psychological recovery of a community.

I also posed an additional question around housing reconstruction: Did aid organizations approach rebuilding homes in ways that support local cultural needs and environmental constraints? In the last section of this chapter, I examine the issues and limitations around the reconstruction process, such as contested land ownership and unfamiliarity with the social functions of homes. I discuss how aid organizations are challenged by the requirement of materials and modes of construction appropriate to place and environmental challenges.

## Tent Cities and Temporary Shelters

The Haitian earthquake and tsunami in Aceh were both powerful natural forces. The natural disasters wiped out residential areas and basic services, forcing residents to seek shelter and supplies. Temporary camps are often the hubs for the distribution of emergency aid after a disaster. Survivors relocate to a camp in order to obtain food, water, medical care, and shelter because such necessities are no longer available in their home neighborhoods.

The following section explores the challenges and problems that arise in the temporary camp environment. Survivors are often unwilling or unable to return to their home neighborhoods because supplies and services are centralized in the temporary camps. This limited access to food, water, health care, and shelter outside of the temporary camp can lead to permanence, perpetuating the disruption of community structures and social networks.

Jonathan Katz explains in *Tectonic Shifts: Haiti since the Earthquake*, that these temporary camps are, at best, “planned relocation sites with temporary shelters...and social services such as security patrols, water, maintained toilets, clinics, and some simulation of a school” (111). The majority of temporary camps do not offer all of these basic services. To avoid these settlements becoming permanent—a problematic scenario for a number of reasons—it is important to consider a range of strategies for aid distribution and develop plans for permanent, replacement housing. As temporary camps are frequently funded by non-local organizations, they may not take into account cultural or social norms.

After the earthquake, many Haitians found themselves displaced, their homes in rubble or damaged to the point of structural instability. The aftershocks that shook Port-au-Prince also drove people to live in the open air for fear of further collapse. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the estimated number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) peaked around 1.3 million in the summer of 2010 (Schuller and Morales 111). Shelter became the primary concern for many Haitians, especially given the looming arrival of the rainy season. Four days after the earthquake, there were an estimated 107 temporary settlements for survivors. Six months later, there were between 1,300 and 1,500 temporary camps, 800 of which were located in and around Port-au-Prince (Katz 96). In the spring of 2011, more than a year after the earthquake, the IOM estimated 600,000 people were still living in temporary camps or “tent cities” (Schuller and Morales 111).

In Haiti, some tent cities cropped up organically around food and water distribution points, such as the one that was established at the Petionville Club golf course. The U.S. military used the golf course as a base to hand out water and rations, and the temporary settlement quickly ballooned to tens of thousands of people (Katz 96). Many aid responders recognized the danger of the temporary camps becoming permanent slums, hindering redevelopment by occupying land meant for reconstruction. Although some of the Haitians living in the camps had habitable homes in close proximity, they were reluctant to leave behind the access to necessary supplies and chose to stay put.

One survey conducted by the United States-based organization LAMP for Haiti examined living conditions in the camps. The survey involved teams of U.S. investigators

and Haitian student volunteers interviewing 90 Haitian families from six IDP camps (The LAMP for Haiti Foundation et al. 1). The survey found that a month after the earthquake, 15 percent of the respondents lacked a shelter of any kind and were living in the open air. Three-quarters of families surveyed did not receive shelter from aid organizations—such as a tent or tarp—and instead created shelters from salvaged materials (The LAMP for Haiti Foundation et al. 8). 73 percent of survey respondents expressed a need for food assistance that was not provided (The LAMP for Haiti Foundation et al. 9). While the survey did not involve residents of all the temporary camps around Port-au-Prince, it does support an understanding that many camps did not meet residents’ needs for shelter or food.

Many camp residents experienced stress and sleep deprivation, lax security—despite a frequent military presence—and erratic food distribution. In *Fault Lines*, author Beverly Bell describes how residents rarely had “safe or private places to bathe, wash clothes, relax, or, in the case of kids, play” in the overcrowded camps (133). Access to water and bathroom facilities varied from camp to camp. Remote water sources or latrines made women “targets for sexual and physical abuse and assault” (Rand et al. 201). Reports of gender-based violence surfaced in the camps, including women and girls attacked on the way to the latrines. In one “well-managed” camp, more than seven percent of women had been sexually assaulted in the three months following the earthquake (Farmer 147).

With efforts to clear rubble in Port-au-Prince stymied by the lack of a clear plan for a dumping location for debris, most of the collapsed concrete structures in the city

remained where they fell and rebuilding stalled. IDPs were left without alternative housing options and were forced to remain in the tenuous environment of the temporary camps. As time elapsed after the earthquake, some of the temporary camps became established shantytowns with informal economies (a topic further explored in Chapter Six). Others remained rows of flimsy tarp shelters. Providing IDPs with tarps rather than complete tents was a tactic used to prevent the tent cities from becoming permanent, but it came at the expense of resident comfort and safety.

Temporary camp residents were further endangered by the impending hurricane season. An American humanitarian relief team proposed the construction of 125,000 T-shelters, small, temporary plywood structures that provide a stronger barrier to inclement weather (Katz 99). The wealthy Haitian families that owned open land near to Port-au-Prince were reluctant to donate any space for the T-shelters to be built (Katz 115). Without local cooperation, many IDPs remained in tarp shelters through the 2010 hurricane season and beyond. Resident discomfort was likely high because the tarp shelters flooded frequently and provided little protection from the elements.

NGOs working in temporary camps asked for representatives to claim and distribute assistance to the camp residents and to relay their needs to aid workers. However, NGOs often disregarded established local leadership or grassroots organizations when forming committees, bringing into question the legitimacy of such groups (Schuller 120). Jonathan Katz notes that young Haitian men most often came forward to claim the responsibility and serve as camp leaders (101). The imbalance between male and female camp committee members is a concern because of frequent



reports of gender-based violence in post-disaster situations (Schuller 120). Katz cites other examples of corruption and mismanagement in the Haitian camps as they were allowed to persist for months—and years—following the earthquake. In one camp, called Marassa, residents told the journalist that the camp’s governing committee reserved the best food and most favorable camping sites for themselves (Katz 103). The imbalance of men in the camp government and the breach of existing community networks raises concerns about how needs—and whose needs—are addressed in the temporary camp environment.

Tsunami survivors in Aceh faced similar post-disaster challenges to those in Haiti. Immediate survival needs were addressed, including the demand for temporary shelter in the form of tents and barracks. Aceh was challenged with IDPs throughout the decades of internal armed conflict. The IDP crisis grew in 2004 as more than 500,000 people lost their homes and were displaced immediately following the tsunami (Fan, “Disaster as Opportunity?” 5).

In Aceh—as in Haiti—there were instances of displaced persons settling in temporary camps. In the days following the tsunami, many survivors made their way to a hilly area southeast of Banda Aceh. The location quickly became the focus of humanitarian aid organizations because of the number of IDPs (Mahdi 145). The concentration of services and aid agencies created an IDP camp that drew other survivors from neighboring regions. A number of Acehnese went back to their tsunami-affected neighborhoods two or three months after the tsunami. While many no longer considered themselves IDPs because they “returned home,” they were largely living in tents or

makeshift structures (Mahdi 140). The movement of tsunami IDPs back to their home communities—and away from temporary camps—is a marked difference from what occurred in Haiti.

The majority of tsunami IDPs, approximately 67 percent, migrated to nearby communities where they had family or connections through the *gampong* structure (Mahdi 140). In Aceh, *gampongs* are communities, “villages in rural areas and neighborhoods in more urban settings” with a leadership structure and shared social and religious values (Daly 240). Due to “*gampong* cohesiveness...grounded in kinship and family,” tsunami IDPs were welcomed and supported by neighboring “host communities” (Mahdi 136; 140).

A study conducted in several Acehnese communities found that those with higher levels of education were more inclined to settle in host communities than in government-built barracks (Rofi et al. 348). The study suggests Acehnese with higher educational attainment and socioeconomic statuses have wider support networks than those with less education. For disaster survivors with limited resources and small support networks, relocation to an IDP camp provides easier access to basic services and supplies. The study also revealed that a higher percentage of female-led households settled in host communities than in the IDP camps (Rofi et al. 348). The study responses imply women found more security and safety in staying with family than settling in a camp where gender-based violence is a risk.

Approximately 17 percent of Acehnese tsunami IDPs chose to reside in government-built temporary camps. They moved into military-style barracks, a type of

housing not particularly suited to the *gampong* social structure. For researcher Patrick Daly and Yenny Rahmayati, Director of the Aceh Heritage Community Foundation, the “vital roles that *gampongs* play within Acehnese identity...are embodied within the vernacular landscapes of Acehnese villages” (64). The barracks did not provide the spaces needed for community social practices to take place as they did in the village environment. Limited amount of space in the barracks resulted in IDPs from the same *gampong*—or even the same family—being moved into different barracks (Mahdi 142). The barracks disrupted the communal nature of *gampong* life and the social order.

The access to supplies was also a point of stress with some of the government-built camps in Aceh. Survivors from the Al-Mukarramah neighborhood in Banda Aceh were divided between the government barracks, makeshift shelters in their destroyed neighborhood, and family members in other communities. The division was prompted by an inadequate number of barracks to house all the survivors from the neighborhood. It led to tension and disagreements between members of the same *gampong*.

A number of survivors from Al-Mukarramah lived in temporary tents in their old neighborhood. There, they subsisted without sanitation and other essential infrastructure. They observed that the residents of the barracks were given supplies by the government and NGOs. They believed the barrack-dwellers to be in an advantageous situation. The barracks residents were faced with similarly poor living conditions, with “limited water and sanitation facilities and a lack of privacy” (Mahdi 143). Those in the barracks felt they were not receiving enough from the NGOs and would visit their former neighborhoods and ask for more supplies and support. The perceived resource inequality

led to jealousy and distrust among the dispersed community members, and they questioned their leaders. The forced physical separation of the community rendered useless the traditional methods through which such problems and tensions could be addressed.

Survivors from another community, Gampong Lambung, had greater success in rebuilding their village and maintaining strong social relations. Lambung survivors centralized themselves while in an IDP camp, enabling them to stick together and organize. Male survivors built a barrack in their old neighborhood so that displaced residents, including women and children, could gradually return. The *gampong* leadership continued to meet, and all communication with aid agencies was centralized (Mahdi 146). Gampong Lambung did not face the same discord as Al-Mukarramah because they prioritized community organization and cohesion and were able to move *gampong* members out of the IDP environment.

For Acehese tsunami survivors, a primary factor in the choice to return to their home neighborhood was the desire to live in a familiar place in which social bonds connected them to neighbors and friends. As a student named Lina explained, “All our friends are from here, so if we would move we would again experience a loss. We already lost family members, now perhaps we would lose our neighbors too” (Samuels 213). As Lina’s comment indicates, social relationships were a major driving force in the choice to return and rebuild in a tsunami-hit neighborhood.

Government barracks were constructed in many neighborhoods after the tsunami. From the barracks, survivors connected with neighbors, engaged with NGO programs,

and oversaw reconstruction of their homes (Samuels 213). Several years after the tsunami, most living in the barracks had returned to their own homes, and familiar social activities resumed. Cultural anthropologist Annemarie Samuels cited the study of the Koran, marriages, and birth celebrations as important points at which neighbors intersected socially (Samuels 213). Informal daily interactions—like women meeting at the market or men gathering at a coffee shop before or after evening prayer— also helped build and rebuild community relationships (Samuels 214).

Post-disaster temporary settlements in Aceh and Haiti significantly disrupted “individual, familiar, group, and collective identities, roles and value systems” (Schininà et al. 158). There were a number of problematic outcomes as a result of external agencies distributing aid outside of established social structures. Descriptions of temporary camps in Haiti demonstrate how the centralization of supplies and resources creates an array of problems, including dense, ill-equipped settlements. Insufficient shelter and the unstable IDP camp environment can be psychologically damaging and dangerous—especially for women. Several examples from post-tsunami Aceh depict how the physical separation of families and community members led to a breakdown of decision-making structures and lines of communication. All of these factors can delay the sense of normalcy that comes with returning to a familiar built environment.

Emergency shelter is a necessity following a natural disaster, and the rebuilding process is often protracted. Aid organizations can support IDP camps as temporary, well-managed sites that deliver an array of services in an equitable way, provide security, and address some of the needs that arise in a high-stress, high-density environment. Aid

organizations can also work with existing community leadership and grassroots networks to empower communities to organize themselves, advocate for their own needs, and promote cultural frameworks for social cohesion.

### Urban Connections and Rural Relocation

Highly populated urban areas were impacted by the natural events in Haiti and Aceh, pushing some survivors to return to home villages and seek out community and family support. Aid organizations largely did not address the needs of survivors outside of the urban core and missed an opportunity to extend support to the rural host communities. The concentration of resources in urban areas did not encourage permanent relocation to rural communities. In Port-au-Prince in particular, opportunities in the rural hinterland could potentially ease overcrowding in the city center.

As mentioned in the previous section, a high percentage of Acehnese tsunami survivors chose to relocate to host communities in which they had ties through the *gampong* system. Many of them were migrants that had been living in urban areas, like Banda Aceh, for work opportunities and chose to go back to their rural home villages. Relocating to their original *gampong* gave many survivors the opportunity and support to “mourn, to heal, and...in some cases, resources to start a new life” (Mahdi 141). The *gampong* structure supported mobility of the tsunami IDPs within Aceh, but many would find that humanitarian aid was difficult to come by in the rural interior.

A divide existed between urban and rural Aceh prior to the tsunami, but the aid response brought to the forefront the advantages afforded the urban coastal population.

As Miller and Bunnell explain, the coastal capital city of Banda Aceh was largely protected from the violence of the separatist conflict because much of the fighting took place in rural rebel strongholds (85). Many urban Acehnese were unaware of the extent of the conflict, but rural Acehnese lived daily with “fear, fighting, forced migration, and internal displacement” (Miller and Bunnell 85). There were unaddressed needs that existed outside of the tsunami zone.

Banda Aceh received a great deal of the resources funneled into Aceh after the tsunami. Miller and Bunnell cite a “broader pattern of post-disaster response...which tends to disproportionately channel recovery resources into cities” (89). Smaller cities, like Meulaboh in West Aceh, received inconsistent aid, and even tsunami-hit villages along the coast were abandoned because aid organizations and supplies failed to reach them (Miller and Bunnell 89). Few incoming aid organizations knew about the separatist conflict and were unable to divert their spending from tsunami relief to assist rural populations affected by war (Miller and Bunnell 90).

Rural populations touched by the separatist conflict were not afforded the same benefits as urban coastal areas impacted by the tsunami. Tsunami IDPs that relocated to the rural interior risked losing out on opportunities only available in urban coastal areas, such as cash-for-work programs (Miller and Bunnell 90). Poverty statistics from 2006 show that more than 30 percent of rural Acehnese households fall below the poverty line. In comparison, less than 15 percent of urban Acehnese are considered to live in poverty (Miller and Bunnell 93). Educational spending—which is tied to poverty levels—was focused on urban coastal areas after the tsunami. Miller and Bunnell note that 2,000

schoolteachers and 200 university-level lecturers died in the tsunami, and aid was needed to restart educational programs for students (94). Schools in the rural interior, damaged by the separatist conflict, did not receive much-needed support and investment, and teachers were reluctant to relocate to remote areas with fewer resources (Miller and Bunnell 95).

The urban exodus was also a point of conversation after the Haiti earthquake. Haitian government officials saw the earthquake as a chance to address the severe and dangerous overcrowding in Port-au-Prince by relocating residents to other cities or rural areas. However, many aid organizations disagreed with this plan on the principle that survivors should remain as close as possible to their neighborhoods in order to preserve their social networks. This recommendation was primarily based on the experience of NGOs in Banda Aceh after the tsunami (Gros 184). However, the unregulated settlements in Port-au-Prince challenged this recommendation. The homes were illegal and unsafe and should not have been built in the manner or location in which they were. Many of the Haitian IDPs, estimated at up to 70 percent, were renting or squatting in the structures before the earthquake and were not homeowners (Gros 184).

Rural relocation occurred naturally as tens of thousands of Haitians left the devastated capital after the earthquake. However, resources and aid workers failed to follow them to ensure they were supported during their transition away from the city (Katz 74). Katz cites the concentration of aid in Petionville, while the outlying neighborhoods of Carrefour and Léogâne —the actual epicenter of the quake—were largely ignored (Katz 105). Katz describes a sign he saw on the road to Léogâne: “SOS:



WE DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY EVERYTHING IS GOING TO PORT-AU-PRINCE BECAUSE LÉOGÂNE WAS BROKEN TOO" (Katz 84).

An estimated 600,000 people fled from earthquake-stricken urban areas to rural towns where they had family connections (Katz 73). Jean-Germain Gros criticizes humanitarian organizations for insufficiently supporting the resettlement of displaced Haitians in rural areas. Without assistance from the government or any other organization to find food, shelter, or medical help, many Haitians were forced to return to tent cities in the urban core (Gros 184). There was little aid organization support and few employment opportunities in the rural fringe.

The earthquake also presented an opportunity to support decentralization through the provision of aid specifically for Haitian peasants. The peasantry has typically been excluded from urban Haitian society, referred to as *moun andeyò*, or "outsiders" (Schuller and Morales 96). The lack of aid organization interest or investment in peasant wellbeing after the earthquake did not help to bridge the existing rural-urban divide, nor did it improve the lives of the rural poor that welcomed the urban migrant population back to the countryside.

Jonathan Katz cites an example of aid distribution from the 1998-1999 conflict in Kosovo in which aid was delivered directly to families in their residences. The approach would not have been feasible in the city of Port-au-Prince itself, owing to the widespread destruction and displacement, but would have better supported the nearly 600,000 survivors that took up residence with extended family in rural homes. The strategy could have directly supported peasant families housing displaced family members and could

have either stopped or tempered the flow of earthquake survivors seeking resources in the capital (Katz 98). The Haitian state did not act on further plans for relocation following the earthquake. Temporary tent cities supplanted the slums in Port-au-Prince and the rural poor remained without support.

The tsunami and the earthquake both prompted migration from the urban core or coastal areas to the rural hinterland, an action especially needed to tame the overpopulation in Port-au-Prince. However, in Haiti, support was largely unavailable for those looking to relocate to rural villages. The rural peasantry had not been a priority for NGOs prior to the earthquake; therefore, support did not follow the exodus of survivors from Port-au-Prince into the countryside. In Aceh, a cultural and social framework was already in place—the *gampong*—that could support survivors moving inland from urban or coastal areas. In general, rural people and areas that were historically neglected did not receive any direct benefits from aid organizations that arrived following the disaster.

### Housing Challenges

One challenge in rebuilding homes in both Haiti and Aceh was appropriate construction. In order to prevent structural failure during a future natural event, and to support the psychosocial healing process, new building projects can be considered in light of culture and place. Post-disaster housing is a desirable focus for NGOs because building projects can be documented and quantified for donors, more so than other social programs. This is not to diminish the restoration of the built environment. Safe homes, roads, and sanitation infrastructure must be in place before survivors can return to their

home neighborhoods and social networks (Daly 222). However, the participation of multiple aid organizations in rebuilding projects—especially those with limited construction experience and cultural understanding—can lead to mixed results.

Local, national, and international organizations all participated in the rebuilding of homes in Aceh following the tsunami. Some houses were rebuilt where they stood before the disaster, but new settlements were also created. For some NGOs, this was the first time they built houses, and Aceh challenged them with environmental limitations and forced new approaches (Rand et al. 188). Some agencies allowed survivors to give input as to the kind of home they desired, while others gave them the materials to construct their own. In general, Acehnese survivors were provided a standard house built by an aid organization without any consultation as to their specific wants or needs. Many Acehnese families subsequently modified the houses and gardens when—and if—they were financially able (Samuels 220).

The Haitian government and foreign NGOs made promises to rebuild homes, but more than a year after the earthquake, fewer than 5,000 homes had been repaired or rebuilt out of the estimated 190,000 that were damaged or destroyed (Regan 101). Haitian officials encouraged homeowners to return to their homes—which they claimed were largely habitable. Plans were put in place to rebuild safer neighborhoods and to assist homeowners in creating better-constructed homes, but renters and squatters were excluded from housing opportunities. Before the earthquake, it was common for Haitian families to pay rent in advance for terms ranging from six to 24 months at a time. The

lost rent paid out before the earthquake, coupled with lost livelihoods, left renters in a state of limbo and perpetuated their residence in IDP camps (Regan 101).

Without a coordinated reconstruction effort, many Haitians found themselves in temporary camps months and years after the earthquake. Long-term residents in the temporary camps faced eviction because 60 percent of IDP camps were located on private property (Snyder 144). Landowners forced IDPs off their land through the threat of violence or by blocking aid. However, the decline in the population of various IDP camps was more likely attributed to survivors relocating to other camps or into damaged, unsafe houses. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), only 4.7 percent of IDPs that departed a temporary camp took up residence in permanent housing (Snyder 146).

In the months following the earthquake, a collection of community groups, camp committees, and nonprofits formed the Housing Reflection and Action Force (Fòs Refleksyon ak Aksyon sou Koze Kay, operating under the acronym FRAKKA). In addition to fighting for the rights of IDPs living in the camps, FRAKKA campaigned for the Haitian government to “develop a national housing policy for all citizens, not just earthquake survivors” (Bell 136). As a community coalition, FRAKKA asserted that the inadequate housing in Port-au-Prince contributed to the high number of earthquake deaths, but also insisted that rural Haitians also had the right to safe housing that allowed them to live with dignity. The earthquake created an opportunity for nation-wide housing issues to be addressed by the government and aid organizations, but I have not

encountered evidence to suggest that the disaster was a turning point for housing policies and practices.

The following sections will explore several of the challenges and opportunities presented in a post-disaster situation when much of the housing stock has been eliminated. It is important to recognize that aid organizations are not reconstructing in a void. There may be opportunities for housing plans to take into account environmental pressures and resources as well as how the homes function for a family and within a community. Aid organizations approached the process of rebuilding in Aceh and Haiti in different ways. The outcomes of working with community members are explored at the end of this chapter.

### Architecture and the Environment

This section explores the challenges of rebuilding in an environment with natural hazards and resource limitations. Aid organizations in Haiti and Aceh faced reconstruction in seismically active regions, and the preferred “modern” building material—concrete—was not as appropriate to the environment as other locally sourced materials. Housing models better matched to the environment are found in both Haiti and Aceh, but they are not suited to large-scale reproduction. While outside experts and architects may draft plans for innovative housing solutions, construction materials are ideally affordable and available locally in order for new approaches to take root.

A major contributing factor to the number of earthquake casualties was the dense, poorly built slums in Port-au-Prince. Haiti did not have its own building codes prior to

the earthquake, only adopting international building standards following the disaster. In the years leading up to the earthquake, there was no oversight for how structures were built or the materials they were built with. Concrete was the preferred “modern” building material, introduced to Haiti in the 1920s and popularized by its use in public buildings such as the National Palace (Audefroy 448). Many concrete structures failed to meet basic building standards. Buildings had flimsy walls that could not hold up the slabs above when the ground shook. Floors and ceilings had insufficient reinforcement so their failure “brought buildings tumbling down like houses of cards” (Audefroy 448). The lax building standards and concrete construction was responsible for much of the destruction in Port-au-Prince.

In 1751, a large earthquake destroyed Port-au-Prince, then a new colonial city. Colonists noted the “flexible wood structures withstood the quake better than rigid masonry” (Katz 37). With the widespread decimation of trees in Haiti, local knowledge of how to build wooden houses was largely lost. “Vernacular” structures—defined as owner-built with local materials and technology—fared better than concrete construction during seismic events (Audefroy 448).

Architect Joel Audefroy details two different types of Haitian vernacular architecture that fared better than concrete buildings during the earthquake. Wattle and daub houses, in which “a wooden structure [is] filled with stone and bound together with a mix of lime and earth,” moved with the tremors and survived better than concrete construction (Audefroy 451). Homes with horizontal board walls with a twin-sloped roof—often made of lightweight corrugated sheets—were also found to have withstood

the earthquake with less damage (Audefroy 453). In addition to being able to better withstand nature's threats, these types of homes also make use of locally found materials.

In the post-earthquake rebuilding process, stone and wood were overlooked in favor of "modern" materials. Concrete and cement blocks were highly desirable—and costly—despite the widespread structural failure of concrete construction. Audefroy notes that Haitians rebuilding their own homes were left without technical support or guidance in how to make anti-seismic modifications (457). This resulted in quick builds once again vulnerable to environmental pressures.

For Haitians to widely adopt anti-seismic housing models, construction materials are preferably readily available and inexpensive. Construction techniques may also be adapted to the machinery available and level of builder knowledge. Paul Fallon, an architect working in Haiti in the years following the earthquake, explained his building designs as "prototypes of Haiti's vernacular construction, reinterpreted to withstand earthquakes" (Fallon, "On Shaky Ground: Haiti, Five Years Later"). Due to inflation and the fact that "labor was cheap and plentiful, while materials were expensive and machinery rare," Fallon saw the cost of his buildings rise to \$75 per foot (Fallon, "On Shaky Ground: Haiti, Five Years Later"). In comparison, Haitian-built homes before the earthquake were built at an average cost of \$25 per foot. While the architect-led constructions utilized superior, safer materials, Fallon acknowledged that they do not meet the larger goal of anti-seismic homes that can be built by Haitians alone. The gulf in price between Haitian-built and foreign-built homes—regardless of the high quality—makes it unlikely that survivors would, or could, choose the safer option.

Aid organizations rebuilding in Aceh faced similar questions around materials and housing design. Pre-tsunami, 66 percent of the respondents in an Oxfam survey were living in a wood house (Rand et al. 199). Acehnese raised homes were constructed of tropical hardwoods and were safer than masonry homes during an earthquake. Masonry houses were preferred over timber houses because Acehnese saw them as a symbol of modernity, progress, and wealth. Yet masonry houses were “not part of the traditional building culture...and they were not suited to Aceh’s earthquake proneness or climate” (Rand et al. 193). It is a challenge for aid organizations to overcome this preference for concrete because of the qualities that it represents. I question how aid organizations can communicate the value of a non-masonry home and emphasize safety as a high priority.

Acehnese wooden houses require a great deal more timber to complete than masonry builds. Many NGOs working on housing programs were under pressure from organizations like the World Wildlife Fund to be mindful of environmental damage as a result of logging (Kennedy et al. 27). The potential environmental impact of reconstructing wooden houses on such a large scale was staggering. After the tsunami, timber was in high demand both for construction and to fuel the firing of bricks. The demand for wood would have either necessitated increased importation of lumber into Aceh or sparked illegal logging practices. Therefore, many aid organizations chose to construct masonry structures instead of the traditional wooden homes (Kennedy et al 27).

Vernacular examples of suitable construction existed in both Aceh and Haiti, but what may be feasible for small-scale building projects is not necessarily transferrable to extensive rebuilding. Thousands of homes with wood construction, while more



earthquake-resistant than masonry, require far more wood than is environmentally feasible. Therefore, other material solutions could be explored and risks weighed. Aceh did not experience the same widespread concrete structure failures that led to the high number of casualties in Haiti, but the preference for masonry structures may not be the most environmentally suitable in the long-term.

### Socio-cultural Practices and Housing

While it is understandable that aid organizations prefer to have a standard housing model to keep costs down and simplify construction, it is important to consider that a one-size-fits-all approach does not take into account various cultural living arrangements and social practices. In addition to the common practice of extended families living together pre-disaster, new models of habitation may materialize to care for orphans, widows, and other vulnerable members of a population. It is also important to consider women in the design process, as their social life may be more closely tied to the home than it is for men. Ideally, if a standard housing model is used, there is some opportunity for a family to customize it to meet their unique needs.

Oxfam was one of a multitude of organizations involved in providing shelter for displaced persons in Aceh. A survey conducted after the construction of permanent residences—although not the experience of every aid organization—provides valuable insight into the process. Oxfam’s plan for providing shelter post-tsunami was three-pronged: supply emergency shelter for short-term protection (e.g. a tent); create “transitional” shelters like temporary dwellings or barracks that house multiple families;

and create permanent housing (Rand et al. 188). In a little more than five years following the tsunami, Oxfam “built 1,564 homes in 28 villages across seven districts in Aceh” (Rand et al. 189). The homes had a standard layout and components—two bedrooms and a living room, water and sanitary facilities—as well as earthquake-resistant features. Residents commonly adapt the organization-built housing to meet their needs and desires after they move in.

More than 350 of the households that received an Oxfam home after the tsunami participated in a survey to gauge residents’ satisfaction with their home. The survey consisted of a household questionnaire, individual interviews, and group discussions. Resident judged aspects of their Oxfam housing on a 1-5 scale in which 1 corresponded to “definitely unacceptable” and 5 indicating that it “significantly exceeded expectations” (Rand et al. 196). Interviewees were selected to ensure that both genders and different population categories were represented, including more “vulnerable” households headed by tsunami widows, widowers, and orphans (Rand et al. 194).

The survey found that a widow, widower, or orphan was the head of 33 percent of the interviewee households (Rand et al. 97). This is not the only change from pre-tsunami occupancy patterns. Fewer people on average lived in each house—an average of 5.1 people pre-tsunami, and 3.6 people post-tsunami. Throughout Indonesia, as well as in Aceh, it is typical for multiple generations to live together in one home, and have multiple households living under the same roof. Many eligible, tsunami-impacted households chose to accept their own house rather than continue to live with extended

family members (Rand et al. 199). This may suggest NGOs disrupted the practice of multigenerational cohabitation, at least in the short-term.

Due in part to limitations on the timber supply, the vast majority of Acehnese Oxfam survey respondents (approximately 95 percent) moved into masonry houses built for permanent occupation. The design and construction of many masonry houses did not support some of the socio-cultural practices or customs of women in particular. As explained by Patrick Daly and Yenny Rahmayati, the areas beneath the traditional wooden, raised Acehnese homes—or in the kitchen in non-raised houses—were the places in which women interacted in groups. Although men still had their coffee shops to gather and engage in dialogue, the construction of “modern” masonry houses disrupted the social patterns of women and brought about increased feelings of isolation (Daly and Rahmayati 66).

The Oxfam survey also mentions the psychological benefits of having a home to move into, or even simply the promise of a new home. It allowed survivors to focus on reestablishing their livelihood. Men in the Acehnese village of Sawang noted they “didn’t need to think about our house construction anymore because they were being built by Oxfam. We could focus more on our livelihoods” (Rand et al. 201). Having a stable home is an important step for social and economic recovery, both for home-based industries (for example, making fishing nets or weaving) and for Acehnese that work away from the home.

Land ownership is an important cultural undercurrent in the humanitarian aid narrative that has come out of Haiti. Being a landowner is a sign of both freedom and

wealth, especially in light of Haiti's plantation system past. The USAID program that killed off Haiti's indigenous pig population, coupled with a decline in sugar and rice production, led to widespread internal migration as agriculture was abandoned for urban prospects (Beauvoir-Dominique, "The Social Value of Voodoo throughout History: Slavery, Migrations, and Solidarity" 104). The rural social system of *lakou*, in which groups of peasants claimed land as their own and organized as a system of shared responsibilities and resources, was difficult to transfer to the setting of Port-au-Prince (Katz 100). The *lakou* also has important cultural ties to Vodou, as the shared space "represents the overlapping of natural and social forces" where spirits have great powers (Beauvoir-Dominique, "The Social Value of Voodoo throughout History: Slavery, Migrations, and Solidarity" 103).

In urban Haitian communities, efforts were made to recreate the *lakou*—an "extended family"—in the nearby suburbs (Beauvoir-Dominique, "The Social Value of Voodoo throughout History: Slavery, Migrations, and Solidarity" 104). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) articulates the possible benefits to using the *lakou* system in the planning and reconstruction of new settlements post-earthquake. Such guidelines would include relocating a segment of the population in the same camps and organizing new settlements around courtyards. In an article written by IOM staff, the authors postulate that such organization could help to care for minors orphaned or displaced by the earthquake, at-risk elderly populations and households led by women (Schininà et al 161). While using the rural *lakou* to guide reconstruction of housing is a model grounded in Haitian culture, many Haitians did not own land or a home. Renters—

often the poorest of the poor—were excluded from housing development projects. It is unclear if *lakou*-based housing could be built on a large scale or if it would benefit renters, the population that may benefit most from the support the model provides.

In response to misguided attempts, some non-profits put forward potential housing models. One such model was a small-scale land and housing co-op in which residents operate as a community, combine resources, and engage in shared decision-making and planning (Bell 138). Another small-plan community included homes with water and electricity generated through rainwater collection and solar panels (Bell 138). While these models appear to address the cultural and social needs of the Haitian earthquake survivors—and address some environmental concerns—they were relatively small-scale, experimental proposals.

Aid organizations rebuilding homes have the opportunity to evaluate how design can either support cultural and social norms or disrupt them. Designing for extended families to live in the same home and utilizing cultural models—like the *lakou*—can aid a community in recovery and support its most vulnerable members. Aid organizations may also choose to weigh gender-based needs in the design of the home. While men may engage in social activities out in the community, Acehnese women in particular socialize in and around the home. A dwelling that addresses socio-cultural needs and leverages the familiar can support community cohesion and stability.

## Rebuilding with Communities

In addition to issues around environmental and cultural suitability, aid organizations may have an opportunity to reflect on how community stakeholders participate in the rebuilding process. The following section explores how collaborating with locals can help move a project forward and address problems and challenges that arise throughout the process. External agencies operating without an understanding of community needs and priorities can waste time and resources pursuing projects with minimal impact and damage their relationship with the community they were meant to serve.

In Aceh, issues of land ownership arose for a number of reasons and impacted the ability of aid organizations to construct new housing. Many households did not hold formal land titles and many existing title documents were destroyed by the tsunami. External agencies were unable to move forward with housing allocations without clarity around land ownership. Local leadership, in tandem with input from the community as a whole, was an important factor in resolving questions of land ownership so that the external agency projects could proceed (Daly 242). Those communities that prioritized community-mapping efforts resolved the ownership issues sooner and were able to move forward more quickly with rebuilding efforts.

Some of the houses purposely built for tsunami survivors were never occupied. The reasons for vacancies included life events—such as remarriage and cohabitation—and extended families choosing to live together. Some individuals were given multiple houses by different aid agencies, suggesting a lack of coordination and communication

between agencies and communities. The housing allocation process was described as complicated and “wide open for abuse” despite efforts made in community mapping and land titling (Daly and Rahmayati 68).

The majority of organizations in post-tsunami Aceh also adopted a contractor-led construction approach instead of relying on the community or individuals to build their own homes. Some NGOs ran into challenges in overseeing housing construction projects, especially the coordination and direction of myriad subcontractors. The complicated and inefficient project management structure led to “delays, confusion, and...the construction of housing that is often inappropriate within local cultural and social contexts” (Daly and Rahmayati 66). Although Daly and Rahmayati do not detail why the project management structure was inefficient, language barriers and changing NGO staff could have complicated the building process.

Contradictory feedback about the level of satisfaction with contractor-built homes may point to a general approval of the quality that construction experts lend to the process, but it suggests deficiencies in how the home met the needs or desires of an individual family (Rand et al. 207). There were also problems that stemmed from using locals in construction projects. The use of unskilled laborers slowed the building process and led to frustration among the housing beneficiaries and the organizations that measured success by the number of completed houses (Kennedy et al. 27).

On paper, and to some degree in practice, Oxfam appears to have consulted with the community and responded to their concerns with the building process. Oxfam’s approach to reconstructing housing included “cash grants, gender

considerations...specific targeting of vulnerable populations [and] technical training” (Rand et al. 189). The organization initially began with a program that provided materials and training to individual homeowners—or to communities in some cases—and allowed them to rebuild their own homes. The recipient family guides the project because they build the home to their own specifications. Oxfam was specifically guided by the principle of accountability, explained in this case as “ensuring that affected parties participate in and can influence decisions affecting them, so that the affected parties’ needs, interests, and ability are fully considered” (Rand et al. 189). Through the community feedback received as a part of an accountability model, Oxfam made the decision to enlist larger contractors to build several homes at a time, rather than continue with the original model (Rand et al. 192). The ease and speed of construction were important to recipients because they were likely in a temporary shelter through the rebuilding process.

Oxfam also created housing committees in the communities it worked in and allowed for co-management of housing construction. Predominately male “housing committees” were elected in the various Aceh communities to oversee the construction progress and serve as the means through which residents could pass along their concerns during the homes’ construction (Rand et al. 202). The presence of these housing committees led to overall higher rates of satisfaction than in communities that did not have a means through which they could communicate throughout the process. This consultation appeared to be the key in achieving high resident satisfaction, more so than residents physically participating in the construction process.



According to the survey, the Oxfam-built houses had a much lower vacancy rate than homes built by other aid organizations, 5 percent in comparison to 21 percent. Oxfam theorized that the low vacancy rate could be in part attributed to the inclusion of desirable components like electrical wiring and sanitation facilities, assuming that not all other aid organization housing came with these features standard (Rand et al. 189). It may also be due to the close involvement and communication with the community. In the Oxfam survey, 79 percent of the respondents said that they were consulted during construction of their home, and 57 percent in some way participated in building their own house (Rand et al. 199).

In Haiti, with rubble and collapsed buildings stalling reconstruction in the capital, permanent housing projects were slow to take off. Rebuilding in Port-au-Prince fell under the jurisdiction of the Government of Haiti, but the earthquake severely restricted its ability to operate. Shelter organizations worked locally, but the frequent turnover of staff working directly with communities led to decisions being made by external, international staff with little knowledge of the realities on the ground. Aid organizations had “debates and divergent views on what a sustainable approach to shelter would look like in an urban environment” (Fan, “Disaster as Opportunity?” 23). There was a “tendency for shelter agencies to [favor] transitional shelter, or ‘T-shelter,’ construction over other possible responses” (Fan, “Shelter Strategies” 74). Aid organizations could control the end product of the investment—T-shelters were of a standard design and construction—more so than if they distributed materials or cash for survivors to build their own homes.

The cost of the T-shelter was comparable to what a Haitian family would spend on a permanent house. Earthquake survivors saved money on construction materials and rent by living in a T-shelter, but “they had not been asked if they wanted to live there or not” (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies 54). Coupled with a lack of support and planning for permanent housing, Haitians living in the T-shelters assumed that they would stay there for several years. With that belief in mind, T-shelter residents expressed disappointment that they were not consulted about their preferences and that their requests were not considered. The small living space of the T-shelters, measured at 18 square meters, was one of the primary complaints. As one survey respondent notes, “it did not matter if there were three or nine in a family, they gave everybody the same” (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies 55).

There are many accounts of promised homes that never materialized as well as costly—yet substandard—contractor-built homes. While organizations like the American Red Cross raised huge sums of money for housing projects in Haiti, bureaucratic delays and mismanagement led to a lack of discernable results on the ground (“In Search of the Red Cross’ \$500 Million”). The Red Cross planned to rebuild 700 homes in Campeche—and made promises to residents—but difficulty acquiring land rights and bureaucratic delays within the agency dramatically altered the scale of the project. Rather than constructing new homes, the Red Cross focused on smaller repair projects as well as the building of a road (“In Search of the Red Cross’ \$500 Million”).

Another project, a Housing Exposition coordinated by the Haiti Recovery Commission, was intended to provide housing models for organizations involved in the rebuilding. However, as David Odnell, director of the Unit for the Construction of Housing and Public Buildings in Haiti commented, “some of [the models] had nothing to do with the way we Haitians live or think about housing. It was a completely imported thing” (Haiti Grassroots Watch, “Questions about the Reconstruction’s Housing Projects”). Due to poor planning and project management, the homes were largely forgotten after their 2011 unveiling. Earthquake survivors were not presented with the homes, nor were the housing models purchased for new, rebuilt communities. Instead, squatters took over the vacant site (Haiti Grassroots Watch, “Questions about the Reconstruction’s Housing Projects”).

The approach to rebuilding homes in Haiti was complicated. Many Haitians needed immediate shelter solutions and long-term, sustainable housing requires a coordinated effort—that includes the Haitian government—and community participation. Frantz Duval, editor-in-chief of the Haitian national newspaper *Le Nouvelliste* claims that aid organizations,

...had these grand visions to erase the country and start all over. They thought Haiti was a blank slate. They forgot the model. Usually, Haitians take 20 to 25 years to build their houses, room by room, with the help of friends and family (qtd. in Porter “In Haiti, a failure to ‘build back better’”).

Rather than provide displaced earthquake survivors with the materials or funds to support their own rebuilding projects, aid organizations invested in T-shelters and planned for new communities without understanding the conditions on the ground. Duval suggests

that funds should have been invested in the existing neighborhoods to improve sanitation, trash pickup, and health clinics (Porter). Long-term plans for permanent shelter solutions stalled despite the huge amount of funding available for housing projects and neighborhood improvements.

Unsurprisingly, a lack of consultation with stakeholders leads to varying degrees of satisfaction with post-disaster housing. In Haiti, earthquake survivors were grateful to have the rent-free T-shelters as temporary, transitional housing. T-shelters, however, did not meet families' needs for permanent shelter, and the proposed housing solutions were not widely implemented. Instead of viewing Haiti as an opportunity to start over with new housing models, aid organizations may have occasion to invest in neighborhood infrastructure and support Haitians in building homes that fit their families and their cultural needs. Based on the Aceh Oxfam survey, establishing a system for feedback and allowing contractors to handle the building process led to higher satisfaction for residents and more timely construction. The consultation with residents is essential; a top-down approach led by outside "experts" does not guarantee culturally appropriate housing or actual progress on the ground.

## Discussion

This chapter explored three questions around post-disaster shelter: How are habitation patterns and social relationships impacted by disaster? What is the role of shelter in the recovery process? Did aid organizations approach rebuilding homes in ways that support local cultural needs and environmental constraints? Through the exploration

of these particular lines of inquiry, I identified key concepts as well as additional questions.

Disaster can alter habitation patterns and social relationships in a number of ways. Temporary camps or shelters can divide families and community members and disrupt social institutions like the *gampong* system. As evidenced by the rifts that emerged in the Al-Mukarramah neighborhood, this separation can have ramifications for how a community problem-solves and communicates. Ideally, aid organizations are able to keep families and communities together, but if the situation necessitates separation, are there strategies for how to keep social relationships intact and address conflicts that arise? Even in a stressful camp environment there may be ways to better host areas for women and men to socialize. Leveraging local leadership and better representation in temporary camp environments.

Aid organizations may also see the composition of households change following a disaster as family structures change and survivors seek out means of support. Following the tsunami, there was a rise in Acehnese households led by widows, widowers, and orphans. Through marriage, remarriage, cohabitation, and migration, households can actively change following a disaster. This state of transition can complicate how aid organizations distribute housing and resources. In order to take advantage of additional assets, multigenerational families may opt to live in separate homes. While household composition may again shift, aid organizations may find value in understanding common habitation patterns. There were other “vulnerable” groups—such as orphans and the elderly—that lost family members and their networks of support. This raises questions

around how communities provide social support to these groups. Can it be built into temporary and permanent housing in a way that is similar to the *lakou* system?

There is also a question of who should be entitled to a home after a disaster. How do aid organizations measure need? Haiti has the problem of high number of renters who have no claim to land or a permanent dwelling. Renters and squatters were left in a state of limbo because they were not eligible to receive an NGO-built home. There were few rental options after the earthquake because of the widespread destruction. The question of housing need and entitlement also applies to people living in rural Haiti and Aceh—including disaster survivors, peasants, and persons displaced by the separatist conflict—that had similar, urgent housing needs. If urban decentralization and rural support is a goal, housing and opportunities would also need to extend into the rural interior.

I initially posed a question around the role of shelter in the recovery process. Why is shelter so important? From a comparison of the Aceh and Haiti case studies, I believe shelter provides several benefits in a post-disaster context. At the most basic level, shelter provides protection from the elements, stability, safety, and privacy in a chaotic camp environment. Shelter can also provide peace of mind so that survivors can focus on other aspects of recovery, such as returning to their pre-disaster livelihood. Aid organizations that focus on providing permanent, secure housing can incidentally support economic recovery. The push for permanent housing, however, can be problematic if aid organizations take a one-size-fits-all approach and do not weigh the size of a family or their socio-cultural needs.

Humanitarian research fellow Lilianne Fan says that aid organizations must think of shelter as a process (72). Emergency shelter—like a tent or tarp—can be provided immediately following the disaster, but a plan should be in place for transitional and permanent shelters. Aid organizations or donors may believe that by supplying a tent, the need for shelter has been addressed. It is a more complex issue. Tents or tarps are not sufficient shelter; they do not offer much in terms of privacy or protection from the elements. However, providing more than a tent or tarp might suggest permanence, which is problematic in a temporary camp environment. This leads to a bigger question: how much investment should aid organizations make in temporary camp shelter and services? From the accounts in Haiti and Aceh, life in temporary camps may lead to instability and delay the return to normalcy. Could investment in better housing make the temporary camps better in the short-term, but could it also make them more permanent? It would seem to be a delicate balance between addressing the immediate need for safety and shelter and continuing to pursue permanent shelter that addresses social and cultural needs.

In both Haiti and Aceh, the environmental and cultural appropriateness of NGO-built homes is perhaps up for debate. It is difficult to gauge how the homes withstand natural threats absent another disaster. Vernacular housing models can provide valuable insight into key design components suited to the environment, but aid organizations face critical material and financial limits. Regardless of the materials and approach to rebuilding homes, the process may improve if a feedback mechanism is instituted so that recipients can weigh in on the process and how the homes meet their socio-cultural needs.

The opportunity for home recipients to be involved in the process raises an important question. How much consultation is sufficient for aid organizations to move forward? If timely house construction is important, how can aid organizations support home recipients in making later modifications to the home so that it fits their needs?

In general, temporary camps and transitional shelters have not been shown to support community healing and a return to normalcy. While having a permanent home provides more security and stability than the temporary camps, it may not be beneficial if the construction leaves the inhabitants prone to environmental threats or social discord. Despite the urgency to rebuild, aid organizations may have an opportunity to consider the potential ramifications of taking a one-size-fits-all approach without a plan to address later modifications.



## CHAPTER FIVE: CHALLENGES OF FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT

In this chapter, I investigate some of the complicated relationships and occasional tensions that arise as part of foreign involvement and assistance. With the influx of high numbers of foreign, non-local responders, conflict and confusion may occur. Aid organizations can benefit from working with and through existing decision-making and leadership structures and leveraging local knowledge. Two questions guided my inquiry into the experience of aid organizations and disaster survivors in the recovery and reconstruction process: To what extent do cultural differences present a challenge to disaster recovery, and how are they addressed or negotiated? Finally, how do aid organizations work with community groups and social institutions to address needs?

The post-disaster environment can present a number of challenges. Haiti, for instance, was already open to international agencies because of its history of foreign involvement and reliance on aid. However, a history of misguided foreign policies and unmet promises—both briefly mentioned in Chapter Three—complicated relationships between the aid workers and aid recipients. In Aceh, the ongoing military conflict made it difficult for foreign agencies to make initial headway in tsunami-hit areas. Aceh is an Islamic province, and according to researcher Patrick Daly, *sharia* law made international NGO involvement more complicated. In both locations, many aid agencies were under a great deal of pressure to spend the enormous funds from foreign donors. They were

expected to achieve measureable results quickly, all while consulting with the community and improving aid organization collaboration and communication.

### “Mountains of Misunderstandings”

This section examines some of the cultural differences and points of mutual misunderstanding between foreign aid workers and the populations they assisted in Haiti and Aceh. For foreign aid workers that lived apart from the people impacted by the disaster, it may have been difficult to understand the challenges faced by disaster survivors. The cultural divide can also impede relationships, breed distrust, and complicate aid activities.

As detailed in *The Big Truck that went By*, Jonathan Katz’s first-person account of the earthquake and its aftermath, cultural differences made response and redevelopment matters in Haiti difficult. Katz refers to the divide between the *nèg* and the *blan* as “the cardinal division of Haitian society” (56). Although derived from the French word for ‘white’, the word *blan* more accurately means “foreigner.” Many *blan* came to Haiti via NGOs with the desire to help in the aftermath of the earthquake. The Kreyol word *nèg* simply means “person.”

In his account of the Haiti earthquake, Katz equates the cultural difference between *blan* and *nèg* to “us” and “them” (56). He explains that some *blan* equated *nèg* with instability and violence, taking measures to protect themselves against a perceived danger. Aid workers and UN staff were strongly encouraged to live in select neighborhoods, creating what Katz refers to as the “Blan Bubble” (57). This fear of the

*nèg* was continually reinforced as aid workers were told not to walk through the IDP camps or were given a 6 p.m. curfew (Miles 49).

The mutual misunderstanding between the *blan* and *nèg* manifested itself throughout recovery efforts. The *blan* anticipated violent behavior on the part of the Haitian earthquake survivors, reinforced by “vague reports of civil unrest” (Katz 73). Food distribution in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake was chaotic and largely ineffective as a result of “pervasive stereotypes of Haiti—‘poorest country in the Western Hemisphere’” (Miles 45). Aid organizations expected looting and violence to erupt at distribution sites and sent soldiers to enforce order. Katz observed UN soldiers firing warning shots and releasing pepper spray on crowds forced to wait hours in the sun for cooking oil and rice, only serving to increase the level of panic (Katz 80). The presence of the armed soldiers likely contributed to a sense of instability and danger—on the part of aid workers and aid recipients—and called into question who the soldiers were intended to support and protect.

Other approaches taken for food distribution—such as airdrops from cargo planes or helicopters—induced panic and were deemed unsafe (Katz 79). The indirect food drops were ineffective because they did not make use of the existing cultural frameworks. A Haitian named Thomas Louis told Katz that he believed “food could have been distributed more effectively through existing networks, such as churches” (Katz 80). The armed soldiers and airdrops did not create an opportunity for constructive dialogue to occur around survivors’ concerns and needs. If aid agencies had made use of community

relationships in food distribution, perhaps much of the panic that erupted around distribution centers could have been avoided.

The perceived divide between the *blan* and the *nèg* intensified after the outbreak of cholera, unintentionally brought to the country and introduced to the water supply by Nepalese UN soldiers. The epicenter of the cholera epidemic was in Mirebalais, outside of the area most affected by the earthquake (Piarroux et al. 173). In addition to anger directed at the Nepalese UN soldiers, there was a belief among Haitians that the mobile UN medical teams brought cholera into new areas as they tried to stay ahead of the contagious disease (Katz 232). The confusion was understandable considering that dispatch of NGO medical personnel and mobile clinics into the countryside often coincided with the arrival of the new cases of the disease due to its natural spread and advance. Although, this dislike and distrust of UN soldiers was not a new phenomenon in Haiti, it further strained Haitians' relationships with foreigners (Katz 224).

There was a similar tenuous relationship with some of the foreign responders that arrived in Aceh after the tsunami. Many of the incoming aid workers "had limited understanding of Acehnese or Indonesian culture, social practices, religion, and local languages," save those that had spent time in Aceh pre-tsunami, so there was a general unfamiliarity with the realities of Acehnese life (Daly 239). Ismet Fanany notes that it is "virtually impossible for foreign organizations of any kind to operate without an Indonesian partner organization" because of the complexity of Indonesian society (109). Aceh had been closed to foreigners because of the separatist conflict, so it is not surprising that incoming aid workers were unfamiliar with aspects of Acehnese culture.

Many Western aid workers and agencies held a negative view of Islamic law, *sharia*, and viewed fundamentalist religious beliefs as an impediment to redeveloping the area (Miller 41). Miller cites the “othering” of the Acehnese by “foreign development workers on the basis of their Islamic identity” (41). Foreign donors and aid organizations that opposed the implementation of *sharia* law found themselves at odds with Acehnese *ulamas*, Muslim scholars. As Miller explains, disagreement on the subject of *sharia* law made it difficult for stakeholders to relate to each other and agree about recovery priorities and development programs (36). Aid organizations that were vocal in their opposition to *sharia* law either elected to leave Aceh or were asked to.

While certain international aid agencies espoused a neutral position on the subject of *sharia*, it is difficult to determine the impact of personal biases. The fundamental disagreement between foreign aid workers and *sharia* advocates about the role of Islam in the recovery process “affected their capacity to relate to one another” (Miller 36). United States military personnel were one such group that experienced strained relationships with the local population. Some of the military personnel had been deployed directly from the Middle East to Aceh. They felt uncomfortable in Muslim-majority Aceh having recently been targeted by radical Muslim militant groups in Iraq (Miller 41).

The incoming non-Muslim aid workers were also a concern for religious leaders in Aceh. Islamic groups—looking to increase their own power in post-tsunami Aceh—promoted the theory that the United States was actively attempting to undermine Aceh’s Islamic foundations and the “moral fabric” of the province (Miller 42). The American

offer of humanitarian assistance to Aceh was in part a strategic foreign policy move intended to serve as proof that the United States was not anti-Islam (Miller 39).

The physical distance between foreign aid workers and the communities they served was a criticism leveled at aid organizations in Haiti and Aceh. It is difficult to understand cultural nuances, negotiate cultural differences, and build relationships without investing considerable time into living and working with people on a local level. The stationing of UN aid workers on a cruise ship outside of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, illustrates the concern around absentee aid workers and the enormous amount of funding—estimated at \$112,500 per day—required to provide such amenities (Bell 79). As Nadève Ménard inquires, “how can these people be drafting plans to help Haiti when they have no contact with Haitian life or even Haitians?” (Ménard 50). *Blan* aid workers spent off days exploring the mountains and lingering on beaches before returning to work in the earthquake-stricken Haitian capital. While the argument could be made that aid workers need time away from their difficult work, there may be a public perception that they were provided comforts unavailable to disaster survivors.

Haitian filmmaker Raoul Peck offered a critical perspective on the efforts and priorities of the outside aid agencies. He described NGOs as disconnected from the culture and reality of Haitians in the days following the earthquake. As Peck explained, “everyone instead got overexcited about occupying the largest intervention space possible, which was the worst thing for practical help, and the best thing for diplomatic vanity” (Peck, “Dead-end in Port-au-Prince” 44). NGOs expended time and energy competing for space and resources while vital aid remained undistributed (F. Pierre-Louis 200).

The fear of violence on the part of the *nèg*—introduced earlier as a concern around food distribution—also emerged during emergency rescue efforts. Instead of heading into Port-au-Prince, many foreign responders in Haiti focused their efforts on the well-publicized “priority” sites where foreigners were trapped—namely the Hotel Montana (Katz 72). The potential for violence was perceived to be high in Port-au-Prince; many Haitians were left to dig family, friends, and strangers from the rubble without much assistance (Katz 73). For the most part, the expected societal breakdown and descent into chaos did not come.

A similar critique surfaced in Aceh, that very few aid organizations “actually had personnel living or spending significant amounts of time in villages,” which would suggest a limited amount of sustained engagement with local processes and procedures (Daly 246). While this may be attributed to limitations on time and funding for projects, very few aid workers learned the ins and outs of daily life in Aceh. As another respondent in Aceh put forward, most aid workers were on “tours,” spending a year or two at most in Aceh before moving on to other countries and aid situations (Daly 246).

The blame is not laid entirely on the aid workers in the affected area, as their parent organizations may have not set an expectation of close involvement with the local population in their work. As Katz explains further,

“...the problem often was that these individuals were merely the vanguard of distant, massive organizations whose managers seemed less interested in nuances or painful lessons on the ground. And ...our ability to report back on those nuances was inhibited by the fact that we were viewing life through a bubble, separated by language, class...” (Katz 57)

Katz makes this statement as a foreign journalist—an outsider—working in Haiti. Raoul Peck also levels criticisms against the foreign journalists working in Port-au-Prince. Despite journalists' knowledge of Haiti and Haitian society, Peck questions articles with “dramatic and scandalous headlines” and photographs of the earthquake aftermath that seem to make Haitians “conform to the image [non-Haitians] have of us” (Peck, “Dead-end in Port-au-Prince” 46-47). Peck expressed concern about the lack of nuance in the media coverage—whether the work of the journalists or of their editors overseas—because it focused on the sensational and did not allow for discussion of Haiti’s complexities (“Dead-end in Port-au-Prince” 46).

In addition to the physical distance between aid workers and the people they endeavor to work with, there are “oceans of history, mountains of misunderstandings, storms of prejudices” that separate them (Peck, “Dead-end in Port-au-Prince” 47). Pervasive stereotypes and personal discomfort with aspects of culture—such as *sharia* law—can impact how aid workers and communities are able to work collaboratively. The time that many aid workers spend in direct contact with people is often too brief to comprehend the realities of life in a post-disaster landscape. Aid workers spent their “tours” living apart from the affected communities and in a degree of comfort that disaster survivors were not afforded. Without consistent, meaningful contact between aid workers and disaster survivors, cultural misunderstandings can persist.



### Working with Locals

Criticisms leveled at aid organizations and workers are balanced by genuine efforts on the part of aid organizations to understand a population, involve locals in the reconstruction process, or turn the process over to them entirely. The idea of participatory aid, in which the beneficiaries are “empowered to outline their own needs and priorities,” has been a part of development thinking for much of the last 25 years (Daly 237). In participatory aid practices, the expertise of foreign aid agencies is minimized. The following section examines some of the successes and failures of NGOs in Haiti and Aceh in regard to their ability to defer to local expertise, plan for the future with meaningful community participation, and collaborate with government entities.

There were examples that emerged from Aceh, as cited in Patrick Daly’s survey of post-tsunami aid workers, in which “local laws, customs, and cultural practices” were important considerations in the conception and implementation of projects in the province (Daly 245). For one particular aid organization working in Aceh, all members of the organization leadership were required to be in contact with the local Acehnese to better understand customary law (*adat*) and incorporate local systems into the aid organization structure. The Indonesian government, in the master plan for Aceh’s post-tsunami recovery, recommended that external aid organizations leverage the traditional village structures, the *gampong*, and look to existing cultural and social practices for guidance as to the types of projects that are culturally appropriate and can function within local norms and restrictions (Daly 234).

Even though there were differing views on *sharia* law among aid organizations and workers, this is not to say that NGOs were dismissive of Islam as it was practiced in Acehese communities. On the contrary, as one Acehese NGO worker notes, “international organizations did not want their workers to dress wrongly, for men and women to be hanging out and having relationships, and for people to drink openly” for fear of offending the local population and running counter to their Islamic social framework (Daly 245). This was especially important as some NGOs in Aceh looked to work locally through the *gampong* system.

The structure of the *gampong* is complex and composed of a number of religious as well as secular leaders with specific oversight on traditional activities such as food crops, sea-related livelihoods, agricultural fields, and markets (Daly 240). There is also leadership at the *mukim* level, which is a collection of villages. Daly also makes mention of existing community social practices that exist at the *gampong* level that ensure care for village members, such as tsunami widows and orphans, and provide charity (242). Care for tsunami survivors can be an important social function of the *gampong* in a post-disaster environment.

In interviews conducted with both foreign and Acehese aid workers involved in the post-tsunami recovery, all respondents supported the idea that the *gampong* had the capacity to be leveraged in the reconstruction process and the distribution of aid (Daly 240). The *gampong*, and the *mukim* at a higher level, have the framework in place for “decision-making, resource allocation, and aid governance” (Daly 241). As the *gampong* consists of religious leaders, it also has the ability to help interpret and apply Islamic law

within the community. The *gampong* also has a forum structure in place for public debate and discussion to occur, an important consideration if the community as a whole is expected to be involved. In addition, the *gampong* could function as a mechanism for problem-solving between locals and external aid organizations through practical assistance, such as mediating delays on projects or resolving issues with late worker compensation (Daly 241).

An example of the benefit of NGOs working within existing local Acehnese structures is cited by Patrick Daly in a 2015 article. The *panglima laot*, the local authority with oversight on matters of fishing and other “sea related activities,” was a critical partner in getting a number of small-scale boat projects up and running (Daly 242). As many of the projects were conceived by external agencies with varying degrees of understanding and familiarity with traditional livelihoods, partnering with the *panglima laot*, with an understanding of the community structure, led to a higher degree of success in implementation.

Beverly Bell expresses a fear that “it’s not Haitians who will decide what Haiti we want, it’s people in other countries” (73). There was little belief that aid organizations and foreign workers had much interest in the needs and wants of ordinary Haitians. Annie Joseph, a factory worker, expressed her frustration that “we protest, they don’t listen. We have a sit-in, they don’t listen. We don’t have a president, really; our president is the white foreigners” (qtd. in Bell 83). This sentiment is understandable. Haitians may feel as though they have lost agency when the post-disaster response is directed by non-local organizations. Jonathan Katz supports this idea and notes that aid organizations had the

power to function in Haiti “without oversight or accountability” (51). Haitians had no recourse to challenge the “expertise” of NGOs or push back against unwanted development projects.

The Haitian Response Coalition (HRC), a group of small- and medium-sized NGOs that had been working in Haiti for many years, attempted to get assistance into a number of neglected areas through collaboration with Haitian community leaders. The HRC focused on the identification of self-formed committees within the displaced persons camps to help assess the needs within the community and potentially help with the distribution of aid. However, due to the overall sense of distrust or fear of the Haitian victims, as mentioned previously, aid distribution was limited to large NGOs distributing supplies while under military protection, rather than on a smaller, more personal scale (Miles 48).

The HRC also looked to expand Haitian participation and autonomy in the aid distribution process by creating working groups and selecting representatives to attend meetings (Miles 47). However, among other challenges, these aid meetings were held in English or French, with translation into Haitian Creole infrequently provided to attendees (Miles 47). The lack of regard for the local language was an enormous barrier to community participation and excluded representatives from community groups and IDP camps (Bell 84). Furthermore, it should be mentioned that these critical meetings were held on the UN Logistical Base—not out in the community—and were primarily attended by foreign aid workers. In Katz’ assessment, the response in Haiti could generally be described as top-down, utilizing foreign responders to direct the distribution of aid (105).

In general, a lack of meaningful consultation with locals led to uninformed decision-making and an unequal allocation of resources.

The Coordinating Committee of Progressive Organisations, a collective of Haitian groups, released a joint statement that called for the “international brigades” to contribute to humanitarian aid “appropriate to our reality, respectful of our culture and our environment” (Coordinating Committee of Progressive Organisations). While they welcomed international assistance because of the staggering scale of the disaster, they implored foreign NGOs not to undermine the grassroots work they had done with Haitian communities over the span of several decades. Beverly Bell endorses local aid models as exemplars for how to create humanitarian aid approaches founded on “respect, democratic participation, generosity and dignity” despite limited funding and capacity (Bell 51).

Bell cites an example of a local organization, the Association for the Promotion of Integrated Family Health (APROSIFA), at work in a neighborhood of Port-au-Prince. The organization used international grants to pay 60 female street vendors to cook a meal for the same designated families each day. APROSIFA estimates that it fed upward of 4,800 people each day (Bell 54). Food for the meals was purchased from rural Haitian farmers. Bell contrasts the communal meal sharing with the chaotic scenes of armed foreign soldiers distributing imported rice (Bell 54). The APROSIFA model approached food aid as a local task that prioritized recipient dignity and reinforced community.

From the responses in Patrick Daly’s survey of aid workers in Aceh, there is a suggestion that locals were only consulted at the beginning of the project as a way to

ensure that the project was technically deemed “participatory.” Survey respondents suggested there was a “patronizing” quality to the way in which aid workers engaged with local stakeholders, suggesting that the local participation was “token” (Daly 249). While the concept of community participation was often discussed, the survey respondents acknowledged that in practice, they were hampered by “ignorance of how communities in Aceh operate; how they make decisions, organise, allocate resources, mobilise and resolve conflicts” (Daly 249).

Unfamiliarity with local Acehnese customs surfaced in a variety of ways. In one example, the common NGO approach of gathering a wide swath of Acehnese community members for focus groups—including men and women of varying ages and education levels—was not a culturally-appropriate practice. Men and women typically gather in separate forums to discuss issues and, therefore, in a mixed group, women are unable to express their thoughts on the matters at hand (Daly 2015). While non-Acehnese NGO staff saw success from gathering a diverse group, their approach went against local custom. As a result, the female perspective was unrepresented or underrepresented. The lack of meaningful input from women was a significant omission and suggested a lack of understanding of the nuances of gender in Aceh.

This is not to suggest that the success or failure of participatory or community-based projects rests solely on the shoulders of the foreign aid workers. As Daly notes, the quality and capabilities of the local leadership varied by village, especially with the high human toll of the tsunami. There were questions as to if and how community leadership would be able to handle the influx of funding for local projects and distribute to

beneficiaries in an equitable way; some oversight was needed to keep elites from disproportionately benefitting. Despite the loss of local leaders in the tsunami, many communities displayed a high degree of resilience, reassembling their leadership structures in order to move rebuilding projects forward. However, for projects that extended beyond the community level, such as rebuilding roads and other major infrastructure, health initiatives, and education programs, aid workers surveyed agreed that they were better approached through higher levels of government rather than through local avenues (Daly 243).

Haiti found itself in a slightly more complicated position in terms of working from a state or national government level. Among many foreign governments and aid agencies, there was a perception—and an expectation—that the Haitian government was corrupt and would mismanage funding. This perception resulted in a reluctance to give Rene Préval and his ministers direct control over the monetary aid pledged to Haiti and assigned “spectator status” to the Haitian government (Bell 79). Katz suggests that the perception of corruption is misguided and Eurocentric and, as some working for humanitarian aid would claim, circumventing governments “made fragile states weaker” (Katz 111; 128). Excluding the Haitian government from the recovery process likely did not improve their capacity to handle future disaster situations.

The NGOs and foreign agencies were present in Haiti because of its political and economic instability. Nadève Ménard suggests, “had...national institutions been stronger...it would have been more difficult to suggest skirting them to rebuild” (Ménard 51). If foreign aid agencies continue to bypass the Haitian government, and refuse to

involve officials in any recovery efforts, it offers little possibility for the government to participate in the rebuilding of the country in any meaningful way.

Aid organizations arrive in a post-disaster situation with their own expertise, but the knowledge and experience of local, grassroots organizations is invaluable. Examples from Haiti and Aceh demonstrate that working directly with locals and through community structures can confer a sense of dignity. In contrast, militarized aid distribution tactics can fuel distrust between aid organizations and the community. For participation to be meaningful, aid organizations can move to convene meetings out in the community, converse in the local language, and consider the suitable forums for both men and women to convey their needs. Foreign aid organizations can also be more aware of how they work in tandem with government entities. Governments are unable to build capacity to handle future crises if they are excluded from emergency assistance programs and reconstruction plans.

### Discussion

In this chapter, I investigated several issues that came to the forefront as a result of foreign involvement in Haiti and Aceh. The two primary questions that guided my inquiry were: To what extent do cultural differences present a challenge to disaster recovery and how are they addressed or negotiated? Additionally, how do aid organizations work with community groups and social institutions to address needs? There is overlap between the two post-disaster environments, but there are unique considerations as well.



In Haiti, the “othering” of the Haitian survivors by international organizations was a primary concern. It created a perception of reliance on predominately white foreigners to maintain order and dictate the post-disaster recovery process. A long history of imposed foreign assistance contributed to the impression Haitians are powerless, unwilling to help themselves, and potentially violent. As demonstrated by some of the aforementioned examples in this chapter, this view can keep foreign aid workers at a distance from the communities they are meant to assist. Similar concerns arose in Aceh around strict Islamic beliefs and practice. With these issues in mind, how can such misconceptions be addressed before aid workers head into a disaster area? It can be difficult when certain practices and customs have been sensationalized and reinforced by the media.

In the same thread, a general awareness or sensitivity to local customs and social frameworks is not necessarily enough to build meaningful relationships between aid workers and the populations they work with. In both Haiti and Aceh, aid workers were accused of “drive-by” development efforts in which engagement with locals happened through very surface level encounters. To help counter misunderstandings and charges of token community participation, aid workers and organizations could spend a greater amount of time living and working in the affected locations. In order to do so, donor expectations around time and results would need to be recalibrated. Adjusted timeframes could allow aid workers to make personal connections, develop programs to meet the needs identified by the community, and engage in meaningful discourse throughout the life of a project. For situations where a longer timeframe is not possible, in what ways

can an anthropologist best support aid workers and recipients and expedite the project identification and development process?

It is important for foreign aid organizations to work on a local level to ensure that resources are distributed and projects developed in an equitable, intelligent way. The scale of international funding and involvement is such that projects with a larger scope, such as infrastructural rebuilding, are best addressed at a higher state or governmental level. For these projects, international NGOs may choose to take into account how their work may circumvent the governing body or officials. Foreign governments and NGOs distrusted the Haitian government and elected officials, and they feared corruption and mismanagement of humanitarian funds. However, keeping them out of major national development projects may perpetuate the widespread belief—among outsiders and Haitians—that the government is incapable of protecting and providing for its citizens. As discussed throughout this chapter, there were parallels between the nominal involvement of governmental bodies and how NGOs engaged citizens in the recovery process. Can aid organizations adopt similar methods for working with survivors and foreign governments? Perhaps respectful, participatory approaches on both local and national levels could counter the belief that foreigners direct survivors' futures.

## CHAPTER SIX: EMPLOYMENT AND LOCAL ECONOMIES

In September of 2008—more than a year before the earthquake—former Haitian President René Préval spoke to the United Nations General Assembly. Préval thanked the organization for monetary donations and resources after four successive hurricanes rocked the country. Préval called attention to a greater concern for Haitians as he noted,

I am worried, because I dread that once this first wave of solidarity and human compassion has dried up, we will be left, as always, alone but truly alone, to deal with new catastrophes and to see restarted, as if in a ritual, the same exercises of mobilization. (R. Préval)

In other portions of his speech, Préval called attention to the traditional way in which aid is distributed, what may be understood as the ‘paradigm of charity’. Préval noted that charity has never helped any country to recover from under-development. He suggested that if the international community wanted to do something productive in Haiti, it would be to help Haitians maximize their potential.

This chapter delves into how aid organizations can comprehensively support local economies and livelihoods following a disaster. Préval’s concerns voiced in 2008 around providing Haitians with meaningful training or employment—and thereby maximizing potential—could also be applied to thinking long-term about Aceh. The cessation of armed conflict left a plethora of former GAM soldiers looking for another source of income. The upheaval of the tsunami created an opportunity to examine employment needs and development opportunities.

In both Haiti and Aceh, the physical scale of the destruction led to a widespread loss of employment, which was magnified by high poverty rates pre-disaster. Many Haitians had flocked from rural areas to Port-au-Prince to find work. The city's collapse destroyed their place of work and few opportunities were accessible in the rural fringe. In Aceh, the tsunami destroyed much of the coastal land and livelihoods linked to the sea.

With these changes in mind, I posed two questions around post-disaster economies to guide my research: In what ways does natural disaster impact livelihoods and the economic system? In a post-disaster economy, how can aid organizations support economic recovery through employment opportunities without creating new dependencies? Studies of other natural disasters suggest that the loss of income and livelihoods can trap survivors in a cycle of poverty (Christoplos and Wu 43). Cash-for-Work programs and NGO-sponsored jobs are transitional sources of income, but employment opportunities rooted in local needs and industries are a crucial long-term consideration for aid organizations.

### Cash-for-Work Programs

Aid organizations often look for ways to generate jobs out of the disaster recovery effort. Infrastructure and public works projects hold potential for short-term job creation. One strategy used by aid organizations in Haiti and Aceh was "Cash-for-Work" (CFW), an opportunity for survivors to pick up short-term, unskilled, minimum wage jobs essential to the recovery effort. NGOs have utilized the CFW program in many post-disaster contexts in order to provide income for survivors as well as encourage the

circulation of cash in the local economy. The benefits and disadvantages of CFW are explored in this section.

Cash-for-Work programs in Haiti received criticism for being unproductive—workers were observed underperforming or were noticeably absent—and for the low wages that were offered. Duties included clearing out earthquake debris, excavating drainage ditches, and building latrines in the temporary camps (Haiti Grassroots Watch, “Cash for What?” 83). The work would earn Haitians an “unlivable” wage of five USD or less per day (Bell 150). The CFW program offered short-term work but neglected to provide stable income. After receiving reports of CFW teams neglecting their duties, a CFW coordinator for the American Refugee Committee commented that the program may be providing “a visual association of working with not necessarily working hard” to other Haitians (Haiti Grassroots Watch, “Cash for What?” 85). While the CFW programs in Haiti—by limited accounts—may have produced positive results, they may have been hindered by poor management and low wages.

Although CFW jobs are temporary and often menial, some Haitians saw the availability of paid work as evidence that NGOs could—and should—address Haiti’s basic needs. As one Haitian Cash-for-Work manager is quoted, “Our future lies with NGOs! We can’t count on the government. If it were for the government, we would be dead already” (Haiti Grassroots Watch, “Cash for What?” 86). A growing dependency on foreign NGOs for employment opportunities could undermine the Haitian government and establish an economy fueled by Cash-for-Work and other foreign-funded programs.

In Aceh, Cash-for-Work programs were also established to allow survivors to receive compensation for tasks like clearing agricultural land and drainage ditches, moving corpses, and cleaning houses. CFW programs took on tasks like planting rice, creating fishponds, and repairing boats that could also aid the return to livelihoods rooted in the local resources (Doocy et al. 283). Participants were given a small daily sum—on average less than four USD—for their efforts (Doocy et al. 282). Jobs that required more skill or responsibilities were paid at a higher wage. The Aceh CFW program was phased out in part due to concern that participants were becoming dependent on CFW income, delaying the return to pre-tsunami modes of employment (Doocy et al. 286). A similar issue of foreign dependency arose in both Haiti and Aceh around Cash-for-Work programs. Although they provide economic assistance, CFW programs may postpone the to pre-disaster livelihoods.

The concerns about dependency may be brought to the forefront when NGOs leave. In Aceh, the jobs made available by the influx of the NGOs and the governmental recovery agency—the BRR—were high paying, but they were only available to some. When the NGOs and BRR decamped, the jobs left with them, leaving the economic situation fairly tedious (Samuels 220). As told to Jonathan Katz, Haitian Billy Chery explained his persistent attempts to find employment in post-earthquake Haiti. He noted, “[he] couldn’t stay under the care of aid... They won’t be around forever” (Katz 106). Jobs created through CFW programs and other NGO sources are typically not reliable sources of income because they are dependent on the coordination and funding of outside organizations.

Despite concerns around dependency, Cash-for-Work programs may produce benefits outside of the economic realm. Participants in a CFW program organized by Mercy Corps responded to a survey and indicated that CFW income allowed them to return to their tsunami-hit neighborhoods. Survey respondents also disclosed that CFW jobs enabled them to “remain active while reducing feelings of trauma and stress” (Doocy et al. 293). The Mercy Corps CFW programs in Aceh allowed tsunami survivors the opportunity to work collaboratively with their friends and neighbors to improve their own community and remain productive.

Broadly speaking, Cash-for-Work programs can be useful income generators in the interim period between when traditional income sources are disrupted and when they resume. As well as reintroducing money into the local economy, CFW programs can also be used as a strategy to clean up debris and restore the infrastructure needed for survivors to return to pre-disaster employment. As suggested by the experiences in Haiti and Aceh, CFW programs are more effective when they are properly managed and approached in a way that encourages participants to invest in their critical, albeit temporary, work and improve their own communities. Difficulties arise when the temporary CFW jobs are not replaced by program participants’ former source of income or by a new form of employment that does not rely on temporary aid organization funding. Once the period of emergency relief has ended, and outside organizations depart, disaster survivors are ideally in a position to sustain economic development.

## Local Economies and Foreign Investment

Industries in Haiti and Aceh were significantly affected by natural disaster. This section examines two industries that received support or attention after the events. The Acehnese fishing industry was impacted at all levels, from the fishermen that lost their boats to the destruction of fish processing facilities. Post-disaster, the local fishing authority was instrumental in identifying the industry's immediate needs. Furthermore, the destruction of the coastal ecosystem impacted the ability of locals to utilize the natural resources. In Haiti, the earthquake sparked renewed interest in garment factory investment from foreign companies, but there was little discussion of how that industry could create a stronger Haitian economy. The focus on low-paying factory jobs and dearth of meaningful job and training opportunities raises questions about whether or not aid organizations are helping to create an independent Haiti.

### Haiti's Garment Industry

Official government statistics vary greatly, but between 40 percent and 70 percent of the Haitian population was unemployed before the earthquake (Katz 141). Haiti's historically cheap labor and close proximity to the United States market has made it vulnerable to foreign exploitation. Even for those that were employed—often in foreign-owned assembly or garment factories—the daily wage paid was often lower than what was legal. Haitians need employment options, but economist Camille Chalmers remarks, the opportunities must “develop our human resources or reduce poverty” (qtd. in Bell



182). Many Haitians accepted that a low-paying, exploitative job was better than none at all.

After the earthquake, there was interest in building more international garment factories outside of Port-au-Prince in subsidized free-trade zones. Garment factories had long been part of the global development plan for Haiti. Paul Collier, an Oxford University economics professor, pointed out shortly after the disaster that the earthquake could serve as the pivotal event that sparked a garment industry investment boom in Haiti (Bell 180). As of June 2010, nineteen garment factories employed approximately 23,000 Haitians, less than one half of one percent of the working population (Bell 181). As Camille Chalmers puts forth, the garment industry “contribute[s] little toward making the economy more productive”, but not only because it employs a low number of Haitians (qtd. in Bell 181). The raw materials are purchased outside of Haiti, and the products are sold in foreign markets. In order for foreign investors and factory owners to be profitable in the industry, Haitian “garment-worker wages must remain at poverty levels” (Katz 141). The push for additional investment and development of the foreign garment industry in Haiti faced opposition due to these concerns. It also raises questions around the extent of foreign involvement and control over Haiti’s economic future.

### Aceh’s Fishing Industry

Acehnese were employed in a number of different industries before the disaster, but the fishing industry was directly impacted by the tsunami. The number of part- and full-time fishermen in Aceh was estimated at around 88,000 in 2003, the year before the

tsunami (Janssen 5). An extensive study conducted by the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) estimates that approximately ten percent of the fishermen in Aceh lost their lives in the tsunami (Janssen 10). Fishing activities were suspended for around three months following the tsunami due to the initial recovery efforts, the search for family members, and resettlement into temporary camps.

In addition to the widespread loss of fishing boats, the tsunami also destroyed market facilities and aquaculture farms (Griffin et al. 176). Fish and shrimp were farmed in cultivated coastal ponds, or *tambak*, before the tsunami. From interviews with Acehnese farming the ponds, the tsunami destroyed the *tambak* and greatly influenced their ability to continue their livelihood (Griffin et al. 176). In the Acehnese village of Pande, the force of the tsunami eroded away beaches and pushed sediment further inland, reducing the amount of available land in which to reconstruct new ponds (Griffin et al. 179). Many employed by the fishing industry or on the aquaculture farms were left without a livelihood following the tsunami. They were forced to obtain alternate employment, like Cash-for-Work programs (Janssen 18).

While the lengthy armed conflict impeded fishing activities in Aceh in a variety of ways—including periodic fishing bans and seized boats—the tsunami was particularly devastating to their livelihood. Many of the fishermen privately owned their own small boats that were lost in the tsunami (Janssen 6). The impact on the fishing industry was not limited to the fishermen and the aquaculture farmers. Owners of large boats with crewmembers, fish processors, and fish market workers were also left without their regular source of income. It is unclear from post-disaster economic reports if responding

aid organizations were aware of how the tsunami created need in all parts of the Acehnese fishing economy.

The coastal landscape, like beaches, forests, reefs, and rivers were all dramatically altered. The destruction of the mangrove forests along the coast made the loss of employment more severe. The mangroves created an aquatic ecosystem in which locals could regularly find fish, shellfish, and crabs, a free source of food (Griffin et al. 180). Mangrove wood and bark was once used to construct the ponds and dye fishing nets, but supplies had to be purchased at additional cost after the tsunami. Women customarily used mature mangrove leaves to make cigarettes as a way of supplementing income. Even though some mangroves have returned to the coast, the leaves of the immature trees were too small to be used in this way (Griffin et al. 180). Although those employed by the fishing industry were most obviously in need of economic support, the change in the coastal landscape also resulted in a loss of family income that may or may not have been addressed by aid organizations.

Foreign aid organizations partnered with local organizations to implement specific projects around fisheries because many of them were unfamiliar with the sector. There was a specific focus on working with and through the *panglima laot*, the traditional authority in the *gampong* that enforced local fishing operations. Economic programs that worked with and through the *panglima laot* generally avoided the missteps made by those that tried to circumvent the local systems. For example, the ICSF reported that foreign aid agencies donated boats and canoes unsuited to fishing activities, and they were subsequently abandoned or unused because of their poor quality (Janssen 21). The

*panglima laot* had the ability to provide aid organizations with basic information, such as the type of fishing boats that the majority of locals preferred.

### Training Opportunities and the Informal Economy

Another concern raised in Haiti is the sustainability of foreigners filling jobs created by the disaster. NGO job opportunities that did not involve manual labor typically carried an English language requirement, eliminating most Haitians from consideration (Ménard 49). An alternative to awarding foreigners higher-paying, desirable jobs is to train Haitians for the same positions. Thus, if an NGO or governmental agency decides to leave their Haitian post, a trained worker is left in place. Nadève Ménard makes specific mention of the thousands of Haitian university students—with expertise in social work, psychology, engineering and medicine—sitting idle in the aftermath of the Haitian earthquake (50). For Ménard, the university students possess valuable skills that could be put to use, as well as the cultural knowledge to create sustainable, appropriate solutions:

When, three months after the earthquake, free food is plentiful, but jobs are scarce, is that really helping Haiti? Will the world always be willing to give us free food? Shouldn't we be starting now to learn or remember how to earn it? (Ménard 51-52)

The lack of jobs and relevant training for ordinary Haitians can impact the long-term outlook on the recovery. An opportunity may have been missed because Haitians were not trained or employed in roles that were vacated when foreign aid workers moved on to the next crisis.

In Aceh, communities led aspects of the reconstruction process as a method of job training. There were organizations in Aceh—including Oxfam—that had community

members build houses as a way to pick up on-the-job training in “seismic-resistant construction techniques” (Kennedy et al. 17). The hope was that it would lead to both future employment and informed, safe construction. It is not noted in a post-project survey if any of those that participated in the physical construction of houses were able to leverage their training and skills on later construction projects as a means of long-term, sustainable employment (Rand et al. 201). Many survivors returned to their traditional livelihoods and were reluctant to pick up construction as a new trade. Furthermore, many of them recognized that after the post-tsunami building boom, the opportunities for construction would be considerably diminished (Kennedy et al. 28).

While aid organizations can provide assistance for survivors in terms of temporary employment or can invest in training or job creation programs, Haitians and Acehnese have informal economies and small businesses. In Kreyol, the term *cherche lavi* is used to refer to different types of work in the informal sector. This could include such activities as selling or bartering juice, fruit, clothing, phone cards, and other items on the street or in the IDP camp. Many Haitians included in official unemployment statistics were, in reality, part of this economic system and could be considered to have a job providing goods and services. As Katz notes, Haiti was not lacking in “jobs.” It was lacking in jobs that would offer stable incomes and security (Katz 142). A foreign aid organization may not understand how this economic system operates or how to best support it.

Acehnese tsunami survivors also found ways to generate income for themselves in response to their post-tsunami reality, often out of necessity. Samuels cites examples

of two women, both tsunami widows, who set up small kiosks in front of their homes to sell food, cigarettes, or other products to neighbors (Samuels 215). Many disaster-impacted individuals—who may have had a low income even before the tsunami struck—were in need of access to lines of credit in order to invest in starting or improving their businesses.

The number of individuals in Aceh that were beneficiaries of economic recovery assistance from NGOs was limited (Samuels 216). Although some NGOs gave small grants to survivors looking to start their own businesses, many borrowed money to fund their small business endeavors from family and neighbors (Samuels 215). Annemarie Samuels cites an example of a tsunami widower who borrowed money from friends to start a small shop that later grew into a coffee house business (216). Some Acehnese would use their social networks to find job opportunities in other towns and migrated locally to find work (Christoplos and Wu 42). This reliance on social connections to further one's livelihood—in both the short and long term—is an important consideration for future aid efforts.

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, having a home can also provide economic benefits. In an Oxfam-conducted survey, 91 percent of participants thought their Oxfam-constructed home improved their livelihood. The home is for many Acehnese “a base for income generating activities” (Rand et al. 202). A study following a 2001 earthquake in Gujarat, India showed that residents used their newly reconstructed homes to further their livelihoods, whether it was running a shop out of their own home, or simply being able to securely store tools related to their line of work. In Aceh, these activities included

weaving, making nets, and building boats. A home can provide the space and security for residents to pick back up their trade.

A few points of consideration emerge from the examination of the impact of disaster on local economies. Both Haiti and Aceh were faced with widespread poverty and unemployment at the time of the natural disasters, but this does not mean that disaster survivors should accept any and all aid or investment. For example, the garment industry has been called exploitative because it is only profitable if Haitian workers are paid less than a living wage. From the experiences noted in Aceh, aid organizations that do not consult community members about their livelihoods and their needs run the risk of wasting their investment. Organizations that circumvented the *panglima laot* in Aceh, for example, donated boats that were not useful to the fishermen and were ultimately unused. Foreign aid organizations can learn from people's ability to leverage local networks to find job opportunities and support their small-scale business endeavors. Closely working with community members may give aid organizations better insight into where investment can support organic economic growth.

### Rural Livelihoods

Much of the post-disaster response focused on coastal and urban areas in Haiti and Aceh. The lack of investment and consideration paid to the Haitian and Acehnese rural interior is detailed in this section. An example from Haiti—in which donated seeds threatened the independence of Haitian farmers—draws attention to the flaws of foreign-directed investment. The Acehnese recovery did not fully address the needs of former

combatants living outside of urban areas. The natural disasters created an opportunity to address issues of poverty and create employment opportunities, but not all populations were given equal consideration.

Foreign policies enacted over the years have been particularly unkind to Haitian farmers. Cheap foreign food supplies flooded Haitian markets and priced out local producers. After the earthquake, peasants were still subject to questionable foreign involvement in Haitian agriculture. The American agricultural biotechnology corporation Monsanto sent “hybrid seeds and vegetable seeds” to Haiti (Jean-Baptiste 99). The donation was approved by the Haitian Ministry of Agriculture and was funded by U.S. taxpayers. The Minister of Agriculture assured the public that the gift did not include genetically modified organisms (GMOs), but Haiti had no system in place to test whether or not this was true (Jean-Baptiste, 99).

The sustainability and appropriateness of the project was called into question on several fronts. The seeds had never been tested in the country, and their effect on the Haitian ecosystem was unknown. There was no understanding of the irrigation and fertilization requirements. Furthermore, what happened to farmers if the hybrid seed technology failed? Little information was available about the potential outcomes, and farmers ran the risk of being dependent on Monsanto for seed distribution.

Creole seeds, on the other hand, were widely available in the local markets—a fact publicized in a Catholic Relief Services report before the Monsanto gift (Bell 125). The Creole seeds were already known to be suitable to for Haitian ecology. Local farmers, organized by the Peasant Movement of Papay, protested the hybrid seeds in June of



2011—leading a call for “food sovereignty”—and there were reports of seed stocks being burned (Bell 124). The Monsanto gift raised awareness that some aid may come at the expense of the Haitian environment or potentially create foreign reliance.

There are opportunities for investment in local economies that could lead to meaningful and sustainable employment and support for existing livelihoods. For example, in 2010, the Coca Cola Company announced a collaborative effort with Haitian mango farmers to create a mango limeade beverage. Ménard estimated that the project would “involve 25,000 Haitian mango farmers” in an effort to increase income and develop the industry (Ménard 50). This type of project is more likely to be sustainable considering it taps into an existing trade and seeks to be a long-term partnership rather than a temporary solution. However, the program has been criticized for the fact that mangoes are already in surplus in Haiti. Additional funding from Coca Cola to increase mango production would not serve to increase the production of food crops that were more urgently needed by the Haitian people (Katz 149). In addition to the benefits for mango farmers, as Ménard notes, “several NGOs...stated that they will start buying rice and other goods from local farmers...” (Ménard 49). Encouraging aid workers to support the local economy, rather than purchasing from foreign vendors can also support the recovery efforts.

In Aceh, there were issues with former militants that needed to be addressed with the same urgency as the tsunami survivors. While funding was specifically allocated to tsunami relief, there was significantly less consideration given to those most affected by the end of fighting. An important distinction should be made—the tsunami primarily

affected the coastline while the conflict with the Government of Indonesia (GoI) was “a more inland concern” (Hyndman and Waizenegger 116). A line was drawn between the coastal populations that were hit by the natural disaster and the inland populations that were affected by a political conflict. Both were in need of humanitarian and economic assistance, but the response may be seen as uneven.

Foreign aid agencies that arrived in the aftermath of the tsunami were hesitant to get involved in assisting Acehnese that were not impacted by the tsunami but were affected by the political conflict. Others were also bound by the intent of their donors, as funds collected abroad were intended for tsunami-impacted victims and related causes. Although there were both tsunami IDPs and displaced persons due to the separatist conflict, the families displaced by the armed conflict outnumbered families displaced by the tsunami. These two populations, living in close proximity to one another, received vastly different amounts of support in the years following the tsunami.

The discrepancy in the amount of aid and attention paid to the coast in contrast to the interior “exacerbated longstanding disparities in development patterns between the relatively prosperous coastal areas and the underdeveloped hinterland” (Hyndman and Waizenegger 119). Former combatants were compensated during the conflict, and the cessation of hostilities also meant a loss of their livelihood. They had fewer skills on which to build post-conflict careers and faced poverty. “Peace dividends” were distributed to the GAM elites, but less funding and opportunities were available for the remainder of the former GAM combatants (Hyndman and Waizenegger 115). Nearly four years after the tsunami and the peace agreement, approximately 75 percent of the former

combatants in Aceh had not found employment (Hyndman and Waizenegger 120). Reported crimes—including serious offenses such as extortion and robberies—were higher in former GAM areas (Hyndman and Waizenegger 120). This data may suggest that former soldiers sought out alternative sources of income due to the lack of opportunity.

In Haiti and Aceh, certain populations fell outside the scope of the post-tsunami work of many aid organizations. Their economic needs were either overlooked or addressed in what may be considered an inappropriate way. In Haiti, the earthquake created an opportunity to address poverty and the longstanding needs of the peasantry. However, it is unlikely that the Monsanto donation was made with long-term sustainability in mind. The potential was high that the hybrid seeds would continue Haiti's dependency on foreign organizations. In Aceh, the former Free Aceh Movement soldiers were handled much differently than tsunami survivors. The former soldiers were left without their source of income when a peace agreement was signed, and many lacked the skills to find a new livelihood. There is an opportunity for aid organizations to work with these forgotten or marginalized populations because their needs are likely not addressed by short-term aid programs.

### Discussion

Issues around economic support and development emerged in Haitian and Acehnese post-disaster accounts and merited further exploration in this thesis. The two research questions that I developed around disaster and economies are as follows: In what

ways does natural disaster impact livelihoods and the economic system? In a post-disaster economy, how can aid organizations support economic recovery through employment opportunities without creating new dependencies? As discussed throughout this chapter, disaster can be disruptive to key industries and income generators. Disaster can also present opportunities for economic investment, employment training, and new industries to emerge. As foreign aid organizations participate in and support local economies, it may be advisable to understand the complexities surrounding their involvement, including concerns over foreign dependencies and discussion around what constitutes a fair, livable wage.

Despite the criticisms of the Cash-for-Work programs, the short-term, transitional jobs can be an important source of income at a time of economic and social upheaval. Although no two post-disaster situations are exactly the same, there may be broad considerations to improve participant satisfaction and overall productivity in CFW programs. Could greater output and commitment perhaps be achieved through community identification of the projects to undertake? Establishing a firm end date for the project at the outset—and gradually reducing the hours and income obtained through CFW programs—may also alleviate some of the concerns around dependence.

Long-term employment opportunities were also critical to the reconstruction efforts in Haiti and Aceh. Disaster may create an opportunity for economic investment and job creation. Paul Farmer notes that in Haiti in particular that there is an urgent need for “jobs that would confer dignity to those in greatest need. Jobs in both education and healthcare are essential as are opportunities for women” (Farmer 37). Farmer’s focus on

“dignity” may be a guiding principle for NGOs focused on introducing new industries and employment opportunities. The need for sustainable jobs in Haiti and Aceh existed before—and persisted after—the natural disasters, and the introduction of well-paid, safe jobs can diminish reliance on foreign aid. Questions remain about what this looks like in practice. Haiti and Aceh should not be closed to foreign investment and industries, but who is advocating for equitable wages and safe working conditions? What role can aid organizations play—if any—in supporting the rights and needs of workers in potentially challenging post-disaster economic conditions?

Before implementing strategies for employment programs, NGOs may benefit from an understanding of how livelihoods are rooted in cultural systems and practices. The examples cited in this chapter suggest there were opportunities for NGOs in Aceh to work through culture-based leadership structures—like the *panglima laot*—to ensure that needs are better met and to leverage local resources. However, I question how common it is to have economic leadership so clearly established. Is it more common that NGOs will encounter local worker organizations, like the Peasant Movement of Papay mentioned in this chapter? If so, what other strategies or approaches to economic support may need to be considered?

Prior to the disasters and the influx of aid, communities in both Haiti and Aceh had functioning informal economies that were powered by entrepreneurs. There were social systems in place to support the growth of small or home-based businesses and to connect community members with job opportunities. Micro-loans are a noteworthy option for aid organizations looking to support economic development. Micro-loan

distribution may be feasible in one small community or on an individual basis, but what does this look like in practice when you have high numbers of people in need? There were several examples cited in this chapter in which Acehese tsunami survivors went to family members or friends for business loans. Does bringing in outside loans have the potential to disrupt this existing practice?

The natural disasters discussed in this thesis also seem to have created an opportunity to share the post-disaster financial support with oft-forgotten populations. Investment in rural livelihoods may encourage urban-dwellers to relocate to the countryside and decentralize overcrowded cities in the process. The same concern for self-sufficiency and independence applies to projects focused on peripheral populations, but how are the economic needs of rural or marginalized populations different than those living and working in urban areas? Are there specific aid programs, training, or investment strategies that better support and benefit Haitian farmers or former GAM soldiers? Without sufficient, appropriate support and opportunity, it will be difficult for these marginalized groups to break the cycle of poverty.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: THE ROLE OF RELIGION

“And I saw when he opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; [...] and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.”

- Revelation 6

Religion was another cultural belief and practice I chose to explore in this thesis. Post-disaster research suggests that high-casualty disasters can create feelings of “intense fear, horror...helplessness” and can “challenge fundamental assumptions about the world and one’s sense of safety within it” (Frankenberg et al. 499). Even those not directly experiencing personal loss may confront death, devastation, and disruption within the broader community. I developed two questions to explore religious belief in post-disaster circumstances. Can religious belief or practice benefit survivors of disaster and contribute to community recovery? If so, how do aid organizations leverage and support religious beliefs and practices as part of their approach?

In both Haiti and Aceh, post-disaster accounts indicate that religion may have impacted how survivor needs were addressed and aid was allocated. I was particularly interested in how religious beliefs influenced relationships between the disaster survivors and aid workers, especially those from religious aid organizations. The following chapter explores how religion can benefit and hinder survivors as they adjust to a new post-disaster reality.

## Religious Belief and Practice as a Stabilizing Force

In researching the role of religion in post-disaster Haiti and Aceh, I encountered examples of how religious belief and practice can contribute to a community's stability and recovery. In light of the staggering scale of human loss and physical destruction, religious leaders and organizations mobilized to offer spiritual and material support. This section delves into the ways that religion and faith-based aid efforts can sustain a population as they come to terms with their post-disaster reality.

A number of religious denominations are recognized in Haiti, although there is no official record of the number of Haitians that identify with each. Unofficial estimates identify approximately 70 percent of the population as Roman Catholic and 30 percent Protestant. An unknown—but high—percentage of the population also practices Vodou to varying degrees (Payton 237). Catholicism in particular exists in a “creolized symbiosis with Voudou” (Desmangles and McAlister 75). Catholic and Vodou traditions and practices intermixed and gradually came to coexist over the hundreds of years since Catholicism was introduced into Haiti society.

Churches and religious organizations, especially those under Protestant leadership, have long had an important role in Haitian society. Churches filled some of the social services gaps left by the government, such as education, food distribution, and medical care (Germain 249). After the earthquake, Haitian religious leaders stepped forward to provide spiritual and physical assistance to the people as they struggled with the meaning of the disaster. A number of religious leaders were tapped to distribute food aid and advocate for the communities they worked in (Desmangles and McAlister 70).



According to post-disaster accounts, survivors sought out places of worship and familiar religious rites. Churches—including the iconic Notre Dame cathedral in Port-au-Prince—and Vodou temples were destroyed, forcing leaders and their congregations to hold rituals in makeshift spaces or in the open air. People took to the streets to pray, read bible verses, and sing hymns (Desmangles and McAlister 70). The earthquake diminished the ability of the clergy and religious leadership to adhere to religious customs, but disaster survivors adapted to the circumstances.

More than 100 Catholic priests and nuns perished in the earthquake, and the remaining clergy was unable to administer last rites (Desmangles and McAlister 75). It was difficult to provide a traditional burial for earthquake dead, and many were rapidly and anonymously buried in mass, common graves (Oriol 16). Improper burial was not just a concern for Roman Catholics. Vodou practitioners believe in the close connections between the worlds of the living and the dead, and personal wellbeing is the “result of the harmony that an individual is able to create within his [or] her context and the natural world” (Schininà et al. 161). Many Haitians believe that spirits of ancestors and deceased family members can directly impact their emotional welfare. As a result, Vodou practitioners experienced feelings of guilt and feared retaliation from angry ancestors because they were unable to properly bury them. At a UN meeting shortly after the earthquake, a theologian raised concern over how to preserve the dead for future “proper” burial (Farmer 59). In response, the International Organization of Migration (IOM) collaborated with religious leaders to develop burial rituals “in the absence of corpses” (Schininà et al. 162).

Despite the varying estimates of the number of practitioners, Vodou has been described as “part of the fabric of the Haitian nation” and is an integral part of the Haitian cultural experience (Germain 259). Vodou has “traditionally empowered Haitians” and has been credited for sparking the colonial-era rebellion against the French (Germain 248). It offered ways for self-reliant Haitians to cope with everyday life in the face of governmental failures and international apathy. In an example cited by Felix Germain, Assistant Professor of Africana Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, Vodou is important support for women who are victims of sexual assault. It provides an opportunity for victims to call upon “spirits to hunt their offenders” as their only avenue for justice (Germain 260). Germain suggests that the threat of retribution from spirits could serve as a deterrent for potential rapists, a pertinent concern in the IDP camp environment (260).

In Aceh, a number of incoming international aid organizations were unaware of the faith-based needs of the Acehnese. The overwhelming majority of the Acehnese population, around 98 percent, is Sunni Muslim. A very small minority identifies as Catholic or Protestant. Aid workers focused on the wellbeing of the survivors, but many Acehnese were concerned with providing proper Islamic burial for the deceased. The joint CGI-Bappenas report issued by the Indonesian government and the Consultative Group on Indonesia (CGI) echoed the sentiment that efforts to rebuild “must take into consideration that Islam is the primary cultural force” in Aceh (Miller 38). Acehnese communities were centered on mosques, students attended Islamic schools, and there was an Islamic university in the capitol Banda Aceh. Organizations like the World Wildlife

Fund (WWF) used Islam and Islamic values as the basis for new initiatives. They believed that local participation in development programs would increase if they “were positioned within an Islamic framework” (Miller 37). In this instance, religious beliefs and values could inform non-religious humanitarian programs.

Aceh is the only province in Indonesia that has an official policy of *sharia* law. *Sharia* is typically associated with ultraconservative, restrictive forms of Islam. A police force is in place to dole out reprimands and caning for more serious offenses. According to former governor of Aceh, Irwandi Yusuf, “*sharia* law was created not to get humans into trouble but to form an Islamic community” (Miller 44). Michelle Ann Miller of the Asia Research Institute contends that *sharia* has the potential to be a stabilizing force and to address serious crimes in the province, but it has not yet been realized (Miller 47). While it is important to note that the CGI-Bappenas report stressed the importance of acknowledging Islam in development efforts, it remained neutral on the appropriateness of *sharia* law in Aceh (Miller 38).

Aid organizations and human rights groups in post-tsunami Aceh expressed concern that *sharia* law unequally punished the poor and women, focused on “moral minutiae”, and did nothing to further social welfare concerns or address Aceh’s economic issues (Miller 44-45). Public interest led to the investigation of particular offenses, like adultery, gambling, the consumption of alcohol, and women wearing non-Islamic dress (Miller 49). Miller contends that *sharia* law, and Islam, could better serve the redevelopment of Aceh and create a “fairer and more equal society” if there was “less

emphasis on punishments for minor moral infringements” (Miller 52). As of 2010, there were no laws established to address serious crimes like murder, rape, and theft.

Following the tsunami, Muslim militias gained a foothold in Aceh province. Their primary purpose for mobilizing in Aceh was to ensure that *sharia* law was adhered to despite the influx of Western aid workers. The militias also filled cultural voids left in the relief efforts and provided proper mass Islamic burials for thousands of tsunami victims. Militia members distributed “prayer kits” containing prayer mats and Qur’ans (Miller 43). Their presence was met with mixed reactions. The village leaders knew why the militias were showing interest in the survivors—to promote their strict form of Islam—but their work on behalf of the deceased and the living was appreciated (Miller 43).

Based on the accounts of anthropologists and aid workers, churches and religious aid organizations addressed a number of crucial faith-based needs in the post-disaster period. Religious belief and practice offered an opportunity for Haitian and Acehnese survivors to address post-disaster suffering and loss. Haitians used Vodou as a mechanism for coping with crimes that may otherwise go unpunished and to address societal problems. The situation in Aceh was more complicated because foreign organizations did not fully understand the province’s cultural and religious foundations, including Acehnese support for *sharia* law. Aid recipients appreciated providers that acknowledged the role of Islam in Acehnese society and in the recovery process.

## Understanding Disaster as Divine Retribution

In both Haiti and Aceh, many of the disasters survivors reported that they felt an extreme sense of guilt. They believed they were the recipients of divine punishment, either through their own doing or through the misbehavior of others. Spurred by the disaster, a number of survivors recommitted to living devout lives. Some placed blame on particular segments of the population, and others accepted the idea that they had no control over their own destiny. This section looks at religious practice following the disasters and how belief systems were both embraced and vilified.

There is a belief among Christian Evangelicals, both in Haiti and abroad, that Vodou is “evil” (Desmangles and McAlister 75). American broadcaster and conservative Christian minister Pat Robertson blamed the earthquake on a well-known ceremony that sparked the slave rebellions. Robertson blamed the destruction on the invocation of Afro-Creole spirits in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, vilifying the religion and Haiti’s heritage in the process (Desmangles and McAlister 71-72). Robertson claimed Haitians “made a pact with the devil” to free themselves from slavery (Payton 238).

Vilification of non-Christian beliefs also came from within Haiti and as a result, many Haitian Christians felt pressured to reject Vodou practice. The suggestion that “evil” Vodou spirits were the root cause of the earthquake was circulated widely after the event. As Haitian Claude Adolphe is quoted, “some people say that it is God that hurt them...because they do a lot of Vodou” (“Claude Adolphe”). For those that believe disaster to be a form of punishment, they may have strong feelings of guilt and remorse—for individual and collective behavior—and call for strict religious observance.

In an article written for the UNESCO Courier, Haitian anthropologist and sociologist Michèle Oriol noted religious beliefs and superstitions contributed to the mindset of many Haitians post-disaster. An evangelical preacher named Guibert Valcin proclaimed in front of thousands of displaced Haitians that the earthquake was the cataclysmic event that signaled the end of the world (Desmangles and McAlister 74). Religious leaders and ordinary Haitians repeated biblical verses referencing disaster and the apocalypse. If the earthquake was interpreted as a sign that total destruction loomed large, it is not inconceivable that the population was emotionally destabilized and fearful. The notion of Haiti being unlucky—through natural disasters, incompetent leadership, and foreign intervention—may have contributed to a sense of victimhood. Those who believe they are victims may doubt their ability to take care of themselves and control their own destiny (Oriol 18).

In contrast, some Haitian survivors surveyed about their spirituality post-earthquake expressed feelings of “specialness” and the belief that their lives had been spared for a purpose (O’Grady et al. 298). As one respondent said, “all that has happened to me has affected my spirituality. I...realize that my life was not destroyed because I need to finish certain tasks that God has asked me to do” (O’Grady et al. 298). In a survivor’s oral history collected by Claire Payton, Protestant Francoise Erylne recounts “I wasn’t hurt at all...God did it for a reason, a well-determined reason” (Payton 241). As several years have elapsed since the earthquake and the collection of these accounts, it remains to be seen whether the survivors determined their special, personal calling or maintain an increased dedication to their faith.

After the 2004 tsunami, many Acehnese believed that the disaster was punishment for a lack of devoutness. In post-tsunami interviews conducted with survivors, many Acehnese saw Islam as both the cause of the tsunami—punishment for immoral behavior—as well as the “antidote to fear and grieving” (Miller 35). As a result, many Acehnese renewed their commitment to their Islamic faith and the enforcement of its principles. Faith was frequently referenced in post-tsunami survivor accounts and seemed to contribute to their understanding of the disaster as well as their outlook. There are stories of people praying to Allah while stranded on rooftops or floating in the water waiting for rescue (Samuels 217). Mosques were left standing in the debris field in villages like Lok Nga, serving as physical evidence of the divine at work (Hyndman 22). Many people also expressed the belief that their time of death had already been pre-determined by Allah. There was no need to fear moving back into areas where the tsunami had hit because death could come anywhere; it was out of their control (Samuels 213).

Some survivors saw the tsunami as a cleansing force—or a warning—for the province to repent and grow stronger in their faith. The majority of Acehnese believed that the key to avoid another disaster was to adhere to *sharia*, and the message was repeated and reinforced by religious authorities during times of prayer (Miller 35). The NGOs that provided assistance in the area coordinated education programs to provide information about earthquakes and tsunamis and to address misplaced feelings of guilt. Mosques continued to promote the message that moral failings and divine intervention played a part in the disaster (Miller 35).

While *sharia* law had taken root in Aceh prior to the tsunami, the police force was established in the aftermath to ensure that the policies were adhered to (Hyndman 21). Although a stabilizing force during the tsunami recovery efforts, the enforcement of *sharia* law disproportionately punishes women as well as religious minorities. Islamic theologians in Aceh specifically placed blame on women for the tsunami, publicly criticizing their immodest dress and behavior (Hyndman 21). As stated by *sharia* judge H. Marluddin A. Jalil, “the Holy Koran says that if women are good then the country is good” (Miller 35). Jalil’s statements were not unique. Other Acehese religious leaders offered as proof that women were at fault for the tsunami because more women died than men (Miller 35). In the years following the tsunami, *sharia* police were specifically ardent in enforcing restrictions on form-fitting clothing on women and shaming women that did not wear Islamic dress (Hyndman 21).

The blame for the tsunami was not placed solely on women. There were reports that “Javanese government soldiers were smoking and drinking at an important religious site” only the night before the waves hit Banda Aceh (Hyndman 22). Again, this “moral inferiority” was cited as a potential cause for the tsunami, an incitement of God’s wrath (Hyndman 22). In other reports, the tsunami was also interpreted as punishment, or *vonis*, for Aceh waging war with Indonesia (Hyndman and Waizenegger 114).

At the beginning of this chapter, I posed a question: can religious belief and practice benefit survivors of disaster and contribute to community recovery? The previous section explored how people relied on their religious beliefs and practices to navigate their post-disaster circumstances. In this section, I chose to discuss how religious zeal can surface



following a disaster. In Haiti and Aceh, some survivors felt guilty because they believed that their improper behavior incited divine retribution. Others trusted that they had been spared for a particular purpose. However, religious leaders that appeal for devoutness while maligning women, Vodou practitioners, and other marginalized populations can aggravate existing community divisions.

### Religion as a Source of Community Conflict

Despite the stability that religion provided after the disasters in Haiti and Aceh, diverging beliefs also led to tension. As introduced in the preceding section, discord emerged as particular religious practices—like Vodou and *sharia*—were targeted and denounced. Religious beliefs also reportedly complicated working relationships with foreign aid organizations. Some religious aid groups opposed beliefs that were unlike their own and prioritized conversion. The practice of Vodou and the controversial enforcement of *sharia* law were particularly polarizing. The challenges of working to address needs—while contending with complicated belief systems—are detailed in this section.

Religious beliefs divided Haitian society along economic lines. The International Organization on Migration identifies “subcultures” in the Haitian socio-cultural system (Schininà et al. 161). The more educated upper and middle classes hold Catholic and Protestant values, and the lower class is guided by Vodou principles. Following the earthquake, there were instances of what were described as groups of primarily Protestant evangelicals at odds with Vodou practitioners. In one particular incident in the Cite Soleil

neighborhood of Port-au-Prince, Protestant evangelicals attacked a Vodou memorial ceremony in honor of the earthquake dead. Urged on by a pastor, evangelicals threw rocks at the Vodou practitioners. As explained by Desmangles and McAlister, the purpose of the attack was to destroy Vodou ritual objects and deter the practitioners from contacting spirits (72). Following the well-publicized episode, Protestant religious leaders retracted their condemnation of Vodou in favor of a more tolerant approach.

Religious organizations were central to the initial recovery efforts in Haiti. Staff and supplies were mobilized to earthquake-hit communities in the days following the earthquake. Some religious relief organizations were criticized by more entrenched NGOs for “not collaborating with more established missions that would stay in Haiti long-term” (Desmangles and McAlister 77). The criticism may be due to the religious organizations that deployed staff to the island with the primary goal of “saving souls” rather than addressing immediate physical needs. Vodou practice was a point of contention for some foreign aid workers assisting Haitians on behalf of Christian organizations. Material support often had an underlying theological agenda to “discredit and often vilify the indigenous belief systems” (Germain 251). Catholic aid groups took a more permissive approach to Vodou and blended religious beliefs, but Protestant churches largely disallowed theological overlap.

Haitian evangelicals and American missionaries cast Vodou practice as an impediment to recovery efforts and at the root of the nation’s troubles. They criticized Vodou for its perceived fatalism. As one Haitian remarked, “...all over the streets, profiting from the destruction of Catholic churches, the ‘preachers of the militant hordes

of American churches,' are calling for people to reject Vodou, which is them the cause of all the nation's woes" (Le Bris 33). Protestant missionary preachers spoke out against Vodou practice and claimed "Jesus talks to them and tells them that Vodou is evil..." (Desmangles and McAlister 73). Vodou elder Max Beauvoir condemned evangelical aid efforts that prioritized converted Haitians and excluded Vodou communities (Desmangles and McAlister 73).

Similarly in Aceh, *sharia* law was met with reticence from foreign aid workers, and it was a hurdle in how aid workers built relationships with the Acehnese. Aid organizations that were openly critical of *sharia* law—primarily Christian groups from North America—were asked to leave Aceh. Some chose to leave under pressure from Islamic groups or because attempts to convert the Muslim Acehnese proved unsuccessful (Miller 36).

Miller cites an example of the Christian organization WorldHelp that attempted to relocate 300 Muslim tsunami orphans from Aceh. WorldHelp's goal was to move the children to a Christian orphanage in Jakarta in order to convert them to Christianity (Miller 36). The Indonesian government intervened and ended the removal of any orphans from Aceh, and WorldHelp ended its work and fundraising efforts for tsunami victims. There was a parallel incident in Haiti in which American Baptist missionaries attempted to move 33 Haitian orphans from the country. It was discovered that the children were not orphans, and the scandal led to increased scrutiny on religious groups working in Haiti (Desmangles and McAlister 77). WorldHelp may be viewed as an extreme example of a foreign organization flouting local religious customs. There were

numerous faith-based aid organizations working in Aceh and with the Acehnese without issue. These organizations refrained from evangelizing and criticizing *sharia* out of concern they may “undermine their credibility, activities, and community relationships” (Miller 37).

The International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO) focused on reconstructing homes, mosques, and infrastructure in Aceh post-tsunami. The IIRO approached the reconstruction with an eye on religious needs and operated under the philosophy of “religious imperative that comes hand-in-hand with aid” (Miller 40). Their approach appealed to *sharia* law supporters in Aceh that saw the need for aid to include Islamic education in addition to physical repairs (Miller 41). Despite addressing faith-based needs, the IIRO and the affiliated World Assembly of Muslim Youth both had links to Al-Qaeda and were accused of using their humanitarian efforts as an opportunity to spread the radical ideas of Wahhabism (Miller 40). Suspect activities included the dispersal of Wahhabist literature as well as the emphasis on supporting worldwide, violent *jihād* (Miller 40).

These instances of conflict suggest religious needs and differences may be a crucial concern for foreign aid organizations. If socioeconomic classes mirror the divisions of religious groups, there may be the potential for unequal aid distribution. Depending on the religious organizations that provide assistance following a disaster, the predatory practice of withholding aid in order to force religious conversion may emerge. The question remains as to if—or how—aid organizations could be monitored to ensure that preference is not given to one particular religious group over another. Regardless, it

may be beneficial for foreign aid organizations to understand local religious divisions and challenges in order to curtail inequality and avoid worsening contentious situations.

### Discussion

In approaching this chapter about religious belief and practice as an important cultural concern, I focused on two research questions: Can religious belief or practice benefit survivors of disaster and contribute to community recovery? Additionally, how do aid organizations leverage and support religious beliefs and practices as part of their approach to working with disaster survivors? In regard to the first question, my research suggests that religion was a framework through which both the Acehnese and Haitian survivors began to understand and process the natural disasters. Religious belief can play a role in a community's resilience because it provides "a sense of coherence within the chaos of disaster" (O'Grady et al. 290). Survivors looked to spiritual leaders for guidance and to religious practice for solace. As evidenced by both Haiti and Aceh, disasters may prompt self-examination and give people the impetus to live more purposeful or devout lives. Is this post-disaster religious devotion and self-reflection a short-term reaction? Or can disaster create long-term changes to a survivor's values and outlook?

Religious belief may also bring about less favorable outcomes in a post-disaster situation, including survivors experiencing feelings of guilt and helplessness. Religion has been used as a vehicle for excluding and vilifying segments of the population. Aid organizations may benefit from an awareness of religious divisions and inter-religious relationships in a community to ensure that protection and support is given to

underrepresented religious groups. Some Haitians—fueled by the words of religious leaders—blamed Vodou practitioners for the earthquake and targeted them with violence. Aid organizations may benefit from better understanding and anticipating religious divisions. However, what is their responsibility, if any, to interfere in a situation that involves religious violence against a segment of the population (e.g., Vodou practitioners)?

The second research question focused on how aid organizations leverage and support religious belief and practice as an aspect of a culturally appropriate response. Based on my research, aid organizations can strengthen community relationships by recognizing that religion can provide comfort and stability for survivors and by making spiritual needs a priority. As discussed previously in this chapter, communities in both Haiti and Aceh expressed a need to bury the deceased according to religious tradition. Aid organizations were responsive to this particular concern and worked to come up with a solution. If this need—or other needs—went unacknowledged, what would the ramifications be for personal and community recovery?

The importance of *sharia* is an important one for incoming aid organizations. Radical Islamic groups were opportunistic and introduced their message providing essential support. In order to combat radicalism, aid organizations may elect to provide direct and timely religious support. Conflicting religious beliefs and practices can lead to discomfort among responding aid workers, especially those with religious affiliation. I reiterate a question introduced earlier in this chapter: how would religious aid organizations be monitored to ensure that they were not threatening or coercing a

distressed population? Their assistance may be essential, but how might their involvement in relief efforts lead to further disruption?

## CHAPTER EIGHT: HERITAGE PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN AID

Previous chapters of this thesis focused on how cultural beliefs and practices were taken into account in several different aspects of disaster recovery. The central question explored in this chapter was prompted by the numerous local and international organizations that respond to cultural heritage believed to be under threat following a disaster. Natural forces destroyed cultural heritage sites and disrupted heritage practices in both Haiti and Aceh, and many of the responding organizations viewed their work in heritage protection and preservation as an essential part of a humanitarian response. In this chapter, I sought to answer the following question: what is the impact on a community when heritage sites are destroyed, heritage is threatened, or heritage practices suspended after a disaster?

The definition of cultural heritage used in this thesis was introduced in Chapter Two and is reintroduced here. In summary, heritage may be defined as the product of shared beliefs, history and experience and may be tangible or intangible. Cultural heritage is of interest to this thesis because of its perceived benefits in a post-disaster environment. Local and international heritage organizations have supported protection and preservation efforts because it has been suggested that the shared nature of heritage can be “a source of identity and cohesion for communities disrupted by bewildering change and economic instability” (“Protecting Our Heritage and Fostering Creativity”). Their post-disaster actions are in response to the idea that heritage sites and practices are “an anchor that



retains identity” (Rico, “The Limits of a ‘heritage at risk’ Framework, 159). Therefore, reestablishing such places and practices may be seen as an important undertaking for the wellbeing and cohesion of a community.

This chapter studies how disasters impacted cultural heritage sites and practices in Haiti and Aceh with a specific focus on how it may affect community recovery. It examines the work of several key cultural heritage organizations—both local and international—to restore and protect cultural assets. It also raises important questions and turns a critical eye on the attention given to post-disaster cultural heritage, especially in relation to how heritage priorities are identified. The chapter concludes with a look at a museum exhibition that highlights how cultural production could contribute to community recovery after a disaster.

### International Aid Organizations Respond

In the aftermath of the natural disasters in Haiti and Aceh, a number of international organizations mobilized to assess the damage and determine next steps for heritage sites. The Prince Claus Fund, UNESCO, and The International Committee of the Blue Shield are introduced in this section because they were involved in post-disaster cultural heritage support. These organizations initiated both large- and small-scale projects in tandem with local heritage organizations.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), established in 1945, advocates for culture at the core of development programs.

UNESCO emphasizes the importance of tangible and intangible cultural heritage in its

various programs and identifies cultural heritage as an instrument for social stability and economic growth (“The Power of Culture for Development” 2). The organization takes on projects to protect and rehabilitate cultural heritage sites and museums and also trains cultural professionals. The organization’s World Heritage mission claims to identify and protect sites of special value to all people, not just those in the territory in which they are located. While raising the profile of cultural heritage worldwide, UNESCO has been criticized for the disproportionate number of European heritage sites on the list.

The Prince Claus Fund is an Amsterdam-based organization founded in 1996 on the tenet that culture is a basic need. From the perspective of the Prince Claus Fund, every humanitarian emergency is a cultural emergency since the cultural values of a community may be threatened. After the looting of the Iraq National Museum in 2003, the Prince Claus Fund established the Cultural Emergency Response (CER) initiative in order to provide immediate aid to threatened or damaged cultural heritage sites. In practical terms, the CER program provides rapid, emergency aid to stabilize cultural heritage sites and works in tandem with a local partner organization. After stabilizing the site, The Prince Claus fund may assist in acquiring the funding necessary to complete the restoration work (Stolk 84). The Prince Claus Fund awards fairly small sums for the initial recovery work—capped at around 35,000 Euros per disaster (Stolk 84).

The CER program takes action after natural disasters, manmade disasters, and warfare to protect the environment, people’s livelihoods, social networks, community values, and heritage. Its goal is also to raise awareness of how culture may be a basic need in times of emergency and is crucial for the “psychological survival of people in

disaster situations” (Mendez 4). The Prince Claus Fund believes that without prompt attention, psychological traumas may linger and hinder the healing and rebuilding process. Allocating resources cultural support can “contribute to [the] overall resilience and empowerment” of a population (Stolk 83).

The International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) is an organization dedicated to the protection of cultural property from a variety of threats, both natural and manmade. It describes itself as the “cultural equivalent of the Red Cross” (“Who We Are & What We Do”). The ICBS is comprised of pillar organizations with specific expertise in museums, libraries, monuments, and archives. The Blue Shield symbol serves as a physical marker of cultural sites protected under the 1954 Hague Convention. The ICBS mobilizes to safeguard world cultural heritage sites in the event of an emergency, restore damaged cultural property, and assist professionals around in the world in disaster recovery. Local committees in 20 countries support the ICBS. The U.S. Committee of the Blue Shield (USCBS) is one such local committee.

The three aforementioned organizations are profiled in this thesis because their post-disaster work is driven by their belief in the social benefits of cultural heritage. They address post-disaster cultural heritage loss as an issue as significant as housing and healthcare. They often work in tandem with heritage groups and professional organizations in order to identify local priorities and address post-disaster needs. Their approaches vary and may include funding small-scale projects, collaborating on professional training opportunities, or creating global initiatives built on the benefits of

culture. The specific involvement of the Prince Claus Fund, UNESCO, and USCBS in Haiti and Aceh will be detailed in upcoming sections.

### Haitian Cultural Heritage

In a 2011 article written for “Museum International”, Michele Duvivier Pierre-Louis, former Prime Minister of Haiti, called Haiti a “paradox” (“Restoration and Social Value of the Historic Gingerbread Houses” 90). Haiti’s literacy levels are among the lowest in the hemisphere, but it is home to a number of award-winning poets, writers, and artists. However, few resources were available preserve cultural heritage sites and offer protection from environmental threats. In this section, I detail how Haitian cultural heritage was affected by the earthquake and assess the collaboration between international cultural organizations, Haitian groups, and the Haitian government to identify and address heritage needs. These points are explored in order to address how a community may be impacted when heritage sites are destroyed, heritage is threatened, or heritage practices suspended after a disaster.

The 2010 earthquake directly affected Haitian cultural heritage sites. Haitian Wole Soyinka, a previous winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, describes the loss of,

...the venerated spots and landmarks, the patina of ancestry of familiar walls, the communal spaces such as market squares, arbours, ageless trees under whose shade a community is renewed...where knowledge of identity passes from the old and is embedded in the young. (9)

The destruction of significant community sites and familiar landscapes—as Soyinka describes—can translate into the loss of collective identity. Cultural heritage can inform the “living culture, its values, attitudes and sensibilities” and can serve as a reminder of

Haiti's struggles and resilience (Kurin 30). Marie-Laurence Jocelyn Lassegue, former Haitian Minister of Culture and Communication, similarly puts forward that “the sense of identity and citizenship needed for social cohesion can only emerge when knowledge and skills are valued and passed on from generation to generation,” through the preservation and sharing of heritage (14). These statements suggest a belief that cultural heritage loss can disrupt the transfer of cultural knowledge, identity, and values to future generations of Haitians.

The destruction of cultural heritage sites in Haiti was unprecedented. Libraries, historic buildings, museums, archives, art galleries, churches and artists' workshops were both damaged and destroyed (Kurin 20). A number of foreign organizations—including UNESCO, USCBS, The Prince Claus Fund, and the Smithsonian Institution—arrived in Haiti to address the cultural heritage needs they identified, but local organizations were crucial to the response. Foreign cultural organizations supported Haitian agencies like the Institute for the Protection of National Heritage (ISPAN) and The Foundation for Iconographic Research and Documentation (FOKAL) with funding, resources, and expertise. The Musée du Panthéon National Haïtien (MUPANAH) withstood the earthquake and assumed a central role in the subsequent recovery efforts. In the immediate aftermath, its resources—including staff and storage space—were offered to other institutions and collectors (Paret 45). MUPANAH was viewed as an important guardian of Haitian cultural heritage before the earthquake and actively offered support (Paret 45).

In March 2010, USCBS president Corine Wegener visited Haiti with Richard Kurin of the Smithsonian Institution to meet with Haitian colleagues and look for opportunities for a joint cultural heritage recovery project. The Haiti Cultural Recovery Project was organized in tandem with the Haitian Ministry of Culture and Communication—a branch of the Government of Haiti—and was managed by the Smithsonian Institution. The project relied on support from USAID, the National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, Institute of Museum and Library Services and other members of the arts community. Cultural preservation organizations—such as U.S. Committee of the Blue Shield, FOKAL, and UNESCO—were key program partners.

The murals of the Holy Trinity Episcopal Cathedral were of special concern to the Haiti Cultural Recovery Project partners. A collection of 14 murals at the cathedral—including *Marriage at Cana* by prominent Haitian painter Wilson Bigaud—“offered a distinctively Haitian take on biblical events” and were painted by several Haitian master painters (Brubaker 46). Eleven of the murals were destroyed, including Bigaud’s work. Haitian sculptor Patrick Vilaire stabilized the surviving murals and protected the site from looting in the hope that “the murals could be saved and restored, and thus appreciated as part of Haitian and human patrimony” (Vilaire 26).

At the time of the earthquake, there were few professionals in Haiti that were trained to address the damage. The Haiti Cultural Recovery Project was instrumental in pulling together a team to support and train Haitian colleagues to restore the three surviving murals. The mural restoration efforts were intended to demonstrate the how

closely the Episcopal Church was integrated “into the Haitian experience” and the role it plays in Haitian society (Delatour 149). Preserving the work of well-known artists brings up further questions around heritage priorities. Who recognized the master artists’ murals as worthy of such extensive attention and preservation? Is it members of the Haitian art community and international organizations that have distinguished it as culturally important, or ordinary Haitians that find it personally relevant?

Several other Haitian arts organizations are mentioned in post-disaster accounts. The Centre d’Art, an institution viewed as a creative hub over its sixty-year history, suffered a total structural collapse. It trained a number of Haitian artists and facilitated the sale of their work. The extensive art collection kept onsite was damaged when the structure gave way. In the first month following the earthquake, staff members pulled works from the rubble by hand in an attempt to save what they could. The Centre d’Art became a partner in the Haiti Cultural Recovery Project in order to take advantage of “the expertise of foreign specialists versed in methods and techniques of conservation and restoration” as well as the additional training that was offered (M. Pierre-Louis, “Forging the Partnership” 59).

Similarly, the 20,000 works of the Nader Museum—Haiti’s first private art museum—were trapped under earthquake rubble. George Nader, Jr. led a personal six-month effort to retrieve as many paintings as possible because he felt that “national heritage, pieces of Haitian art that gave the people the sense of community and of being one, was at stake” (Kurin 32). Nader was able to unearth 16,000 paintings—3,000 of which were damaged—but the repair and re-housing process required resources and

expertise not found in Haiti. The Foundation for Iconographic Research and Documentation (FOKAL) and The Haiti Cultural Recovery Project mobilized to reassemble damaged artworks before restoration experts took over the process. In both the case of the Centre d'Art and the Nader Museum, it is unclear how the recovery efforts benefited ordinary Haitians, or to what degree they had contact with either institution. The work likely protected and elevated the profile of Haitian arts and artists on a global scale, but its local impact is more difficult to measure.

There were a number of more public heritage sites that were mentioned in post-disaster accounts. The majority of Haitian government ministry buildings—including finance, communications, and education—were reduced to their foundations (Katz 54). Journalist Jonathan Katz equated the destruction of the Haitian National Palace to “the destruction of the White House, the collapse of Westminster. The substance and symbol of the state itself was under those fallen domes and ceilings” (Katz 29). Despite the perceived failures of the government, the presidency seemingly held great symbolic meaning and importance for Haitians. As one Haitian remarked, “We saw the National Palace destroyed. I would like to see Haitian engineers rebuild it, not foreign engineers, so we can look proudly in the future and say that Haitians built the National Palace” (Katz 146). This sentiment suggests that people may value local participation and coordination in heritage restoration efforts. It also raises the possibility of potential benefits from undertaking more visible or widely symbolic heritage projects.

The Prince Claus Fund was involved in Haiti prior to the 2010 earthquake. In 2008, a year of multiple natural disasters in Haiti, the organization was involved in



emergency restoration work at several Vodou sanctuaries. Immediate action was taken at the sanctuaries of Ozias, Bernardo, Alberic and Ti Paul to preserve a number of paintings that offer historical insight into Haitian Vodou practice (Stolk 86). The Prince Claus Fund believed that preserving the shrines and the paintings would support Vodou-related artistic expression and creative output in Haitian culture. As mentioned in a previous section, some aid organizations demonstrated bias toward Vodou practitioners because of their religious beliefs. The Prince Claus Fund intentionally chose the sanctuaries to show support for Vodou practitioners.

The same sanctuaries were damaged by the 2010 earthquake and once again required urgent attention. CER responded again to restore the sanctuaries because of the belief that they were an indispensable safe haven in a time of catastrophe (Stolk 87). In an essay for Museum International, Deborah Stolk of The Prince Claus Fund offered an explanation of why these sanctuaries were restored not once, but twice in the aftermath of natural disaster. Stolk explains,

Restoring the spaces where Vodou is practiced offers the community a place to gather and grieve, a place to ask questions and to try to come to terms with recent events. Above all it offers a place with which people are familiar, where they feel at ease and safe. The restoration of the sanctuaries could provide people with a feeling of continuity and a sense of normality in a situation that was disrupted by disaster. (86)

The decision to support restoration work at the sanctuaries was intentional, a show of support for practitioners at a time when Vodou culture was maligned. By focusing on the sanctuaries' restoration, The Prince Claus Fund aimed to provide a refuge for Haitians looking for stability and normality. The project focused on a more public site, a different approach than the aforementioned efforts directed to private art institutions.

In addition to work at Vodou sanctuaries, the Prince Claus Fund brought international experts to Haiti to train local professionals and treat recovered library and archival collections. The project began in 2011 and focused on the recovery of 30 libraries and archives in the greater Port-au-Prince area. The Prince Claus Fund assisted in the creation of a center to retrieve and treat paper documents damaged by the earthquake (Stolk 89). The Prince Claus Fund viewed the project as an investment in the libraries and archives that protected Haitian cultural heritage. The loss of archives and libraries was detrimental to Haitian cultural history, but it was also problematic in a practical sense for Haitians that lost official documents (Stolk 88). The Prince Claus Fund's program may have helped Haitians by treating and returning their personal documents and restoring a sense of identity in the process.

The Prince Claus Fund also assessed architectural damage in Port-au-Prince in collaboration with the World Monuments Fund. The "gingerbread houses" in Port-au-Prince were a primary focus. The houses are a remnant of colonial occupation in the capital, but they are also recognized as a Haitian architectural style adapted to the environment and developed at a time of prosperity and creativity (Stolk 88). The distinct style is colorful and elaborate, with many structures incorporating steep pitched roofs, towers and turrets, and latticework on the exterior (M. Pierre-Louis, "Restoration and Social Value of the Historic Gingerbread Houses" 91). Many gingerbread houses were deteriorated and at risk of demolition prior to the earthquake. The CER program supported the conservation of the gingerbread houses, in part by training locals how to repair the homes (Stolk 88). The Prince Claus Fund saw value in their preservation

because—as discussed in a previous section—the architectural design was well suited to the seismic conditions and could provide insight for future construction.

FOKAL, ISPAN, and other Haitian organizations also committed resources to address the deterioration of the gingerbread houses. The effort pre-dates the earthquake, but the disaster provided an opportunity to advance the project. The improvements were not intended to be limited to the gingerbread houses. FOKAL’s planned restoration of the gingerbread houses was intended to relay a strong message of “community urban renewal” (M. Pierre-Louis, “Restoration and Social Value of the Historic Gingerbread Houses” 97). There were hopes that the work would lead to the redevelopment of urban areas to include parks, gathering spaces, and overall neighborhood improvements. In addition to preserving these pieces of Haitian heritage, ISPAN hoped that the restoration of the gingerbread houses would bring tourists to these historic locations (Elie 24).

Although several organizations committed to the restoration of the gingerbread houses, the community impact is unclear. FOKAL hoped the gingerbread house project would showcase Haitian creativity and allow culture to serve as a “uniting force...situating us in terms of our history, our collective memory and the present time” (M. Pierre-Louis, “Restoration and Social Value of the Historic Gingerbread Houses” 97). The restoration of the historic, unique homes was also intended to provide practical benefits—including the preservation of anti-seismic building techniques and revitalization of urban areas—but it is unclear if such projects benefited the community. There is little information cited as to the cultural significance Haitians assigned to the

gingerbread houses, or if the various programs and efforts achieved any of their intended outcomes.

In addition to the smaller organizations, UNESCO was active in Haiti after the earthquake. UNESCO targeted projects to address the damage in the cultural sector and in education and infrastructure. The Action Plan for National Recovery and Development of Haiti—a publication of the Haitian government—stressed the importance of culture to economic recovery and growth in the following passage:

Thus, if a country is to be restructured, it is essential that culture be a driving force that contributes as significantly to economic growth as do other key sectors of national life. Given the globalized environment, it is necessary to create conditions that allow the effective development of a market for cultural goods and services... (Government of the Republic of Haiti, “Action Plan for National Recovery” 34)

Marie-Laurence Jocelyn Lassegue, introduced earlier in this chapter as the former Haitian Minister of Culture and Communication, also supported the idea of culture as a significant contributor to economic development. She called for the development of services and infrastructure around cultural heritage sites to drive cultural tourism activities. Lassegue envisioned a “creativity fund” for artists and craftspeople in Haiti to encourage cultural entrepreneurship and allow for professional training opportunities (Lassègue 14). With the extensive infrastructural challenges facing Haiti, and urgent needs in the healthcare and education sectors, it is unclear where the funding for such culture-based economic projects would come from.

Cultural tourism is a frequently mentioned as a possible way to address some of Haiti’s economic issues. Jacmel—a center for Haitian art and craft production—was nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2004, before the earthquake damaged

the area. There are already designated UNESCO World Heritage Monuments in Haiti—namely the Henry Citadel and the Parc des Ramiers—but there are numerous other sites that may be eligible for the same consideration. Jacmel’s inclusion as a World Heritage Site could mean opportunities for heritage tourism revenue because of the interest and value that such designation confers on a site. Haiti’s rich collection of legends and folk tales may also be seen as “assets” used to enrich a heritage tourism experience (Bertrand 37). This raises important questions for organizations, like UNESCO, that identify and designate such sites. What are the criteria for a site or heritage practice considered worth preserving? In some ways, the feasibility of Haiti’s cultural tourism sector depends on foreign organizations like UNESCO and the locations that they believe are significant.

This is not to disparage UNESCO for all of their work in Haiti after the earthquake. The organization was an important partner for several Haitian agencies and organizations. ISPAN, Haiti’s cultural heritage bureau led by Daniel Elie, made an effort to assess the state of Haitian cultural heritage sites after the earthquake. A small amount of funding from UNESCO provided urgent protection for three damaged buildings in Port-au-Prince (Elie 25). Elie published his cultural heritage documentation online so that the international community stayed up-to-date with the status of Haiti’s heritage post-earthquake. UNESCO assisted by placing an emergency, temporary ban on the trade of what were identified as “Haitian cultural goods”, including artworks (“Emergency Actions in Haiti”). UNESCO supported cultural work in Haiti after the earthquake, especially in tandem with local organizations. The organization’s reach allowed it to

provide support to local organizations as well as monitor the heritage situation on a global scale.

One UNESCO-sponsored project helped the Haitian street theatre troupe Zhovie stage a production of the play “Zonbi Lage” in an earthquake IDP camp. One of the actors, Jean Joseph, described the play as a “therapeutic experience” for the earthquake survivors, allowing for a moment of laughter and a buoyed sense of hope (Bokova, “Editorial” 7). Joseph supports the idea that to help survivors, “it’s not enough to give them food. Mental health counts as much as physical health” (Bokova, “Editorial” 7). UNESCO increased its sponsorship in accordance with high demand for the group and supported performances in other temporary camps.

The use of theatre as a way to reach disaster survivors serves as a reminder to not overlook Haitian intangible heritage like folk tales, language, music, rituals, and dance when addressing cultural heritage needs. The performance of heritage can serve as a “living transmission of cultural knowledge and values” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Heritage* 166). After the earthquake, Carnival and *rara* (Holy Week processions) were suspended and Vodou ceremonies were derided because some Haitians saw the practice as the root cause of the disaster (Bertrand 35). It has been suggested that the performance of such heritage practices can aid psychological healing after a disaster because they can affirm cultural identity and build community connectedness and solidarity.

A recurring theme of cultural heritage work in post-disaster Haiti is that culture has always been a “keystone of [Haitian] society” (Kurin 27). Heritage sites and cultural

practices were supported by numerous local and international organizations because they viewed their work as a way to offer support to Haitian survivors. Wole Soyinka wrote, “as the healers of the world rush to the aid of the wounded and the traumatized...writers, artists and intellectuals must join hands for the restoration of the mind. Libraries must be re-stocked, galleries replenished, and schools resuscitated” (10). Cultural heritage preservation was positioned as a noble endeavor, and numerous organizations mobilized to address heritage deemed to be at risk.

Questions remain around who is leading the efforts to protect cultural heritage in Haiti. Do international organizations, Haitian cultural elites, or members of the broader community identify the priorities and direct the work? International and local organizations established protection and preservation programs for an array of heritage sites—Vodou sanctuaries, private art museums, and gingerbread houses to name a few. It is unclear if certain projects provide greater benefit to a recovering population than others. For projects at private institutions or other locations that are largely inaccessible to Haitians, do they provide any benefit at all? In some circumstances, it may be that artists and those employed in an arts or cultural field benefit more from the work of these cultural organizations than the community.

### Cultural Heritage in Aceh

In comparison to the extensive cultural heritage programs launched in Haiti, there were fewer reports on the state of Acehnese cultural heritage after the tsunami. Aceh was not the only location affected by the tsunami, but it was the first area to be hit by the

waves (Rico, “The Limits of a 'heritage at risk' Framework” 164). After the tsunami, status reports were produced on a number of heritage sites in Aceh and other Indian Ocean nations. UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Sri Lanka were of initial concern, but little was initially reported around Indonesia (Rico, “The Limits of a 'heritage at risk' Framework” 163). As Ginger da Silva and Iwana Chronis of the Prince Claus Fund note that Indonesia has “a high awareness of its cultural past and an impressive network of heritage organizations,” but little was communicated to the international community about the state of Acehese heritage shortly after the tsunami (20). This section explores the work done primarily by Acehese cultural heritage organizations to address the changes in the heritage landscape and how Acehese were impacted by such a transformation.

The tsunami impacted Acehese cultural sites to varying degrees. The waves damaged structures and erased historic landscapes in Banda Aceh, the capital city of Aceh province. Archaeological sites in coastal areas were destroyed, and water carried away the *batu Aceh*, Islamic tombstones valued for their historical and artistic importance (Nurdin 94). Many mosques—due to the fact that they were built with high-quality concrete and reinforced with steel frames—withstood the waves and could be spotted in fields of tsunami debris (Cluff 14). As discussed in a previous chapter, some survivors believed the mosques were spared through divine intervention.

The Aceh State Museum is of particular interest because it was built in the traditional wooden, raised Achenese architectural style. The museum is best known for its extensive collection of Islamic manuscripts, which—along with its extensive



ethnographical, historical, and geological collections—remained untouched by the tsunami. Therefore, the institution assumed a role as the “centre of efforts to protect and conserve Aceh’s manuscript heritage” after the disaster (Nurdin 96).

In 2006, the BRR allocated funds to purchase 315 manuscripts to be kept in the collections of the Aceh State Museum. The purchase of the manuscripts ensured that they stayed in Aceh—and were not sold abroad—and was also intended to “[raise] public awareness of the importance of preserving cultural property as a source of national pride” (Nurdin 96). The connection of cultural heritage to a feeling of national identity and pride also suggests a sense of obligation or responsibility for its care.

The Aceh State Museum partnered with the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies to develop a program to educate manuscript owners about the cultural and historic value of the texts (Nurdin 96). The museum offered to purchase manuscripts from individual owners and properly conserve them, but some owners donated their manuscripts to the museum and expressed they wanted to protect a piece of Acehnese cultural heritage (Nurdin 97). The Aceh State Museum used the tsunami as an opportunity to raise awareness of heritage that may have otherwise gone unnoticed.

Although the Aceh State Museum’s collection of manuscripts was not impacted, private collections of manuscripts were lost. Furthermore, the Pusat Dokumentasi dan Informasi Aceh (Aceh Documentation and Information Center) building was completely destroyed (Nurdin 95). The Aceh Heritage Community Foundation (AHCF) also assisted with the recovery and replacement of the cultural documents kept at the Pusat Dokumentasi dan Informasi Aceh. The Librarians’ Association of Malaysia called on

libraries with Indonesian and Acehese manuscripts and rare books to trace the materials to aid in the “rebuilding of [Aceh’s] cultural memory” (Baba 3).

The Prince Claus Fund’s Cultural Emergency Response (CER) program funded and was involved in the reconstruction of a new library to house Islamic manuscripts in Arabic, Acehese, and Malay (da Silva and Chronis 20). The initial earthquake—rather than the tsunami—damaged the library building and threatened the safety of the manuscripts. Although the Prince Claus Fund contributed to the recovery, the efforts to protect and replace the manuscripts appear to have largely been done on a local and regional scale through the work of Acehese heritage groups and other organizations in Asia.

The Aceh Heritage Community Foundation (AHCF) also conducted an initial assessment of Aceh’s heritage after the tsunami. It advanced a number of initiatives to document heritage sites and raise support for their safeguarding. The AHCF was driven by the belief that Acehese cultural heritage “contributes to the psychological well-being, social pride and identity” of the province (Rico, “The Limits of a 'heritage at risk' Framework” 164). Several years following the tsunami, the AHCF also conducted a survey of intangible heritage in Aceh with an eye on “reviving traditional practices” and livelihoods (Rico, “The Limits of a 'heritage at risk' Framework” 165). The AHCF created a public heritage trail program that highlighted surviving Acehese cultural heritage sites. One heritage trail stopped at a graveyard used by the Dutch, Japanese, and the former Sultan to “demonstrate the rainbow of communities” represented in Acehese history (Rico, “The Limits of a 'heritage at risk' Framework” 166).

The heritage trails also featured the “tsunami boats”. The tsunami boats—watercraft of various sizes that were washed kilometers inland by the force of the water—became “some of the most iconic and recognizable monuments to post-tsunami Aceh” (Rico, “The Limits of a 'heritage at risk' Framework” 167). Some of the tsunami boats were relocated to the sea during the cleanup process but others remained as memorials to the tsunami and “sites of memory” (Rico, “The Limits of a 'heritage at risk' Framework” 166). The boats became icons because they speak to “a strong theme of resilience and adaptation in Acehnese identity” and a local, shared experience of the tsunami (Rico, “The Limits of a 'heritage at risk' Framework” 171). As the tsunami boats are tied to a recent event, they challenge a view of heritage as a present-day use of the more distant past (Hoelscher 202). Without an agreement on whether or not they should be considered heritage, it was difficult to secure preservation funding and resources to care for the tsunami boats.

The tsunami boats illustrate how cultural heritage can communicate and validate a traumatic experience. In contrast, the Aceh Tsunami Museum created a great deal of controversy when it was opened in 2009. It was criticized for the cost of its construction at a time when tsunami survivors still needed resources. The museum was charged with poorly representing Acehnese identity, undermining the value of the Aceh State Museum, and furthering a “narrative of destruction” to draw tourist interest (Rico, *Constructing Deconstruction* 52-53).

The Aceh Tsunami Museum was also accused of being a “culturally inappropriate form of dealing with psychological trauma and memorialization in contrast to the role of

prayer and mosques” (Rico, *Constructing Deconstruction* 53). The mosque and the *meunasah*—a space for prayer and social gatherings—were identified as the “most important elements of ‘cultural heritage’” in a community regardless of whether they were old structures or newly built (Daly and Rahmayati 65). The mosques had a comforting or healing quality for survivors and were valued for their role in religious practice and as social spaces. A survey of Acehese villagers impacted by the tsunami found that many could not “conceptualize an Acehese community in the absence” of a mosque or *meunasah* (Daly and Rahmayati 65). Both features were essential to “the fabric of everyday social life” and part of Acehese cultural heritage because they were an expression of a community’s Islamic roots (Daly and Rahmayati 68).

Preservation work in Aceh focused on cultural heritage that spoke to survivors’ Islamic identity. The preservation of Islamic manuscripts was a primary consideration for cultural organizations and institutions like the Aceh State Museum. Religious structures like the mosque and *meunasah* were viewed as essential to the restoration of community and revival of social practices. Post-disaster cultural heritage in Aceh can also be tied to a broader discussion of what can be considered heritage after a traumatic event. As Trinidad Rico explains, when a landscape is restored to its pre-disaster state, it erases the knowledge of how the changes came to pass. Allowing for new forms of cultural heritage to emerge can support “an effective transmission of this knowledge” (Rico, “The Limits of a ‘heritage at risk’ Framework” 172). The tsunami boats are an example of a new form of heritage that was embraced by many Acehese as a reminder of their shared

experience and reinforced their resilience. This new form of heritage may be as impactful and important to survivors—if not more—than the manuscripts and other sites.

### Arts of Survival

The previous section briefly introduced the concern that cultural heritage preservation can halt the natural changes that occur in culture over time. Artistic production is one way that change—prompted by disaster—can be represented. The Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico hosted an exhibition in the summer of 2011 entitled *The Arts of Survival*. The purpose of the exhibition was to highlight the use of folk art to assist in the recovery of populations affected by natural disaster. As written in *Saving Haiti's Heritage*, “cultural expression always accompanies disaster...it is the way we humans process the unfathomable” (Kurin 20). This section delves into an example of how folk art may be used as a means to heal communities and communicate a post-disaster reality. Folk art, as suggested by the works on display in *Arts of Survival*, can memorialize the dead, console the living, and help the community to recover from the effects of natural disaster, both economically and psychologically.

The exhibition is centered on folk art objects and production, so it is essential to define “folk art”. Folk art, as defined in this thesis, expresses cultural identity through shared community values and aesthetics. Folk art first and foremost conveys a community’s cultural identity, rather than individual artistic identity. In other words, the artist draws from established cultural and community design principles in order to reference a shared community identity. While the folk art in *Arts of Survival* is not

necessarily produced with national identity in mind, folk art and folk culture have often been tied to ideas of nationalism and national roots.

Folk art can also be seen as a form of living cultural heritage, an expression of cultural identity, and the mechanism through which a group of people are connected to a place. As *Arts of Survival* curator Suzanne Seriff states, survivors of a disaster are “faced with tasks that require the most basic humanity and the most humble creativity—to comfort, to rebuild, to petition, to record, and to create” (Seriff 62). As explored in *Arts of Survival*, folk artists approached these tasks in order to strengthen their communities because they believed in their ability to “reflect our deepest emotions through their creative expressions” (Our Inspiration/Our Mission).

Folk art, as cultural heritage, can communicate “identity in terms of family, religion, folklore, geographic location, and the time in which [the artist] lived” (Carlano 2). This connection to a place and time is evident in many of the works on display in *Arts of Survival*. New Orleans folk artist Joe Minter used salvaged pieces of wood and metal to tell the story of Hurricane Katrina. With paint and phrases—often religious—added to the pieces, Minter's folk art communicates ideas about the African American experience in America as well as his personal experience of life in the South. The creation of a folk art piece in the shape of Louisiana is a literal representation of place, as are the names of the wards and areas affected by Hurricane Katrina.

In another example, Indonesian artisan and master puppeteer Ki Enthus Susmono brought “hope and inspiration” to Javanese affected by the eruption of Mt. Merapi using familiar and beloved shadow puppet figures (Seriff 62). Mt. Merapi has an important

place in the “physical and spiritual landscape” of Indonesia, and its depiction as a puppet builds upon its long ties to Javanese life. Susmono created and incorporated imagery of the eruption of Mt. Merapi into his work in order to encourage Javanese to move on with their lives. The puppets also communicated important information about current events and recovery efforts. The shadow puppet depictions and retelling of the disaster story unites survivors in the present and confirms their shared Javanese identity.

Lucy Lippard, in *Between Art and Anthropology*, identifies “diaspora, post-colonial discourse, emigration, immigration, and vulnerable national boundaries” as raw material and lived experience from which artists work (33). Natural disaster becomes a new sort of “raw material” from which folk artists in the *Arts of Survival* may draw. In the context of disaster and recovery, folk art production takes on additional meaning and significance. Well-known Haitian painter Prefete Duffaut died in October 2012, less than a year after the earthquake. Duffaut was well known for his idyllic and imagined rural scenes, but he stated that his “future paintings will be inspired by this tragedy” (Brubaker 39).

The resilience and imagination of the Haitian people, especially in times of great stress, may be evident in the works created to record and to cope with the earthquake. Vodou is a defining force in Haitian life and culture. Haitian artists draw a great deal of inspiration from Vodou. The *gede* are the spirits that embody death and have frequently appeared in Haitian art. The *gede* also are associated with regeneration and hope. As the *gede* are closely tied to death, they are also linked to the domain of the cemetery, imagery that frequently crops up in Haitian art. Evelyne Alcide is a folk artist who produces

Vodou ceremonial flags in her own workshop. Traditionally, the flag portrays symbols of *lwa* or spirits. After the earthquake, Alcide used the disaster as “raw material” and produced “a series of sequined portraits depicting the dismembered bodies in the National Cemetery, crushed by concrete blocks and collapsed power lines” (“Evelyn Alcide”). She also illustrated spirits bringing comfort to the earthquake victims.

The *Arts of Survival* exhibition is one example of how identity may be communicated through art forms rooted in culture and place. The folk artists in the exhibition drew upon familiar forms—like puppetry and Vodou flags—to attempt to tell the story of a contemporary, traumatic event, memorialize the victims, and bring comfort to the survivors. The exhibition promotes the idea that their creative responses called attention to shared values and cultural identity and laid a path to community recovery (Seriff 62).

### Discussion

This chapter explored the impact on a community if heritage sites are destroyed or heritage practices suspended after a disaster. Similarly, I sought to understand if heritage protection or preservation work resulted in positive outcomes for a community. The accounts of local and international organizations prompted a number of additional questions about how cultural heritage is approached in a post-disaster situation. The involvement of international organizations—like UNESCO, the Prince Claus Fund, and the Smithsonian Institution—raises questions around how value is ascribed to cultural heritage, and who identifies heritage “at risk” and directs preservation efforts. These



organizations provided needed resources, support, and staff expertise. However, it is important to consider “who defines cultural heritage and who should control stewardship and the benefits of cultural heritage” (Silverman and Ruggles 3).

Responding international organizations may disagree with locals on what constitutes heritage and what is worth saving, which leads me to ask, how were heritage priorities defined in Haiti and Aceh? Western heritage values, for example, may prioritize the restoration of a built site over the ritual that takes place there (Silverman and Ruggles 4). When these resource-rich cultural organizations arrive in a post-disaster situation, the question remains as to if they set their own priorities or if it is in their practice to work with local stakeholders. It may also be important for responding organizations to consider how professional training is commensurate with the resources available and respectful of local methods of care for cultural heritage sites and objects (Kreps, “Appropriate Museology in Theory and Practice” 25).

There are a number of other issues raised by working with cultural heritage, especially when considering the potential to leverage heritage sites for tourism revenue or urban renewal. When UNESCO adds a site or heritage practice to one of its “world heritage” lists, there is a symbolic value that comes with the designation. Recognition for the sites is driven by the belief that “you cannot protect what you don’t value” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Intangible Heritage as Metacultural Production” 57). Not only does this raise questions about whether locals ascribe the same value to these sites as UNESCO, but is there a suggestion that the only heritage sites or practices worth

supporting are the ones that can be leveraged for tourist dollars or generate revitalization projects?

Furthermore, there are few concrete examples of how cultural heritage can contribute to community recovery after a disaster. The question still remains—does cultural heritage reinforce a shared identity, generate solidarity, and provide symbolic strength when there are urgent, basic needs that may go unaddressed in a post-disaster situation? Is funding for the Tsunami Museum, gingerbread house revitalization, and private art collections appropriate when disaster survivors lack access to adequate food, water, or shelter? Locals and foreigners working in the cultural realm produced the accounts of cultural heritage efforts cited in this chapter. Many of the projects tended to be by international organizations—such as the attention given to private Haitian art collections—would seem to benefit a limited segment of the population, primarily cultural producers and consumers. Despite research into the work done by cultural organizations, I am unsure as to whether the benefits of cultural heritage are measurable, especially when looking at the situation broadly.

In spite of these criticisms, efforts to restore frequently used places of worship and restart cultural heritage practices—like festivals—may benefit a wider segment of the population. The role of religion in post-disaster recovery was discussed in a previous chapter, but rebuilding places of worship—such as churches, mosques, and temples—may be vital in a post-disaster environment. These sites communicate beliefs, values, and ideologies and are often essential to a community's social life. Acehese tsunami survivors could not imagine their communities rebuilt without a mosque and *meunasah* at

the core. Places of worship can support religious practice, aid a return to normalcy and stability, and may benefit a broader segment of the community.

Natural disaster also presented an opportunity for new forms of cultural heritage to emerge. The tsunami boats are a display of heritage and are “active vehicles in producing, sharing, and giving meaning to popular understandings of the past” (Hoelscher 203). The displaced boats can reinforce Acehnese cultural values of resiliency and adaptation and carry the collective memory of the tsunami. Heritage may be actively produced and “embodied in people and not just societies in the past” (Silverman and Ruggles 7). Disaster has the potential to spur creative production as people search for ways to understand and process their trauma. Intangible cultural heritage—legends, beliefs, music and dance—is the “greatest inspiration” for artists, writers, and performers (Bertrand 37). As evidenced in “Arts of Survival,” Vodou beliefs were fused with folk art traditions to produce artworks that speak to a collective identity and shared past.

## CHAPTER NINE: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Sphere International Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards was drafted in the 1990s and was accepted by many international humanitarian agencies. A key passage in the charter explains, “we acknowledge that it is firstly through their own efforts, and through the support of community and local institutions, that the basic needs of people affected by disaster or conflict are met” (“The Humanitarian Charter”). The idea that people affected by a disaster have the cultural systems and social support mechanisms in place to inform their recovery, and set their own priorities, was an important topic in this thesis. Aid organizations may be able to provide more efficient, directed assistance if they are conscious of the cultural practices around decision-making, resource allocation, and addressing loss, and look to align their involvement with these systems.

Haiti and Aceh were linked in the media through the repetition of the “build back better” mantra, but there are several other parallels that helped to ground this comparative study. For example, Haiti and Aceh experienced periods of destabilization in their respective histories. The effects of foreign occupation, misguided aid programs, and armed conflict were explored in greater detail in Chapter Three. Both Aceh and Haiti have strong religious foundations, which influenced community priorities and affected how some aid organizations interacted with disaster survivors. As noted in Chapter Seven, certain organizations viewed *sharia* law and Vodou as progress-resistant practices that

complicated humanitarian aid and development programs. Within these broad similarities, there were also nuanced differences. For instance, both Haitians and Acehnese had a complicated relationship with the national government. Despite the tensions between Acehnese and the Government of Indonesia, the province benefited from the strength of the government-created BRR. The centralized and relatively powerless Haitian government possibly hindered Haiti's recovery. It was with these similarities—and differences—in mind that I examined aspects of the disaster response through case studies and a comparative analysis.

In Chapter One, I outlined the primary, general interests of my research. I sought to understand how disasters affect shelter in the short- and long-term as well as how it influences living arrangements. Also of interest was how the experience and expertise of responding aid workers interacts with local knowledge and community decision-makers. I was interested in how local economies function post-disaster as well as if religious belief and practice have some bearing on community recovery. Cultural heritage intersected with the other areas of inquiry because of its potential to propel both social and economic recovery.

The central research questions were established in Chapter Two and are reintroduced below. While these questions are not an exhaustive list of post-disaster considerations, they were formulated to explore a related set of human concerns and the influence of local cultural forces, traditions, and beliefs in the recovery process.

- How are habitation patterns and social relationships impacted by disaster?
- What is the role of shelter in the recovery process?

- Did aid organizations approach rebuilding homes in ways that support local cultural needs and environmental constraints?
- To what extent do cultural differences present a challenge to disaster recovery?
- How do aid organizations and disaster survivors negotiate cultural differences?
- How do aid organizations work with community groups and social institutions to address needs?
- In what ways does natural disaster impact livelihoods and the economic system?
- Can aid organizations support economic recovery through employment opportunities without creating new dependencies?
- How did aid organizations support or ignore religious practices, beliefs, and institutions and integrate them into their efforts?
- What is the impact on a community when heritage sites are destroyed, heritage is threatened, or heritage practices suspended after a disaster?

These questions provided a lens with which to analyze post-disaster accounts, aid organization program surveys, and cultural organization studies, among other documents and resources. Although Haiti and Aceh are geographically and culturally distinct, a comparative study of the two disaster response efforts elicited a number of similar challenges, misguided actions, and positive directions. Therefore, I perceived there to be a set of general recommendations or considerations for future humanitarian relief scenarios.

The conversation around appropriate housing—both transitional and permanent—can be expected in a post-disaster situation. A few recommendations may be elicited from

the successes and failures of the response in Aceh and Haiti. Tents, shared barracks, and more established T-shelters are perhaps best conceived of as transitional structures. The temporary camps in Haiti described in Chapter Four were described as overcrowded, chaotic, and unsafe. The examples described in this thesis suggest that insufficient housing can perpetuate a feeling of instability and can delay the return to social and economic normalcy. The centralization of resources in temporary camps can also separate survivors from their home communities and disrupt social networks. In Aceh, poor planning divided members of the same *gampong*—and even the same family—between multiple government barracks. The separation created conflict within the community and complicated the allocation of resources.

Thinking broadly, a temporary housing model that keeps families and villages in as close proximity to their homes as possible during rebuilding may provide a better base for other aid organization programs. Rather than centralizing resources in overcrowded, inadequate temporary camps, supplies could either be handed out through satellite supply distribution points or through the networks of community and religious leaders. These approaches may allow for socio-cultural systems of support to remain intact and functioning despite outsider influence.

Based on survey results from Aceh, survivors preferred that aid organizations led housing reconstruction but with local input. They disliked assuming responsibility for the physical construction of their homes because—as non-experts—construction took longer. Construction delays prolonged their reliance on temporary housing and postponed a return to their pre-disaster livelihoods. In general, resident input was critical in

determining how their home fit their cultural and social needs. Standard housing models are preferred by aid agencies for efficiency and cost, but modifications may help the housing fit the cultural needs of a particular place. One solution may be providing residents with a small fund to modify the standard model to support cultural practices and fit family requirements over time. There may also be an opportunity for international organizations to innovate new models of post-disaster housing that address cultural preferences, protect against environmental hazards, and respond to ecological concerns. There are also opportunities to learn from housing models rooted in culture, as traditional architecture may be more environmentally responsive. In Haiti and on the Indonesian island of Nias, vernacular structures were more earthquake resistant than concrete construction.

Other factors influenced habitation patterns in a post-disaster situation. At the time of the earthquake, Haiti had a high number of renters who could not lay claim to replacement houses offered by aid organizations. Many survivors were left with the choice of leaving Port-au-Prince to stay with family in the rural interior—where there were few job opportunities and little aid support—or staying in an overcrowded, poorly equipped temporary camp. Acehese tsunami survivors faced challenges of their own, but community-mapping programs helped to allocate land in the absence of paper records. In a number of locations, the *gampong* structure was leveraged as a temporary camp alternative.

Cultural differences between aid workers and disasters survivors can also be a challenge in a post-disaster situation. Chapter Five detailed various tensions that emerged



because many foreign aid workers lacked a fundamental understanding of cultural practices and beliefs and had limited interaction with local people. Disaster survivors were also wary of the policies and practices of aid organizations. For example, the implementation of *sharia* law was a point of contention between aid workers and Acehnese. Aid workers were uncomfortable with the uneven application of *sharia* punishments. Similarly, Acehnese religious leaders were fearful the arrival of non-Islamic foreigners would threaten the moral foundations of the province.

It is difficult to say how such fundamentally different principles can be overcome. However, aid organizations may want to provide advance training and equip aid workers with strategies to navigate such situations. It benefits aid organizations and disaster survivors alike to avoid a difference of belief devolving into a more confrontational situation. For example, the presence of UN and American soldiers at supply distribution points reinforced a pervasive stereotype of violent and dangerous Haitians while simultaneously amplifying a sense of fear among the earthquake survivors.

The physical distance between aid workers and disaster survivors may have also contributed to a lack of engagement with the affected population. It is improbable that aid workers and organizations can deliver culturally responsive aid when they have little understanding of survivors' day-to-day life. Many aid workers lived apart—offshore, in the case of UN workers in Haiti—from the people they were directed to support. In order to facilitate better working relationships, the parent organization may choose to establish an expectation that aid workers live and work alongside the project stakeholders before any long-term development project can be implemented. In this situation, an

anthropologist can serve as a cultural mediator and make recommendations for how aid workers and locals can partner. As discussed in previous chapters, collaboration between aid organizations and communities—through cultural structures like the *gampong*—led to greater program success.

There is also variability between aid organizations describing their projects as participatory and the degree to which their process is collaborative. Many Haitians were kept from active involvement because critical meetings were held on the UN Logistical Base instead of out in the community. Discussions were in English or French, not Haitian Creole. The Haitian government was largely excluded from decision-making processes, which made it appear to be unable to care for its citizens. These forms of exclusion reinforced the belief that white foreigners decided Haiti's future, and Haitians had little or no say in development projects that they did not want. Some aid organizations in Aceh touted their projects as participatory, but community members claimed they were consulted only at the beginning of a project. There is an opportunity for increased awareness among NGOs in terms of the ways in which stakeholders are routinely excluded from involvement and how local knowledge and participation has been utilized in a token or patronizing way. Community member involvement throughout the recovery process—not just at the outset—may help to ensure a program's cultural relevance and applicability.

The natural disasters in Haiti and Aceh were economically disruptive. Cash-for-Work (CFW) programs were one tactic implemented to provide short-term monetary support while other income sources were unavailable. The short-term CFW programs in

Aceh were vital because the tsunami greatly impacted the fishing economy and the income generated from the coastal ecosystem. However, critiques of the post-disaster CFW program—especially those implemented in Haiti—cited concerns around dependence on NGOs for employment opportunities. Post-earthquake employment opportunities in Haiti were generally limited to exploitative, low wage jobs in foreign-owned garment factories. Therefore, the employment opportunities proffered by NGOs were preferred. Given the likely economic challenges in a post-disaster situation, there may be an opportunity for aid organizations to further explore how to support alternative employment opportunities in the informal sector, entrepreneurial endeavors through small business loans, and training for careers typically given to foreign workers.

In Haiti and Aceh, economic support for the rural hinterland was generally not considered in plans to decentralize overpopulated urban areas and address issues of poverty. Rural workers, farmers, peasants, and GAM soldiers did not receive the same economic support as the coastal, urban communities. These examples of urban-rural divisions demonstrate how rural populations in particular may be economically marginalized. Monsanto's donation of hybrid seeds—an example mentioned previously in Chapter Six—underscores how concerns around dependency also apply to aid offered to rural communities.

Chapter Seven explored how aid organizations were challenged by communities' religious beliefs and practices. Religion can be a stabilizing force in a traumatic post-disaster situation, and aid organizations may be better able to support communities by addressing faith-based needs early in the humanitarian response. Religious beliefs and

practices are a central aspect of culture, and aid workers—and their approaches—can benefit from understanding the ideology and worldview of the people they assist. The question remains as to how—or whether—to provide oversight and ensure that NGOs do not discriminate on the basis of religion, give preferential treatment to people of their own faith, or mandate conversion before support is offered.

The preservation of cultural heritage post-disaster was a formative concept for this thesis and was further scrutinized in Chapter Eight. A number of international organizations—UNESCO among them—espouse the idea that cultural heritage sites and practices communicate cultural values and identity. Heritage protection and preservation projects are driven in large part by the belief that cultural heritage sites can connect communities with the past and ground their lives in meaning. However, there are a number of concerns around diverting resources to such projects. Some heritage projects—for example, the restoration of “gingerbread houses” in Port-au-Prince—may have a narrow public reach and relevance. This may mean that the projects’ benefits are also limited. It may be difficult to justify expenditures on seemingly extraneous cultural heritage projects if there are urgent physical needs that are unmet. Furthermore, it is unclear if locals or international organizations are more likely to identify heritage priorities and guide preservation efforts. It may be useful for aid organizations to respond to what communities identify as important in a post-disaster situation rather than prioritizing sites identified as globally valuable.

Despite these challenges, cultural heritage can be a valuable resource in the recovery process. Heritage can support the cultural beliefs, values, and social practices of

disaster-affected communities and aid a return to normalcy. Additionally, heritage and cultural practices can help fulfill basic needs following a disaster. There is practical value in vernacular housing models that better resist environmental threats or traditional leadership structures that can distribute emergency supplies more efficiently.

Disasters will continue to occur, and based on the information gathered in this thesis, there is additional work to be done in terms of humanitarian response efforts. While many of the issues and recommendations are specific to a particular place and context, aid organizations may choose to take a more proactive approach and invest in advance preparation. Improved training and planning for humanitarian emergencies may help to ensure both basic, physical needs as well as cultural needs are met.

Aid organizations may also decide to institute policies in support of more substantive engagement between workers and disaster survivors. For example, they may establish guidelines that require key staff members to live and work in the communities in which projects and programs are planned. This may provide greater insight into how communities are equipped to meet their own needs. Better understanding of cultural beliefs and practices may also help to communicate information about disaster preparedness and causation. More work is likely needed to streamline the disaster response process and address the issue of abandoned aid projects.

Humanitarian emergencies are complicated situations. The two particular disasters explored in this thesis are no exception. Reflecting on misguided aid efforts in Haiti, Jonathan Katz suggested, “the urge to help seemed to have overpowered the desire to do so thoughtfully” (Katz 79). There are numerous aid organizations and individuals

with a desire to help. Despite their good intentions, communities are more likely to benefit if they are guiding their own recovery and their cultural beliefs, practices, and values are at the heart of humanitarian response.

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