Tectonic Shifts: Haiti Since the Earthquake. Mark Schuller & Pablo Morales (eds.). Sterling VA: Kumarian Press, 2012. xiii + 271 pp. (Paper US\$ 24.95)

This book, the newest anthology to address the situation of post-earthquake Haiti, might best be described as a testimony to a broad consensus of failure. *Tectonic Shifts* presents an array of overlapping voices asserting the failure of the international aid community and the government of Haiti in responding to the devastating earthquake in Port-au-Prince in January 2010. Its 47 brief essays are organized in three sections, dealing with geopolitical structures (i.e. preexisting vulnerability and disaster capitalism), on-the-ground realities (i.e. displacement and tent cities), and emerging movements (i.e. politics and civil society). Each writer attempts to make nearly the same argument—uncovering aid fiascos, detailing the continuing lack of water and sanitation systems, and decrying the ongoing need to protect human rights in Haiti.

The use of the word “failure” throughout the book points to its intended readership. Mark Schuller has problematized this concept before in the context of Haitian civil society organizations. “Instead of *having* failed,” he writes, aid groups in Haiti “*have been* failed by the same neoliberal policies and institutions that are ostensibly working toward their participation and empowerment” (2007: 68). The misattribution of the concept of failure—blaming aid providers rather than the neoliberal policy that governs them—leads Schuller to conclude that the existing model within which aid groups work should be destabilized. It does not appear that the spirit of that argument has made its way to this new collection, which is unfortunate, given the contributors’ sundry interests in failure in Haiti. In this regard, *Tectonic Shifts* can be seen as written by and for members of the aid industry in Haiti.

The book could also be seen as a text for policy-makers. Sixty percent of the articles are reprinted from other sources, including *Haïti Liberté*, the *Boston Haitian Reporter*, and non-governmental reports and blogs. Schuller and Morales acknowledge that the book grew out of a special 2010 issue of *NACLA Report on the Americas*. Edited by an anthropologist and a journalist, the diverse set of contributors includes professors and graduate students, policy experts, aid workers, members of the diaspora, and various NGO and civil groups. The reprinted entries offer interesting glimpses into the workings of the disaster response system and grounds for the consensus of

failure, but for the most part do not contribute information that is particularly new or surprising to those already familiar with Haiti and the earthquake disaster response.

A primary shortcoming for those familiar with Haiti—or, conversely, a strength for readers completely new to the country—is the brevity of the entries, which average four pages, rarely enough space for a fully developed argument. Many entries lack compelling, insightfully argued evidence to back up their claims. In only a few cases are authors succinct enough to make a clear case with sufficient evidence. A strong argument—probably the best in the collection—is made by Renaud Piarroux and his team of seven French and Haitian epidemiologists (pp. 173–76), who show that the cholera that appeared in the Artibonite Valley in the fall of 2010 came from a breakout earlier that year in Kathmandu, Nepal, and was carried to Haiti by Nepalese UN soldiers. Researchers, aid workers, and policy-makers would do well to remember the exact details that prove foreign introduction of cholera into Haiti.

Tectonic Shifts is, above all, a useful aid to institutional memory. The institution in this case is the aggregate of the Haitian government, international interests and pressures (including the UN's MINUSTAH mission), and the private non-governmental aid industry. Schuller and Morales write that they mean the book to be “a tool for educating students, journalists, solidarity activists, and humanitarians, hopefully inspiring and informing principled action” (p. 240). To the extent that journalists and activists ever do their homework before hitting the ground in Haiti, *Tectonic Shifts* would be a decent place to start.

Among the alphabet soup of acronyms, IDP (“internally displaced person”) is one of the most common in this text. The use of an acronym for a set of people, and over a million at that, seems inappropriate in a volume promoting the inclusion of Haitian voices. Moreover, absent from the book is any critical discussion of the victimization of Haitians, which has been a problematic and central concept of aid efforts since at least the 1980s. Instead, the entries sit easy with the simple explanation that “Haiti’s people were not silent, passive victims waiting for a handout” (p. 7), and leave the rest to the imagination.

Given that the earthquake’s most devastating physical damage was in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area, the book’s subtitle “Haiti Since the Earthquake” seems a bit misplaced. The population in the capital is only

a fraction of the national population, most of which is concentrated in rural areas. Despite mention of the “Republic of Port-au-Prince” and the post-disaster movement to and from rural areas, *Tectonic Shifts* does not demonstrate that the earthquake was a truly nation-wide catastrophe. Focusing instead on the lives of the displaced in Port-au-Prince and the efforts to meet their needs, the ideas in this book hardly stray outside of existing conceptions of how Haiti works. The contributors’ consensus leads to a clarion call to activists, Haitian and international, to hold agencies and donors accountable to Haitians’ pressing needs in tent cities and destroyed neighborhoods.

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Reference

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