Kasia Mika, *Disasters, Vulnerability, and Narratives: Writing Haiti's Futures*. London: Routledge, 2018. ix + 253 pp. (Cloth US\$140.00)

Published by the Routledge Studies in Hazards, Disaster Risk and Climate Change, *Disasters, Vulnerability, and Narratives* analyzes seven literary works, both fictional and biographical, that narrate, represent, and grapple with the 2010 earthquake and subsequent recovery in Haiti. It argues that “the January disaster might have flattened the city but it did not level social inequalities and compound vulnerabilities which directly contributed to the scale of this processual disaster and its unfolding aftermath” (p. 13). Kasia Mika’s literary analysis incorporates the voices of authors, a poet-writer, first-time writers, a political observer, a Christian evangelical charity organization worker, and young adult novelists. She proposes that unlike short-term, sensational media accounts, novels and other literary works give readers a more complex sense and taste of the world and disaster experiences. The book makes three central arguments that serve as a foundation for countering dominant, and oft-disempowering, discourses of Haiti and the 2010 earthquake. First, the disaster of 2010 was not a one-time, singular event but indeed a process, making it imperative to bring the colonial historic context and slow progression of risk and systemic vulnerability to the fore. Second, there is no one, homogeneous account and lived experience of the 2010 disaster (or any disaster). And third, new, empowering narratives of Haiti exist and are much needed.

Even though the book focuses entirely on the Haitian earthquake of 2010, its main goal is to raise important questions about how to define, analyze, and write about disasters. In this sense, it is really a study of disaster ontologies. Mika’s processual approach allows her to stake out her main argument—that it is not the innate characteristics of an earth-shattering ecological event that create a disaster. Rather, it is the preceding structural vulnerabilities plaguing communities that transform a natural event into a disaster. This focus draws attention to social, economic, and political legacies and conditions as well as environmental factors that cause communal vulnerabilities which in turn escalate seismic tremors to the heightened scale of disaster. A processual approach moves us beyond reductive, essentialist and sensationalist accounts of disasters in that it renders the socially constructed and historically rooted nature of disasters visible.

Using the concept of “hinged chronologies” (p. 14), Mika challenges Western disaster discourses and the conception of disasters as one-time, fragmented occurrences that are out of human control and disconnected from the past and future. Her critical analysis of the selected works reveals the pervasive doings of colonial history in Haiti and related progression of risk and systemic vulner-

ability over decades. She contends that disasters in general (and Haiti's 2010 earthquake in particular) result from compounds of vulnerabilities that build up and progress over time; thus postdisaster scenes expose long-term vulnerabilities. Moreover, her complex, multisystemic, and chronologic analysis of the 2010 disaster exposes the "knotted" individual and collective histories, which, to be sure, rarely feature in the scholarly theorizations of disasters.

Through the "comparative and immersive layering" (p. 10) of the selected authors' insights, Mika argues that there is no one homogenous account and experience of the 2010 earthquake. Her analysis reveals that the lived experiences of the disaster were "non-linear, highly individualized, highly variable" (p. 44), defying the homogenizing and formulaic narratives of disaster and healing that are so widespread in the news media and political narratives.

At the same time, there is a core problem with her approach in that only two of the seven texts that she analyzes were authored by "Haitian writers"—francophone diasporic writers who reside in the Western world (Canada), and who write primarily for a Western audience. The rest are by Western academics, NGO workers, Evangelical charity workers, or novelists who make Haiti their careers. Mika talks about agency and empowerment, but what we see is more the way Westerners imagine Haiti, and/or how Haiti is represented and portrayed to Westerners than the way Haitians themselves see and portray Haiti to their fellow Haitians. Where are the voices of nondiasporic, local Haitians who have no other place to go; the voices of the most marginalized and affected whose past, present, and future is exclusively tied to Haiti; the voices of the most affected and silenced? Their absence plagues the core objective and central arguments of *Disasters, Vulnerability, and Narratives*. What is missing is the way local Haitians perceive their vulnerabilities, their healing, and recovery process. How would hearing the voice of Magdalie—the fictional Haitian girl given voice by an American anthropologist who made Haiti her career—translate into unpacking the promise of narrative approach to disaster recovery?

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