

Leading through Chaos in a Neocolonial Context

Perspectives from Haitian Educational Leaders

ABSTRACT Academic and public discourses often oversimplify the complex historical, social, and discursive forces that have created the current realities in Haiti. These discourses ignore or distort the role that foreign governments and international agencies have played and continue to play in the creation of the Haitian state. They portray the Haitian government as singular and static, corrupt and incapable, and fail to acknowledge changes in leadership and the diversity of individuals who exist within the government. This “single story” about Haiti privileges the international community and overlooks the stories from Haitians who are working to rebuild and reimagine their own country. This article examines the personal stories of Haitians in order to better understand the nature of Haitian leadership in a neocolonial, post-disaster context. **KEYWORDS** Chaos, Disaster, Failure, Global Perspective, Haiti, Leadership, Storytelling

The master narrative about Haiti and Haitian leadership is well established; the Haitian government is continually positioned as corrupt and incapable, and is often labeled as “a nightmare, predator, collapsed, failed, parasitic, kleptocratic, phantom, virtual, or pariah state.”¹ Haiti is labeled as the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and academic and public discourses alike often oversimplify the complex historical, social and discursive forces that have created the current realities in Haiti; specifically, the role that foreign governments and international agencies have played—and continue to play—in the creation of the Haitian state is often ignored or distorted.² Additionally, portrayals of the Haitian government tend to homogenize it—making it singular and static, and failing to acknowledge changes in leadership and the diversity of individuals who exist within the government.³ One of the dangers of this “single story”⁴ about Haiti is that it privileges the international community and overlooks the stories from Haitians who are working to rebuild and reimagine their own country. Personal stories are important because they remind us of the connections between the global and the

1. Terry F. Buss and Adam Gardner, “Why Foreign Aid to Haiti Failed—and How to Do it Better Next Time,” in *Foreign Aid and Foreign Policy: Lessons for the Next Half-Century*, eds. Louis A. Picard, Robert Groelsema, & Terry F. Buss (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2008), 173.

2. Michael Clark, “Twenty Preliminary Propositions for a Critical History of International Statecraft in Haiti,” in *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader*, ed. Ileana Rodriguez (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 241–259.

3. Gabriel Dattatreyan, personal communication, 2011.

4. Chimamanda Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story,” filmed 2009 for TEDGlobal. https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en.

local; and in the case of this article, they highlight the personal nature of leadership in a neocolonial, post-disaster context.

In the aftermath of a disaster in a neocolonial context, it is often the case that the international community further marginalizes the population in the affected country.⁵ Such was the case in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. As Alexander de Waal argues, the post-disaster discourse often reduces survivors of the disaster to helpless victims and the external agents are elevated to the status of savior. Nandini Gunewardena asserts that instead of continuing to blindly tout the international community as the savior, we should instead be examining the historical circumstances that created a relationship of dependency in neocolonial contexts.⁶ Some scholars even argue that disasters in neocolonial contexts further benefit foreign agencies and governments, as it gives them an opportunity to reassert their power, provides the potential to make profit, and affords an opportunity for increased surveillance and administrative control.

By shifting the gaze away from the large international NGOs, foreign agencies, and foreign governments, and instead focusing on leaders from the host country, we can begin to challenge the larger narrative and its associated practices. Gerald Campano challenges dominant narratives about immigrant children in the United States, and suggests that one way to start imagining alternatives is “to recognize the students’ experiences as a source of knowledge and a point from which to theorize practice.”⁷ In the same vein, the aim of this article is to imagine alternatives to the neocolonial and neoliberal post-crisis discourse and the related practices of the international development community by recognizing these Haitian educational leaders as a source of knowledge, and their knowledge as a point from which to imagine a new Haiti. It is clear that Haiti needs to rebuild, but that rebuilding must come first and foremost from *Haitian* leadership. Maxine Greene talks about the beauty in imagining “not what is necessarily probable or predictable, but what may be conceived as possible.” As she explains, “Imagination, after all, allows people to think of things as if they could be otherwise; it is the capacity that allows a looking through the windows of the actual towards alternative realities.”⁸ This, indeed, is a significant component of leadership: creating visions and imagining new possibilities.

RESEARCH METHODS

The data presented in this article stem from my dissertation research, where each of these leaders’ stories are shared in greater detail. All of the participant interviews quoted below first appeared in my Ed.D. dissertation, “Breaking the Single Story: Narratives of

5. Alexander de Waal, “Forward,” in *Capitalizing on Catastrophe: Neoliberal Strategies on Disaster Reconstruction*, eds. Nandini Gunewardena and Mark Schuller (Landham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008), ix–xiv.

6. Nandini Gunewardena, “Human Security versus Neoliberal Approaches to Disaster Recovery,” in *Capitalizing on Catastrophe: Neoliberal Strategies on Disaster Reconstruction*, eds. Nandini Gunewardena and Mark Schuller (Landham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008), 3–17.

7. Gerald Campano, *Immigrant Students and Literacy: Reading, Writing, and Remembering* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2007), 18.

8. Maxine Greene, “Teaching as Possibility: A Light in Dark Times,” in *The Jossey-Bass Reader on Teaching* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 63.

Educational Leaders In Post-Earthquake Haiti” (University of Pennsylvania, 2012). The focus of this article is specifically on the participants’ perspectives and experiences with leadership in the post-earthquake context. The broader research questions that guided the dissertation were as follows: What are the individual and collective stories and experiences of a group of Haitian educational leaders who are working to rebuild and reconstruct the educational system in Haiti after the earthquake? In what ways can these narratives add to our understanding of educational reform and leadership in a post-crisis, neocolonial context? The participants in this research are educational leaders in Haiti who worked in or with the Haitian government after the earthquake. They were each selected because of their involvement in conceptualizing and/or implementing the post-earthquake reforms in the education system in Haiti.

Narrative research was the chosen methodology because it creates opportunities to highlight people’s lived experiences and can be used as a starting point for understanding how people make sense of their lives, and for understanding how and why peoples’ stories are shaped and reshaped.⁹ As narrative research, the primary source of data was in-depth semi-structured participant interviews.¹⁰ Fieldnotes and researcher memos also served as an important source of data. Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer Pierce, and Barbara Laslett note that there has been a recent increase in using personal narratives as evidence in social science research for a number of reasons.¹¹ Most central to this research, narratives can highlight typically marginalized voices and develop counter-narratives to dispute universalizing claims.

LEADERSHIP THROUGH THE EYES OF HAITIAN LEADERS

During their interviews, participants were asked to describe their conception of leadership, to give concrete examples of leadership among the people they know, to describe the process of leadership within their team, to think about themselves as leaders, and to talk about the role of leadership in the post-earthquake context. From these questions, a number of themes emerged. All of the participants described leaders as people who work for the greater good and inspire others to do the same, are human (and thus fallible) and must listen and be reflective, face struggles but also opportunities because of multiple (sometimes competing) perspectives with which they must work, thrive in chaos, and are more impactful when they have a direct connection to their struggle.

The literature on leadership mirrors the participants’ conceptions in a variety of ways, though the specific language varies slightly. The literature highlights a variety of attributes of successful leaders, such as charisma and strong character, the ability to meet the needs of those they are leading, the ability to intellectually stimulate those they are leading, the

9. D. Jean Clandinin and Jerry Rosiek, “Mapping a Landscape of Narrative Inquiry: Borderland Spaces and Tensions,” in *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology*, ed. D. Jean Clandinin (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), 35–75.

10. John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007).

11. Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer Pierce, and Barbara Laslett, *Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

ability to motivate and inspire, and the ability to create and communicate a shared vision.¹² Importantly, each of the above attributes (as described by the participants as well as the literature) align more closely with conceptions of transformational leadership, rather than transactional leadership. Transformational leadership is distinct from transactional leadership in that it leads to powerful shifts in ways of thinking and ways of being. Femke Geijsel, Peter Slegers, and Rudolf van den Berg state that transactional leadership is generally acceptable to maintain the status quo, while transformational leadership is required to create change.¹³ It is quite fitting, therefore, that the participants' conceptions of leadership align more closely with transformational styles, as they were working in a particular context in which radical transformation (personally and systemically) was required.

CONTEXT AND IDENTITY MATTER

One of the themes that emerged from the data is that when leaders have direct connections to the context and the identities of those around them, they are in a better position to inspire. One of the participants in this study was particularly lauded by his colleagues, and was portrayed as a deeply transformational leader. In describing his leadership style following the earthquake, one of his colleagues explained, "[He] was able, very, very easily, to get us to work without keeping track of the time or the days."¹⁴ He did this by setting a strong example; he worked around the clock, without seeking recognition and without complaining. He held onto, and was able to communicate, a strong vision for a new education system in Haiti, and he knew that nothing short of hard and relentless work would give them the chance of realizing that vision. The ability to inspire those around him came second nature to him, as he grew up in Haiti and had always been deeply committed to his country. Reflecting on his childhood, he explains, "I remember talking to my friends, I was in grade five or six, so we were young, and I remember one of my friends asking me . . . what I wanted to be when I grow up. I told him: 'I don't know, but I do know that I have two reasons to live: my mother and my country.'"¹⁵ He never had to prove his commitment to Haiti; he lived it every day and it was palpable to those around him.

Another participant provided an example of when he was able to inspire a large group of medical students who were about to leave the country after the earthquake. He had lived through a great deal of political and economic change over the years and he knew

12. Bernard M. Bass, "From Transactional to Transformational Leadership: Learning to Share the Vision," in *Organizational Dynamics* 18, no. 3 (1990): 19–31; Ronald A. Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, "Leadership in a (Permanent) Crisis," in *Harvard Business Review* (July/August 2009), 62–69; Peggy C. Kirby, Louis V. Paradise, and Margaret I. King, "Extraordinary Leaders in Education: Understanding Transformational Leadership," in *Journal of Educational Research* 85, no. 5 (1992), 303–311; C. Dean Pielstick, "The Transforming Leader: A Meta-Ethnographic Analysis," in *Community College Review* 26, no. 3 (1998), 15–34.

13. Femke Geijsel, Peter Slegers, and Rudolf van den Berg, "Transformational Leadership and the Implementation of Large-Scale Innovation Programs," *Journal of Educational Administration* 37, no. 4 (1999), 309–328.

14. Laura Colket, "Breaking the single story: Narratives of educational leaders in post-earthquake Haiti" (Ed.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2012). Dissertation is available from ProQuest. <https://repository.upenn.edu/dissertations/AAI3583485>

15. Laura Colket, "Breaking the single story: Narratives of educational leaders in post-earthquake Haiti."

that the country could not afford to lose more students to the Diaspora; he knew he had to convince them to stay.

I said to them, ok, I understand, you don't see any buildings, any classrooms, there are no laboratories, so you think you are finished as a medical student. But if I were in your position, I wouldn't think like that. I would say to myself that Haiti is actually the biggest school of medicine on the planet right now. There are so many people around us who are in need of health care, so this is where you should finish your medical studies, by serving the community. I told them, let me put my two tents here, and we will see. And you know, I put the tents there at 2:00 p.m. and at 5:00 p.m. there were 300 patients here. Children, adults, senior citizens, pregnant women, everyone. And the group of 6 students became 42 by the evening.¹⁶

This participant's direct personal connection to the context and the people around him allowed him to lead in a powerful way in the chaotic aftermath of the earthquake. For all of the participants, the leaders they looked up to were deeply committed to Haiti because they embodied Haiti, and thus were working for something larger than themselves. As one participant explains, leaders "go beyond themselves, their goals are way beyond themselves." As the participants discussed what motivates them, this sense of leadership for the greater good became abundantly clear. When one participant spoke about how the earthquake gave him a new level of motivation in his work; he explained, "If you are alive [after the earthquake], you have a mission. Not only for the people who are alive, but also in honor of all the children, men, and women who were killed in the earthquake."¹⁷

The earthquake abruptly and unapologetically showed people that the greater good had been disregarded for too long in Haiti; that much of the population had been ignored and mistreated. One participant explains below:

For years, I think people have been working for self-advancement. There comes a time to think about Haiti. Haiti as a whole. Haiti as a country. Haiti as a nation. Haiti as a whole population. Not: 'I am here, I have 5 years, and I am trying to advance myself and then go somewhere else.' You know what I mean? Behind that, you have issues of corruption, selfishness, etc.¹⁸

For the participants, leadership started to look different after the earthquake. As one of the participants explains, "The earthquake revealed leaders to themselves." In other words, in the moment of crisis and chaos, leaders emerged; people began to put the greater good above themselves in ways they may not have imagined previously, and they inspired others to do the same. The earthquake brought people together and corralled people around a shared mission. One participant explains:

I remember the first meeting with my faculty and staff, when I tried to sell this new mission to them. I said to them, we don't have a traditional university anymore. The university we have now is in the streets. The training needs to happen in the streets

16. Laura Colket, "Breaking the single story: Narratives of educational leaders in post-earthquake Haiti."

17. Laura Colket, "Breaking the single story: Narratives of educational leaders in post-earthquake Haiti."

18. Laura Colket, "Breaking the single story: Narratives of educational leaders in post-earthquake Haiti."

because we don't have classrooms, we don't have labs, so either we exist in the streets and we accept that our students can learn in the streets and from the streets, or we don't have a university at all. And so, I told them we are going to organize ourselves into a big machine in the service of the community. And then, from that, we will see how we can gradually come back to the normal university. But right now we are not a normal university. We are a university in the streets. You know, [the faculty] were so traumatized themselves that they couldn't understand it. It was a big, big challenge for me to convince my colleagues to do this because they also had problems. They didn't have tents to live in, they lost family, they lost their homes, most of them were living in their cars. And so, how can I ask people who have problems themselves to put themselves at the service of others? And, you know, I discovered very quickly that this solution ended up being the best therapy for them. Because, in serving the community, they ended up forgetting about their own problems. And they found a new energy for survival, to transcend their own problems. And for me, that was the secret of recovery.¹⁹

The most effective and respected leaders, in the eyes of the participants, are those who are not motivated by recognition of their own personal accomplishments, but rather by the accomplishments of the larger group and by the betterment of the community, organization, or society. In this sense, leaders are not always standing in front taking credit; in fact, they can be completely invisible at times, operating from behind the scenes. One participant explains the importance of this behind-the-scenes leadership: "[L]eaders are behind the scenes, but they are indispensable. The first quality of leadership is humility. The leader is behind the lines, pushing people to be in the front, to take initiative."²⁰ By knowing the context, by sharing identities and commitments with those around them, and by being deeply committed to building a stronger Haiti, the leaders in this research inspired each other and were inspired *by* each other on a regular basis.

LEADERS ARE CAUGHT BETWEEN WORLDS

Another theme that emerged from the participants was that they often felt pulled between two worlds: in some cases, this allowed them to build bridges that did not previously exist; in other cases, it helped them to understand competing perspectives; and often, the process felt frustrating and overwhelming. One of the participants who was able to build a bridge between two worlds (the public and private sectors) said it proved to be one of the most difficult challenges of his life. He likens the process to a hurricane, and explains, "It took 18 months of negotiation, of battles, to reach an agreement. I mentioned to you that in this country, those two worlds don't talk together, and I was trapped between those two worlds." He goes on to explain that his unique background, as someone with experience as both a university professor and a consultant in the private sector, positioned him as connected to both worlds, yet not fully integrated into either. While this created a challenge for him, he also saw it as an opportunity to use his position

19. Laura Colket, "Breaking the single story: Narratives of educational leaders in post-earthquake Haiti."

20. Laura Colket, "Breaking the single story: Narratives of educational leaders in post-earthquake Haiti."

‘in between’ to create a unique partnership.²¹ This experience of working at the nexus between the public and private worlds in Haiti gave him a unique perspective on these two sectors, and through this experience he grew to believe in the possibilities that could emerge from creating partnerships between the two worlds.

It was not just worlds within Haiti that the participants felt caught between. There was also the complicated relationship between Haiti and the outside world. For example, the participants regularly found themselves caught between languages and were constantly having to translate language and culture. One participant reflects back on the first month after the earthquake as she explains:

For the whole first month, everything was in English. After a month I said, no, that’s enough. I won’t speak English anymore. I won’t translate for anyone anymore. You are in a French speaking country, and if you want to do work here, then you need to speak French.²²

Another example of being caught between worlds is the way in which the participants were positioned between the Haitian government and international aid agencies. Because the Ministry of Education has not had the funds to implement and manage large-scale projects on its own, it has, in many ways, remained dependent on foreign governments and international agencies. This is one of the many ways that imperialism continues to shape Haiti. For example, the participants in this research are technically considered to be consultants to the Minister of Education as their salaries are paid by outside agencies; yet, they are all Haitian and most of them have been working with the Ministry of Education for many years. They feel a deep commitment to working to strengthen the Haitian state in order to no longer be dependent on the outside agencies and foreign governments. Because of their unique situation, the participants are simultaneously positioned inside and outside of the Ministry. Below, one participant explains the complicated nature of this arrangement:

Yes, I work for the state. Yes, I am a consultant. I am a consultant because the state is organized in such a way that lots of people like myself, we have to be consultants. The Ministry hires us through others, through its [international] partners, but at heart I am a civil servant. When I talk of the Ministry, I don’t consider myself to be outside of the Ministry. I am a part of it. I cannot consider myself to be only a consultant. I share the responsibility for [the Ministry’s] flaws. . . . So, yes, I am a civil servant at heart. And when I am at meetings with the partners, I totally forget they are paying my salary. I talk for the Ministry; I represent the Ministry.²³

Though this participant considers herself to be a civil servant and a representative of the Ministry of Education, her position and that of her colleagues is quite complicated. Money often sets priorities. As their salaries ultimately come not from Haiti, but from the international agencies, they are forced to constantly negotiate between the two

21. Laura Colket, “Breaking the single story: Narratives of educational leaders in post-earthquake Haiti.”

22. Laura Colket, “Breaking the single story: Narratives of educational leaders in post-earthquake Haiti.”

23. Laura Colket, “Breaking the single story: Narratives of educational leaders in post-earthquake Haiti.”

worlds. This muddled relationship is just one of the many manifestations of the imperialist trap that Haiti has been caught in for centuries. The term “Third World” emerged in the 1950s, as a phrase used to describe the contested area between the two world superpowers at the time: the United States and Russia.²⁴ In this sense, the “Third World” became a discursively created political and geographical area to be ideologically conquered, and international development became the political and economic tool in the race for control. Though the specific players and terminology may have shifted over the years, the language and practices have not become any less political. And the participants in this research were, in many ways, caught between these worlds.

LEADERSHIP IS CHAOTIC

In addition to the personal, relational, and contextual nature of leadership, the chaotic nature of leadership must also be considered. Despite the claims of popular media, leadership cannot be tackled with a generic 10-step process. As one participant explains, mathematics is often taught as a series of steps, and because of this, many people miss the true essence of the discipline; the chaotic nature of mathematics is not understood. He explains:

I realized that the teachers teach what the book says, but that is not mathematics. . . . There is the activity of the mathematician, which is a chaotic activity: one step forward, two steps back, two steps to the side. . . . And what happens is that books teach you only the final part of the process. Everything is so structured and organized. But this is not the real mathematical activity.²⁵

The same can be said for leadership. While leadership scholars often identify certain traits of successful leaders, the process of becoming a leader or enacting leadership is not as easily explained. People may learn how to engage in transactions and follow certain steps, but there is something missing with such a flat conception of leadership. The inspiration, the trust, the larger vision, and intuition to know what to do in uncertain situations is missing when leadership is boiled down to a simple formula. Chaos and uncertainty are endemic to leadership, and this is even more the case in particularly chaotic situations such as in the minutes, hours, and months after the earthquake in Haiti. Strong leaders, therefore, are not only those who take the time to get off the dance floor and onto the balcony, as Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky describe,²⁶ but strong leaders are also those who, when they have to remain on the dance floor, can thrive amidst the chaos, and know when to take “one step forward, two steps back, two steps to the side” without a view from the balcony.

24. Wolfgang Sachs, *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power* (New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd, 1992).

25. Laura Colket, “Breaking the single story: Narratives of educational leaders in post-earthquake Haiti” (Ed.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2012). Dissertations available from ProQuest.

26. Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2002).

The chaos these leaders faced after the earthquake was disorienting in numerous ways, yet they had to keep moving forward. They no longer had an office, as the Ministry of Education building had been destroyed in the earthquake, so they held their meetings outside where the building once stood. One participant describes the realities of those first few days:

You know, we were completely disorganized. We had to find out how we were going to solve all the problems, and we still had bodies under the rubble. And the bodies were starting to smell, and we had to work there, we didn't have anywhere else, because all the government buildings had collapsed. And as you should know, at that time, there were still aftershocks. And part of our building here that hadn't come down yet fell in an aftershock.²⁷

It is under these conditions that these Haitian leaders had to make decisions that would impact the lives of many people. They had to figure out how to assess the situation, how to find out how many schools had collapsed, how many students, teachers, and principals had died. They had to mobilize inspectors to get out and collect data. And at the same time that they were sending people out into the field, they also had to assess the situation within the Ministry itself. They had to figure out who was still alive, who lost houses, who lost families, and who was still able to work. In total, 19 people were lost who worked directly at the Ministry. In addition to these Ministry personnel, the earthquake also took the lives of 540 teachers and 189 nonteaching staff, and, as they would soon find out, thousands of students' lives were lost and 4,268 schools were destroyed.

Because of the urgency of the situation, one participant stated, "Our traditional organizational structure didn't exist anymore. The responsibilities were redistributed because of the urgency of the situation. No one said, 'that's not my job.' Everyone did whatever was necessary." Another participant adds:

It changes from day to day. There is no way you can plan ahead, I mean seriously plan and hold on to your plan. For example, if an event is going to take place in a month, you would think that this week you might be doing this for it, and next week that, building up for the event. But no . . . events just fall on you, they just happen. People fall on you.²⁸

While leadership at all times requires a clear vision and sense of confidence, in crisis situations, leaders are expected to remain calm, collected, confident, and in control—no matter how chaotic the surroundings. As Arjun Boin and Paul Hart explain, making decisions under such conditions can be quite difficult, if not impossible. As they note, however, leaders tend to make bold promises in moments of crisis—promises that they are often unable to keep. Boin and Hart are particularly critical of leaders who make promises for systemic reform following a disaster; as they explain, "The popular notion that crises make it easy to overcome long-standing barriers to reform is not only naive, but

27. Laura Colket, "Breaking the single story: Narratives of educational leaders in post-earthquake Haiti" (Ed.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2012). Dissertation is available from ProQuest.

28. Laura Colket, "Breaking the single story: Narratives of educational leaders in post-earthquake Haiti."

also logically unfounded.”²⁹ Their strong words bring up some important questions for the participants of this research (who did make bold plans for systemic reform) and for others who have been working to create systemic change since the earthquake in Haiti. Ultimately, it is important to remember that leadership in crisis situations is extremely difficult—even if one was not directly involved in the crisis situation. To have directly experienced the crisis (and the trauma associated with it), and then to continue on and lead—is an enormous feat.

LEADERSHIP IS LOCAL

One of the strongest messages that came through from these leaders was the importance of developing, respecting, and supporting local leadership. One participant explains, “It is imperative that we, those of us who are inside the country, take control of the catastrophic situation and lead the reconstruction of the society, and respond to the needs of the society.” The participant continued by stating that international agencies need not instantly pull out of Haiti—indeed, their help was very much needed after the earthquake—but these agencies can reorient their work in support of the Haitian government, they can align with the government’s plans rather than creating their own, and development assistance can be targeted specifically to help strengthen the capacity of the Haitian leadership so that ultimately the government can move forward without the continuous involvement of the international community.³⁰ After the earthquake, the participants in this research were bombarded by outside agencies. Most of these outsiders, however, did not come asking how they could help, but rather, came with a prefabricated plan. This became increasingly frustrating for the leaders at the Ministry as they had been working relentlessly on creating a strategic plan for moving forward. They needed help building their capacity so they could implement the plan; they did not need people from the international community to come in to try to ‘save’ them with their own (often decontextualized) plans. One participant explains the frustration she felt during this time:

A guy came with a program that was designed after the war in Guatemala, and he wanted the Ministry’s approval so he could get money. And I said, we are not at war—we just had an earthquake. Some other people came because they had worked in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and I said, this is Haiti, this is a special situation. So come and ask us what we need, because we have ideas of what we need. And that was my job, and there were hundreds of them. Hundreds of these organizations. Some of them exist, I think, only because there was an earthquake in Haiti.³¹

Keeping in mind the intimate connection between Haiti and the international community, the 2010 earthquake cannot easily be separated from the broader social, historical,

29. Arjen Boin and Paul Hart, “Public Leadership in Times of Crisis: Mission Impossible?” *Administrative Review* 63, no. 5 (2003), 545–553; Jeffrey Cufaude, “Crisis Leadership: Do You Have What it Takes to Lead Your Staff and Colleagues during Difficult Times?” *NACUBO Business Officer* (2002), 51–56.

30. Laura Colket, “Breaking the single story: Narratives of educational leaders in post-earthquake Haiti” (Ed.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2012). Dissertation is available from ProQuest.

31. Laura Colket, “Breaking the single story: Narratives of educational leaders in post-earthquake Haiti.”

and political context. In fact, the earthquake was not simply a natural disaster; rather, the damage caused by the earthquake was *deeply* political.³² As Jean-Germain Gros argues, the extent of the devastation from the earthquake was the result of a severely weakened state, caused in part by the international community's anti-state policies such as providing funds and resources to NGOs instead of helping to strengthen the capacity of the state.³³ The post-earthquake context was a unique moment for many reasons, but it was also a moment in time within a broader social, historical, and political context. Outside leadership has been prioritized over local leadership in Haiti for centuries. This mentality needs to shift, and one of the ways of doing so is by learning from and truly listening to the Haitian leaders who have the deep local knowledge needed to create change.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Leadership is less about a set of concrete steps or characteristics than it is about the individuals, the relationships among individuals, and the context in which they work. Context and identity cannot be ignored when we think about leadership perspectives and practices. Haiti, as a neocolonial state that has been recovering from one disaster after another, provides a unique context in which these leaders are working, but also offers important lessons for the broader field. While statistics and numbers are often used to tell the story of Haiti, and specifically about the earthquake, the individual perspectives and experiences of each of the participants in this research add important texture to that story. Foucault illustrates the ways in which statistics can be used as a tool to control—personal stories, on the other hand, can be used as an important means to counter those statistics.³⁴ In this article, the experiences of these Haitian leaders are shared as a counter-story to the depersonalizing statistics that are often used to depict the earthquake in Haiti and its aftermath.

As one of its main tenets, Critical Race Theory emphasizes the importance of counter-storytelling, or highlighting the voices and experiences of People of Color, as their realities and perspectives are often left out of the larger dialogue.³⁵ Leadership studies, in particular, are based largely on the White, male, Euro-centric experience of leadership. By sharing the stories and experiences of these Haitian leaders, this article not only speaks back against the broader discourse on international aid that is often devoid of the perspectives of the Black and Brown people in the Global South, but it also pushes against the field of leadership studies that has historically ignored the experiences of Leaders of Color.

As these leaders' stories illustrate, the post-earthquake reconstruction is not simply about putting up new buildings; the entire process is also deeply personal. Indeed, the macro and the micro, the global and the local, are all intertwined and should not be separated. For the participants in this research, their worlds were not only transformed,

32. Paul Farmer, *Haiti After the Earthquake* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011).

33. Jean-Germain Gros, "Anatomy of a Haitian Tragedy: When the Fury of Nature Meets the Debility of the State," in *Journal of Black Studies* 42, no. 2 (2011), 131–157.

34. Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984).

35. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: NYU Press, 2001).

but they, themselves, were transformed as well. Their worlds were physically and metaphorically shaken, and after the earthquake, they saw things differently, they moved forward differently, and they carried with them a new level of motivation for creating change. For each of the participants, their goals, priorities, and perspectives changed on January 12, 2010. Their commitment to Haiti strengthened, their dedication to reforming the education system took on a new urgency, and their perspectives on international involvement, and the face and focus of leadership in Haiti, shifted as well. ■