POST-DISASTER LITERATURES AND CULTURAL RECONSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

KATHERINE KARCHER CLARKE: Post-Disaster Literatures and Cultural Reconstruction
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Counteracting sensational or simplistic representations of post-disaster societies, chronicle literatures offer the writer an occasion to reappropriate histories and cultural identities. The text thus becomes a means to assert a community’s worth and vitality while also acting as a source of solidarity that may aid a collective cultural restoration that must be organized, established, and supported before material reconstruction may occur. I propose to examine these literatures, specifically using texts that were created following both Hurricane Katrina and the January 12, 2010 Haitian earthquake, in order to explore how, for what reasons, and to what purpose, the written and spoken word is used in the process of reconstruction.
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INTRODUCTION: WRITING THE DISASTER

“Je le veux! Je le dis, haut, fort, fier, comme si je pouvais ainsi conjurer le sort,” writes Monique Mesplé-Lassalle, pitting human will and desire, here expressed by the spoken word, against and above a reality that has been found to be less than satisfactory, (Berrouet, et al. 117). Mesplé-Lassalle continues by lamenting her own physical powerlessness and shame in the face of grief and catastrophe in writing that, “J’égrène les noms aimés comme si je pouvais leur insuffler la vie. Et je déteste mon inutilité, en orgueil mal placé, comme si j’avais pu faire quelque chose pour éviter l’horreur” (Berrouet, et al. 117). Mesplé-Lassalle’s text forms part of the chronicle Haïti parmi les vivants, a collection made up of various writers’ contributions that does not conform to the traditional chronicle format since it includes several genres: poetry, theatre, fiction, and anecdotal chronicle. The chronicle genre allows the author, who is both writing for and speaking to a specific community, to translate experienced events into written accounts that permit reflection and sociopolitical engagement. Haïti parmi les vivants aims to present a vision of Haiti that is different from that of the media. It belongs to a new kind of committed literature. Dominique Fisher describes the contemporary relationship between literature and politics in terms of réhistorisation, or the reconstruction of

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1 “Chronicle” is derived from the Greek word Χρόνος, meaning “time,” and is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “a factual written account of important or historical events in the order of their occurrence.” “chronicle”. Oxford Dictionaries. April 2010.
historic memories and the current surge of literary genres that blur the line between fiction and reality (Fisher 59). Fisher writes that today's chronicle authors are grouped on the margins of literature, are agents for marginal communities, and are engaged in a struggle for self-expression and self-representation that is understood to be both “impossible et nécessaire” (Fisher 62). Haïti parmi les vivants, whose profits were used for educational and cultural reconstruction in Haiti, treats the aftermath of the Haitian earthquake that occurred on January 12, 2010. By chronicling and addressing the event and its impact upon Haiti, and upon Port-au-Prince in particular, the book’s written testimonies, poems, and short stories serve several purposes. The chronicle’s contributing authors attempt to offer accounts that oppose and question the sensationalized and misrepresented reports of popular media outlets to the local and international public. The authors’ combined efforts have also created a written refutation of human uselessness in the face of natural disaster, conveying the gravity and horror of the situation and its dead along with the hope of the living. In this way the text could be viewed as a textual reconstruction of Haiti—forming itself not physically, but emotionally and culturally. The written representations and expressions of the specific instance of the Haitian earthquake form a committed literary work that becomes a laboratory microcosm of the Haitian struggle and spirit, itself a microcosm of humanity as a whole.

Similarly, Chris Rose’s 1 Dead in Attic: After Katrina, a chronicled collection in book form of Rose’s regular contributions to the Times-Picayune newspaper, documents everyday life in the city of New Orleans for the year and a half that
followed its devastation due to the flooding caused by Hurricane Katrina’s
destructive impact on the city's protective levee systems. Presenting his text of
journalistic memoirs, which also includes a poetic satire called “Refrigerator
Town,” a criticism of unhelpful and greedy local officials and a reference to the
post-storm presence of duct-taped refrigerators full of rotting foods left citywide on
street corners, Rose aims to offer his testimony as an accompaniment to the
exaggerated reports about the city that have been promoted by the media in what
he terms to be “The Great Elsewhere” of America. Rose’s memoirs are dated and
temporally organized, beginning two days after the hurricane made landfall, and
chronicle the author’s experiences for audiences that are both local and national.
His efforts to soothe his fellow residents’ cares and losses seem aimed to reassure
them of their former city’s potential and to encourage them to return and rebuild.
His message to the national audience, however, is a bit more complex as he strives
to adequately offer thanks for all aid and relief efforts, to express the soul and needs
of his community, and to refute popular misconceptions of that community. Honest,
sentimental and often angry, Rose combats the apathy and cowardice of outsiders
and of New Orleanians alike by addressing both audiences in order to preserve a
unique culture and his own chosen way of life. Like Haïti parmi les vivants, 1 Dead in
Attic is not a simple laudatory exposition of New Orleans as a sort of “paradise lost”
or Atlantis, but rather as a city that, like Port-au-Prince, is half-dead, possessing a
combination of both the ugly and the beautiful that reflects the complexity of the
human condition.

2 “In Refrigerator Town there was a Council Full of Clowns” (Rose 105).
THE LITERARY PROJECT: NECESSITY AND SELF-AFFIRMATION

In the avant-propos to *Haïti parmi les vivants*, Valérie Marin La Meslée introduces the collection of texts by offering insight on literature’s ability to communicate across time and space, and in some instances to represent the unrepresentable or the unpresentable:

J’ai lu Haïti avant de la connaître. Ses écrivains m’avaient offert ce pays dans leurs romans, leurs poèmes, et tout au long de fécondes rencontres. À l’heure tragique du séisme, leurs mots s’avéraient indispensables pour qu’au milieu des images et au-delà des clichés, la littérature donne à imaginer l’inimaginable (Berrouet, et al. 9).

Literature permits both the writer and the reader to mentally construct alternate realities in the realm of the imaginary. Fiction allows these horizons to be further broadened by narrative strategy and the potential to create voices. Michel Le Bris remarks, for instance, that first-person narration, in relation to the author, is the narration of another.3 The writer thus becomes an incredibly powerful figure who by virtue of his or her own creative capacity is able to explore the unknown, to make possible the impossible. The literary voyage may also be a project of re-creation and transformation that pulls material from the disparate and nonsensical elements of

3 “*Je est un autre* [qui] ouvre depuis l’origine même de la littérature—l’espace, et donc le mystère, qu’explorent obstinément les écrivains” (*Je est un autre* 12).
life and rearranges them in an artful order. Another literary method of transformation involves using themes and symbols of ruin and destruction in order to create a critical art that seeks to ameliorate the social afflictions that it also condemns. This technique, described as “the Aesthetics of Decay” by Rafaël Lucas, has in recent decades become an interesting tool used by Haitian authors in order to safely and effectively exhibit social criticism and to advocate change (Lucas and Mitsch 54).

In his own first-hand account of the impact of the Haitian earthquake on Port-au-Prince, Tout bouge autour de moi, Dany Laferrière uses his lyrical chronicle as an opportunity to express a Haiti that is not often shown by the media, included with his own commentaries and meditations. He writes of literature’s practical use in an everyday setting notes that the products of writers’ fancies and imagination may be useful on both a professional and a personal level, helping one to manage life’s difficulties by allowing an opportunity for exploration, reflection, or escape, comparable to “la bibliothérapie” (Berrouet et al. 32). He divulges his own method for coping with life’s stresses by praising the merits of poetry: “Ma confiance dans la poésie est sans limite. Elle est seule capable de me consoler de l’horreur du monde” (Tout bouge 73). The poet’s work, for instance, is very similar to the task that Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud assign to the writer: it is to turn grief into beauty. “Pour Homère, si les dieux nous envoient des malheurs, c’est pour qu’on en tire des chants,” he writes, explaining the value of suffered experience as an occasion to explore beauty through self-expression (Tout bouge 52).

4 “Ecrire, n’était-ce pas, faisant œuvre à partir du chaos, tenter de rendre celui-ci habitable?” (Pour une littérature monde 28).
Laferrière also comments upon the everyday power of literature that may distract its reader with beauties and meditations. He writes of the provisional tented community that was set up in the courtyard of the Hotel Karibe following the earthquake and of his observation of a young boy who passes his time reading novels and thus avoids the excruciating and uncomfortable wait for help: “Un enfant plongé dans Les Trois mousquetaires n’est plus sous une tente. Il vit dans le roman de Dumas” (Tout bouge 176). The literary project, or the goal of engaging in the writing process, may also be an occasion to tell one’s own story, to affirm a cultural or personal identity, a unique experience or perspective, with one’s own words. In Haïti parmi les vivants, Lyonel Trouillot suggests that this project has become, for himself and his contemporaries as well as for the country that they write and defend, an urgent necessity that is now more pertinent than ever:

Poésie, roman, littérature jeunesse, lyrisme, réalisme . . . Que peut la littérature devant les grands malheurs? Rien. Mais surtout pas se taire. Avec nos morts, avec nos mots, nous qui sommes revenus du déluge de pierre, écrivons pour trouver “une place dans le monde des vivants” (Berrouet, et al. 54).

Trouillot thus describes writing as a compulsory and active engagement with one’s world which may be used as a tool for self-transformation and self-improvement.

Rodney Saint-Eloi echoes this great need for words, for speaking out, in a way that is both more personal and more abstract. In his own text, Haïti kenbe la!: 35 secondes et mon pays à reconstruire, which acts as both chronicle documenting the aftermath of the Haitian earthquake and lyrical reflection, he writes about a
Canadian acquaintance whom he finds to be genuinely interested in and engaged with the welfare of the Haitian people. Saint-Eloi effectively becomes this man’s link to Haitian news and opinion, becoming a physical specimen of the type of purposeful literature that he promotes. He recreates a casual conversation with this man that reflects an effective exploration of differing public opinions concerning the best way to approach and manage personal reconstructive efforts:

Il veut surtout savoir si je suis d’accord avec le point de vue d’un psychiatre, qui a déclaré que le pays n’a nullement besoin de littérateurs mais plutôt d’ingénieurs et de scientifiques pour colmater la douleur . . . Le psychiatre parle de résilience du peuple haïtien. Le vrai remède à la douleur, lui ai-je répondu, c’est d’avoir les mots justes pour la secouer et la circonscrire (Saint-Eloi 256).

Saint-Eloi’s work does not simply appeal to the efficacy of words, which he claims to be incapable of lying in and of themselves, but rather treats them as the vehicles of suppressed history that makes them capable of a collective effort of declaration and thus of self-control and self-determination. One of the text’s two epigraphs mirrors this idea by making use of a well-known African proverb, which is also well-placed in Dani Kouyaté’s film Djéliba: The Heritage of the Griot: “Tant que le lion n’aura pas son historien, les histoires de chasse glorifieront toujours le chasseur” (Saint-Eloi 7).

Literature thus becomes a means of presenting a different image of a culture than is more popularly shown. The need for self-appropriation becomes more urgent in times of collective crisis, when both exterior and interior worlds are shaken or shattered, affecting equilibria and threatening the dissolution of both cultural and individual identities. Saint-Eloi explains that:

However, descriptions, eyewitness account and testimony may offer personal fragments that combine to form a sort of perceived mosaic of the entire event itself. This tactic, as explained by Ana Filipa Prata, allows one to reassemble the event from experience, express its complexity, and establish a direct relationship with the public (Prata 3-4). Lyonel Trouillot elaborates upon this idea by explaining that written assemblages necessarily reflect the effects of perceived individual experiences: “Les littératures, dans leur saisie du référent, ne disent que des parcelles du monde, sa fragmentation” (Pour une littérature monde 201). The formal structure of Haïti parmi les vivants itself also imitates this fragmented reality in that it offers the reader a wide variety of authors and accounts—reflective, fictionalized, theatrical and poetic. Dany Laferrière’s Tout bouge autour de moi is, like Chris Rose’s 1 Dead in Attic: After Katrina, a collection of brief descriptions, observations and meditations that reflects an urgent state of discontinuity in which accustomed norms have broken down and in which cause and effect are no longer necessarily linked. Similarly, Chris Rose’s text reads as a dated suite of memoirs, some of which were regularly published in the Times-Picayune newspaper. His style could be described as sentimental, or reflective, journalism, and as the accounts progress it becomes clear that Rose himself has been battling depression following the trauma
of having experienced Hurricane Katrina. Amidst his reports, descriptions, critiques, and praises of post-Katrina New Orleans, which present a collective offering of personal testimony and observations, Rose’s essential message is, in opposition to media transmissions of nonstop violence and looting, a hopeful one:

—to raise up a great city, a great region, from ruin, defy the odds and the naysayers (and the forgetters), and live life to its richest possibilities, which was always the best thing about New Orleans anyway. The infinite possibilities of the night for those who chase dreams and dreamers. We choose to be in that number. To go marching on (Rose 361).

REPRESENTATIONS OF HYBRIDITY

The formal structures of Haïti parmi les vivants and 1 Dead in Attic also reflect their respective Creole cultures, forming a hybridized hodgepodge of styles, characters, and languages in a way that is both self-identifying and self-declaring. Louis-Philippe Dalembert addresses the uniqueness of the Haitian perspective, writing that, “Comme toute littérature, la littérature haïtienne est ce qui fonde et ce qui déborde, océan de langage et regard multiple qui appelle à la multiplicité des regards. Nos échanges ne sont qu’une ouverture sur l’ancré et l’irréductible” (Dalembert 16). This “multiplicité des regards” is magnified by the country’s colonial roots and of its inhabitants’ ideological vision of Africa as the matrice culturelle. This cultural acknowledgment of déracinement figures largely in the
Haitian psyche, and is also a cause and catalyst for incredible creativity, allowing for cross-cultural exposures and the exchanges of beliefs and ideas. In *Ainsi parla l’oncle*, Jean Price-Mars reflects that, “Par un paradoxe déconcertant, ce peuple [...] a eu, sinon la plus belle, du moins la plus attachante, la plus émouvante histoire du monde—celle de la transplantation d’une race humaine sur un sol étranger dans les pires conditions biologiques” (Dalembert 22).

In addition to this inherent hybridity of Haitian culture, broadly and popularly reflected by the creole language and the mixed traditions associated with Voodoo practices, is the common figure of the *écrivain exilé*, who is also necessarily a hybrid figure. Roger Dorsinville, interviewed in Jean Jonassaint’s collection *Le pouvoir des mots, les maux du pouvoir: Des romanciers haïtiens de l’exil*, further adds to this discourse by highlighting more contemporary migration trends in which Haitian-born writers have been traveling back to Africa. He declares that such movement could only be positive and beneficial, with each side, Haiti and Africa, enriching and developing their points of view through contact with the other. One should not neglect, however, the position and power of the writer as an individual who, in spite of cultural or national belonging and identification, necessarily has a unique voice. Gérard Etienne writes, “Mais ma préoccupation première n’est pas d’écrire pour être identifié comme un écrivain noir, antillais, québécois, haïtien. Ma préoccupation, c’est que j’ai quelque chose à dire comme être humain” (Jonassaint 64). Etienne admits that in his quest to produce a literature for man in general, his individuality manifests itself in what he calls a “syntaxe désarticulée, qui se fout des règles traditionnelles de la syntaxe française et des mots purement créoles”
This rich hybridization of the writer that produces such unique voices does not come without misunderstandings, largely due to popular negative associations with and images of Haiti. Louis-Philippe Dalembert comments upon the stigmas and stereotypes with which Haitian writers tend to be labeled:

Lorsqu'on est écrivain haïtien et qu'on rencontre un public et des journalistes étrangers, on s'agace vite d'un certain nombre de questions auxquelles on a peu de chances d'échapper: -Où avez-vous appris votre français? -Comment expliquez-vous tant d'écrivains et de publications dans un pays si pauvre et avec autant d'analphabètes? (Dalembert 75).

A valid goal of Haitian literature is thus “à la faire connaître à l’étranger,” in order to offer a more complete image of what l’âme haïtienne actually is (Dalembert 75).

Chris Rose himself is an American hybrid, having been born in Maryland and having relocated to Louisiana later in life. He, like many other non-native residents of New Orleans, strongly identifies himself as a New Orleanian. Rose’s position as a proud and firmly rooted cultural transplant is not an extraordinary case. He recalls meeting a local artist who, “Like many of the more eccentric characters in this city, [is] not from New Orleans (born in Pineville, actually) but settled here about a year ago after a young life traveling the globe because it feels like home” (Rose 248). In addition to the diverse mix of transplants who call the Crescent City home is its own widely diverse native population—consisting of African Americans, American Indians, Caucasions, Asians, Creoles, and Cajuns. “I ride by the newly opened Cajun Fast Food To Go, operated by Asians and patronized by African Americans, and isn’t that a New Orleans story?” (Rose 209). He also writes about a certain intangible
spirit or quality that the city possesses, drawing people into it. One of his elderly neighbors waited out the storm in her home in Uptown and relates her passion for the city, “‘I just love New Orleans,’ she says. ‘It gets into your blood. I’m seventy years old, and I thought at this point in my life I’d just be out here in the yard fooling with my sunflowers and rosebushes’” (Rose 205). Rose himself admits to having a love affair with the city, mythologizing it as a sort of symbol for a *joie de vivre* that he claims to not exist elsewhere in America. He writes of the incredible psychological effect of having to leave the city, even for volunteer firefighters from New York City and recounts that: “‘They go through their own grieving hell when they leave New Orleans,’ he said to me. ‘It’s like leaving the *Titanic* for a safe distant shore—and leaving all the people behind. There is such a dissonance between what’s going on down there and everywhere else in America’” (Rose 214). It is not solely a *joie de vivre* that motivates Rose and his family to call New Orleans home—it is also its incredibly diverse population that allows for a constant exposure to “otherness” that convinces him of the city’s perfect environment for the raising of his children.

**MEDIA SENSATIONALISM AND POPULAR PERCEPTIONS**

The turbulent political history of Haiti and its unique culture of mixed influences and traditions, much like those of New Orleans, have become interesting objects of universal fascination, leaving them susceptible to false media representations and sensationalism. The country is often subject to discourse that
solely treats its unfortunate dictatorships, famines, and violence that is a result of severe economic inequality. Dany Laferrière laments the appellation of Haiti as a “pays maudit” in the occidental imagination, noting that the problems that the country has faced are mostly interior. He questions outside portrayals of Haiti, writing that in such cases the danger is that “…les informations que nous transmettent les médias ne sont pas toujours fiables. Pas par malhonnêteté. Les journalistes n’analysent pas ce genre de pays par rapport à ce qui se déroule sous leurs yeux, mais en fonction de l’idée qu’il se sont faits bien avant le voyage” (Un art de vivre 8). Laferrière admits that one of his main goals in writing about his home country, about his gentle and kind grandmother, about simple descriptions of the daily life experienced and observed by himself, his friends, and his family, is to show Haiti’s humanity, which he claims to have been robbed of dignity by Western opinions and assumptions. It should be noted, however, that it is not only outside opinion that has maligned Haiti; like any place, it too is subject to harsh self-criticism. Laferrière writes of a man who, in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, went about screaming in the streets and who “entreprend de nous rappeler que ce tremblement de terre est la conséquence de notre conduite inqualifiable” (Tout bouge 24).

Laferrière also takes notice that after the earthquake the media coverage seems to rely upon loops of many of the same dramatic, emotional, and visceral images that evoke the suffering, pain, and grief of those who have survived the trauma. He writes, “Je sens qu’on est en train de nous confectionner une mémoire,” and proposes in response a counteractive and productive reappropriation of the
stories of the people themselves who have been affected (*Tout bouge* 87). Lyonel Trouillot also treats the issue of questionable media reports and disorganization of both federal and private aid, noting that getting any news or properly communicating information within Port-au-Prince itself, was nearly impossible: “Les informations circulent dans un grand désordre ou ne circulent pas,” and that, as a result, communities began organizing themselves in order to secure water and provisions (Berrouet et al. 38). He goes on to question his growing paranoia due to all of the reports of looting and murders, offering an intimate account of one’s facile susceptibility to circulating rumors in an uncertain environment: “Me serais-je laissé influencer par ceux qui parlent de pillage et de violence?” (Berrouet, et al. 31). Trouillot does express a substantial amount of gratitude towards Anderson Cooper, a prominent CNN anchor, who publicly admitted that reports of looting and violence in the city immediately following the earthquake were sensationalized, and bemoans the fact that no attention whatsoever is accorded to the cooperation and community that the people themselves develop following the disaster, “C’est vrai qu’on pourrait parler un peu plus des formes de solidarité développées par la population” (Berrouet, et al. 29). Weeks later, Dany Laferrière echoes Trouillot’s sentiments with more hopeful optimism, noting a change in mentality both inside and outside of Haiti by suggesting that the country is no longer discussed in terms of the unfortunate climates of dictatorship and corruption, but rather, “Pour la première fois on entend reconstruction” (*Tout bouge* 114).

New Orleans has been labeled as a site of libertinism and decadence since the dawn of its existence as the third French capital in the New World. The American
Gulf Coast’s harsh climate, subject to intense humidity and heat and full of swamps and reptilian fauna, first discouraged early attempts at population. The first colonial settlers of the region were therefore state-appointed military personnel, and then later introductions of social undesirables, such as criminals and prostitutes, as reflected in Abbé Antoine François Prévost’s contemporarily successful novel *Manon Lescaut*, an account of a deceitful female criminal from Paris who is deported to the New World. The city contemporarily faces many problems—including violence that has arisen out of a lack of economic and social mobility, the drug trade, and gang culture. It is often ranked as the “murder capital” of America by many media outlets. National criticism of New Orleans’ “criminal” nature is often bolstered by its various celebrations, notably the premier holiday of Mardi Gras, that attract revellers from all over the country who abuse the city’s lax open container laws and the allowance for occasional partial nudity, notably female breasts.

Chris Rose succinctly offers his own criticism of those who blame New Orleans’ tolerant and celebratory culture as the primary cause of its social and economic failures, writing that they, “horrified at our behavior” have failed to realize that “98% of the people flashing and taunting for beads on Bourbon Street are from THEIR hometowns[.] That THEY are watching a mirror of THEMSELVES, not us”

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5 "Nature seems not to have intended it [Louisiana] for the habitation of man; but rather to have prepared it for the retreat of alligators, snakes, toads and frogs, who at dusk, by their united, though discordant vociferations, upbraid man as an intruder, assert their exclusive right, and lay their continual claim to the domain they inhabit" (Martin 9).

6 "A company ship arrived on the third of January, 1721, with three hundred settlers of the grant of Mme Chaumont, on Pascagoula River, and another landed in the following month with eighty girls from the Saltpêtrière, a house of correction in Paris, with one hundred other passengers” (Martin 139).
This condemnation of what some perceive as the city’s loose morality is not just a vague, exterior phantasm, but also occurs within the city itself. Rose grieves that verbally violent individuals have used the occasion of the storm’s devastation in order to pronounce their own divisive denunciations. He labels these groups and individuals as “tasteless demagogic ministers who have used Katrina’s destruction to preach the message that God was tired of the city’s libertine ways and decided to clean house” (Rose 29).

Media portrayals of the hurricane itself and its aftermath presented a depiction of New Orleans that was more biased and exaggerated than ever. While the relief efforts following the storm were poorly planned and executed on both the national and local levels, the visual images and stories that were used to relate the disaster force-fed the public a description of the city as a racial battleground in which the rich whites were pitted against the poor blacks, in which one group employed violence, trickery, and scare tactics in order to secure the other’s failure and demise. While it is true that the Lower 9th Ward, a mostly low-income and traditionally black neighborhood with rich cultural traditions and history, was heavily flooded, it was certainly not the only neighborhood to suffer widespread damages. Other mixed race or mostly white neighborhoods, wealthy and working class, were also destroyed, such as Lakeview, Chalmette, and St. Bernard Parish.

Rose writes that the flood ignored socially determined barriers and distinctions and “claimed lives, property, and peace of mind indiscriminately and equally across race, class, and gender lines and across hundreds of square miles. The failure of the Corps of Engineers was true democracy in action” (Rose 275).
laments that this media trend of dividing and analyzing the racial balance of New Orleans has continued, and that this is mostly the only way that the city is able to gain any sort of attention. The former mayor of New Orleans himself, Ray Nagin, intensified matters by declaring that the Crescent City is a “Chocolate City,” even though he has since explained that he was referring to the city’s cultural equilibrium.

This sort of logic that pits race against race is at worst, arbitrary and at best, simplistic in that it completely neglects the dynamics and history of an incredibly diverse region. Rose cites Howard Witt’s article, “The Big Uneasy,” published in the Chicago Tribune in 2006 after the city’s first post-Katrina Mardi Gras, as an example of a media piece that missed the chance to explore reconstruction efforts and the area’s beautiful culture by instead focusing on the fact that New Orleans’ two major Mardi Gras organizations, Rex and Zulu, are largely (although not exclusively and certainly not mandatorily) segregated by race. Rose’s response to the article is both weary, in that it is a reaction to a typical and facile analysis of the city’s dynamics, and biting: “I suspect it is too much to expect them to understand that this is probably the most complex ethnic and cultural port of call in America” (Rose 276).

The issue here is that these false and undocumented portrayals of New Orleans form essentially the core material by which outsiders may come to know the city at all. Rose writes: “Obviously, the range of opinions and 'knowledge' about New Orleans out in the Great Elsewhere [of America] is staggering . . . . It's not that people don't care about New Orleans. It's more that they're oblivious to what

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happened. They just don't know” (Rose 317-8). In addition to the dearth of viable information that exists concerning the cultural makeup and history of the American Gulf Coast, the scope of devastation following the hurricane itself is not fully understood. Rose references the widespread damage that occurred all along the Gulf of Mexico and not just within the 9th Ward of the city of New Orleans itself, emphasizing the important role that collective memory plays in the process of reconstruction:

It’s funny, but out there in the Great Elsewhere that is America, New Orleans seems to get most or all of the focus of the national media. As if this whole thing happened only in a place called the Lower 9th Ward. As the memory and images and impact of Katrina fade in the national consciousness, so too, it seems, does the geographical and emotional scope of its damages, not to mention Rita’s. From the Texas border to Mobile Bay, a huge swath of America took a grenade (Rose 217).

His text thus becomes a testimony and reminder that is not only an informative piece that may communicate his own experience as a journalist and resident of post-Katrina South Louisiana, but is also a validation of the worth of Gulf Coast and of the value of New Orleans as both a cultural gem and a major port city that is essential to America’s prosperity. *1 Dead in Attic* serves as an appeal to local community and cooperation as a necessary means to the city’s physical, cultural, and psychological restoration.
CREATIVE VOICES AND VALIDATIONS

The work’s first chapter, “Who We Are—9/6/05” perfectly communicates Rose’s intentions for the work. The letter format allows Rose to personally address a large and unknown public concerning the exodus of Gulf Coast residents, clearly identifying himself as a member and representative of this community, from their homes to elsewhere—a mass diaspora that at first began as a routine hurricane evacuation. His style is humorous, candid, and sincere, beginning with: “Dear America, I suppose we should introduce ourselves: we’re South Louisiana. We have arrived on your doorstep on short notice and we apologize for that, but we were never much for waiting around for invitations” (Rose 1). What follows this surprise announcement, which is directed to the entire United States, is a heartfelt declaration of gratitude, a genuine appeal for aid, and a description of the eccentricities, resiliency, hospitality, and generosity of spirit that characterize South Louisianians. This collective validation forms a vital component of the work and extends to all areas, from the general and cultural to the specific and personal. For instance, Rose dedicates a chapter to Chris Cressionnie, “The Magnet Man,” who spends his time collecting magnets from the duct-taped curbside refrigerators that have been removed from houses that are in the process of being gutted or reworked. Cressionnie has arranged these magnets on his 1994 Chevy Blazer in order to form a type of recycled mosaic that documents antediluvian daily life in New Orleans. Rose

8 “Who We Are—9/6/05” is written in the form of a personal letter on behalf of an allegorical South Louisiana to the rest of America. It serves as a symbolic acknowledgment of the spotlight placed upon South Louisiana, American Gulf Coast, and their cultural uniqueness, following Hurricane Katrina.
comments on the effect of the magnet-covered SUV as a vibrant and visual way to
tell the story of New Orleans’ residents, writing that:

In fact, these are your magnets. And my magnets. And everybody else’s magnets. For weeks, Cressionnie has been collecting these delicate little tokens, at once so frivolous and common, but that tell a story of our city. They say where we go to school, what teams we root for, where we order pizza, what gods we pray to, what veterinarians we take our pets to, when our next dentist appointment is, where we like to go on vacation, and—this part stays with you—who we love (Rose 116).

Michel Le Bris speaks of the contemporary burst of Haitian artistic creativity, which in fact reflects a longlived cultural tradition, as an “occasion d’affirmer une autre image de l’île que la litanie de clichés habituellement servis” (Berrouet, et al. 14). This self-declaratory desire is echoed in Le Bris’s article in Haïti parmi les vivants: “Oui, Dany a raison: il faut que les écrivains fassent ce qu’ils savent faire, écrire, pour dire Haïti, à la face du monde” (Berrouet, et al. 19). Early Haitian writers, such as the poets Ignace Nau and Antoine Dupré, offered works that may be described as combative and patriotic. Much like the contemporary works of Dany Laferrière and Lyonel Trouillot, they call for the necessity of a national and cultural collective memory that revives a nostalgia for Haiti’s early independence, pride, and uniqueness while also extolling the quotidien and the country’s beauty. The role of the writer is thus educational, unifying, and responsible for preserving a social consciousness that has a “but explicite de corriger la réalité sociale et matérielle du pays” (Fleischmann 5). Laferrière also declares his goal to challenge exterior perceptions of his birth country’s artistic production, asking: “... comment est-on
arrivé à croire de tels clichés comme celui qui insinue . . . que l’art est un luxe au-dessus de leurs moyens?” (Un art de vivre 5). This goal, as he has made explicit in both lectures and writings, has the consideration of the human, of individual expression and utility, at its heart. He evokes a scene that he witnessed in the courtyard of the Hotel Karibe that is consistent with his creative intentions: “Cette grand-mère, pas loin de moi, est en train de substituer, dans la tête de son petit-fils, ces images horribles par des chansons et des mythologies qu’elle tire de sa mémoire vacillante” (Tout bouge 70). This passage, which seems on the surface to be a simple, sentimental account of a grandmother soothing her grandson with lullabies and fairy tales, echoes the insistence of authors associated with the Indigénisme and Négritude movements, who strove to rekindle an appreciation for a mythical and pre-colonial Africa among the Haitian public, by referring to a present-day reconstruction of historical memory that aims to recall a glorious past.

Laferrière and Saint-Eloi both refer to the Haitian as a “conteur-né,” with a rich history of oral tradition, who is capable of transforming the ordinary, the joyful, or the sorrowful into a lyrical and creative expression of celebration or hope (Tout bouge 57). Saint-Eloi cites Jean Price-Mars’ description of the Haitian in Ainsi parla l’Oncle as someone who “chante et qui souffre, qui peine et qui rit, qui danse et se résigne. De la naissance à la mort, la chanson est associée à toute sa vie. Il chante la joie au coeur ou les larmes aux yeux” (Saint-Eloi 256). Saint-Eloi is suggesting that in spite of hardship, and perhaps even because of it, the survival and resilience of the Haitian people is not in question. He indicates that the grace of Haiti’s artistic production lies in the fact that it represents a powerful praise of beauty and joy,
capable of transforming the bitter adversities of reality into a world of imaginative improvement. Amidst his description of Port-au-Prince’s devastations following the earthquake, Laferrière also maintains a sort of optimism in anticipation of the artistic production that will inevitably follow it: “Quelle forme d’art va se manifester la première? La poésie si impulsive ou la peinture avide de nouveaux paysages? Où verra-t-on les premières images du séisme?” (Tout bouge 144). Yasmina Khadra similarly expresses, along with his grief, an undeniable hopefulness that the Haitian people, “nourris par la fougue des poètes, des peintres, des musiciens de son pays, rendra à Haïti un peu de sa superbe, un peu de sa magie” (Saint-Eloi 15). While Laferrière and Saint-Eloi advocate a spiritual or cultural cultivation and redevelopment, Lyonel Trouillot also insists upon the imperative need to restructure the state itself, an obligation that extends from political to social order and physical rebuilding: “Ce grand malheur peut être l’occasion de corriger des vices structurels,” in order to create “une société plus juste” (Berrouet et al. 44).

THE TELLING OF THE DISASTER

The role of voice, in either spoken or written form, serves a manifold purpose in the telling of the disaster. This articulation may be a last resort attempt to assert some sort of personal control over one’s environment and to conquer desperation, a unifying factor that may encourage the strengthening of community and
togetherness, or an assertion of worth and vitality. A first response after any traumatic event is to reach out to family and friends in an endeavor to assess the outcomes of one’s new atmosphere and to assuage feelings of isolation. Dany Laferrière writes that immediately following the wave of terrified silence that reigned over Port-au-Prince after the earthquake’s largest shocks, there was a flurry of mobile phone use that was complicated by the difficulties caused by disruptions in service: “‘Où es-tu, chérie?’ . . . . Pour finir par hurler à l’autre comme s’il pouvait entendre: ‘La ligne ne marche plus’ . . . . Le langage se résume alors à l’essentiel. Puis le silence” (Tout bouge 20).

The use of language here has become an emergency for the speaker in spite of its inability to communicate information to the desired listener. This obligation to speak regardless of the probability of not being heard is echoed by Sarah Berrouet’s short fictional piece in Haïti parmi les vivants. Narrated in the first person, Berrouet’s piece is a monologue that recounts an unknown wanderer’s search for a loved one amidst the ruins of Port-au-Prince. The narrator validates his or her interminable search and repeated cries for the loved one: “Que me reste-t-il, hormis cette poignée de mots que tu ne liras sans doute jamais?” (Berrouet et al. 55).

Georges Castera’s poem “Pour la énième fois,” of the same collection, adds to the imperative utility of speaking by describing it as a means of progress in spite of the impossibility of physical action: “A Port-au-Prince / je déplace encore les mots / à ma guise / mais les maisons sont trop lourdes / à porter” (Berrouet et al. 68).

The speech act may also serve as a means of unification and solidarity that can alleviate destructive feelings of isolation on a psychological level as well as
motivate cooperative action. Laferrière conveys the consolidating effects of communal prayer and singing in the streets as the coming together of separate individual voices into one whole with a common struggle:

Les voix sont harmonieuses. C'est là que j'ai compris que tout le monde était touché. Et qu'il s'était passé quelque chose d'une ampleur inimaginable. Les gens sont dans les rues. Ils chantent pour calmer leur douleur. Une forêt de gens qui s'avancent lentement sur la terre encore frémissante. On voit des ombres glisser des montagnes pour les rejoindre. Comment font-ils pour se fondre si vite dans la foule? C'est ce chant qu'ils adressent au ciel, dans la lumière blafarde de cette aube naissante, qui les unit (Tout bouge 27).

The effects of shared joys and sorrows imply a psychological buttressing that allows one to dissolve barriers of the self and to cultivate hope and collective success. Laferrière attributes this success to the durability and resiliency of culture despite the setbacks of traumatic experience:

Pourtant les conversations sont animées, et j'entends parfois des rires. On cherche une sortie par tous les moyens. Ce qui fait croire que quand tout tombe autour de nous, il reste la culture. Mais ce qui sauve cette ville, ce sont les gens qui déambulent. C'est l'appétit de vivre de cette foule qui fait la vie dans les rues poussiéreuses (Tout bouge 61).

Further emphasizing the comforting resiliency of culture and tradition, Rodney Saint-Eloi writes that he witnessed a woman who was telling the tale of the life of Emmanuel, a Haitian man who married a French woman, who was generous, loved
his neighbors, worked hard, and whose exemplary spirit may now serve as a model
to his countrymen. Saint-Eloi juxtaposes this story with the words of a distraught
woman who has told him, “J’ai encore tout perdu” (Saint-Eloi 58). The tale of
Emmanuel is thus presented as a productive counteraction of hope and communal
education amidst an atmosphere that predisposes widespread pessimism. Saint-
Eloi relates that: “Une petite femme ronde, au visage renfermé, raconte la vie
d’Emmanuel. Elle raconte, en changeant seulement de place. Elle a besoin de parler.
Elle ne parle à personne en particulier. Elle fait l’éloge d’Emmanuel” (Saint-Eloi 58).

By stressing the Haitian people’s cooperation and willingness to work
together in order to ensure collective prosperity, Laferrière is announcing Port-au-
Prince’s persistent vivacity and validity as a community and as a culture. His
objective sends an important message to both Haitians and outsiders as a hopeful
appeal to confederation and recognition. Lyonel Trouillot emphasizes the strength
of hope in the dilapidated city by writing that, “Port-au-Prince semble une ville
vivante. Des habitants sur les ruines, dans les rues, occupant les places et tous les
espaces non couverts” (Berrouet et al. 49).

COMMUNAL SOLIDARITY AND CREATIVE REBIRTH

In addition to the physical signs of life that were so encouragingly manifested
after the earthquake, creative representations also emerged, taking charge of the
necessity to proclaim the continuity and ingenuity of Haitian culture. Syto Cavé’s short piece in *Haïti parmi les vivants*, entitled “Ma place parmi les vivants,” interestingly refers to her own textual rebirth that she creates following her symbolic death due to the disaster: “Quelqu’un m’a appelé hier pour me demander si je suis mort. Absolument, j’ai dû répondre. Une amie m’a suggéré d’écrire, comme pour reprendre ma place parmi les vivants” (Berrouet et al. 77). The writing process thus becomes the opportunity to rebuild a new history by nostalgically drawing from and remembering the past, the good and the bad, and moving on. Emmelie Prophète uses the imagery of buried books and destroyed residences to indicate the past, suggesting that the telling of what happened could help to reconstruct the present. She addresses an unknown Toi, emphasizing her insistence to unveil the histories of the earthquake’s voiceless victims: “Te retrouver, entendre Ton histoire, inventer avec Toi un endroit où dormir et rire, si nous en avons le cœur, de la maison qui n’existe plus, des livres enfouis sous les décombres avec les histoires que nous avons aimées ou détestées” (Berrouet et al. 139). Additionally reaffirming the importance of incorporating the historical with the new, Lyonel Trouillot, like Syto Cavé, insists upon the writing project as an opportunity to emphasize the presence of life and to reclaim the effects of the disaster. Trouillot writes that, “Avec nos morts, avec nos mots, nous qui sommes revenus du déluge de pierre, écrivons pour trouver ‘une place dans le monde des vivants’” (Berrouet et al. 54).

By acting as a means for solidarity and as an inward and outward affirmation of life and worth that makes use of the past in order to reformulate and reimagine
the present, verbal expression also paves the road to psychological and material reconstruction. In order to properly, and collectively, carry out this project, one must directly face the disaster and recognize it as such. In a short piece adapted to French from Creole, Jocelyne Trouillot-Lévy uses the story of a young girl, Marie Rose, who experiences the earthquake (the *goudougoudou*) and who does not understand why the adults surrounding her avoid the real issue by not calling it by its proper name. Trouillot-Lévy writes: “Des voix hurlent: Voilà ‘la Chose’ qui recommence . . . . Marie Rose connaît le nom de ‘la Chose’: un tremblement de terre. Pourquoi les adultes refusent-ils de l’appeler par son nom? Ils sont allés à l’école comme elle” (Berrouet et al. 154, 157). Avoiding naming, here expressed by verbalization, of catastrophe results in an inability to effectively move past it. “La Chose” thus becomes a vague and formless horror that becomes impossible to ever conquer.

In opposition to an evasion of troublesome situations, Saint-Eloi offers an explanation of the Creole and French expressions, *Se lavi*¹⁰ and *C’est la vie*, comparing their utterances to the expression of an ideology that is capable of accepting all types of situations that befall one in order to work with them to produce the best possible outcome. Saint-Eloi describes that the purpose of *Se lavi* is “Pour accepter la vie comme elle vient. Pour ne pas forcer le destin. Pour être capable de tout accueillir d’un même élan: bien ou mal, peine ou joie, bon temps ou mauvais temps” (Saint-Eloi 70). He bolsters this position as a cultural practice that

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¹⁰ “La Chose” combines euphemism and hyperbole in order to represent the unnamable.

¹⁰ The inclusion of Creole vocabulary and ideas in this text is essential to Saint-Eloi’s goal of expressing Haitian culture through its own words.
is apparent in the Haitian people’s spiritual and religious beliefs that effectuates their perspective of a world in constant transformation in which things are not always what they seem, in which, “la mort est un rite de passage, une transition vers un autre état” (Saint-Eloi 259). In Haïti kenbe la’s postface, structured as a letter from Saint-Eloi to his editor, Saint-Eloi declares that his goal in writing the text was to show this dual-reality, whose functioning is made possible by the compatible elements of destruction and creation, and to assert the persistence of humanity’s resilience:

Je me mets à lire ou à écrire pour oublier que la terre, qui sait nourrir, peut aussi trembler et tuer... J’ai écrit ce livre pour dire que la vie ne tremble jamais. Un peuple debout cherche sa route, à la lueur des bougies. Un peuple debout cherche de l’eau et du pain, et enterrer ses morts. Car les morts savent traverser les jardins et frapper aux fenêtres des rêves pour amener aux vivants l’espoir et les gros lots de la loterie nationale (Saint-Eloi 267).

The psychological impact of disaster, including feelings of isolation, hopelessness, and powerlessness, within a community are often underestimated or neglected. Rodney Saint-Eloi’s text, alongside Chris Rose’s 1 Dead in Attic, argues for the need of a cultural or spiritual reconstruction that could in turn motivate physical rebuilding. Saint-Eloi explores the complex and profound impact of the earthquake upon psychology in both general and culturally specific terms when he describes la terre as:

un chant d’espérance. La terre est l’hymne des vivants, l’ancrage des corps à la racine, l’ombilic du monde.... La terre est une amie qui protège. La terre
The physical instability of the earth also disturbs one’s feelings of comfort and security, necessarily affecting one’s perceptions of the world. Lyonel Trouillot writes of phantom feelings of vertigo following the seism, expressing his own disillusionment at the diagnoses of medical specialists who are unable to offer solutions. He relates the “sensation de déséquilibre constant, de vertige, que beaucoup de personnes disent éprouver. C’est psychologique, répond le psychologue. Merci de l’information, monsieur le spécialiste” (Berrouet et al. 33).

Reinforcing the need for psychological and ideological rehabilitation, Dani Laferrière writes that without the emotional, the physical would be empty and lifeless since “une maison n’est pas un abri. Et une ville doit avoir une âme pour être habitable” (Tout bouge 126). Laferrière also expresses a hope that the new Haitian âme will be a source of cooperation for the country itself as well as for its relationship with the rest of the world, thus ensuring its future success and prosperity. The cultivated esprit that he advocates would enable Haiti to “quitter cette mentalité d’insulaire qui nous garde au chaud dans une stérile auto-satisfaction. Une nouvelle ville qui nous forcerait à entrer dans une nouvelle vie” (Tout bouge 163).

Chris Rose makes a similar appeal to New Orleanians and Americans alike in his 1 Dead in Attic, in which he enumerates the losses that were suffered following the storm. He of course includes the physical and material losses such as homes, places of work, schools, and hospitals, but focuses most of his attention on the “less
tangible assets” that were dissolved such as “peace of mind, security, serenity, ability to concentrate, notions of romance, sobriety, sanity and hope” (Rose xvi). He often mentions the disturbances of a “collective psyche” that has been affected by the consequences of the flood itself, by the subsequent threat of Hurricane Rita, and by the despairingly vacant city whose residents were unable to return for months on end. He writes that, “the isolation can be maddening. The car radio just tells you bad things. You just want to find someone, anyone, and ask, ‘How ‘bout them Saints?’” (Rose 26).

The effects of loss and isolation described by Rose are no small matter. In his text, he consistently refers to the overwhelmingly large number of people who are undergoing psychiatric treatment and being given prescription medications for what he calls “this thing, this affliction, this affinity for forgetfulness, absentmindedness, confusion, laughing in inappropriate circumstances, crying when the wrong song comes on the radio, behaving in odd and contrary ways” (Rose 51). As the text progresses, it becomes clear that Rose himself is also having difficulties in balancing his mental and emotional states and in coping with the decaying state of his beloved city and its population. The endless rehashing of the storm and its aftermath, which lasted for months and is arguably still not resolved, has also had its effects upon New Orleanians. Rose bemoans that the survivors of the floods have been locally and nationally labeled as victims. Rather than focusing upon the positive aspects of life in the recovering city, people only seem to want to replay the events and repercussions of the disaster. Rose writes that, “Not only is The Horror the only thing anyone around here ever talks about anymore, it’s also
the only thing everyone Out There wants to talk about when they meet you” (Rose 84).

Discussions of “The Horror” may, however, be beneficial. As a journalist reporting for New Orleans’ Times-Picayune newspaper, Rose comments upon the eerie situation that he experienced while documenting Anderson Cooper and Dr. Phil, who were in turn documenting the disaster that had befallen his home city. In spite of the oddness of the situation and the propensity for the spreading of deceitful information, Rose reacts by pronouncing that at least, “One thing’s for sure, our story is being told” (Rose 20). The importance of the story’s telling is essential to both the livelihood of the city and to its people. Rose for instance writes that the most curative practice for people to initiate is talking with one another and establishing a feeling of helpfulness and solidarity. Interestingly, he describes bartenders as performing invaluable social duties, and even psychiatric care, by patiently and understandingly listening to what patrons have to say: “All anyone around here wants is someone to listen to their stories” (Rose 54).

The importance of exchange, here manifested by verbal communication, seems to be the glue that holds together the post-disaster society. It implies a reappropriation of events, personal and communal, which may lead to both psychological and physical restoration. Rose writes that immediately following the storm, “We sit and some of us drink and some of us smoke and together we solve the problems of the city—since no one in any official capacity seems able or inclined to do so” (Rose 48). This response, of taking control of the disaster and of its recovery,
becomes a direct counteraction to misplaced interests on the national level, governmental and private.11

Rose’s answer to this conundrum is, in addition to his text itself, a wholehearted support of New Orleans’ cultural festivals, such as Mardi Gras, French Quarter Festival, JazzFest, and Voodoo Fest, which have consistently brought attention and tourism to the city. The benefits of these festivals are not solely a collective expression of recovery, but are also a means to bolstering communal solidarity. Rose writes that, “The unequivocal success of these events and the community pride they ignited were the surest signs we’ve seen that (A) we can indeed be saved and (B) we are indeed worth saving” (Rose 193). The togetherness of community was an essential, and traditionally New Orleanian, activity that became an element of utmost value in regard to the city’s psychological and physical revival. Rose includes a chapter in his text entitled “We Raze, and Raise, and Keep Pushing Forward,” that celebrates the city’s cooperative spirit. He describes a simple neighborhood get-together as “a gathering of souls and survivors to commemorate just being alive” (Rose 211). In an eloge to the city and it’s indomitable and harmonious spirit, he writes that “we move on, move up, our faith in government washed out to sea with all that floodwater and our hopes for recovery rooted in our reliance on one another and the triumph of the human spirit. They are our best and only chance” (Rose 212).

11 “I can’t hear what they’re saying on TV. I don’t know what they’re talking about. Why aren’t they talking about the elephant [in the room]? . . . . Finally I found a magazine with a blaring headline—’What Went Wrong?’—and I thought, finally, something about us. It turns out, thought, it was People magazine and ‘What Went Wrong’ was not about FEMA or the levees or the flood, but about Renee Zellweger and Kenny Chesney” (Rose 50).
Rose’s inclusion of the power of these events, both public and private, is not arbitrary. The first post-Katrina Mardi Gras was hotly contested by New Orleans citizens and outsiders alike due to both its expensive and joyful nature. Rose completely dismisses any reluctance for the city to participate in the holiday by writing: “Mardi Gras. It’s not on the table. It’s not a point of negotiation or a bargaining chip. We’re going to have it, and that’s that. End of discussion . . . . We need to send a message that we are still New Orleans . . . we embody the triumph of the human spirit” (Rose 127-128). Rose consistently refers to this “triumph of the human spirit” that exists in New Orleans by equating its existence by the various art forms that the city has traditionally produced. He lauds the second-line as an ultimate and spontaneous public expression of joy and even mentions one of the city’s most famous brass bands, Rebirth, who famously plays for a packed house biweekly at the Maple Leaf Bar on Oak Street. He chronicles his own attendance of one of the group’s shows and compares the experience as his own personal rebirth from his struggle with depression. He recalls “staring into a wall of horns whose music is so muscular that it almost takes on a physical manifestation and reaches out and beats you about the head and screams in your face, ’You are alive, boy! Do you understand?’ And I do. And I am home again” (Rose 269).

The ultimate goal of Rose’s text seems to be that of a journalistic countermeasure to the false popular media representations of the storm’s aftermath and of the state of the city of New Orleans. Two of his later chapters, “Eternal Dome Nation” and “Say What’s So, Joe,” both affirm his goals to unite the city’s and the nation’s population into a corps of solidarity and cooperation in order to ensure the
survival and prosperity of New Orleans as a cultural gem and as a place full of life. “Eternal Dome Nation” addresses the national and local controversy surrounding the reopening of the Superdome for NFL Saints games. Scarred by its reputation as a resourceless holding ground for hurricane evacuees, the Superdome was nevertheless refurbished at great expense. In response to commentaries from across the States that maligned the dome’s reopening as a case of misplaced priorities and funds, Rose maintains that it’s sealance and closure would be even more unfortunate. He argues that if they did not reopen the dome for Saints games, then they would also not be able to reopen it for “anything else that happens there in the course of a normal year\textsuperscript{12} and that generates massive spending, jobs, and activity in the community” (Rose 311). What Rose wants to convey is that New Orleans is a viable and vibrant city that is in desperate need of a return to normalcy.

“Say What’s So, Joe,” is another example of epistolary exhortation in which Rose addresses “Joe,” the average American, and entreats him to report back to family and friends on New Orleans’ post-Katrina state. He asks Joe to send America a message that may be a little hard to follow due to its complexity:

Tell everyone that the city is rocking, it’s alive and kicking with music and food and all that good-timing crazy stuff that Americans have come to expect when they visit here. The fact is, you can spend a week downtown and in the Quarter and the Marigny and the Garden District and Uptown—the small, old part of the city to which tourists usually confine themselves—and hardly see any manifestations of the storm, the flood, and its damages. Tell people that, Joe. Tell them that New Orleans is still the best city in America. Tell them to come see for themselves that we’re happy, joyful, and celebratory still. Then

\textsuperscript{12} “. . . the Bayou Classic, the Sugar Bowl, Tulane football, the state high school football championships, the Essence Music Festival, rock concerts, religious revivals, car shows, home and garden shows” (Rose 311).
tell them this: New Orleans is a broken, suffering mess, weakened and scared. We’re not ashamed to say it, Joe. We’re afraid . . . . Everything is fine here. But it’s not fine (Rose 298-299).

CONCLUSION

While these chronicle literatures do present accounts of humanity and cooperation in the face of extreme adversity, they do not over-romanticize their respective situations, offering instead testimony and personal responses to the disasters themselves as well as to the chaotic post-disaster worlds. For example, *Haiti parmi les vivants* and *1 Dead in Attic* write of the prevalence of a foul odor attributed to the number of dead who were unable to immediately be recovered and buried. Rose writes of the inability to properly represent the sensory reality of life in post-Katrina New Orleans: “Stink is a situation that TV and radio cannot successfully portray, olfactory being one of the senses not yet conquered by the airwaves or internet” (Rose 46). Chris Rose’s *1 Dead in Attic* itself is dedicated to Thomas Coleman, a man who died in his attic in New Orleans’ 8th Ward during the hurricane. Rose explains this dedication, as both choice for the title of his chronicles and as representation of unknown, distorted, or misreported stories, by describing that:

those Byzantine markings and symbols that the cops and the National Guard spray-painted on all the houses around here, cryptic communications that
tell the story of who or what was or wasn’t inside the house when the floodwater rose to the ceiling. In some cases, there’s no interpretation needed. There’s one I pass on St. Roch Avenue in the 8th Ward at least once a week. It says: 1 DEAD IN ATTI, (Rose 56).

These chronicle literatures both refute and echo media outlets’ highlighted stories of violence and disaster that contribute to popular, sensationalized notions of places like New Orleans and Haiti. They allow communities to express and declare their own histories, thus actively engaging in the political project of confirming a cultural identity that is not popularly assumed and perceived. This process of réhistorisation allows the author, who makes use of his or her experience, to both recreate and address the disaster while adding the human element of hope and beauty that can also coexist in such times. As Chris Rose writes, “Disaster can be like that. It makes death, despair . . . and art” (Rose 249). Verbal expression, presented in either written or spoken form, is used as a willing and necessary means to communicate within and without a community in order to organize collective cooperation that must be established and supported before any physical restoration is possible.
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