

INTRODUCTION

Moving Forward Post-Hurricane Dorian: The Necessity for Public, Private, and Individual Collaboration in the Face of Climate Change

Ian A. Bethell-Bennett

 0000-0002-8958-9581

Saskia M. Fürst

 0000-0002-8085-959X

University of The Bahamas

Introduction

Mere months after Hurricane Dorian devastated various islands of the Caribbean and impacted the eastern cities of the United States, the SARS-CoV-2 virus, better known as COVID-19, has caused the most serious health crisis our species has faced in generations. COVID-19 overshadowed disasters in many parts of the world as governments and the media focused their attention on the virus's spread, mortality rates, and the race for a vaccine. In fact, the vaccines developed against COVID-19 have proven to be a nigh-miraculous feat; developed through international collaboration, they were created at an incredible speed because of the shared interest in preventing further death and loss. It is remarkable to see what our species can do when allied and aligned toward a singular end. Indeed, the ever-present dangers of climate change and its global impacts should demand just as much attention and collaboration. Yet, COVID-19 has drawn attention and funding away from other causes, such as relief efforts in The Bahamas after Hurricane Dorian.

Right now, The Bahamas is still reeling from Hurricane Dorian, still mourning the dead and lost, still repairing damaged buildings,

and still recovering from the psychological trauma. The official death toll stands at 74 at the time of writing, although 245 people remain missing more than a year later (Reliefweb, 2020). The Inter-American Development Bank estimates that \$3.4 billion in USD in damages occurred in northern Bahamas, which is approximately a quarter of the Bahamian GDP (Inter-American Development Bank, 2019). According to a Sol Relief report in April 2021, less than a quarter of homes in Green Turtle Cay and Marsh Harbour, Abaco are inhabitable and local costs to renovate and rebuild homes remain expensive, with little support from the Bahamian government for residents (Sol Relief, 2021, para 1). It is easy to forget, with or without a global pandemic, that the next natural disaster is a question of when, not if, as the annual hurricane season begins June 1st and ends November 30th. Given the highly destructive nature of Hurricane Dorian, both the public and private sector need to be better prepared—structurally, economically, and emotionally—for future catastrophes. As the articles in this special section of the *International Journal of Bahamian Studies (IJBS)* focusing on the impacts of Hurricane Dorian note, the Government of The Bahamas can no longer be so lax in its

preparation strategies for managing natural disasters. Private companies, non-governmental organizations, and individuals will and must be included in both the preparation and recovery from such disasters, at national and international levels. Furthermore, support structures should be in place for those very volunteers and individuals who are directly and indirectly affected to alleviate the emotional and psychological trauma surviving and supporting survivors of such events can cause. The Bahamas, like other Small Island Developing States (SIDS), is especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change; therefore, understanding and learning from the lack of preparedness and the ongoing responses to the impacts of Hurricane Dorian will prove crucial for better preparation for future disasters due to global warming.

In SIDS, life is always political—or so it seems. Silences and speech become understood as political acts. One's ability to speak out against social exclusion or marginalization is always circumscribed by a danger of it being understood as a political act of defiance against a government. These political challenges often mean that people do not discuss the inefficiencies of local governments or are unwilling to document social injustices because they understand that they are risking exposure. This special section of the journal hopes to document what has often been obfuscated or denied by those who claim that there is no way to have been prepared for such an event, though, for each of the last few years, hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes have been gathering force, frequency, and ferocity, globally.

While the body of literature on responses to natural disasters and criticisms of how governments handle this in SIDS is growing, to date, it is mostly focused on Puerto Rico and Barbuda. Lloréns and Stanchich's (2019) article "Water is Life, but the Colony is a

Necropolis: Environmental Terrains of Struggle in Puerto Rico" documents much of the corruption that surfaced around Hurricanes Irma and Maria as communities had no access to potable water. In "Imaging Disaster: Puerto Rico through the Eye of Hurricane Maria" (2018), Lloréns further captures communities' experiences with the representations and the uneven impacts of Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Focusing solely on Hurricane Maria, *Aftershocks of Disaster: Puerto Rico Before and After the Storm* by Bonilla and LeBrón (2019) brings together accounts of many people already affected by policies and structural failures that forced them to live in substandard conditions, which were then worsened after the hurricane hit Puerto Rico. Meanwhile, Gould and Lewis's (2018) "Green Gentrification and Disaster Capitalism in Barbuda" discusses the green gentrification that remaps Barbuda in the wake of Hurricane Irma in 2017. While these articles give voice to the concerns of those in Puerto Rico and Barbuda, there is little published from The Bahamas on the impacts of previous hurricanes, apart from the damages to the environment. Decades ago, Westgate (1978) published an article on "Hurricane Response and Hurricane Perception in The Commonwealth of The Bahamas," meteorologist Wayne Neely has published several books on the history, naming, and formation of hurricanes in The Bahamas, including *The Major Hurricanes to Affect The Bahamas* (2006), and Shultz et al. (2020) have recently published a brief perspective on "Double Environmental Injustice: Climate Change, Hurricane Dorian, and The Bahamas." Thus, this special section will address the social, political, public, and personal responses to Hurricane Dorian as a way of understanding potential future responses to similar disasters that are applicable not only to The Bahamas, but also to other SIDS, to spark further conversations and lead to positive socio-political change.

Unfortunately, the governments of SIDS often disguise or draw attention away from aspects of structural violence already in place due to lack of preparedness for, in this case, hurricanes and other natural (and now partially anthropogenic) disasters. Klein's work on disaster capitalism, particularly her reporting on New Orleans after Katrina (2007) and her book *The Shock Doctrine* (2010), points out how governments use natural disasters as an opportunity to implement neoliberal policies. As Nixon (2011) notes in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, first comes the inequality and slow institutional violence against the poor, then the natural event, then the disaster after the natural event, exacerbated by human activity. Here, governments use natural disasters as opportunities to clear out and gentrify poor communities. Engaging in works produced beyond The Bahamas encourages people to understand the political use of exceptionalism that denies similarities while also noting the regional experiences that unite us. This international exchange of ideas is especially important when looking at natural disasters since such discussions about the humanity of design, disaster capitalism, and responses to natural weather events that become disasters through flawed recovery efforts are rare—if held at all—in The Bahamas, except perhaps around groups who work in disaster response agencies and organizations. What is even rarer are discussions about human displacement and cultural erasure in the wake of a disaster. What has emerged, especially since Hurricane Joaquin in 2015, is the political manoeuvre where the Government of The Bahamas would rather move people from depopulated southern islands to the capital, New Providence, after hurricanes have ravaged their homes than to rebuild (see Adderley, 2018).

While some of the essays in this special

section of *IJBS* speak to inclusion and to residents coming together to support each other, there remains silence around other important topics. Migrant communities and certain groups of survivors, despite local support and aid, have been picked up and forcibly moved to other islands and countries by the Bahamian government. Stories of undocumented persons remain under-told, although complaints emerge that they receive too much attention and misrepresent the government's ability to deal with the situation (Charles, 2020). In some instances, justification and vitriol have been deployed to manage the discourse of Haitians in The Bahamas surviving The Mudd, a shantytown community in Abaco. However, The Mudd is not the only place of silent exclusion, nor is it exclusively populated by Haitians. Some parts of Grand Bahama had similar experiences to The Mudd. Sadly, since undocumented individuals are invisible, their lost lives were not always documented in a similar manner to Bahamians and legal residents, so their stories remain largely untold, as noted by Rolle (2019) in an article in *The Tribune*. We have witnessed the failure of a heavily red-taped (post-)colonial bureaucracy to function effectively for all residents of The Bahamas, regardless of their immigration status.

Looking forward, so what has been done since Hurricane Dorian? Funerals have been held for the documented 'undocumented' bodies in the makeshift morgue on Abaco (Smith-Cartwright, 2020) and non-profit organizations and the Bahamian government have invested in rebuilding efforts and increasing economic revenue possibilities in Grand Bahama and the Abacos. On an international level, many non-governmental organizations have mobilized funding and aid for the people of The Bahamas who lost so much due to Hurricane Dorian, while, simultaneously, The Bahamas has been featured in *The New Yorker* and called to task

for its mishandling of the Haitians with irregular migration status living in The Mudd and Pigeon Pea communities pre- and post-Hurricane Dorian due to structural racism and xenophobia (Baussan et al., 2021). Further, the exhibition at the National Art Gallery, *Refuge* (on display from December 19, 2019 through March 29, 2020 <https://nagb.org.bs/refuge>), captured some of the experiences surrounding Hurricane Dorian, and then these articles add to the ongoing discussions, post-Hurricane Dorian.

The articles in this special section were conceived, written, and edited in a relatively short time period—thanks to the hard work and diligence of the *IJBS* managing editorial team and the contributors. Ranging in discipline, style, and goal, the contributions in this section all offer insight into theoretical and practical ways that The Bahamas can move forward, better prepared to face future disasters. It further aims to (re)voice and document the varied experiences of communities and individuals to create a national archive on Hurricane Dorian that extends internationally.

In the first article in this special section, Adelle Thomas, Cathleen LeGrand, and Susan H. Larson discuss the value in having volunteer groups assist the public sector in responding to national disasters through a close study of the Core Group. They note that volunteers will inevitably be motivated to assist in the recovery of national climate disasters, so governments, like that of The Bahamas, should integrate and effectively make use of this resource in its emergency management system.

The second article in this section, by Nastassia Pratt, analyses the areas for adaptation capacity relating to housing and building (re)development, national systems of sheltering and evacuation pre- and post-hurricanes, and how vulnerable communities are particularly susceptible to injustices post-

natural disasters using Hurricane Dorian as a case study in The Bahamas in “The Responsibility of Community Sustainability from the Frontlines of Climate Change.” Pratt argues that these areas, particularly, need to be approached differently by the Bahamian government. She advocates for including locals and local communities to rebuild and design homes and buildings, relocate those whose homes are not salvageable, provide (better) shelters during a hurricane, design evacuation strategies and plans, and protect vulnerable communities, like The Mudd and Pigeon Pea of Abaco along with assistance from the private sector. She stresses the importance of collaboration between the public and private sector and individuals in achieving these goals for better preparation for national disasters in the future.

Finally, Ian A. Bethell-Bennett provides an auto-ethnographic overview of the structural violence, slow violence, and spatial (in)justice facing (often silenced and unvoiced) communities due to Hurricane Dorian in “Dorian Unmaking Space: Policy and Place and Dislocation.” Echoing the previous articles, Bethell-Bennett comments on the loss of property, community, and connections to past stories, that is caused by a hurricane. Furthermore, the physical and emotional violence that usually occurs afterward, unseen and unacknowledged by those not willing to speak about the unspeakable, are given a voice and a space to be seen, even if only partly, including some visual images taken by Bethell-Bennett of Abaco post-Hurricane Dorian.

In the face of something so horrific as the aftermath of a Category 5+ hurricane, it is easy to lapse into the comfort of numbers, the way they numb the mind to the visceral reality of loss. A single death, by itself, is tragic. A young child swept out to sea in front of their loved ones. A body pinned under a concrete wall, lying there for months while emergency crews scour the landscape. A

person trapped inside their house as the water levels rise to the ceiling. Each of these held out as a particular event is tragic. But multiply that by several factors until the individual tragedies number in the thousands and they become abstract, mere digits and numerals. Through this special section of

IJBS, we wanted to give names back to the faceless numbers and, hopefully, offer a path forward to better facing the inevitable increase in natural and, in the current pandemic state we find ourselves in, man-made disasters.

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