

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Danger of the Extended Hand: A Critique of Humanitarian Aid in Makenzy Orcel's *L'Ombre Animale*

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Since the 2010 earthquake that destroyed Port-au-Prince, there have been a number of inquiries detailing the material failures of the multi-national humanitarian aid response. Studies have focused on the misuse of funds by large international organizations, and they have attempted to trace the donations made by individuals and governments alike. Still others indicate the neocolonial manner in which Haitians were themselves cut out of negotiations regarding *how* their nation should be rebuilt. Such criticisms are of particular interest, given the 40,000 Haitians still living under tarps more than eight years after the quake.

Despite the documented disappointments of the post-earthquake aid initiative, North Atlantic aid workers and organizations enjoy a privileged position in the collective unconscious of the global North. As is becoming increasingly clear, “Aid” often does more harm than good, whether due to oversight, greed, or the momentum of the global wealth and power disparity. Makenzy Orcel's 2016 novel *L'Ombre animale* represents foreign development workers—not as the long-awaited rescuers of Haiti—but as wolves come to feed off the precarity and vulnerability of a rural Haitian village. In this article, I maintain that, through the historically and mythologically salient figure of the wolf, Orcel systematically questions the moral capital attributed to the white savior.

**Keywords:** foreign aid; foreign development; Haiti; Haitian exceptionalism; Haitian resilience; white savior narrative; marvelous realism

## Introduction

“According to the collective imaginary and Vodou mythology,” claims Makenzy Orcel, “the dead see everything. The corpse, the dead person, is in the land of truth, and the living in the land of lies” (Librairie Mollat).<sup>1</sup> *Je*, the cadaver-narrator of Orcel's 2016 novel *L'Ombre animale*, possesses just this quality of discernment. Speaking from beyond the grave, she recounts the numerous traumatic events and conditions which have shaped her family and rural Haitian community. As Orcel suggests, her death affords her a clear view of the foreign development workers who arrive in her community in the middle of the novel. *Je* sees through their sheep's clothing, casting them as wolves in no uncertain terms; over the course of several chapters, these foreigners ignore, exploit, and even kill Haitian villagers, all under the guise of a helpful—read civilizing—intervention. By representing development workers as a pack of hungry, instinct-driven wolves, Orcel mobilizes Vodou myths of the *loup garou* as well as the Atlantic post-slavery symbol of the dog in a critique that locates the colonial roots of foreign aid.

The influx of NGOs and IGOs to Haiti has been the subject of stringent critique in recent years. The global relief effort following the 2010 earthquake in Haiti was enormous in terms of personnel and resources. 22,000 US troops were sent, private donations totaled \$1.4 billion in the United States, with \$5.2 billion donated worldwide, followed by a pledge of \$10 billion from foreign governments for Haiti's reconstruction. Despite (or perhaps because of) the scale of the aid response, many have criticized its ineffectiveness. This large sum of money, if given directly to Haitian individuals, regardless of their impact from the quake, would have amounted to \$1,600 per capita (Katz *Big Truck* 20). In effect, however, the majority of donations reverted back to donor nations, either directly to their governments, or to private organizations (Quigley). Eight years after the earthquake, there are nearly 40,000 displaced persons still living in camps in Haiti, and the relief effort has come under fire for the cholera epidemic introduced by UN troops in October 2010,

<sup>1</sup> “Selon l'imaginaire collectif, selon la mythologie vodou, celui ou celle qui est mort comprend tout. Le cadavre, le mort, il est dans le lieu de la vérité et les vivants dans le lieu des mensonges.” All translations, unless otherwise stated, are mine.

which led to a death toll of at least 10,000 (International Organization for Migration; Katz "U.N. Admits Role"). Far from a seamless improvement, the massive and ill-coordinated relief and reconstruction effort has constituted, for many Haitians, a second disaster following the earthquake, a "humanitarian aftershock" (Schuller 3). The influx of foreign bodies to Haiti following the earthquake meant a further stress on limited resources. It also reinforced a now age-old story in which Haitians and their seemingly endless cycle of disasters elicit "a sort of wearied collective head-shaking"; a story in which the US and other donor nations are confirmed as the stable, capable, and, most importantly, benevolent force, ready to rescue their southern neighbor (Glover, "New Narratives" 199).

Orcel's criticisms of foreign development in Haiti are not new, or unique. His innovation, I will argue in this paper, lies in his mobilization of collective memory and folklore in order to equate this contemporary Haitian experience with that of pre-revolutionary slavery. He calls into question the altruism of humanitarianism by merging the aid worker with the wolf, a symbol of ultimate white oppression, thus disrupting the narrative of the white savior. This narrative, in which "whiteness is associated with progress, power, and higher status," and "those in the global South ... have lower capacity for development", congratulates the humanitarian for his selflessness, prizing the emotional recompense of relief work over its effectiveness (Bandyopadhyay and Patil 652). Ultimately, Orcel clarifies that both the savior and the predator depend upon the vulnerability of their subject, which leads me to consider the relationship between Haitian weakness in North Atlantic media, and their relative disenfranchisement from the relief and rehabilitation efforts in their own nation. In what follows, I first discuss the multivalent symbol of the wolf in Orcel's novel. I then establish a correlation between Orcel's wolves and the foreign aid presence in Haiti, drawing parallels between Orcel's negative portrayal of the intruders, and scholarly critiques of the real-world aid initiative. In the third section, I consider the relationship between the normalization of Haitian suffering, and the neocolonial overtones of the foreign rehabilitation of post-earthquake Haiti.

### White Benevolence and the Big, Bad Wolf

The oppressive and invasive presence of the wolves is but one of the traumatic moments in *Je's* life, which she recounts in slippery, rambling prose, separated only by commas or blank spaces. This particular, breathless rhythm attests to *Je's* compulsive need to dispense with so much truth, and creatively expresses what Laënnec Hurbon has referred to as a state of '*catastrophe permanente*,' (8). In keeping with Orcel's oneiric writing style throughout *L'Ombre animale*, the wolves are difficult to decipher. With no physical description, Orcel's wolves occupy a liminal space between human and animal. They are only motivated by instinct, and yet they hunt as do humans, on horseback. They devour human flesh, and yet they manipulate political elections and run factories. We are left to wonder: are these humans animalized in their instinctual motivations and actions? Are they animals anthropomorphized and implicated in neoliberal global development? In keeping with the early Haitian writers of the marvelous real, Orcel uses the multivalent symbol of the wolf to "[endow] the concrete and the tangible with a figurative meaning" (Dash 66). In writing the development workers as wolves, Orcel engages with a particularly Haitian iteration of the genre through which Michael Dash has argued "enslaved peoples might have in their own imagination so reordered their reality as to reach beyond the tangible and concrete to acquire a new re-creative sensibility which could aid in the harsh battle for survival" (66). As I argue below, Orcel mobilizes the Vodou character of the *loup garou* as well as the loaded post-slavery symbol of the dog in a critique of the aid initiative in Haiti.

While the wolf is not an integral part of the Haitian imaginative landscape, the *loup garou* is. The *loup garou* in Haitian folklore is the master of disguise, possessing the capacity to shapeshift (Simpson 219). As opposed to the common European legends of the werewolf, in which a man unwillingly transforms into a wolf in the moonlight, the Haitian *loup garou* intentionally uses his lycanthropic faculty for evil; he is able to "change his form because the skin he uses in the daytime is not the same one that he uses at night" (Simpson 223). Like the *loup garou*, Orcel's wolves have dressed themselves in sheep's clothing, so to speak. They arrive in the fictional village under the guise of helpful and selfless aid, offering a much-needed development to this "backwards", rural space. Orcel mobilizes the Vodou legend to suggest that, like their fictional counterparts, the Aid workers are only disguised as altruistic, and that their motivations and the ultimate effect of their actions are harmful. By drawing on Haitian legend to make his point, he gestures towards the Haitian canon of marvelous realism and subverts Western values of "intellectualisation", promoting a "counter-culture of the imagination" (Dash 67, 66).

However, the *loup* is not only *loup garou*, but also specifically canine. The figure of the dog has a particular salience in Antillean literature; during the Atlantic slave trade, large dogs were transported to the Americas alongside slaves in order to serve as their keepers. The mastiff was assigned the role of the intermediary, ordered by the slaveholder to chase and even maim runaway slaves (Boisseron, "Afro-Dog" 20). If, as Bénédicte Boisseron writes, there is a "subtle association between the dog and the traumatic past of slavery," it is owing to the fact that plantation dogs were trained to respond violently only to Black bodies and were employed in the intentional mutilation of runaway slaves ("A Creole Line of Escape" 209; "Afro-Dog" 20, 24). The dog, thus, signifies the trauma of slavery and its centuries-long aftermath of economic and political oppression.

While Boisseron has commented on the use of the dog to define the Black man as inhuman, Colin Dayan reads the definition of humanity through the legal ownership of dogs and slaves. A dog cannot be entirely owned because of his untamed nature, his wildness (Dayan 214). On the other hand, a slave can only exist as such (as property) if his

wildness, or free will, is denied (Boisseron, “Afro-Dog” 21). A dog is, as Boisseron writes, “a hybrid entity, neither completely domesticated like farmed animals nor fully wild like wolves” (“Afro-Dog” 21). Through his use of the symbol of the wolf, Orcel nods at the history of dehumanizing slaves (and later Black bodies) through a hierarchy of white man/dog/black man, but also affords the foreigner the position of *wild* dog – one that is not and has never been under the command of another. He simultaneously draws attention to the use of dogs to undermine the value of human life and indicates that former colonial powers continue to transcend the confines of ownership. The wolves have inherited their self-possession and, like the slave-owner, exhibit pure id; they are free to serve their instinctual drive with no one to answer to.

The wolves, emblems of ultimate free will and evil disguised, are positioned as the representation of the international development and aid response in Haiti. From the limited knowledge afforded the reader, we know that the wolves have arrived from a distance, and that their presence in the fictional village is explained and excused on the basis of their good intentions (218–19, 215). Orcel likens the network of wolves to the many intergovernmental organizations present after the earthquake. All of the wolves, and thus all of the villagers, report back to the GLI, the *Grand Loup International*, a powerful headquarters which has the final word on all matters related to the wolves’ work (229). They open a factory in which they put the village to work. The conditions within the factory mimic a modern-day industrial slavery, complete with Bentham’s panopticon (Bonilla 159). The factory mirrors allegations that foreign development profits from the labor of those they claim to help. In fact, most of the money promised Haiti eventually made its way back into the pockets of US companies and government (Bonilla 159). Funds were chipped away in part due to transfer charges: as money moved from one aid organization to another, fees were incurred by one or both groups, slowly reducing the reserves intended for Haitian relief (Sullivan). The racialized power structure within Orcel’s factory, in which Haitians are forced to do menial labor while white foreigners are cast as their overseers, illustrates the accusation that real-world aid agencies enacted neocolonial structures by promoting particularly green foreigners above Haitians who, themselves, had intimate knowledge of the needs of their communities (Schuller 16).<sup>2</sup>

Orcel effectively troubles the association of foreign aid and benevolence by describing the wolves as predatory creatures, driven by instinct alone. They are categorically limited as a species who “ne savent que se laisser guider par leur instinct, leur intarissable soif” (210).<sup>3</sup> Orcel’s use of the term *espèce*, coupled with the intruders’ incapacity to reflect, situates the wolves in a taxonomy outside the human realm. They salivate, follow the odor of carrion, vomit and re-ingest their victims (210, 218, 223). Orcel’s effect in locating development workers outside humanity is two-fold. First, he elides “predator” and “perpetrator.” Because the agents of heinous and violent crimes have historically been described as inhuman, Orcel’s choice to represent aid workers as limited by animal instinct and predatory thirst inscribes the foreigners in the category of perpetrator. Thus, he necessarily interrupts the white savior narrative and its attendant association of moral irreprehensibility.

Second, in an Atlantic, post-slavery context, the dehumanization of the white man via canine comparison is reminiscent of the centuries-old dehumanization of Black slaves and their descendants in the wake of chattel slavery.<sup>4</sup> Dogs have been instrumental in the devalorization of Black lives; the two are intertwined in the Americas through a “deeply rooted tradition of conjoined racialization and animalization” (Boisseron, “Afro-Dog” 18–19). Therefore, Orcel’s animalization of white foreigners plays on an established assumption that slaves (and later descendants of slaves) are worth less than dogs. Orcel calls this history to mind while enacting a reversal such that white and non-human are associated via a shared cruelty. By assigning the same pattern to the non-other, the white race, his association stands out as un-natural because it has not been normalized through use. Drawing attention to the strangeness of this symbolic pairing of animal and white man, Orcel exposes the invisible and strategic pairing of animal and black man. Ultimately this gesture allows Orcel to locate modern humanitarian aid and development in a timeline of capitalist exploitation of slaves and their descendants.

Like the bondsman’s dogs, the wolves are driven to hunt their prey, but rather than blood or fear, they are drawn to the scent of precarity. The predatory wolf is likened to the white savior when Orcel describes the lengths to which the wolves will go in order to capture their prey. He writes:

Quelle odeur de charogne aurait pu les attirer, combien de péages avaient-ils brûlés, de forêts et de ciels traversés, ils arrivaient d’aussi loin que notre imagination, et les animaux de leur trempe ne reculent jamais devant la forte pestilence d’une proie, sont prêts à tout, leurs chevaux et leurs 4x4 auraient le mérite d’atteindre sans la moindre difficulté les plus hauts sommets de l’indigence et de la précarité humaines ... à eux il fallait tout le sang, toute la chair, tout le pain, tout le reste, si ce rassemblement répondait à un besoin essentiellement animal, une

<sup>2</sup> Mark Schuller’s *Humanitarian Aftershocks in Haiti* is based on ethnographic research of eight camps conducted over four years (14).

<sup>3</sup> “Know only to be guided by their instinct, their boundless thirst” (210).

<sup>4</sup> The phrase “in the wake” is intended to reference Christina Sharpe’s formidable text *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, in which the term *wake* signifies the myriad ways the specter of colonization and chattel slavery makes its presence known today in the Atlantic world.

soif pour être plus précise, il n'avait en soi rien d'innovant, de bien exaltant, de ses puissantes serres le rapace se saisit de la proie et la broie, c'est la grande aventure humaine qui se répétait ... (218–19).<sup>5</sup>

In this passage, Orcel tethers the dog, a symbol of the collective memory and contemporary experience of white oppression, to the movements of aid and development. In so doing, he suggests a colonial lineage of NGOs and IGOs, necessarily complicating the association of altruism and humanitarianism.

While explicitly casting the development workers as predators devoid of the capacity for reflection and entirely obedient to their thirst, Orcel draws several parallels between the predator and the most stringent critiques of the aid worker. He indicates the resource disparity between the wolves and the villagers, which mirrors an elemental gap between development workers and their beneficiaries. Regardless of their privileged position, the wolves are characterized by their insatiable greed and an instinctual need to take advantage of their prey. In stating that this hunt is a repetition of the *grand human adventure*, Orcel draws a parallel between the imperial spirit, characterized by greed and the dehumanization of African slaves, and a neocolonial manifestation of international aid. Most fascinating, though, is that the wolves are driven not by the scent of blood or fear, but by that of human precariousness. It is the vulnerability of the villagers that provides the opportunity for the creation of a parasitic dependence, from which the wolves will profit for years to come.

Whether one accepts Orcel's unforgiving portrayal of the development worker, or chooses to read these individuals sympathetically, there can be no doubt that foreign aid workers and developers alike are drawn to where there is the greatest need. Those who pursue disaster and precarity for their own material gain, as well as the altruistic who seek to be of use in the wake of disaster, or in ongoing conditions of poverty, are dependent on the weakness of the needy. Much like Hegel's dialectic of the lord and the bondsman, the narrative of the white savior expresses a relationship in which the identity of the savior and that of the saved are created and mutually reinforced through their relationship. That is to say, the savior only exists as such because of their capacity to save another, who they consider to be unable to save himself. More specifically, the savior is ontologically dependent on the vulnerability of the individual or community that they save. Orcel's use of the predator in place of the savior is elemental in illustrating the fact that both the identity of the predator and that of the savior hinge on the weakness of the Other. When Orcel homes in on the scent of human precarity, which drives the wolves' hunt, he merges the two identities such that the predator is indistinct from the savior. His wolves are destructive, limited to instinct, and specifically attracted to those individuals and spaces which they perceive to be helpless. This reliance on the weakness of the Other is constitutive of the damage of the white savior narrative. In depending upon the vulnerability of Black bodies, the development and aid initiative unwittingly perpetuates said precarity.

The villagers are silenced both actively and passively by the wolves. Within the factory, the wolves impose unattainable quotas and threaten the workers with violence should they speak up. As mentioned above, the factory takes on the form of industrialized slavery. Not unlike the *chef des loups garous*, the *chef des loups* commands and passes judgment from afar. His demands are enforced by guards picked from the community, akin to *commandeurs*, or drivers during the reign of chattel slavery (Simpson 222). These young men are in such dire need that they are vulnerable to the manipulations of the wolves who offer them a small amount of power and a weapon with the expectation that they will use it against members of their own community who disobey or do not meet their quota (237). The figure of the wolf, the specter of pre-Revolutionary white oppression, forces the villagers to work under pain of death, deprived of their land and agency. Through this fantastic metaphor, Orcel suggests that development and aid in Haiti are tinged with neocolonialism, an echo of a critique made by Schuller and Peck.

The villagers eventually succumb to the wolves' pressure; the oppression of the factory leaves the villagers listless. They begin to speak so softly that they could no longer hear each other (237). It is as though the villagers have chosen to conserve their energy, that they recognize the futility of speech. One of the most insidious forms of silencing occurs as the wolves and their hand-picked political candidate willfully ignore the desires of the villagers. Rather than ask the locals what could be improved in their community, the candidate distracts them with flashy and unrealistic promises to bring back Christmas. Despite his limited knowledge of the town or its inhabitants, he insists on building a school with a real roof, specifically because this is how schools look in "les pays normaux" (123).<sup>6</sup> His good intentions are hampered by his belief that in order to *be* like normal countries, they need only *appear* to be like them. While the villagers are happy to hear his promised improvements, they have their own ideas of what would help them and attempt to approach the candidate:

<sup>5</sup> "What scent of carrion could have attracted them, how many tollgates did they burn, forests and skies traversed, they came from as far as our imagination, and the animals of their moral fiber never retreat before the strong stench of a prey, are ready for anything, their horses and 4x4s would have the merit of easily reaching the highest summits of human destitution and precarity ... they needed all the blood, all the flesh, all the bread, everything else, if this collection responded to an essentially animal need, a thirst to be more precise, it contained nothing innovative, nothing thrilling, with their powerful talons the vulture seizes their prey and crushes it, it is the grand human adventure that repeats itself" (218–219).

<sup>6</sup> "Normal countries" (123).

On aurait voulu lui parler un peu, au candidat, de choses plus concrètes, plus urgentes comme la hausse du prix des produits de première nécessité, mais il devait s'en aller, il était attendu chez les loups pour une réception organisée en son honneur (123).<sup>7</sup>

Orcel's juxtaposition of the quotidian needs of the villagers and the inflated, superficial promises of the politician mirror the disconnect between real-world aid workers and their beneficiaries.

### Foreign Rehabilitation and Haitian Disenfranchisement

The disenfranchisement of Orcel's Haitian villagers echoes one of the most widespread criticisms of aid and development after the earthquake: Haitian interests and voices have been largely unrecognized throughout the relief effort (Dize 132). The choice to move ahead without the input of Haitians, those who are intimately acquainted with the challenges of life in their own nation, endorses the assumption—implicit in the white savior narrative—that privileged outsiders know best, and that the wounded and impoverished have no story to tell beyond that of their misery or hunger. Like Orcel's fictional villagers, real-world Haitians have been silenced and subjected to neocolonial forms of development, the specter of the colonial past.

Elizabeth McAlister discusses a literal silencing of Haitians in the post-earthquake international media. Both in American attempts to raise funds for the relief effort, and in journalistic representations of the disaster, she argues that Haitian voices are systematically stifled. The "Hope for Haiti Now" telethon featured images of survivors and victims stripped to their barely-human abjectness, set to a soundtrack of familiar American celebrities and pop music calling for donations. McAlister argues that "the telethon was designed to funnel compassion into material relief" (28). That Haitian voices were superfluous—or possibly even disruptive—to this emotional manipulation is quite telling. In a second instance, McAlister notes that an American evangelical organization used the visual footage of Haitians singing on the one-month anniversary of the quake, but dubbed over their harmonies with the words of an American pastor (37). Here, too, we find that Haitians are treated as a visual emblem of disaster, an emotional catalyst for the re-enactment of a familiar story of "Americans as both romantic and rescuers" (McAlister 23).

On the ground in Haiti, some survivors experienced an overtly neocolonial disenfranchisement within small NGOs. In his in-depth inquiry into NGOs in Haiti, Mark Schuller found a trend in which younger, less experienced foreigners were promoted above Haitians (173). Due to assumptions regarding political corruption in Haiti, many foreign NGO workers pushed ideals of democracy (Schuller 189). This intrusion of cultural values is especially problematic coming from foreign aid workers hailing from "former colonial powers" (Schuller 189). The assumption of Haitian corruption is mirrored at the macro level; Raoul Peck's post-earthquake documentary *Assistance mortelle* illustrates that in the "neocolonial rhetoric of humanitarianism," "whiteness is read as benevolent and civilized and Blackness is coded as backward and corrupt" (Dize 137). This narrative of the limits of Black self-governance is used to excuse the disenfranchisement of Haitians at the local level, as evinced by Schuller, and at the national level.

Peck chronicles the ways that Haitians have been marginalized in the rehabilitation and relief of their own nation, and that the appearance of aid was often prioritized over demonstrated need. For example, IHRC Executive Director Gabriel Verret claims that donors were eager to fund new construction, but that the less glamorous and much more necessary removal of debris was underfunded, which ultimately meant that Haitian needs were disregarded in favor of projects that would reflect better on the aid community (Peck). The capitalist drive behind international aid and development contributed to a gap between services provided and the imminent needs of Haitian beneficiaries, a point which Orcel echoes with his juxtaposition of the fictional villagers' needs and the politician's superficial plans. The fact that Orcel's fictional politician is swayed by the financial contribution of the wolves only further reflects Peck's accusation of the capitalist inclination of international aid.

Despite the documented shortfalls and questionable motivations of aid work, the story which often accompanies and represents it is that of the American or European rescuer and the poor, dependent victim. This story is inherently neocolonial, keeping racial identities locked in the same power structure that has governed the postcolonial world for centuries. The damage of this narrative is its maintenance of the status quo: it reinforces the white First World as the savior, and figures Third World suffering as normative, inhibiting a reckoning with the history of imperialism and perpetuating its racial and spacial divisions.

### The Perils of Purported Precarity

There is an argument to be made that Haitians have not, in fact, been represented as weak in the years following the earthquake. Countering the narrative of Haitians' exceptional suffering is that of their exceptional resilience. Initially used by scholars of Haitian Studies as a counter-narrative to that of unending suffering and victim blaming, this "positive exceptionalism" highlights Haitians' strength and historical resistance, announcing Haiti as "singularly heroic: the site of astounding resilience" (Clitandre 147; Bonilla 153). This focus on Haitian resilience could have destabilized an

<sup>7</sup> "We would have liked to speak with him a bit, to the candidate, about things that are more concrete, more urgent like the increased prices of staples, but he had to go, he was expected by the wolves for a reception organized in his honor" (122–23).

international narrative in which Haitians are routinely victimized and deprived of agency. However, the narrative was quickly “co-opted by the media in problematic ways” (Clitandre 150). North Atlantic media repurposed the narrative as a confirmation of distant, abject suffering and used it as an opportunity to shed the limelight on white saviors.

In the media of the global North immediately following the earthquake and repeated *ad infinitum* in the years that followed, the term “resilience” has almost become a requirement in editorials about Haiti. It references unexpected survival and provides an emotional balance in articles that are otherwise focused on gory descriptions of injuries. Haitian resilience is evinced in “the miraculous discoveries of those found still alive deep in the rubble nine to ten days after being trapped there ... No ordinary human being could withstand so much, but for some reason, those Haitians can” (Ulysse and Kelley 10–11). Overwhelmingly, the narrative of Haitian resilience seems to go hand in hand with the white savior narrative. It serves as the backdrop upon which aid agencies report their contributions. For example, in 2017 the Haiti Red Cross Society claimed to be “hard at work supporting the survivors and building more resilient communities” (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies). The Catholic Medical Mission Board wrote on their blog that they “[salute] the resilience of the Haitian people,” before quickly moving on to list their organization’s accomplishments and contribution to said resilience. In both of these instances, resilience is not only characteristic of Haitian survivors, but also describes the impact of foreign aid workers.

In local news in the United States and Canada, the term “Haitian resilience” appears in headlines, belying the fact that these articles actually recount the experience of small-town white saviors. One article entitled “Paramedic encounters Haitian resilience” describes a young Canadian woman’s trip to Haiti: “Even from a young age, Ms. Barber was interested in assisting others ... She gives credit for her caring spirit to the values instilled in her by her parents and ... church” (Pearce). Still another article, “Haitians’ resilience is the real story,” offers a first-person account of a Canadian journalist who struggles to cope with the pain of his empathy for Haitians. He offers Haitian resilience as an antidote to the uncomfortable feelings outsiders encounter while witnessing the trauma of the earthquake at a distance. While he claims that the stories of Haitians’ positive attitudes in the face of death and loss “are the real stories of Haiti, not carnage shots and piles of bodies,” actual Haitians figure in his article only as unimaginable, abject suffering (Thompson).

Images of distant suffering, argues Judith Butler, “operate as an ethical solicitation,” one that “compels us to negotiate questions of proximity and distance” (Butler, *Obligations of Proximity*). In the above examples, the narrative of Haitian resilience is repurposed by aid agencies and foreign media to quickly resolve the moral imperative of empathy. This amounts to problematic representations of Haitians that are particularly revealing in what they offer the distant bystander: Haitian suffering is expected, whereas non-Haitians’ suffering is unanticipated, coded as anomaly. This expectation means that Haitians’ suffering is part of the order of the world, a normalization that “subtly disables true empathy” (Glover, “New Narratives” 200). This story allows outsiders to discuss the poverty and misfortune of this island and her inhabitants in such a way that pity is transmuted into a much more comfortable awe. Awe at their ability to withstand, to survive *despite*. This celebration is fixed on a strength that is contingent upon subhuman conditions.

Haitians’ purported strength in the form of exceptional resilience, in so far as it is constructed as a response to poverty and disaster, is a *qualified strength*. It depends upon a pre-existing condition of weakness and need. In this sense, I read resilience as intimately connected to vulnerability; it is survival in the face of precarity, despite the odds. As a narrative, Haitian resilience appears to suggest that Haitians are strong and capable, but they are only capable in the midst of chaos and suffering. Thus, it is categorically opposed to the absolute strength of the predator or the savior. It allows the media to represent Haitians favorably, while still creating space for the necessity of the foreign savior, thus underpinning the narrative of white benevolence, which conveniently eclipses that of white imperialism.

Kaiama Glover has argued that, best intentions aside, the rhetoric of Haitian exceptional resilience excludes Haitians “from consideration within the borders of recognizable and lovable (empathy-inducing) humanity” (“New Narratives” 201). This narrative is ethically problematic because it normalizes the suffering of Haitians, effectively relegating them to a sphere of subhuman living conditions and forestalling an interrogation into the structures which allow such conditions to persist. The concomitant normalization and distancing of suffering is part and parcel of the white savior narrative (Bandyopadhyay and Patil 651). It gives cause for young members of the white, First World middle class to explore the world while inscribing themselves in a tradition of idealism. This same distance which must be travelled in order to help the unfortunate Other also serves to reinforce the “ontological borders” in which “Afro-bodies are at once essentially prone to and built for suffering” (Glover, “Flesh Like One’s Own” 237, 242). The normalization of Black suffering makes its reality less and less visible, merely an appendage of the dark body it accompanies. Christina Sharpe writes similarly of the connection between Black bodies and terror: “Black people, become the *carriers* of terror, terror’s embodiment, and not the primary objects of terror’s multiple enactments” (19). Terror and suffering merge in the signifier of the Black body, which invokes fear of pain through a simultaneous representation of violence and abject agony. Glover argues that this detachment is not only important in what it does to distant Black bodies, but in what it offers a First World audience who, in locating suffering in Haiti, create a semblance of safety at home (“Flesh Like One’s Own” 248). She writes, “we, in fact, get relief—the ‘Phew! Thank God that’s not me or my kids!’ kind of relief ... The drive to consume disaster and the implication that disaster is an ontological reality for the other is, then, a comfort” (“Flesh Like One’s Own” 248). This distant suffering provides yet another comfort, one that allows, even urges, the privileged to believe they are not implicated in the pain of the Other. Images of distant disaster and the accompanying white savior

provide fodder for a narrative that simultaneously reinforces the essential goodness of the white man and the unavoidable misfortune of the Black man.

The perception and subsequent treatment of Haitians as weak has been shown to hold real consequences for the nation through the process of rehabilitation. Orcel alludes to the danger of being perceived as vulnerable in a number of ways. His fictional villagers are intimately acquainted with the perils of weakness. It is, after all, their weakness that leaves them vulnerable to the invasion of and control by the wolves. However, in Orcel's universe, the wolves, too, are susceptible to vulnerability. *Le Gamin*, a young foreigner hired by the wolves as a guard in the factory, chooses to protect the head wolf from his own vulnerability. One day, *le Gamin* accidentally sees the head wolf sick in his hammock. Rather than approach the feverish wolf, he decides it is best not to let on what he has witnessed. The wolf will be back to normal tomorrow, superior to all other wolves, protected from the knowledge that one of his own has seen him in need. He can continue to be "l'invincible pour lequel il se fait passer" rather than "un pauvre animal qui mériterait parfois qu'on lui donne la main dans le noir de sa desolation" (231).<sup>8</sup>

In encountering his boss in the hammock, *Le Gamin* demonstrates an "awakeness ... an understanding of the precariousness of the Other" (Butler, *Powers of Mourning* 134). When *le Gamin* asserts that the truest kindness is to allow the wolf to continue his ruse of impermeable power, he also shows that there is a danger in the extended hand. Were the other wolves to see his vulnerability, they would likely take advantage of it. For the villagers, it is the visibility of their precarity that inspires the wolves to seize their land and their voice. However, this momentary chink in the armor of the *chef des loups* reveals that the wolves are not complete in their invulnerability. By allowing a sliver of humanity to shine through the animalization of the foreigners, Orcel further disrupts the "three-century long habit of equating black men with animals" by asserting the fallibility of the dehumanizing gesture (Boisseron, "Afro-Dog" 18).

"A human being cannot be the son of no man," writes Jacques Stephen Alexis, "the past and history cannot be denied; the Haitian, and, through him, his culture, is the legatee of an inheritance of reactions of behaviour and habitude anterior to his hundred and fifty years of independence" (269). In his 1956 manifesto of Haitian marvelous realism, Alexis establishes a transatlantic connection via folklore and the imaginary that colors the way Haitians view reality and express that vision artistically. In *L'Ombre animale*, Orcel mobilizes Haitian folklore and imaginary, not that predates the Middle Passage, but that endures from the period between the boat and the Revolution. In an opaque literary universe where the story of *Je's* life is told from beyond the grave, Orcel mobilizes the dog, the symbolic fruit of collective memory, to show that the aid initiative is a contemporary installment of the values, power dynamics and disenfranchisement of the colonial era, knitting together the sister traumas of colonialism and foreign aid.

### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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<sup>8</sup> "The invincible man he pretends to be"; "a poor animal who deserved from time to time that one offer him a hand in the darkness of his despair" (230–1).

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