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**A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE PORTRAYALS OF HAITI AND
HAITIANS FOLLOWING THE 2010 EARTHQUAKES ON AMERICAN 24-
HOUR CABLE NEWS NETWORKS**

A Thesis in

Media Studies

by

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Abstract

Haiti has long been considered by the world as a “Third World” country and as the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, primarily because of its poverty and political instability. Because of its close proximity to the United States, the two countries have shared a long and troubling history since Haiti’s independence in 1804. After a series of devastating earthquakes shook the country in January 2010, Haiti was launched into the American media once again. The earthquakes and the aftershocks that followed were the worst to impact the nation in nearly 200 years, causing the United States to send millions of dollars in aid, search and rescue personnel, and military officials to organize the relief effort. Twenty-four hour cable news networks were among many other news providers to monitor nearly all aspects of the disaster.

Prior studies have explored how the American media cover disasters. However, few have sought to understand how 24-hour American cable news providers handle disaster coverage, and even fewer have investigated how American media depict Haiti and Haitians. Therefore, the purpose of this study was two-fold. First, to investigate how American 24-hour cable news networks, specifically Cable News Network (CNN), Microsoft and National Broadcasting Company (MSNBC), and Fox News Channel (FNC) discursively portrayed Haiti and its people in the aftermath of this overwhelming disaster. Secondly, to gain an understanding of what aspects of this disaster these cable news providers considered most newsworthy.

Discourse is a powerful rhetorical tool that is often used to perpetuate existing ideologies, both implicitly and explicitly. In this case, it is imperative to consider how discourse perpetuates and justifies power and dominance. Therefore, it is important to understand the role of American 24-hour cable news networks in framing both Haiti and Haitians discursively during a vulnerable time. To accomplish this, the study uses Teun A. Van Dijk’s Critical Discourse Analysis approach to analyze a total of 224 news transcripts from the three most viewed cable news networks: CNN ($n=184$), MSNBC, ($n=13$) and FNC ($n=17$) from January 12, 2010 to December 31, 2010. Five main themes

emerged from the disaster coverage: problematic pre-conditions, incompetence of the Haitian government, U.S. involvement in the relief efforts, victim experience and recovery.

In their uneven coverage, the three networks “recontextualized” the disaster for American viewers by using semantic strategies that Teun A. Van Dijk (1991) would describe as: “presupposition,” “hyperbole,” “vagueness,” “over-completeness,” “blaming the victim,” “comparison” and “admission.” Overall, the coverage portrayed Haiti as a charity case in need of not only funding, but of order and proper governance – which could be accomplished by U.S. intervention. Additionally, the coverage offered by these networks perpetuated some long-standing notions of Haiti and its people and focused on poverty, political instability, and weak infrastructure. Limitations were also identified.

Hopefully, this study’s findings contribute to literature on American media portrayals of Haiti and its people, while offering insight to how discourse on 24-hour cable news networks can potentially impact the way in which viewers perceive Haiti and countries like it.

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*In loving honor of my father
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I thank God for blessing me
with your words.*

Ansanm n'ap rebat ayiti
(Together we will rebuild Haiti)
-Haitian Proverb

Chapter 1

Introduction

On January 12, 2010, the world witnessed a devastating natural disaster - a 7.0 magnitude earthquake shook Port-au-Prince, Haiti and was considered the worst earthquake to shock the country in nearly 200 years (Haiti Earthquake, 2010). The densely populated capital city experienced over thirty aftershocks, and according to the Disaster Emergency Committee (2010), 230,000 lives were lost and 300,000 people were injured as a result (Haiti Earthquake, 2010; Atkinson, 2010). Haiti's infrastructure, thousands of schools, and many hospitals were destroyed in the wake of the disaster, causing widespread devastation, deaths, and injuries. The world watched as the cameras of 24-hour cable news networks captured the devastation of victims and survivors in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

Few studies have examined the role of 24-hour cable news networks media in natural disasters, and thus far, none have examined these organizations' roles in depicting Haitians in the aftermath of disastrous situations (Cohen, et al., 2008; Davis & French, 2008; Fothergill, et al., 2002; Fry, 2003; Potter, 2009; Lawless, 1992). Therefore, The aim of this study is to critically analyze the portrayals of Haitians in the news coverage of this disaster, and to track such coverage throughout 2010 within televised news discourse to uncover issues of power and dominance which serves as a perpetuation of existing hegemonic ideologies, which constantly pervade our media outlets (Van Dijk, 2001). Moreover, by conducting a critical thematic discourse analysis, this study seeks to better

understand how the discursive nature of American television news plays a role in framing Haiti during a chaotic and vulnerable time.

Se apre batay ou konie blese
(It's after the battle that you count the wounded)
-Haitian Proverb

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

What is a Crisis/Disaster?

Since disaster and crisis communication are both burgeoning areas of study, scholars are grappling with how to thoroughly explicate the concepts “disaster” and “crisis” (Atkins, 2010; Coombs, 2010; Shaluf, Ahmadun & Said, 2003). Scholarly discourse of crises is quite diverse, and the concept can mean many things. For the purposes of this paper, I will consider a crisis to be an event or series of unexpected “events that throw off the everyday patterns of life” with heightened danger levels, and intervention of public officials in order to “counteract the potential threat” (Spence, Lachlan & Griffin, 2007, p. 541). Scholars disagree about one central definition for “disaster,” but most generally believe it to be a “dangerous event that causes significant human and economic loss and demands a crisis response beyond the scope of local and state resources” (Coombs, 2010, p. 59; Shaluf, Ahmadun & Said, 2003). Within the larger and sometimes amorphous discourse, the terms “crisis” and “disaster” are often used interchangeably. Yet, despite the similarities that exist between these terms, there are key differences as well. Though scholars agree on the need to differentiate between the two terms, the task has proven to be increasingly difficult because they often interrelate (Atkins, 2010; Coombs, 2010; Shaluf, Ahmadun & Said, 2003). Coombs (2010) argues that while it is possible for disasters to evolve into crises, “not all crises are disasters” (59). The two can sometimes have unique but related characteristics. The

differences between crises and disasters have often proven difficult to articulate and disaster and crises management research have suffered as a result. However, Atkins (2010) seems to provide the clearest distinction between the two he suggests that,

a crisis involves the negative outcomes that come from internal weaknesses in an organization that are revealed during attempts to respond to an external stimulus (such as a disaster or accusations from outside sources). Alternatively, a disaster is an external event that potentially threatens the welfare of the organizations(s) impacted by it (97-98).

Taking these definitions into consideration, in this thesis I consider the events surrounding the Haiti earthquakes as both a disaster and a crisis. Using Atkins' (2010) conceptualization of these two terms, I will consider the earthquakes and their aftershocks as "disaster" because they acted as those "external event[s]" that presented threat to life and property. Additionally, I consider the problems that occurred because of the earthquakes and aftershocks to be a "crisis" because there were "negative outcomes...from internal weaknesses" made evident "during attempts to respond to an external stimulus" (97-98). Of course, the earthquake served as the disaster, but the dire humanitarian and infrastructural needs of the Haitian population quickly turned this disaster into a crisis – one of epic proportions. For the sake of clarity, I will refer to these events, in a larger sense, as a disaster. I acknowledge that some scholarly literature makes distinctions between the two terms, but the main focus of this study is to deconstruct the discourse surrounding the Haiti earthquakes and the aftershocks that follow. Additionally, the aftershocks (which are still external events) were powerful enough to aggravate the devastation that already occurred. Consequently, it would be extremely difficult to determine exactly when a crisis occurred after each set of aftershocks. Therefore, I will be referring to these situations as a disaster because these events (even the crises that

followed the earthquakes and the aftershocks) were revealed largely after and exacerbated by the on-set of a series of earthquakes (e.g.: an external event, which Atkins defines as a disaster). Essentially, there first had to be a disaster to act as a catalyst in order for the crises associated with the earthquakes to occur.

Both crises and natural disasters are “‘social’ events, having their foundation in the social structure,” making the communicative and discursive acts surrounding them a significant area of study (Fothergil, Darlington, & Maestas, 1999, p. 157). Yet, natural disasters have not been the subject of scholarly discourse as much as crises surrounding politics and organizations have, and since these events are happening with more frequency, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of how they are handled in the media (Spence, Lachlan & Griffin, 2007). More disturbingly, studying natural disasters with an emphasis on how they affect minority and disadvantaged populations is even less evident in scholarly discourse – even though these groups are more vulnerable to the dangers of natural disasters than their non-minority counterparts.

Furthermore, crises and disasters are important to study because they create chaos and “represent a fundamental threat to the very stability of the system, a questioning of core assumptions and beliefs and risk to high priority goal, including organizational image...and ultimately survival” (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002, p. 126). Essentially, it is during these times when the public sees how stable infrastructure is, and how organized public officials and organizations are in responding to the plight of individuals impacted or otherwise. Additionally, this study is a necessary follow-up to the scholarly discourse surrounding natural disasters because it is important to consider the discursive nature of these events and how they are mediated for the American public. Yet, as Hearit &

Courtight (2003) suggest, the discourses surrounding these particular situations are rarely studied. This is surprising, given the fact that “crisis events are intrinsically wed to social discourse” (Davis & French, 2008, p. 245). Previous studies examining the discursive nature of crises situations indicate that crisis discourse “is most often about hard responsibility, fault, culpability, blame, guilt, liability, compensation and victimage,” and the news is a dominant communicator of these discourses (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002, p. 126). Since crises have the potential to be life-altering, catastrophic events, it is even more imperative to study them from a critical perspective and to gain a deeper understanding of how the media discursively construct them for the viewing public.

Television News’ Coverage of Crises and Disasters

Among other things, television news serves as a form of entertainment and as an important source of news information (Bogart, 1980). Despite the proliferation of various media outlets, including online news reports, research suggests that people continue to receive the majority of their knowledge of crises from television news broadcasts (Pew Research Center, 2005; Morris, 2005; Kahle, et al., 2007; Johnson-Cartee, 2005; Littfield & Quenette, 2007). One of the reasons why people still look to television news for information is because television makes disasters more dramatic through the use of language and visual images, making disasters in particular objects of spectacle (Fry 2003; Mutter, 2008). Because of the pervasiveness of television news in American households, it is important to examine both the language and visuals, which serve as texts, and consider the implications that result from this coverage.

Journalism scholars, recognizing the significant role of television news, devised expectations for the coverage of natural disasters. Graber (1980) suggested that the news

should “warn of impending disaster; convey information to officials, relief agencies, and the public; chart the progress of relief and recovery; and dramatize lessons learned to benefit the community in the event of future disaster” (as cited in Fry, 2003, p. 106). Eliot (1989) went further to suggest ethical guidelines for coverage of natural disasters aimed specifically at reporters. He recommended reports to “focus on the context of the event, rather than just the body count, and following the disaster, participate in setting up an agenda for the public and government discussions on issues for future disaster” (as cited in Fry, 2003, p. 106). Yet, scholars question whether the media actually do these things (Fry, 2003). However, many agree that television media does help to archive disasters, and have begun to do that more since the mid-to-late 90s to give more airtime to disasters (Fry, 2003). The role of media in crisis situations is undoubtedly an important one because of the expectation to monitor, evaluate and inform (Spence, Lachlan & Griffin, 2007; Cohen, Vijaykumar & Wray, 2008). Usually, in the event of a disaster, the media operate in the following ways in order to communicate information to the public: “try to obtain information, use their own files to add background to their stories, [and] dispatch reporters and report anything they are told. Often they devote their air time to much of the space available to that single story,” (Scanlon, 2009, p. 3). News media also act as a conduit for passing on warnings about disasters to those who could be impacted by an impending disaster because “the public relies on media interpretations to counterbalance interpersonal sources of information,” (Cohen, Vijaykumar & Wray, 2008; Scanlon, 2009). Therefore, the type of discourse and how it is used within the media’s interpretation is important to investigate because such interpretations set the agenda for the public’s attitudes about crisis and disaster-related issues.

Past research suggests that the chaotic nature of disaster situations is a breeding ground for myths, and once these myths gain momentum, the news media cover them, and perpetuate them more (Tierney, Bevc, & Kuligowski, 2006; Scanlon, 2009). And, in an effort to rival their competitors, news outlets monitor other outlets, resulting in misinformation that may show up on one channel, thereby helping to further spread misinformation (Scanlon, 2009). In fact, Tierney, Bevc, & Kuligowski (2006) suggest that “messages contained in the mass media and even in official discourse continue to promote ideas that have long been shown to be false in actual empirical research on disasters” (59). The reasons myths and misinformation dominate mediated disaster discourse has a lot to do with the information gathering technique of news outlets, because they have few ways to verify information (Tierney, Bevc, & Kuligowski, 2006, p. 60). As sociologist Shirley Laska recounted to Congress in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina:

While many media outlets have science reporters, the media almost universally lack specialists in disaster-related phenomena, particularly those involving individual, group, and organizational behavior...the vast majority of the reports with whom she spoke lacked even the most basic understanding of societal response and emergency management issues (Tierney, Bevc, & Kuligowski, 2006, p. 61-62).

Scholars suggest that myths gain prominence in disaster discourse because of this very reason (Tierney, Bevc, & Kuligowski, 2006). Therefore, studying natural disaster discourse is important because media professionals largely lack experience with many of the various social behaviors that may manifest within disaster related events and are therefore uninformed about the actions of those involved in disasters. For example, many of the reports during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina indicated that the city of New Orleans was rife with looters, robbers, and violence, when in fact empirical data suggest

that many of those instances were rare, or did not happen at all. Because news media heavily relies on particular, ready-made frames to communicate stories, “media portrayals of disasters and their victims so often deviate from what is actually known about behavior during emergencies” (Tierney, Bevc, & Kuligowski, 2006, p. 60). Further, since television news capitalizes on the spectacle surrounding natural disasters, news media tend to focus on “dramatic, unusual and exceptional behavior, which lead audiences to believe such behavior is common and typical” to keep viewers interested in the content, (Tierney, Bevc, & Kuligowski, 2006, p. 61). Journalists also must decide what is considered newsworthy, and these choices lead to real consequences, especially in disasters, because these decisions are often “rooted in judgments about the social value of disaster victims and on conceptions of social distance and difference” (Tierney, Bevc, & Kuligowski, 2006, p. 62).

Additionally, it is important to study the discursive nature of disaster coverage through a critical discourse analysis approach because news media rely on stereotypes in order to formulate news reports and “media treatment of disasters both reflect and reinforce broader societal and cultural trends, socially constructed meta-narratives, and hegemonic discourse practices that support the status quo and the interests of elites” (Tierney, Bevc, & Kuligowski, 2006, p. 62). Because the media serve as a barometer of public opinion and societal ideas, it is important to critically deconstruct and analyze the ways in which the media both construct and perpetuate such ideas – especially in the wake of a disaster/crisis situation where information is of utmost importance (Herbst, 2001).

Moreover, scholars suggest that the majority of news coverage in what are considered “Third World” nations are primarily comprised of disasters and political unrest, and rarely anything positive (Lawless, 1992; Potter, 2009). However, other scholars argue the contrary: that the American media makes sound journalistic decisions when it comes to its coverage of developing nations and do not exhibit bias against these countries in their coverage (Gaddy & Tanjong, 1986). Yet, Adams (1986) found not only that American media exhibit bias in the coverage of disasters in developing nations, but when such nations receive American media coverage they do not receive as much time in the news as First World nations in the event of crises. He proposes that this is in part because American journalists identify more readily with those who may share similar cultural values and ways of life (Adams, 1986). He also posits that there is a disproportionate value placed on lives around the globe. He asserts, “overall, the globe is prioritized so that the death of one Western European equaled three Eastern European equaled 9 Latin Americans equaled 11 Middle Easterners equaled 12 Asians (Adams, 1986, p. 122). However, Adams (1986) makes no mention about the value of the lives of those within the African Diaspora, perhaps because he finds that “earthquakes, typhoons, and floods in the developing world, given their severity, proportionately little attention” (p. 122). Given the amount of coverage allotted to certain parts of the world from the American media perspective in the present day, Adams’ assertion could still hold true today because it does seem as though certain lives are considered more valuable than others.

Revolution and Internal Struggle: Haiti's Tumultuous Political History

Haiti has endured a long history of crises, both politically and economically since gaining its independence from French colonizers in 1804 led by iconic Haitian figure Toussaint-L'Ouverture (Preeg, 1996). Haiti's political history has been anything but stable. The country has had fifty-five presidents, but few of them have been able to serve their full terms. Three presidents have been killed, 23 have experienced military coups d'état, and 31 have served for less than two years (Buss & Gardner, 2008). Since becoming a sovereign nation to date, Haiti has undergone 33 coups (Farmer, 2004; Arthur & Dash, 1999). Nearly all of the regimes ruling the country have been plagued by corruption, greed, and scandal resulting in not only incessant political strife, but severe economic stratification since the beginning of its history as an independent country (Buss & Gardner, 2008). Despite the country's rich history, Haiti is considered the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, partly because of debts owed to its foreign lenders and former colonizers (Sletten & Egset, 2004; St. Jean, 2007; Arthur & Dash, 1999). Though Haiti became the world's first Black republic, independence was difficult to maintain because of international isolation, fickle foreign relations, fierce internal conflicts, foreign invasions, and controversial occupations by the United States, (Chomsky, 1994). Haiti's struggles are both political and economical, leaving many of its people civically disengaged and pessimistic about governmental affairs (Preeg, 1996; Arthur & Dash, 1999).

In the midst of what is now known as the Haitian Revolution, the country was internally divided by colorism, with its mulatto, upper-class citizens and the lower-class

former slaves in a struggle for power and privilege (Preeg, 1996). Still, the two factions combined to eventually win independence from Haiti's French colonizers. Almost immediately after victory over the French, conflict emerged between two of the remaining leaders of the Haitian Revolution, Alexandre Petion and Jacques Dessalines, with many of the newly emancipated citizenry taking sides once again along color lines (Preeg, 1996). Two very distinct parties emerged with their own ideas about the future of Haiti, with the mulatto elites under Petion's direction and the lower-class blacks under Dessalines' direction (Arthur Dash, 1999). Two main areas of contention dividing the Haitians were "the issue of ownership of agricultural land, and the continuing tensions between blacks and mulattoes" – areas that seem to reverberate continually throughout Haiti's history (Arthur & Dash, 1999, p. 45). Conflict between the factions resulted in bloodshed and occupation by the United States Marines from 1915 until 1934, and because the military occupation, Haitians were humiliated and many organized protests occurred, resulting in the eventual departure of the U.S. Marines in 1934.

Some believed the United States' intentions were to restore order and reduce violence, but others believe the U.S. wanted to "make Haiti safe for U.S. investment and commerce" that had the potential of occurring in the future (Preeg, 1996, p. 13). Specifically, the economic interests of the US were ensured by embargos, exploitation of its natural resources, and the instigation of governmental overthrows by foreign powers (Arthur & Dash, 1999). From "the US-backed eradication of the entire native pig population," to the extension of "US economic interests" in Haiti's rich natural resources, to the country's dependence upon "US produced food aid...contributing to the deterioration of the traditional peasant agricultural economy," relations between the two

countries have a history of being strained (Arthur & Dash, 1999, p. 142; Ridgeway, 1994).

A few elections commenced after U.S. Marines' departure and eventually one of Haiti's most notable leaders, Francois Duvalier, was elected as president of the country in 1957 (Preeg, 1996). Known infamously as a "strong-willed and ruthless ruler," throughout Haiti, Duvalier's leadership led to a period of economic decline, 'brain drain' of professionals from the country, and corruption (Preeg, 1996, p. 14). The United States even excluded Haiti from its Alliance for Progress efforts (Preeg, 1996). Despite his ruthless leadership, Duvalier is credited with "overturning the existing [mulatto elite] power structure" in Haiti because of his revolutionary, black populist stance. In fact, he strongly encouraged the adoption of the Creole language and the Voodoo religion into the Haitian mainstream (Preeg, 1996). Still, some considered Duvalier's 14-year presidency a failure regarding the nation's economy and foreign relations, but the effects of his leadership proved to forever impact Haiti because of his "revolutionary populism" (Preeg, 1996). Duvalier died in 1971 while in office, and power was then transferred constitutionally to his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier (Buss & Gardner, 2008).

Under Jean-Claude Duvalier's 15-year leadership, Haiti's economic growth was significant. Additionally, Haiti was able to restore relations with the United States during the Carter administration, which resulted in an increase in foreign aid – from \$9 million to \$106 million in 1980 (Preeg, 1996). Perhaps most importantly, Haiti's capital city became more modernized, with a highway system and paved roads. Yet, Jean-Claude's terms in office were plagued by the same issues that his father faced, as well as blatant economic corruption and eventual submission to the minority mulatto elite in the country

(Preeg, 1996; Arthur & Dash, 1999). In fact, Jean-Claude's corruption was so notorious that the Haitian government became commonly referred to as a "kleptocracy" (Arthur & Dash, 1999, p. 49; Buss & Gardner, 2008, p. 32). As a result, Jean-Claude Duvalier left the presidency in 1986 to seek exile and was succeeded by Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1990 (Preeg, 1996; Arthur & Dash, 1999). In his departure, however, the majority of the Haitian people were left more impoverished than ever before. The poverty level increased "from 48 percent in 1976 to 81 percent in 1985" and the country gained the unfavorable reputation that it still holds to this day as one of the poorest nations on the globe (Arthur & Dash, 1999, p. 49). In January of 2011, after spending twenty-five years in exile, Jean-Claude Duvalier returned to Haiti in the midst of a contested election and a deadly cholera outbreak following a devastating series of earthquakes. Upon his return, the former President was charged criminally with embezzlement and corruption (*The Economist*, Jan. 20, 2011).

As Haiti's first democratically elected president, Aristide's election marked a significant change in the way politics had been traditionally handled in Haiti (Ridgeway, 1994; MacDonald, 2008; Arthur & Dash, 1999). Aristide was a priest who disturbed the status quo long established by the mulatto elite in order to appease the poor. In the beginning of his tenure as president, Aristide was supported by the United States but after only 8 months into his presidency he was overthrown by what many speculated was a military class supported by the disgruntled elites (Arthur & Dash, 1999). By the rigid insistence of the United States, Aristide was restored to power in Haiti in 1994 (Ridgeway, 1994). After completing his allotted 5-year term, Aristide was defeated by Rene Preval in the 1996 presidential election, but gained power once again in 2000. But,

Aristide no longer enjoyed support from the United States or the Haitian masses because in 2004, his administration was overthrown once again before the expiration of his term while the United States called for his resignation. Some argued that Aristide was “indisputable the chief culprit in the unraveling of democratic governance on the island,” which is why he was ousted for the second time (Erikson, 2005, p. 83). Additionally, others argue that capricious diplomatic dealings with the United States – especially during the Clinton and George Bush Sr. administrations - was one of the many root causes behind Haiti’s perpetual failed efforts at democracy (Erikson, 2005; Potter, 2009; Ridgeway, 1994). Undoubtedly, Haiti has been in an incessant struggle to define itself as a nation since the Haitian Revolution. But, while some point to the lack of a consistent, functioning government and decades of official corruption, others believe that Haiti’s exploitation by world powers ultimately led the country to the abysmal political and economic state that it was in on the eve of the January 2010 earthquakes (Potter, 2009; Farmer, 2006; Lawless, 1992; Buss & Gardner, 2008).

Haiti’s Economy

According to the U.S. Department of State’s 2009 estimates, Haiti’s GDP is \$6.56 million with a real GDP growth rate of 2% and per capita GDP of \$733 (U.S. Department of State, 2010). With regard to exports and trades, Haiti generated \$551 million from exporting apparel, mangoes, leather and raw hides, seafood, and electrical supplies in 2009 (U.S. Department of State, 2010).

Overall, twenty-four percent of the nation’s revenue or GDP is derived from agriculture, which is comprised of things like coffee, mangoes, sugarcane, rice, corn, cacao, sorghum, pulses, and other harvests. Eight percent of the economy is dependent

upon industry – things like apparel, handicrafts, electronics assembly, food processing, beverages, tobacco products, furniture, printing, chemicals, and steel. Forty-three percent of Haiti's income is derived from services like commerce, hotels and restaurants, government, and tourism. Finally, 25% of the economy is generated from other sources (U.S. Department of State, 2010). This 25% could include remittances from Haitians abroad. In fact, Buss & Gardner (2008) indicate, "90% of the Haitian Diaspora sends money home" (p. 55). Remittances from Haitians abroad have become increasingly important to the nation's economy, yet because of the sometimes informal nature of such support and the lack of a reliable tracking system it is relatively unknown just how much the Diaspora sends back (Buss & Gardner, 2008). Nonetheless, scholars estimate that in 1999, remittances comprised up to 17% of Haiti's GDP and were even more substantial in 2004, making up about 25% of the GDP (Buss & Gardner, 2008). Despite its exports, agricultural industries, and remittances, Haiti is still considered among the poorest nations in the Western Hemisphere (Sletten & Egset, 2004; Schreiner, 2006).

According to some scholars, Haiti had long been a source of contempt and target of discrimination by other world powers as well (Farmer, 2006; Arthur & Dash, 1999). For years after winning its independence, the country was shunned internationally, primarily because it was a republic of former slaves (Bruss & Gardner, 2008). In fact, Haiti was discriminated against so severely that in the earlier part of the nineteenth century "the country could not find any printer in the world to print its currency" (Buss & Gardner, 2008, p.44). Additionally, many of Haiti's economic problems stem from centuries of constant political unrest and upheaval and because of such problems, many

countries around the globe have categorized Haiti as a “fragile state” (Buss & Gardner, 2006, p. 2).

Much emphasis has been on the pervasiveness of poverty in Haiti. In fact, Sletten & Egset (2004) suggest the poverty line for the country could be computed as one dollar a day per person, allowing scholars to place Haiti among the poorest nations in the Western Hemisphere. Haiti’s poverty is often attributed partly to the “decline in GDP” and its steadily declining economy since 1954 (Sletten & Egset, 2004, p. 5). Measuring poverty in a country like Haiti is especially difficult because scholars struggle to adequately define what poverty entails for Haitians. Furthermore, it is difficult to create a poverty threshold for the country because of the large economic disparities between the various groups – especially between the rich and poor. For instance “a person in Port-au-Prince living on \$1 per day will be able to purchase different bundle of goods and services compared to a person living in the inland” (Sletten & Egset, 2004, p. 7). From what scholars can ascertain, seventy five percent of Haiti’s population is considered poor and fifty percent of those people are considered “extremely poor, which is a higher poverty incidence than any other country in the region and comparable to the poorest African countries” like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, and Zimbabwe (Sletten & Egset, 2004, p. 9; Arthur & Dash, 1999).

While the main area of interest of this study is Port-au-Prince, most of the country’s poorest inhabitants live in surrounding rural areas. Scholars suggest the unemployment rate for Haiti is nearly impossible to measure adequately; yet, some claim that unemployment hovers at around 50 to 70 percent (Buss & Gardner, 2008). The relative confusion over Haiti’s actual unemployment rate stems from the popularity of the

informal economy and the inability to accurately track tax payments (Buss & Gardner, 2008). In fact, “ninety-five percent of employment in Haiti exists in the underground economy” (Buss & Gardner, 2008, p. 11). To make ends meet, many Haitian households use a variety of livelihood strategies: self-employment makes up 37% of a Haitian household’s income, transfers (including transnational remittances) make up 25%, wage income makes up 20%, and self consumption (i.e., selling their own products) makes up 11% on average (Sletten & Egset, 2004). Scholars argue that various sources of human capital are likely to help Haitians escape from poverty. Among them, the formal market labor helps to alleviate poverty. So does obtaining higher education. For those who are not so fortunate to be able to do those things, transfers from family abroad often help Haitian families. In fact, according to Sletten & Egset (2004), poverty rates are lower among those that have relatives abroad, and an even stronger difference exists between those that receive external transfers and those that do not” (p. 15). Yet, many Haitians face limited opportunities to bettering their lives. Over half of the population cannot read or write and most of the acceptable private schools in the nation are too expensive for many to attend (Buss & Gardner, 2008).

In addition to few ways to earn a living, the people of Haiti also live with an abysmal infrastructure and living conditions. Reportedly “only 5 percent of Haiti’s roads are in good repair,” (Buss & Gardner, 2008, p. 11). Telecommunication saturation is among the lowest of any developing country with only 150,000 phone lines serving a population of 8 million (Buss & Gardner, 2008). Furthermore, only half of the population has access to adequate drinking water and health services (Arthur & Dash, 1999; Buss & Gardner, 2008). Because of its many environmental problems, it is difficult for Haitians

to make a living agriculturally or to even survive the harsh weather conditions as a result of nearly 97% deforestation (Buss & Gardner, 2006). Such environmental problems make Haiti even more vulnerable to flooding and tropical storms, which further increases loss of life and damage to its failing infrastructure (Buss & Gardner, 2006).

Beyond the aforementioned issues, Haiti's health conditions are less than ideal. In fact, the UN ranks Haiti among the lowest of 175 countries in its Human Development Index scale (Erikson, 2004; Buss & Gardner, 2006). Scholars suggest that "more than a quarter of children suffer from malnutrition, and one in ten people depend on daily food rations provided by international relief agencies" (Arthur & Dash, 1999, p. 119; Buss & Gardner, 2008). Documented cases of HIV/AIDS are increasing as well as the statistics for infant mortality, leaving the average life expectancy age at 53 years (Buss & Gardner, 2008).

There are a myriad of reasons that contribute to Haiti's near-destruction as a result of the 2010 earthquakes. Even before the most recent natural disaster, Haiti was in a severely vulnerable state, making it even more susceptible to potentially damaging media fodder and spectacle. While much discussion and media attention constantly surround Haiti's devastated economic state and its infamous label of the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, it seems that very little explanation is given to how those who label Haiti as such define poverty.

Perhaps one of the reasons why Haiti has become a pit of billions of dollars of international "charity" is because such donors fail to understand the intricacies of Haitian culture, thereby not fully addressing, nor alleviating the source of Haiti's alleged poverty. Aid to Haiti has been plentiful throughout the years; however, aid from the United States

has been fickle, causing many scholars to question the United States' intentions in giving (Preeg, 1996; Arthur & Dash, 1999; Buss & Gardner, 2008; Erickson, 2004; Ridgeway, 1994). Although many U.S. presidential administrations have posited that U.S. involvement in Haitian affairs primarily stems from humanitarian concern and nation-building in order to reduce poverty and restore order, many scholars argue that the United States' concern for Haiti stems from questionable economic interests, as well as to push its own agenda for democracy (Preeg, 1996; Arthur & Dash, 1999; Potter, 2009). In its attempts to help create commerce and revive Haiti's economy, Haitian workers were also reportedly exploited for their labor and required by those in charge to work menial jobs (Ridgeway, 1994). In a similar instance, many major US retailers operated sweatshops in Haiti in the 1990s, only compensating workers a reported \$.14 per hour – despite an embargo placed against the country (Ridgeway, 1994). Numerous times throughout the nation's history, the U.S. retracted its military and financial support in order to influence political affairs there (Preeg, 1996; Arthur & Dash, 1999, Buss & Gardner, 2008).

In an attempt to understand how Haiti regards itself economically, I found no statistics generated by Haiti to describe its economic status, which is problematic because it shows that Haiti has been and is rendered powerless to define itself economically. Therefore, many of the statistics and figures on Haiti's economy are generated from Western interpretations of what a stable economy should be. It is important to review Haiti's economy in order to understand why the nation was so heavily impacted and nearly destroyed by the recent earthquakes.

Haiti's Troubled Foreign Relations

For centuries, Haiti has experienced strife with its neighboring country, the Dominican Republic. Haiti has had a history of bloody hostility with the country since the Dominican Republic declared independence in 1844 (Prince, 1994). Though numerous Dominican Republic's citizens are of African ancestry, many of them as well as those of mixed race racially discriminate against Haitians and consider them inferior (Prince, 1994). In fact, in 1991, the Dominican president declared, "all Haitians 'over the age of 60 and under the age of 16' would be expelled" from the country (Prince, 1994, p. 22).

Despite its strained relations with the neighboring Dominican Republic, most of Haiti's foreign relations have been in the form of aid receipt. Because the country has been labeled as a "fragile state," the nation has been a frequent recipient of billions of dollars of foreign aid, mostly from the US. Though Haiti was the recipient of nearly \$4 billion in international funds and nearly \$1 billion from remittances from Haitian emigrants from 1990 to 2003, much of that aid has not reached the majority of the population, puzzling donors who give frequently. In fact according to the World Bank from 1969 to 2004 Haiti received almost \$8.3 billion dollars from foreign donors, and even more in recent years – most from the United States (Buss & Gardner, 2008).

Additionally, relations were strained between Haiti and the United States because of immigration issues. While the United States freely entered and exited Haiti throughout its history, Haitians have not enjoyed the same privilege regarding immigration. Specifically during the height of the AIDS panic in the 1980s, U.S. sources wrongly believed Haiti was the source of the deadly pandemic and strict immigration legislation was set in place (Arthur & Dash, 1999). Further, Haitians, desperate to escape repressive

presidential regimes throughout the years have often been refused ‘refugee’ asylum in the United States, and were often referred to as “boat people” at the height of the country’s political strife, though the country lies only 600 miles from U.S. soil (Potter, 2009; Farmer, 2006). Despite structural causes that undoubtedly contribute to Haiti’s many problems, many often hold individuals and the nation itself responsible for its plight when, evidently, its problems are complex (Buss & Gardner, 2008).

Depictions of Haiti in the American Media

Relatively little research has examined depictions of Haiti in the American media. However, among the small group of studies, scholars suggest that generally, Haiti has been depicted negatively in the American media (Potter, 2009; Lawless, 1992; Ridgeway, 1994). Unfortunately, early depictions of Haiti were communicated to the world by travelogues, books, and films using and perpetuating ready-made stereotypes of the country (Potter, 2009; Lawless, 1992). The most popular stereotypes framed Haiti as a voodoo nation that often participated in bloody sacrifices. In the past, the Western press framed Haiti as a nation of cannibals and in the 1960s, talk of zombies dominated news discourse. In the 1980s, Haiti became infamously known as a hotbed for the newly emergent AIDS virus (Potter, 2009; Lawless 1992). Western press stereotyped the country, causing some its expatriates living in the U.S. to become the subject of societal discrimination. In fact, according to St. Jean (2007: 414), “Haitians were the only Caribbean group placed by the Centers for Disease Control, with homosexuals, hemophiliacs, and heroin addicts (the four H’s as they were called), in a high risk category for AIDS” before much was known about the disease. On the contrary, studies suggest that while “the per capita incidence of AIDS is higher in Haiti (and in many

Caribbean countries) than it is in the United States, the difference is a matter of percentage points only, and not the sort of ‘night and day’ difference that is commonly portrayed” (Arthur & Dash, 1999, p. 134). But, at the height of AIDS coverage, the Centers for Disease Control and the National Cancer Institute of Technology argued that AIDS made its way into the U.S. through Haiti. These speculations also suggested that this could have been through various voodoo practices held in the country.

However, these reports proved to be erroneous, because as anthropologist and physician Dr. Farmer suggested, “AIDS was in fact introduced into Haiti by homosexual tourists from New York and San Francisco, for whom Haiti was a delightful vacation spot in the late 70s and 80s” (Arthur & Dash, 1999, p. 135). Yet, reports of this newly found evidence in the 90s did not gain as much media prominence as the original allegations. The misrepresentation of Haiti as one of the “breeding grounds” for AIDS by the American media not only caused Haitian Americans to suffer from discrimination, but also left an indelible mark upon the country’s image. These misrepresentations had very real consequences for the Haitian tourism industry. For instance, tourism fell from 75,000 people in the winter of 1981 to a staggering 10,000 in 1983 (Arthur & Dash, 1999). As recently as 2008, Haiti gained media attention again - as one of the subjects of the “World Food Crisis,” where newspapers and other news reports named it among one of the nations suffering from devastating poverty, and, as a result of food inflation, devastating hunger (Magdoff, 2008). Reports focused on human suffering and examples of the poor unable to buy food. Instead, they relied upon “a traditional Haitian remedy for hunger pangs: cookies made of dried yellow dirt” (Magdoff, 2008, p. 6). Media reports like these continued to fuel a pitiful, poverty-driven image of the nation.

Other real implications result from Haiti's damaged image, according to a study conducted by Potter (2009), who examined depictions of Haiti in the American media. Potter found that the most common frames in news discourse about Haiti include violence, poverty, the country's ruined economy, a failed Black republic, a hotbed for illicit drug trade, devastated physical landscape (because of natural disasters and other environmental problems), and the growing number of refugees fleeing the country.

Overwhelmingly, American media portray Haiti and its people as the "other" (Potter, 2009, p. 223). Potter found that the positive coverage of the country was rare, but when it did appear, the researcher found it to be "condescending, as contributing to the image of the noble savage" (224). Finally, Potter suggests that "the media representation of Haiti is...one of the most devastating problems it faces today [because] 'Haiti's 'bad press' is bad...not merely because it is defamatory...[but also] because it obscures Haiti's real problems, their causes and their possible cures" (p. 226). Because the root problems that persist in Haiti are often overlooked in the American media's portrayals, many viewers never know or are able to understand the intricate problems that plague the nation. Therefore, these problems continue to persist, and if fortunate, the only help Haiti receives is the type that treats the symptoms instead of the disease that cause many of its ills.

Kapab pa sou
(He who has means does not suffer)
-Haitian Proverb

Chapter 3

Theoretical Background

The goal of this study is to analyze discursive depictions of Haiti in American news coverage in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquakes using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. As mentioned previously, Haiti is considered by the majority of the globe as a “Third World” country and is labeled as the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. As such, it is important to (1) examine how the American media discursively construct, situate, and depict Haiti during one of the most vulnerable times in its history. More importantly, it is imperative (2) to understand the implications that such discourse may have for Haiti.

CDA is an inter-disciplinary, theoretical approach that is employed in studying complex social phenomena through the deconstruction of the discourse surrounding those particular phenomena (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 2; van Dijk, 1988). Additionally, CDA is concerned with “investigat[ing] the interplay between discourses imbuing larger bodies of texts, such as reports surrounding a particular event, to illustrate the contested nature of meaning and understanding” (French & Davis, 2008, p. 248). I consider the 2010 Haiti earthquakes to be a complex communicative phenomenon, not necessarily because of the disaster itself, but because of the amount of attention that the American media devoted to Haiti.

One of the critical impetuses of CDA is the idea of discourse and how it is used. In the CDA tradition, discourse is not just the mere use of language; instead, it assumes

that language is a “form of ‘social practice’” situated within a particular social, political, and economic context (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 6; van Dijk, 1988). The earthquakes created a complex humanitarian emergency in Haiti, making the surrounding discourse that followed inevitably social, political, and economic. Importantly, CDA is concerned with “the opacity of texts and utterances – the discursive constructions or stories that are embedded in texts as information that is less readily available to consciousness. Analysis is a method of dealing with this opacity”, (Locke, 2004, p. 40). Additionally “CDA reveals the contradictions within and between discourses” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 36). Essentially, the objective of the approach is to reveal biases, evidence of power and dominance latent within the discursive practices surrounding the communicative phenomena being studied and how such practices perpetuate social inequalities (Wodak & Meyer, 2009; Weiss & Wodak, 2003).

Another critical impetus of CDA considered within this study is how discourse “gives rise to important issues of power” that has the potential to “produce and reproduce unequal power relations” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 6). Discourse is therefore intrinsically tied to power. Moreover, the news is more than just about information gathering and dissemination – it is also a form of discourse (van Dijk, 1988). This study draws upon Foucault’s understanding of power. Foucault (1996) asserts that power is made up of “series of particular mechanisms, definable and defined, that seem capable of inducing behaviours or discourse” (as cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 35). Foucault’s concept of power also focuses on the ways power is exercised throughout a society, which involves the use of discourse. According to him, “power is not simply a commodity that may be acquired or seized. Rather, it runs through the whole social body,

functions in the form of a chain, and is exercised through productive networks which are extended everywhere and in which all are caught” (Gecience, 2002, p. 119). This study presupposes that one of those “networks” is discourse, which is “exercised” through conduits like American cable news providers. According to Wodak & Meyer (2009), discourses are communicated and exert power because “they transport knowledge on which collective and individual consciousness feeds. This knowledge is the basis for individual and collective, discursive and non-discursive action, which in turn shapes reality” (39). It is important to consider notions of power within the news discourse examined within this study because power manifests itself in the language use of those with authority – particularly those in the news; therefore allowing us to better understand how power is sustained. Therefore, this study is preoccupied with revealing those mostly subtle mechanisms that are used to maintain power by examining the behaviors, namely the language used within the news reports about Haiti.

CDA is also pre-occupied with the “power and dominance of the symbolic elites, those who have special access to public discourse” (van Dijk, 2005). Perhaps more importantly, CDA is concerned with how social structures use discourse to produce and reproduce social inequality (van Dijk, 1993; Locke, 2004). Critically investigating these notions of power and dominance are what fundamentally make critical discourse analysis ‘critical.’ Furthermore, dominance of these elites is achieved through Gramsci’s concept of “hegemony.” According to Bates (1975), hegemony assumes that “man is not ruled by force alone, but also ideas” (p. 351). These ideas are communicated and perpetuated through “the consent of the led, a consent which is secured by the diffusion and popularization of the worldview of the ruling class” (p. 352). Consequently, the reason

discourse is so powerful and effective is because it is the conduit by which the ideas of the ruling elite are passed on.

One aspect of the CDA approach that appeals to this study is the reflexivity that is required. The approach requires the researcher to acknowledge their own ‘situatedness’ and to “make their position, research interests and values explicit and their criteria as transparent as possible, without feeling the need to apologize for the critical stance of their work” (Locke, 2004, p. 7). Essentially, as an approach, CDA allows the researcher to situate him/herself within the work without compromising the validity of his/her critical contributions. It is also important to note here that the CDA approach is not one that is particularly concerned with maintaining objectivity. In fact, it “aim(s) to transcend the academic/activist divide, seeing their work as not merely describing the inequitable discourse practices to problems of race, gender, class, and so on, but also contributing to the contestation and even transformation of those practices” (Haig, 2005, p. 52).

As a female African American media scholar, I am largely concerned with how the American news media portray other African Americans and those that are a part of the African Diaspora. Therefore, I find it important and timely to investigate how the American media’s coverage of an international disaster like the Haiti earthquakes may have contributed to long-standing notions of power, hegemony, racism, and dominance over a country that has consistently fought against these issues since its independence. By describing what Haig calls the “inequitable discourse practices” that occur I believe that I and other scholars can not only “contest” these practices, but “transform” the discourse by offering solutions to the problems that we identify. My aims are two-fold. It is my hope that the findings in this study will contribute to the scholarship within the realm of

discourse analysis. But, more importantly, it is my hope that this study will also challenge those of us in Western nations to change the ways we think, talk about, and interact with countries like Haiti in the future.

A critical discourse analysis of the earthquake coverage within American media is important for a variety of reasons. First, the 2010 earthquakes in Haiti was an event that was extensively covered by the mass media, and news of the disaster largely dominated nearly every major American media outlet. Therefore, it is increasingly important to understand and analyze the ways the United States, as a “First World” nation with hegemonic power, discursively discussed Haiti’s situation and represented Haiti as a “Third World,” developing nation. History and past relations suggest that the relationship between the two countries has been hegemonic in nature, with the United States heavily influencing the affairs of Haiti as well as the images of Haitians that much of the world sees. Secondly, many traumatic events drive the media to cover them, especially television news, perhaps because of the mantra, “if it bleeds, it leads.” It has been a long-standing tenet of journalism to report and describe events as they unfold and to provide audiences with an accurate portrayal of events. It is important to examine how American cable news networks handle disasters as they unfold while grappling with communication issues and more breaking news updates in what may sometimes be environmentally and politically unsafe areas. Finally, the United States and Haiti share an extensive past. Specifically, the United States has been intimately involved in and has influenced Haiti’s political, economic, and humanitarian issues for centuries.

Critical discourse analysis assumes that “all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social and historically situated,” (Locke, 2004, p. 5). Therefore, it

is important to understand how longstanding interactions between the United States and Haiti are situated with regard to power, dominance, and agency and how influential they are upon the relations between both countries (see Locke, 2004, p. 5). It is also important to use the knowledge of a shared past between Haiti and the US as a way to contextualize, inform and interpret my observations and analysis of contemporary American media more richly. Additionally, using the historical context outlined earlier, I will be able to draw stronger conclusions about the way in which the American media help to shape Haiti's identity for the American people and the rest of the world.

As noted earlier, the main objective of this study is to investigate and analyze whether and how American news coverage of the earthquakes helped to perpetuate and justify notions of power and dominance over Haiti. Additionally, this study presupposes that the "news is the report or re-contextualization of an event...News therefore, is not an objective representation of facts – news is a cultural construct that encodes fixed values. These values help journalists to determine what is newsworthy and therefore what gets reported" (Caldas-Coulthard, 2003, p. 273). Because of this assumption, it is important to examine the news coverage surrounding a disaster that had the attention of the entire globe in order to understand how the American news media, (1) either consciously or unconsciously, "recontextualized" the Haiti earthquakes, (2) to explore the cultural determinants of manifest content and (3) review the implications of such journalistic decisions. Critical Discourse Analysis is a fitting approach to employ in this study because of the complex issues of power and dominance that inevitably reveal themselves in the discursive practices of the media so often taken for granted by audiences.

Subsequently, taking these objectives into consideration, this study aims to investigate and answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: How were the people of Haiti depicted in the news after the earthquakes?

RQ 2: What aspects of the disasters were deemed most newsworthy?

RQ 3: How did the coverage by these cable networks compare?

Lè ou malere, tout bagay samble ou
(When you are poor, everything can be blamed on you.)
-Haitian Proverb

Chapter 4

Method of Analysis

There is no one-way to “do” Critical Discourse Analysis because the approach “does not constitute a well-defined empirical methodology” and is eclectic and diverse in its methods (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 27). My approach, then, will draw largely from Teun Van Dijk's method of Critical Discourse Analysis, which takes a semantic, or thematic, approach to analyzing discourse - what Van Dijk refers to as “macrostructures” (Dijk, 1988; 1980). This approach is characterized by taking a larger universe of messages, or themes, that texts communicate and analyzing those more deeply (Van Dijk, 1980). This method is an appropriate one to use when analyzing the portrayals of individuals impacted by disasters and crisis in order to “investigate the interplay between discourses imbuing larger bodies of texts, such as a set of reports surrounding a particular event, to illustrate the contested nature of meaning and understanding” (Davis & French, 2009, p. 248). Since the news media informs many and contributes critically to the construction of identities, it is imperative to analyze and bring to light the subtle ideologies that may be communicated through this form of media (Davis & French, 2008).

To address the critical issues that this study is concerned with, specifically the question about how Haitians and the nation of Haiti as a whole were depicted in the news, I will concentrate on analyzing content that manifests itself within these news reports in order to conduct what Van Dijk (1988) refers to as an “abstract semantic

analysis” of these reports (p. 170). Essentially, I will review these news reports at the macro-level in order to “define overall meaning of whole texts or large text fragments” to determine themes that emerge. This means “dealing only with the news structures beyond the sentences level” and, instead, analyzing the reports on the bases of what Van Dijk (1988) calls the “global” level. Although discourses can be examined at the minute, linguistic level, analysis at the macro, thematic level is important because news consumers make important assumptions and associations about news content through themes (Van Dijk, 1988). Identifying and analyzing themes that emerge in these news reports is appropriate because,

Language users can summarize fairly complex units of information with one or a few sentences, and these sentences are assumed to express the gist, the theme, or the topic of the information. In intuitive terms, such themes or topics organize what is most important in a text. They, indeed, define the upshot of what is said or written,” (Van Dijk, 1985, p. 74).

To conduct this analysis, I closely read the news reports in order to note recurring themes that dominate the coverage of the people of Haiti and the country. According to Van Dijk (1991), themes in news reports are different from those in “everyday storytelling,” because, “topics in news reports are usually expressed in a continuous way. It is not the chronology of the events, but rather their importance, relevance, or newsworthiness that organize news reports,” (p. 72). Additionally, Van Dijk (1991) posits that themes not only “summarize complex information,” they are usually the best recalled information of a text” (p. 73). Therefore, I analyzed emergent themes through textual analysis to ultimately address the questions surrounding the role of the American media in the portrayals of Haiti as a country, as well as its people.

To direct my discussion of these emergent themes, I used the following semantic strategies developed by Van Dijk (1991): presupposition, vagueness, over-completeness, hyperbole, blaming the victim, comparison, and admission. Van Dijk (1991) posits that these semantic strategies are as commonly used to communicate information about ethnic minorities, or those considered to be members of the out-group. Further, those *presuppositions* are used to “convey information that is supposed to be known and shared by the writer and the reader, and which therefore need not be stated” (183). Van Dijk argues that it is through this strategy that journalists sometimes assume media users know certain pieces of information about “debatable” issues, yet these media users may not know the necessary details behind such an issue. Therefore, these important details are often left unsaid. An example of this strategy is the assumption that the inhabitants of a country deemed as a “Third World” nation will erupt into chaos and civil unrest in the event of a disaster.

Vagueness is a strategy that is used “when it is essential to conceal responsibility for negative actions” and “biased reporting, thus generally draws attention to the agency of out-groups when their acts are negative, while playing down or concealing similar acts by in-group members” (Van Dijk, 1991, p. 184). For instance, journalists might highlight a negative circumstance, like an environmental problem, but will not attribute blame directly to those responsible because the responsible party is a part of or is the in-group.

Over-completeness can be understood as information (that would otherwise be considered irrelevant) included in news reports to negatively position members in of an out-group (Van Dijk, 1991). An example of this in disaster discourse could be discussing

the education levels (or the lack of education) of the victims and survivors, when such information is irrelevant to the overall story about the disaster.

Hyperbole refers to the exaggeration of the actions, conditions, or environment of those being discussed in the news reports (Van Dijk, 1991). Journalists often use this strategy when covering disasters. For example, journalists may stress a condition like poverty in a country by using certain descriptors that further solidify the condition, like referring to the poverty in Haiti as an “endemic” condition.

Blaming the victim is often understood as “attributing” blame for a negative situation to those experiencing the situation or event (Van Dijk, 1991). At times, journalists discursively construct the problems resulting from a disaster as the fault of those experiencing it. For example, journalists or contributors may blame Haiti’s environmental degradation and therefore the entire devastation from the earthquake, upon the people of Haiti, when other countries occupying the country also exacerbated such conditions (Potter, 2009).

Van Dijk (1991) characterizes *comparison* as the discussion of members of the out-group or ethnic minorities in a way that positions them in an “‘us’ and ‘them’” situation (p. 195). For instance, American journalists, when reporting on “Third World” countries, often resort to this type of semantic strategy by comparing the country in discussion (i.e.: economy, living conditions, government) to the United States.

Admission can be understood as the use of a “disclaimer” in order to “avoid being accused of making...generalizations” (Van Dijk, 1991, p. 197). For instance, journalists describing those in “Third World” or developing countries will often admit that not everyone in that country can be included in the negative description.

Organizing emergent themes with these foregoing semantic strategies in mind is important because doing so helps to understand how the American news media communicate certain knowledge and ideologies to the viewing or the listening audience. Additionally, these semantic strategies provide a way to better conceptualize how the American media help to assert and justify U.S. power and dominance in countries like Haiti. According to Van Dijk (1991), these semantic strategies are “goal-directed propert[ies] of discourse,” and these goals are “usually accomplished through various functional ‘moves’” (p. 187). Given this perspective, it was my objective in this study to understand what goals American news reports achieve in the discursive depictions of Haitians and Haiti as a nation, through the lens of critical discourse analysis – a paradigm that is concerned about issues of power, dominance, and hegemony.

This study borrows from a facet of the grounded theory approach, constant comparison. To implement Van Dijk’s semantic strategies, I use his thematic approach to Critical Discourse Analysis as a starting point to create and identify themes emerging in the news reports inductively. I found that for this specific study, it is through these themes that Van Dijk’s semantic strategies work. Tesch (1990), highlights the importance of comparison as a tool, and describes the process:

The main intellectual tool is comparison. The method of comparing and contrasting is used for practically all intellectual tasks during analysis: forming categories, establishing the boundaries of the categories, assigning the segments to categories, summarizing the content of each category...The goal is to discern conceptual similarities, to refine the discriminative power of categories to discover patterns (p. 96).

I did this with each transcript individually in order to understand and “formulate the core message” of the news report (Boeije, 2002, p. 395). While reading the transcripts, at each instance where I saw a potential theme, I made a note of it and categorized it with a label.

After reading the transcripts from all three networks with all the categories noted, I compared and reviewed those labels, and collapsed them into larger, more manageable themes with supporting subthemes where appropriate. To review and compare the labels, I first reviewed them within the context of the individual network coverage and discussion of that label, then within the larger body of news reports among all three networks. To operationalize these themes, I used the context within the news reports to define them. In other words, I used the labels I had created and identified within the reports to describe how each theme could be understood.

Finally, this study uses standards for the media's coverage of disasters developed by Graber (1980) and Eliot (1989) to complement Van Dijk's (1991) semantic strategies as ways to analyze cable news networks' efficiency in the coverage of the Haiti earthquakes. As a reminder, those standards are: (1) warn audiences of danger, (2) communicate important information to authorize and the general public, (3) track progress, (4) dramatize lessons learned to mitigate future disasters, and (5) include context, instead of discussing body count only. Van Dijk's strategies are more critical in nature, and allow scholars to understand the ways journalism discursively portrays those of African descent, as well as how the media "recontextualize," or manipulate events in their coverage. Graber and Eliot's standards for news coverage complement that assessment by providing a matrix for whether or not news providers maintain some of their practical objectives: ethical portrayals and the efficiency of those portrayals.

Data Collection

To conduct this investigation, I collected a sample of news transcripts using the *Lexis Nexis Academic* database from the three major 24-hour cable news networks, the Cable News Network (CNN), the Microsoft and National Broadcasting Company (MSNBC), and the Fox News Channel (FNC), from January 12, 2010 to December 31, 2010. I chose these three particular cable news networks because they are generally representative of cable news coverage in America. Furthermore, these three networks offer a balance of various American political perspectives, which allow for a more holistic and substantive understanding of how cable news covered the Haiti earthquakes. Media scholars have found a strong relationship between political attitudes and the news sources media users choose (Nie, et al., 2010; Morris, 2007). According to the Pew Research Center (2009), FNC is largely regarded by the American public as a conservative news provider; MSNBC is considered to be a liberal news provider, and CNN is considered to be a centrist news provider with a more liberal bent (Pew Research Center, 2009; Morris, 2007). Additionally, I chose these networks because they are the three highest rated 24-hour cable news networks on television, according to the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (2010). Gathering transcripts from these three different sources from the *Lexis Nexis Academic* database allowed for drawing stronger conclusions about how Haiti is depicted by American broadcast / cable news media.

So as to gather only the most substantive reports about Haiti, I used the following search formula: “(Haiti w/5 earthquake) and TERMS (January 2010 Haiti earthquake).”

The key terms in the search were “Haiti” and “earthquake.” However, I wanted to be sure that I drew news reports that discussed the January 2010 earthquakes from the database. Therefore, I needed the terms “Haiti” and “earthquake” to be within five (w/5) words of one another. By drawing only a subset of all the transcripts on the Haiti earthquakes from these three cable news networks, I used purposive sampling. According to Teddle and Yu (2007), purposive sampling is a common strategy used in qualitative research, and is defined as “selecting units based on specific purposes associated with answering a research study’s questions” (p.77). Furthermore, purposive sampling is appropriate for this study because certain “events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten well from other choices” (p. 77).

My search yielded a total of 234 transcripts: 196 from CNN, 22 from FNC and 16 from MSNBC. Despite the significantly low number of news transcripts from FNC and MSNBC in comparison to CNN transcripts, it was still important to use the reports from FNC and MSNBC because these networks tend to have strong ideological and political leanings. Since I am investigating this disaster from a critical discourse analysis perspective – one that is concerned about ideologies – I am interested in how these three networks cover the same disaster.

After reviewing the dataset for duplicate transcripts, and excluded those that were not directly discussing the Haiti earthquakes, I retained 214, making the dispersion of transcripts among these networks as follows: CNN ($n= 184$), FNC ($n= 17$), and MSNBC ($n= 13$). These transcripts were the most substantive and representative, exposing the strong ideological positions evident in the news networks’ discourse about Haitians and Haiti in the aftermath of the earthquakes. I analyzed, organized, and discussed the

transcripts from a critical discourse analysis perspective relying on Van Dijk's (1991) framework of semantic strategies.

Nanpwen cho ki pa vinn frèt
(There is nothing that is hot that doesn't eventually become cold.)
-Haitian Proverb

Chapter 5

Analysis

CNN, FNC, and MSNBC's Coverage and Newsworthiness

Of all of the cable news networks, CNN provided the most coverage of the earthquakes ($n=184$ transcripts), mostly by focusing on investigative, on-the-ground reporting by journalist, Anderson Cooper and medical doctor, Dr. Sanjay Gupta on the *Anderson Cooper 360* program. The other programs on CNN, which focused on interviews of key public figures and updates from investigative reporters, included: *Larry King Live*, *Campbell Brown*, *Issues with Jane Velez-Mitchell*, *The Situation Room*, *CNN Newsroom*, *Sanjay Gupta MD*, *CNN Tonight*, and *The Joy Behar Show*.

While also devoting some time to the earthquakes, FNC ($n=17$ transcripts) and MSNBC ($n=13$ transcripts) did so within the realm of brief updates, interviews and political commentary regarding key public figures involved in the response to the disaster, with little to no on-the-ground reporting. Much of FNC's earthquake coverage appeared on the following programs: *Fox on the Record with Greta Van Susteren*, *Fox Hannity*, *The O'Reilly Factor*, *Fox Special Report with Bret Baier*, and *Your World with Neil Cavuto*. Likewise, much of MSNBC's coverage of the disaster occurred on the *Rachel Maddow Show*, *Countdown with Keith Olbermann*, *The Ed Show with Ed Schultz*, *Hardball with Chris Matthews*, and *MSNBC Special* programs.

In addition to the difference in the number of transcripts I drew from each network, the scope of coverage was different between the networks. CNN's scope of coverage was consistent throughout the months of January and February, with periodic updates in April and May. The network's coverage picked back up again during the sixth-month anniversary of the earthquake and subsequent aftershocks on July 12th, and tapered back with more coverage in October and November (primarily because of the cholera pandemic that impacted the region). I contend that the interruption in CNN's coverage of Haiti could be contributed to other disasters and crises the network also considered newsworthy. Specifically, the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in April of 2010 began another constant news cycle of updates, as well as the Pakistan earthquake in March of 2010 interrupted coverage of the Haiti earthquakes. I speculate these two other disasters and crises eventually took precedence because of the novelty of each event, therefore shifting what was once extensive coverage on Haiti to periodic updates. This is because the programming, which at one time devoted nearly all of its attention toward the Haiti earthquakes, began to reduce the amount of discourse on the matter and replaced once extensive coverage with updates about the most recent crises and disasters.

MSNBC only covered the first two weeks of the disaster (from January 12th through January 25th). FNC's coverage lasted a bit longer. At its peak, FNC covered the earthquakes from January until March, with a few more days of coverage in October, and more coverage throughout the month of December.

As mentioned before, the objective of this thesis is to understand and investigate how American cable news networks generally portrayed Haiti and Haitians in the

aftermath of disaster. It is important to note here that because CNN offered more stories on Haiti than FNC and MSNBC, the analysis will include more references and excerpts from CNN. In addition to addressing the extensive discourse CNN provided, I wanted to call attention to the relative silence of FNC and MSNBC concerning some aspects of (and in some of themes I identify) in the Haiti disaster. The reason it is important to critically examine the data that FNC and MSNBC *did* yield is because such discourse, or the lack thereof in many cases, also reaps consequences for viewers who may selectively tune into one preferred network to obtain news.

Although these three networks are typically associated with particular political and ideological positions, it appears that concerning this event, the discourse is largely similar across all three news networks, with a few occasional nuanced differences between them. I organize the findings by the themes I mentioned earlier, at times combining quotes and references from CNN, FNC, and MSNBC under each appropriate theme.

Furthermore, I identify the following themes these networks deem newsworthy in their coverage of the disaster: problematic pre-conditions, incompetence of the Haitian government, U.S. involvement in the relief efforts, victim experience, and recovery. As planned I employed Van Dijk's (1991) semantic strategies to analyze these emergent themes in order to discuss the discursive portrayals of Haitians.

Problematic Pre-conditions

Much of the discourse in the news reports on Haiti in the aftermath of the earthquake involved what I call *Problematic pre-conditions*. This theme can be understood as a discussion of the conditions that may have plagued Haiti before the

earthquake impacted Port-au-Prince, its capital city. Problematic preconditions became a resounding theme on all three networks with the focus primarily on Haiti's poverty in the early days following the earthquake and also continued in the coverage throughout the remainder of 2010. The networks relied on this theme to place the earthquakes' devastation into perspective for the viewers and to explain some of the ways Haiti was not prepared for a 7.0 magnitude earthquake - or any crisis, for that matter. In addition to the discourse around poverty the networks also discussed other pre-conditions, including talk of the country's weak infrastructure, descriptions of the physical landscape, and over-population.

Poverty

Haiti's poverty was newsworthy because it provided the foundation for many of the problems discussed in the news reports. In fact, on numerous occasions, Haiti was characterized as a "Third World country" and as "the poorest country in the Western hemisphere" on all three networks (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). The same characterization also appeared on FNC, with host Greta Van Susteren saying, "Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world" (FNC, Jan. 12, 2010). MSNBC's Rachel Maddow echoed the same sentiment, as well saying, "Haiti, is by far, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere" (MSNBC, Jan. 12, 2010). Discursively, many of the news reports mentioning Haiti's economic state – more specifically, its poverty – engage in the semantic strategy that Van Dijk (1991) refers to as *presupposition*. That is, much of the discourse surrounding this topic assumes that readers and viewers are already aware of the pre-conditions contributing to the massive devastation after the earthquake. In fact, on the day of the earthquake, while speaking about its impact on the large Haitian

community in New York City, Raymond Kelley, the Police Commissioner of the city, stated that “the place [Haiti] is desperate, as you know” and the country itself was “sort of on permanent critical condition” (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). Similarly, MSNBC reported that Haiti was “a miserable country for so many...and now, so much worse” (MSNBC, Jan. 13, 2010). FNC’s Greta Van Susteren also highlighted Haiti’s poverty saying, “And this is a country that sure didn’t need this [the earthquakes]...it’s so poor. (FNC, Jan. 12, 2010). Not only are these reports characterizing Haiti as a country in need of help before the earthquake, many of the speakers engage in another semantic strategy Van Dijk (1991) refers to as *hyperbole*, or exaggeration. Raymond Kelley goes on to state that although the earthquake itself was a large and devastating one, it was “the preexisting conditions in the [sic] Haiti make it so much worse” (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). He even states that “poverty is *endemic*” there (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010, emphasis mine). One CNN correspondent remarked that Haiti was “a Third World country. This is a country that needed help with or without an earthquake. I can tell you that” because “this is a country that is *really suffering at its very core*” (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010, emphasis mine). MSNBC’s *Countdown with Keith Olbermann* show featured reports from its parent company, NBC, which had correspondents on the ground. The correspondent commented that Haiti represented “the scene of a country that is a miserable country on a good day...It’s almost pathetic” (MSNBC, Jan. 13, 2010). While all of this information may be accurate concerning the state of affairs in Haiti, and we cannot disregard the country’s conditions, the discourse used to describe Haiti - especially in these examples - use the earthquake to dramatize these pre-conditions.

Since many of the guests and correspondents on all three networks assumed the audience were aware of Haiti's economic state prior to the earthquake, the reports were oftentimes void of the deeper context and reasoning behind Haiti's "endemic poverty" (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). However, contributors and correspondents, specifically on CNN, would attempt to explain the depth of poverty by talking about the "layers" of problems that contributed to the earthquake's destruction, through giving a "quick download on the country -- Haiti 101" (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). To illustrate the scale of poverty, one CNN correspondent described that "80 percent" of Haiti's population were "living below the poverty line" with "about 50 percent in abject poverty...Many people living for less than \$200 a year, and \$400 a year, something like that" (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). This attempt to explain the depth of poverty in Haiti also points to another semantic strategy used by these networks that Van Dijk (1991) refers to as *comparison*. This strategy positions Haiti and the United States in a space of "us" and "them." In fact, the very mention of Haiti as a "Third World" country in the news discourse implicitly involves comparison. American journalists and experts - especially in the coverage of this disaster - explicitly label Haiti as a "Third World" country, but neglect to do the same thing discursively in relation to the United States by labeling it explicitly as a "First World" country. This is because hegemonically, countries like the United States are automatically considered all-powerful, fully-developed places, endowed with the authority to label other countries as they see fit.

Comparison is again used by CNN's journalist, Anderson Cooper. While reporting from Port-au-Prince, Cooper mentions that "it is hard to understand the level of poverty" in Haiti (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). Although not explicitly stated, this remark

indicates, that for the majority of the viewers, the level of Haiti's poverty is difficult to understand because of the relative wealth of the Western world, especially the United States. In fact, a CNN correspondent explained the scope of Haiti's poverty by providing the following statistics:

The World Bank ranks it as a chronic food deficit country. And what that means is it's only able to produce half the food it needs under normal circumstances. 46 percent of Haitians do not have regular access to drinking water...So Haiti ranks very low on the Human Development Index of the U.N. it's 154 out of 177 countries (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010).

The use of statistics and figures that compare Haiti to the rest of the world serve as "proof" of the country's inferiority, while potentially solidifying Haiti's devastated position in the minds of viewers and listeners.

Anderson Cooper uses this comparison strategy again in another narrative, describing Haiti as a place "where people sell mud cakes on the street. So the mothers feed their kids mud cakes so that it fills their stomachs so their kids aren't hungry, but it's essentially made of mud. I mean, there's a level of poverty in this hemisphere which is - frankly, shocking unless you've seen it for yourself" (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). MSNBC host Keith Olbermann also reports something similar using the hyperbole semantic strategy to describe the depth of poverty in Haiti before the earthquake. He says:

It [Haiti] already was the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, a country without a stable food supply, the most destitute, resorting to, literally, eating dirt in search of nutrition. And that was before yesterday's earthquake (MSNBC, Jan. 13, 2010).

Narratives like these not only situate the United States and Haiti in an "us" and "them" positions, but it places these two nations on two extremes, with Haiti experiencing "dire poverty," while the United States is understood to have massive amounts of wealth. This can be inferred because Haiti's poverty is "shocking unless you've seen it for yourself"

(CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). In other words, for CNN and MSNBC's viewing public Haiti's situation is nearly unfathomable because it is so far removed from much of what many Americans experience on a daily basis. Essentially, comparison can also be considered a hegemonic strategy because the United States exerts its dominance as a world power by discursively juxtaposing conditions in Haiti as a way to justify the fact that it is a country in need of help from a nation "capable" of offering such help.

On CNN, J. Bryan Page, a professor of Anthropology at the University of Miami, attempts to explain the reason for Haiti's dire economic situation – even after it had been given millions of dollars in foreign aid. He gives a brief history of the country. He explains:

“The United States didn't give up their slaves for another 60 years after the independence of Haiti. So the United States is very reluctant to have any relations at all...if you think about the legacy of that first 100 years of independence, what happened was that there were never resources put forward to educate the populous, to help them develop the skills necessary to participate in industrial development. For example, 80 percent to 90 percent illiteracy doesn't make you attractive to big business or big industry. And you still aren't attractive in this day and age because of that same drawback...The problem is there is so many institutional corruption and disorganization that there are huge barriers (CNN, Jan. 16, 2010).

Although Page highlights some legitimate reasons for Haiti's poverty, what he fails to address fully is the role that external factors and actors played in the nation's plight.

Although Page briefly mentions that relations between the United States and Haiti were strained, he does so only obscurely – making use of vagueness as a semantic strategy, which somewhat frees the U.S. from much responsibility. Instead, it appears Haiti's poverty problem is largely framed as a problem of the people. The blame is shifted from other responsible parties onto Haitians themselves, and Page engages in another semantic strategy of blaming the victim by saying that the lack of education, “institutional

corruption, and organization” are the “huge barriers” (CNN, Jan. 16, 2010) that prevent the country from prospering economically.

However, one day later, during an interview with Dr. Sanjay Gupta, former President Bill Clinton gave another historical account of Haiti, saying that the country’s poverty can be contributed to a “series of reasons:”

It was a colony. It was largely populated by slaves. It was never recognized – the United States did not recognize it when it won its independence. Other countries did not help it. We even occupied it for a period of time in the 20th century...It’s just an unfortunate confluence of events (CNN, Jan. 17, 2010).

In this account, Clinton lays a lot of the responsibility on the United States by addressing the fact it occupied Haiti and the lack of recognition from the rest of the world, which largely contributed to the country’s poverty.

Weak Infrastructure

The state of Haiti’s infrastructure was also integral to the discussion of the devastation. Much of the damage in Port-au-Prince and surrounding areas was exacerbated by and attributed to the weaknesses of the country’s infrastructure before the earthquake. Many of the news reports concluded that Haiti’s weak infrastructure was a result of the country’s deep poverty. News contributors and correspondents describe Haiti as a place where “the building code is very lax” (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). Some even wondered “just how some of these buildings could possibly be approved or be built” because the “buildings aren’t built the way that we would expect. The foundations aren’t great. There’s a lot of concrete buildings here, but not well-built” (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). During an interview on CNN, Former FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency)

official, Andrew Sachs, compares Haiti's infrastructure to the infrastructure in the United States - perhaps to provide viewers with some perspective about the level of devastation:

There's a lot of concrete construction in Haiti. None of it done with any code in mind...And even having seen a lot of the construction there, including buildings under construction over the last six or eight months in Haiti, the construction that is multistory is not being built even close to anything that we in the United States would call seismically-resistant standards (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010).

Such discourse engages *comparison* as a semantic strategy because Haiti's infrastructure is framed as something that is not only different from the United States' infrastructure - it is considered inferior. In fact, another CNN contributor, an expert in civil and environmental engineering, explains further how many buildings in Haiti are "non-engineered. They are single-family homes that have been put together by individuals without any engineering whatsoever", (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010).

Additionally, Haiti's weak infrastructure is an important part of the discourse employed in reporting because it helps to explain how one place could be so destroyed after an earthquake and because it illustrates Haiti's vulnerability to disasters. One CNN correspondent describes just how vulnerable Port-au-Prince was to this earthquake:

We can't overstate how vulnerable Port-au-Prince is to a natural disaster like this. The way the houses are built you have so many shanty towns around Port-au-Prince that are built up hillsides, very shoddy construction. The government does not have any kind of ability to police any sort of building codes (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010).

Discursively addressing the state of Haiti's infrastructure allows viewers to extrapolate and imagine how underprepared the country was to "deal with a crisis like this" (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). MSNBC reports similar reasons for Haiti's vulnerability through the expertise of contributor, David Applegate, a U.S. Geological Survey official. He explains the weakness of Haiti's infrastructure, saying:

The saying is: earthquakes don't kill people, buildings kill people. Certainly, just the images that we're seeing now... we're seeing the typical un-reinforced masonry and brick buildings that are the highest collapse hazard. They are not designed to withstand earthquake shaking. And unfortunately, a lot of those buildings, particularly the larger ones, are the schools, hospitals, and other really critical facilities (MSNBC, Jan. 12, 2010).

FNC also addressed the country's weak infrastructure by using hyperbole as a semantic strategy to highlight and dramatize Haiti's vulnerability to disaster. Host Greta Van Susteren comments, "The buildings are so flimsy, it's like, you know, *if you take a deep breath, you can knock some of these buildings over*" (FNC, Jan. 12, 2010, emphasis mine).

Not only are Haiti's buildings discussed, other vital services, like communication are assessed, as well. After the earthquake, Haiti's telecommunication system was virtually non-existent, and communication with those on the ground was difficult without power. CNN also reported problems like these, and in an interview, New York City police commissioner, Raymond Kelley pointed out that, "communication and medical support are marginal at best. Every day and the best of days, there are power blackouts. So of course, that's got to be a major factor in doing any sort of relief or rescue effort" (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). FNC also made mention of failing communications in Haiti. Host Greta Van Susteren reported, on the first night of the disaster, that "large parts of the country tonight are in total darkness" (FNC, Jan. 12, 2010).

Degraded Physical Landscape and Overpopulation

Yet another issue related to the discussion of Haiti's pre-conditions was the country's degraded physical landscape. One specific reason given for the level of devastation was the amount of deforestation. While reporting from Haiti, CNN's

Anderson Cooper explained that “a lot of the mountain sides are completely barren of trees. People have cut down the trees for firewood to make charcoal and the like and so you don’t have any shrubbery or trees that can prevent the mud on these mountains from just cascading down” (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). Haiti’s landscape is discursively constructed as a function and a result of the country’s poverty, just as the discussion of its infrastructure was. More specifically, discussions of Haiti’s deforestation use *blaming the victim* as a semantic strategy. Essentially, the people of Haiti are held responsible for the “environmental degradation” Haiti experienced throughout the years, thereby causing “significant problems” (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). Although given a bit of a reprieve for the country’s deforestation because of their poverty, Haitians are still blamed for this aspect of the earthquake’s destruction because “there’s no vegetation to keep that mountain from just sliding right down,” causing further damage, injuries, and deaths (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010).

While these reports attempted to help American viewers understand just why and how Haiti’s landscape became degraded, some of the reports failed to address exactly why Haitians are even occupying parts of that country in large numbers, and these reports use what Van Dijk (1991) refers to as *vagueness* as a semantic strategy. That is, the diversion or the denial of responsibility for a negative action or consequence. Without the knowledge of American occupation and questionable business practices in Haiti during the twentieth century, it would be easy for viewers of these news reports to attribute blame to the Haitian people for the country’s degraded landscape.

To further emphasize Haiti's physical degradation, CNN's Anderson Cooper describes what it is like to fly over the island of Hispaniola, land that is comprised of both the Dominican Republic and Haiti, saying:

One of the things that really strikes you when you fly over D.R. [Dominican Republic] and also over Haiti. You fly over D.R., and it's green in a lot of areas, especially the mountain areas. As soon as you cross the border into Haiti, the mountains are literally stripped of all vegetation" (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010).

Cooper uses this narrative to *compare* Haiti's landscape to the Dominican Republic's - a semantic strategy that further solidifies Haiti's place as one of the "least developed countries in the Western Hemisphere" (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). Additionally, John Eves, former regional manager of the Peace Corps, compares Haiti with the Dominican Republic, saying:

The other thing that I think is interesting is that Haiti shares the same island with the Dominican Republic, and Hispaniola, the island, Hispaniola. Haiti is one third of the island and the more part is the Dominican Republic. So when I was there, I had a chance to see the various difference between Haiti and DR, in terms of infrastructure, in terms of greenery, environment, et cetera (CNN, Jan. 16, 2010).

By comparing the two nations that share an island, Eves discursively constructs Haiti as an inferior place that has not been maintained the way its close neighbor has maintained the landscape. Similarly, On MSNBC, one contributor engaged in comparison by juxtaposing Haiti's earthquake preparedness to California, another earthquake-prone area. The contributor, David Applegate, is a an official at the U.S. Geological Survey, and he says that Haiti's populations is one that "is nowhere near as earthquake-ready in terms of its construction as California" (MSNBC, Jan. 12, 2010). Applegate compares Haiti to California because of the fact that the country's weak infrastructure will ultimately be reason for many of the deaths reported.

Discourse about Haiti's landscape also included overpopulation in Port-au-

Prince, the epicenter of the earthquakes. The capital city is often described as the most densely populated city in Haiti. Population density was important to the discussion because of the amount of lives in danger from fallen buildings. In fact, MSNBC reported (via an NBC correspondent on the ground) that although Port-au-Prince was a “large city,” it was described as a city “so compact with so many shanty towns and so many shacks built on the sides of hills” (MSNBC, Jan. 13, 2010). On CNN, Port-au-Prince was described as an “urbanized” city where people are “packed together” - a phenomena that is “familiar in the Third World” and “a result, frankly, of overpopulation, complete lack of birth control in Haiti itself” (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). Such discursive descriptions – namely those discussions about the lack of birth control in the country – give the impression that many Haitian births are mistakes or that many of them should have been prevented. Not only is Haiti viewed by the rest of the world as a “Third World” country, perhaps unwittingly, use discourse to minimize the importance of lives in Haiti.

Incompetence of the Haitian Government

Another dimension to the news coverage of the Haiti earthquakes involved the discursive portrayals of the Haitian government. This theme can be understood as the discussions about Haitian government’s inability to respond to the needs of its citizens, both before and after the earthquakes, and dialogue about the government’s incompetence, suspicions of corruption, and fear of possible civil unrest. Often when discussing the Haitian government, these news reports would also focus on Haiti’s history of political unrest to further illustrate the country’s desperate conditions. One CNN correspondent, in an attempt to situate Haiti’s plight, mentioned that the country’s history “is one of political instability and violence” (CNN, Jan. 13, 2010). Therefore,

Haiti's extensive political history serves as a precursor to many of the news reports surrounding its current government in the aftermath of the earthquakes.

Government Absence

Many of these reports portrayed the absence of the Haitian government as something that was to be expected - making use of the semantic strategy, presupposition. In fact, in addition to discussing the overall bleak circumstances the country faces in the midst of disaster, one FNC host mentions the fact that Haiti has long experienced political problems. He says that Haiti has "been victimized by its own government over generations and generations. *It is as close to a godforsaken place as you can imagine*" (FNC, Jan. 13, 2010, emphasis mine). Not only does the host use presupposition to discuss the inadequacies of Haiti's government, he also uses hyperbole to highlight the fact that, as a result of overall governmental neglect, Haiti has become a "godforsaken place." In another instance, while reporting from Port-au-Prince, CNN's Anderson Cooper commented on how largely absent the Haitian government was after the earthquakes:

You don't see much Haitian government presence. That's really nothing new in this country...But you don't see government bulldozers out clearing roads or - or you don't see government search and rescue teams, because I don't really think they have them (CNN, Jan. 13, 2010).

Cooper's use of the words "that's really nothing new in this country" illustrates the low expectations many people had of the government. Other reports echoed this same sentiment, characterizing the Haitian government as incompetent and unable to respond properly to this disastrous situation, or any other situation that would call for a government response. Because of that ineptitude, journalists and contributors alike agreed

that it was “going to be up to the international community” to respond to Haiti’s disaster because the Haitian government “clearly is just not up to...the task” (CNN, Jan. 13, 2010). One person who witnessed the earthquake observed:

The response was not as swift and prompt, as it should have been, even at the local level. We should have had some basic coordination, cohesion and coherence of what needed to be done to assist the people - you know, shelters and...getting basic clean water to help people and something to eat (CNN, Jan. 13, 2010).

Cooper even remarked, “until we start to see some major, you know, international involvement here, there’s not going [to] be much of a solution” (CNN, Jan. 13, 2010).

Another correspondent also noted that many Haitians “don’t expect their government to really be much help” (CNN, Jan. 13, 2010). Not only are journalists expressing their thoughts about the state of Haiti’s government, they are projecting those opinions upon Haitians, as well. However, there were no such sentiments reported from the Haitian people themselves.

MSNBC’s Keith Olbermann asks a Reuters’ correspondent on the ground about the “societal structure” in Haiti, and the reporter says, “I can’t say anything other than what I saw, which was, when you speak of society, you speak of order. And at this point, Port-au-Prince, at least from my own eyes, there is none” (MSNBC, Jan. 13, 2010).

Although not explicitly stated, the reporter alludes to the fact that the Haitian government is largely absent in the city, meaning that order is being compromised.

Additionally, the portrayals of the Haitian government’s absence were exacerbated by the fact that Haiti’s President, Rene Preval’s residence was destroyed by the earthquake. While being interviewed by CNN’s medical correspondent, Dr. Sanjay Gupta, President Preval indicated that he couldn’t live in the presidential palace or in his own home and that he didn’t know where he was going to sleep (CNN, Jan 13, 2010).

However, Preval did indicate that he had “plenty of time to look for a bed, but now I am working on how to rescue the people” (CNN, Jan. 13, 2010). From his interview, Preval declared that he would do everything he could to help the people of Haiti during this time. The head of the government’s relative helplessness is both literally and symbolically indicative of Haiti’s overall state after the earthquake. Such discourse about the Haitian government paves the way for foreign, “First World” countries come into Haiti’s space and exert power by organizing search and rescue and clean up efforts during this time of devastation. Additionally, such discourse portrays Haiti as a “failed state,” largely reliant upon outside help to respond to the needs of its citizens (Potter, 2009).

Suspicious of Corruption

In addition to highlighting the absence of Haiti’s government in the immediate days after the earthquake, some journalists, correspondents, and experts were concerned about issues of corruption. While discussing the “Talking Points Memo” of the January 13, FNC’s Bill O’Reilly expressed his own concern about the intentions of Haiti’s government with the charitable donations coming into the country. O’Reilly indicated that he did donate to the relief effort through an organization run by an American doctor, but he said, “I give the money directly to the doctor because I know if I send it to the island, Haitian authorities will most likely steal it. And therein lies the problem with Haiti, massive corruption” (FNC, Jan. 13, 2010). O’Reilly engages in the strategy of presupposition because he automatically assumes that whatever charitable donations reach the hands of the Haitian government, it would “most likely” be stolen.

Because of its history of government corruption in the past, O’Reilly even wonders *how much* help American should offer to Haiti this time. He says:

Now as far as Haiti is concerned, the USA has given that country more than \$1 billion over the past five years...There are 9 million Haitian on the island, so there's enough aid to provide for all of them. The nation could be a tourist Mecca. It is rich in folklore and culture, including voodoo. It has the Caribbean Sea and very nice people. But there is little tourism in Haiti...No matter how much charity is given, no matter how many good intentions there are, Haiti will remain chaotic until discipline is imposed...No society will prosper unless there are rules of conduct, mandatory education, and fairness by those in power. None of that happens in Haiti. And so, the USA will once again pour millions into that country, much of which will be stolen...and one year from today, Haiti will be just as bad as it is right now" (FNC, Jan. 13, 2010).

O'Reilly's concerns about corruption are also implicitly imbued with ideas that Haiti is to blame for its current state and he uses a semantic strategy that involves *blaming the victim*. He lists how well Haiti could and *should* be doing by highlighting the fact that it is an island on the Caribbean Sea with a rich culture. With its culture and physical location, Haiti's tourism industry should be booming and with the massive amounts of aid "poured" into the country over the years, Haiti's economy should be stable. However, what O'Reilly fails to address in his "Talking Points Memo" are the complex issues that plagued Haiti *before* the earthquake - some of which were exacerbated by treatment from Western nations, like the United States. While O'Reilly attempts to discursively illustrate the United States as an altruistic nation that does "more than anyone else on the planet" for Haiti, he fails to address how, at one time, the United States, among other powerful nations, acted as a saboteur to Haiti's progress (CNN, Jan. 13, 2010).

Additionally, O'Reilly's "Memo" includes some problematic discourse regarding Haiti's culture. While he attempts to compliment Haiti on its "rich" culture, the one only specific area of the country's culture he chooses to focus on is voodoo. By doing this, he engages in another semantic strategy that Van Dijk (1991) identifies as *over-completeness*. That is, he includes information that would otherwise be considered

irrelevant to negatively position members in an out-group. He even suggests “in slums like City Soleil, neighborhoods are run by drug dealers, *voodoo priests*, or common extortionists” (FNC, Jan. 13, 2010). Since the country’s existence, it has been marked as a key place where voodoo is practiced. In fact, many early portrayals of Haiti in American media involved focusing on the practice of voodoo and barbaric human sacrifices (Potter, 2009). By engaging in this semantic strategy in this way, O’Reilly is helping to perpetuate negative portrayals of the Haitian people. And since Haiti is rarely ever considered newsworthy in the American news media, save for disaster and crises situations, American viewers form opinions and views of Haiti during times like these (Potter, 2009). Therefore, these one-dimensional discourses are not allowing the “richness” of Haiti’s culture that O’Reilly speaks of to be properly displayed. O’Reilly’s mentioning of Haiti’s voodoo culture serves as a hegemonic function because it confirms the already established idea that Haiti is a mismanaged country in need of organization and discipline from the United States.

Furthermore, O’Reilly’s “Memo” also suggests blatantly that the United States should exert its power and provide the structure, or the “rules of conduct” that Haiti needs in order to see progress. Because “no matter how much charity is given” Haiti will remain in the state that it is in until “discipline is imposed” (FNC, Jan 13, 2010). The comment is a deterministic perspective to communicate. O’Reilly appears to assume that the United States is the answer to all of Haiti’s problems and if Haiti were to adopt our way of doing things, it will prosper. He even says, “President Obama should not just promise \$100 million with no accountability. Every dollar needs to be managed. And if that means the USA calls the shots, ‘Talking Points’ says, good. And I believe the Haitian

people would say good as well” (FNC, Jan. 13, 2010). While there is no doubt that Haiti is in need of aid and competent management of that aid, such discourse is demonstrative of how the United States and countries like it are able to justify using power to control vulnerable countries. Furthermore, by using the words, “calling the shots” to express how the United States should work with Haiti in the days ahead – O’Reilly sees America’s relationship with Haiti in a unilateral manner.

Suspicious about the intentions of Haiti’s government were not only expressed on FNC, they were discussed on CNN, as well. Six months after the earthquake, CNN’s Anderson Cooper went back to Haiti to provide an update about the country’s progress. While there, he discovered that NGOs (non-government organizations) and other aid organizations had not delivered much needed supplies to many victims of the earthquake. Cooper reported:

What the NGOs are telling us, these charities, are saying is, look, that’s fine for-profit companies who are bringing in things to sell or to make money, but for companies that are bringing supplies to help Haitians, they shouldn’t be taxed 20 percent on that (CNN, July 13, 2010).

Apparently the Haitian government had been taxing the aid organizations 20 percent and charging storage fees for materials that Haitians need in order to survive. However, Haitian President Rene Preval, insisted that there was no government corruption involved in the aftermath of the earthquake. However, news reports highlighted the fact that “certainly in past governments we have seen great amounts of corruption. Transparency International, among others, says ...Haiti has a long problem of this. It’s pretty obvious to anybody who has been on the ground here”, (CNN, July 13, 2010). Yet, NGOs suggest that some sort of corruption had to occur because even though Haiti has strict customs policies, these organizations claim that they followed through with all of their

requirements and the supplies were still unable to reach the people. CNN's Sanjay Gupta also discusses how problematic this is, saying:

And we came across something today that really will make people angry. I think the idea that there are supplies that people need...potentially live-saving things, located literally just down the road from the people who need it -- you talk about lack of communication. People who need it can't get in touch with people who want it. And, as a result, you get these absurd situations, like the one you're about to see now (CNN, July 13, 2010).

The way in which this story is juxtaposed with fear of corruption from the Haitian government reveals another semantic strategy being used by CNN: *vagueness*. That is, the audience is not really sure from the way the reports are structured whether the NGOs' lack of communication with each other or the assumptions surrounding the Haitian government's alleged corruption is to blame for these vital materials sitting "literally just down the road from the people who need it" (CNN, July 13, 2010). MSNBC, however, neglected to provide discourse on this issue altogether.

Fear of Civil Unrest

Given that Haiti has been largely characterized as a country rife with poverty and political instability since from the early days of its existence, the fear of civil unrest was another dimension of incompetence of the Haitian government. Many correspondents and experts *presupposed* that in the aftermath of the earthquake, the Haitian people would engage in criminal activities because of the absence of the Haitian government and its inability to police its own country. Additionally, Haiti is often considered as a place that is "naturally violent" (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). In fact a journalist reported that "there is also a great fear among many of the officials that we've spoken with so far about the potential for unrest and violence, even after...an earthquake of this magnitude" (CNN, Jan. 12,

2010). In other words, many people were bracing themselves for the worst, especially because one Haitian prison was destroyed, resulting in about 1,000 prisoners escaping. FNC host Bill O'Reilly even talked about Haiti's violent reputation, asking one guest who worked there, "Did the gangsters leave you alone?" (FNC, Jan. 14, 2010). After answering affirmatively, O'Reilly continues to discuss the issue from his point of view, saying, "I mean, I've been to Haiti. And those people are rough people. They'll chase you down if they can" (FNC, Jan. 14, 2010). Though the guest told O'Reilly that he encountered no such problem, O'Reilly's comments are problematic because they appear to generalize the people of Haiti into "gangsters" who will harm those coming to help them. By discursively portraying Haiti in this way, viewers may get the impression that all Haitian people are dangerous and prone to violence.

In another instance, a CNN anchor asked one correspondent on the ground, "what about the danger of violence at this hour? It's after dark, there must be chaos in the streets. This is a rather violent nation", (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). However, the correspondent responded:

I can assure you that Haiti in the last two years has basically turned a corner...It has not had the problems of violence that it has had, and in fact, if you looked at some of the United Nations statistics, it will tell you that it does not have the crime statistics that other countries have had. Yes, Haiti has gone through a series of political instability, we have seen on CNN and elsewhere in terms of the violence, but in the last two, three years, everyone in the national committee has talked about the turnaround this country has undergone and the measure of political stability it has been undergoing (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010).

Interestingly enough, the correspondent cited statistics that disproved the idea that Haiti was not as prone to violence as many initially thought.

While many expected Haitians to wreak havoc on their own nation in the days after the earthquake, CNN's reporters on the ground dispelled that presupposition

because the situation was not as bad as expected. In fact, one American citizen living in Haiti observed:

I was warned a few times last night about potentially going into dangerous areas, but I did go into downtown after dark and I saw no violence of any kind and I stuck with different people who offered to help me. I think that Haiti has a reputation for being a violent place, when in reality, it actually has some of the lowest crime rates in the region in the Caribbean...I think that a lot of the Haitians are dealing with this in an entirely peaceful way (CNN, Jan. 13, 2010).

This observation by the American citizen residing in Haiti is an interesting account not only because it presents Haiti in a more positive way, but it also directly challenges the notion that Haiti is a “naturally violent” place as once presumed. Additionally, this observation provides evidence that Haitians are more than their history or previous depictions in the media might suggest.

A former military general interviewed on CNN supports this in his attempt to explain why some people regard Haiti as a violent place and why such an opinion is problematic. The general addresses these problematic conclusions while discussing a recent decision to remove doctors from the ground, saying:

I think they’ll take the acts of a few criminals and characterize the people. That happened to us during Katrina and there appears to be a natural fear among our people – poor people, who are massed in a location, that there is going to be a security issue. We saw it in New Orleans repeatedly for the first three weeks because there was a crime problem there before. There were crime issues going on in Haiti before the disaster. Few criminals could cause the entire operation to stop. That is why the first responders have to ensure that we don’t do something like happened last night, move the doctors off because of security and leave 24 patients there on their own. That is stupid” (CNN, Jan. 16, 2010).

He dismisses the idea that the country is “naturally violent,” and argues that such presuppositions are made because of “the acts of a few criminals.” Perhaps the most pressing portion of his argument is that 24 patients would have been left without medical

care, simply because of an exaggerated generalization about the state of security in Port-au-Prince.

Additionally, some journalists were surprised at the civility of the Haitian people. In fact, one MSNBC correspondent reported, “the one thing that stuck out is that people are still being civil in Haiti. People are walking around. There’s at least 2 million people just walking the streets. They’re trying to walk out of the country but they’re acting civil” (MSNBC, Jan. 14, 2010). It seems that the correspondent was operating within Van Dijk’s (1991) semantic strategy of *presupposition*, by assuming that after the earthquakes, the Haitians would somehow be “uncivil,” yet that assumption was disproved upon personal observation.

However, according to these news reports, the calm sentiment did not last for long. While reporting from Port-au-Prince, CNN’s Sanjay Gupta heard gunshots in his immediate area. He observed:

We heard about 12 gunshots over a period of a few minutes. And...we turned off our lights...we wanted to make sure that we weren’t a target...There is sort of this sense that, you know, people are going from having been stunned over the last day, which was sort of the mood that I felt when I first got here, to people are sort of becoming a little bit more anxious. There’s a little bit more energy, a little bit more violence in the air (CNN, Jan. 13, 2010).

Gupta attributes the behavior to be a sign of impatience, resulting from the poor conditions the city of Port-au-Prince was left in after the earthquake.

Similarly, days later, CNN’s Anderson Cooper observes “looting” in the city’s streets, amongst the rubble. Cooper describes the scene for viewers:

It doesn’t take long. The block is now in the hands of the looters. The American businessman, Tony, has blocked off the street in front of his business, which is just about 300 feet away from where the main looting is occurring right now. So, he’s used whatever debris he could here...And they have closed off this entire street. He has those two Haitian police officers with him here protecting his store.

And, look, they have been able to bring in a truck, and they're quickly loading as many of the food supplies from his store into that truck, and then they're going to take it away before the looters can get to it (CNN, Jan. 18, 2010).

Cooper's observation juxtaposes Haitians (the alleged looters) with an American businessman trying to preserve what merchandise he can, while needing police protection. Scholars have concluded that looting is one of the behaviors that are often exaggerated or untrue altogether in the aftermath of disasters (Constable, 2008). Since the media "plays an important role in defining the situation," the use of the word "looting" in news discourse following a disaster can be problematic because its use could impact the ways in which disaster managers, rescue workers, and policymakers approach the situation (Constable, 2008, n.p.). Furthermore, media consumers may have a difficult time accurately understanding what the term means and may form negative opinions about those allegedly engaged in the behavior. Although the term is defined by the Merriam-Webster as "steal[ing] goods from a place typically during a war or riot," Constable (2008) argues that the items taken or "looted" during these situations are "things that would generally be considered necessary for an individual's survival" (n.p.; Merriam-Webster dictionary, 2010). From Anderson Cooper's observations, it is unclear what items are "looted" from this American businessman; therefore, Cooper's observations, are vague - another example that demonstrates one of Van Dijk's (1991) semantic strategies: *vagueness*. Cooper's report can also be considered vague because of the contestable nature of the term "looting."

However, in an attempt to provide a balanced view, Cooper continues to qualify his observations, saying:

Again, I don't want to paint a picture that that is happening all over Port-au-Prince, because it is not. I know, for several days, it seems like I hear from folks

in the States and on TV saying that, you know, that there's tension and frustration and violence. That's the first looting I've seen. And, again, I was in a two-block area. And it was happening on both streets" (CNN, Jan. 18, 2010).

It seems that Cooper is aware of the negative connotation the term "looting" has for the viewing audience, which is why he engages in another one of Van Dijk's (1991) semantic strategies, almost in the same breath: *admission*. He is careful not to generalize his observations to encompass the entire city of Port-au-Prince. He admits that the "looting" incident is isolated within the region that he is specifically located.

US Involvement

Haiti's government has been portrayed as unable to meet the needs of its citizens. As such the country had to rely upon international assistance in order to handle the devastation because "clearly Haiti will need as much help as it can get from the U.S. and some countries around the world" (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). Therefore, within the news reports, the theme of US government involvement soon emerged. This theme can be understood as the discourse surrounding the United States' involvement in the organization of relief, rescue and recovery in Haiti after the earthquakes through military intervention and the charitable donations of Americans.

Military Intervention

Much of the discourse about US involvement in Haiti included talk of military intervention in the devastated country. In a statement Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared, "The United States is offering our full assistance to Haiti and to others in the region. We will be providing both civilian and military disaster relief and humanitarian assistance" (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). Given that news reports indicated that the Haitian

government was largely absent in the immediate days after the earthquake, the U.S. government thought it was imperative to deploy military personnel to maintain order, to secure the area, and to coordinate search and rescue operations. According to MSNBC reports, military personnel were already present in Haiti before disaster struck, but because of the earthquake, “U.S. Southern Command says they are willing to deploy military resources to help if that is required” (MSNBC, Jan. 12, 2010). Additionally, because of the assumption of Haitian government’s inability to coordinate and organize the influx of aid, CNN reported:

The U.S. military is trying to get in there and make sure this airport can run efficiently and effectively...The first order of business here – this is essentially a line of attack they’re working on...And I said we’re going to be building sort of a situational awareness all day. Right now, what is happening there is they’re figuring out how to get the roads open, how to get basic medical care, basic services and basic search and rescue out there to figure out the situation (CNN, Jan. 13, 2010).

Because Haiti’s airport was the only reasonable way for some relief supplies to reach the devastated area, and because the government was unable to respond effectively to such devastation, the United States’ military had to take over the organization and distribution of relief goods. Once FNC contributor stated that this was a positive thing and also said that while the earthquakes were,

Certainly...cruel and incomprehensible, I would say the only good news is the United States exists and is nearby and can help. And it’s good that the U.S. can project power, military power, planes, ships, marines, and so on, because it means they can also project aid (FNC, Jan. 13, 2010).

Another FNC contributor also mirrored this type of discourse by saying, “This is an opportunity for the United States to demonstrate what it can do well, and that is rescue because we have power” (FNC, Jan. 13, 2010). It appears that these journalists see action from the United States as a way for the country to demonstrate its power and,

subsequently, its greatness and superiority. While such an intervention from a resourceful country like America is undoubtedly helpful, it is important to be mindful that such discourse could provide a false sense of entitlement and jurisdiction. That is, the discourse could provide justification for a complete American take-over of Haitian affairs – even after the rubble from the earthquake is cleared and the country is restored. Coverage of this disaster by these networks also demonstrate that the reporting – whether biased or not – has the potential to significantly influence American foreign policy strategy and decisions.

In addition to pledging manpower to help Haiti, President Obama also pledged millions of dollars toward the relief effort. According to FNC host Bill O'Reilly, "Another \$100 million of American tax money [is] heading to Haiti... Today, President Obama pledged an enormous amount of money" (FNC, Jan. 14, 2010). The President also made a statement about how he planned to help Haiti, which included making the nation a top priority by using "every element of our national capacity," in order to not only help the people of Haiti, but to demonstrate America's leadership (CNN, Jan. 14, 2010). He also clarified that the reason why it is America's duty to help the nation is "for the sake of our citizens, who are in Haiti, for the sake of the Haitian people who have suffered so much, and for the sake of our common humanity" (CNN, Jan. 14, 2010). It seems that while assuring the people Haiti about America's commitment to them, the President had to also justify why the nation is committed – because of shared humanity. Furthermore, he briefly mentions Haiti's troubled history and promises that the nation "will not be forsaken" or "forgotten" because "In this, your hour of greatest need, America stands with you" (MSNBC, Jan. 14, 2010). Although the President promises,

“with conviction,” help from the United States, one can’t help but question just how long the help will continue and what the price of that help will be, since historically, the United States and others have abandoned Haiti in other moments of need.

Charitable Donations

In addition to President’s Obama \$100 million pledge of support from the government, allowing for the provision of “life-saving equipment, food, water and medicine that will be needed,” private donations from Americans were also discussed (CNN, Jan. 14, 2010). Some of the reports highlighted the charitable donations made by Americans and American companies toward the recovery effort. Much of the discourse surrounding the donations praised Americans for their generosity. In fact, one CNN correspondent praised the American people, saying, “it’s encouraging to see that people are reacting so quickly” (CNN, Jan. 14, 2010). American citizens could give in a number of ways: by texting to a number and adding a few dollars to their phone bill, which would be donated to a connected to an aid organization, by going online to donate, or giving by phone. Another important message within the discourse of giving was the instructions for doing so. Former President Bush encouraged the American people to give money above all else, saying:

[The] most effective way for Americans to help the people of Haiti is to contribute money. That money will go to organizations on the ground and who will be able to effectively spend it. I know a lot people want to send blankets or water. Just send your cash. One of the things that the President and I will do is make sure your money is spent wisely” (CNN, Jan. 14, 2010).

Perhaps sensing the American people’s questions about how the money donated would be handled and by whom, the former President assured the audience that the money would be handled by American overseers and “spent wisely.” CNN reported that the money

would be used “for nutrition programs, immunization drives, rebuilding schools, and health centers and clean water” (CNN, July 12, 2010). In another instance, MSNBC’s Keith Olbermann devotes some airtime to discussing charitable giving. He provides a clip of former President Bill Clinton encouraging Americans to give toward the relief effort, saying:

We’ve got to save as many lives as possible and keep the people who are wounded as healthy as possible and give water to people where there’s no more clean water and feed them...The most important thing individuals can do who care is to send cash, even if it’s \$1 or \$2 (MSNBC, Jan. 13, 2010).

FNC also provided airtime to let viewers know how to give charitably and updating viewers on what was being done for Haiti by the American government. Former President Bill Clinton appeared on FNC also via telephone saying:

President Obama and Hillary and the USAID people, they're working hard with the military in America to help...we can't even think about rebuilding until we get through that rubble, save every life we can and treat the dead respectfully and try to preserve them long enough for their nearest kin to come and get them so they can give them a decent burial. Right now, what we need more than anything else is not for everybody to go down there, unless you're a rescue worker or you've got a medical team...The best thing anyone can give in the next two weeks is money, even if it's just \$5 or \$10 (FNC, Jan. 13, 2010).

Clinton is adamant about the importance of donor dollars in the early days after the disaster, and emphasizes the fact that money is what is needed the most.

Victim Experience

Coverage about the people immediately impacted was essential to discussions of the disaster. Therefore, I have identified the discourse surrounding this theme as *victim experience*. This theme can be understood as talk about casualties and injuries and missing persons. Also included are other more in-depth human-interest stories, appeals

for help by Haitian-Americans, including Haitian-American celebrities; and talk about the mood and mentality of the victims.

Casualties, Injuries, and Rescues

Because of the enormous physical damage to the area and the population density in Port-au-Prince, many people were negatively impacted, resulting in many injuries and casualties. Many of the initial reports speculated that casualties and injuries would be high because of Haiti's weak infrastructure. In fact, MSNBC host Keith Olbermann suggested "all this—could be the greatest natural disaster and the greatest humanitarian crisis since the Indian Ocean tsunami. The death toll could be 5,000 or 50,000 or 500,000" (MSNBC, Jan. 13, 2010). FNC echoed the same sentiment, as well with host Greta Van Susteren placing emphasis on the country's internal weaknesses and lack of resources, saying, "Any kind of shock like this [the earthquakes] is going to have a devastating effect. I think the casualties will be very high, and the lack of medical facilities and doctors and nurses and medical infrastructure is just going to make it that much worse," and as a result, "bodies are lying in the streets and the scene is total disaster and chaos. Witnesses describe hearing cries for help among the rubble" (FNC, Jan. 12, 2010).

In another instance one CNN correspondent observed while reporting from Haiti:

It's pretty overwhelming to see the amount of people wounded, to see people carrying their mothers, their loved ones on doors, trying to find some medical clinic to treat them after the wounds they received in the collapse...to see people laying on sidewalks outside of medical clinics waiting for hours for some kind of treatment for these wounds. And when people die, there is nobody to collect the bodies. So they are literally stacking up on the sidewalks (CNN, Jan. 13, 2010).

As mentioned earlier, Haiti was characterized largely as an underdeveloped country with very few resources before the earthquake hit. Therefore, much of the coverage about the victims in the early days of the disaster revolved around human-interest stories about people being rescued from the rubble, others who were not fortunate enough to survive the earthquake, and missing persons. In fact, CNN's Anderson Cooper, while reporting from on the ground, witnessed a 13-year old girl being pulled from rubble:

There's an awful lot of people trapped underneath rubble right now and we are still seeing people being pulled out alive. I saw a little girl 13 years old today pulled out alive after being trapped for 18 hours. It was an incredibly dramatic moment -- a moment of sheer joy. And then she was put on a seat right next to four bodies, one of whom was her aunt (CNN, Jan. 13, 2010).

It has often been said, "earthquakes don't kill people, buildings do" (Coppola, 2007, p. 15). This was definitely the case in Port-au-Prince. In fact, CNN's Dr. Sanjay Gupta reported, "we see all the ramifications of what we've been talking about for the last day. Buildings like this completely crumbled and as you might imagine, lots of people devastated and have died as a result of that", (CNN, Jan. 14, 2010).

Oftentimes the television news media capitalize on the images that disasters and crises like the Haiti earthquakes provide. Much of the discourse within this theme entailed use of *hyperbole* as a semantic strategy to get audiences to tune into the most updated coverage. While much of this was accomplished by a myriad of visual images, such images were often supported by equally "juicy" discourse. Journalists on the ground would often point out dead bodies lining the streets of the city. In fact, CNN's Sanjay Gupta reported:

There are just bodies lying in the streets...I did not think I would see what I am showing you right now. It's a dead body right here...Twenty-five more bodies...I have never – as a doctor, as a journalist who's traveled around the world, I have never seen anything quite like this. It's just astonishing (CNN, Jan. 14, 2010).

Another CNN correspondent reported the people of Haiti were in “a living hell” and further described the living conditions of those that survived:

This park is now home. It’s a place to sleep. But when they awaken – scenes like this are waiting for them. There’s no shortage of misery in Port-au-Prince this morning. People are still trapped everywhere, tangles in debris and desperate for help. For many, help did not and will not come soon enough. For others, this is the best medical care available for now (CNN, Jan. 14, 2010).

One MSNBC correspondent describes Haiti as “truly an unbelievable sight. There are bodies on the streets, children, people are actually using their cars as ambulances to transport people to and from the border to any hospitals... It’s just really a really unbelievable and unimaginable sight” (MSNBC, Jan. 14, 2010).

Another journalist illustrates a scene where a child was waiting desperately to be rescued, describing the scene as a “building full of people that has collapsed like an accordion. Almost pancaked down on itself. There’s a child dangling from the top, arms waving for help” (CNN, Jan. 14, 2010). On another occasion, CNN’s Anderson Cooper witnesses the rescue of a teenaged girl. He reports “a small group of men who have been digging for more than five hours” to rescue this girl. He then begins to describe the scene in detail, saying:

Her feet are the only part of her still visible...she’s clearly in pain...It’s not clear how they’re going to get her out. They only have this one shovel. They don’t have any heavier equipment. They are being very careful, though, about what they are moving. They are afraid if they move this big slab that seems to be on top of her, that other stones, other pieces of would fall on her and crush her. So, they are arguing over what to do next (CNN, Jan. 14, 2010).

Although the images shown were gory and graphic, one CNN correspondent addresses that with the audience by saying, “we want to warn you some of these images may be disturbing, but it is footage we feel you really have to see” (CNN, Jan. 14, 2010). The

coverage of Haiti, with the barrage of images of suffering and devastation, on these three cable news networks is not necessarily problematic in itself. Instead, it is the pre-existing discourse around Haiti that make these portrayals hyperbolic and, at times, one-dimensional. If featured in the news, Haiti is almost always synonymous with disaster, crisis, or violence of some sort. This type of discourse solidifies the idea among media audiences that this is Haiti's identity: a crisis-ridden country, without much context as to why Haiti is in that state.

Haitian Voices

When not featuring footage and reports from the ground, CNN often conducted interviews with experts and Haitian-Americans appealing to Americans to help Haiti during this difficult time. Members of the Haitian Diaspora featured were often well known Haitian-American figures like musical artist, Wyclef Jean. These Haitians were interviewed on shows like *Larry King Live* in order to situate the disaster and to appeal to the viewing audience for help for their home country. In fact, Wyclef Jean states:

I mean, it's definitely one thing after another, but I think right now the most important thing is you're on CNN, you're talking about it. Hillary Clinton is talking about it, giving help. President Obama is giving help. Keep in mind, there's 4 million Haitians outside of Haiti. This is the time for the Diaspora, the Haitians that are outside of Haiti, to step up and to call their councilman, call the Congress and say, you know what? We need a state of emergency for our country. This is the most important thing (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010).

Wyclef praises CNN for providing in-depth coverage of what was happening in Haiti, yet seeks help from his own fellow-Haitians who have the means to help Haiti and appeals to the US government to create scenario of emergency response to Haiti. FNC also featured Jean as a guest to provide an on-the-ground update on the situation. From Port-au-Prince, Wyclef Jean describes the devastation:

The best way I can say this is apocalypse... We are talking about people that are still under rubble. The count is not 100,000. There is at least has to be [sic] 400,000 to 500,000 people that is about to die... The numbers are high. We are talking about we need a state of emergency... We spent the day picking up dead bodies all day (FNC, Jan. 14, 2010).

Similarly, on CNN, Haitian-American actress Garcelle Beauvais-Nilon describes how hard it was to see the devastation in her country:

It's really hard to watch. I mean, seeing, the one picture of the baby covered, because they couldn't get to it, I just – those are my people. Those faces are my family. And it's the one place – I was seven. I was seven when I came to the states... I've been back a few times. It's amazing. This is the country that deserves this the less – not that anybody deserves it. But we are resilient and we are proud. Even if we have nothing, we are very, very proud. It's unfortunate. It's devastating (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010).

She also asks Americans, even in the midst of a difficult economy, to “give anything they can” (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). Even the Haitian Ambassador to the US makes a similar appeal. However, in the midst of his pleas for help, the ambassador uses this opportunity to provide a history lesson for the viewers, saying although “Haiti has been portrayed all of the time as the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere,” many people forget about or are unaware of the country's rich history as “the first Black republic in the world” that “did help many others in the beginning to gain independence, and even helped the United States by fighting the war of independence of the United States and by defeating the French in helping the United States get the Louisiana Purchase. So we did help in the beginning” (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). It seems that the ambassador recounts the historical relationship between the United States and Haiti in order to justify the plea for help from a country that has benefitted from his country in the past.

When asked about his thoughts on potential civil unrest in Haiti, Haitian-American musician, Pras Michel, rejected the idea that much criminal activity, like violence and looting would occur, saying:

Well, knowing Haitians, I don't believe any form of chaotic [sic] is going to happen. I think that they're very resilient. They understand this is a natural disaster... So in that case, I don't foresee any gun shooting or any looting. I think they're just going to rally behind each other, and try to help everyone that they can, especially the ones that haven't been found yet" (CNN, Jan. 13, 2010).

Michel gave his fellow countrymen the benefit of the doubt, saying that since the situation was a natural disaster instead of a political situation, Haitians would demonstrate solidarity instead of criminality. Although he understood the reputation that preceded his country, being a Haitian himself, Michel reassured people watching the coverage that unrest would likely not occur because of the country's resilience and desire to recover from the disaster. Pras Michel also appeared on MSNBC and talked with host Keith Olbermann about a foundation he started to help the people of Haiti. Michel emphasizes the fact that responding to Haiti is going to be an on-going effort, stating, "we've got to deal with the long-term of Haiti after the short-term" (MSNBC, Jan. 13, 2010).

Resilient People

On numerous occasions, journalists and contributors hailed Haitians positively as a resilient people. Noted for their ability to survive numerous tragedies and unfavorable circumstances, Haitians were described as "tough," "resolute," and "inspirational" (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). Many of these reports used *admission* to give the appearance of unbiased reporting by discussing their "strength" in the midst of adversity. Despite the fact that "poverty is endemic" in Haiti, Raymond Kelley, the Police Commissioner in NYC

admitted that the country's "greatest asset is the people...and somehow they seem to survive" (CNN, Jan. 12, 2010). On another occasion, actor and humanitarian, Ben Stiller expresses his concern for some of the people in areas he had visited, saying:

Cite Sole, a densely packed slum, where already the living conditions are horrible. I don't know what's happened to those people...who knows what's happened to these people. They're amazing people, because they are working so hard against such adversity...Anybody you talk to who spent any time down there really talks about the resiliency of the people (CNN, Jan. 13, 2010).

Often these characterizations of Haitians are juxtaposed with the tragic circumstances and dire poverty they are surrounded by constantly.

Additionally, much of the "good" discourse about Haitians was an effort to appeal to the American people to help the nation in its time of need and to portray Haitians as people worthy enough of America's help. In fact, former President Bill Clinton described the people of Haiti:

They are good people. They are survivors. They are intelligent. They thrive in their diaspora communities. They desperately want to reclaim their country and give it a better future. And they need our help now...These people are just like you, and they are hurting now. There are people who are missing their spouses, their children, their brothers, their sisters, their parents. We are going to save as many of them as we can. And with your help, we are going to help them begin again (CNN, Jan. 13, 2010).

Perhaps Clinton thought it was imperative to remind the audience about the Haitians' humanity by saying that they were people "just like you," in order to tug at the heartstrings of Americans to give. Similarly, a former Peace Corps director wanted to make sure the American people knew just how dedicated Haitians were to bettering themselves by highlighting their work ethic, saying:

I think the main thing that needs to get out that I saw, as a person who visited Haiti is the Haitian people are a strong people, have a strong spirit, have a tremendous work ethic. So even though this is a bad thing that happened, if these are people used to dealing with challenges, they are certainly a group of people

who can weather the storm, so to speak, and they have a strong spirit and strong work ethic” (CNN, Jan. 16, 2010).

Furthermore, Raymond Alcide Joseph, a Haitian ambassador to the United States, reminds the audience that the very same people who claimed their independence over 200 years ago, would reclaim their national slogan, “Where there is unity, there is strength” in the midst of this tragedy. Even President Obama complimented Haitians in an official statement and pledged the country’s support, saying:

We know that you are a strong and resilient people. You have endured a history of slavery and struggle of natural disaster and recovery, and through it all, your spirit has been unbroken and your faith unwavering. So, today, you must know that help is arriving. Much, much more help is on the way (MSNBC, Jan. 14, 2010).

Again, the Haitian people’s resiliency is mentioned, but the President goes a bit further by briefly mentioning the country’s history. He uses the examples of “slavery and struggle of natural disaster and recovery” in order to illustrate how hardship is nothing new for Haiti and to acknowledge that many the country’s problems stem from circumstances outside of their control. Because of such circumstances the President promises “help is arriving” for Haiti. FNC, however, did not contribute any story discussing the resiliency of the Haitian people.

Recovery

Much of the discourse about Haiti’s recovery occurred some time after the initial earthquake and appeared in updates weeks and months after the disaster. This theme includes discussions of the recovery and rebuilding process, major attention to the progress of the country 6 months after the earthquake, and the possibility of a “better Haiti” emerging from the disaster. Relatedly, reports also contained discourse about

Haiti's progress as a nation and how the earthquake acted as a setback, in addition to some considering the idea of "starting over" with Haiti.

A Better Haiti?

In the aftermath of disaster or crises, attention often shifts from initial search and rescue efforts to restoration and recovery. In Haiti's case, the focus not only shifted to restoration, but to making the country a stronger one because of its status as an underdeveloped country even before the earthquakes. In fact, a former Peace Corps director admits that "Haiti as a country has been ignored," however he is vague about who or what countries have ignored Haiti. Nevertheless, he proposes:

It certainly needs the attention it deserves. And I think something comprehensive, something multinational in terms of what they did after World War II with the Marshall plan in terms of rebuilding the country. So I think something needs to be done in a comprehensive long-standing approach dealing with Haiti (CNN, Jan. 16, 2010).

However, some questioned whether pouring foreign aid dollars into the country once again should be done. To answer that, former President Bill Clinton said:

Everybody who's seriously followed Haiti over a long period of time believed that Haiti had the best chance it has had in our lifetime to break the chains of its past, to build a truly modern state, to have a more thriving economy, and honest and competent government, better health care, better education, more self-generated clean energy, the whole nine yards (CNN, Jan. 17, 2010).

It is also important to note that in the coverage, Clinton was one of the few to discuss the earthquakes as a setback to Haiti's marked progress over the years. Clinton emphasized the fact that Haiti was making progress toward becoming a better place before the earthquake, and with the help of the rest of the world – despite this setback – it can get back on track to bettering itself. He does not frame the disaster as an opportune time to "start over" with Haiti. Instead, he suggests that the solution to Haiti's dilemma is to

support Haiti's progress by giving to the relief effort. He also stated that he wouldn't "feel successful if all we do is get them back to where they were the day before the earthquake" (CNN, Jan. 17, 2010). Yet, it appears that some, including Bill Clinton, believe this is an opportunity for the United States to "take the lead of the Haitian government" during the recovery process. While this type of discourse may seem benign and altruistic, it could pose some problems for Haitians who may want to remain an independent nation after this process is done. Such mediated discourse could also be problematic because it could help Americans justify imposing power over another country by framing it as "help." It is evident that CNN was the only network to discuss the idea of a "better Haiti" emerging from the disaster. MSNBC and FNC did not offer any stories discussing this idea.

6 Months Later...and Beyond

As with nearly every major event, after a time, event and after-effects are no longer considered as newsworthy. The Haiti earthquakes were treated no differently in the FNC and MSNBC news coverage. MSNBC did not follow up on the disaster at all, while FNC only did so within a few reports scattered throughout the rest of the 2010 calendar year.

However, after six months, CNN revisited the story to update viewers on progress made in Port-au-Prince. Many of the correspondents on the ground were hoping to see and report about rubble being cleared, hospitals functioning, and fewer people displaced. There was some good news about progress. For example, CNN's Anderson Cooper reported on July 12th that,

There's been no civil unrest, and obviously, many, many people's lives were saved and had their lives improved with the hundreds of millions of dollars [that] had been donated by many Americans and people around the world. So that is the progress (CNN, July 12, 2010).

Yet, good news was rare. Six months after the earthquakes, Haiti experienced a myriad of problems including rubble blocking many of the streets because the lack of resources. Cooper also reported that "there's no clear master plan to use large-scale machines and there's no funding at this point to do that – clear the neighborhoods of rubble, the first step of getting back into their own neighborhoods" (CNN, July 12, 2010).

Eventually, what was once a disaster transformed into a humanitarian crisis. Reporting from the ground, CNN's chief medical correspondent, Dr. Sanjay Gupta, admits:

I planned on doing different stories after six months. I planned to do stories about hospitals that were building up, not shutting down; about camps that were turning into more permanent camps as opposed to temporary camps that are still existing. But nobody knows how fast progress is going to occur here in Port-au-Prince. There's no question this is going to be one of the most difficult and complicated reconstruction projects that many people have ever seen (CNN, July 17).

Some of the basic physical aspects of the disaster had not yet been taken care of.

Although "many lives were saved...there's been no major civil unrest. Kids are in school" and "disease outbreaks avoided" because of the charitable donations sent, Anderson Cooper reported. However, "Rubble is still everywhere, no doubt, some human remains still buried deep inside" (CNN, July, 12, 2010).

Cooper visited camps where displaced survivors were still living and interviewed Sean Penn, an actor and humanitarian who had been involved in recovery since the beginning to gain his perspective on the issue. He reports, "There are more than 1,300 makeshift camps throughout Port-au-Prince housing more than a million-and-a-half

people” (CNN, July 12, 2010). Penn states that the tent cities are not safe to live in, saying, “You see, with all these tents, they’re right on top of each other. I think one match on a breezy day could pretty much run this whole place down” (CNN, July 12, 2010).

In addition to the nearly permanent presence of rubble and tent cities, there were problems with getting much needed relief resources to the people that needed them because of the lack of communication between aid agencies. As a result, the rebuilding process was stalled, and Cooper reports:

The rebuilding has been plagued by lack of organization and leadership. There’s still no master plan for removing the rubble, which prevents many from returning home... There are a lot of NGOs [non-governmental organizations] who we’re told are not coordinating with each other (CNN, July 12, 2010).

Not only were aid agencies not cooperating with one another, many of the governments around the world that pledged millions and billions of dollars had yet to send the money promised to Haiti. In fact CNN reported that nearly six months after the earthquakes, only three countries had actually given money. Cooper reports, “about 60 countries pledging aid money for Haiti, more than \$5 billion for the next 18 months, right? Only Brazil, Norway and Australia have actually paid up that money that they have promised, just three countries” (CNN, July, 12, 2010). Additionally, FNC’s Bill O’Reilly reported, “This is stunning... Almost \$9 million was pledged to help the Haitian people countries around the world. All right? Less than 10 percent of that has gotten to the island” (FNC, Oct. 8, 2010). Perhaps because of the lack of financial commitment from these foreign countries and because of the fading media attention, most of the hospitals that were booming with doctors and other volunteers were closing. Many of the doctors volunteering their time had left, leaving many of the country’s 300,000 injured in

desperate need of medical attention. While reporting from Port-au-Prince, Sanjay Gupta says, “there are still some tragic stories of people dying because they simply can’t get some of the basic care that they need [at the] hospitals, even ones open before the earthquake, are now shutting down” (CNN, July 17, 2010). Responding to the waning media attention, Sean Penn said that Haiti is “out of people’s minds. And I guess the romance is gone in some way,” but suggests that viewers should understand that “the need has not gotten any less” (CNN, July 12, 2010).

There were more barriers to the swift on-the-ground restoration and recovery, including conflict between “the powers that be,” according to Sean Penn. Penn posits that at the expense of millions of lives in Port-au-Prince, decision makers are more concerned about the politics surrounding the event, since it is an election year for Haiti. However, Penn suggests:

One of the things...that we can focus most on is – is that we – we have got to trust the Haitian people to elect that person and make that choice. So, whatever policies or whatever grants are given – and those things should not be limited to – to prior that election, or prior to a new administration, they should be administrable with some kind of future” (CNN, July 12, 2010).

Despite the slow progress, he appeals to the audience to continue donating to the effort, because “we need it” (CNN, July 12, 2010). Addressing perhaps what many viewers were wondering, Cooper asks Penn why people should continue giving to the relief effort. Although there was concern about possible corruption from the Haitian government, Penn also addresses the allegations, saying, “the government of Haiti doesn’t have anything to be corrupt with” because much of the money coming to the country was “funneled through President Clinton’s commission that he’s co-chairing with the prime minister (CNN, July 12, 2010). It appears that Penn’s discourse is similar to former

President Clinton's, regarding Haiti's progress and the setback that occurred with the earthquakes. However, Penn takes it a step further and goes against the dominant, hegemonic discourse in the news media to suggest that the United States should relinquish its dominance over Haiti and allow the Haitian people to have power over their rebuilding processes.

As if all of the above-mentioned challenges were not enough, nine months after the earthquakes, Haiti experienced a deadly cholera outbreak and a tropical storm. CNN reported that the hospitals, which were already in trouble, were "overflowing with people sickened by a deadly cholera outbreak. At least 138 people have died, more than 1,500 are ill. You know, it is being described as a [sic] deadliest health problem to hit Haiti since last January's earthquake" (CNN, Oct. 22, 2010). FNC reiterated Haiti's plight, and host Greta Van Susteren talks about how Haiti was in "great need" and could be "so vastly different," but because of "terrible unrest, terrible violence, and now this cholera epidemic," it will continue to be a country in need (FNC, Dec. 13, 2010). MSNBC, however, did not include follow-up coverage of any kind in the 6 months after the earthquakes.

Discussion

It is often said among those involved in disaster management that there is no such thing as a natural disaster (Coppola, 2007). Although the earthquakes in Haiti were "natural" occurrences that were beyond man's control, it soon became evident the devastation that resulted was anything but natural. As mentioned earlier, disaster and crisis communication scholars find it extremely difficult to define the difference between the two concepts. Surely, the crisis versus disaster discussion does not have a simple

answer. But, after conducting this study within the scope of time that I did, my findings and analysis suggest that Haiti's disaster eventually turned into a crisis. This is because of the medical emergencies and lack of internal resources the country had after the earthquakes ended. Much of the devastation that occurred happened because of weak infrastructure and overpopulation of the city, resulting in many deaths and material damage. Port-au-Prince's internal weaknesses resulted in a humanitarian crisis because of the country's inability to respond to an external disaster.

The purpose of this study was two-fold. First, to explore the ways in which American cable news networks, namely CNN, FNC, and MSNBC, portrayed Haiti and Haitians during the earthquakes and secondly, to identify which aspects of the disaster these networks considered newsworthy.

"Recontextualizing" Disaster

Overall, my findings suggest that in one way or another, these three networks helped to "recontextualize" the disaster in their coverage for American viewers through the use of Van Dijk's (1991) semantic strategies. Regarding the first research question, concerning the depictions of Haiti and Haitians after the earthquakes, the coverage they offered often perpetuated some long-standing notions of Haiti and its people, specifically the country's physical and political instability and poverty. All three networks focused much attention toward Haiti's poverty – reiterating the country's plight both before and after the earthquake. The discourse from all three networks constantly contextualized Haiti as a "Third World" country and as the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere with failing infrastructure.

Though Van Dijk's (1991) semantic strategies helped to provide understanding about the discursive practices on these networks, I contend that one additional strategy was at work that Van Dijk does not clarify explicitly: the use of emotion. Emotion is an important concept and semantic strategy to address within this study because much of what television news does is appeal to the senses and the emotions of viewers. Emotion also works as a hegemonic concept, especially regarding this study's findings because of the nature of the event covered. Often times, networks provided coverage that was especially emotional and worked to hegemonically position the United States as a savior to Haiti. This became apparent specifically when the coverage discussed the United States' intervention through the deployment of troops, medical personnel, and U.S.-based aid agencies. Essentially, in this instance, the U.S. maintains its power through display, which is juxtaposed with Haiti's weakness and vulnerability.

Additionally, these reports were not void of bias in some areas, and as Van Dijk (1991) contends, ethnic minorities and those in the out-group are often subjected to such bias in the news. Some of the findings support Van Dijk's claim because all three networks speculated that because Haiti's reputation of violence, there would be many instances of civil unrest. Yet, MSNBC and CNN had to acknowledge eventually that such was largely not the case. For instance, CNN reported "a lot of the Haitians are dealing with this in an entirely peaceful way" (CNN, Jan. 13, 2010). MSNBC echoed those sentiments, as well, reporting, "people are still being civil in Haiti...they're acting civil" (MSNBC, Jan. 14, 2010). However, FNC did not retreat from those speculations of potential civil unrest.

Next, the networks all discussed the need for the involvement by the United States because of the Haitian government's inability to respond properly. Perhaps by highlighting Haiti's poverty and inability to respond on its own to a disaster of this magnitude, it seems these American cable news providers both implicitly and explicitly justified America's power and ability to dominate Haiti to viewers. Overall, my findings suggest that Haiti was portrayed as a charity case in need of not only funding, but of order and proper governance. These news networks' discourses also appear to be consistent with literature on and about Haiti's poverty and tumultuous and unstable political state. Additionally, the discourse surrounding Haiti's foreign relations is, in this case, consistent with the literature that largely characterizes the country as one that is dependent upon foreign aid, especially from the U.S. Furthermore, the findings also suggest that much of Haiti's foreign relations occur in the form of foreign aid.

While the networks upheld some long standing notions of Haitians, not all the networks fully portrayed Haiti as the "other," which is a relative improvement from the ways the country and its people have been historically depicted as previous literature suggests. CNN and MSNBC specifically focused some attention to the resiliency of the Haitian people, by calling attention to their ability to survive in the midst of numerous adversities. The discourse on the people's resiliency was largely absent on FNC, however.

It is important to note here that a relationship exists between power and hegemony, and the anchors/correspondents discussing the disaster in Haiti. It appears that, whether intentionally or not, all of these networks use their most notable anchors/correspondents to report the news. These reporters have the power to influence

how the audience views Haiti beyond the actual content that they report. Some viewers may consider their preferred reporter or correspondent to be the most credible, and may have confidence that however or whatever they report about an event is the most accurate. In other words, the “star power” that some of these reporters hold on each network also works to “recontextualize” the disaster in Haiti. As mentioned earlier, media users tend to use selective exposure when choosing what networks they tune into for news because of their political views (Nie, et al., 2010; Morris, 2007). For instance, some media users may choose to tune into CNN because they prefer Anderson Cooper’s coverage of Haiti than FNC’s Bill O’Reilly or MSNBC’s Keith Olbermann, or vice versa.

Regarding the second research question about the newsworthy aspects of the disaster, all the networks focused some attention on Haiti’s poverty, its weak infrastructure, its degraded physical landscape and overpopulation, the overall incompetence of the Haitian government, U.S. involvement in restoring order and rescuing survivors, and Haitian/Haitian-American voices. CNN covered the abovementioned aspects with the most depth. FNC, however, did not devote attention to certain aspects like the victim experience (other than giving an overall body count and report of injuries), resiliency of the Haitian people, and very little attention to the state of the country 6 months after the earthquake and beyond. MSNBC also neglected to include reports about suspicions of Haitian government corruption and the recovery phase of the disaster after January.

How Networks Incorporate News Ethics

As mentioned earlier, Graber (1980) and Eliot (1989) suggests that the purpose of the news in the event of disaster is to (1) warn audiences of danger, (2) communicate

important information to those in authority positions (e.g., government officials and relief agencies) and to public at large, (3) track the progress of rescue, relief, and recovery, and (4) “dramatize lessons learned to benefit the community in the event of future disaster,” and (5) provide context for the disaster, not just talk of boy county (as cited in Fry, 2003, p. 106; Eliot, 1989). She also recommended that reports should give context and not just focus on body count, while also creating a conducive space for government to set up relief and recovery objectives and disaster mitigation (Graber, 1980, as cited in Fry, 2003). While the discourse on the networks was largely similar, there were some instances where the topics and scope of coverage differed among them. Essentially, FNC, MSNBC, and CNN handled these standards differently throughout their coverage.

The findings suggest that CNN did cover the disaster in all four capacities that Graber (1980) and Eliot (1989) mention. Although the disaster was an international one, the network still warned Americans who may have been in Haiti about the dangers of fallen buildings, blocked roads, and presumed violence and civil unrest. The network also helped to communicate some context to viewers regarding Haiti’s poverty and the government’s inability to respond to the disaster in addition to discussing casualties and injuries. CNN provided up-to-date reporting of important information to the American public, as well as government and relief agency officials, as best as possible, despite the weak communications infrastructure in Haiti. In fact, CNN was a useful liaison between representatives of the Haitian government (namely, President Preval), the American government, and the American people by reporting the country’s condition (e.g., infrastructural problems and dangers, casualties, and deaths), U.S. military intervention,

and opportunities for Americans to give charitable donations toward the relief effort. CNN was the network that tracked the relief effort, rescue and recovery phases of the disaster management the most consistently.

The findings support this primarily because of the network's continued coverage of the disaster, even 6 months after the earthquakes. CNN also fulfilled its role the most as a news provider responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and informing the public about what was being done to quell the humanitarian crisis that resulted (Spence, Lachlan, & Griffin, 2007; Vijaykumar & Wray, 2008). The network did this by questioning relief agencies, the Haitian government, and the American government about where and when donor dollars and relief supplies were (or were not) given to the Haitian population in need. Finally, the network helped to create a space for a discussion of a "better Haiti" by talking about plans for creating a stronger infrastructure and jumpstarting the Haitian economy. My belief is that much of this can be attributed to the network's extensive on-the-ground reporting by journalists Anderson Cooper and Dr. Sanjay Gupta.

However, though CNN did meet Graber (1980) and Eliot's (1989) standards, the findings also show that the network certainly dramatized certain aspects of the disaster in the reporting. In some ways, the dramatization could be seen as a way to communicate lessons learned to mitigate the effects of future disasters. For instance it could be argued that follow-up by Anderson Cooper and Dr. Sanjay Gupta helped both the audience and the American government understand how to better assist those impacted by disasters of this magnitude. This is because both reporters discussed the fact that many of the resources promised had not yet reached the majority of the Haitian population – even 6 months after the earthquakes.

Yet, there were other ways CNN's reports dramatized the situation in a potentially negative way. One way CNN did this was to prime American viewers (including American policymakers) for massive civil unrest in Port-au-Prince. CNN characterized contextualized Haiti as a "naturally violent" and unstable country. Such portrayals may have influenced American government officials to remove doctors from the ground prematurely, leaving a desperate population in need of medical attention. Another way CNN dramatized the disaster by providing many accounts of rescues, by focusing on the medical emergencies in Port-au-Prince after the earthquake, and by highlighting the fact that Haitian bodies were piled up and lining the streets of the city.

In my judgment, FNC and MSNBC did not meet all of the standards for disaster coverage. I draw this conclusion primarily because of the minute amount of coverage from both networks. FNC did not warn audiences of danger. The network's reports did not warn Americans who may have been in Haiti about building hazards and did not provide information about how to contact the American embassy to find a way out of the country. In the coverage the network *did* provide, FNC did somewhat act as a liaison between the American people and the American government. The network informed Americans about what the American government was doing to respond to the disaster, while also allowing space for American politicians and officials to communicate ways to give to the relief effort. In fact, much of its coverage revolved around discussing the best strategies for responding to the disaster, especially on shows like *The O'Reilly Factor*. As mentioned in the findings, host Bill O'Reilly questions the amount of donor dollars that were going to Haiti because of the past corruption in the Haitian government. However, because there was little to no on-the-ground reporting from the network, it could not act

as an *eyewitness* liaison to the American public and the American government about the conditions in Haiti. Instead, the network had to largely rely on reports from the Associated Press and Reuters. FNC did track the progress of rescue, relief, and recovery mostly from January to March. However, the majority of its reports ($n=13$ of 17 transcripts) in the sample were in the month of January. Therefore, there was not extensive follow-up in the months after the earthquakes. In fact, the only follow-up I found was about donor dollars reaching the Haitian population, as reported by host Bill O'Reilly in October. Finally, FNC did dramatize aspects of the disaster. Some of the reports (albeit, very few) did point out the few resources dispersed to the Haitian months after the disaster, which can be viewed as a positive thing. However, like CNN's coverage, some ways FNC dramatized the situation could have been negative. This is because the network's coverage was minute, the focus was primarily on reporting the number of casualties and deaths.

Finally, MSNBC's coverage, in a lot of ways, echoed FNC's coverage because of the small number of transcripts ($n=13$) in the sample. With the fewest number of reports in the sample studied, MSNBC's reports handled Graber's standards in its own way. Overall, mainly because of the little attention devoted to the disaster, the network did not fulfill all of Graber's standards. The network did warn audiences of danger. In fact, on one airing of *The Rachel Maddow Show*, host Maddow provided valuable information for American citizens who may have been in Haiti during the earthquake. The program provided the number to the State Department and instructions for Americans to conduct a call for help. The network did act as a liaison between the American public and the American government. MSNBC informed the public about how the government was

handling the relief effort, while also including messages from officials like President Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and former President Bill Clinton encouraging the public how to give to the relief effort. Like FNC, the network was limited in the ways they could provide coverage because of the lack of on-the-ground reporting. Therefore, eyewitness accounts from correspondents were few, and those that were broadcast were from the parent company and network, NBC.

Additionally, MSNBC did not track the progress of rescue, relief, and recovery because the coverage only lasted throughout January. Given that Haiti's disaster was one that would take a while to respond to, the network failed in this area. The network's silence demonstrates that even though the disaster in Haiti was one that demanded prolonged attention and required massive cleanup and restructuring over an extended period of time, those aspects were not as newsworthy as the initial earthquakes. MSNBC's eventual neglect of the issue is problematic because those who may not tune into FNC or CNN closely or often to gain news may be only getting bits and pieces of a larger story.

Finally, like all the other networks, MSNBC certainly dramatized certain aspects of the situation, but not for reasons that would "benefit the community in the event of future disaster" (Graber, 1980, p. 106). Instead, in my judgment, the network dramatized the number of casualties and deaths in a more sensationalistic way.

Transforming the Ethos of News and Re-Orienting Audiences

This study reveals that all three cable networks examined accomplished the task of dramatizing the Haiti earthquakes and the devastation that resulted, and those networks created that drama through the use of discourse (Fry, 2003). This study also confirms

Fry's (2003) argument that the choices journalists make tend to reinforced "dominant myths" about a region, "which have specific an powerful connotations in the national collective imagination" (p. 6). Essentially, these journalistic choices have real consequences for both those portrayed as well as those viewing the portrayals. It can be argued that specifically with the Haiti earthquakes, the emphasis on emotion, drama, and the incorporation of "dominant myths" not only drew in viewers, but also drew in an unprecedented amount of donor dollars. In fact, countries around the globe pledged over \$10 billion in aid ("UN donor pledges," 1 April 2010). There is no doubt that the vivid imagery of poverty, devastation, and human conditions captured by news networks like CNN, FNC, and MSNBC appealed to viewers and prompted them to give to the relief efforts. Another outcome of the coverage was the amount of renewed attention to the region, which prompted those like former President Bill Clinton, actor Sean Penn, and others to appeal for a more long-standing connection between the U.S. and Haiti and the promise of more communication between the two countries. Still, one cannot help but acknowledge the potentially negative outcomes from coverage that drew so extensively upon established myths and tropes about Haiti. The ways Haitians were discursively portrayed (as potential criminals mired in poverty with a corrupt, incompetent government) could also impact the ways audience members view U.S.-Haitian relations. Specifically, news coverage of U.S. involvement and intervention in Haiti, in addition to the framing of Haiti and the Haitian people as incapable of handling their affairs, perpetuate hegemonic ideas and U.S. dominance over a developing country.

Some scholars contend that the purpose of television news is to,

Rivet the eye and focus the senses. The value of information on TV, news or entertainment (in many cases they are one and the same), is its ability to retain

attention through dramatic video footage, fast-moving image sequences, and the juxtaposition of highly disparate elements (Fry, 2003, p. 109).

Television news is unique in that it has the ability to pass important information onto viewers in compelling ways. However, such a medium also has constraints. The present study reveals and analyses those discursive constraints. According to Fry (2003) “television creates an environment where dramatic visual spectacle is the norm, the expected” and “the outstanding visual capability overshadows language,” the news providers still have a responsibility to the viewers and those being portrayed in their coverage to communicate information in a way that goes beyond aesthetics, drama, and excitement (p. 133). I believe that such objectives should and can be accomplished practically by keeping Graber (1980) and Eliot’s (1989) ideas about the social responsibility of news media in mind. In other words, it is necessary that 24-hour cable news networks transform their current ethos and praxis to those that portray victims and survivors of disasters with dignity and context and work to re-orient audience expectations for such coverage.

One way for 24-hour cable news networks to improve their coverage of disaster practically (regarding Haiti specifically), is to incorporate the use of news wires from Haitian news outlets, both within the country and within the Haitian Diaspora. Since much of the news and story leads come from centralized news wires like AP and Reuters, the viewing public’s perspective of Haiti could be aided by hearing the voices of the people, themselves. This solution may be especially helpful to news providers, like CNN, that tend to follow up by reporting on the rebuilding and recovery processes.

Another solution that news networks could incorporate in their coverage is more discussion about the historical, political, and economic contexts behind Haiti’s current

plight. Scholars contend that “natural disaster TV is enticing because it obscures the political and economic factors, our own efforts, that contribute to these Acts of God and/or nature. We construct our own enemy and make sure it is not us” (Fry, 2003, p. 143). Additionally, “deadlines and the economic imperative of TV news generally conspire against a thorough examination of issues that have a deep and lasting impact on people’s lives” (Fry, 2003, p. 110). However, we must not let that obscurity exist and persist. Without a solid understanding about who these people are, the typical American viewer may not question some of the hegemonic ideas and practices that exist regarding Haitian-U.S. relations. Additionally, it is important for American viewers to have a working understanding of the people they seek to help, instead of viewing them as people incapable of sustaining their own nation.

Though the political economy of news production often overshadows the need for in-depth and contextual coverage of an event, it is important for cable news networks to move past covering disasters that happen abroad with Western eyes. News providers must remember that, in this case, the “enemy” that Fry speaks of is not the Haitian people, or even the Haitian government. Constructing them on dichotomous extremes in comparison with the American people and the U.S. government is problematic. Instead, Haiti as a nation should be constructed as an ally and journalists should prompt the U.S. government to treat them as such, concerning the rebuilding of their nation after the earthquakes.

Finally, some aspects that could have been emphasized on FNC and MSNBC’s coverage specifically could be more on the ground reporting. Though both networks, unlike CNN, can draw from coverage from a parent company (FOX and NBC,

respectively), it is important to have correspondents from each of the cable networks themselves to cover the disaster. Or, incorporate more correspondents reporting from the parent companies on the ground. Such changes would result in more expensive news production practices, but would provide viewers with multi-dimensional news coverage. This is especially important since there is such a strong relationship between political attitudes and news source selection among the viewing public. Some viewers who would not typically tune into CNN, but prefer either FNC or MSNBC's news coverage would still benefit from on the ground coverage and a more in-depth understanding of the disaster in Haiti.

As mentioned before, I am an African American scholar concerned with the portrayals of people of the African Diaspora within news media. The findings within this study made the ramifications current journalistic practices of these 24-hour cable news networks more apparent. To me, it is important to analyze, critique, and suggest solutions to transform practices because of the power that the news, specifically television news, has upon its audiences. The objective of the above-mentioned suggestions is to not only to transform news practices, but to also re-orient audiences to think differently about those in developing nations in the long-term. I found that many aspects of the Haitian people's experiences after the earthquakes were largely overlooked. Specifically, news and coverage of inter-Haitian relations on these networks failed to address how many Haitians used their family homes as shelters and safe havens for other displaced Haitians. I did not learn this from CNN, MSNBC, or FNC's coverage. I learned this information from a personal conversation with a Haitian woman whose family was among many providing help for others in the disaster-ridden city of Port-au-Prince. Omitted anecdotes

and stories like these need to be told because such accounts help Americans to see Haitians multi-dimensionally and change this nation's collective imagination regarding a country's humanity that has been largely disregarded. For many Americans, information concerning those living in developing nations depends heavily upon how they are depicted in the news. Therefore, journalists and news providers should work conscientiously to provide accounts that capture all facets of humanity, without regard to who is the subject of such accounts.

Pèp vanyan se pèp ki oganize
(A strong people is an organized people.)
-Haitian Proverb

Limitations

This critical discourse analysis contributes to both disaster and crisis communication literature in a qualitative way by calling attention to the various ways American cable news providers cover disasters and subsequent crises. Additionally, this study fills a large gap in communication scholarship by addressing the ways Haitians are portrayed in American media. However, it is important to discuss and clarify the limitations within this study.

Purposive sampling was the method used for data collection, in order to assure that only the most substantive transcripts discussing the Haiti earthquakes would be drawn during the searching process. Therefore, the number of transcripts yielded was uneven between the three networks. The number of transcripts drawn from CNN ($n=196$) vastly outnumbered those drawn from FNC ($n=22$) and MSNBC ($n=16$), making the analysis more focused on CNN's coverage. It is also important to address the limitations about the type of coverage each network provided. Though CNN's on-the-ground reporting helped American viewers understand the disaster in a more real way, such coverage could raise problems concerning journalistic integrity. Given that the areas in Haiti many CNN correspondents were stationed had communication problems and other physical limitations like blocked roads, information and breaking news coverage could have suffered from inaccuracies. Both studio anchors and correspondents could have been communicating inaccurate or incomplete information to viewers.

Additionally, because this study focused on analyzing how Haitians and the country of Haiti were portrayed on television news, one important element was missing – the visual. Television networks are able to draw a significant audience during disaster and crises situations because of the moving images they make available to viewers. Given that this study was a textual analysis done from a critical discourse analysis perspective, only the texts from the transcripts were used to analyze the coverage, potentially limiting the conclusions I was able to make.

Finally, because of the scope of the study, I analyzed transcripts from the day the earthquake impacted the region, until the end of the calendar year, which could have also limited the conclusions drawn. More analysis could have commenced with a larger scope of time, perhaps using one whole year of coverage instead of 11 months. Given that CNN provided a six month update on the disaster, the network would have also provided more coverage and updates in the full year after the earthquakes.

*Yon sèl, nou fèb
Ansanm, nou fò
Ansanm, ansanm, nou se lavalas
(Alone, we are weak;
Together, we are strong;
Together, together we are the flood.)
-Haitian Poem*

Future Research

Since the Haiti earthquakes are undoubtedly a rich area of study, scholars could delve deeper into the media aspect of this event in a variety of ways. An examination of how Haitians and the country itself were portrayed on network news outlets like ABC, CBS, and FOX could provide some interesting scholarship for comparison to CNN, FNC, and MSNBC's coverage.

Occasionally, these three cable news networks would mention the Hurricane Katrina disaster in New Orleans, Louisiana during the Haiti earthquake coverage because of the similarity in the social, economic and physical conditions of both areas. Therefore, I believe that disaster communication scholarship would benefit from a comparison of these two events – specifically focusing on how those impacted by each of these disasters were portrayed in the news. Additionally, a study surveying disaster coverage in “Third World” countries would also enrich communication scholarship.

Voices of Haitians and Haitian Americans were in the coverage CNN, FNC, and MSNBC provided, but I suggest that future studies include more diversified views by examining how Haitian citizens themselves understood the disaster and its subsequent coverage. Additionally, it would be interesting to get a deeper understanding of how Haitians and those within the Haitian Diaspora covered the disaster. Specifically, a study

exploring how Haitian and Haitian-American news outlets, namely newspapers, reported about the disaster and how these news outlets responded to the coverage of the earthquakes in Western media.

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