CREATIVE WORK

We Are Not OK: The Bahamian Plantationocene, Hurricane Dorian, and the Limits of Academic Genre

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Abstract

In September 2019, Hurricane Dorian made landfall in The Bahamas, ending lives, decimating infrastructure, and dispersing survivors. Soon after, the COVID-19 pandemic halted mainstream economic activity for well over a year. Despite the appearance of structural recovery and rebounding tourism, the island nation and the scholars who covered these events are still not OK five years later. How do we narrate events like these? In this piece, using autoethnography, a group of Bahamian and international scholars reflect on their experiences after the impact of Hurricane Dorian.

Note: The authors agree that there is value in keeping each individual's own spelling, thus highlighting the range of voices—Nicolette's and Adelle's are British English, the others are American English.

Prologue

I
In Grand Bahama the week before: I spent the day
touring the campus, meeting the students, meeting
the faculty. Or so I thought. You[1] were in Nassau,
battening your home for the storm you heard
was travelling. He[2] was at the clinic, battling a flu
that had settled on his chest.[3] We[4] sat in the con-
ference room, talking of trauma, talking of con-
flicting schedules, misalignments, opportunities.
We sat in a classroom, outlining a programme.
The chief of security gave us a tour. Here
is our cafeteria; here are the dorms. Here are
the students, the tuck shop, the open-air
quadrangle where they hold their plays. And here
is the library, admissions, faculty offices, all here.

II
When they told us Dorian was travelling, we[5] chose
not to cancel rehearsals. September 1: three weeks
out from the festival, a Cat 3 storm veering eastward:
no reason for worry. Or so we thought. At home in
Nassau, we pulled in the shutters, hunkered for mo-
ments, for hours, a day. There was wind and some rain.
In the middle of the storm we stepped out onto the porch.
A bird, soaked through the feathers, dripping, was sing-
ing on the telephone wire. Singing in the rain. When birds
do not vacate, all will be well. There are natural signs:
where spiders build webs, where wasps build nests. All
the signs said all would be well. Behind aluminum shut-
ters we opened our windows, let the fresh air and press-
ure blow through. A respite. A welcome wind.

III
It cruises up the Bahama chain, staying off islands
to the east, sailing through the deep Atlantic, biding
its time, the kind of hurricane you don't pay much mind,
Cat 1, Cat 2, some bluster, some rain. What
we don't see is how it spools and spins, how it sweeps
its lip on the ocean, perfects its cycles, sucks up air
and water and air. We don't see its gyre tighten and perne
and swirl itself into the perfect cloudy reel. But when
in a day it grows from Cat 2 to Cat 4, we turn
to watch the dance. Miami says it will turn
too, sometime in the night, swing westward,
a clotted pioneer. We hunker in the sloshing night
and wait. In Nassau: bluster, and some rain—

IV
—but we are not in Abaco, where this great storm washes
across flat land like a housewife sluicing her yard.
The water, they tell us, rises in an instant, glugging up
through sinks and toilets, the sea bubbling its way
up through limestone porous as a sponge. Tiles grow loose
and start to float, and salted sewage swallows houses
faster than people can swim. Those who can dive
through windows and doors and strike out for higher land.
They say the sea surged like a tidal wave. They say
the sea swept deep sea fish above men's roofs.
A child was feasted on by sharks. A grandma too.
They say whole houses dissolved like salt into the surf.
There was a church where people stayed. They prayed
for mercy, shelter, to be spared. Survivors said
thick concrete walls began to ripple like sails flapping
in the wind: they rippled, shivered, crushed the faithful.
They say that storm scream like a steamer, a freight train, a
    vex vex god.

V
And we are not in Grand Bahama, where the monster
stopped for rest. We are 132 miles away, on a hilly island
and this is enough for us not to be able to comprehend
what happens on grand low land when the ocean
comes rolling from the east. *Mandatory evacuation*,
the prime minister said, but to where? What ridge,
what rise? East End filled like a bathtub, water rising,
water rolling, over the sides of the canals, halfway up
the ground floor walls, lapping at stair treads,
slapping at ceilings. Children, dogs, and grandpas
struggled through manholes, stretched out in attics.
Black water sogged ceiling tiles, tormented bare toes,
rising, rising, still rising. And the roofs: sheet metal,
Spanish tile, Bermuda concrete, selected and installed
to resist wind, to stay intact in hurricanes. And now,
intact in hurricanes, they resist hammering from within.
They close lids on the drowning, coffin-lock homes.

VI
Our first thought after the storm passed was right back
to rehearsal. The show must etcetera. Catharsis. Drama
healing. So we sent out the WhatsApps and got back this ans-
wer: we can't leave our homes yet. The water is rising.
The water is rising? Here, in Nassau? Where birds braved
the weather, where the storm bowed and breezed by? But
the water was rising here: inconveniently, not fatally.
Canals in the roadways, and water in cars. Sogged sand-
bags. You know the story, the problem with limestone:
the water will soak through. No dams for you. Our second
thought was right back to rehearsal. The show must. You
know. Catharsis. Trauma healing. And this time they came:
to talk out the horror, to sing through the terror, think
different for an hour, for two. They came, they all came,
and thanked us for the diversion. For it was all horror.
The debris and the bodies, the cars stranded in flood-
water, the fish in the airport, the town in the sea.

VII
The news was full of Abaco: Hope Town, Marsh
Harbour, Man O' War Cay, Treasure Cay. The one
road awash, the dead landing bad. The water ebbed
and receded, leaving jetsam behind. My mind
was full of Freeport. Not six days before I walked
the northern campus. Someone told me they built
your campus on floodland. I didn't believe till the sea
rolled in from the north not a tidal wave but a tide,
rose up to the second floor, gutted the ground. Away to
the west you[6] stood out in the storm, a black Lear
on your own blasted heath. We almost lost him.[7]
For days after the storm his brother and wife pleaded
on Facebook, sending directions: our brother Dean of Faculty
in the house near the campus is trapped in his attic
with an asthmatic son and a terrified wife. He is calling
and we know where he is. He doesn't understand
why no one is coming. His phone is near dead.
What he doesn't know: people come every day but
the roads are all water. The place is just roofs
and flat waves lapping thunder grey sea

[1] Executive Vice President, University of The Bahamas North Campus, Grand Bahama.

[2] Dean of Faculty, University of The Bahamas North Campus, Grand Bahama.

[3] This being September 2019, is it possible that this flu was in fact an early, unidentified strain of COVID-19?

[4] A team of UB North and UB Oakes Field (Main Campus) faculty on a visit to discuss the development and delivery of School of Social Sciences courses and programs across both campuses. I (Nicolette) was serving as chair of the School of Social Sciences, and the focus was the delivery of the Social Work program in Nassau and Grand Bahama.

[5] The artistic team producing the annual Shakespeare in Paradise (SiP) festival in Nassau, New Providence. The SiP 2019 dates were September 30-October 12.

[6] Executive Vice President of the UB North campus, riding out Dorian in Grand Bahama after securing his family home in Nassau against the storm.

[7] The Dean of Faculty, who did not evacuate his home ten minutes away from the Northern Campus so as to be available to secure the plant if necessary.

Narrating the Plantationocene after the Hurricane

Our prologue was written by Nicolette Bethel, a Bahamian resident citizen, anthropologist, and dramaturge. She has been narrating Bahamian life in academic accounts, plays, essays, and blogs for many years. But when she sat to write about Hurricane Dorian, her words came out in verse. Scholarly prose could not convey the weight of her experience.

Bahamians are painfully aware that Hurricane Dorian invaded the Western Atlantic archipelago of The Bahamas in early September of 2019, becoming one of the strongest hurricanes ever recorded in the region as it all too slowly dragged itself across the islands of Abaco and Grand Bahama, shifting so much water from the sea into so many homes and businesses, and sending thousands of refugees to the nation's capital on New Providence and to many other elsewheres (InterAmerican Development Bank, 2020; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2023).[8] As of this writing, five years later, the hurricane has officially claimed 67 lives, but because so many migrants from Haiti were not officially documented in the country, the death toll was undoubtedly much higher and will never be officially known. How does one go about narrating events like these?

How we document such moments depends a great deal on what we understand these moments to be. None of the authors of this chapter consider this hurricane to be a "natural disaster," nor do we put much stock in calls for apolitical or ahistorical forms of "resilience." While hurricanes have always been a part of Caribbean and Bahamian life, as far as human memory is concerned, increasingly intense storms with increasingly high winds and volumes of water are phenomena linked to climate change and the warming of the planet (Environmental Defense Fund, 2023). We don't consider climate change to be a default outcome of general human development either. These events are not the logical telos of anthropogenic evolution, and the *Anthropos* in Anthropocene is not an idea or

entity that can ever be sufficiently responsible for all this warming, wind, and water (Moore, 2016; Moore, 2019).[9] Instead, we recognize, along with many contemporary scholars, that these climatological and meteorological events, and the highly inequitable responses they are met with on the ground, are the result of centuries of global scale extraction, racialized exploitation and dispossession, and deep-seeded supremacist entitlements to bodies, land, air, and seascapes as waste repositories and sites of accumulation (Klein, 2008; West, 2016; Bonilla & Lebròn, 2019; Liboiron, 2021). Events like Hurricane Dorian, and their aftermath, are therefore not singular situations–they are inevitable material manifestations of our present condition of pervasive crisis. This is the era of ongoing (neo)colonial imperialism and racial ecocidal capitalism that scholars in this article have chosen to engage with as the Plantationocene (Wynter, 1971; Haraway, 2016; Davis et al., 2019; Moore et al., 2019).

To understand the Plantationocene as constitutive of The Bahamas, we must take a critical view of Bahamian history. The Bahamas is an outlier territory among the former British Caribbean colonies. Its peculiarities stem from five main facts. First, it was never a producer of sugar. The islands lack rivers, and fresh water must be obtained from wells sunk into aquifers. The limestone bedrock of the archipelago is porous, and the soil beds that lie atop this base are mostly thin, with deep pockets that made the islands good for subsistence farming and very poor for traditional commercial ventures. Second, the plantations that were established flourished for less than a generation: within 30 years of their development, they failed utterly and fell into disuse and disrepair. As a result, the socio-economic structure of The Bahamas has always been seafaring and commerce-driven: there is room to make a case to regard the archipelago as part of *another* Caribbean, one in which the plantation structures are drawn on the ocean and the port rather than on the soil (see Hannerz, 1974, for a parallel argument for the Cayman Islands). Third, the presence of a sizeable population of Europeans in The Bahamas (until the 21st century, this stood at about 15%, more than the estimated percentage of African Americans in the United States) meant that the colony was never without a local parliament. While other major Caribbean nations (Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, Guyana, Barbados) were ruled directly from Britain for almost 100 years, The Bahamas was governed from 1729 to 1967 by a handful of ultra-powerful, ultra-conservative, ultra-racist local White elites. These realities contributed to the fourth fact: that The Bahamas turned very early in its history from agricultural pursuits to the kind of commercial activity that has become emblematic of the 21st century global economy, with a focus on services (tourism being the main one of these) rather than goods and a taxation system based on consumption instead of production. The fifth fact is geographical: The Bahamas is a large, scattered territory, made up of small, low-lying coral islands spread across a vast swath of the globe. Roughly the size of California, The Bahamas thinks of itself as small, but it is the largest country in the Caribbean; its archipelago is the largest in the Atlantic, bigger than Cuba, Guyana, or any other individual Antillean nation.

As a peculiar archipelago on the outskirts of the British empire in the Caribbean, then, The Bahamas suffered throughout its colonial history from profound neglect. Its people languished beneath White minority rule, and the archipelago, as a whole, was unevenly developed. In the half century that has followed independence, this basic structure of governance has not changed. Almost all of the focus on development and

investment has been concentrated on New Providence, the site of the nation's capital—which comprises 1.5% of the total landmass of The Bahamas. The remainder of the archipelago is poorly served by the state—a flaw which was thrown into sharp relief after Hurricane Dorian.

The upshot of all of this is that the Bahamian Plantationocene stems more from the colonial era and the development of the tourism industry than from any focus on actual cash-crop plantations. In The Bahamas, today's plantations are the mega-resorts that are supposed to anchor economic activity throughout the archipelago (Strachan, 2003); cruise ships and their private islands; the private islands owned by the über-rich; and all the smaller hotels and guesthouses that survive off the economic and cultural whims of the millions of visitors to the nation. The permanent population of The Bahamas is almost 400,000 people (Bahamas National Statistics Institute, 2023); the numbers of visitors who pass through the nation on an annual basis is ten times that. Tourism *is* the Bahamian plantation.

Within this critical Bahamian historical framework, the Plantationocene becomes far more than a mere "alternative Anthropocene," capable of alluding to inequity, although this is an important semantic corrective. As we explore its implications, we find that the Plantationocene idea in The Bahamas can provide the conceptual means to reread White supremacy and racialization, European and American imperialism, and capitalist extraction into the social fabric and material substrate of the Bahamian archipelago. The idea also destabilizes our own understanding of academic research into socioecological disasters and, therefore, necessarily, into our personal relationships to collective trauma. Acknowledgement of the Plantationocene demands research reorientation, emotional recalibration, and the expansion of our understanding of the scholarly genre to encompass this insecurity and instability across scales, from the deeply personal to the geopolitical. (Un)natural disaster, generational and collective trauma, anthropogenic climate change, structural and historical inequity, social responsibility—the material semiotics of racial capitalism—are rendered achingly interconnected within the scope of the Plantationocene idea. The Bahamian Plantationocene, as a concept grounded in place, creates the possibility for our individual and collective grief to foreground more voices and modes of communication to help shape an argument for radical change.

Within this framing of the Bahamian Plantationocene, Hurricane Dorian was as predictable as it was unimaginable. For decades, natural scientists have been warning of larger and stronger Atlantic hurricanes while social scholars have been warning of climate refugees and the uneven impacts of storm events in terms of race, class, gender, nationality, and sexuality. Government officials and policy analysts have been warning about the lack of resources and preparation for these inevitabilities, particularly in postcolonial countries and small island states. And on and on. We all knew the storm was coming, literally and figuratively. Recent storms like Hurricanes Irma and Matthew (2017 and 2016) reminded us that The Bahamas is riddled with structural vulnerabilities baked into over 400 years of colonial, postcolonial, and neocolonial exploitation (Strachan, 2003; Bethell-Bennett, 2020; Thomas & Benjamin, 2023). But when this storm came to squat over the land and raze the earth, we were eviscerated, bereft of the conventions we rely on to describe our world.

We are a multi-racial and multi-national collective of Bahamian and American researchers and writers who came together

to help document the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian in The Bahamas in 2019. While we have conducted many interviews with survivors and responders in the country (we dutifully collected the data), we are not satisfied that a conventional research paper about the experience of others is necessarily the only way to convey the lived experience of the Plantationocene. Further, we believe we are approaching the limits of conventional academic genres to compose our shared understanding of the present. Rather than producing an article exploring collected narratives about the storm, we are instead using this space as an opportunity to experiment with collective autoethnography: a tense exercise in fragmented yet aligned self-reflection concerning subjects that are often all too close to home and heart (Bethel, 2000).[10]

Taking inspiration from Bahamian scholars like Ian Bethell-Bennett (2021), the following contributions from our team of authors, whether poem or stream of memory, reveal the existential realities of scholarly life in the Plantationocene. There is no objective position from which we can study or write about events like Hurricane Dorian without stress, fear, confusion, or guilt (oh the ever-present weight of that guilt), nor can we ever adequately convey the terror expressed to us by so many survivors and their loved ones. When the storm came, we were all too far away to be in physical danger and yet somehow also far too close to the devastation to remain unscathed. Our deep connections to the country, to the people of the archipelago, and to each other drew us in with inevitable force. We remain deeply affected to this day. We hope our reflections can begin to narrate the unfathomable.

Adelle Thomas

Adelle Thomas is a Bahamian geographer, climate change scholar, and small islands advocate. Her work directly addresses Plantationocene issues of geopolitical inequity that affect The Bahamas and other island nations when it comes to developing socially appropriate climate science and negotiating for the amelioration of greenhouse gas pollution.

Hurricane Dorian struck when I was in Toulouse, France. I was at a climate science conference, providing my perspective to climate physicists as to why it was important to downscale climate change projections to a scale that was both relevant and useful for small islands. I argued that there was an urgent need for better science on hurricanes that already affect so many small islands and I stressed that, at this time, they should not focus on extra-tropical cyclones that may someday affect Europe. I tried to balance my identities as a social scientist, as a Bahamian, and as a woman of colour. I was an outlier among the group of European natural scientists and had been invited to the conference particularly for that reason—to provide a different viewpoint. However, as the satellite images of Hurricane Dorian completely covering Abaco and Grand Bahama were broadcast around the world and around that conference, I felt like even more of an outsider.

While my new colleagues were sympathetic, they were also intrigued by the physical aspects of the growing storm: the high winds, the slow speed—a textbook case of a storm made more intense by climate change. But I was away from family and friends with no idea of how they were faring in the storm. I felt guilty for my frequent travels that so often took me away from home. I felt as if I should have been at home and was anxious about being able to return, hoping

that air travel would be cleared. The arguments I had made just a few days before were now unfolding before my eyes. "See!" I wanted to shout, "this is what I meant."

When I eventually returned home, I was inundated with requests from international news agencies to provide my perspectives on Hurricane Dorian as a Bahamian climate change expert. I disengaged. This was surreal—too close to home. Although I research and write on these issues, I wasn't prepared for a superstorm to decimate my maternal grandparents' home in McLean's Town, Grand Bahama. An article I had co-authored about inadequate disaster management in The Bahamas two years ago was now playing out in real time. Real consequences, real lives lost, real people missing, real displaced people on the street asking me if I knew anywhere nearby that they could rent for cheap. I volunteered at a few places, donated money, sent out requests to my international network to help. All of it felt inadequate.

I visited Grand Bahama a few months after Hurricane Dorian. I was shocked at the destruction that was evident in parts of Freeport. I could not bring myself to visit the cleared land where my maternal grandparents' home once stood. The news coverage and drone footage on YouTube was enough. It brought up the same feelings as when I visited New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina; I can still envision the painted numbers on the outsides of homes, indicating the number of dead people and animals inside. My paternal grandmother was missing for years after that. Already affected by mental illness and homelessness and refusing help, she was hard to locate even before Hurricane Katrina. When we didn't hear from her after the storm, we assumed the worst. We weren't able to locate her until 2010. I felt helpless then too.

To try and do more, I focused on what I could contribute as an academic. I've tried to direct my grief, my frustrations, into something "constructive." I've taken part in research projects to gather experiences of those that were affected by Hurricane Dorian (all of us) and helped to establish a climate change research centre at University of The Bahamas. But this also feels inadequate, not enough, not effective.

The structural inequities that feed the Plantationocene are the same inequities that led to the impacts of Hurricanes Dorian, Katrina, and other storms and shocks that have caused so much destruction and trauma. They don't seem to be getting better. We know the big problems—ineffective governance, corruption, lack of political will, limited resources, et cetera, et cetera. We know who bears the brunt, whose pictures of grief and destruction are used for the headlines: the most affected in Dorian, the most affected in Katrina–Haitians, African Americans, the least valued in society. We see this pattern playing out globally. We see climate change intensifying these effects. We see COVID-19 adding more fuel to the fire. How can things improve?

My experiences, my family, and my career are all connected. They make me who I am, they affect the lenses through which I see the world, and they shape my work. However, I sometimes feel that all my research and writing and advocacy aren't really changing anything. Writing up results, developing theories, speaking at conferences—these can all feel like trying to make a dollar out of 15 cents. But, these are my contributions, They are what I have to offer so far. I offer a voice that provides a different perspective and viewpoint than the many that don't understand the lived experiences, the extent of the pain, and the trauma that are just as real and impactful as the climate models and the projections.

Sarah Wise

Sarah Wise is an American environmental anthropologist and fisheries specialist. Her work highlights the meaning and social complexity of artisanal and subsistence resource use in small fishing communities that have been deeply affected by postcolonial and neocolonial Plantationocene processes of racialization and marginalization.

Most mornings WhatsApp dings on my phone with family greetings from The Bahamas: daily prayers, birthday wishes, warnings, accomplishments, good grocery deals, and baby pictures. Every year, during hurricane season, the storm predictions come earlier, along with notices about where you can still buy plywood or water, and who has cooked a big pot to share. On Wednesday, August 28th, 2019, as Hurricane Dorian entered the Caribbean near the Greater Antilles, then started to edge northward, I watched closely for a shift toward The Bahamas—toward family. No one was too worried. Hurricanes were familiar and preparations routine—the Plantationocene has been normalized as an aspect of everyday life. Dorian wasn't expected to be a direct hit, and the storm was only a Category 1— "Enough to wash the streets," they told me. Most of my partner's family live in Andros and New Providence, but some have married and moved to other family islands, or travelled as police officers, teachers, hotel staff, and construction workers.

My partner's large family is tight, and I have been wrapped up with them for nearly two decades. I first travelled to The Bahamas in 2003 as a student researcher and met my partner. Over the next 18 years, I returned—sometimes multiple times a year—as an anthropologist, researcher, spouse, friend, daughter-in-law, and mother. The Bahamas has my heart, and every year I closely watched as storms formed and spun their way across the oceans. Every hurricane I worry. I have never gotten used to the idea of shuttering doors and windows to ride out a storm. The family laughs at me about being White, soft, and scared of "a little washing." By Thursday, Hurricane Dorian looked like it might pass north of The Bahamas as only a Category 2. WhatsApp filled with funny memes and well wishes for a very pregnant sister. I asked if anyone thought it would make landfall in The Bahamas and was met with shrugs and reassurance that they knew how to ride out a storm.

Hurricane Dorian strengthened to a Category 3 and turned southwest—heading for Abaco, they said. Aunt Terese was a chef at a resort in Abaco. Her son did some landscape work. No one could reach her, but still no one was worried. "Just a little breeze," they said. I remembered a summer spent in Southern Abaco conducting interviews 15 years after Hurricane Andrew. People still spoke of the horror of the flooding, of seeing coffins float down the street, of losing homes, boats, and fishing gear. The roof damage was still visible on some homes, years later. I tried to call Terese. I obsessively watched the news, clicking links to short video clips, constantly refreshing pages, watching the spiraling angry red purple eye swirl closer. It looked like it would engulf the entire island chain, swallow it whole and leave nothing in its path. The weather service projected Dorian would stay a Category 3. Residents who could boarded up their homes and others arranged to move to the designated shelter. Those who could afford to had long ago flown to the United States or Nassau.

On Friday night, we went to bed with deep dread. WhatsApp filled with a steady stream of "keep safe and ride it out" and "prayers for everyone in Dorian's path." Saturday

morning, we woke to the news of a Category 5 screaming west for a full hit on North Abaco. The video clips became alarming, shifting from families playing monopoly with stacks of water bottles and coolers full of sodas and beer, to camera pans of dark skies, ominous clouds, and rising water. One family filmed the water rising closer to the house, streaming over the front yard, onto the porch, crashing against the closed and locked windows. I thought in vain, surely, they will leave (and go where?), surely, they will get to shelter, surely, the shelter will hold. Another video—which came to be known as the "Pray for Abaco" video (CBS Miami, 2019)—showed a woman pleading for help for herself and her four-month-old baby. The wind screamed and the waves rose behind her as she held the infant. "Pray for us, pray for Abaco, pray for my baby." In the video, the woman stood on the deck of her apartment building, stranded with her baby and others as the waters raged around them. As she pans the small phone camera across the horizon, we can see shredded buildings, submerged cars, and what looked like an angry river roaring through what was once Marsh Harbour.

Soon after that, the videos and messages stopped. The storm had taken out the phone lines and cell towers. Official reports stopped as all communication ended and agency staff could not be reached. For the next 24 hours, Dorian continued to roar, but its forward momentum stalled. The bloated storm ground down on North Abaco and Grand Bahama, tearing down nearly every structure in its path, flooding schools and churches, lifting ships and cargo containers and depositing them inland, laying bare the limestone. The dark hole of silence and wondering was even worse than the flood of information. Still, we could not reach Terese or Karlo. I thought of the terror of the rising water, the infants being held above the waves, the grandmothers and great uncles who had never seen a storm like this, the grandbabies whose ears popped with the storm's pressure. I wondered if coffins were floating in the streets.

Being so far away but emotionally tied to an ongoing disaster is strange. I was consumed with fear, but I also felt guilty that I could sit in a dry home with power and that I had the luxury of having my immediate family safe. This was only one of many inequities that would become starkly visible in the aftermath of the storm. What felt like days later, the storm started to shift and continued a path northwest. The silence continued except for a few independent first responders, many American, some with links to the area through second home ownership. The early reports were sobering. Drinking water, food, and transport for the injured were needed immediately. Marsh Harbour, the third largest city in The Bahamas, had been razed to the ground. The only access point to the area was by sea, but that was unsafe due to the hazardous debris in the water. A wealthy American individual eventually hired the private American robotic company, Hydronalix, to clear marine debris in the harbor and scout a safe passageway using a submersible. The effort allowed vessels to enter the marina and deliver food and water. Images of the devastation began to emerge.

The paralysis of dread lifted, and the reality of the destruction began to settle. We reached out to our social networks to organize and to bolster relief efforts with financial support, supplies, and words of encouragement. I reached out to my co-authors to develop a National Science Foundation rapid grant on the effects of Hurricane Dorian. We collaborated with well-known colleagues at the University of The Bahamas, and within a few weeks we had funds to support a small team of researchers to talk with Bahamians and document their lived experiences. In

preparing for the fieldwork, we talked about doing research in the aftermath of a disaster when emotions are raw, when people are still unsheltered—the lucky ones squeezed in with relatives or living in government shelters—when roads are filled with debris and airports closed, when time is precious because it takes extra hours to find clean water or baby formula, when loved ones are still missing, new bodies unearthed daily, and the storm is still very much fresh in everyone's mind. We wanted to listen and record, to give space for people's voices and experiences, but we did not want to do more harm. We did not want to take when there was so little left.

By the time we landed in Marsh Harbour a month after Hurricane Dorian, Aunt Terese and Karlo had been found safe and were living with family in Nassau. We were privileged enough to scrape together the money for their passage on a private plane. Many people offered services for free, but these were not enough, so disaster transport became a lucrative business, a Plantationocene industry, so to speak. It took 10 days for Terese and Karlo to get transport off Abaco. While they waited, they hustled to find water and food; they helped to clear debris and slept on the floor of a building still partially standing.

As we arrived by plane, little of Marsh Harbour was recognizable. We met many people from international relief agencies. They offered us coffee and warm food, and they spoke of the devastation and desperation they saw. One man said he'd been doing this work for five years, and Abaco was different. Hurricanes—even catastrophic ones—are relatively common in The Bahamas, and structural vulnerabilities have long been evident in the postcolonial capitalist Bahamian society. However, when Hurricane Dorian roiled over Abaco, the event caused exceptional disarray. It left the landscape and social fabric shredded and unrecognizable. Career aid workers, whose job it is to administer assistance from one disaster to the next across the globe, described the atmosphere as unfamiliar and "different." The aid worker explained that it wasn't just the enormity of such a storm but the lack of government collaboration or information. "It was left to the individuals," he said. He told the story of a group of nurses who refused transport and stayed to administer care to the injured, contrasted with government officials who disappeared only to show up 10 days later safe and sound in Nassau. He recognized the deep neglect and lack of recognition of the migrant Haitian population, whose area, The Mudd, was eradicated in Marsh Harbour, with estimates of undocumented dead in the thousands. Located in a low-lying area, The Mudd comprised acres of homes, some made simply with wood pallets and tin sheets while others benefitted from more durable cement construction. There were no regulations nor building codes. There were also no official schools or medical facilities, leaving the inhabitants to rely on their own social frameworks for survival. Many of these people had lived in Abaco for generations. Their parents and grandparents had migrated to The Bahamas for improved living conditions and economic opportunities. The Mudd provided some form of shelter, and the people provided low-cost labor, an arrangement familiar in The Bahamian Plantationocene. The aid worker told us that the official death estimates did not count Haitian bodies. "Another big difference," said the man, "was the level of collaboration across NGOs. This time, we are working together. Usually agencies stake their flag, everyone has separate agendas–but here it's been different." The effects of Hurricane Dorian defied his expectations and prior experiences of a post-disaster setting.

At night, we slept in an American

colleague's house (Kenneth's house) about 30 miles from Marsh Harbour, in beds with running water and with fresh coffee in the morning. During the days, we talked with officials in Marsh Harbour; in the evenings, we sat in the beach bar and talked with anyone who was willing. People wanted to talk. One man told of sitting in a flooded room with 19 other people through the storm. When the worst had subsided, he waded out to find his wife dead in the rubble of their home. One woman described how she jumped out of the attic window as the water surged and hung on to a mangrove stand with her young daughter and unconscious teen son. She held on to him all night thinking he was dead. At dawn, as the storm continued to rage, she managed to pull them out and get help from neighbors. Her children lived. She said she was grateful, but "still I can't sleep at night. I can't dare close my eyes."

Another woman told of sheltering in her home in Marsh Harbour as the storm raged. "My husband is a carpenter; he knows how to build a hurricane house." She and her husband crouched in the small space under the stairs—their "hurricane hole"—crammed in with their two dogs and vacuum. "I know that sounds crazy. But that is the most expensive thing I own. There was no way I was going to give it up." She told of the days after the storm passed when there was no relief from the flooding. People wandered the streets looking for survivors. Days were spent administering wounds, sharing stashes of water, clearing the wreckage, and finding bodies. Once the roads were cleared, a friend from Little Harbour arrived with a truck and took her and her husband to come stay with him. Since then, they have lived in an empty vacation home owned by a Canadian that has solar power and running water. "I finally got to take a shower. It was glorious. I'm starting to feel human again." Dorian managed to disrupt familiar alignments along racial, social, and economic lines, but only briefly. That night the beach bar that had long been a favorite with tourists was filled instead with storm survivors, aid workers, and residents, each disentangling their own experience of the storm, experiences that were still deeply rooted in the Plantationocene.

Kenneth Broad

Kenny Broad is an American environmental anthropologist, boat captain, helicopter pilot, and cave diver whose work documents the social and environmental effects of ongoing environmental change in sites of socioecological precarity and instability.

Being on the ground in Abaco, just a few days after Dorian's landfall as part of the self-organized relief efforts, I found my mental models of place, morality, and their association with political parties as unrecognizable as the island I thought I knew well. I've spent over 30 years in different parts of The Bahamas for a combination of ethnographic fieldwork, underwater cave exploration, some less noble activities (yes, even more nefarious than anthropology), and more recently as a second homeowner about 12 miles from Hurricane Dorian's Ground Zero.

Upon arriving in Abaco a few days after Hurricane Dorian's sea-rise (as the waters covered the main town in Abaco by over 30 feet in some places, along with wind gusts of over 200 miles per hour), my orientation was in disarray. In a town with one intersection, and a harbor that life literally and metaphorically revolves around, I could scarcely make sense of where I was. A massive steel freighter perched up against a shopping center's last remaining wall and hundreds of boats and cars were tossed haphazardly on top of each other. It was as if kids were told to clean up their toys and they

threw them all in a giant bin. We saw twisted metal from roofs and cars and countless other forms of debris, micro fragments of all the things of daily life. Intact porches and roofs had floated a mile from their original homes, settling randomly in precarious spots of soggy land or atop other structures once the waters receded. All of life's most critical and mundane items had been put into a mischievous deity's blender to be smashed up and dumped from above on this low-lying coastal town.

Streets were desolate save for a few people who were scavenging goods and food from the rows of eviscerated homes, revealing cross sections of rooms. There were occasional uniformed Bahamian defense force soldiers—many of whom were allegedly involved with making off with expensive items—and increasing teams of aid workers from an array of religious and secular organizations. The looting and paranoia evidenced by those who didn't know each other was reminiscent of a *Mad Max* film scene, with armed residents setting up checkpoints on roads fortified by makeshift barriers of debris.

I was part of a previously dormant transnational network, albeit unknowingly at the time, that emerged in response to this massive Category 5 tropical cyclone as it gained momentum in the Atlantic, heading westward toward Abaco. I now think of this as Plantationocene social organizing. The multi-sited and amorphous "we" were unified by the color-enhanced satellite imagery of the monster storm and the tropical cyclone track forecasts that we all monitored and speculated about through chatrooms that organically sprung up on WhatsApp. We simultaneously processed the technical information while imagining the catastrophic impact on these limestone islands that barely scratch the surface where the steamy ocean seamlessly meets the horizon.

The impending doom of watching and waiting was magnified by a stomach-churning sense of helplessness, akin to another form of race-based Plantationocene sociality: watching videos of police abuse and other slowly unfolding horrors around the fall of 2019. To alleviate the discomfort that had me waking up every few hours to check the radar, I was able to finally start doing something physical by preparing for post-storm relief. "Action is the enemy of thought", or of anxiety, in my case, to paraphrase from *The Human Stain* (Roth, 2000). In my small corner of Miami, just a couple of miles from my home, is west Coconut Grove. Coconut Grove was one of the first permanent Black Bahamian settlements in the United States. There, and then throughout Miami, churches organized donations along with many ad hoc groups affiliated with local organizations—schools, fire stations, and universities started collecting well before the storm's arrival. Our phone rang constantly with folks asking how to help. Our living room became a staging area for packing plastic crates with medical and food supplies for the aftermath.

As the storm approached Abaco, I got a call from a friend asking if I could help him shuttle relief supplies and "personnel" to Abaco on a luxury yacht owned by a wealthy American second homeowner. I learned that a flotilla of these megayachts was being assembled and loaded from a marina complex's large parking lot in Ft. Lauderdale. Expecting a makeshift staging area when I arrived, there were instead shipping containers full of equipment and supplies, tents with organizational staff in matching t-shirts, piles of material being sorted from unknown sources, and materials dropped by local fire and rescue squads. A continuous parade of large SUVs, the majority of which had stickers in support of Donald Trump on them, filed in and dropped off donations. The multimillion-dollar

vessels in the marina also flew oversized flags in support of Trump, though the yachts' opulent excesses were countered by the positive energy of those organizing this relief flotilla.

Pulling into the parking lot, my ingrained progressive liberal sensibilities welled up full force. It must be obvious that despite my belonging to the White, bald, relatively affluent male-over-50 demographic, I am not a Trump fan; and so, of course, I thought that the only reason these folks, who in my categorizations were certainly the "other," were so well organized was that they were mustering to help protect vacation assets in their Bahamian playground, often viewed as a mere extension of their Florida waters. I was learning that Plantationocene realities and hierarchies are far more complex than my ideological imaginary. After wracking my brain with twisted logic about why these people were doing this for motivations less noble than mine, I finally choked on my own overdose of confirmation bias and realized, as patronizing as it sounds, that there was also a shared love and sense of place for the people of The Bahamas at play here. I further acknowledged my own participation in inequity: my own attachment to the islands of The Bahamas extended far beyond academic research into the realm of self-serving escape, complete with perceived freedom from the United States panopticon.

When we finally got the green light to load our vessel (a long three days after the storm), the chaos of our mission slowly revealed itself. As I was trying to jam as much as possible into and onto the yacht, securing it for the trip, our passengers trickled into the marina. There were about 20 passengers broken into three groups: an emergency response team from a global NGO with post-disaster related equipment, a privately contracted security team of incompetent, wannabe special forces mercenaries (à la *Blackwater*) who were armed to the teeth with weaponry (they were being paid to secure an über-wealthy private club), and eight people in their 60s who had lived in Florida for decades, originally from The Bahamas and one from Jamaica, who confronted every obstacle with group prayer. To add to the tragic, yet somehow sitcom-like atmosphere, another friend who joined was a 75-year-old former-motorcycle-gang-enforcer-turned-captain, who, in his own words, was "so far to the left that his motorcycle didn't even turn right."

Even years later, I have trouble mustering categorical statements about race, identity, class, and my own position within this experience. With absolute clarity, I can vouch for the paranoia, incompetence, and thinly-veiled racism of the security detail, which provided a window into the shadowy, lucrative world of private security contracting that is inextricably linked to the financial powers that be in many corners of the world. In this case, the private club had members with connections. To add to my exercise in contradictions, though, this same club sheltered many of their local Bahamian and Haitian employees and continued to support them with food, salaries, and basic medical care post storm for an impressive amount of time. These facts can be neatly viewed through the prism of plantation paternalism, along with the underlying failed state response. In this case, structural inequity begets new forms of aid, like mega-yacht relief flotillas. And yet, what was most personally disorienting was to be hyperaware of partaking in something that I have long been academically critical off–the shifting of governance responsibility to market forces and disaster aid as a postcolonial extension of dependency relationships. I saw no alternative.

Back to the voyage to Abaco: the security detail possessed ammo, assault weapons, and other matte black gizmos, and they

conversed in pseudo-military jargon combined with vitriolic anti-Obama rhetoric. Yet, they had zero understanding of the physical layout, let alone the social milieu, of where we were heading. On our first night anchoring out, for example, they set up an armed watch on the bridge of the yacht, much to our amusement, since we were over 100 miles from the action in an area safer than the one we had left in Florida. Late at night, I overheard their coded chatter from the bridge about a target they had "locked onto that was moving erratically," which they were tracking through their night vision goggles. I joined them on the flybridge and asked if I could see what they were looking at. Indeed, our potential assailant was a small island that was quite stationary, while it was our boat at anchor that was the one moving with the shifting wind and current. If this is our shadow army, may they stay deep in the shadows.

The next day, we cleared customs in a Family Island that had not been impacted by the hurricane. Though we were bringing aid to a disaster area, this was an exercise in bribery since the yacht was carrying weapons, goods, and people, and it did not have the necessary pre-clearance. In fact, the bribe was less about the firearms than the recently enacted (and alleged) rule that all foreign aid material had to first go to Nassau. In addition to being inefficient, this rule fuel extreme anger and paranoia about the central government stealing materials, with fears that aid material would not make it to Abaco or Grand Bahama in a timely manner, if at all. At the time, it felt as though there were no clear rules about aid efforts. Everything was being made up in the moment.

The nurses onboard the yacht were as benevolent as they were underprepared for the journey ahead. As we navigated island chains, I had to orient them as to which islands they were passing and which way was North and South. While originally from The Bahamas, most had not been anywhere besides the capital, Nassau, on New Providence, for decades. They had not spent time in the Family Islands, let alone spent time there post-disaster – they were "indoor cats." They had no supplies, inappropriate clothing, and no sense of local geography. We dropped them off at the private, high-end club that was financing our relief trip, but that club was 30-plus miles away on nearly impassable roads from where they were most needed.

As we neared Abaco, the normally deep blue ocean waters were milky white from the stirred-up sediment in the battered shallow waters. The only consistent presence was overhead; the U.S. Coast Guard was making constant evacuation trips in helicopters while a cutter moved offshore as a fleet of American private aircraft evacuated the injured. As someone monitoring and involved in some of the aviation work (co-piloting a helicopter to drop supplies in Marsh Harbour), it appeared from my narrow perspective that there was no clear adult in charge in the aftermath of the storm, nor were there consistent rules about how foreigners should engage with aid. (This perspective was echoed in comments from those I met staggering around in shock—from the highest administrative levels to the on-ground personnel.) Again, my postcolonial sensitivities were unmoored by Plantationocene illogics and pulled in different directions as we ignored any existing state rules (akin to the way many Americans ignore fishing regulations and other rules, treating The Bahamas as their less-regulated playground along many dimensions, albeit this time from a reverse moral imperative). In this way, the Bahamian Plantationocene evidenced the prevalence of regional neoliberalism taken to the extreme. Of course, local social networks played critical first responder

roles, but everyone on the ground remarked on the absence of the Bahamian government. I cannot deny that the efforts by American civil society and private funding had the most immediate, large-scale relief effect in those early days in Abaco. This linkage to the United States was also critical because anyone (and there were many) who could get off the island to stay with relatives in the United States was desperate to do so.

As painful as the destruction was to see, the racialized blame for the storm was more troubling, suggesting that Haitians' voudon transgressions and largescale immigration had brought wrath on this Christian nation. Similarly, many Bahamians blamed looting and hoarding on Haitians, despite on-the-ground (Black) government defense force officers also being accused of stealing valuable merchandise intended as aid. According to some in Abaco, as proxies for the government, these officers seemed to selectively enforce rules based on skin color (whose color benefited varied, depending on who you asked). At the same time, White and mixed Bahamian settlements outside of Ground Zero set up roadblocks outside of their towns for fear of looting.

The shifting, subjective nuances of the categories of race, nationality, ethnicity, and their role in American Plantationocene societies are well-worn topics for anthropologists, as are the historical pathways that have led to today's inequities. However, anthropologists less frequently acknowledge or address the nuances of our homegrown, academically-enforced cognitive biases, nor do we often analyze the ways our rational justifications play out where the rubber meets the road. I now know from within my own lived Plantationocene experience how biases are shown in bold relief in extreme situations.

My interpretations of the race-related events of the last few years have not changed because of my Hurricane Dorian experience. In fact, my renewed hope in the moral commonality of humanity is reminiscent of my gestalt when I was in New York City during the 9-11 attacks, watching New Yorkers unite. Yet, I did not live that event through the structural inequity lens of the Plantationocene that seems to be ever-present in me now. Today, my experience of Dorian has profoundly confused my bandwagon acceptance of liberal, top-down "human relations-style" institutional approaches to resolving our increasing schisms in the United States and globally (also known as the progressive approach to reunification with the unintended consequences of "shaming," "wokewashing," "credentializing," and "calling out" versus "calling in"). I increasingly feel aligned with what George Packer wrote: "We have no choice but to live together—we're quarantined as fellow citizens" (2021). So, as The Bahamas slowly recovers from the one-two punches of Hurricane Dorian and COVID-19, and the material evidence of the shared destruction is cleared, I hope we can remember this time when our defining narrative was to help each other, regardless of our position in a transnational web of multi-dimensional relations.

Amelia Moore

Amelia Moore is an American anthropologist and ethnographer studying contemporary small island life. Her work focuses on the historical and contemporary social inequities that structure environmental science and explores how scholars can work towards dismantling the effects of those legacies in their own research and projects.

When Dorian struck The Bahamas, I was in New Orleans, Louisiana, where I had planned to attend sessions at a science

studies conference, catch up with friends, and spend time in the city. Instead, I walked the streets in a fog, intermittently reading everything I could about the hurricane and avoiding reading about it, waiting for messages from Bahamian friends and colleagues to appear in my inbox or on social media to let the world know they were going to be alright. As I waited, New Orleans began to haunt me. I became viscerally cognizant that the city was still in the process of unevenly recovering from Hurricane Katrina, a specter that suddenly loomed around every corner. I began to plan a trip to The Bahamas with my co-authors then and there.

By the time I finally landed in The Bahamas in November of 2019, Marsh Harbour, Abaco, was still unrecognizable. Two American colleagues (Sarah and Kenny) and I drove down roads that had just been cleared of debris, looking for landmarks and signs of familiarity. “Is this where Snappa’s used to be?” I asked incredulously, looking at a ragged edge of shoreline, devoid of structure. “I think so,” said Kenny, who has spent years of his life in that community, “it was somewhere around here. It’s hard to tell…”

We were driving around in a borrowed van that miraculously survived the hurricane, examining the destruction of a community where we had all worked as anthropologists, on and off, for decades, but that now seemed unimaginably strange. There were massive ships scattered around the land, thrown from the sea by the storm surge. Jagged snarls of raw, wooden beams and bent rebar jutted out where homes and businesses used to be. Entire marinas had seemingly evaporated, leaving little trace of their former existence. For some reason, I was most confused by the fact that the town’s one stoplight was nowhere to be seen. I couldn’t identify the intersection where it had once hung, even as we drove right through it.

By far the worst thing, though, was the area called The Mudd. Where once there had been a dense network of haphazardly built homes occupied by Haitian migrants and Bahamians who could not afford, were not allowed, or did not want to live elsewhere, there was now a giant field of rubble surrounded by a chain link fence. The site had occupied a low piece of land, far too close to the sea, and it had rapidly flooded. Too many people died, too many are still missing. Whatever structures survived were bulldozed to prevent the area’s reoccupation, leaving behind a profound desolation. Looking over the stark drifts of wood and concrete piles felt like callously staring at a gravesite.[11] We did not linger.

As we carefully traversed the transformed landscape in central Abaco, the few people we saw were well-organized volunteers, clearing mounds of debris, cooking collective meals in an enormous open-air temporary kitchen, and painting murals on partially collapsed buildings to spread messages of hope and renewal. These volunteers were primarily foreign visitors from the United States or Europe, members of the global disaster relief community that descends on locations that are not equipped to relieve themselves. “I was at an earthquake earlier this year” one man told us over hastily brewed coffee on the porch of a makeshift sanitation center, “I do about three disasters a year.” He was here in Abaco to make sure the island’s water was safe to drink. He wasn’t convinced that it was.[12]

At the one bar we found that was open, where we knew people would gather to commiserate and share stories, the Bahamian bartender related her experience to us. She had been trapped on a building’s second story with family and dogs in a small space, watching the water rise below, waiting for the worst and then waiting for relief once the storm had passed. As she

talked, a light rain fell on the corrugated roof above her head, and she shuddered visibly. “It will be a long time before I feel safe, even with a little bit of rain,” she said. “I am not ok.”

On the island of Grand Bahama, later that same week, I drove around on another voyage of assessment and collection, this time with Sarah in a rented sedan. We went to see the industrial fossil fuel storage facility that was feared to be leaking its imported oil into the surrounding pine forest and wetlands. Massive holding tanks had open holes in their metal lids that were visible from the road. Oil slicks had been bulldozed and power-washed away, but dark brown stains were still visible on the external walls of the tanks, and local scientists were deeply concerned that oil had spread throughout the surrounding ecosystem. The international company in charge assured everyone that the site was contained. No one believed them.

The hotels in downtown Freeport were open, but we didn’t see any tourists, although at times we felt like Plantationocene tourists visiting an apocalypse. The nicest hotel was full of American relief workers, but the local restaurants that were open were only sparsely occupied. We took a Bahamian scientific diver we had known for years out for dinner. She was waiting to go back to work because the coral nursery owned by American expatriates that employed her was not yet operational at that time. “We found our coral growing tanks miles away in the woods,” she told us. “I did get to work on some of that recovery, but right now there isn’t much I can do.” Her father’s house had been flooded and water had swallowed the lower floor, so instead of working for pay she was occupied with repairs and with the emotional toll that comes when your childhood home has been irreparably altered beyond recognition.

Nassau, on the island of New Providence, was not hit directly by the storm, but it certainly experienced the aftermath. Between trips to Abaco and Grand Bahama, Sarah and I visited the national gymnasium in Nassau which had been converted to an emergency shelter. Outside the gym there had been televised protests, as some Bahamians loudly vociferated against the housing of Haitian migrants. Inside the gym, refugees who had been evacuated from their home islands milled around, talking quietly in creole. Children played in the foyer as more volunteers set up tables to provide services. The mood was calm, but tense, and I again felt like a voyeur. It was a relief to interview the Bahamian shelter manager in a storage room full of medical supplies—at least I was no longer taking up space amongst so many who had nowhere else to go.

I could not help but notice that my Bahamian friends and colleagues in Nassau were exhausted. Some had spent weeks organizing aid donations, coordinating group therapy sessions, and building elaborate networks to find emergency housing for the suddenly homeless. Others had spent many sleepless days and nights waiting for word from their relatives on Abaco and Grand Bahama, wondering if loved ones were alive and if their homes had survived the hurricane. All were incredibly frustrated at the slow response of their elected officials, and at the disorganization of the disaster response that had to be coordinated and led by countless volunteers who had to act without clear direction from the central government. I met this exhaustion with my own sense of nervous energy that could only be channeled into more listening and more documenting.

I had come to The Bahamas after Hurricane Dorian to record experiences of the hurricane and to observe the aftermath with my American anthropological colleagues.

We had received a grant to do this work, and we were partnering with Bahamian social scientists to help document oral accounts across Abaco, Grand Bahama, and New Providence islands. We all wanted to better understand how everyday people in the Caribbean managed to survive and navigate the fallout of increasingly intense and slow-moving storms so that future resources might go where they are most effectively utilized, rather than disappearing into national preparedness budgets. Yet, I felt totally useless as we shuttled around these islands. I was all too aware that we were neither international volunteers, assigned vital tasks, nor were we Bahamian residents, taking stock, dealing with trauma, and slowly planning our recovery. Instead, I felt like some kind of opportunistic indicator species, one of the many vultures of the Plantationocene, circling around the latest crisis, akin to a disaster capitalist, looking for valuable insights while signaling the presence of devastation at the same time.[13]

As an anthropologist who has worked in The Bahamas for over 20 years, this was somehow my first hurricane disaster, and I hope to never have to "do" another one. Yet the Plantationocene events keep coming, highlighting entrenched economic and racialized hierarchies and inequities, the concomitant precarity of small islands in the global south, pervasive governmental disorganization, and the ways in which generational trauma can simultaneously congeal and reveal itself within people and communities over time. After that fall, I was unable to visit The Bahamas for nearly two years, kept out by the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. When I did travel to the country again, it was to document the compounded crisis caused by the global pandemic that arrived after one of the worst hurricanes to hit The Bahamas in a lifetime. And in the back of my mind, all the while, was the fear that I was yet again only circling, circling, circling….

In Search of New Genres

As we analyze our own autoethnographic narratives we are struck by the obvious commonalities. There is, of course, the aforementioned guilt (so much guilt) at not being able to do anything or enough, but there is also a great sense of disillusionment. "We have witnessed the failure of a heavily red-taped (post-)colonial bureaucracy to function effectively for all residents of The Bahamas, regardless of their immigration status" (Bethell-Bennett & Fürst, 2021, p. 89), and all that we thought was solid has dissolved into…. We cannot wrap our heads around it, even though we were told it would happen, even though we were the ones that were supposed to know better. And then there is the fear that remains with us, one and all, to this day. What will happen, and what will we do, next time?

One of the certainties of the Plantationocene is that there will be a next time. The linked conditions of extraction (the removal of materials, wealth, and human resources from places like The Bahamas replaced with dependency and paternalism), inequity (between racialized and marginalized groups and historical and contemporary privileged classes and nations), and pollution (the ever-increasing industrial greenhouse gases in the atmosphere that exacerbate unnatural disasters) have been set and stabilized. This means that catastrophic events are primed to happen again here, there, everywhere. There will almost certainly be another monster storm to hit The Bahamas in the coming years, though the most immediate catastrophe may be an economic hurricane. Or, there will be another pandemic. The storm is not gathering. It is here.

We have been tasked, as social scientists, in a way, with developing methodologies to narrate and document these events. This is a tense responsibility in the Plantationocene.

How should we bear witness to this epochal crime? Are we voyeurs or vultures? Or, are we actors with our own agency to shape some small part of how our readers understand what has been, what is, and what is to come? We are currently in search of better scholarly and literary genres with which to record and recount what this responsibility means for scholars like us, inside and out. How do we convey that we are listeners but also laborers and survivors, and that we are damaged too? How do we convey that our bodies and beings are also part of the racialized international networks of subjugation and survival that the storm engaged? We exist within the global asymmetries of power and wealth that shape the Plantationocene conditions where we live and work, but we also strive to communicate in ways that can help create imaginative and political possibilities for change.

In our case, narrating the Plantationocene in The Bahamas in the context of Hurricane Dorian means highlighting our own experiences but also acknowledging the other meaningful genres that are already coalescing around us. WhatsApp messages and group chats brought the storm into our homes and living rooms. It brought us close to the trapped and the desperate in new and terribly necessary ways, and it made us accountable as responders in new ways. Further, counselors, group therapists, prayer warriors, mental health practitioners, and expressive writing therapy workshops (Furst & Hellberg, 2023), gave voice to an individual and collective sense of not being okay. Those networks are another kind of narrative we need to understand in more depth, because they are still telling the story. The path to healing is being charted within them.

This work is critical because too many people remain trapped within conventional narratives and understandings of global environmental change and natural disasters. Univocal, god's-eye depictions of "anthropogenic climate change" brought on by "human activities" that effect large scale climatic patterns and massive movements of people and evolving economies are insufficient explanations for the lived experiences, compounded traumas, and interwoven inequities of everyday life in small islands like The Bahamas. Our understanding of the Bahamian Plantationocene and our narration of even our own limited exposure to it offers a more complex and potentially radical vision of intergenerational and geological harm. We cannot legislate or spend our way out of these compounding crises if we cannot first acknowledge their origins in plantation logics and structures. We cannot dispassionately document the on-the-ground realities of Plantationocene existence without first acknowledging that this work is always also personal and that it takes an enormous emotional toll, affecting different people and researchers differently. And we cannot communicate the lived experience of all this precarity without confronting the limits of mainstream narrative genres that serve to emotionally and structurally distance audiences from the storms that will eventually consume them—that are, more accurately, consuming them as we speak.

We hope our experimentation with autoethnographic narrative has helped to widen the opening for more critical responses to climate change as a condition of structural, racialized, scale-spanning inequity. We are still searching for language, tone, and multivocal genres that can convey the horrific enormity of it all. This article is perhaps evidence that our work remains incomplete and in process. We therefore conclude with an epilogue poem by Nicolette, which conveys more than any deft analytical essay ever could.

[8] According to the latest census, the population of New Providence increased by 21.26% between 2010 and 2022. The population of Grand Bahama decreased by 8.42%; the population of Abaco decreased by 10.16% (Bahamas National Statistics Institute, 2023, p. 9).

[9] The Anthropocene is commonly defined as "the period of time during which human activities have had an environmental impact on the Earth regarded as constituting a distinct geological age" (Merriam-Webster, 2023).

[10] We are aware that autoethnography and narratives of our individual experiences are not enough *on their own* to explicate the lived experience of the Plantationocene, but we cannot deny the way that trauma, anxiety, and guilt pervade our work. Experimentation with this genre became a way to process that together.

[11] This reminds Nicolette of the mass grave into which Haitian bodies were flung after the tragedy at sea engendered by the misguided Royal Bahamas Defense Force towing of an intercepted migrant sloop in 1990.

[12] Grand Bahama's drinking water is still affected by storm water intrusion as of summer 2023.

[13] Those who swoop in to purchase damaged or destroyed property (land, businesses, intellectual property) at bargain prices or to collect aid dollars for their own enrichment in the aftermath of such disasters are a certain kind of vulture (see Sou, 2019 on Barbuda post-Hurricane Irma).

Epilogue: after Dorian the therapist said

after Dorian the therapist said
it doesn't matter you were here
not there / it is still trauma
and you are //
traumatized

survivors' guilt
she said // and to be fair
I held a girl who cried who cried

people are trapped and they call me
on twitter on
WhatsApp

I tell them turn on location so I
but their batteries are dying
I call the police
they call the jetski operators
the crawfishermen
they turn their fleets towards the dropped pins

but I can't save them all

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