

## Chapter 3

# The Locals Do It Better?

### *The Strange Victory of Occupy Sandy*

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It is Thursday, November 8, 2012 at St. Jacobi Church in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. It's a bright, dry day.<sup>1</sup> Just one week earlier, Hurricane Sandy made landfall on the East Coast, ravaging everything in its wake. In New York City, thousands of houses are destroyed or flooded. Thousands of households in the low-lying areas of Staten Island, Red Hook, and the Rockaways are still without electricity. At St. Jacobi Church, young people with smartphones and walkie-talkies are sifting through piles of donations, sorting canned food, diapers, torches, candles, bed covers, and power generators into stacks, and loading these items onto trucks. A young man with a scruffy-looking beard posts on Facebook: "Attention! If anyone in Rockaway needs to have their basement pumped, please contact Suzanne Hamalak at suzyboklyn@aol.com. Her family wants to help and have industrial pumps [...] they will do it for free."<sup>2</sup> The young man is part of Occupy Sandy, Occupy Wall Street's disaster relief agency that set up camp in Brooklyn a day after the hurricane, while the Red Cross and FEMA were still struggling to get personnel out to New York's hardest-hit areas.

The most lethal and destructive hurricane of the 2012 Atlantic hurricane season, Sandy's immediate death toll in New York City alone was 97, followed by weeks-long power cuts and billions of dollars in damage.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Sandy revealed the staggering vulnerability of low-lying New York City areas that proved incapable of protecting their property. While low-lying areas are naturally vulnerable to flooding, this vulnerability was exacerbated by drastic economic and social factors. Red Hook, one of the hardest-hit neighborhoods in Brooklyn, has a 45% poverty rate with soaring levels of asthma and diabetes.<sup>4</sup> While many wealthy Manhattaners and residents on higher ground experienced virtually no disruption to their everyday activity,

the devastation wrought by Sandy on the lower lying parts of the city was hefty. As the journalist Nick Pinto describes,

Power was out in huge swaths. Flooded tunnels cut off whole regions from the rest of the city. In Lower Manhattan, Red Hook, Coney Island, the Rockaways, and much of Staten Island, everything from electricity to heat to potable water was in short supply. Hospitals were being evacuated after power failures. Bodies drowned in the storm surge were being recovered. The news media began to show the first images of Breezy Point, burned to the ground, and houses up and down the coast torn apart by wind and water.<sup>5</sup>

In ghostly reminiscence of Hurricane Katrina, it quickly became clear that the relief efforts of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Red Cross were inadequate.<sup>6</sup> While the contingency plans from FEMA had “anticipated aftereffects such as electrical fires, flooding, and displacement of populations residing in evacuation zones,”<sup>7</sup> the emergency planners did not expect that the severity of the power cuts would entail a crucial lack of services, affecting everything from clean drinking water and sanitation to food preparation. Furthermore, the concentration of emergency personnel onto Lower Manhattan neglected those outlying boroughs that were worst hit by the flooding: “They put a lot of attention to Lower Manhattan when they should have been in Coney Island,”<sup>8</sup> said first responder Nick Weissman of Williamsburg.

Part of the failure of the Red Cross and FEMA to adequately address the situation on the ground can be attributed to the emergency managers’ disconnect from local communities. While there existed numerous contingency and hazard adaptation plans such as PlaNYC from the Office of the Mayor and the New York City Hazard Mitigation Plan from the NYC Office for Emergency Management, official schemes tended to be technocratic and did not integrate the local level of community organizing.<sup>9</sup> Thus, while FEMA does train community response teams to enact hazard mitigation in their neighborhoods, these community responders are not actually integrated into adaptation and mitigation planning committees, creating a communication lag between local and administrative levels.<sup>10</sup> In the aftermath of Sandy, this aid gap, created by the official relief workers, set the stage for the volunteer-based relief work of Occupy Sandy, activists from the social movement Occupy Wall Street that had occupied Zuccotti Park in Lower Manhattan to protest economic inequality a few months prior to Sandy and were now looking for a new mission.

Tapping into the existing social media network of Occupy, the activists quickly set up camp in Brooklyn, utilizing Twitter to call for manpower and donations. It soon turned out that social media was quicker and more effective than waiting for official aid workers to be deployed. Nick Weissman

specifies, “Occupy Sandy had Twitter feeds running and a community kitchen set up by Tuesday night after the storm, whereas larger organizations, with bigger bureaucracies, were unable to respond as quickly and specifically.”<sup>11</sup> In only a short space of time, Occupy responded by providing tens of thousands of volunteers (four times the number of official aid workers), an estimated 15,000 meals and 120 truckloads of essential supplies,<sup>12</sup> while raising \$1.5 million in donations.<sup>13</sup> Donors were sympathetic to Occupy’s hands-on initiative, often preferring to give to the social movement rather than the Red Cross’s “comparatively sluggish response.”<sup>14</sup> By February 2013, Occupy Sandy’s track record was even more impressive, as journalist Sam Knight chronicles: “In February 2013, the group claimed to have filled 27,000 meal requests and reported assisting 3,400 residents with medical help, financial assistance, repairs and basic supplies with a mere \$1.34 million—roughly 1 percent of the entire Red Cross payroll and less than the sum of three Red Cross executives’ salaries in 2012.”<sup>15</sup>

Faced with the paucity of the official aid effort, Occupy Sandy quickly gained public as well as media favor. Time and again, journalists and commentators compared the agility of Occupy’s bottom-up organizing to the inertia of the official aid groups. Likening the federal failure to deliver fast and effective relief to FEMA’s negligence during Hurricane Katrina, Nick Pinto commented:

As temperatures dropped toward freezing two weeks after the storm, residents in public-housing apartments from Red Hook to the Lower East Side to Rockaway were still without power, water, and heat. Displaced homeowners surveyed the wreckage of their lives and wondered how they’d ever build back. And almost everywhere, the vaunted presence of FEMA and the Red Cross was next to invisible. Weeks after the storm, many New Yorkers in storm-damaged neighborhoods had yet to see any sort of institutional relief at all.<sup>16</sup>

Occupy capitalized on this failure and made their independence from slow and ineffective government into one of the group’s hallmarks. Mike Birch, one of Occupy’s many cooks, championed this direct action approach when interviewed by a reporter from Voice of America: “Grassroots, real people power. We don’t rely on the Red Cross, or FEMA, or the city.”<sup>17</sup> Surveying the situation on the ground, the news report praised the unparalleled efficiency of Occupy’s relief effort, “The scene at St. Jacobi Church, Brooklyn is controlled chaos: scores of people sorting and distributing tons of aid for relief centers in the hardest-hit parts of New York. Everyone is a volunteer, and all seem to be working at top speed.”<sup>18</sup>

Occupy Sandy confirmed what is proven time and again in disasters from New Orleans to the Philippines to Port-au-Prince. Namely, that

self-organized citizen initiatives are often more adept at delivering first aid than large governmental bodies. Among the first to take note of this fact was pioneering disaster scholar Charles Fritz, who in the 1960s, observed the communitarian behavior that disasters generally inspire and rejected the media reports of social anomie and collapse that make up the stuff of disaster movies:<sup>19</sup>

Even under the worst disaster conditions, people maintain or quickly regain self control and become concerned about the welfare of others. Most of the initial search, rescue, and relief activities are undertaken by disaster victims before the arrival of organized outside aid. Reports of looting in disasters are grossly exaggerated; rates of theft and burglary actually decline in disasters; and much more is given away than stolen. Other forms of antisocial behavior, such as aggression toward others and scapegoating, are rare or nonexistent. Instead, most disasters produce a great increase in social solidarity among the stricken populace.<sup>20</sup>

Occupy Sandy confirms the decades-long promotion of local knowledge in disaster studies. Critiquing the cold-war understanding of disasters as natural contingencies or technical failures, disaster studies began endorsing *local* methods of disaster risk reduction after its vulnerability turn in the 1980s. Rather than proposing a short-term fix, delivered by the momentary presence of aid workers or military personnel, the so-called vulnerability approach promoted local knowledge as the answer to natural and man-made hazards. With this, it broke with the technocratic emphasis on expert knowledge that had dominated disaster research after World War II. How did vulnerability studies frame the idea of *local* as compared to *expert* knowledge?

## VULNERABILITY AND THE EMERGENCE OF LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

In 1983, the geographer Kenneth Hewitt argued that it was insufficient to view disasters merely as geophysical occurrences that disrupted an otherwise normal state of affairs.<sup>21</sup> Disasters were rather, he proposed, the result of social action and social processes. They were thus thoroughly anthropogenic in nature. With this, Hewitt ushered in the so-called vulnerability approach that dominates contemporary sociological and anthropological disaster research today. The vulnerability framework extends the analytic gaze beyond the immediacy of the disaster onto the social, cultural, political, and ecological conditions that played a role in its production (or exacerbated its severity). Formerly seen in technocratic terms as a contingent event that necessitated a swift, mainly technological solution, natural disasters were,

until the 1980s, talked about in a vocabulary that effaced their social logic. The vulnerability approach argued on the contrary that disasters are the result of underlying conditions of social vulnerability combined with an external hazard. In the words of disaster scholar Kathleen Tierney: "Put simply, the organizing idea [...] is that disasters and their impacts are socially produced, and that the forces driving the production of disaster are embedded in the social order itself."<sup>22</sup>

For Tierney, this holds true for any kind of disaster. Rather than resulting from forces of nature or failures in technology, disasters are in this perspective always an effect of a particular configuration of the social. Starting from the assumption of social root causes for disaster, the vulnerability approach carries a strong, political impetus. Taking a critical stance toward the capitalist ideology of development, free trade, and competition, Greg Bankoff and Dorothea Hilhorst have pointed out that the exposure of vulnerable communities to disaster most often follows established power relations of class, race, and gender. The unequal exposure to disaster is thus "largely a function of the power relations operative in every society."<sup>23</sup> For Eric Klinenberg, the zooming-out movement of the vulnerability approach makes it possible to "denaturalize" disasters and tease out their underlying political economy.<sup>24</sup>

Once disasters are "socialized" in this way, it is clear that a merely technical solution to emergency situations won't suffice. Rather than proposing such a short-term fix, delivered by the momentary presence of aid workers, the vulnerability approach promotes local knowledge as the answer to disaster risk reduction, breaking with the technocratic emphasis on expert knowledge that had dominated disaster research into the 1980s. Organizing aid in a top-down way, this former approach ignored established local ways of responding to hazards. Since it framed local disaster victims through a matrix of scientific expertise that denied them any access to relevant knowledge, as well as to the resources, needed to organize the relief effort, local victims were simply not listened to. In the words of vulnerability scholars Blaikie, Wisner, Cannon, and Davis:

Too often, survivors are relegated to the role of passive spectators by aid workers who rapidly take over the entire recovery process [...] some international consultants and the staff of certain agencies tend to sprout like mushrooms after disasters that attract media coverage [...] Such officials typically do their job and then all too quickly depart from the scene for yet another disaster or administrative talk or commission.<sup>25</sup>

Since this approach had derided *local* knowledge as ineffective in the fight against hazards, its strategy lay in radically changing the valence of local knowledge, which now emerged as the primary *solution* to building disaster

resilience. Critical of the technocratic approach's top-down authoritarianism, vulnerability studies recognize that communities afflicted by disaster mostly already possess the resources needed for an effective response. Since disasters reoccur frequently in specific regions, vulnerability studies trust local people to have acquired the capacity and the skills to respond adequately.

These local capacities include various elements in a community's way of life, for example technologies such as informal security systems, elaborate practices of land use, and ecosystems management adapted to the risk of floods, storms, or drought. For vulnerability scholars, these practices constitute a learned habitus that is perfectly adapted to a particular environment with its very own dangers and risks. The vulnerability approach, therefore, reserves a minimal role to aid workers, whose task is reduced to bringing local knowledge to the fore and act as its facilitator. Rather than as technocratic expert, it views the aid worker as a cultural facilitator, who is trained in reading those local capacities that might at first sight be illegible to an outsider. For Greg Bankoff:

The current emphasis on the importance of [...] local knowledge in disaster situations is a belated recognition that [people] have historically developed sophisticated strategies and complex institutions to reduce the constant insecurity of their lives [...] The respect now accorded to coping practices forms part of a wider attempt to broaden local participation in the entire development process through bottom-up planning and to empower local people through encouraging community participation. Local knowledge is seen as the key to success as it is the only resource controlled by the most vulnerable, is already present at a potential disaster site, and in many cases constitutes a viable operational strategy.<sup>26</sup>

The bulk of vulnerability studies advances such an empowered notion of local knowledge. For Kathleen Tierney too, communities mostly already possess the capacities needed to build resilience but all too often “powerful social forces will stand in the way of such improvement.”<sup>27</sup> In this perspective, the task of the aid worker becomes to *listen to the locals* and help them exercise their knowledge in the forums and avenues that benefit them. In marked opposition to the technocratic approach to disaster, in vulnerability studies, there is a strong concern about speaking for people without a mandate. Ben Wisner emphasizes the practice of creating open spaces to listen to local people's concerns and engage in knowledge sharing on an equal footing. Wisner maintains that the task of the vulnerability scholar is to give a voice to the marginalized and to reveal the hidden, but systematic, violence that keeps local communities in situations of poverty. For Wisner, vulnerability is “the blockage, erosion or devaluation of local knowledge and coping practices, or—taken together—local capacity.”<sup>28</sup> He argues there is a need to set free

the people's "social capital" and to liberate the "creativity of the masses"<sup>29</sup> to enable an effective and ethical process of recovery.

Similarly to Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon, and Davis advocate an idea of disaster relief as the creation of a free and open space to listen to the locals and to learn from local expertise. Whereas the aid worker formerly exercised his scientific authority to regain mastery over the situation, vulnerability studies restrict his role to that of facilitator and collaborator in the production of hybrid forms of expertise that blend local, vernacular skills with centralized resources. In this view, vulnerability is conceptualized as a blockage to a community's natural, unimpeded flourishing. For Blaikie et al.:

[the vulnerability approach] requires a genuine listening to local people and an awareness of how power relations can block the participation of the most vulnerable. Indeed, as Chambers [1983] puts it, one must "put the last first." Doing so opens up a channel of communication between the people and disaster aid workers that goes beyond "consultation." People are able to express their needs and work together with outsiders to overcome obstacles.<sup>30</sup>

What is the epistemological background of this connection between a distinct location and a form of knowledge? Indeed, what is the deeper justification of this valorization of the local that emerges as privileged with regard to knowledge production? With its deconstruction of the authoritarian position of the knowing "expert" and the reversal of the power hierarchy that now "puts the last first," the epistemology advanced by the vulnerability approach emerged from within the feminist and deconstructivist critiques of scientific objectivity put forward in the 1970s. Let us take a deeper, historical look at *local knowledge* before evaluating its efficacy when applied to Occupy Sandy.

## LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AS SITUATED KNOWLEDGE

Arguing that established scientific paradigms presupposed the universality of a subject that was in reality white, privileged, and male, deconstruction and feminism set out to challenge its hegemony by elaborating a "successor science" that, rather than claiming universal knowledge, would be made up of several composite knowledge that did not deny their boundedness but were instead *place-specific, local, or situated*. Along with Clifford Geertz' anthropological treatise *Local Knowledge*,<sup>31</sup> Donna Haraway's essay "Situated Knowledges" can be seen to form the epistemic backbone of vulnerability studies' emphasis on local knowledge.

"Location is about vulnerability,"<sup>32</sup> writes Donna Haraway in "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial



Perspective.” In her work, Haraway develops a radically partial form of “local knowledge” she dubs “situated knowledge.” Her starting point is the radical multiplicity of a wide array of knowledges that are all incommensurable with each other. Having been formulated from particular standpoints, they don’t share the same outlook, perspectives, and concerns. For Haraway, every epistemology is situated and necessarily bounded by that situation. However, this doesn’t mean giving up on the promise of objective knowledge, it just means that no viewpoint is sufficient in itself to provide the kind of panoramic overview traditionally associated with “objectivity.” For Haraway, situated objectivity can only be achieved through a democratic conversation between the partial positions: by creating a “network of connections”<sup>33</sup> between standpoints, translating between power-differentiated-communities, and constructing a mediated subject position that is based on radical insufficiency and multiplicity. While Haraway does not argue that this objectivity is achieved in a power-free or neutral space, she has a lot of hope for situated knowledge as a “wonderfully detailed, active, partial way of organizing worlds,”<sup>34</sup> in which “only partial perspective promises objectivity.”<sup>35</sup>

Like the vulnerability approach, Haraway advances a strong concept of “partiality” to arrive at a more accurate and just epistemology. And like in Blaikie’s account of those vulnerable communities that came “last” and now deserve to be placed “first,” Haraway also believes in the epistemic advantage of the underprivileged that now emerges as favored among the array of partial knowledges. She frames her account of situated knowledge as emerging explicitly from the vulnerable position of marginality she calls the “subjugated”: “Many currents in feminism attempt to theorize grounds for trusting especially the vantage points of the subjugated; there is good reason to believe vision is better from below the brilliant space platforms of the powerful. [...] Subjugated standpoints are preferred because they seem to promise more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world.”<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, Haraway cautions against appropriations of the position of the subjugated and claims to speak on their behalf. “There is a serious danger,” she writes, “of romanticizing and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions.”<sup>37</sup>

At the outset of her essay, Haraway contrasts the position of the subjugated with the position of dominant mastery. For her, the essential difference, is that “we are the embodied others, who are not allowed not to have a body.”<sup>38</sup> Echoing a classical tenet in feminist theory, the masculine, rational subject can imagine himself as disembodied, universal, and capable of abstract thought, while the female is imagined as an essentially corporeal creature, tied to bodily rhythms, and incapable of rational enquiry. For Haraway, the essence of masculine science lies in a stifling reduction of the object of science to an inert body that can be appropriated at will by the male knowledge-seeker. By



being, thus, reduced to a mere “object-for-knowledge,” the scientific object is denied any kind of agency or any potential for “conversation” with the subject.

Haraway highlights how situated knowledge differs from the objectifying paradigm by creating a dialogical space that allows the scientific object to speak back. For Haraway, the methodologies in the social sciences, championed by the vulnerability approach (such as ethnography and participant observation) are exemplary “critical approaches [...] where the agency of people studied itself transforms the entire project of producing social theory.”<sup>39</sup> Haraway characterizes that this dialogue does not disavow power differentials but instead attempts to productively overcome them as a new dialectic. While the Hegelian dialectic had established the conditions for a productive encounter between subject and object in a scientific setting, for Haraway, it too quickly aborted this dialogue by subsuming the encounter into a synthesis or a new fixed form. According to Haraway, what is needed is an *open-ended* dialectic between situated knowledges that together produce situated objectivity in a “power-sensitive conversation.”<sup>40</sup> Haraway argues that this dialogue would truly dissolve the boundary between scientific subject and scientific object: “Situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not as a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally as slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and his authorship of ‘objective knowledge.’”<sup>41</sup> The references to the dialectic make Haraway’s elaboration of situated knowledge a peculiar one that hovers uncomfortably between materialist and postmodern epistemologies. Certainly, the idea of an epistemic privilege, pertaining to those who are marginalized by configurations of power, is common critical currency since Marx posited the proletariat as the epistemically privileged historical actor. However, while Marxism and later Marxist Feminism grounded this epistemic privilege in the centrality of the “subjugated” to the capitalist mode of production and reproduction, Haraway falls short of grounding “situated knowledge” in anything outside the positioning of a subject *as* a marginal body. While she nuances her claim for *subjugated* knowledge by asserting that “to see from below is neither easily learned nor unproblematic, even if ‘we’ ‘naturally’ inhabit the great underground terrain of subjugated knowledges.”<sup>42</sup> She nevertheless seems to justify the existence of epistemic privilege simply *qua* natural inhabiting rather than dynamically or dialectically as an element in a social totality.

Even so, vulnerability studies appear as a great leap forward, compared to the cold-war command-and-control style of the Red Cross or FEMA. Since the 1970s, disaster scholars have flaunted the creation of a dialogical and open space, in which aid workers and local people can exchange knowledge on how to best mitigate calamities. However, this progressive image is keenly

lacking an economic dimension, since which great economic changes happened in the 1970s that have so unambiguously been pinned to the names of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan? This alerts us to the question of economic periodization and an evaluation of vulnerability studies in the *current* era. Let us return to Occupy Sandy to attempt to answer these questions.

## THE STRANGE VICTORY OF OCCUPY SANDY

Occupy Sandy's overwhelming success practically confirms disaster studies' affirmation of local knowledge. But to what avail? In the autumn of 2013, one year after Superstorm Sandy, the Department of Homeland Security published a comprehensive report, endorsing the social movement's relief effort. In a study entitled "The Resilient Social Network," Homeland Security—a huge governmental body that emerged in response to the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and incorporates FEMA as well as the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) that prosecutes and deports undocumented migrants<sup>43</sup>—praised the bottom-up spontaneity of Occupy's relief effort. Mirroring current disaster research,<sup>44</sup> Homeland Security praised the efficacy of self-organized disaster relief, admitting the "limitations of traditional relief efforts"<sup>45</sup> to provide adequate aid services in an age of heightened disaster risk. In its "Executive Summary" of the events, Homeland Security is unambiguous in its praise for the social movement's relief effort:

Within hours of Sandy's landfall, members from the Occupy Wall Street movement—a planned social movement comprised of social activists who protested income inequality in the United States—used social media to tap the wider Occupy network for volunteers and aid. Overnight, a volunteer army of young, educated, tech-savvy individuals with time and a desire to help others emerged. In the days, weeks, and months that followed, "Occupy Sandy" became one of the leading humanitarian groups providing relief to survivors across New York City and New Jersey. At its peak, it had grown to an estimated 60,000 volunteers—more than four times the number deployed by the American Red Cross.<sup>46</sup>

The Homeland Security report goes on to praise the relief effort in much the same vocabulary and tone that we have seen vulnerability scholars adopt vis-à-vis local capacities. Enumerating five "Occupy Sandy Success Drivers" that include "the horizontal structure of Occupy Sandy, social media as the primary means to attract and mobilize a large volunteer corps,"<sup>47</sup> as well as, ironically, the "Occupy Wall Street infrastructure,"<sup>48</sup> the report admirably reaches a conclusion: "Unlike traditional disaster response organizations, there were no appointed leaders, no bureaucracy, no regulations to follow, no

predefined mission, charter, or strategic plan. There was just relief.”<sup>49</sup> Aiming to learn from Occupy Sandy’s bottom-up approach, the stated purpose of the Homeland Security report is to “determine how FEMA can coordinate response activities and capabilities with grassroots entities operating at the local level.”<sup>50</sup>

How can we make sense of the strange proximity between the US government and Occupy Sandy? Wasn’t Occupy Wall Street a resolutely anti-state social movement that had protested the governmental bailout of banks as unjust? Had the NYPD not attacked Occupiers with pepper spray and violently removed protesters from Zuccotti Park in the autumn of 2011? Just one year and one hurricane later, everything seemed different. Mayor Bloomberg went out to Brooklyn to pay tribute to the activists.<sup>51</sup> A few weeks later, Occupy was meeting with the NYPD and the National Guard to soak up their praise and coordinate contingency plans.<sup>52</sup> After another few months, the social movement that had blockaded banks on Wall Street was filling out applications for government grants and soliciting donations for reconstruction from Home Depot.<sup>53</sup> What had happened?

A possible answer emerged when the Obama administration presented its budget for the fiscal year 2013. Quoting the “superiority” of community-run disaster aid, the proposal suggested a \$1 billion cut to FEMA’s annual budget, amounting to a 14% budget reduction compared to the fiscal year 2012.<sup>54</sup> As evidence indicated that self-help initiatives were more successful than government aid, disaster relief could be proposed as a prime area for reductions in government spending. This continued a trend begun by the Bush government, which had restructured FEMA by subsuming it under the Department of Homeland Security. As the eco-critical writer Rosemary Radford Ruether points out that FEMA was already “greatly eroded under the Bush administration by funding cuts [...] where most of the funding went to anti-terror plans.”<sup>55</sup>

The policy of offsetting government deficits through cuts to social spending is known as austerity. Its application in the United States can be traced back to the 1970s, when the privatization of public infrastructure was implemented on a massive scale in order to reduce government overheads.<sup>56</sup> The political theorist Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen describes the era since the 1970s as “one long crash landing,”<sup>57</sup> in which “capitalism has tried to reconstruct itself by saving on social reproduction through debt, technological development and the outsourcing of production.”<sup>58</sup> In line with Rasmussen’s assessment, economic analyses of the decades since the 1970s diagnose a “long downturn”<sup>59</sup> or “world-slump,”<sup>60</sup> resulting from a real crisis of capital accumulation. While attempting to revive the economy by hedging its bets on speculative gains on the stock market,<sup>61</sup> governments simultaneously sought to minimize all forms of social spending. With the state thus reduced to the core functions

of security and surveillance, disaster victims are left to their own devices, a situation which is retroactively embellished through references to grassroots organization, local capacity, and communitarian action.

Referring to Naomi Klein's work on Disaster Capitalism,<sup>62</sup> the collective Out of the Woods has recently described the effects of austerity politics on the disaster sector. In the wake of a massive cutback of governmental spending, communities are first exposed to disaster by development aggression, urban immiseration and the privatization of infrastructure. Once the hurricane hits, disaster victims are made responsible for their own reconstruction process:

Since self-organized disaster communities are more effective than state agencies and market forces at responding to disasters, the state can simply sit back and let people suffer, then reassert itself when the community dissipates as normality returns. This is the state's interest in "resilience," exposing proletarians to disaster, abandoning them to survive by their own efforts, and then moving in with the "disaster capitalism" of reconstruction and gentrification once the moment of disaster has passed.<sup>63</sup>

We are now able to draw preliminary conclusions about the economic role of local knowledge today. While theories that championed grassroots organization may have had a critical thrust in the 1970s, they have been outpaced by the real historical development of capitalism that culminates in the austerity state. Countering the technocratic disaster relief that followed World War II, scientific research as well as popular activism promoted the people's ability to survive alone and without the state. Unbeknownst to its actors and participants however, this discourse emerged in parallel to the large-scale dismantling of the welfare system, in which the state withdrew from the task of maintaining its population alive and in good health. Rather than providing essential services like health care, pensions, and disaster relief, these domains have been increasingly privatized, which has opened new and lucrative business avenues for capital.<sup>64</sup> In a context where communities effectively have no other choice than to self-organize in order to remain alive, the possibility of the subjugated to "speak back" and engage in a shared space of knowledge production is harnessed by institutions like Homeland Security and fed back into their systems of regulation and control.

Citizen initiatives have thus unwittingly and paradoxically legitimized neoliberal reforms toward the privatization of aid. However, when citizens are made to "shoulder the burden of the failed state,"<sup>65</sup> many questions are left unanswered—citizen efforts are simply not adept to organize large-scale rebuilding, infrastructure repairs, or resettlement grants. By claiming a deliberately "insufficient," "partial," and "multiple" perspective, in which knowledge is produced in conversation and in dialogue, vulnerability studies

neglects the role of local knowledge in the reproduction of the very vulnerable conditions it set out to fight. The time is thus ripe for a paradigm shift.

I want to suggest that disaster studies again become critical and fulfill its mandate of providing research on how to mitigate disasters. What is needed for this is a thorough rethinking of disaster studies' relation to vulnerability. We have seen that the prevailing relation that scholars and activists adopt toward the vulnerable is a valorization and an endorsement of their local knowledge, whose particular capacities are championed in the fight against disaster. However, a close look at the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy has shown that this valorization has today become problematic. Intended to build autonomy and self-determination vis-à-vis the state, the affirmation of local knowledge becomes counterproductive, once the self-sufficiency of communities becomes a mandated state policy. Set up in opposition to the state, Occupy Sandy quickly became a necessary communitarian engagement under conditions of scarcity. With this however, it also lost its unique value as a critical practice.<sup>66</sup>

In a different critical register, and as McKenzie Wark has recently remarked, the position of the vulnerable has for decades been called "the labour point of view."<sup>67</sup> Extending this materialist viewpoint outward from Occupy Sandy, we find an alternative relation to vulnerability; instead of simply identifying with the vulnerable position, it critically reflects on its function between the state and the market.

## DISASTERS FROM THE LABOR POINT OF VIEW

What can the labor point of view tell us today? Does it not hark back to a bygone era? To state socialism and the dream of a society modeled on the collective worker? On the contrary, for the cultural theorist Michael Denning, the need for a labor viewpoint emerges precisely *in response to the crisis* that beset the Left, following the West's large-scale deindustrialization that transformed formerly industrial societies into consumer cultures. This shift meant that long-rehearsed Marxist patterns of explanation based on the gradual victory of the proletariat became increasingly untenable, as the postwar New Left struggled to develop new critical accounts of postindustrial society and its declining proletarian identity. In Denning's words, the question remains: "How to invent a Marxism without class. How could one maintain the insights and political drive of historical materialism in an epoch where left, right and center generally agreed that the classes of Fordist capitalism were passing from the stage of world history, when the 'labor metaphysic' [...] seemed irrelevant."<sup>68</sup> For Denning, the New Left responded to the changes in the world economy by developing two dominant theoretical models. The first

centered on the market and commodity culture as the structuring determinants of capitalist life. The second focused on the state and its fine-tuned modes of government and control that created docile and obedient citizens. Denning equates the first market-based explanation with the analyses of Guy Debord and the second state-based explanation with the figure of Michel Foucault. In both accounts however, *production* is conspicuously absent and it is here that the demand for a labor viewpoint arises. Reviewing the humanities landscape since the 1960s, Denning describes “our reluctance to represent work”<sup>69</sup> and the fact that in most social scientific accounts “work remains invisible.”<sup>70</sup> How can we apply the labor viewpoint to disasters and what can this application teach us today?

Following Denning, the labor viewpoint requires that we see different forms of social action *as* labor, meaning as *productive* activity under capitalism. Through the wage, capitalism socially validates some activities—such as work in factories and offices—as labor, while framing others as driven by altruism or care and thereby as unworthy of pay. The reproduction of capitalism thus necessitates the interplay between two distinct spheres: first, a commercial sector where activities are performed for a direct market profit, and second, a noncommercial sector where activities are performed at a remove from immediate market interest. The collective Endnotes has called for these directly market-mediated sphere (DMM) and indirectly market-mediated sphere (IMM) to highlight their interconnectedness in the totality of the capitalist mode of production.<sup>71</sup>

While corporations occupy the DMM sphere, the state has historically occupied the IMM sphere, in which civil servants provided health care, education, public infrastructure, and disaster relief as social services, free of charge.<sup>72</sup> Formerly, placed firmly in the sphere of waged IMM activities, since the crisis of the 1970s, states have been increasingly “withdrawing from organizing IMM activities because they are a mere cost.”<sup>73</sup> The economist Loren Goldner calls this a “general process of non-reproduction,”<sup>74</sup> in which states divest the means of basic social reproduction to cut costs, resulting in falling wages, an increase in private debt, the full privatization of health care and education and a public infrastructure left to rot. In a country like the United States that is traditionally poor in the provision of welfare services but generous in the provision of disaster relief,<sup>75</sup> emergency budgets have been significantly cut, despite an increasing disaster-rate. Some of these services were privatized and transformed into commercial DMM activities in the form of insurances and private security services, while a large part of them stayed in the IMM sphere but became the unwaged responsibility of volunteers.

Faced with this crisis, activists and social movements such as Occupy—many of whose members were indeed unemployed<sup>76</sup>—have begun organizing essential community services by themselves.<sup>77</sup> However, despite Occupy’s

effort to provide “solidarity” rather than “charity,” these activities are haunted by their complicity with the neoliberal transfer of social responsibility onto voluntary aid providers. In the worst case, social movements are in this way helping to create the austerity state. The labor viewpoint today suggests the inability to affirm self-organization because it plays into the neoliberal idea of the *Big Society*, in which members of the community perform formerly state-run services as unpaid labor.<sup>78</sup> This highlights a new political situation, in which disaster studies’ classical opposition between the state and civil society appears as definitively superseded. How can we characterize this new configuration between society, the market, and the state? Reexamining the notion of *vulnerability* can provide us with an answer to this question.

Writing on the political conjuncture of the 1970s, the anthropologist Didier Fassin highlights the particular role of *vulnerability* in the contemporary political landscape. For Fassin, vulnerability has today become a key concept that is embodied in the practice of humanitarianism: “[Humanitarianism] relates to [...] the treatment of the poor, immigrants, abused women, children affected by poverty—in short, all those categories constituted in terms of ‘vulnerability.’”<sup>79</sup> For Fassin, the perspective of vulnerability entails a general shift in political practice and activist rhetoric to a grammar of suffering, in which *human life* emerges as the ultimate civic good, in need of protection. Enhancing Denning’s diagnostic of a market-based and a state-based analysis of the present, Fassin proposes *humanitarianism* as the third pillar on which contemporary government rests:

We could even say that philanthropic politics is a sort of moral counterpart to the contemporaneous development of both the police state, understood as the ensemble of apparatuses maintaining security and control of populations, and classical liberal reason, understood as the emergence of economic activity into the field of power [...] Under this hypothesis, modern governance would rest not on two but on three pillars: to the police and liberalism, we should thus add humanitarianism.<sup>80</sup>

Fassin emphasizes that in contrast to state sovereignty, the quintessential humanitarian actors are the members of civil society and nongovernmental organizations, which have experienced an unparalleled proliferation since the 1960s.<sup>81</sup> Fassin further specifies that as a consequence of its non-parliamentarianism, humanitarianism draws its vital force precisely from its apparent opposition to the state. While humanitarian organizations see themselves as firmly “on the side of life,”<sup>82</sup> Fassin argues “they have to place political actors on the side of death,”<sup>83</sup> resulting in an ostensible opposition to the state.<sup>84</sup> Counter to this self-proclaimed opposition, Fassin outlines the contemporary embedding of humanitarian practices at the very heart of a new governmental



rationale that spans the state, the market and civil society, and this Fassin calls Humanitarian Reason.<sup>85</sup>

In line with Fassin's analysis, I argue that the case of Occupy Sandy serves as a counter-history to the way in which self-organized reproductive activism presents itself today. Rather than in opposition to the state, self-organized social reproduction integrates itself functionally into a new interplay between the state, the market, and the people. By proving that the people can survive alone and by themselves, it alleviates the charges against state-administered austerity through the maintenance of social reproduction under conditions of imposed scarcity.

How does our disaster landscape look like today? For the Department of Homeland Security, it looks like this: "If there will be more disasters in the future, and there will be, then there will be more opportunities, opportunities like Occupy Sandy."<sup>86</sup> From the labor point of view, we can say that *becoming opportunities* is what has to be resisted. Instead, social movements providing disaster aid will have to enter into real conflict with existing capitalist relations. They will have to consider their role within the wider frame of social reproduction and adapt their strategies accordingly, since any activist movement that merely performs *relief labor* for free does not have the chance to move outside a condition of vulnerability. It might achieve improvements and incremental ameliorations, but it will not put an end to the power structures that expose communities differently to disaster.

## NOTES

1. The records show a sunny, dry day with an average temperature of 10 degrees Celsius. See [https://www.wunderground.com/history/airport/KJFK/2012/11/8/DailyHistory.html?req\\_city=&req\\_state=&req\\_statename=&reqdb.zip=&reqdb.magic=&reqdb.wmo=](https://www.wunderground.com/history/airport/KJFK/2012/11/8/DailyHistory.html?req_city=&req_state=&req_statename=&reqdb.zip=&reqdb.magic=&reqdb.wmo=)

2. Cited in Maghan Barr, "Occupy Wall Street Morphs into Occupy Sandy, Offering Relief," [http://www.denverpost.com/ci\\_21973563/occupy-wall-street-morphs-into-occupy-sandy-offering](http://www.denverpost.com/ci_21973563/occupy-wall-street-morphs-into-occupy-sandy-offering).§10. Because of the relatively short time that has elapsed since Superstorm Sandy, academic studies of the disaster are scarce. For this reason and in order to connect a scholarly discussion of the disaster to public opinion and the activist field, the article makes frequent use of newspaper and press sources.

3. Michael Schmeltz et al., "Lessons from Hurricane Sandy: A Community Response in Brooklyn, New York," *Journal of Urban Health* 90, no. 5 (2013): 799.

4. See S Brockwell, F Kilminster, and A Starr-Bochiccio, "A Red Hook Community Health Assessment," [http://www.brooklyncb6.org/\\_attachments/2009-05-22%20RHI%20Red%20Hook%20Houses%20Health%20Assessment.pdf](http://www.brooklyncb6.org/_attachments/2009-05-22%20RHI%20Red%20Hook%20Houses%20Health%20Assessment.pdf).

5. Nick Pinto, "Hurricane Sandy Is New York's Katrina," *The Village Voice*, <http://www.villagevoice.com/news/hurricane-sandy-is-new-yorks-katrina-6436817.1>

6. This in itself is surprising since the city's exposure to hurricanes has drastically increased over the years. For an informed ecological and social history of New York City, see Theodore Steinberg, *Gotham Unbound : The Ecological History of Greater New York*, First Simon & Schuster hardcover edition. ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

7. Schmeltz et al., 800.

8. Cited in Sheila Anne Feeney, "Volunteers Pour Forth in Wake of Sandy to Help Their Neighborhoods," in *A.M. New York* (New York: McClatchy-Tribune Business News, 2012).§2

9. In addition, the anthropologists Stan and Paul Cox describe how during Hurricane Sandy, the official and intricate contingency plans by New York's Office of Emergency Management were ignored and the decisive authority relegated directly to the mayor. For the authors, this episode is representative of a larger trend in emergency management that regards official disaster plans as too complex to be followed, preferring to delegate responsibility to non-specialists such as politicians and volunteers. See Stan Cox and Paul Cox, *How the World Breaks: Life in Catastrophe's Path from the Carribean to Siberia* (New York: The New Press, 2016), 73.

10. Schmeltz et al., 802.

11. Cited in Feeney, §2.

12. Allison Kilkenny, "Occupy Sandy: One Year Later," *The Nation*, <http://www.thenation.com/article/occupy-sandy-one-year-later/>. §2

13. Sarah Maslin, "Storm Effort Causes a Rift in a Shifting Occupy Movement," *The New York Times*, 01.05.2013 2013, §2.

14. *Ibid.*, §18.

15. Sam Knight, "Occupy Sandy and the Future of Socialism," *Truthout*, <http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/22880-occupy-sandy-and-the-future-of-socialism>.§20

16. Pinto, §4.

17. Cited in *Voice of America*, "Post-Storm, 'Occupy Wall Street' Becomes 'Occupy Sandy'" (States News Service, 2012), §18.

18. *Ibid.*, §1.

19. The very first study to comment on the prosocial behavior emerging after a disaster is Samuel Henry Prince's account of the explosion in Halifax Harbor in Nova Scotia, Canada. See Samuel Henry Prince, *Catastrophe and Social Change, Based Upon a Sociological Study of the Halifax Disaster*, Columbia Studies in the Social Sciences (New York: Columbia University Press, 1920).

20. Charles E. Fritz, "Disasters and Mental Health: Therapeutic Principles Drawn from Disaster Studies," University of Delaware Disaster Research Center, <http://udspace.udel.edu/bitstream/handle/19716/1325/HC%2010.pdf?sequenc>.

21. Kenneth Hewitt, *Interpretations of Calamity from the Viewpoint of Human Ecology*, The Risks & Hazards Series (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1983).

22. Kathleen Tierney, *The Social Roots of Risk: Producing Disasters, Promoting Resilience* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014), 4.

23. Greg Bankoff and Dorothea Hilhorst, "Introduction: Mapping Vulnerability," in *Mapping Vulnerability: Disasters, Development, and People*, ed. Greg Bankoff, Georg Frerks, and Dorothea Hilhorst (London; Sterling, VA: Earthscan Publications, 2004), 2.

24. Eric Klinenberg, *Heat Wave : A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
25. Piers M. Blaikie et al., *At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability, and Disasters* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 207 and 214.
26. Greg Bankoff, "The Historical Geography of Disaster: 'Vulnerability' and 'Local Knowledge' in Western Discourse" in *Mapping Vulnerability: Disasters, Development, and People*, ed. Greg Bankoff, Georg Frerks, and Dorothea Hilhorst (London; Sterling, VA: Earthscan Publications, 2004), 32.
27. Tierney, 7.
28. Benjamin Wisner, "Assessment of Capability and Vulnerability," in *Mapping Vulnerability: Disasters, Development, and People*, ed. Greg Bankoff, Georg Frerks, and Dorothea Hilhorst (London; Sterling, VA: Earthscan Publications, 2004), 189.
29. Ibid.
30. Blaikie et al., 214.
31. Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983). In this article collection, the essay "From the Native's Point of View" in particular outlines Geertz' methodology for understanding the particular knowledge of a subaltern group.
32. Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 590.
33. Ibid., 580.
34. Ibid., 583.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., 583–84.
37. Ibid., 584.
38. Ibid., 575.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., 590.
41. Ibid., 592.
42. Ibid., 584.
43. The Homeland Security Act of 2002, passed in the direct aftermath of 9/11 united a panoply of new and old agencies in one organization. It constituted the largest governmental reorganization since the founding of the Department of Defense in 1947. See Thomas Hintze, "Homeland Security Study Praises Occupy Sandy, with Murky Intentions," Truthout, <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/22837-dhs-study-praises-occupy-sandy-with-murky-intentions..>
44. Russell R. Dynes, "Community Emergency Planning: False Assumptions and Inappropriate Analogies," *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 12, no. 2 (1994); D Neal and B. D. Phillips, "Effective Emergency Management: Reconsidering the Bureaucratic Approach," *Disasters* 19, no. 4 (1995).
45. Eric Ambinder et al., "The Resilient Social Network," Homeland Security Studies & Analysis Institute, <http://homelandsecurity.org/docs/the%20resilient%20social%20network.pdf>. 3
46. Ibid., 1.
47. Ibid., 3.

48. Ibid.
49. Ibid., 1.
50. Ibid., 3.
51. Ben Yakas, "Bloomberg Praises Occupy Sandy: "You Guys Are Great,"" *The Gothamist*, [http://gothamist.com/2012/12/01/video\\_bloomberg\\_praises\\_occupy\\_sand.php](http://gothamist.com/2012/12/01/video_bloomberg_praises_occupy_sand.php).
52. Christopher Robbins, "Occupy Sandy Recognized by Ny Times, Mayor's Office & National Guard," *The Gothamist*, [http://gothamist.com/2012/11/11/occupy\\_sandy\\_recognized\\_by\\_ny\\_times.php](http://gothamist.com/2012/11/11/occupy_sandy_recognized_by_ny_times.php).
53. Maslin. Indeed, Occupy's collaboration with governmental bodies such as the NYPD as well as corporations like Home Depot was contentiously discussed among participants of the social movement and by no means an uncontroversial issue. However, it was ruled that by collaborating with antagonistic institutions the movement would be able to extend its control and influence into areas that would have otherwise remained inaccessible.
54. See Suzy Khimm, "Obama Cuts Fema Funding by 3 Percent. Romney-Ryan Cuts It by 40 Percent. Or More. Or Less.," *The Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2012/10/30/obama-cuts-fema-funding-by-3-percent-romney-ryan-cuts-it-by-40-percent-or-more-or-less/>.
55. Rosemary Radford Ruether, "After Katrina: Poverty, Race and Environmental Degradation," *Dialog* 45, no. 2 (2006): 179.
56. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Theodore Steinberg, *Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disaster in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
57. M.B. Rasmussen, *Crisis to Insurrection: Notes on the Ongoing Collapse* (Wivenhoe; New York; Port Watson: Autonomedia, 2015), 147.
58. Ibid.
59. Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence : The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945-2005* (London; New York: Verso, 2006).
60. David McNally, "From Financial Crisis to World-Slump: Accumulation, Financialisation, and the Global Slowdown," *Historical Materialism* 17, no. 2 (2009).
61. In 1971, President Richard Nixon uncoupled the dollar from the gold standard, making the future of the world economy dependent on the future-oriented fluctuations of the stock market. In this context, the political scientist David McNally differentiates between value and capital, arguing that Nixon's decoupling proclaimed the end of value and hailed the beginning of "fictitious capital." See *ibid.*
62. Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, 1st ed. (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2007).
63. Out of the Woods, "Disaster Communism," Libcom.org, <http://libcom.org/blog/disaster-communism-part-1-disaster-communities-08052014>.
64. Harvey; Vincanne Adams, *Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith: New Orleans in the Wake of Katrina* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013); "The Other Road to Serfdom: Recovery by the Market and the Affect Economy in New Orleans," *Public Culture* 24, no. 1 (2012).

65. Kilkenny, §3.

66. Can we not say that this is also the sad predicament of much of the identity politics that informed vulnerability studies' political orientation? Nancy Fraser has argued that it was precisely the feminist movement's turn toward a politics of *recognition* that diluted its radical goals of material equality between men and women into a weak claim for the acceptance of cultural difference, enabling feminism's alliance with neoliberalism at the end of the 20th century. See Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (London; New York: Verso Books, 2013). Similarly, Jasbir Puar has shown how the promotion of same-sex marriage by the US government has rendered invisible prevailing hetero-normative structures in the United States, while contributing to an Islamophobic demonization of Middle Eastern countries that are openly homophobic. See Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Next Wave (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). Finally, Jared Sexton has critiqued the official multiracialism of American society for generating an inclusion of successful people of color at the expense of a persistent and antiblack exclusion of the African American community. See Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). These critical accounts share an underlying narrative of the co-option of radical energies by capitalist and state forces. They thereby pose the question of a revitalized politics of negative critique.

67. McKenzie Wark, *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene* (London; New York: Verso, 2015), 25.

68. Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (London; New York: Verso, 2004), 84. The 'labor metaphysic' is C. Wright Mills' term. See Charles Wright Mills, "Letter to the New Left," *New Left Review* 5, no. 5 (1960).

69. Denning, 91.

70. *Ibid.*, 92.

71. Endnotes, "The Logic of Gender," *Endnotes* 3, no. 3 (2013): 63.

72. The extent of this provision varies strongly from country to country but one finds a variation of state-funded IMM activities in almost all modern states.

73. Endnotes, 86.

74. Loren Goldner, "Fictitious Capital for Beginners: Imperialism, Anti-Imperialism and the Continuing Relevance of Rosa Luxemburg," <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/fictitious-capital-beginners-imperialism-anti-imperialism-and-continuing-relevance-rosa-luxemburg>.

75. Michele Landis Dauber, *The Sympathetic State: Disaster Relief and the Origins of the American Welfare State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

76. Hintze.

77. This situation has given rise to a rich academic and activist debate on the possibility of organizing 'the commons,' spaces for the collective sharing of resources and the self-organization of collective social reproduction. See among others Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland, CA; Brooklyn, NY; London: PM Press; Autonomedia, 2012).

78. Indeed, David Cameron's idea of the Big Society, one of the hallmarks of the Conservative government in the UK shares a lot with the politics of self-help endorsed

by the Department for Homeland Security. Cameron advocates the organization of social services “on a voluntary basis.” The Big Society is a political culture “where people, in their everyday lives, in their homes, in their neighborhoods, in their workplace [...] feel both free and powerful enough to help themselves and their own communities.” See David Cameron, “Speech ‘the Big Society,’ Liverpool, July 19, 2010,” (2010).

79. Didier Fassin, “Heart of Humaneness: The Moral Economy of Humanitarian Intervention,” in *Contemporary States of Emergency : The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions*, ed. Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi (New York; Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books ; Distributed by the MIT Press, 2010), 269.

80. Ibid., 272.

81. James N. Rosenau, *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Change and Continuity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990).

82. Fassin, 276.

83. Ibid.

84. Fassin’s account of the emergence of humanitarianism as a resolutely anti-state position is complemented by Michael Behrent’s brilliant study of the French Second Left. The Second Left was an important side current in the French political landscape that alongside the emerging neoliberal policy makers critiqued the established Left’s fixation on the state. Against the state’s policy of *dirigisme* or intervention, the Second Left promoted *autogestion* or self-management to “decompose and redistribute the functions of the capitalist state, transforming its shackles into a voluntary institution.” See Michael C. Behrent, “Liberalism without Humanism: Michel Foucault and the Free Market Creed, 1976–1979,” in *Foucault and Neoliberalism*, ed. Daniel Zamora and Michael C. Behrent (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015), 96.

85. Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

86. Ambinder et al., 21.

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