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**Review of *Democratic Insecurities: Violence, Trauma, and Intervention in Haiti*. Erica Caple James. Reviewed by Amy Wilentz.**

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that characterized those who moved successfully.

In 10 chapters, the book details the unfolding of the residents' experiences at several points over the course of the experiment with attention to the differences among the cities. The text is enhanced, in this regard, by quotes from the renters themselves, whose stories of success and frustration amplify the statistical outcome data. The authors do not shy away from critiquing the underfunded, and therefore inadequate, way in which the supportive counseling services were implemented. Compliers, those in the first group who successfully found housing in low poverty areas, did have modestly better outcomes than the those in the other groups. The authors' summary chapter, "Lessons," appropriately labels MTO as "the strong-idea-weakly-implemented problem" (p. 223) and details the several ways in which the experiment was based on erroneous assumptions about the poor and their available resources.

*Moving to Opportunity* is carefully researched and documented. It is sometimes repetitive, likely the result of its having three authors. The book will be of interest to social policy and urban planning students and academics as well as planners who have a particular interest in housing for the poor; sociologists interested in social mobility and its deterrents will also find this book informative. It documents once again that expecting that housing will solve entrenched poverty, in the absence of other needed social and economic supports—jobs, adequate income, schools with sensitive teachers and guidance personnel, public transportation and so forth—is foolhardy.

Marguerite Rosenthal, Emerita, School of Social Work, Salem State University

Erica Caple James, *Democratic Insecurities: Violence, Trauma, and Intervention in Haiti*. University of California Press, 2010. \$60 hardcover, \$24.95 paperback.

This book on Haiti and the consequences of political unrest and imposed democracy by MIT anthropologist Erica Caple James is one of the most important books on the country published in years. Although marred by excessive academic jargon, it radiates intelligence and understanding. James'

central premise is that in Haiti, an atmosphere of insecurity reigns on every level—political, economic, personal—and thus planning on a personal or familial level, as well as ‘development’ on the national scale, are nearly impossible. James posits further that everyday political insecurity in Haiti means that there is no stable framework against which citizens can make judgments about any event; therefore, all events take on a subjective meaning and are infinitely interpretable, leading at best to bickering and confusion and at worst to internecine violence and political paralysis. Hard truths about Haiti and its international partners are revealed despite James’ difficult academic turns of phrase. *Democratic Insecurities* represents a major advance in ethnographic and sociological scholarship on Haiti.

James’ analysis of urban Haitians’ behavior is among the best writing on this subject. She documents many instances of mysterious, paranoid, proud, and seemingly self-destructive conduct of Haitians in crisis and finds that, at the heart of such actions, a fierce battle over scarce resources is taking place. In moments of extreme national crisis, getting hold of individual micro-donations—doled out according to complicated, indecipherable formulae of victimization developed by international organizations—can lead to bizarrely dramatic (to our eyes) rituals of name-calling, jealousy, revenge, envy, denunciation, and even accusations of witchcraft.

James, who worked with human-rights organizations in Haiti before the 2010 earthquake, describes individual reactions to reductions in supplies and/or payments. More important, she includes narratives of people who come to the fund seeking support: people who were raped for political reasons; a woman whose son was stomped to death by a death squad and whose husband vanished; men who were chased into hiding while their friends were disappeared and their girlfriends raped. She considers and analyzes each story and explains the victims’ anger: they are not only already suffering from trauma, but also from fear of being cut off from crucial supplies for their families.

These victims (or *viktim*, as James calls them) must repeatedly document the details of their victimization in order to qualify for humanitarian funds and goods distributed by

outsiders. James' *viktim* stories combine to paint a picture of a highly neurotic, abused, and neglected population. There is no *post* traumatic stress disorder in Haiti, because there is no *post* about it, ever. It's just ongoing traumatic stress disorder, as if the shells will never stop falling.

James writes with great accuracy about how the bureaucracy of human-rights institutions mirrors the ongoing Haitian trauma. Gossip, rumor and retribution among officials in human-rights work, which James calls "bureaucraft," often closely resemble what Haitians call witchcraft, thus reversing the way outsiders regard Haitian victims. James' implication, of course, is that such behavior often goes all the way up to the top in Haitian politics. James brilliantly captures the mistrustful and dangerous atmosphere in which all remedial activity takes place when resources are scarce and the state offers no institutional infrastructure or continuity.

The book, written before the devastating 2010 earthquake that destroyed Port-au-Prince and much of its environs, when Haiti was already an ongoing economic disaster, is filled with prescient ideas. James writes about "the compassion economy," "the commodification of suffering," the inhuman, unblinking "development gaze," "the emergency framework," the "technologies of trauma," and "trauma portfolios." These are universally useful and important ideas for studying the humanitarian intersection of the world's haves with the world's have-nots. Right now, however, Haiti provides perhaps the most extreme example of this crossroad, the country's failures and geo-neuroses reflecting the enormous, knotty, shameful difficulties encountered during the rush to rescue, when the world attempts to translate outsider money and "good will" into insider improvement or "progress."

James' harshest observations focus on USAID's Human Rights Fund, which she studied during the periods of Jean-Bertrand Aristide's reinstatement as president of Haiti and subsequently that of René Préval's first presidency. Here James provides the *viktim* narratives of political repression and violence, both as individuals' reporting to James, and as they relate their victimization to form a part of the trauma dossier that will qualify them (or not) for help from the HRF. But these narratives, while revealing and vivid (and often contradictory),

are not the most valuable aspect of this very valuable book.

Aside from how much it shows us about the way Haiti works, what *Democratic Insecurities* most accurately demonstrates is how we work in Haiti, with our outsider role as "mobile sovereigns," James' stinging appellation for various kinds of tiny foreign dictators working on the ground, especially field anthropologists, like James herself. Her observations are not only from the field but are also based on solid, painstaking research in the literature of Haitian development, ethnography, and anthropology. The book's detailed index itself is a work of some importance.

*Democratic Insecurities* has one other central virtue: it is unflinchingly self-aware. James is no cowboy anthropologist blithely critiquing the methods of other cowboy anthropologists. "A crucial dilemma emerged during the course of this work," James writes in her introduction. "How do individual and institutional humanitarian actors grapple successfully with conditions of ongoing insecurity without resorting to the very predatory practices that create such conditions?" How do we correct the system without becoming part of it, becoming tainted by it? After long experience in Haiti, one comes up with a sad and disconcerting answer to this question: No matter how much we grapple with this, we don't grapple with it *successfully*. No one can remain utterly uncorrupted by the predatory political situation. In fact, as James shows us, in places like Haiti, we the outsiders are helping to brew and ladle out portions of the very corruption we seek to remedy. It is to James' great credit that she illustrates this in detail from within the humanitarian edifice.

*Amy Wilentz, author of The Rainy Season: Haiti since Duvalier and other works on Haiti*

Carmelo Mesa-Lago, *World Crisis Effects on Social Security in Latin America and the Caribbean: Lessons and Policies*. Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2010. \$28.95, paperback.

This book has been written by a leading social security expert and social policy analyst of Latin America. Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of Economics and Latin American Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, Carmelo Mesa-Lago