
Introduction

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Given their graphic and often horrific natures, events traditionally labeled as disasters capture everyone's imagination including journalists, politicians, humanitarians, policy-makers, academicians, and the public. How these events are perceived and contextualized plays a decisive role in not only how we respond to calamity, but also how we envision calamity prevention. The goal of this book is to gain a greater understanding of disasters by contextualizing them in hopefully new and different ways by paying close attention to two decisive factors: narration and globalization, which on various levels are two reoccurring themes throughout the volume. Deeply embedded in both themes is the notion of vulnerability, which as Hilhorst and Bankoff (2004, 2) trenchantly observe, is "critical to discerning the nature of disasters."

We usually perceive of disasters as isolated and abnormal events. What is missing from this perspective is that disasters are grounded in a larger social, political, historical, and spatial context that very often reflects the historical processes that surround the economic and political processes of both the nation-state and the global economy. The phenomena that we label disasters often belong to a larger series of spiraling events that are often translocal (Button 2016). Scholars (e.g., Button 2016; Wisner et al. 2004) note the difference between more common, everyday disasters and the less common but more spectacular catastrophes. This volume discusses both.

We need to view disasters more as routine, normal, and connected to one another along various social fault lines and as a direct product of culture and not something to be imagined as simply exceptional events (Button 2010). Conceiving of disasters in this manner allows us to move beyond the bounded unit of analysis that has too often typified traditional disaster studies and popular media narratives.

Disaster researchers and media outlets devote considerable attention to iconic *catastrophes* like Hurricane Katrina or the earthquakes in Haiti or Nepal but fail to recognize everyday disasters, which, upon examination, disclose the larger processual contexts in which many disasters evolve in both space and time. To see disasters in this manner is a very different approach than the one that has traditionally dominated disaster studies. Doing so challenges us, among other things, to think about where disasters begin and where they end and even how they are sometimes imbricated in one another (Button 2016). One goal of disaster studies and anthropology in particular should be to challenge the traditional axiomatic and unproblematic concepts, which are employed to analyze disasters. In short, analysis often requires seeing beyond the specific details of any particular disaster in order to uncover wider patterns found in adjacent or similar cases (Button 2016).

Disaster Narratives

One crucial way in which we can gain a greater understanding of disasters in a broader, processual context is the interrogation of disaster narratives. Competing disaster narratives have no doubt accompanied disasters from time immemorial, however the debate over disaster narratives on a global level first emerged in the wake of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755. According to Russell R. Dynes (2000), this massive earthquake, which affected the fourth largest city in Europe, generated a heated series of debates resulting in newspaper discussions, books, essays, and fictional works. While these debates occurred during the Enlightenment, there are parallels to today: both epochs are characterized by vigorous intellectual debate about the roles of science and religion. Then, as now, issues of progress and modernity are being debated among clergy, common folk, and intellectuals. Most notable among these Enlightenment debates was the discussion that ensued between two major figures, Voltaire and Rousseau (Dynes 2000; Molesky 2015). As Dynes observes, it was Rousseau who unwittingly set the stage for a modern day social science approach to disasters by arguing, contrary to Voltaire's more moral/religious perspective, that rather than God or nature, "man" (we would now say humankind or society) was to blame for the ravages of the earthquake by arguing that if the tens of thousands of houses in Lisbon were less densely occupied and dispersed throughout the city there would have been fewer fatalities. Immanuel Kant was ahead of his time on this issue—even though he could not see beyond the contemporary attachment to slavery—arguing that

there would have been much less harm inflicted if the city was better prepared for an earthquake (Molesky 2015).

This historical debate, unearthed at the dawn of the new millennium by Dynes and others, highlights the contested nature of narratives about disaster, that they are products of society and also shape our understanding of responses. It also underscores who gets to tell, to narrate, the story of disaster. In contemporary society, competing narratives continue to emerge in the wake of disasters large and small not only because of how small the world seems to have become as a result of recent technological advances, but also because disasters have become globally imbricated in the broader context of late capitalism, neoliberal policies and of course climate change.

Thus, narratives continue to play a vital role in our perception of disasters and, on multiple levels, shape how we respond to them. Traditional media narratives commonly portray disasters as isolated events rendering invisible the global/transnational forces that produce them. Too often inaccurate framing can constrain our notion of what is both possible and desirable given the realities of prevailing ideologies.

News stories are, for the most part, anecdotal accounts and not systemic analyses of disasters and the larger historical circumstances that shape and determine them. In other words, such accounts ignore the disaster continuum by focusing almost exclusively on the middle of the continuum or the triggering event, without attention to the historical sequence of the events leading up to the disaster and the long-term recovery process. This process collapses media accounts into a very narrow frame and ignores fuller, more complete explanatory approaches—thereby reinforcing the notion that disasters are exceptional events, which are not reflective of everyday life and the material world that shapes them. This decontextualized scenario deters us from studying the nature of the social and cultural construction of reality. The neglect of the longitudinal evolution of disaster serves to reinforce the neglect of systemic forces, asymmetrical power relations, and the long-term impact of disasters on human communities. As one evacuee in the Houston Astrodome stated, “The news don’t tell you everything.” Yet another evacuee said, “The media tells you what it wants to tell” (Button 2006).

As illustrated in the chapters that follow, survivors and their families struggle in the wake of disaster not only to regain control of their lives, but also to refute the supposedly objective frames of the disaster offered by the media and official government accounts. As Donald Brenneis (1996) reminds us, the world does not come to us already narratized. Whose disaster narratives are heard and whose are ignored is a vital part of the

contestation of meaning about disasters and the ongoing debate about who is to blame for either the disaster or the failure to adequately respond to the calamity (e.g., Brenneis 1996; Button 2002, 2010; Steinberg 2006; White 1981). McGee and Nelson (1985) observe that moral narratives are too often obliterated by privileged or hegemonic narratives. Often authorities' frustrating failure to prevent disasters and their ineptitude in responding to them causes people to question the social order. Disaster victims ask, "Why me?" "Why here?" "Why didn't the government prevent this from happening?" "Why aren't people being held accountable?" The assignment of blame and responsibility often becomes an integral part of this struggle to find meaning (e.g., Barton 1970; Baum, Fleming, and Davidson 1983; Button 1990; Drabek and Quarantelli 1967). In most instances, these accounts can take the form of counter-narratives that challenge the official accounts offered by officials and the media. These narratives can provide valuable insights into the disaster survivors' perception of class, race, and power. Narratives are also important because they play a formative role in the creation of the subjectivity of those affected by calamitous events. Focusing on the subjectivities that are revealed in these narratives offers us additional, rich, theoretical insights about the nature of disasters.

Disasters as Global or Translocal Processes

Another crucial way in which we can gain a greater understanding of disasters, their translocality, and their inherently processual nature (Hewitt 1983; Oliver-Smith 2009; Wisner et al. 2004) is to examine them in the context of the ever-increasing international economic and social forces that shape our contemporary world. Arguably, disasters since the advent of capitalism can be seen as deeply interconnected with global forces, whether they be in the form of colonialism or late state capitalism, or neo-liberal forces. In other words, the ever-changing political economy of capitalism has mediated the social forces that have influenced the production of hazards and disasters in extremely complex ways—ways that shape how we understand, investigate, and talk about catastrophes. Today, many social scientists and practitioners researching disaster risk reduction view disasters in a processual light, not only in an effort to uncover the origins of disaster but also to sharpen our focus on the processes that produce vulnerability, as well as the successes, failures, and social changes that disaster response inspire.

One of the major contributions of disaster scholarship in changing policy and practice is the concept of vulnerability. As David Alexander (1997) noted in a twentieth anniversary issue of *Disasters*, the word "vulnerabil-

ity” successfully entered the conversation in policy and aid circles regarding disasters in the last two decades of the Twentieth Century. However, as Frerks and Bender (2004) point out in the conclusion to *Mapping Vulnerability*, vulnerability reduction had not been included in development institutions’ stated goals and agendas. That said, in recent times some development institutions have modified this stance, at least on paper.

Greg Bankoff (2004) offers a critical discussion about the historical and cultural geography of disaster, in which most of the world was depicted by early European explorers as being dangerous places requiring intervention. Drawing on David Arnold’s (1996) account of the emergence of tropical medicine in warmer climates, Bankoff utilizes Arnold’s notion of how Western medicine defined equatorial parts of the world as ridden with disease and contagion, thereby perceiving tropical regions as vulnerable and underdeveloped and thus justifying the colonial intervention of Western medicine. Thereafter, the discourse moved from a geographical discourse to a cultural one about inferiority and otherness.

In the same volume, Oliver-Smith (2004) challenges scholars and practitioners to address the issue of uneven experiences of risk and vulnerability, and particularly the geographical distance between producers of risk—those who reap benefits from exploitation of natural resources—and those who are subjected to increased hazards. In an increasingly global economy, this distance increases, as the headquarters of multinational corporations that emit toxic waste are often thousands of miles away from populations—the workers and residents near production sites or factories—who are exposed to waste, and often across national borders from them.

As Oliver-Smith (2004) rightly acknowledges, one of the more balanced approaches to globalization has been offered by Ankie Hoogvelt (1997). Hoogvelt notes that, the contemporary globalized world is distinctly different from the world in the beginning of the twentieth century in that multinationals have geographically dispersed production systems that exert new forces on domestic supplies of capital, labor, and companies. This, in turn, means that national boundaries can no longer protect workers, companies, or the environment, thus making it increasingly difficult to cope with vulnerabilities imposed by both natural and technological hazards (see also Oliver-Smith 2004). In 2005, at the UN’s World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Japan, the resulting Hyogo Framework for Action noted that official development programs can lead to greater vulnerability (Wisner and Walker 2005); thus, reducing vulnerability became an explicit goal.

The current geopolitical and economic world order, often characterized by the terms “globalization” or “neoliberalism,” or some connection

of the two such as “neoliberal globalization,” has produced both wealth and inequality at an unprecedented scale. Following the demise of the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc, capitalism has emerged as the dominant economic paradigm, expressed as triumphalism, as found in Fukuyama’s phrase “End of History” (1992) or in Margaret Thatcher’s declaration, “There is no alternative.” Social science research has debated the contours of the transformation of state authority, responsibility, and ability engendered by globalization. Activists, particularly those from the global South such as Walden Bello, Arundhati Roy, and Vandana Shiva, denounce what they see as neoliberal globalization’s erosion or undermining of state authority (e.g., Bello 1996; Danaher 1996; Danaher and Burbach 2000; Mander and Goldsmith 1996; Sassen 1998; Starr 2000).

Ethnographic research has qualified some of these claims, pointing out that global governance regimes, even policies referred to as neoliberal, can entail the strengthening of some, which could be defined as “masculinized,” facets of the state such as border patrols, customs regimes, and militaries (e.g., Chalfin 2006). That said, states’ roles as protector (of workers’ rights, environmental standards, or building codes) or provider (of services deemed basic including drinking water and sanitation, and others deemed social including education and health care) steadily eroded as a result of debt deals, austerity, and structural adjustment (Harrison 1997; McMichael 1996; Sassen 1998; Stiglitz 2002; Tsing 2003). Called the New Policy Agenda, the Washington Consensus, or simply neoliberalism, these policies and financial flows also favored the nongovernmental organization (NGO) sector, deemed the magic bullet (Edwards and Hulme 1996).

Given this global political and economic restructuring, it makes increasingly less sense to think about the disaster continuum—from vulnerability production to disaster responses—only in relation to nation-states and borders. Put more simply, disasters, and the processes that give rise to and shape them, are increasingly global, as the chapters in this book document. Neoliberal globalization increases the distance and speed with which both benefits and harms can travel, thus exacerbating the uneven development of risk and vulnerability.

Union Carbide, now Dow Chemical, acted within the logic of maximizing profits for shareholders, accumulating wealth and profit in its U.S. headquarters, while externalizing risk, minimizing payments to workers, and undercutting safety. On December 2, 1984, an explosion in a plant in Bhopal, India, released toxic gas, killing at least six thousand and injuring even more. Thirty years later the local community is still experiencing elevated health risk. Bhopal is a clear case of the globalization of the production of risk and vulnerability, and increasing distance between differential direction of environmental benefits like clean air and water, spaces for

recreation, and so on, along with environmental risks—pollution, hazardous waste, radiation, susceptibility to infectious diseases, and so on. As Button and Eldridge's chapter documents, these risks constitute potential environmental hazards, disasters waiting to happen.

While large industrial disasters like Bhopal, Chernobyl, or Fukushima, are easier to conceptualize within this frame, the globalization of risk and vulnerability shapes natural events like earthquakes as well. For example, Oliver-Smith (1999) discusses how Spanish colonial policy set into motion practices, relationships, exploitation of resources, and processes that exacerbated the destructiveness of a 1970 earthquake in Peru, calling it a 500-year earthquake. The January 12, 2010, earthquake that devastated Haiti offers another clear example of socially produced vulnerability as a result of neoliberal policy and practice. Although most donors claim that 230,000 people perished, the Haitian government estimates that 316,000 died as a result of the quake. A debate was triggered when an unpublished report commissioned by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (Schwartz, Pierre, and Calpas 2011) declared the death toll was only 64,000 people, thus providing us with a perfect example of how disasters often engender conflicting narrative accounts (Button 2002).

There is, however, no question the event in Haiti on January 12 was far deadlier than the Chilean earthquake that occurred six and a half weeks later, which was five hundred times more powerful and killed 525 people, according to official sources (see Parson chapter, this volume). One of the reasons for the dramatic difference in death is the proximity of the quakes to urban centers (Oliver-Smith 2010). For an even clearer example of the importance of this difference, in September 2010 an earthquake of similar magnitude to the one in Haiti, as well as similarly proximate to an urban center, occurred near Canterbury, New Zealand; in this instance, only one person died (Crowley and Elliott 2012).

The heightened vulnerability to disaster in Haiti was foretold in 2004 when tropical storm Jeanne killed 3,006 people. In 2008 Haiti was slammed with four hurricanes: Fay, Gustav, Hanna, and Ike. While the Haitian government's preparedness did result in relatively fewer deaths in 2008 than in 2004, the comparison to Cuba's response is nonetheless stark. Cuba was also hit by some of the same hurricanes, but in terms of vulnerability, only seven Cuban as opposed to eight hundred Haitian people died. Hurricanes have long played a key role in the history of Cuba and were, even prior to the Castro government, a key factor for centuries in the development of modern Cuba and the nation's sophisticated methods of preventing and responding to hurricanes (Perez 2001).

In 2004, Oxfam published a report (Thompson and Gavia 2004) distilling Cuba's formula that explains the difference. Between 1996 and 2002,

six major hurricanes struck the island. In that period, only sixteen people died in Cuba, compared to 649 for its island neighbors. The Oxfam report outlined twelve major themes, among which are communication, government priorities, social cohesion, and community-based institutional reinforcement in the civil defense and community-based disaster management approach as the keys to Cuba's success at reducing vulnerability.

Haiti's vulnerability is largely due to neoliberal policies that destroyed rural livelihoods and swelled cities like Gonaïves, the site of the deaths in 2004 and most of the deaths in 2008, and in the capital city of Port-au-Prince. Policies championed by USAID and the World Bank triggered the massive urbanization that contributed to the high number of fatalities (Deshommes 2006; DeWind and Kinley 1988). Alex Dupuy (2010) demonstrated that Port-au-Prince's population quadrupled in the two decades since neoliberalism: from 732,000 in 1986 to 3 million in 2007. Coupled with the erosion of public services and public oversight, as a result of neoliberal policies households were forced to stretch what little resources they had and to build housing as cheaply as possible. As a result, as Yolette Etienne (2012) cited, 86 percent of the homes destroyed had been built since 1990. While Haitian citizens certainly hold their own government to account, they also understand clearly the transnational forces, and particularly neoliberal globalization—what they call the “American Plan” or simply the “death plan.” Haiti's earthquake was, as a result of international financial policies, a disaster of global proportions.

A starting point for this volume is the increasing focus within disaster scholarship on the importance of examining the global and processual aspects of disaster that for too long were ignored. Building on the increasing ethnographic emphasis on the importance of globalization in understanding the origins of disaster, this book suggests that understanding disasters in a translocal light is indispensable for understanding the translocal construction of vulnerability and disaster.

Ethnographic insights about globalization require that processes labeled global, such as the global economy, are at the same time viewed as local (Appadurai 2001; Kearney 1995; Marcus 1995): for example, sweatshops and the workers who operate the machines are in a particular location, as is a CEO. Scholars have adopted the term “glocal” to refer to this chain of localities linked together through specific nodes of capital. Disasters are expressed in much the same way. The Pressure and Release Model (Wisner et al. 2004), perhaps the most recognized equation of disasters = hazards x vulnerability can be understood in this way as well while vulnerability, or pressure, might be built up over years and across borders, disasters require local agents as triggering events. The book also outlines three levels of vulnerability, what the authors call “root causes,”

“dynamic pressures,” and “hazardous conditions.” This model explains how local and global processes are often imbricated in one another.

A classic example of such global/translocal disasters are outbreaks of Ebola in West Africa. Especially devastating was the outbreak in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea in 2014 that has been confirmed in almost 15,000 cases and resulted in over 11,000 deaths as of May 2015, only fifteen months after the first case was officially registered. Emerging infections like Ebola exemplify not only diseases’ indifference to borders (Markel 2005), but the forces of political economies’ indifference as well. Like more traditionally defined disasters, narratives of emerging infection outbreak narratives (Wald 2008) closely resemble disaster narratives in their attempt to explore the legitimization and reproduction of power.

Contemporary accounts by Western (more appropriately Northern since these trends are also visible in Japan) governments, the media, and the public represent continuities in Arnold’s (1996) thesis cited above: commonly-circulated tropes include “contagion,” Africa as a “disease-ridden region,” the pathologization of poverty seeing affected populations as “weak” and “passive”—all of which are terms that Hewitt (1997) defines as central concepts of vulnerability (Bankoff 2004). Thus, one could say that history not only prefigures disaster, but also prefigures our response to disaster.

The Ebola outbreak triggered a massive public health response, particularly in countries in the global North. Responses were mapped onto existing geopolitical, national, and racial inequalities, as increasingly severe quarantines reinscribed the isolation and marginalization of West African individuals (and aid workers, who were portrayed as innocent victims). While the rapid spread of the virus highlights the connectivity of people across borders, particularly via travel, the response highlights the processes of localization.

Disasters profiled and analyzed in this volume are also experienced as particular, localized expressions of global vulnerabilities, such as Hurricane Sandy (also referred to as Superstorm Sandy) that Melissa Checker discusses in her chapter in this volume. Sandy is a perfect example of a single event having particular ramifications in local contexts: in Haiti the storm destroyed a season’s harvest in the south of the country, killing hundreds. In the New York metropolitan region, it flooded the subway system, knocked out power, and displaced thousands of people, further isolating individuals and communities that were already marginalized. Moreover, the fact that a hurricane could track so far north, and so late in the hurricane season, has been cited as a harbinger of global climate change, similar to the typhoon almost exactly a year later in the Philippines, thereby suggesting that disasters of global proportion seem to be increasing.

As Bankoff and Borrinaga remind us, and Checker, Parson, and Marino and Lazrus aptly demonstrate, storms also have local meanings as well that are often expressed in the narrative accounts of local residents. Because of these multiple and varied meanings, always rooted in local cosmologies, histories, political structures, gender ideologies, economies, and lived experiences, we use the term “translocal” instead of “global” or “glocal.” This book offers case material from ten recent disasters—including six events since 2010 and two unfolding disasters resulting from global climate change—that to varying degrees are all translocal. Each of the case studies is unique in the contours of causality, risk, and vulnerability, and certainly in the ways in which they were perceived, experienced, and responded to on the ground. Beyond these discrete events, this book offers a range of theoretical tools that, as the title suggests, aid us in contextualizing disasters.

Outline of Chapters

We begin this volume with a contribution by Gregory V. Button and Erin R. Eldridge on the chemical spill in West Virginia’s Elk River (2014). Their chapter is a “thick description” (in the broadest and best sense of the notion in a post-post-modernist world) of a disaster that examines how disasters are sometimes imbricated in one another in uncanny ways (Button 2010, 194) and are often part of a larger sedimented cluster of disasters (Button 2016). Moreover, their approach embraces the notion that disasters are best viewed as processes (Wisner et al. 2004). Their in-depth approach harkens back to Hewitt’s idea (1983) of the necessity to recognize the “ongoing societal and environment relations that prefigure disaster” (24). Thus they take a historical/processual approach to the socioeconomic and environmental conditions in West Virginia, which serve to uncover not only the uneven development of capital in the region (Smith 1984), but also the translocal influences of conditions that range from nearby states to locations halfway around the world, as far away as India and Europe, thereby underscoring the influence of the global forces of late state capitalism. In this manner, the authors tell a small story that uncovers and interprets larger historical and economic structures that enlarges our understanding of the evolution of disasters through space and time.

Continuing this idea of the disaster narrative, the chapter by Greg Bankoff and George Emmanuel Borrinaga discusses the Category 5 storm that hit the Visayan Islands of the Philippines on November 7, 2013. This event has two names: internationally it is referred to as Typhoon Haiyan, and on the archipelago it is known as Yolanda. The article discusses the two

ways in which the disaster is understood; according to the chapter these two different nomenclatures have come to represent two quite different discursive narratives about the typhoon and its aftermath. Bankoff and Borrinaga argue that Typhoon Haiyan made international headline news and engendered analysis of climate change, freak storms (numerical calculation of risk), and poverty. Typhoon Yolanda, on the other hand, has a storyline to do with history, accusations of incompetence (national versus local), and stubborn people at fault. These very different discourses about blame and responsibility lie at the heart of the fundamental difference in the way disasters are viewed from the standpoint of the developed and developing worlds. Importantly, how the storm is understood shapes the response to it.

Assembling historical evidence and interviewing two local journalists, the provocative chapter stretches the concept of disaster narrative to its limit; perhaps, indeed, the single weather event might be better understood as two disasters. Invoking Quarantelli's three phases of understanding disasters, Bankoff and Borrinaga conclude with a series of critical questions that help to sharpen the focus on disaster scholarship. Whereas in the global North (or the developed world) disaster policy and practice has focused on resilience, the authors contend that in the global South (or the developing world) the conversation has remained focused on large-scale vulnerability, and what renders them more vulnerable. This blame game is typically focused on outsiders, specifically advanced industrial nations and transnational institutions, which according to the authors can also serve developing nations as ideological cover to continue high-carbon economic development strategies.

As the chapter by Mark Schuller demonstrates, Haiti's earthquake became a global event that hailed global citizens to act. The multinational response broke new ground; it truly became the model for a global disaster. To paraphrase Ralph Waldo Emerson in his writings about the battles of Lexington and Concord that triggered the Age of Revolution, on January 12, 2010, the tremors were felt round the world. The times are very different, but Benedict Anderson's (1987) insights in the role media play in forging "imagined communities" are useful to understand the contemporary era. The response to Haiti's earthquake was one of the most generous in recent memory. This is in no small part because of the event's high media profile. As several analysts have noted, disaster aid feeds off media coverage.

However, the high media profile—and the generosity it inspired—came at a price. The stories of devastation, appearing to many foreign observers as hell on earth, with phrases like "state failure" often repeated, foreign media coverage also naturalized foreign control of the response. Schull-

er's chapter explores this phenomenon, looking at how what might be called "disaster narratives" shape responses. The transnational nation building, the global imagined community, thus triggered a chain of events that empowered foreign agencies and actors. Foreign agencies assumed de facto control over Haiti's governance apparatus. Framed by the continued media coverage, this foreign control was naturalized through a series of discourses about Haiti being a "failed state," requiring a "republic of NGOs" to step in and take over. Schuller's chapter contrasts foreign media coverage with Haitian understandings, following this discussion with an exploration of the connection between foreign media coverage with aid delivery, particularly four tropes: a weak state, dehumanization, the photo op, and the blame game. Schuller's chapter ends with a series of reflections on the disaster narrative.

Nia Parson's chapter discusses powerful, competing discourses, linked to material, political, and economic actions and allocation of resources that have emerged in Chile following the 2010 earthquake. The chapter centers on the contests over the official story or disaster narrative. The Chilean state has claimed that recovery has been moving along well, that Chile is a technologically sophisticated, democratic, and modern state. Parallel to this narrative and in response to the inaction of the government to address chronic disaster, social movements critique disaster capitalism in particular and neoliberal inequalities in general. In addition, the state seized on the creation of what Noam Chomsky called a pseudo-event, in the rescue of the thirty-three miners trapped months after, and also on the obvious differences from the response in Haiti, in effect directing attention away from systemic inequalities, also expressed in official reconstruction. Playing to the global stage, the Chilean state portrayed itself as modern and advanced, and technology as the solution.

Parson's chapter draws from insights from other scholars that different groups create conflicting narratives of disasters and their aftermaths, as they negotiate old and new stakes of what matters, materially and morally, in post-disaster social and environmental contexts. States, private enterprises, and local, national, and global actors have different stakes in the construction, maintenance, appropriation and contestation of official narratives in the aftermath of a disaster. Drawing lessons from the social movements organized in opposition to the newly elected neoliberal government, Parson's analysis chapter builds upon the unresolved questions of citizenship and what it means to be human, specifically Agamben's notion of the *homo sacer*—literally the "sacred man" or often translated as "bare life," and the dilemmas of a supposedly universal humanity identified by anthropologists such as Michel Agier (2010) and Didier Fassin

(2010). This chapter offers a compelling ethnographic case to move the conversation forward.

Bridget Love's analysis of the problem of reconstruction in coastal municipalities in northeast Japan in the wake of 3/11 provides a finely textured analysis of the influence of the global economy on reconstruction efforts. Japan's postwar recovery policies that promoted accelerated economic growth gradually faced increasing criticism for what many termed "Tokyo-centric development," which made remote regions economically more vulnerable. Criticism of these economic policies, heightened by decades of recession, and major shifts in the global economy eventually promoted neoliberal approaches and a decentralized economy that would purportedly make rural regions more autonomous while simultaneously creating a more robust national economy by promoting resilience and innovation in outlying regions.

Unfortunately, as Love trenchantly demonstrates, these optimistic claims failed to produce more-robust regional economies and fell far short of developing regional self-sufficiency and innovation. In fact, the neoliberal policies did just the opposite and made rural communities more vulnerable in struggling to meet the needs of increasingly aging populations in an era of increasingly less government support. In the aftermath of the triple disasters of 3/11, diminishing state support and massive devastation increased the rural communities' vulnerability rather than making them more resilient. Love's account calls into question not only Japan's logistics of reconstruction, but also the negative effects of late state capitalism's promotion of neoliberalism. On a subtler level, Love's account also forces us to examine more critically global and nonlocal factors that adversely affect issues of vulnerability and resilience.

The chapter by Roberto E. Barrios reviews a number of anthropological insights concerning the application and production of expert knowledge in disaster reconstruction, based on two ethnographic studies conducted in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch and in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. The evidence included in these case studies problematizes two representations of expert knowledge. The first is how technoscientific knowledge-making is often represented by its practitioners as an optimal and culturally unbiased way of knowing and representing the social and material worlds, like the Chilean state discussed in Parson's chapter. Second, technoscientific knowledge is often represented as a universally relevant basis for making prescriptions as to how people should live (or recover from disasters) across human societies.

Barrios leverages two compelling ethnographic case examples, each highlighting the shortcomings of this technoscientific knowledge. Both

case examples offer powerful evidence of the importance of local knowledge and priority setting. In New Orleans, following Hurricane Katrina, planners made people invisible in their redevelopment plans that Barrios argue were directed at the unobstructed flow of capital, not rebuilding residents' social ties and the local economies that emerged to meet their needs. Accessing local knowledge is also the key factor in the difference in relocation settlements in Honduras following Mitch: the textbook top-down NGO settlement quickly degenerated into disrepair and even violence, whereas residents of a settlement that from its outset played an oppositional role were able to leverage what scholars call social capital. While the importance of local knowledge is almost too obvious a point to mention, Barrios's chapter offers both compelling case evidence and a rich discussion of the epistemological frames themselves, elements of what Button (2010) called disaster culture. To disaster scholarship, this chapter offers disaster knowledge.

Like Barrios, in the next chapter Elizabeth Marino and Heather Lazrus call into question the privileging of technoscientific knowledge over that of local knowledge in their respective ethnographic accounts of two particularly vulnerable communities already experiencing what used to be termed slow-moving disasters, one aspect of what Rob Nixon (2011) termed slow violence. Marino and Lazrus base their analysis on their long-term research in Tuvalu (an island nation-state in the Pacific) and Shishmaref, Alaska. Shishmaref is situated on an ice shelf; because of melting glaciers and ice caps, planning authorities deem it necessary to relocate the entire town. Tuvalu, an island that never is more than a few meters above sea level, also faces the slow but devastating onset of climate change and the prospect of their community relocating thousands of miles away from home. The authors argue that in these very different settings culturally held notions of time, flexibility, and uncertainty do not necessarily conform to bureaucratically held notions of preparedness and response. For instance, flexibility in the face of uncertainty about how and when global climate change will manifest locally is critically linked to personal and community interactions with time that do not necessarily resemble the one-size-fits-all notions of the bureaucratic response to disaster. The conclusion of the chapter underscores Button's (2010) observation of the importance of contextualizing uncertainty in the domain of culture in order to arrive at a comprehensive idea of the role uncertainty plays in a given society.

In the final chapter, Melissa Checker undertakes an in-depth investigation of the political ecology of Superstorm Sandy and the long history of Staten Island's ecological degradation. Like Button and Eldridge's chapter, she trenchantly demonstrates in her own way how "disasters are deeply

entangled in extensive political and economic webs that stretch across time and space.” Her highly nuanced, complex account uncovers several deep-seated webs of significance that converge to make the island and its inhabitants vulnerable to not only the wrath of Superstorm Sandy, but also centuries of ecological degradation and gradual dense urban development situated in and around numerous toxic waste sites. The historical roots of these sites date from colonial times to the Manhattan Project, to the creation of a massive toxic waste site (that was for a long time the largest site of its kind in the world), to the dumping of toxic waste from the ravages of 9/11 and numerous other environmental follies. She somehow also manages to recount how the development of the Panama Canal, rising sea levels, and late state global capitalism compounded the harm inflicted on Manhattan’s fifth borough, often referred to by its inhabitants as the city’s forgotten borough. As if that is not enough, she convincingly argues that Staten Islanders’ complex, in-depth understanding of Superstorm Sandy and the “ways in which it connects to other disasters, suggest potential new trends in post-storm activism.”

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