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Introduction to the Special Issue

Disasters Can Lift Veils:

Five Issues for Sociological Disaster Studies

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Introduction

This Special Issue, for the most part, is based on the proceedings of the Philippine Sociological Society's National Conference held last year. Hosted by the Mindanao State University-General Santos City, over fifty paper presentations and four plenary sessions took on the challenge of critically unpacking the conference theme: *Crises, Resiliency, and Community: Sociology in the Age of Disasters*. The theme could not be more topical. The conference was held a month before the Philippines commemorated the first anniversary of Typhoon Haiyan, locally known as Yolanda. And, lest we forget, the conference also took place exactly twelve months after the Bohol earthquake—the most fatal earthquake in the Philippines in twenty three years.

Much, of course, has been said about Haiyan. It is the strongest storm that made landfall in recent history. It displaced nearly a million families, claimed the lives of more than 6,000 individuals, and damaged over a million homes. Its economic costs amount to over 100 billion pesos (National Economic Development Authority 2013). Authorities suggest that it will take years, if not decades, for the government, aid agencies and local communities to build back better.

As with most complex phenomena, however, it seems that the more we know about Haiyan, the more we are left wanting of ideas that can help make sense of the extent of devastation. To investigate Haiyan as a monster meteorological event is one thing, but to understand it as a destabilizing social phenomenon requires a different perspective. Haiyan as an event disrupted dominant paradigms of thought and action and therefore demands critical sociological inquiry into how mega-disasters prompt a reconstruction of our social worlds. Such call for sociological understanding is not limited to the Philippines, but part of a global research agenda that considers the study of disasters as integral to getting to the bottom of how social life is organized today (Stallings 2006; Tierney 2007).

This places sociologists in a challenging position theoretically, methodologically, and politically. The relevance of sociology's theoretical traditions warrants reconsideration. After all, sociology is the product of the Enlightenment where human conquest over nonhuman nature was the dominant narrative. These days, the triumph of techno-scientific rationality is increasingly put into question not only for its failure to mitigate the severity of natural catastrophes but also for its role in exacerbating vulnerabilities that precisely lead to extreme weather events. Where then does this leave sociology as an anthropocentric discipline that, aside from its sub-field of sociology of the environment, continues to place humans at the

center of inquiry, as if social action can be abstracted out of its dependence on ecological systems (see Clammer 2009; Murphy 1995)?

Methodological questions also need to be addressed. For example, while it is convenient to frame our research topics in terms of periods —case in point being the conference theme “Sociology in the Age of Disasters”—it is also worth problematizing whether we are, indeed, ushering an era of a “world risk society” (Beck 2000) where fragility has become the main characteristic of modern societies, or, whether some societies have always been vulnerable to natural catastrophes such that some communities have developed “cultures of disaster” (Bankoff 2003)? How useful then are comparative categories of pre- and post-disaster? Is there analytical value in treating a disaster event as a “critical historical juncture,” to borrow historical institutionalism’s term?

Politically, the tradition of critical sociology prompts researchers to unmask seemingly benign relationships of power when studying vulnerable social contexts. Who benefits from moments of solidarity induced by crisis situations? What is the purpose of restoring normalcy after a disaster if restoring normalcy means the re-institutionalization of marginality? Which kinds of intervention are ethical, and which are not? And, most importantly, critical sociology dares us put our cards on the table: for whom are we doing disaster research?

In this Introduction to the Special Issue, we aim to take stock of these theoretical, methodological, and political debates by summarizing five key issues in the sociology of disasters. We have selected these issues based on recurring themes we have observed as we surveyed the literature, conducted our own field research, and exchanged ideas with fellow participants in the PSS conference.

In the next section we ask five key questions: (1) Do disasters mark change or continuity?; (2) Are disasters exceptional events defined by solidarity or anomie?; (3) Do sociological disaster studies need to decenter human societies from the focus of inquiry?; (4) What perspective can global sociology offer in disaster studies?; and (5) Have sociologists become part of the so-called “disaster industrial complex” of parachute journalists, humanitarian workers, disaster risk reduction experts, and reconstruction project consultants? Our modest attempt to take on these questions and bring together these debates is by no means exhaustive and by any stretch of the imagination definitive. Our goal is to set the scene for the articles published in this issue by locating their sociological engagements in the growing field of sociological disaster research.

Issue 1: Do Disasters Mark Change or Continuity

Within seconds after a volcanic eruption, strong earthquake or giant tsunami, experts and citizens alike are compelled to check their taken for granted assumptions about appropriate human action. After all, if one defines disasters as events in which societies “incur physical damages and losses and/or disruption of their routine functioning” (Kreps 1989:32), then inherent to the definition is the breach of collective expectations in institutions and practices that make everyday life work. From building makeshift homes from driftwood and scrap metal to burying dead bodies in hastily constructed mass graves, disasters are powerful moments that confront societies to take stock of what matters and how to make things work again. Disasters, especially ones that break down basic structures of governance and disrupt access to basic material resources, demand modifications in human behavior, thereby challenging communities to reconstruct the rudiments of social life on the fly.

The exceptional situation that emerges in the aftermath of disasters leads sociologists to consider it a fertile case for sociological investigation. It posits a “quasi-experimental context for understanding human behavior” (Barnshaw and Trainor 2010:104). Analytically, disasters provide the opportunity to examine the “exception” in order to better understand “the rule,” as exceptional circumstances tend to expose the social structures and processes that are often hidden in the ordinariness of everyday life (Stallings 2002:283). In other words, as Steven Lukes puts it, “disasters can lift veils” (Lukes 2005).

To categorize disasters as exceptional, disruptive, or abnormal scenarios speaks well to both sociological traditions of functionalism and critical theory. For functionalists, disasters are aberrant events which surpass a social system’s “capability to respond for a period of time” which, in turn, “results in systematic disruption followed by a return to normalcy” (Barnshaw and Trainor 2010:104). Researchers influenced by this tradition, therefore, focus on the ways in which communities respond, reorganize, and resume their services (Barnshaw and Trainor 2010:104), or in Parsonian terms, to uphold the functional prerequisites of the social system to restore order and stability (Parsons 1951). Satwinder Rehal’s article in this issue (pp. 81-104) provides an empirical illustration of how the functionalist “sports for development” programs are deployed by charitable foundations to heal and re-socialize children traumatized from Haiyan to “positive” social values of camaraderie, teamwork, and confidence. Rehal takes a critical assessment of this

functionalist bias in the sociology of sports literature and proposes meaningful ways for sports to claim a productive social role in post-disaster contexts.

Critical sociologists, on the other hand, focus their analysis on the extent to which interruptions in the normal course of social life can bring to bear alternative conceptions of the world. Instead of aiming to restore stability and normalcy, critical theorists think about how disruptions like crises and disasters shatter dominant worldviews, uncover oppressive social relationships, and propose directions for future action (Turkel 2002:74). Craig Calhoun, former president of the Social Science Research Council, argues for a critical unpacking of the “half-hidden references to astrology and turning points” in the terms “disaster” and “crisis.” He argues for the need to attend to the historical and material precedents to an emergency as well as the justifications behind humanitarian or military response (Calhoun 2013:30).

Indeed, states of emergency often become momentous events that facilitate interests of particular agents—states, lobbyists, charity organizations—thanks in part to the public attention and sympathy mobilized by powerful images and discourses that construct emergencies. Critical sociologists are also mindful of disasters serving as opportunities to advance a broader neoliberal agenda, as popularly described in Naomi Klein’s (2007) book *The Shock Doctrine*. Disaster capitalism—the “orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events combined with the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities” (Klein 2007:6)—has become an increasingly popular topic in social science research (see Gotham 2012; Adams, Van Hattum, and English 2009). Atasay and Delavan (2012), for example, find the process of neoliberal reconstruction to be best spelled as “wreak-construction.” To spell reconstruction with “re” is to provide a “discursive distraction” while their preferred prefix “wreak” foregrounds the failures of marketdriven solutions, which lead to land grabbing and displacement (Atasay and Delavan 2012:541). April Porteria’s critical essay (pp. 179-206) takes a closer look at these issues, and argues that disaster capitalism, just like the nature of capitalism itself, should be understood in terms of both its particularities and universalities. Ultimately, the challenge of critical disaster studies is to uncover structures and agencies of power, to lay bare the personalities who have the capacity to act in spite of structural constraints and identify the structural constraints that systematically disempower individuals from taking control over their fates. But, as sociologist of power Steven Lukes suggests, determining who has power and who has not “is not a straightforward matter of fact but of judgment” and therefore “so highly contentious.”

To ask who, during the onslaught of Haiyan and its aftermath had the power is a subject of intense debate, but an important one, as it is only by getting to the heart of this question can we allocate responsibility and assign blame. In spite of the differences in thematic focus between functionalism and critical theory, both approaches, at least as far as the empirical applications of these sociological traditions go, consider disasters and their immediate aftermath as a period that warrants close sociological investigation. Whether it is to examine the exception to understand the rule or to call out power structures that take advantage of social vulnerabilities, sociology has a range of conceptual tools to uncover the dynamics of disasters as a social phenomenon. However, as Letukas and Barnshaw point out, such investigations limit the scope of disaster research to an “eventconcentrated approach” (Letukas and Barnshaw 2008:1063). Disasters have been studied as events—the kind that is recognizable by its sudden and disruptive character, which has a beginning (the onset), middle (the acute or emergency phase), and end (when affected communities begin to recover). To date, the body of work in sociological disaster studies has been built through “quick response disaster research,” which, frequently, has “come at the expense of research focused on longer-term individual, organizational and community social change” (Letukas and Barnshaw 2008:1063). Often times, the rupture or continuity between pre- and post-disaster contexts have become presupposed than empirically proven (Henry 2011:220), leaving a big gap in sociological research.

This, we reckon, is not an issue of sociological theories being incapable of examining social phenomena through a longer temporal period. The challenge is a methodological one, and in this sense sociology has a lot to learn from historical and anthropological research. The final section of this issue features an interview with Greg Bankoff (pp. 207–216), where he explains the importance of focusing the inquiry to disasters that happen frequently, instead of those that wreak the most havoc. While not discounting the virtues of focusing on short-term case studies, Bankoff suggests that it is the cumulative experience of communities in coping with disasters that shape social life. Bankoff, of course, is best known for his work on “cultures of disaster,” where he argues that disasters have become a frequent life experience in the Philippines such that it has made substantive impact on the society’s culture and civil society (Bankoff 2003). Anthropologists such as Veena Das (2006) meanwhile trace the “event” of disaster within mundane rhythms of everyday life using ethnographic methodology. For Bankoff and Das, attentiveness to habit and routine reveals how eventful ruptures are folded into everyday practice and constitutive of social systems.

Aside from drawing inspiration from historical and anthropological research, sociological disaster studies also share important overlaps with the subfield of sociology of organization. Here the challenge is to examine disasters not as a radical break from pre-existing social structures but an outcome of what Diane Vaughan calls “the dark side of organizations” (Vaughan 1999). Post-disaster contexts often involve questions of accountability, particularly when massive failures are spotted on the part of authorities. Vaughan observes that these inquiries usually end up with culturally reassuring responses such as the publication of “fantasy documents” and other official plans to respond to disasters while still lacking appropriate resources for effective response (Vaughan 1999:293). This is because organizational failure has deeper roots. Often unnoticed in examining the mismanagement of disasters are organizational hierarchies, pressures, and routine practices that aspire to meet their targets while failing the communities they deem to serve. To borrow the Arendtian phrase, disasters are not caused by callous individuals doing evil deeds, but the banality of organizational life. What warrant attention, therefore, are organizational logics and audit cultures that constrain organizations to develop creative, participatory and context-sensitive responses to disasters. It is through this line of inquiry that we can find clarity on popular sentiments expressed during typhoon Haiyan: Why do we get the sense that no one is in-charge? Why is government response so slow and humanitarian response so fixated with “criteria”? Why was the mayor of Tacloban forced to sign an ordinance so national government can take charge? These questions, while enticing to be answered in an editorial fashion, are ripe for sociological investigation on the banal logics of governing in a decentralized state.

Issue 2: Are Disasters Exceptional Events Defined by Solidarity or Anomie?

“It’s absolute bedlam,” was the Philippine Red Cross Chief’s response when interviewed by foreign media a few days after Haiyan (BBC 2013). Indeed, images of social disorder abound in mainstream media.

From hordes of men mobbing trucks carrying relief goods to disturbing reports of human trafficking, images of post-disaster scenarios easily fit the category of Durkheim’s anomie. These images in popular media, however, need qualification. As one news segment in the Hurricane Katrina coverage lucidly demonstrates, anti-social behavior like looting is a derivative of the collapse of a system that upholds property rights. So when asked by a reporter, “Why are you looting?” The looter confidently answered, “Can you see anyone to

pay?” (Lukes 2005) Indeed, deviant behavior needs to be understood from the perspective of those who had to live through the breakdown of familiar and taken for granted structures of social life, instead of judging behavior based on normative expectations constructed during periods of normalcy.

For decades, sociologists investigating disasters have taken a qualified view of the extent to which social conflict emerges during the most vulnerable times. As early as 1942, Pitrim Sorokin notes in the book *Man and Society in Calamity* that natural catastrophes produce diverse effects: “Some become brutalized, others intensely socialized. Some disintegrate —morally, mentally, and biologically; others are steeled into an unbreakable unity. In adversity some lose their sense of honor; others are ethically and spiritually reinforced” (Sorokin 1942:159). Indeed, the ways in communities respond to disasters vary. For some, disasters result to a “corrosive community” characterized by a lack of consensus and collective uncertainty (Miller 2006:71). Longer-term social trend include the “breakdown of social relationships, the fragmentation of community groups, family conflict, loss of trust, litigation, and the use of selfisolation as a primary coping strategy” (Brunsma, Picou, and Overfelt 2010:13). In the Haiyan context, the work of Jonathan Ong, Jaime Flores and Pamela Combinido uncovered how neighbor envy and status anxiety in *barangays* were the inadvertent outcomes of targeted and selective relief distribution practices. Intensified by traditional Filipino village relations where neighbors are regarded as extended family, the interpersonal jealousies and gossip cultures around aid distribution dealt hidden injuries to people’s sense of dignity and led excluded individuals to cut ties from the community (Ong, Flores, and Combinido 2015:46). Disasters perpetuate insidious forms of social control, as affected populations are expected to conform to “proper rules of behavior” to be eligible for aid (Miller 2012:128). In our own research, we found that disaster-affected communities were constrained in giving feedback and especially attending protest rallies because of explicit threats from authorities that their handouts could be withheld (Madianou, Longboan, and Ong 2015). The Filipino poor are of course expected to authenticate their deservedness through bodily appearance and genres of speech given that they compete for recognition with many other poor and deserving sufferers (Ong 2015).

The converse of the Durkheimian dystopia, however, claims an equally, if not slightly more prominent role in the literature of disasters. Numerous scholars have theorized and lent empirical grounding to the strong bonds of social solidarity produced by crimes, disasters and mass tragedies (Hawdon and Ryan 2011; Barnshaw, Letukas, and Olofson 2008; Carrol,

Cohn, Seesholtz, and Higgins 2005; Lukes 2005; Bankoff 2003; Turkel 2002; Drabek 1986). As Durkheim narrates, “everybody is attacked; consequently, everybody opposes the attack. Not only is the reaction general, but it is collective” (Durkheim [1915]1966:102). While this statement was made in his discussion on community reaction to heinous crimes, Durkheim’s observation communicates the unifying logic of crisis situations where communities generate collective assurance of support (Doka 2003:180). The study of contemporary humanitarianism is helpful here as well in unpacking the ways in which solidarity is activated by particular emotional regimes evoked by images of sufferers and narratives of “emergencies” (Calhoun 2013; Boltanski 1999).

What then, accounts for the emergence of strong community sentiments or collective effervescence? For Randall Collins, part of this has to do with the sharp increase of ritual intensity of social interaction for affected communities. As people focus their attention on shared rituals of coping, attention is directed to symbols of unity and public demonstrations of togetherness (Collins 2004:55). These rituals “affirm the community in the face of tragedy” (Hawdon and Ryan 2011:1367). They not only provide an avenue for the public outpouring of the most intimate emotions but also create space to enhance a community’s sense of pride and resolve to overcome the devastation. Collective mourning and grieving are recognized to help memorialize the dead but are simultaneously affirmations of existing relationships and connections with the broader community (Das 2006). Religious rituals, fiestas, and community events post-disaster reinforce social solidarity by affirming relationships of care and reintroducing normalcy in everyday life in the wake of rupture. The distribution of aid from better-off populations to disaster survivors through charity and volunteering are also “therapeutic interventions” that reduce levels of anxiety among distressed communities, consequently restoring a sense of security and social well-being (Picou, Brunsma, and Overfelt 2010:16).

These acts of solidarity, however, have a shelf life. As Hawdon and Ryan point out, “rituals often become wearing and emotionally draining” (Hawdon and Ryan 2011:1369). Once the afterglow of collective effervescence wears off, the aftermath of tragedies can lead to tensions and restoration of pre-existing bases for social conflict. Moreover, there remains the challenge of whether civil society organizations that were quick to help alleviate the immediate suffering of disaster-affected communities are able and willing to transform their caring role to political roles, or simply reinforce imperialist relations (Calhoun 2013). Another fundamental challenge to solidarity in the face of suffering is what Luc Boltanski

calls the “crisis of pity” in contemporary humanitarianism, where witnesses of distant suffering could not help but be skeptical and deny moral obligations to vulnerable others (Boltanski 1999).

Issue 3: Do Sociological Disaster Studies Need to Decenter Human Societies from the Focus of Inquiry

Integral to the development of the subfield of sociology of disasters is the definitional distinction between hazards and disasters. While hazards are understood as purely physical events studied within the field of natural sciences, they have the potential to turn into disaster when these physical events have consequences to human societies. Examining the social consequences of these events falls within the purview of sociology. As Michael Guggenheim puts it:

“An earthquake happening in a region where no humans live is not a disaster, it is just a trembling of the earth. This definition, then, is not about separating the human from the non-human but instead about trying to account for the fact that some natural events relevant for natural scientists—earthquakes where nobody is harmed—are not relevant for a sociology of disasters.” (Guggenheim 2014:3)

A quick catalogue search reveals at least fifteen academic journals are dedicated to the study of disasters, all of which publish articles from various disciplines. The cursory impression that positivist and technorationalist approaches dominate this research agenda is not without basis, but the increasing demand to account for the social implications of natural hazards have provided sociologists the space in the field. There are, however, some issues when sociology arrogates “an overly central role” (Guggenheim 2014:3) to the social, especially when it comes at the expense of understanding the natural. How can sociology understand phenomena whose origins are obviously not within society? What analytical merit is there in defining a social problem by distinguishing its relationship with natural phenomenon (Stevens 2012)?

Part of the problem, as briefly mentioned in the first part of this introductory article, relates to sociology’s anthropocentric bias. As sociology takes pride in the breadth of the discipline’s theoretical traditions, these perspectives’ intellectual diversity is “not as important as the fundamental anthropocentrism underlying all of them.” Sociologists, whether Marxist, functionalist or ethnomethodologist, for the most part operate on the paradigm of human exceptionalism, often neglecting the relationship between patterns of human behavior with the laws and principles of other sciences (Catton and Dunlap 1978:42-

43). This leaves sociology with a very narrow vista in understanding the impact on humans on the environment as well as the impact of the physical environment on human communities (Vaillancourt 1995:27). As Stewart Lockie points out, any social theory that “cannot find a place for the nonhuman organisms, substances and patterns of nature in social theory” is “inadequate for understanding key dimensions of our contemporary world” (Lockie 2004:26). Sociology, it is argued, needs to “ecologize”— to challenge the boundaries the discipline has drawn between human society, non-human natures and environment (Lockie 2015; PalancaTan 2014; Stevens 2012). Sociology needs to foreground the premise that massive technological developments have never severed human societies from their ecological roots (Lockie 2015:2). As Ulrich Beck argues, “society with all its subsystems of the economy, politics, culture and the family can no longer be understood as autonomous of nature” (Beck 1992:81).

How then, does “ecosociology” approach the study of disasters? To start with, the role of the non-human world in the constitution of social relations will be placed at the center of sociological investigation. This entails deploying our sociological imagination to draw connections between humans, social structures, man-made technologies and ecosystems that constitute society (Lockie 2015:3). Returning to Bankoff’s body of work is instructive here, as a key part of his research draws from the perspective of deep forestry. Deep forestry examines how forests are shaped by climate, geological conditions as well as human actions. It examines how people shape the forest as well as how the forests have shaped the people (Bankoff 2013:523). In this approach, humans are treated “as only one element in an ecosystem” and places human behaviour within a broader framework that accounts of the complex web of relationships within the forest which include nonhuman agents (Bankoff 2013:526). In this issue’s interview, Bankoff acknowledges that he has been critiqued for being “too environmentally determinist” but he clarifies that his goal is not to disregard the virtues of studying the social, but to call for pause and factor in non-human elements too (pp. 207-216).

In both the Special Issue and the National Conference, several research projects have illustrated the ways in which an ecosociological perspective can make sense of disasters. In his plenary lecture, Mario J. Aguja revisited his research with Prof. Ricardo Zarco which investigated the role of “pre-monitory animal behavior” in earthquake prediction (Zarco, Nicolas, Aguja, Daag, and Ringor 2001). Aguja’s study brings to the fore how contemporary societies are organized in terms of species relations and which knowledge about disasters and

nature count. In this case, animals' sensory power had more predictive potential that eclipsed human knowledge (see Cudworth 2014). The article in this issue by Queenie S. Quilo and her colleagues (pp. 105-130) have investigated the case of the Subanen Community in the Zamboanga Peninsula, which illustrates the strong relationship between human, non-human and the metaphysical in developing an ontology of disasters. Such ontology is complex and constantly negotiated, underscoring the multifaceted relationships between ecological and social systems. Enrique Oracion's article (pp. 27-51) also elucidates how a river simultaneously provides resources and causes devastation in communities in Negros Oriental, thereby creating inequalities on various geographic locations.

These studies, among many others, illustrate the space ecosociology (broadly defined) has created to avoid what Jean-Guy Vaillancourt calls the "twin dangers of naïve materialism and idealistic constructivism that are still so common in sociology" (Vaillancourt 1995:27). The study of disasters challenges sociologists to reflect on the discipline's ontological anthropocentrism and consider the ecological limits of human societies. However, rather than developing environmental sociology as subfields where such ontological reflections thrive, a more productive exercise is to engage in meaningful collaborations with researchers across the sciences, and, indeed, across the lay person-expert divide, to recast dominant theoretical and methodological positions (Lockie 2015:2). It is through what Lockie refers to as "outright disciplinary promiscuity" that new ways of doing sociology can flourish (Lockie 2015:2).

Issue 4: What Perspective Can Global Sociology Offer in Disaster Studies?

In one of his recent works on the Philippines, Bankoff spoke of two typhoons that hit the country on November 8, 2013: Haiyan and Yolanda. The nomenclatures used to refer to this meteorological event have served to represent distinct disaster narratives. Haiyan, he argues, is headline news in global media, representing the storm based on issues of climate change and extreme poverty. Yolanda, in contrast, took a local storyline, one that features stories of political infighting and government incompetence. These distinct representations, Bankoff argues, points to a broader pattern of the fundamental divergence with the way the developed and developing world construct disasters (Bankoff and Borrinaga 2014). This is reminiscent of his earlier work which traces the historical origins of the "vulnerability" as Western discourse—a cultural construction that denigrates regions in the global south as "disease-ridden, poverty-stricken and disaster prone" (Bankoff 2001:19).

Taking a global perspective in studying disasters appears relevant, if not almost unspoken expectations these days, as globalization, climate change, and environmental justice have become part of people's everyday vocabulary. How and why sociological studies on disasters can and should take a global perspective, however, warrants unpacking. Uncritically celebrating a global perspective can create blinders instead of opening views. Here we identify several areas of inquiry where a global sociology perspective has served to uncover broader structures of hierarchy, inequality and power and the implications for the sociological disaster research.

One line of inquiry relates to the critical sociology of humanitarianism, which explores the conditions in which action on distant suffering is mobilized by emotional regimes of pity or indignation (Boltanski 1999). Calhoun (2013) argues that humanitarianism has important historical antecedents, including developments in international law, new public sympathy for distant suffering (itself rooted in colonization, trade, etc.), and increased conditions of visibility facilitated by mass (and recently social and interpersonal) media. This perspective challenges us to think through the ways in which some disasters gain media visibility and public sympathy while others do not. Important work in the sociology of media prompt reflection as to the importance of visuals and narratives in establishing relationships of care for particular distant sufferers (Chouliaraki 2006), creating hierarchies of grievability where some deaths are more grievable than others (Butler 2010). The concept of cosmopolitanism is also important in the study of global disasters in how we may explore the process in which ordinary people may develop moral subjectivities in identifying and empathizing with distant suffering others, motivating them to donate, volunteer, or speak out in the face of suffering (Ong 2009).

While there is a growing interest in studying disasters from a global perspective, it is also worth identifying the alternate yet not necessarily opposing trend of studying disasters from a local standpoint. While concepts such as world risk society (Beck 1998) have gained currency in the past two decades for drawing attention to the ubiquity of risks shared across nation-states, there are also compelling empirical evidence that point to risks as experienced differently in different parts of the world (Cantelli, Kodate, and Krieger 2010). The very definition of what counts as risks and what makes a disaster a disaster are rooted culturally and may not necessarily be shared by different communities experiencing the same natural hazard (Mythen 2007:801). Therefore, a grounded sociological approach can uncover the ways in which various communities experience their environments. In this Special Issue,

there are several articles that take this approach. Lilimay Ramos Manalo, Domenick Marco Somoray, and Maria Theresa Mapili Verian's article (pp. 131-156) on the narratives of Yolanda survivors in Leyte reveal the complexity of constructing narratives of what otherwise is broadly categorized as a "devastating experience." What makes a disaster a devastating experience is very much shaped by shared understandings among communities and the socially constructed boundaries between acceptable sacrifice and traumatic suffering. Similarly, Justin Charles G. See and Emma Porio's article on social vulnerabilities (pp. 53-80), Enrique Oracion's research on local adaptation strategies (pp. 27-51) and Nimfa Bracamonte's postYolanda assessment in Concepcion, Iloilo (pp. 157-178), all point to the localized impacts of disasters and how communities' vulnerabilities and adaptation strategies are affected by their physical environments and material conditions.

How then, can such local-oriented perspective in disaster research speak to a global society? There are, of course, various ways of addressing this question. Beck, for example, spent the last decade of his professional life developing a framework for methodological cosmopolitanism which aims to find alternative, non-nationalist units of research that can open up new horizons for investigating transnational phenomena (Beck and Sznaider 2006). Classical political economy can also be a good starting point. Immanuel Wallerstein's framework for World Systems continues to be a potent theoretical anchor to uncover structures of global inequality and piece together local-level vulnerabilities and global forces (Wallerstein 1974). The climate change and global justice literature have been at the forefront of this enterprise. Parks and Roberts' (2010) work on North-South climate negotiations, for example, argue that the lack of consensus is due to unchecked global inequality, which perpetuates divergent worldviews and particularistic notions of fairness, thereby undermining the possibility for global cooperation.

A modest proposal, however, can also be placed in the sociological disaster studies agenda, which takes inspiration from "connected sociologies" (Bhambra 2010). This approach can be used to challenge localized research to engage in dialogues and forge connections with contexts that share similar experiences with no unifying center or using "advanced, industrialized societies" as reference points. This, in our view, can foreground the intersections of diverse societies and encourage sociologists to establish connections between shared and intersectional projects for emancipation.

Issue 5: Have Sociologists Become Part of the So-Called Disaster Industrial Complex?

Finally, a note on reflexivity. As disaster studies become *en vogue*, it is imperative for sociologists of disaster to acknowledge our participation in what some editorially refer to as the “disaster industrial complex.” As Clarke points out:

“Whenever big events happen, social scientists respond. When big disasters happen, all our skills and instincts come to the fore. Journalists turn to us for sound bites and analysis. We rush to the scene for insight and data. The grant-writing and grant-making apparatus churns. More people in the social sciences try to run projects on disaster and trauma. Thus do we profit from other people’s suffering.” (Clarke 2010:292)

Like journalists, humanitarian aid workers, project consultants and monitoring and evaluation experts, sociologists join the company of professionals that parachute in and out of disaster zones, either as part of professional responsibilities, sheer curiosity or genuine desire to help. What this builds then is an industry that creates transactional economic relationships in disaster areas—from the boom of SUVs-for-hire, “disaster tour guides,” and nightlife spots sustained by capital brought in by parachute professionals. Sociologists become part of the disaster industrial complex that may “commoditize” affected communities when seeking funding from donors (Krause 2014). This, in itself, is not necessarily ethically problematic. The substantive question that warrants reflection is what kind of role that sociologists play and the interests we serve as we take part in the industry of disaster risk reduction, preparedness, relief, recovery, and reconstruction?

Our normative propositions on this matter are two-fold. First, we suggest the role of sociology in the disaster industry is to serve as myth busters. Disaster myths are aplenty and, most of the time, perpetuates oppression. Empirical sociology can confront such myths by providing solid and fair evidence that can inform practice. One such myth, for example, is on new technologies and how these digital interactive platforms may facilitate better and more “people-centered” disaster response. In our own empirical work that sought out perspectives of affected people and their actual (rather than presumed) uses of technologies, we found that digital platforms in fact created new exclusions and exacerbated divides among the affected communities (Madianou, Ong, Longboan, Cornelio, and Curato 2015). Therefore, the celebration of digital technologies’ capacity to give voice to affected populations warrant reconsideration given empirical evidence.

The power of critical theory is also much needed in post-disaster contexts, especially in maintaining vigilance against what Henry Giroux calls the “biopolitics of disposability” where the poor are left to fend for themselves as they are “excommunicated from the sphere of human concern” (Giroux 2006:175). As media interest wanes and compassion fatigue

kicks in, sociological inquiry have even bigger responsibility to give authentic voice to the dispossessed through compelling empirical accounts of how the “chronic disaster syndrome” unfolds and how to overcome the normalization of suffering (Adams, Van Hattum, and English 2009).

Second, we suggest that sociological disaster studies should also, in the end, serve the interest of the discipline itself. In his Presidential Address for the International Research Committee on Disasters, Robert Stallings has lamented that while sociology has notable contributions to public policy and emergency management, the subfield of sociology of disasters had “considerably less impact on sociology itself” (Stallings 2006:1). He continues:

“Most sociologists who study disasters have taken axioms and premises from the theoretical schools in which they were trained into their research. What we collectively have failed to do, or at least have not done consistently and systematically, is to use our empirical findings to evaluate, discredit, or refine those theoretical axioms and premises. We have failed to consistently use disaster research to challenge and advance the central theories and dominant paradigms (ugh!) in sociology. We need to close the loop, complete the circle. What we need to do, in other words, is to integrate insights from our research with the core concerns of the discipline.” (Stallings 2006:5)

Stallings challenges sociologists studying disasters to take a step further from describing and analyzing the social structures that shape how communities encounter disaster to theorizing how disasters themselves shape social structures, or, how social structures have become resistant to change in spite of major catastrophes (Stallings 2006:7). The field of disaster research is well placed to engage in the iterative process of theoretical-empirical refinement, which can open new ways of thinking sociologically.

Organization of the Special Issue

The articles in this issue, in many and varied ways engage the themes we have outlined in our introduction. We begin the issue with two articles that examine the concept of vulnerability. Enrique Oracion’s article examines the ways in which riverside communities adapt to vulnerabilities caused by the Pagatban River, while Justin Charles G. See and Emma Porio investigate the factors that affect the social vulnerabilities of seventeen areas in Metro Manila. Both articles underscore the multifaceted character of vulnerabilities, which have different articulations in various contexts. These articles are followed by Satwinder S. Rehal’s critical analysis of the functions of sports in post-Haiyan Leyte. Rehal’s work is pioneering in bringing together the subfields of sociology of sports and sociology of disasters in conversation with each other. This article is followed by a collaboratively written piece on

the sociology of indigenous knowledge about disasters. Queenie S. Quilo, Mary Antoniette T. Mabini, Nincie Pale O. Tamiroy, Myrma Jean A. Mendoza, Sulpecia L. Ponce, and Liwayway S. Vilorio unpack the practices, logics and complexities of knowledge construction that depart from the realist school of disaster research which has taken a dominant place in the field for the past decades. Lilimay Ramos Manalo, Domenick Marco Somoray, and Maria Theresa Mapili Verian follow the theme of alternative knowledge production, this time in the form of narratives women from Guiuan have constructed in the aftermath of Haiyan. Narratives, their piece argues, provide insight into how victims negotiate their agencies to become survivors by reconstructing the temporal sequence of events that define their stories of struggle and survival.

This issue also features two research reports by Nimfa L. Bracamonte and April Porteria. Bracamonte's research project is an inspiring illustration of sociological imagination's intersection with political practice. Bracamonte's research was inspired by her personal desire to provide immediate relief and assistance to Salvacion, Iloilo—her husband's hometown. For Bracamonte, however, relief and assistance should not stop with providing material support. Knowledge must also be generated so local communities can better understand the extent of devastation and the problems that lie ahead. It is this motivation that led Bracamonte to conduct a rapid assessment to characterize the situation, the findings of which are featured in this issue. Porteria shares the same sociological tradition of linking theory and practice. As a young sociologist-activist, Porteria has critically examined the nature of disaster capitalism in the aftermath of Haiyan to get a sociological sense of the pervasiveness and precise empirical character of this increasingly trendy term. Unlike Klein, however, Porteria's critical essay emphasizes the space available for people's organizations to resist disaster capitalism and imagine alternative visions for recovery and rehabilitation. Taken together, both research reports serve as relevant reminders about sociology's role in examining social realities to enhance political practice.

We conclude the special issue with an Interview with Greg Bankoff, which charts his intellectual trajectory that led him to focus his research on disasters. We also took the interview as an opportunity to clarify his position on sociological concepts of agency and the importance of making value judgments in social theory. Bankoff's interview closed on an optimistic note. The Philippines, he says, is as much as a culture of coping and resiliency as it is a culture of disaster. We affirm this observation, as contributions to this special issue do in their careful record of ordinary and organizational creativity. Ultimately, we hope this

issue illustrates the breadth of sociological scholarship on disasters today and contributes to on-going conversations about what it takes to live in an increasingly fragile world.

Nicole Curato and Jonathan Corpus Ong

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