History, Archaeology and Fine and Applied Arts Research Journal
ISSN: 2997-6294 |
Volume 11 Issue 1, January-March, 2023
Journal Homepage: https://ethanpub.online/Journals/index.php/E27
Official Journal of Ethan Publication

COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY: REBUILDING LIVES AFTER DISASTER

Evelyn Xiao Chen
University of Melbourne, Australia

Abstract:
This study explores the vital role of voice and communication technologies in humanitarian action and disaster recovery efforts. The conventional criticism of humanitarian aid being one-way and asymmetric has spurred a growing recognition of the importance of facilitating two-way communication between aid providers and affected communities. This approach not only empowers affected populations by allowing them to voice their needs and concerns but also promotes a more democratic and accountable humanitarian process. Humanitarian organizations are increasingly leveraging modern communication technologies like SMS hotlines, surveys, and community radio, often combined with interactive platforms such as FrontlineSMS, to enhance their engagement with affected communities. These innovative communication tools enable aid agencies to establish robust feedback mechanisms, thus fostering a more inclusive and responsive recovery process. Incorporating the voices of disaster-affected individuals is pivotal in creating a more equitable and effective humanitarian response. This study delves into the evolving landscape of humanitarian communication, shedding light on the transformative potential of communication technologies in reshaping the dynamics of aid delivery and accountability.

Keywords: humanitarian action, disaster recovery, communication technologies, voice, accountability.

Introduction

Voice—broadly understood as the ability to give an account of oneself (Butler, 2005; Couldry, 2010) and participate in social, political, and economic processes (Tacchi, 2011)—is increasingly recognized as significant in the context of humanitarian action and disaster recovery. The long-standing

Criticism of humanitarian action is that it is asymmetrical and one-way (de Waal, 1997, among others). Giving people the opportunity to make their voices heard can facilitate two-way communication between humanitarian responders and affected populations with the potential to democratize the humanitarian process and correct the power asymmetries on which it is based. Additionally, improved feedback structures can empower local communities to hold aid agencies accountable. It is not surprising, then, that humanitarian agencies have embraced new communication technologies as tools that can give people a say in the recovery process. Humanitarian organizations recently have invested in programs of "communication with communities" and "accountability to affected populations". Such programs routinely employ new communication technologies such as SMS hotlines, surveys, and community radio, which are often combined with interactive platforms such as FrontlineSMS.

Never before have had populations affected by disaster had so many opportunities for making their voices heard. Drawing on an ethnography with communities affected by super-Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, this article assesses the potential of new communication technologies for voice, understood here in terms of disaster-affected people's participation in the recovery process. One of the strongest storms ever recorded, Haiyan tore through the Philippines in November 2013, claiming more than 6,000 lives, displacing more than 12 million people, and triggering a massive humanitarian response. Communication technologies have featured prominently in the Haiyan recovery with dedicated programs to establish communication with communities and a general optimism regarding the role of social media for facilitating voice and grassroots participation (Meier, 2015). Haiyan's recovery has been

the first major humanitarian crisis that featured communication with community's policies and accountability programs so prominently (CDAC Network, 2014).

But do these opportunities work? If so, what are the conditions that facilitate voice? We investigate whether articulating voice results in outcomes that improve the lives of disaster-affected people. Are voices listened to, and, if so, do they make a difference? Are voices sustained over time, or do they represent one-off occasions? Assessing the efficacy of voice is important for understanding whether opportunities for voice do indeed democratize the humanitarian process. Our findings highlight a disconnect between assumptions about technology present in humanitarian policies and documents and the actual uses of technology by affected populations. Communication technologies facilitate voice only if other parameters, such as strong civil society institutions, are present. Although our low-income participants may use interactive and other platforms to communicate with one another and with their benefactors, there are few instances when voice is directed to humanitarian organizations, and even then it is not always listened to nor acted upon. We conclude that, for our participants in the Haiyan recovery, the uses of communication technologies did not achieve a reversal of power asymmetries, as is often assumed in the humanitarian agencies' reports and documents.

The next section outlines our theoretical framework on voice, especially in the context of humanitarian action. We also address the literature on digital media and disasters before we develop our analytical framework on voice.

Conceptualizing Voice

Broadly speaking, voice is the ability to give an account of oneself (Butler 2005; Couldry, 2010). This suggests that voice is linked to storytelling, to providing a narrative for the self. As Ricoeur (1984) reminds us, narrative is a vital element of human cultures. Voice, then, is much more than just speech: A narrative of the self requires an agentic and self-reflexive account of an individual's trajectory and identities. How does one position oneself in the world? How does one account for one's actions, and also one's needs and aspirations? Voice as narrative involves making sense of one's life (Gilligan, 1982/1993) and being able to share this with others. Giving an account of oneself is a sustained process that reflects on the relational and dynamic nature of identities as processes. Of course, voice can be expressed in bursts or one-time acts, but typically a narrative of self-identity is ever-evolving and sustained over time.

Although voice is not speech, it is grounded on material and social conditions. In that sense, voice is socially produced and materially determined. Voice depends on resources—the most fundamental one being language itself. To articulate one's voice in public requires certain skills, including media skills. Although storytelling can occur face-to-face (and, in fact, most social theories of voice assume voice in physically copresent situations), increasingly, new communication technologies are recognized as facilitators for voice and participation. We explore the relationship between media and voice in the next section, but here we acknowledge that voice depends on skills and resources that are asymmetrically distributed according to class (Sennett & Cobb, 1972), race (Ahmed, 2012), and gender (Gilligan, 1982/1993; Skeggs, 1997). The material conditions of voice acquire additional significance if voices are to be durable and sustained over time in order to capture the trajectory of identities.

Giving an account of oneself should not be taken to mean that voice is mainly about individual self-expression. Voice also relates to collective action and the struggle for recognition (Honneth, 1996). Sociological accounts of voice often focus on the ways social groups represent their views in the public domain, attract attention to their concerns, and participate in social and political processes. Much research here has examined voice among migrant and minority groups (Beltran, 2014) and their struggle to take control of their own representation. It is important here to recognize internal group struggles and the processes through which specific voices come to represent, or even dominate, collectivities. Research on collective voice entails the vital task of being attentive to processes of internal diversity (Couldry, 2010) or even exclusion.

Directly connected to the idea of voice is the notion of listening (Tacchi, 2011). Listening materializes voice—without listening, voice becomes irrelevant. Is voice heard, and, if so, is it valued? Is voice part of a dialogue, or does it resemble parallel monologues? The notion of efficacy is crucial here. Does giving an account of oneself make a

difference? Is voice contributing to social and political change? Are there any structures in place (institutional, legal, or cultural) that encourage voice and listening? An institutional framework, of course, will never ensure efficacy or active listening, but it enshrines voice as a social value which is an important starting point. However, such structures are rare, and if they exist, they are hard to implement. So listening as the flip side to voice remains an elusive practice that is usually measured through the outcomes associated with participation in social and political processes.

Understanding voice requires comprehending its absence and the processes that obstruct and impede voice. What prevents voices from being articulated and from being listened to? Just as voice is linked to the struggle for recognition (Honneth, 1996), voicelessness can be linked to "disrespect," the negative moral feelings of anger, shame, and indignation experienced by those who feel they have suffered an injustice (Honneth, 2007). Being marginalized and disenfranchised hinders voice and processes of participation and inclusion in social and political life, which Tacchi (2008) refers to as "voice poverty." But voicelessness is not only the result of disrespect and overt injustice. Voice is also subtly undermined though the "hidden injuries" of social institutions and the organization of social relations— what Couldry (2010, p. 10) refers to as "voice-denying rationalities."

In the Philippine context, the anthropological literature on patronage is helpful in making sense of the articulations and absences of voice in public. In this context, voice in the form of dissent or public protest is potentially muted by cultural norms of reciprocity that regulate relations between wealthy benefactors and their poor, dependent clients. Being extended assistance from a benefactor incurs a debt of gratitude (*utang na loob*) that is internalized in the client, because the benefactor is viewed to have gone beyond the norms of kinship or friendship in extending help (Rafael, 1990). The asymmetries of patronage and the practical dependence of poor people on powerful benefactors can lead to silencing as people weigh the benefits of speaking out against potential consequences, which can include the loss of privilege and protection. Scholars have exposed these processes of silencing as operating in various historical contexts: from American colonial rhetoric that expects "Filipinos to accept their own inherent inferiority" in the face of their paternalistic rulers (Werrlein, 2004, p. 30) to the "crony journalism" that proliferated under martial law but is seen in present-day practices of journalists protecting political authorities with whom they are in covert relationships (Coronel, 2001). Indeed, there is comparative evidence on the relationship between clientelism and political and social conservatism (Mouzelis, 1978) with consequences for media systems (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002).

Power asymmetries between individuals and powerful institutions—including media institutions— also can contribute to silencing. Earlier studies have shown how the power asymmetries of mediation can map onto existing inequalities and deepen processes of silencing (Madianou, 2012, 2013). Often, however, voicelessness results from lack of confidence and internalized censorship. Gilligan (1982/1993) pointed out that voicelessness depends on what counts as voice in the first place. Such definitions are gendered (Gilligan, 1982/1993), classed (Curato & Ong, 2015; Sennett & Cobb, 1972), and racially defined (Ahmed, 2012), rendering whole groups as supposedly voiceless when in fact their voice is simply of a different kind. For example, feminist scholarship has theorized silence as expressive (Glen, 2004) and agentic, because it can connote resistance and defiance from oppressive authority (Clair, 1997). In the specific context of the Philippines, Cannell (1999) captures the various tactics in which "those who have nothing" deploy "idioms of reluctance" to gain the attention and aid of elite benefactors.

Our analytical framework of voice is attentive to the constraints and freedoms in people's capacities for self-expression and community participation. We recognize that voices can be nuanced, taking forms that might not immediately register as voice. For example, among the Filipino poor, voice is less likely expressed in the form of discourses of structural critique than in everyday tactics of "glean[ing] resources . . . and ally[ing] themselves, on a shifting basis, with whichever set of governing rules seems most expedient" (McKay, 2012, p. 172). The Filipino word *gamitan* (making use of each other) captures particular strategies of coping within asymmetrical power relationships (Ong, 2015). At the same time, our analysis is attentive to whether voice ultimately contributes to the correction of the asymmetries of humanitarianism and improves the outcomes for those affected by disaster.

Voice in Development and Humanitarian Action

The concept of voice has been taken up with much enthusiasm by the field of communication for development as a means to address its power imbalances. Voice is closely linked to the approach of participatory communication in development (see Tufte & Mefalopulos, 2009, inspired by Freire (1993) and his radical rethinking of power relationships. Empowering people to define their own needs and concerns is one way of addressing the critiques of development as a form of neocolonialism and dependency.

More recently voice began to be recognized as significant in disaster response and humanitarian action. The urgent nature of humanitarian work and its emphasis on saving lives and addressing vital needs explain the delay. But as disaster response enters the recovery phase (where it often overlaps with development activities), listening to the voices of affected people becomes crucial. We argue that, even in the first response emergency phase, listening to people's voices matters and potentially safeguards against abuses of power (see Fassin & Vasquez, 2005). During recovery, which is the focus of our research, listening to the voices of affected people can democratize humanitarian action and ensure that those most affected by disasters are involved in the decisions that will shape their lives. Empowering people to articulate their experiences and needs and to participate in the proposed solutions and policies also can enhance accountability not just in relation to humanitarian organizations but concerning wider abuses of power and corruption that are common in the aftermath of disasters (Klein, 2007). The interest in voice and participation among aid agencies is also explained by structural changes in the field of humanitarianism and the demands for increased accountability among humanitarians (Krause, 2014). As the remits of development and humanitarian agencies increasingly overlap and they compete for the same sources of funding, participatory communication has entered the agenda of humanitarianism.

Much of the interest in voice in development as well as disaster recovery and humanitarian action has been propelled by developments in communication technologies, which is the focus of the next section.

Digital Media and Voice in Disasters

Digital media were quickly recognized as opportunities for voice. The interactive nature of media is seen to facilitate people's participation in social and political affairs and to amplify the voices of otherwise marginalized groups (Beltran, 2014; Longboan, 2011) through various platforms, including social media. Although research recognizes the potential for empowerment, some authors remain skeptical, pointing out the disconnects between digital storytelling and "the wider distribution of social and cultural authority and respect" (Couldry, 2008, p. 56).

More specifically in the field of disaster response and humanitarian action, digital innovations such as social media are claimed to enable "people-centered humanitarian action" by creating new ways for disaster-affected communities "to organize, coordinate and respond to their own problems" (World Disasters Report [WDR], 2013, p. 13), thus potentially redistributing power in the humanitarian process (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [UNOCHA], 2013). The low cost and interactive nature of digital technologies such as SMS, social media, and crowdsourced mapping enable the collection and dissemination of information, facilitate forms of collective problem solving, strengthen the voice of local communities, and improve the accountability of humanitarian organizations. This optimism has given rise to a discourse of "humanitarian technology," which refers to the use and applications of technology by disaster-prone communities "to better prevent, mitigate and prepare for disasters and, in their wake respond, recover and rebuild more effectively" (WDR, 2013, p. 13). In this vein, technological innovation has been described as a "driving force in the new humanitarianism of today" (WDR, 2013, p. 154).

Despite the enthusiasm regarding the role of digital technologies as tools for humanitarian relief, little evidence exists to assess their impact. What seems to be particularly missing from some of the accounts of humanitarian technology is the perspective of the affected populations themselves, which is surprising given the emphasis on "people-centered action" in the above accounts. While many technology experts and humanitarian organizations have drawn attention to the capacity of digital technologies to decentralize power (UNOCHA, 2013), clear evidence is required for whether digital technologies can actually enable new technologized forms of empowerment and voice, which would indeed redistribute power relations. Research on social media in disasters has largely focused on

Western contexts, where access to the Internet is increasingly taken for granted (although see Murthy & Longwell, 2013). Big data and social analytics have quickly become the dominant paradigm of crisis communication (Meier, 2015) with an emphasis on themes such as government coordination and digital volunteerism—the ways distant others can help affected people in a deterritorialized way (Starbird & Palen, 2011). The perspective of affected people is often absent in these analyses. Studies have typically covered social media activity during disasters or in their immediate aftermath. The crucial, but less spectacular, period of long-term recovery has not received much attention. Finally, research on social media and disasters typically examines only social media (especially Twitter) and not wider communication environments.

Our project aims to fill this gap. Our study puts the voice of affected people at the heart of the research design. Our perspective is ethnographic, following developments in the long, drawn-out period of disaster recovery. We develop a sustained relationship with affected communities, and we follow the ways in which they rebuild their lives and whether they articulate their voices in this process. We are interested in not only digital media but wider communication environments, which include face-to-face contexts such as community consultations. Our approach is attentive to the ways in which users navigate media environments, understood as composite polymedia environments (Madianou & Miller, 2013), and how people appropriate communication technologies and give them meaning in the context of their everyday lives.

Voice in Practice

Our analysis operationalized voice through a range of practices that can be described as participatory communication. These are: collective problem solving, community organizing and mobilizing, fundraising, offering feedback on the recovery process, and protesting. These practices can take place on a variety of platforms, including social media but also via face-to-face community consultations. Given that more broadly voice refers to the ability to give an account of oneself (Butler, 2005), we also interpreted digital storytelling and digital self-representation as instances of voice. For the purposes of this article, we specifically examined digital storytelling and self-representation in relation to the disaster and the recovery process, although we recognize that these practices cannot always be narrowly defined. In other publications, we develop these wider practices of voice and participation that are not directly linked to recovery but that may be extremely relevant to people's welfare nonetheless. Even in the present article we allowed for a range of recovery-related voice practices to be taken into account, such as Facebook posts and digital photography. In other words, we sought voice not only in the designated channels of feedback such as SMS hotlines or FrontlineSMS via community radio but in a variety of social contexts, mediated or not.

Our understanding of voice is also informed by questions of listening, efficacy, and outcomes associated with voice. Are voices listened to, and, if so, what are the outcomes? We are also interested in the durability of voice: Is participation sustained over time, or is it a one-off act? What are the patterns of voice articulation and visibility, and are these stratified or equally distributed? We identify the social conditions that facilitate voice as well as the structures that hinder or silence voice.

Method

We performed a multisite ethnography in two locations affected by Haiyan: the city of Tacloban in the island of Leyte and the island of Sabay (fictional name) in the Visayas. The two field sites were selected for a number of reasons. Tacloban, an urban center and regional administrative capital, suffered the most casualties because it was the site where the typhoon made landfall, causing a storm surge—a tsunami-like wave. Sabay is a small island community that suffered severe material damages but few casualties. We have anonymized all fieldwork locations except for Tacloban. Tacloban is a highly urbanized city (population 220,000) and acknowledged as the area worst affected by Haiyan. Even if we changed Tacloban's name, it would be recognizable by any reference to the storm surge. However, within Tacloban, we have changed the names of all neighborhoods and municipalities where we conducted fieldwork. The article draws on data from both locations, but it is not our aim here to develop a systematic comparison of the two field sites.

Between April 2014 and January 2015, we conducted participant observation and interviews with 101 participants affected by the typhoon (several of whom were interviewed more than once). We recruited participants from a broad range of backgrounds, ages, and socioeconomic classes: Our sample included 55 women and 46 men; 63 participants were very low or low income, and 38 were middle class). The study includes additional interviews with 38 experts (representatives from humanitarian organizations, other local civil society groups, government agencies as well as telecommunications companies and other digital platform developers), although the current article does not report directly on these interviews. All participants' names and personal details have been changed.

Our ethnographic approach is ideal for investigating the perspective and experience of affected populations that are missing from current accounts. Ethnography is particularly well suited for dealing with potentially vulnerable populations and has been used to study traumatized (Clair, 2006) and disasteraffected communities (Adams, 2013; Mayer, 2014). Participant observation allowed us to develop longterm rapport, trust, and empathy over one year to get a deep and "thick" (Geertz, 1973) understanding of questions of power and voice. During our fieldwork, we spent time with our key participants and their extended social circles: We shared meals, sang karaoke at *barangay* fiestas, attended church services and funeral wakes, and participated in community consultations and protest marches. Our chosen method allowed us to observe people's actual media practices, which supplement their interview accounts (see Miller, 1998, on how the two diverge). We also conducted online ethnography and collected data from participants' online interactions.

The Voice of Affected People

Are humanitarian technologies fulfilling their potential for voice? The answer to this question depends on where one looks. Listening to one of the middle-class participants, we see the arguments about humanitarian technologies come to life. Ernie is an entrepreneur on the island of Sabay who exemplifies digital storytelling through a range of practices. Ernie has access to a rich media landscape, which he navigates with ease. Ernie actively uses social media to promote his business interests. After Haiyan, Ernie's community engagement acquired momentum as he set up a charity and actively raised funds from major corporations and even international donors through Facebook. In fact, there is a fusion of charity with private profit and political gain: According to Ernie, because of his fundraising, his business acquired tremendous visibility and was doing better than ever in the aftermath of the typhoon, thus raising his status as a political "big man" (cf. McKay, 2012) to "clients" in the community.

How representative is Ernie? Not very, in the sense that he combines a wide range of practices that constitute voice: Ernie initiated collective problem solving, fundraising, and community organizing, and he was active in digital storytelling. The excerpt below describes how he combined personal self-presentation with visibility for his charity work (and ultimately his business as well).

Actually one of the things that dramatized the signing of the memorandum of agreement [with the funders] was that it was bad weather and I had to go to the mainland so I could sign the MOA the following morning. Boat trips were canceled for the last three days. So I rented a fishing boat to take me to the mainland. . . . So I posted it [on Facebook], and I think that got a lot of people interested. You know, daring the [storm] just to get there . . . These things that you do, that you actually share to the outside world, gave us credibility for me, as the leader, and our conviction. Because no matter how confident you are, the donors would not know, the potential, the people. They wouldn't know that "Hey! I'm out to save the world!

Ernie's fundraising activities, all of which are posted on social media (particularly Facebook), included organizing a charity gala in Manila. Ernie drew on a strong and well-cultivated social capital, having connections to the national media, commercial bank officials, and private companies. His initiatives were successful in that they yielded fundraising outcomes in support of affected communities. Although we cannot assess the outcomes of the charity, we observed how Ernie built his status within the local community and strengthened his political ambitions by extending mutual aid relations with an ever-increasing number of poor "clients" and employees and forging alliances with other influential people in politics and business.

Interestingly, Ernie's voice focused on what could be described—at one level—as "positive" practices of voice revolving around fundraising, collective problem solving, and digital storytelling. We do not intend to introduce a hierarchy of voice here but simply want to recognize that these are practices whose target beneficiaries are the broader community. Additionally, such practices are frequently communicated with positive emotions of hope that call forth solidarity and resilience in the face of disaster. Interestingly, Ernie did not use social media to complain about disaster recovery activities, because he was not dependent on aid from humanitarian or government agencies. Ernie represents an exception in our sample, being among the most affluent of the participants and among the most active in social media—even among other middle-class participants with rich digital media footprints.

Such uses of communication technologies are in stark contrast with the communication environments and practices of the low-income participants. Nine participants did not even own a mobile phone. Although 31 low-income participants owned at least a mobile phone, what matters here are the uses to which the phone or other media were put, and not just the question of access. Most of the verylow-income participants had access to a minimal media environment (revolving around a feature mobile phone) with few opportunities for voice. Of course, voice is not dependent on technological mediation and can be articulated in situations of physical copresence. Still, the distribution of digital media and the uses of these media matters for our project, which particularly investigates whether new media—as part of wider communication environments—facilitate voice.

The contrast to Ernie as a well-connected middle-class participant becomes apparent when we compare his experience to not only the poorest of the participants but participants whom one would expect to have a higher degree of Internet connectivity and digital media skills. Such is the case of Esther, who is a *barangay* captain in one of the most devastated neighborhoods in Tacloban. Contrary to our expectation that Esther would be relatively well connected because of her post, her communicative environment consisted primarily of a feature mobile phone with sporadic access to the Internet. Esther's uses of her mobile phone and her use of the Internet were minimal and mainly consisted of communicating with her constituents and rarely with humanitarian agencies or local government officials. It is indicative that Esther was unsure about how the relief efforts worked and was not always aware of all recovery policies. Esther's media habits are representative of most (76) of this study's participants.

Still, Esther's communicative environment looks rich compared to some of the poorest participants, who can barely afford to use their feature phone because of cost constraints. So far, we observe a clear divide between those who have access to digital media and the necessary skills to articulate their voice and those who do not. The latter also happen to be the ones who were worst hit by the disaster and who most needed help from the agencies.

Voices or Echoes?

It would not be accurate to say that the low-income participants did not articulate voice. As demonstrated in Esther's example, communication and participation take place among existing contacts (between Esther and her constituents). Ruth, a woman in her 30s from Sabay, was active in her local PTA committee, while Bong, a man in his 30s from Tacloban, used Facebook to keep in touch with his local dance group. But these uses do not always constitute publicly articulated voice. In other words, some participants used digital media to communicate with other affected people or with elite benefactors from their own personal networks, but not with humanitarian workers, the local government, or wider publics. There is much value in these communications, which can be understood as creative coping strategies centered on securing resources for themselves and their families. But voice that is only directed to existing networks will not correct the power asymmetries of humanitarianism, nor will they democratize humanitarian action, which is one of the assumptions made by those who advocate the power of humanitarian technologies (UNOCHA, 2012; WDR, 2013).

Most of the participants (both low-income and middle-class) displayed rich and varied uses of communication technologies. Much online communication was for sociality, relationship maintenance, and recreation. Such practices contribute significantly to participants' welfare and quality of life. However, if we follow our earlier definition of voice as "the inclusion and participation in the disaster recovery process" such social uses of technology do not constitute voice, strictly speaking. More importantly, communication practices such as the ones described here

remain private. Private communication can be politically meaningful, but unless voice cuts across social or political boundaries, it will not acquire public visibility and attention, and it will not explicitly address the power imbalances of humanitarianism.

Voice as an Ongoing Project or Voice as Response Mode?

Many participants built an online (and offline) narrative about themselves and their communities through a range of activities that include digital storytelling, collective problem solving, and fundraising. Participants such as Ernie drew on a range of platforms—an environment of polymedia (Madianou & Miller,
2013)—to enact their identities. Polymedia in this sense becomes a form of expansive realization (Miller & Slater, 2000)—giving people the opportunity to realize a previously dormant dimension of their identity and aspirations as they exploit different opportunities afforded by different platforms. As always, digital media uses depend not only on questions of access but on participants' personal aspirations and underlying skills.

Ernie's media engagement was shaped by his role as president of a newly established charity and as manager of a family business, both closely tied to his personal goals in entering politics. Given his central position in the community, he used Facebook in a sustained manner to promote the charity work of his organization. In contrast, poorer participants had goals that were more personal, centered on securing resources for themselves or their families. Their concern was usually about their or their neighbors' inclusion in aid distribution lists within their *barangay*. For instance, Alice in Sabay used the SMS feedback hotline of a humanitarian agency to complain about her neighbors, who lied about their circumstances to receive aid. Although she may have been impelled by personal reasons to report her neighbors, having failed to receive aid herself, it appears that the SMS hotline gave her an opportunity to articulate indignation about the perceived unfairness in beneficiary selection, which resulted in aid workers responding to her complaint and correcting their aid distribution list.

Using communication technologies to complain and protest is entirely legitimate and in line with the intentions of humanitarian policies in the communication with communities and accountability to affected populations models. Several of our participants, typically low income but some middle class, protested about the aid distribution and problems that their families or neighborhoods were facing. Often these complaints were about individual grievances, and voice in these occasions can be described as *response mode*: responding ad hoc to perceived injustices and aiming to correct them.

We immediately observe a contrast between voice as a sustained project and voice as response mode. Whereas some participants were able to articulate their personal ambitions and interests over a range of platforms and were able to sustain this project over time, others articulated voice only in short— usually angry—bursts. We strongly argue that both kinds of voices are of equal value. But in practice we also observe that sustained voices—part of wider projects—are more likely to be listened to than angry voices that are articulated in bursts. This would be in line with a deeply flawed tendency to delegitimize emotional protest as shouting—or being "hysterical," as feminist scholarship has revealed. Anger may be entirely justified in conditions of dispossession or injustice, yet in public life, anger is pathologized and used as a means for exclusion from the register of legitimate speech (Ahmed, 2004). Such is the case of our participant, Oscar, who runs a small variety store in Sabay. He used an aid agency's SMS hotline to repeatedly and angrily complain about the behavior of its personnel as well as local politics, but his complaints tended to be discounted as "unstable" emotional outbursts and thus were not taken seriously.

Parallel Monologues or Dialogue? Listening and the Efficacy of Voice

We argued earlier that voice and listening are intertwined; whether voices are listened to is key to assessing the efficacy of voice. Based on our interviews, some participants were listened to more than others, and this has material and symbolic consequences. Receiving a response after complaining to an international nongovernmental organization not only corrects a practical problem but provides a validation that one's voice is taken seriously. Conversely, the lack of a response not only fails to address a material problem but can inflict deeper injuries. Those who never received a response to their complaints to the agencies told us they were unlikely to speak up again. The most poignant case was that of Dolores, who found the courage to text a humanitarian hotline but never received an

acknowledgment. Usually participants received acknowledgements of but not corrections to their grievances. Often this was because the participants' complaints extended the agencies' remit. For example, when Gino and Linda publicly complained that they were excluded from the beneficiary lists, they were told that the agencies could not bypass the local gatekeepers who ultimately decided who received aid. Linda felt particularly hurt, because the reason for her exclusion was that she was a single (unmarried) mother, which was a criterion for beneficiary selection according to local officials. Her inability to overturn rigid patriarchal views was frustrating. Her example reveals that achieving change through voice depends on a range of structural factors that extend beyond the narrow definitions of participation as providing feedback to agencies or attending community consultations. At least Linda was able to engage in some interaction, even though it did not yield any practical results. Still, her experience resembles a monologue rather than a dialogue where both parties participate equally in conversation. In that sense, Linda's and Dolores' experiences have much in common and point to a strong gendered dimension in public participation.

We did encounter a few cases where voice in response mode led to positive outcomes. Aurora, who was initially excluded from aid distribution lists, was able to persuade *barangay* officials to reverse this decision. Aurora, also a single mother, not only engaged in dialogue but was able to get a practical improvement in her family's living conditions.

Voicelessness

We cannot understand voice without understanding voicelessness. As we have argued elsewhere, silence is very difficult, if not impossible, to capture methodologically (Madianou, 2013). Voice is expressed, while silence is usually only felt because of the absence of certain types of practices and discourses. In other words, we can understand the lack of voice in Esther's interview only if we compare it with participants such as Ernie.

Apart from being attentive to absences, omissions, and what is not there, we also specifically investigated discourses or practices that directly or indirectly obstructed voice. For example, fear of marginalization or punishment (as in the exclusion from aid distribution lists) were reasons cited by participants for not giving feedback or attending protest rallies. Ben, a low-income fisherman from Tacloban, explicitly referred to the threats he received not to participate in a protest rally, because if he did, he would not receive the vital government handout.

Yes, a meeting was held near the seashore and we were supposed to join, but we were threatened that if we join, they will not give us housing and forty thousand pesos. That is their threat. That is what they told us.

Aid and assistance are rarely understood by affected peoples as rights or resources guaranteed by institutions but instead as gifts or benefits personally and provisionally distributed by local leaders and project staff. Traditional expectations of reciprocity animate exchanges between donors and beneficiaries, especially given the prominent role of *barangay* officials in aid distribution protocols. In this light, discouragement from articulating one's experiences does not have to take place in the form of an explicit threat. It is also the result of internalized social monitoring within local cultures of exchange between clients and their potential patrons. Although several participants expressed discontent with the quality of relief goods received from government and aid agencies and suspected corruption in the distribution process, they only shared their concerns with us and often told us they would never dare protest to community leaders. Olive, a low-income, middle-age woman from Tacloban, attributed her exclusion from the *barangay* captain's aid distribution list to her active support for the captain's political rival.

It really is the discretion of the barangay officials whether you'd be given anything. Their people—those would be the first names on the list. They'd be giving to their supporters first. . . . For example, with the aid agency distribution, only 100 would receive help, and so we were the first to be erased from the list. . . . The first time we got erased [by the *barangay* captain], we visited the mayor. That's where we applied [for aid] instead.

Rather than voice her concerns and expose the captain's corruption of the aid agency's distribution protocols, Olive's strategy was to align herself with another influential community member who could personally guarantee her inclusion in the relief activities. Although Olive exercised a degree of agency in skillfully seeking an alternative benefactor who can better guarantee her protection, her strategy of securing aid through forging alliances does not

qualify as voice in the definitions we set out. In failing to contribute to institutional and procedural accountability, her silence instead upheld the dominance of personal and particularistic demands and ambitions of clients and benefactors. While constrained to be voiceless within humanitarian transactions that closely refract local cultures of patronage, we would expect that determined and spirited Olive would continue to secure help from and offer assistance to powerful benefactors to improve the conditions of her family. Although patronage achieves a degree of redistribution, it entrenches existing power asymmetries and appears to be an important factor that hinders the public articulation of voice. This example also demonstrates how humanitarian relief is appropriated within local social structures that need to be taken into account in any analysis of humanitarian technologies.

Asymmetries in social power can be felt in nuanced yet poignant ways that do not register consciously. Lack of confidence, another factor contributing to silence, also can be the result of internalized social relationships of power, including gendered and classed norms and expectations around protesting and speaking out in the community. One factor here is gender, as is evident in the case of Cristy, a middle-age woman in Tacloban working as a sales manager in a central store. Cristy, who is educated at university level and can be described as lower middle class, has a relatively rich media landscape and is a frequent Internet user. However, her interview revealed no desire to protest or complain publicly, even though she held private concerns about the unevenness of the recovery. In her case, we suspect that prevailing gender norms and expectations around protest may have inhibited the conversion from private concern to public voice.

"Text Brigade": Empowered Voices

Just as important as identifying the processes that obstruct voice is the study of processes that empower and facilitate voice. Two powerful stories stand out in our interviews. Both stories involve women from very poor backgrounds who suffered great losses in the wake of the typhoon. Both live in a *barangay* in Tacloban that suffered complete damage and that remained, one year after Haiyan, a tent city.

The first story is that of Dina, a 26-year-old member of a women's group of Haiyan survivors that was organized and mentored by a Manila-based advocacy group. Without wanting to detract from the women's own achievements, the role of the advocacy group is crucial here. The group is dedicated to working with poor people in slum areas to empower them to take some control over their lives. The advocacy group engages in a number of practices and has been active in some of the poorest and most badly affected *barangays* in Tacloban. Activities often involve women who have become actively involved in their communities and in the public domain more broadly. In the first *Harampang* (community consultation), which we attended in June 2014, we were struck by the high number of women who attended and spoke.

Dina is one of the women who stood up and spoke at the *Harampang*. She also visited the community radio station to express her concerns about the slow progress of the recovery, and she was interviewed in national media. Dina was involved in a protest to the government department responsible for social welfare about the need for tarpaulin to cover the tents that had been damaged from the wet weather. Her protest, together with protests by other women from the association, was successful and resulted in the tarpaulin being delivered.

Carol is a member of the same association. She and a group of women started bombarding the government social welfare department representative in Tacloban with text messages about their need for new tarpaulins. *Text brigade*, as this method of SMS bombardment is called, proved highly successful, and tarpaulins were delivered within days. In contrast, previous face-to-face requests had been unsuccessful.

Carol recalls her SMS as follows:

"Good morning, Sir. We are from Barangay Lido, and we are in need of tarpaulins, so we would like to request from you. We just want to ask for updates on when we will get them, because our roofs are leaking, our situation is hard, and it is hot."

Carol eloquently summarizes the value of voice:

Yes, because they don't feel the feelings of those who were affected by the tragedy or typhoon. We really need to speak out so they will know our concerns and the kind of hardship that we are experiencing so they can help us.

Looking closely at what catalyzed Carol's and Dina's voices, we see a powerful intermediary. One community worker from the advocacy group was pivotal for the experience of these two women.

Ms. Rina. She is the one giving me support if I have plans. So if it's wrong, she tells me that it is wrong. Then she'll give me a better idea on what to do. Because on my own, as I know myself, I can't do stuff like that. Because of the organizers, we started to believe in ourselves. We gained knowledge of this and that, that we can communicate with other nations.

The "text brigade" protest would not have taken place without an inspiring intermediary who represents civil society—an important factor for participation in public life. Media technologies are secondary to the social foundations that underpin voice. Such foundations include civil society institutions and wider social networks. When these conditions are fulfilled, then there is fertile ground for voices to be articulated and to be heard. During our project, we became inspired by the transformation of some of the women from the original text brigade. Some of them have formed their own association and have been campaigning for their rights, especially in relation to shelter. Dina, in particular, has been active on Facebook, commenting on the recovery process and politics. She has been "friending" local politicians and administrators and sends them messages. Her voice is growing in confidence and is sustained over platforms and over time. In our last meeting, we were able to visit Dina's new home. She built the house with help from the advocacy group that worked in the neighborhood for several months. It is a wooden structure that is still considered temporary, but according to her, "it's an improvement from the original house that was destroyed by the storm surge." Dina is the exception among the low-income and even low-middle-class participants, but her story is one of the most optimistic ones that we came across in this research.

Conclusion

Communication technologies will not give people voice (see Tacchi, 2011). Technologies are tools that can facilitate voice but only as long as other variables, such as social capital and a strong civil society, are present. Our findings highlight a disconnect between assumptions about the role of technology present in humanitarian policies and the actual uses of technology by affected populations. Further, we identify a divide among the better-off participants, who are most likely to have a voice in post-disaster contexts, and the poorer participants, for whom finding a voice is more challenging, if not impossible. Whereas middle-class participants can exploit some of the potentials of humanitarian technologies to make their voices heard and attract attention to their problems, thus often improving their own social positions, those who are most in need are less likely to find such opportunities because they lack access to these technologies and the skills needed to use them. Most importantly, they lack the confidence to use these technologies to speak out and participate in discussions, internalizing views that their low socioeconomic status diminishes the value of their voice. Consequently, they do not attempt to speak about their experiences, because they assume that their voices will not be listened to or that speaking out will result in further exclusion for violating Filipino cultural expectations of reciprocity. Experiencing humanitarian intervention as an extension of the gift exchange of "patron-client ties" (Rafael, 1990), low-income people refrain from expressing direct and official critique of relief distribution procedures that could ideally contribute to greater accountability. Instead, we observed some participants using digital platforms and other methods to gain the support of potential benefactors and maximize their personal gains.

Another difference between middle-class and low-income participants was that middle-class participants were far more likely to articulate voice in a sustained way and through more positive participatory practices such as community problem solving, fundraising, and digital storytelling, which likewise convey positive narratives of resilience and hope in the context of disaster recovery. By contrast, the rare occasions when low-income participants made their voices heard involve a response mode and, typically, some form of protest, and even that is not sustained over time. This observation is not to introduce a hierarchy of voice. Protest and the negative emotions that often spur it have cognitive structures and offer insight into power asymmetries and injustices. Emotions are "upheavals of thought" (Nussbaum, 2001) that can reveal awareness and understanding. Still, participating through community organizing or collective problem solving can be interpreted as an outward-looking, community-oriented activity that

is mainly adopted by those who are already better off. Conversely, we saw that voices that emerge in—usually—angry bursts are often delegitimized and discounted as "hysterical" (see Ahmed, 2004). The factors that determine whose voice counts and whose voice is listened to are deeply gendered and classed, and ultimately political, and cannot be easily overturned by technological affordances.

Our analysis revealed that much of our participants' mediated communication resembled an echo chamber and not a dialogue. Participants were more likely to articulate their views and experiences to their peers than to representatives from humanitarian organizations or the government. As much as this voice has value, it will not correct any power asymmetries in humanitarian action. Looking at the outcomes of voice—when it is articulated—we see that efficacy is stratified and maps onto existing social, including gender inequalities. Our analysis paid much attention to the processes that silence voice, but also to the conditions that facilitate voice. We came across practices that actively sought to discourage protest and participation in social movements. We also found evidence of more subtle forms of silencing through lack of self-confidence and feelings of helplessness and fatalism (*bahala na*).

The strongest and most optimistic example of voice among the low-income participants (the "text brigade" example) involved the presence of an active intermediary who played a catalytic role for the participants to voice their concerns via SMS and in face-to-face meetings. Civil society and the impact of specific individuals seem to be more powerful than the presence of communication technology platforms. The "text brigade" example reminds us that contesting power relations is not a matter of technology, but a matter of human relationships and courage.

References

Adams, V. (2013). *Markets of sorrow, labors of faith.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Ahmed, S. (2004). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press.

Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Beltran, C. (2014). No papers, no fear: DREAM activism, new social media and the queering of immigrant rights. In A. Davila & Y. Rivero (Eds.), *Contemporary Latino/a media: Production, circulation and politics* (pp. 245–267). New York, NY: New York University Press.

Butler, J. (2005). *Giving an account of oneself*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press.

Cannell, F. (1999). *Power and intimacy in the Christian Philippines.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

CDAC Network: Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities. (2014). *The CDAC network: Typhoon Haiyan learning review.* Retrieved from. http://www.cdacnetwork.org/contentAsset/rawdata/7825ae17-8f9b-4a05-bfbd-7eb9da6ea8c1/attachedFile2

Clair, R. P. (1997). *Organizing silences: A world of possibilities.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Clair, R. P. (2006). Narratives in the old neighborhood: An ethnographic study of an urban neighborhood's stories. *Qualitative Inquiry, 12*(6), 1244–1261.

Coronel, S. (2001). The role of media in deepening democracy. Retrieved from http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un/unpan010194.pdf

Couldry, N. (2008). Digital storytelling, media research and democracy. In K. Lundby (Ed.), *Digital storytelling, mediatized stories: Self representation in new media* (pp. 41–60). New York, NY:

Peter Lang.

Couldry, N. (2010). *Why voice matters: Culture and politics after neoliberalism*. London, UK: SAGE Publications.

Curato, N., & Ong, J. C. (2015). Inclusion as deliberative agency: The selective representation of poor women in debates and documentaries about reproductive health. *Television and New Media*, *16*(6), 576–594.

De Waal, A. (1997). *Famine crimes: Politics and the disaster relief industry in Africa*. London, UK: James Currey.

Fassin, D., & Vasquez, P. (2005). Humanitarian exception as the rule: The political theology of the 1999 *Tragedia* in Venezuela. *American Ethnologist*, *32(*3), 382–405.

Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Rev. ed.). New York, NY: Continuum.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Gilligan, C. (1982/1993). *In a different voice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Glen, C. (2004). *Unspoken: A rhetoric of silence*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Hallin, D., & Papathanassopoulos, S. (2002) Political clientelism and the media: southern Europe and Latin America in comparative perspective. *Media, Culture and Society, 24*, 175–195.

Honneth, A. (1996). *The struggle for recognition: The moral grammar of social conflicts*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Honneth, A. (2007). *Disrespect*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Klein, N. (2007). *The shock doctrine: The rise of disaster capitalism*. New York, NY: Penguin.

Krause, M. (2014). *The good project*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.

Longboan, L. (2011) E-gorots: Exploring indigenous identity in translocal spaces. *Southeast Asian Research*, *19*(2), 319–341.

Madianou, M. (2012). News as a looking glass: Shame and the symbolic power of mediation. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, *15*(1), 3–16.

Madianou, M. (2013). Ethics of mediation and the voice of the injured subject. In N. Couldry, M.

Madianou, & A. Pinchevski (Eds.), *Ethics of media* (pp. 178–197). London, UK: Palgrave.

Madianou, M., & Miller, M. (2013). Polymedia: Towards a new theory of digital media in interpersonal communication. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, *16*(2), 169–187.

Mayer, V. (2014). Signs of home. *Public Culture, 26*(3), 369–377.

McKay, D. (2012). *Global Filipinos.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Meier, P. (2015). *Digital humanitarians*. London, UK: CRC Press.

Miller, D. (1998) Introduction: Why some things matter. In D. Miller (Ed.), *Material Cultures* (pp. 3–24). London, UK: UCL Press.

Miller, D., & Slater, D. (2000). *The Internet: An ethnographic approach*. Oxford, UK: Berg.

Mouzelis, N. (1978). Class and clientelistic politics. *Sociological Review, 26*(3), 471–497.

Murthy, D., & Longwell, S. (2013). Twitter and disasters: The uses of Twitter in the 2010 Pakistan floods. *Information, Communication & Society, 16*(6), 837–855.

Nussbaum, M. (2001). *Upheavals of thought*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Ong, J. C. (2015). *The poverty of television: The mediation of suffering in class-divided Philippines*. London, UK: Anthem Press.

Rafael, V. (1990). Patronage and pornography: Ideology and spectatorship in the Marcos years. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *32*(2), 282–304.

Ricoeur, P. (1984). *Time and narrative*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.

Sennett, R., & Cobb, J. (1972). *The hidden injuries of class*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Starbird, K. & Palen, L. (2011). Voluntweeters: Self-organising by digital volunteers in times of crisis.

Proceedings of the ACM 2011 Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI 2011).

Vancouver, CA.

Skeggs, B. (1997). *Formations of class and gender: Becoming respectable*. London, UK: SAGE Publications.

Tacchi, J. (2008). Voice and poverty. *Media and Development*, *1,* 12–15.

Tacchi, J. (2011). Open content creation: The issue of voice and the challenges of listening. *New Media & Society*, *14*(4), 652–668.

Tufte, T, & Mefalopulos, P. (2009). *Participatory communication: A practical guide.* World Bank Working Paper 170. Washington, DC: World Bank.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2013). *Humanitarianism in the network age.* OCHA Policy and Studies Series. New York: Author.

Werrlein, D. (2004). Legacies of the "innocent" frontier: Failed memory and the infantilized Filipina expatriate in Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*. *Journal of Asian American Studies, 7*(1), 27–50.

World Disasters Report. (2013). *Technology and the future of humanitarian action*. Geneva, Switzerland: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.