

Divided disasters: examining the impacts of the conflict–disaster nexus for distanced crises in the Philippines

Jessica Field Assistant Professor, O.P. Jindal Global University, India

‘Divided disasters’ are conflicts and natural hazard-induced disasters that occur simultaneously, but in different locations within the same national boundaries. They will place pressure on the same national governance structures, will draw on the same international and national humanitarian resources, and therefore can mutually reinforce the challenges and risks faced by affected populations. Yet, as this paper argues, the impacts do not originate in the direct interaction of these two variables. Rather, they derive, in part, from the management of humanitarian responses to them—namely, through the reprioritisation of attention and the redeployment of resources as driven by the imperatives of ‘the good project’. Using a case study of the Philippines, and the parallel emergencies of Typhoon Haiyan (one of the strongest tropical cyclones on record) and the spike in violence in Mindanao in 2013, this paper explores the organisational motivators of humanitarian responses to divided disasters, and assesses their implications for affected populations.

Keywords: aid effectiveness, conflict, disaster, humanitarianism, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the Philippines

Introduction

There has been a surge of academic and policy literature in recent years on the effects of the conflict–disaster nexus, which captures the linkages between conflicts, natural hazard-induced disasters, and the types of humanitarian responses that should be mobilised when these events occur simultaneously (see, for example, Brancati, 2007; Le Billon and Waizenegger, 2007; Hyndman, 2011; UNDP, 2011; Peters and Budimir, 2016). This focus has been strengthened by the increased attention paid to a number of recent rapid-onset disasters that have happened in conflict zones, or fragile contexts, such as the floods in rural Somalia and in the Kashmir Valley, India, in 2009 and 2014, respectively, as well as the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 (Brancati, 2007; UNDP, 2011; Peters and Budimir, 2016).

When analysing the ramifications of the conflict–disaster nexus, the literature tends to pursue three main avenues of enquiry, exploring: (i) whether disasters cause or exacerbate conflict (Brancati, 2007; Eastin, 2016; Peters and Budimir, 2016); (ii) if they offer new opportunities for conflict resolution (Gaillard, Clave, and Kelman, 2008; Kelman, 2011; Zeccola, 2011; Kreutz, 2012); or (iii) the effects of the conflict–disaster interface on people’s lives and vulnerabilities (Le Billon and Waizenegger, 2007; Walch, 2014). Within much of the discussion, there is a recognition of the way

in which conflict and disasters can be mutually reinforcing, in that conflict and fragility can turn an environmental hazard into a disaster, or, in a context of conflict or chronic violence, disasters can ‘exacerbate the challenges people already face and create new risks’ (Mitra and Vivekananda, 2015, p. 1). Nevertheless, these tracks of enquiry tend to miss a key area of interrogation: what are the impacts of a simultaneous conflict and natural hazard-induced disaster, when they occur in *different* locations within the same state?

These events are termed here ‘divided disasters’,¹ which must be considered as part of the conflict–disaster nexus. This is because, more often than not, a simultaneous, but distanced, conflict and natural disaster will place pressure on the *same* national governance structures, will draw on the *same* international and national humanitarian resources, and therefore can *mutually reinforce* the challenges and risks faced by affected populations.

Considering ‘divided disasters’ as mutually reinforcing phenomena raises some interesting questions about vulnerability and responsibility. While dual disasters in the same locale invite immediate analysis of the consequences of the crises (in other words, the disaster and the conflict) and how these events, and their associated responses, directly interact with each other to spawn or exacerbate challenges and vulnerabilities (Waizenegger and Hyndman, 2010; Zeccola, 2011), divided disasters invite immediate analysis of the *responses*, and how the redeployment of resources to one event may spawn or exacerbate challenges in the other. This is because, in a context of divided disasters, the disaster and the conflict do not directly interact. Two significant ways in which a conflict-affected population can be affected by a natural hazard-induced disaster that happens elsewhere, or vice versa, are the redeployment of attention and resources from the emergency and/or the destruction of the governance structures that govern both territories, causing disruption (through, for instance, the deaths of senior officials or the disruption of central government services).²

This paper is particularly interested in probing the former point: what are the implications of attention and resource (re)deployment in the light of divided disasters? What drives this redirection and how does it influence the vulnerabilities of the affected population? These are questions that concentrate on the role of the humanitarian system in heightening the challenges confronted by divided disaster-affected populations, and thus will offer a new way of looking at certain conflict–disaster connections.

To explore this point, the paper builds on emerging research on organisational agenda-setting in the international humanitarian system and looks at how dominant norms, especially framings of ‘humanitarian effectiveness’ (Fiori et al., 2016), determine the wider parameters of a response when crises occur simultaneously. It asserts that the dominant ‘humanitarian effectiveness agenda’ has created perverse incentives for agenda-setting, which have not only pushed international humanitarian organisations into competing with each other in the ‘humanitarian marketplace’ for funds (Cooley and Ron, 2002), but also have pitted humanitarian crises against each other in terms of whether they can improve an organisation’s ‘reach’, ‘visibility’,

and ‘impact’ (Kapoor, 2013; Fiori et al., 2016). In distanced conflict and disaster emergencies in the same state, this essentially pits the conflict against the disaster, with potentially significant effects on the vulnerabilities of affected and interconnected communities on either side.

The paper begins by contextualising the development of the humanitarian effectiveness agenda in order to construct a lens with which to analyse divided disasters. To do so it draws on literature that bridges humanitarian studies and organisational analysis (see, for example, Ferguson, 1990; Natsios, 2010; Wong, 2012; Orgad, 2013; Krause, 2014; Fiori et al., 2016). More specifically, it builds on the recent work of Monika Krause (2014), who has examined what shapes ‘the good project’ in head office imaginations of a crisis, and Juliano Fiori et al. (2016), who examine the influence of neo-managerialism and business sector principles on humanitarian agenda-setting. These scholars, like this author, argue that: humanitarian effectiveness has increasingly become equated with efficiency, particularly cost-efficiency; interventions are driven by donor imperatives to show value for money; there is diminishing engagement with the politics of a crisis; and competition for funding has resulted in the prioritisation of risk aversion in complex emergencies (Natsios, 2010; Krause, 2014; Fiori et al., 2016; Field, 2017; Valters and Whitty, 2017). A consequence of these developments has been an encouragement of projects that are easy to sell (to donors or taxpayers) and easy to measure (enabling a show of success).

With the frame set, the paper uses it to analyse briefly conflict–disaster contexts where these two forms of crisis are intersecting in the same space: Indonesia (Aceh) and Sri Lanka after the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 (Le Billon and Waizenegger, 2007; Waizenegger and Hyndman, 2010; Hyndman, 2011; Zeccola, 2011). Here, the paper (re)articulates arguments concerning how organisational priorities, including response visibility and donor accountability (central to ‘the good project’ and the humanitarian effectiveness agenda), led to a side-lining of protection programming for conflict-affected populations in favour of relief for those impacted by the tsunami.

The second section of the paper aims to raise a set of questions pertinent for the third section: if one can discern clear asymmetrical priority setting in a context where disasters and conflict collide geographically, what happens when they occur simultaneously but not in the same location? What are the additional effects of that distance?

The third section teases out the implications of these questions via a case study of the Philippines following conflict-induced displacement in Mindanao in September 2013 and Typhoon Haiyan in November 2013.³ In particular, it examines the extent to which the humanitarian response to the typhoon drew resources (financial and human) away from Mindanao based on dominant understandings of effectiveness, and what the implications of that diversion might have been for protection and human security in the conflict-affected area. This raises a new set of questions for the scholarly debate on the conflict–disaster nexus, as it highlights the need to consider vulnerability beyond the proximate conflict–disaster crisis/crises, and to look at the effect of humanitarian responses on aggravating crises elsewhere through the resource (re)allocation that materialises in pursuit of ‘the good project’.

Methodology

As part of Save the Children UK and the University of Manchester's Humanitarian Effectiveness Project (Espada, 2016; Fiori et al., 2016), field research was undertaken in the Philippines between January and February 2015 to appraise understandings of humanitarian effectiveness in response to Typhoon Haiyan. Interviews were conducted in Manila (the capital), Tacloban (in the Eastern Visayas region, one of the worst-hit areas), and Ormoc (a city also in the Eastern Visayas and majorly affected by the typhoon). They included four village community group discussions, two focus group discussions with international non-governmental organisation (INGO) workers in-country, and 45 individual/small group interviews with foreign aid workers, Filipino aid workers, local government officials, academics based at the University of the Philippines, and a range of individuals affected by the typhoon (Field, 2016, 2017).

The second phase of the project examined the relation between Typhoon Haiyan and the spike in conflict in Mindanao in 2013, an initiative sparked by interviewees for the above project discussing the situation in Zamboanga and Basilan in the light of Haiyan. To inform the analysis, a substantial desk review was performed of United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and INGO situation reports, policy documents, and organisational analyses relating to the Zamboanga and Basilan conflict, which were published between September 2013 and December 2014.

The Humanitarian effectiveness agenda and the search for 'the good project'

Some recipients are easier to help than others, and those who are hardest to help often receive no help at all (Krause, 2014, p. 41).

Humanitarian agencies have long been subject to, and have shaped in turn, modern organisational imperatives, including: bureaucratisation; competition for funding; marketing for enhanced visibility; professionalisation for improved efficiency; and supply chain management for logistical effectiveness (Lindenberg, 2001; Cooley and Ron, 2002; Orgad, 2013; Wakolbinger and Toyasaki, 2014; Fiori et al., 2016). A burgeoning body of literature has begun to tease out the ways in which these structures, systems, and working cultures are not just affecting management at headquarters, but also are influencing and determining policy and programming decisions in the field (Wong, 2012; Hopgood, 2013). In Chapter two of *The Good Project*, for instance, Krause (2014) outlines a schema of organisational concerns that influence how Western aid agencies decide where and how to intervene. Needs, she explains, often are not enough to guarantee the selection of a project, as there are other aspects that direct humanitarian action. Risk management is an important concern, both in terms of whether there is a security risk to deployed staff and whether there is a reputational

risk in being seen to be focused on one issue/location (Krause, 2014, p. 35), or perhaps being viewed as ineffective or exacerbating the crisis. Political factors at a national level have to be taken into account, too (Wong, 2012, p. 3). Donor interests in a certain state or crisis can guide international attention towards particular emergencies (Krause, 2014, p. 34), as can the expectation of access denial by the government of an affected country (Zeccola, 2011, p. 311). Related to the above, Krause (2014, p. 35) found that key concerns among all of the humanitarian managers that she interviewed were ‘making a contribution’ or ‘adding value’. In this respect, resources are important, especially money. ‘Resources depend on donors’ priorities and media attention’, but added value also depends on ‘the more mundane logistical issues that arise in the planning of projects’ (Krause, 2014, p. 36), such as ensuring access and free movement across the territory.

All of these considerations—adding value, politics, and risk—lie behind programme decision-making because modern relief agencies are overwhelmingly concerned with producing ‘the good project’. This has become the core organising principle and the primary means of helping people because ‘it lends a certain coherence to what are otherwise quite disparate activities’ (Krause, 2014, p. 23), such as booking aeroplanes, data collection, fundraising, recruitment, and undertaking vulnerability assessments (Krause, 2014, pp. 28–30). Its discreet and time-bound nature also lends itself to the formation of measurable indicators for monitoring and evaluation, which are the means of demonstrating effectiveness vis-à-vis predetermined goals. Furthermore, of course, demonstrations of effectiveness in current/past projects are essential for securing future funds. Measurability and illustration of success in achieving predetermined goals have thus become core facets of the humanitarian effectiveness agenda, and they continue to drive the ‘projectisation’ of aid.

Ideas of what constitutes ‘success’ are inevitably filtered through an agency’s understanding of its mandate, such as whether it is a child-focused agency, development—as opposed to humanitarian-focused, or a health-focused agency. Ideas of ‘success’, though, also are affected by broader economic and political norms concerning what constitutes effective aid in the first place. A classic example is James Ferguson’s (1990) analysis of the ‘Bovine Mystique’ rationale among southern African development management in the late 1980s. In Chapter 5 of *The Anti-Politics Machine*, Ferguson (1990) examined how aid managers’ economic views on the problems of cattle overgrazing and poverty in Lesotho led them to introduce improved livestock/range management programmes: a cash-focused market for the sale of cattle, new cattle breeds, and land privatisation. Their ideas of ‘success’ were market-driven and economic (to improve immediate market access and cash flows among the communities), which, Ferguson (1990) explained, did not match the priorities of the farmers’ families, for whom cattle were a long-term investment for retirement or in case of difficult times—cattle did not need to be instantly fungible. Ultimately, however, it did not matter how the farmers and their families assessed the value of cattle, as the aid managers had already predetermined that effectiveness required a working market and cash flow, and programme planning worked back from there.

In doing so they took a political decision on the socioeconomic organisation of the community (what the cattle is for) and reframed it as simply a technical issue (not enough cash flow), requiring an instantaneous technical solution (a market) (Ferguson, 1990, p. 87).

This frame and type of project was not (and still is not) unique in both development and humanitarianism, and these economistic, market-centred norms that underline 'success' have come to be taken for granted as effective aid (Leftwich, 1993; Etherington, 1996, p. 7; Natsios, 2010; Easterly, 2014). Yet, these norms are not 'objectively' effective, and their organising logics have a particular political genealogy.

A revolution in public sector management in the United Kingdom and the United States in the 1970s and 1980s—famously driven from the top by UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and US President Ronald Reagan—embedded business principles in public sector bureaucracies (Borins 1995; Newland, 2001; Fiori et al., 2016). These neo-managerial principles included the imperatives of 'doing more for less', ensuring value for money for any government initiatives, undertaking results-based management to measure success, and underlining the importance of technical expertise. Competition and incentives sat at the heart of this agenda—coined new public management (NPM) (Borins, 1995)—and the driving notion was to 'liberat[e] managers from regulation by central authorities' (Fiori et al., 2016, p. 30). Public relations became a key ingredient for success under this new regime, as taxpayers and service users were treated increasingly as customers and consumers. It was an ideology concerned with the 'depoliticisation' and 'economicisation' of institutional life (Gorz, 1989; Pollit, 1990; Fiori et al., 2016, p. 30).

Such principles rapidly became organising doctrines for the aid sector, primarily as a result of two historical developments. First, through the professionalisation of aid work in the late twentieth century, which saw many career civil servants, government officials, technical experts, and technocrats transfer to the aid sector and undertake development and humanitarian work as part of their career trajectory (Hilton et al., 2013, p. 7), bringing with them their management structures and theories of organisational best practice (Hilton et al., 2013; Fiori et al., 2016). Second, through the top-down financial governance of humanitarian aid, as governments became the main donors for humanitarian action, seeking a soft foreign policy engagement tool following the end of Cold War power-bloc politics (Barnett, 2009, p. 630).

As the 1990s witnessed the rapid growth of expenditure in the humanitarian sector—principally by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Development Assistance Committee countries which were increasing their aid budgets—public accountability of these donors to their domestic constituencies demanded a focus on the (cost-) effectiveness of such large allocations. In other words, that there had to be value for taxpayers' money in the assistance (Borton, 2009). Evaluations of 'effectiveness' increasingly became infused with concerns about budget and spending efficiency, which not only were underwritten by accountability 'upwards' towards donors and their taxpaying constituencies, but also offered lessons learned for future activity/planning, owing to the secondary nature of evaluations

as learning documents. This creates a feedback loop of reinforcement in which cost-efficiency (getting the most impact for the money given) remained a principal concern of overall intervention effectiveness.

Moreover, the professionalisation of the sector and the increased funding available for relief agencies to carry out development and humanitarian work created an aid market. This market has adopted all of the characteristics of a commercial market, inciting inter-agency competition and what Alexander Cooley and James Ron (2002) refer to as ‘the NGO scramble’—a struggle for funds, visibility, and opportunities to expand a mandate. This is having dysfunctional effects ‘beyond coordination failure . . . including disincentives to protest aid diversion and empowerment of uncooperative aid recipients’ (Cooley and Ron, 2002, p. 13). It can discourage organisations from undertaking humanitarian operations that are ‘high risk’, either in terms of physical security, or in terms of the extent to which agencies would be able to attain their goals (Krause, 2014; Fiori et al., 2016). This humanitarian effectiveness agenda, and the spotlight on producing ‘the good project’, can also spawn perverse incentives to ‘help those who are easiest to help’, or to concentrate primarily on measurable material factors on the ground, such as numbers reached (Krause, 2014, p. 38). These effects are particularly evident in crises where there are conflict and natural hazard-induced emergencies occurring in the same location. Aid money and resources can be drawn to the latter at the expense of the former, because, *inter alia*, natural hazard-induced disasters often, in the short term at least, are lower risk interventions for aid workers, are more visible in the media, and have an ostensibly ‘less complicated’ narrative for fundraising than conflict situations (Waizenegger and Hyndman, 2010; Hyndman, 2011; Zeccola, 2011, p. 317). The following section explores these points through an analysis of the conflict–disaster nexus in Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

The conflict–disaster nexus: proximate crises

The Indian Ocean tsunami on 26 December 2004 claimed the lives of some 225,000 people and displaced more than 1.8 million others, mainly across South and South-east Asia. The international response to the disaster was the largest up to that point, with donated funds surpassing the previous record (for Hurricane Mitch in the US in 1998) twentyfold—USD 14 billion was raised for relief and reconstruction, of which USD 6 billion came from private donors (Hilhorst and Jansen, 2013, p. 194). However, the humanitarian crisis in this region was not restricted to the tsunami. Aceh, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, which were hit hard by the tsunami, had long-running internal conflicts in parts of the country that overlapped with affected zones. Aceh had suffered an insurgency since 1976, and Sri Lanka since 1983 (Hyndman, 2009, p. 90).

As noted above, in conflict–disaster contexts where a hazard and a conflict intersect in broadly the same space, there is frequently a bifurcation of attention and a

tussle for funding commitments, with protection programmes for conflict victims often losing out to relief for those affected by disasters (Waizenegger and Hyndman, 2010; Hyndman, 2011; Zeccola, 2011, p. 317). In Aceh, for instance, Waizenegger and Hyndman (2010, p. 787) pointed out that there were ‘very separate flows of aid’ to the ‘dual disasters’ of the war and the tsunami, with the majority of the resources directed towards tsunami-affected populations living on the coast. Zeccola (2011, pp. 315–316) also underlined that ‘it was clear that foreign assistance was welcome in the response to the tsunami, but it was most unwelcome in response to the conflict’. In part, this was a result of the immense scale of the disaster, which saw non-governmental organisations (NGOs) ‘naturally’ throw themselves into lifesaving relief mode (Zeccola, 2011). Other shifts came more reluctantly, as some NGOs attempted to balance conflict- and tsunami-related programmes simultaneously, but ultimately had to close the former as demand for tsunami support increased (Zeccola, 2011, p. 317).

In Sri Lanka, agency staff members who had extensive experience of working on the conflict in the region ‘were pushed aside by strangers . . . on account of the latter being specialists in humanitarian emergencies’ (Hilhorst and Jansen, 2013, p. 196). The significant value of the funds being channelled towards the response led to fierce competition over beneficiaries, personnel, and territory (Stirrat, 2006, p. 13). In addition, the subsequent need to account for these funds to donors (that is, to demonstrate the success of ‘the good project’) resulted in organisations seeking out opportunities for visibility—namely, photogenic moments with the poor, women, and children (Stirrat, 2006, p. 13). The Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC), convened in 2005 to coordinate evaluations of the overall tsunami response, criticised this rivalry, stating that ‘the perceived need for quick, tangible, agency-specific results fuelled competition for visibility, “beneficiaries” and “projects”’ (Telford and Cosgrove, 2006, p. 22).

Organisational competition and territoriality with respect to aid recipients and operating areas are key facets of the humanitarian effectiveness agenda, as projects are driven by opportunities for visibility and the ability to measure results. Increased donor attention to disaster responses have encouraged agencies to ‘expand their influence . . . [and] project their competitive advantage through narratives of success’ (Fiori et al., 2016, p. 44). The consequences of such an approach, in a ‘dual-disaster’ scenario, can be diversion and the exacerbation of the vulnerability of already vulnerable communities. Jim Kennedy et al. (2008, p. 30) noted that: ‘In Sri Lanka beneficiaries were selected on the basis of being verifiably tsunami-affected, so conflict affected people were immediately left out. In Aceh, lack of support for conflict-affected people became a contributing factor to security issues for some NGOs trying to address only the tsunami-affected population’.

Furthermore, this distinction in programming is reinforced by a feedback loop of evaluations that measure success based on original programme objectives rather than their impact on the larger aid eco-system and ‘peripheral’ communities (Fiori et al., 2016, p. 44). In this case, tsunami programme evaluations measured success in

assisting *tsunami*-affected populations rather than those impacted by conflict. Even the TEC said that it did not address explicitly ‘the question of how the tsunami and the aid influenced the conflicts in Sri Lanka and Asia’ (Telford and Cosgrove, 2006, p. 28).

This raises important questions about other, less analysed (but no less significant) scenarios: if one can see clear asymmetrical priority setting in a context where disasters and conflict collide geographically, then what about when they occur simultaneously but not in the same location? To what extent do the perverse incentives created by the humanitarian effectiveness agenda affect crises and programmes beyond the limits of the headlining emergency? To explore these questions in more detail, the paper now turns to a case study of the Philippines, which experienced the divided disasters of Typhoon Haiyan and conflict in Zamboanga and Basilan in 2013.

The Philippines: conflict context

The Philippines has suffered internal conflict since the late 1960s. Fighting is broadly confined to the southern part of the country, particularly the remote islands of central Mindanao. As well as a communist insurgency led by the New People’s Army (NPA), the Philippines has three dominant Muslim separatist groups: the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG); the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF); and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF)—the ASG and MILF are factions that broke away from the MNLF. Direct confrontation between the various militant groups and the government has peaked and troughed over the past five decades, and has been exacerbated by agrarian modernisation and conflict over natural resources (Vellema, Borrás, Jr., and Lara, Jr., 2011). Relevant to this analysis is the spike in violence that occurred in 2013.

On 9 September 2013, a section of the MNLF marched on the Mindanao city of Zamboanga and attempted to raise the flag of the self-proclaimed United Federated States of Bangsamoro Republik on City Hall. This siege was countered by the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police; the ensuing battles in Zamboanga and Basilan resulted in the deaths of more than 80 people and the displacement of more than 119,000 people (OCHA, 2013a). Many of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) were forced to live in overcrowded evacuation centres with incredibly poor sanitation and water supplies. Apparently, there was only one toilet per 1,500 inhabitants at one centre (OCHA, 2013c). Between early September and mid-December, 47 deaths were reported owing to poor hygiene (OCHA, 2014a). This situation was compounded in October 2013 when heavy rains caused flooding throughout Zamboanga, submerging some of the evacuation centres and heightening the risks facing many within them (OCHA, 2014a).

Emergency management of this response was kept largely at a national and local level. The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) of the Government of the Philippines (GoP) took the lead, along with the City Government of Zamboanga. Some support was provided through members of the Humanitarian Country Team and the Mindanao Humanitarian Team of OCHA. The GoP, though,

did not issue a formal request for international assistance, and offers made in this regard to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council by the United Nations (UN) Humanitarian Coordinator in the Philippines were not taken up (OCHA, 2013b).

Some 63,000 people were still displaced in January 2014. Sixty-nine per cent of children were not in school, and there were ‘key challenges remain[ing] in terms of food, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), health, education, protection and livelihoods’ (OCHA, 2014b). Nonetheless, food distributions virtually ceased in December 2013 as the GoP aimed to transition towards recovery mode and ‘food-for-work’ initiatives. Despite this apparent signalling of the end of the emergency phase, the response continued to struggle and IDPs stayed in precarious shelters. USD 6.8 million had been contributed to the Zamboanga and Basilan Action Plan by mid-January 2014, but more than 70 per cent of financial needs were unmet, limiting humanitarian programming in all intervention areas (OCHA, 2014b). Situation reports released by OCHA between September 2013 and January 2014 speak of a crisis in human resources, repeating weekly that there was a shortage of medical workers and protection officers, as well as a significant gap in the training needs of government officers and local organisations working in all of the main humanitarian programming sectors. An OCHA official emphasised in a key informant interview in January 2015 that, by mid-2014, the limitations of the response were ‘prolonging a humanitarian emergency’.

Apropos what was exacerbating this ineffectiveness and the protection gap, shortfalls in funding certainly curtailed the possibilities of the response. A senior manager of one of the country’s largest INGOs pointed out in an interview in Manila in January 2015 that ‘Zamboanga was grossly underfunded. [My organisation] had to pull out’. This is not something unique to Zamboanga, as humanitarian fundraising for a spike in violence in a situation of protracted conflict can be difficult, particularly for private donor-funded charities, since it relies heavily on de-contextualised images of ‘innocent victims’ to mobilise and monetise sympathy (Darnton and Kirk, 2011; Walton, 2017). Private donors (as well as taxpayers who contribute to government aid budgets) can see protracted warfare and internal conflict as ‘too complex’, with aid potentially being diverted to ‘less deserving’ beneficiaries who are complicit in the violence (Bennett and Kottasz, 2000, p. 358). This is in contrast to, for example, large-scale natural hazard-based disasters, where causality in media narratives can be simplified to a rapid-onset meteorological/seismological explanation, and those affected appear innocent of blame and/or not ‘too distant’ to attract the empathy of the Western donating public (whether proximity is defined geographically or in terms of identity, because some/many of the victims are Western) (Moeller, 2006).

Funding from the international humanitarian community was further limited in the case of the Zamboanga and Basilan crisis by the fact that the GoP did not issue a call for international assistance. While money was made available to the national response through the UN’s Central Emergency Response Fund and bilateral donations, the UN and INGOs were to take a back seat in coordination and programming.

As the foreign coordinator of the humanitarian hub in the city noted, when he arrived in May 2014, he was the ‘only international aid worker left in Zamboanga’ and the response was mainly being directed by a small number of local organisations (OCHA, 2015). While not a problem for humanitarian operations in terms of experience and skills—as the Philippines has a strong history of local civil society organisations (CSOs) and Red Cross chapters working in the realm of disaster response (Heijmans, 2009; Field, 2017)—the lack of international presence limits wider attention and proscribes international fundraising campaigns, potentially exacerbating the limited pool of funds (this is a subject to which the paper will return shortly).

Nonetheless, a funding shortfall cannot be taken as a standalone explanation, nor can it be considered in isolation of wider factors. To understand why there were such chronic weaknesses in the Zamboanga response, it is necessary to place the crisis management situation of Zamboanga in the wider setting of national disaster management in the final quarter of 2013, and in relation to the organising logic of humanitarianism far more broadly.

The conflict–disaster nexus: distant crises

Within weeks of the initial military action in Zamboanga, the Bohol earthquake struck the Central Visayas region (on 15 October 2013), killing more than 200 people. The 7.2 megawatt earthquake was felt as far away as Mindanao, although there were no fatalities there. It resulted in significant displacement and damage to more than 79,000 houses, of which 13,402 were completely destroyed (ReliefWeb, 2013). Less than one month later, on 8 November, the Philippines experienced one of the strongest tropical cyclones ever to make landfall in the country, Typhoon Haiyan (known locally as Yolanda). Haiyan devastated a substantial part of the Visayas region, claiming the lives of more than 6,000 people and displacing 4.1 million others—in total, it affected an estimated 14.1 million people (OCHA, 2013d). The GoP responded to Bohol and Haiyan by calling for international assistance and requesting funds amounting to USD 33.8 million and 775.7 million, respectively. By April 2014, 49 per cent of the Bohol Flash Appeal was met (Financial Tracking Service, n.d.a); by October 2014, 60.5 per cent of Haiyan appeal funds were met (Financial Tracking Service, n.d.b). Zamboanga, Bohol, and Haiyan constituted a formidable triple disaster for a single country in the space of just a couple of months.

There was a surge of assistance at the international and national level after the Emergency Relief Coordinator declared Typhoon Haiyan to be a level 3 (L3) disaster, the highest rating for a humanitarian crisis. The announcement led to the first large-scale relief effort in response to a sudden-onset disaster since the adoption of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s protocols under the 2005 Transformative Agenda. Hundreds of international staff were deployed to the Philippines within the first three weeks (interview with a Manila-based INGO manager, January 2015). To borrow the phrase of Hilhorst and Jansen (2013, p. 196), it appeared to be ‘everybody’s

disaster'. Just as in the Indian Ocean region in 2004, INGOs, national NGOs, private and faith-based organisations, and tourists and other private individuals arrived at the most devastated areas and established varying forms of 'relief operations'. Liza Saban (2015, p. 1503) calculated that the response involved a total of 515 organisations, 178 of which were international.

Deployments were not just international. Human resources were drawn, too, from elsewhere in the Philippines, including Bohol,⁴ Zamboanga, and the wider Mindanao region. An OCHA situation report on the Zamboanga and Basilan emergency notes that 'the logistics capacity is overstretched due to multiple emergencies ongoing in the country' (OCHA, 2013e). This was confirmed in a key informant interview in January 2015 with a UN OCHA official deployed there in 2014, who described a situation of threadbare resources. Refugees International stated in December 2014 that part of the reason why tens of thousands remained displaced around Zamboanga City a year on was 'the enormity of the disaster Haiyan left in its wake pulled attention and resources away from the humanitarian needs of IDPs' (Thomas, 2014). Dara McLeod, the then Communications Director of Refugees International, posted on Twitter in November 2014: 'Humanitarians in Philippines focused on Haiyan response, as IDPs in Zamboanga suffered – and still suffer' (Twitter, @mcleoddk, 18 November 2014).

Moreover, this redeployment did not just involve aid workers who had been in the conflict-affected southern island of Mindanao since the September siege, but some who had been working on relief and rehabilitation programmes there for much longer. One manager with the Philippines Red Cross said (in an interview in February 2015) that they were quick to respond to Haiyan and 'most chapters that came here were from Mindanao and Luzon. . . . Those coming from Mindanao had experienced Bopha', which was the strongest typhoon ever to hit the southern island, making landfall in December 2012. Another key informant who worked for the Philippines Red Cross at that time commented (in an interview in January 2015): 'A key tension that is difficult to balance is that, in an emergency situation in the Philippines, for example, staff are called on from across the organisation to assist in the crisis-hit area. However, many of these were based in other . . . offices to work on long-term development projects'. While it is difficult to ascertain the exact number of those redeployed across programmes (as this was not recorded systematically among agencies), the interviews with local and international aid workers during the research on the response to Haiyan suggest a significant level of staff rotation.

Meanwhile, in Zamboanga, nearly a year after the crisis, some 38,000 people remained displaced—almost 14,000 more than were still displaced owing to Haiyan at the time (OCHA, 2014d). Nearly half of them were living in overcrowded evacuation centres or 'transitory sites' (Galache, 2015). Conditions remained poor, as the IDPs had limited access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene, and faced 'alarmingly low health and nutrition conditions' (Thomas, 2014). These poor protection indicators a year after the crisis are due in part to issues of scale and the way in which the prevailing aid system (re)prioritises crisis responses in line with dominant understandings of effectiveness.

Typhoon Haiyan as ‘the good project’

In terms of ‘adding value’, as mentioned above, many aid workers were redeployed from other programmes in the country, including the Zamboanga response, because there was a framed (more) urgent need in affected areas owing to the scale of the disaster. This was creating programme shortages elsewhere and leading to the revolving movement of staff. One Manila-based INGO manager noted in an interview in February 2015 that, ‘among the NGOs based here, much poaching happened’, as personnel were headhunted by competitor organisations and other projects to fill gaps as Haiyan projects expanded. Filipino aid workers were sought (rather than foreigners recruited from international projects) because of language skills and the significant experience that many of them have in humanitarian and development programming.

Moreover, just as with the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, many of these aid programmes and recruitment operations were driven by funding and the mandates that came with those grants. Managers of an INGO that had to pull out of the Zamboanga crisis because it was ‘grossly underfunded’ remarked that they also experienced ‘high grant infusion’ for the Haiyan response, giving them ‘the luxury of building substantial capacity [for Haiyan]’ (interview, January 2015). They admitted that it was not always untied funding, but it was still exclusively for the typhoon response: ‘we were boxed in by international fundraising. [Our] hands were tied due to the awards. . . . [R]ecruitment was driven by a grants mind-set. These grants were often short and focused on specific [Haiyan-related] activities’.

Media attention to the disaster drove much of this ‘high grant infusion’, as outlets around the world sought high-emotion stories to reach their audiences. As Jonathan Ong (2015, p. 8) explains:

This representation of suffering at its worst in global media was successful in drawing worldwide attention and help with humanitarian fundraising. My interview with an official of the UK’s Disasters Emergency Committee reported that their Haiyan appeal was among their most successful fundraising initiatives for a natural disaster.

The result was somewhat of an aid circus in affected areas. As well as Western journalists ‘parachuting in’ to secure stories of suffering (Ong, 2015, p. 8), hundreds of aid agencies were to be found working in the same spaces and attempting to brand their territory. One aid worker from an INGO sub-office recounted in an interview in February 2015 that: ‘You plan an activity to go into an area and you discover another agency’. Another, a senior manager of a CSO, recalled at the same time that there was much ‘duplication of geography’ as aid agencies worked in the same villages. A local INGO worker based in Ormoc pointed out that much of the aid work occurred in easy-to-reach areas along the highway, particularly in Tacloban, which was one of the most devastated areas and therefore received the most attention and funding. In Manila, an INGO manager explained this as ‘a battle for media visibility . . . many organisations capitalise[d] on the visibility of the event’ (interview,

January 2015). Ilan Kapoor (2013, p. 106) describes this swell in the focus of aid on a high-profile crisis as the ‘imperative to act and to act now’, which has emerged from the public relations opportunities that emergencies provide for NGOs to legitimise their functions and expand their operations.

Overall what these interviews suggest is that there was a strong need to be seen to be ‘doing something’ in relation to Haiyan, and financial and human resources were being directed away from other crises in the Philippines as a consequence. This was not with any overt desire to affect programming detrimentally elsewhere, but because, as per the humanitarian effectiveness agenda, competition for funding has resulted in the prioritisation of scale (that is, numbers affected) and visibility (Cooley and Ron, 2002, p. 16; Natsios, 2010; Fiori et al., 2016).⁵

This resonates with observations of post-tsunami responses from 2004. As Jock Stirrat (2006, p. 16) underscores: ‘Relief agencies were very conscious of existing in a highly competitive world and in the long term saw themselves as competitors for resources’. Importantly, he explains, this competition was not to raise resources, but to *spend* them, and there was such a ‘high grant infusion’ from donors for the tsunami response that competition concentrated on an area of operation and control of beneficiaries (Stirrat, 2006, p. 16). However, as noted, this spending could not be on anyone, and aid agencies were reluctant to jeopardise their tsunami funding by working with conflict-affected victims (Zeccola, 2011, p. 232).

While there were echoes of this problematic post-tsunami division—or ‘solitudes’ (Waizenegger and Hyndman, 2010; Hyndman, 2011)—of aid in the Philippines in 2013, the difference was that the geographical separation of Haiyan- and Zamboanga-affected areas meant that the impacts and implications of an asymmetrical and diverted response have been overlooked almost entirely. In other words, the potential exacerbation of the protection gap in Zamboanga and the widening of aid inequality between those in conflict-affected areas and those in typhoon-affected areas in the rest of the country have not been discussed as interconnected and potentially co-constituted crises.

In some ways, the Zamboanga emergency was even seen as an enabler of the expansive typhoon response, underlining the hierarchy of scale in the humanitarian system. For instance, the *IASC Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Typhoon Haiyan Response* states that ‘a number of characteristics of the Philippines created highly favourable conditions for an effective disaster response’, including ‘the absence of a high profile “competing” disaster at that time’, and ‘the ability of in-country humanitarian teams (international and national) to redeploy from existing emergencies in Mindanao and Bohol’ (Hanley et al., 2014, pp. 18, 67). Arguably, the framing of competition here acknowledges the fact that the humanitarian sector does not have unlimited capacity and additional resources to meet a disaster on the scale of Haiyan, and they must come from somewhere. However, multi-mandate INGOs and intergovernmental organisations do not just have a responsibility to go where there are higher numbers of affected people. As well as remaining in complex emergency

situations to address the material needs of affected communities, there is broad academic and policy acceptance of their responsibility also to undertake advocacy and to challenge dominant discourses on conflict, or generate public understanding of complicated humanitarian issues, above and beyond the relief scenario (Walton, 2017, p. 4).

This did not happen in 2004 following events in the Indian Ocean, and scholars have subsequently critiqued the impact of the apolitical and tsunami-focused approach to the dual disasters of the tsunami and the conflict as damaging to peacebuilding and conflict transformation at a regional level (Waizenegger and Hyndman, 2010; Zeccola, 2011), and as exacerbating the loss of human security among individuals and communities on the ground (Hyndman, 2014, p. 111). Given that such apolitical and disaster-centred programming continued in the Philippines in 2013, there seems to be a need, therefore, to begin to theorise as to the effect of ‘the good project’ (the Haiyan response) on human security in Zamboanga and Basilan.

The politics of divided disasters in the Philippines

As discussed, the GoP declined to ask for international assistance for the Zamboanga and Basilan emergency, preferring instead to manage it through the DSWD and the city authorities. It activated its own government-led cluster system in the early stages of the response, but then declared the humanitarian phase over in August 2014, despite some 38,000 people still being displaced (OCHA, 2014c) and the under-five mortality emergency threshold being breached six times since September 2013 (OCHA, 2014d). The UN key informant official based in Zamboanga for six months in 2014 shared his personal assessment of the government’s motivation in an interview in January 2015:

In Mindanao, the government doesn’t want any intervention. . . . There was a human need justification for Haiyan, but it was a protection issue with Zamboanga. . . . The humanitarian situation was not due to the conflict: it was due to the government dragging their feet and not resettling. Mindanao requires a political solution.

Protection and human security in Zamboanga, and Mindanao more widely, have certainly been issues for many decades. The absence of state services in the region aggravated the population’s vulnerability long before the crisis (OCHA, 2013f). Anna Strachan (2015, p. 20) reports that the majority of *barangays* (village units) on the southern island continue to lack access to civil registry institutions and the justice system, limiting their ability to claim rights. Moreover, the region has the ‘worst health governance statistics in the Philippines’ (Strachan, 2015, p. 20). Chronic poverty is believed to be both a ramification and a cause of the violence that has been continuing since the 1970s (Malapit, Clemente, and Yunzal, 2003).

Many of these protection issues, and the tension between the GoP and the local population, manifested themselves after the conclusion of the Zamboanga standoff

at the end of September 2013. For instance, there is evidence that IDPs were having their stay in the emergency evacuation centres unduly prolonged. In October 2014, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) stated that the displacement situation remained dire with more than one-half of those still displaced unable to resettle because they were in ‘no return’ areas or it was unclear whether they were eligible (IDMC, 2014, p. 5). The City Government of Zamboanga did not consider many of those living in the evacuation centres to be ‘legitimate’ IDPs owing to the conflict, but rather opportunity seekers wanting to take advantage of housing assistance (IDMC, 2014, p. 5). However, citing analysis by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees from 2014, the IDMC (2014, p. 5) refuted the claim, contending that an overwhelming majority of the IDPs had been living in Zamboanga for a long time and had been displaced by the fighting.

Concerns about state legitimacy of relief and rehabilitation in conflict zones in the Philippines are nothing new (Soriano, 2006, p. 8), and are beyond the scope of this paper. The purpose of illustrating them in relation to the politics of relief and resettlement in Zamboanga is to question the extent to which they can be considered in conventional humanitarian effectiveness frames and the search for ‘the good project’ when several emergencies are vying for resources. Given the chronic protection and human security deficit in Zamboanga, did international aid organisations have an additional obligation not to redeploy humanitarian resources, despite the scale of the Haiyan disaster? It is an open question and one rooted in reimagining effectiveness beyond competitions of scale, visibility, and value for money. This is not to say that international aid organisations would *automatically* offer more enhanced protection and more effective humanitarian assistance than, say, local CSOs and NGOs. Rather, it is to assert that a less competitive humanitarianism could help to prevent or mitigate some of the problems that come with the diversion of attention and resources, including political ones connected to interpersonal relations between state institutions and conflict-affected Mindanao communities.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the key ideological norms of the dominant humanitarian system that inform decisions regarding where to direct resources in the event of multiple, simultaneous crises. It has highlighted a culture of competition that has materialised owing to the ascendancy of the humanitarian effectiveness agenda— informed by the NPM norms of the 1990s—and the search for ‘the good project’. Agency concerns about visibility in high-profile crises, accountability upwards to donors, and impact-through-numbers-reached are reinforcing the idea of the aid sector as a marketplace. This has particular consequences for the conflict–disaster nexus as an apparently more ‘complex’ crisis such as a conflict is forced to compete with a more ‘pure’ humanitarian crisis such as a ‘natural’ disaster.

The study has built on the established academic critique by arguing how the humanitarian effectiveness agenda contributed to creating ‘disaster solitudes’ in Aceh, Indonesia and Sri Lanka in 2004, as significant resources were directed at tsunami-affected communities, often at the expense of those impacted by chronic conflict. In addition, it provides a fruitful foundation for beginning to explore the ramifications of the humanitarian effectiveness agenda for the conflict–disaster nexus for divided events—geographically distinct crises occurring in the same national boundaries. There was a clear redeployment of resources from smaller-scale emergencies in the Philippines to the Haiyan response, and this has implications for the ability of the former to meet the needs and aspirations of affected populations. The siege in Zamboanga was not a one-off humanitarian crisis, but part of a longer history of violence in a situation of chronic poverty, insurgency, and state conflict. However, the ascendance of a neo-managerial aid culture characterised by technical inputs and measurable goals has entrenched technocracy and competition for results in the humanitarian system, and embedded a rejection of engagement with politics and governance (Fiori et al., 2016, p. 69). This led, at the international response level at least, to Zamboanga assistance programmes falling foul of a competition of scale and visibility.

Reimagining humanitarian effectiveness to consider how competitions of scale can attract resources away from other crises and increase the vulnerability of other communities and populations requires a much broader conceptualisation of project boundaries, geographically and politically, as well as economically and socially (Leftwich, 1995). For now, at least, it is crucial to acknowledge that the conflict–disaster nexus stretches further than proximate crises in the same locale; divided disasters are also interlinked when their humanitarian responses exacerbate the challenges and vulnerabilities facing affected populations on either side.

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Correspondence

Jessica Field, O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat Narela Road, Near Jagdishpur village, Sonipat, Haryana-131001, NCR of Delhi, India.

E-mail: jfield@jgu.edu.in

Endnotes

- ¹ The literature on the impacts of conflict and natural disasters that occur in the same locale uses the term ‘dual disasters’, and includes settings where the overlap between emergencies may be slight (see, for example, Waizenegger and Hyndman, 2010; Hyndman, 2011; Zeccola, 2011). ‘Divided disasters’ merit a separate term as an extension of the dual disasters debate, as they encompass contexts where, through geographical distance, the affected populations are distinct, and hence national/international actors may overlook (consciously or otherwise) the linkages. For instance, there was conflict in the northern region of Mali when the southern part of the country was hit by the severe West and Central African floods in 2012. Jammu and Kashmir in northern India, too, witnessed divided disasters in 2010: a devastating cloudburst struck Leh, Ladakh, in August of that year while there was ongoing conflict in the Kashmir Valley. The Philippines also experiences divided disasters frequently, given the long-running conflict in its southern region and the regular natural hazard-induced disasters in the east and north of the country.
- ² An example of this second instance in a proximate disaster context is Haiti after the 2010 earthquake, where many civil servants died, the main branches of government were destroyed, and the ‘effect on the logistical aspects of government operations was severe’ (Crane et al., 2010, p. 33). The extent to which disruption to central government services has affected distant conflicts in the same state requires further interrogation, but is beyond the scope of this paper.
- ³ The 2013 emergency situation in Basilan and Zamboanga, in Mindanao region, arose as a result of violent confrontation between the forces of the Government of the Philippines and an armed separatist group.
- ⁴ The effects of the Haiyan response to programmes focusing on the Bohol earthquake are beyond the remit of this paper. It focuses primarily on the crises of Zamboanga and Haiyan, building on field data that specifically notes the redistribution of resources around these two events. The paper is principally concerned with constructing an initial argument about divided disasters across separate, but connected, geographical spaces. Further research must be done to build on these ideas, introducing the Bohol earthquake response as a third competing emergency.
- ⁵ Risk mitigation might also have been a factor in these decisions. Zamboanga is a high-risk context for aid organisations, as Mindanao has long been a site of kidnappings of aid workers by extremist organisations. For example, a Belgian aid worker was held hostage by the ASG for 10 days in 1999 (UPI, 1999), and two local aid workers with the Nagdilaab Foundation and the Office of the Presidential Adviser to the Peace Process were abducted in 2008, again by the ASG (GMA News, 2008). Less than a year later, the extremist organisation kidnapped three more aid workers: an Italian national, a Swiss national, and a Filipino who worked for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ABS CNN, 2009).

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