

Transnational Assemblages in a Globalized World

When I started my PhD studies in 2016, memories of the Nepal earthquake were still very fresh in my mind, and I could not ignore them. My academic investment in rhetorical theories and technical and professional communication (TPC) made me contemplate and critically think about my response to the catastrophe. I was a journalist, communications practitioner, and active social media user during the time of the earthquake. Through these professional and personal practices, I have been an active responder to the disaster and its consequences in Nepal where I was part of broadcasting news via Radio Nepal and participated in disaster relief via an organization named Teach for Nepal. As I started to rhetorically think about my personal experiences, rhetorical studies of disaster became my area of focus through which I was able to remain connected with my community and country. While I was studying the Nepal earthquake, other disasters were happening around the world. I knew that smaller countries and marginalized spaces tended to suffer the most when disasters occurred because such communities lack the infrastructure and finances necessary to respond to a catastrophic calamity. When Hurricane Maria struck in late September 2017, for example, news and information about Puerto Rico started to fill my social media feed. As a rhetorician, I started to recognize similarities and differences between the Nepal earthquake and Hurricane Maria.

Disaster research is challenging not only because it is associated with the destruction of lives and infrastructures, but also because it involves researching an entire ecosystem and its actors. Today's disaster experiences are recorded in digital mediums in the form of narratives. Such experiences, both official and unofficial, help in shaping knowledge during a disaster. Liza Potts suggests that during a disaster, "unlike prior experiences in which users marched through a set of interfaces and stayed contained within systems, social web participants

consider an entire ecosystem of solutions for communicating with others across multiple networks” (*Social Media in Disaster Response* 18). In such ecosystems, rhetoric “never escapes from world into social or the symbolic: it is always worldly, a dynamic, emergent composite of meaning and matter” (Rickert 222). As one of the actors in the disaster ecosystem myself, I accepted the challenge to understand the rhetoric of disaster by seeking, finding, and listening to the narratives of other actors. The phrase *rhetoric of disaster* has previously appeared in an article by Michael F. Bernard-Donals in 2001 where he focuses on Holocaust testimonials and traces the origin of rhetoric of disaster in Maurice Blanchot by arguing that the consequences of a rhetoric of disaster are troubling. Bernard-Donals’s theorization of the concept of rhetoric of disaster differs from my conceptualization as his mostly focused on archives whereas I extend this concept by focusing on theorizing rhetoric of disaster as a discourse mediated via various digital and nondigital systems. More specifically, I wanted to highlight people and the actions they demonstrated in the aftermath of the Nepal earthquake and Hurricane Maria and how they contributed in forming a rhetoric of disaster.

As a researcher educated mostly from a Western point of view, I had never been trained to think about the non-Western world from a non-Western point of view or understand values of such a point of view. I found it challenging to conceptualize the appropriate methods to undertake such work. Scholar Bo Wang has talked about similar transcultural challenges in her research, highlighting the need for deeply reflective and reflexive practices when developing new interpretive frameworks for research across cultural, geographical, and disciplinary boundaries. Likewise, Mary Garrett states that “speaking for/about an underrepresented tradition or group especially calls for self-reflexivity because of the insulating effects of good intentions” (251). Yet, when I began to explore the sites of this study, I often found myself thinking within familiar theoretical lenses learned in graduate school. As an emerging researcher in a non-Western rhetorical field, I had to challenge my own Western education, forcing myself to move away from preconceived notions and toward a research method that would highlight the community and its very unique and individual perspectives.

I found it difficult to think outside of the theories and frameworks produced by the “canon” of Western theorists. Expanding my

framework as a researcher, I challenged myself with the following methodological and ethical questions:

- How can I conduct research on my own community while I compare them to a community that I am not a part of by deepening reflexivity and becoming more mindful of my own biases because of my subjectivities?
- How do I negotiate the education I have received from the West and put it in conversation with my non-Western education while creating a balance between them?
- How can I move toward bridging the gap between Western and non-Western theoretical and methodological practices?

These questions have allowed me to analyze the communities' perspectives in a different light, enabling the prioritization of community voices. As Patricia Sullivan and James Porter argue, "research practices should be understood as complex actions that are taken in situation, that arise out of who we are and what we believe" (4). Indeed, throughout the research process, I have adopted reflexivity within my own research practices in searching for participants, reaching out to them, interviewing them, and analyzing the data. And I have been constantly guided by my own sense of responsibility to the world's most marginalized communities. As such, this project is grounded in avoiding dominant cultural frameworks, practices, and contexts in the understanding of disaster response. It challenges the contemporary work in disaster response that is mediated through Western philosophy, financial support, and organization. Hence, in this research, I highlight the voices of people who emerged as the transnational assemblages who, during times of two disasters, supported their communities' survival. The phrase *transnational assemblages* has appeared in research by Vrushali Patil and Bandana Purkayastha where they present a case study of a rape in India in the year 2012 and how it created affective cultural and transnational assemblages. In this book, I make this choice to create space for the transnational assemblages in the context of disaster and actors within these assemblages who play a vital role in managing the disaster response work.

To highlight underrepresented perspectives, I conceptualized the rhetoric of disaster in a globalized context by arguing that such rhetoric of disaster is an emerging discourse between, within, and among multiple transnational assemblages around the globe. I also introduce the

concept of transnational assemblages by grounding in the theories of intersectionality to rethink how coalitional actions performed globally by marginalized communities responding to their local disaster affect the global narrative. With this grounding, I argue that established formal organizations that lead disaster response efforts where disaster rhetoric circulates often ignore the agency and needs of marginalized communities, overlooking such communities' tactical and strategic interventions via networks of communications and affective engagements in both online and offline spaces. In the globalized world, disaster multiplies the effect of transnational coalitional actions by causing sudden shifts in the rhetorical situation, by breaking boundaries, and by allowing for the emergence of various transnational assemblages. In effect, I use the concept of transnational assemblage to help understand the systems of oppressions that exacerbate the effects of a disaster and to accentuate the power of the local community's response efforts. Additionally, I have used a mixed-methods study of narrative inquiry and social network analysis to complement my theoretical approach, which I discuss toward the end of this chapter. My research question was designed to look for the formation and mobilization of transnational assemblages after the disaster. The research question and the rigorousness of the research demanded two epistemological routes for my study: qualitative and quantitative. Combining these two research methods helped me gain different perspectives about how transnational networks function on a people-to-people level and how they function on a societal, cultural, and global level. And in the conclusion of the chapter, I discuss the reflexive research method that allowed these insights to be developed.

THE RHETORIC OF DISASTER IN A NETWORKED, TECHNOLOGICAL, GLOBALIZED WORLD

The rhetoric of disaster in the digitally complex, networked, and technological world is embedded in three overarching geopolitical and technological phenomena:

1. globalization that creates intersections of identities, nationalities, and genders among the transcultural diasporic communities, thus disrupting physical and cultural boundaries;
2. rhetorical actions and ecologies that are mediated by the spontaneous formation of transnational assemblages via affect and disseminated by digital technologies; and

3. bureaucratic networks of governmental and non-governmental humanitarian mechanisms which are on high-alert and they do function; yet, they become dysfunctional due to the scale and consequences of disaster that they can never handle entirely.

Unexpected disasters create a knowledge vacuum that instigates spontaneous actions across these domains through affective connections mediated across platforms, space, and time zones, resulting in transnational coalitions (Baniya “Transnational Assemblages”). Assemblage theory can help in exploring the complexities of the formation and expansion of these networks and flows of communication during a disaster response situation. When a disaster strikes, however, there are multiple stakeholders who represent varied disciplinary, cultural, and educational backgrounds that come into play. To fully understand a complex global disaster requires a theoretical framework that incorporates the varied intersections of disciplines, expertise, and non-Western and decolonial perspectives.

The creation of transnational assemblages and the rhetoric of disaster produced by them in a digital world is mitigated by “the speed and spread of the Internet and the simultaneous comparative growth in travel, cross-cultural media, and global advertisement” (Appadurai 61). The rise of the internet has created a digitally connected world that reacts to disaster in transcultural ways within a very limited amount of time. Zizi Papacharissi adds, “The Internet reorganizes the flows of time and space in ways that promise greater autonomy but also conform to the habitus of practices, hierarchies, and structures that form its historical context” (7). During a time of disaster and emergency, digital media creates an ambient environment (Rickert) by bringing people together via technologies and by creating different practices and structures that start circulating throughout the world.

Current information and communication technologies are a means for saving lives and helping people in the wake of a disaster. Peter K. Haff argues that the proliferation of technology across the globe defines the Technosphere—the assemblage of large-scale, networked technologies that can make things possible through nearly instantaneous communication and mass distribution. In the context of a disaster, people’s lives depend on instantaneous communication mechanisms to communicate and connect with other people around the globe. Such assemblages bring both human and non-human elements together via instant communication technologies so that actors

may share information, network, volunteer, and raise funds. Transnational assemblages create rhetorics of disaster. For example, the tweets, replies to tweets, and retweets with hashtags like #NepalEarthquake and #HurricaneMaria created communication channels among countless human users by fostering sentimental connections that are made possible thanks to physical, non-human networks such as mobile towers, machines, and satellites. As Jane Bennett confirms, assemblages include humans and their constructions, but they also include some very active and powerful non-humans: electrons, trees, wind, and electromagnetic fields. Such networked assemblages are material in nature and provide “agential possibilities and responsibilities for reconfiguring the material-social relations of the world” (Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* 241). Transnational assemblages shrink physical distance by connecting people via social media, shift the relationship between producers and consumers, and blur the lines between temporary locales and the national attachments (Appadurai). Those national attachments, concerns, and empathetic connections in return help in the creation of assemblages consisting of volunteers, donors, information curators, and medical professionals that respond to a disaster and help “their fellow” communities that are suffering.

The rhetoric of disaster in a networked, technological, and globalized world is therefore motivated by affect and disseminated by social media. For instance, a picture of a Nepali woman who was found under piles of rubble was posted on Twitter via a phone or laptop. This picture created an emotional response in someone living in the United States, who, upon seeing the image, decided to find a GoFundMe page dedicated to collecting contributions for relief efforts in response to the Nepal earthquake. This person sent the money they earned to support relief, thus participating in a giving culture or philanthropic activity, which was initiated due to the disaster. This calamity subsequently became a part of the collective memory imprinted in our psyches and recycled on media platforms, rendering the disaster a permanent part of our history and identity (Papacharissi, “Affective Publics” 2). In this way, the person donating the money has become a part of a transnational assemblage that is responding to a disaster on the ground. It is with the support of that person’s money, which flows through various channels, that aid has the possibility to reach a person suffering through the consequences of a terrible disaster. For that aid to reach and support the person, there are various rhetorical decisions that

must be made: what photo to post, how to caption the photo, what platform to use. With effective rhetorical decisions, many assemblages that result from affect have the agency to perform tasks that are not being handled by formal institutions, such as the government.

As such, the rhetoric of disaster disrupts physical foundations and geographical boundaries within differing social, political, and economic spaces. This disruption creates various “flows” that help in reinventing the discourse of the disaster, which is fluid and always emerging (DeLanda). It also creates newer ways for people who are very far away from the location affected by the calamity to act, address others, and mitigate the challenges of the disaster. José Miguel Albala-Bertrand argues that “[g]lobalization is a societal process that widens and deepens the interactions between each country and the rest of the world” (147). The rhetoric of disaster motivates people around the globe to be a part of a transnational assemblage by creating flows that engage people in the discourse and by connecting actors with the vulnerable locals. As Albala-Bertrand explains, “In general, these interconnections refer to the institutions associated with the flows of goods, services, people, information, and cultural traits in a worldwide context” (147). In other words, flows are not just associated with official institutions. They are associated with people and the assemblages created by them and for them to share information, to act together. For instance, in both the Nepal and Puerto Rico disasters, not just established organizations but transnational assemblages ensured relief materials such as food, water, tarpaulins, and medical supplies were arriving from all over the world. Countless people from around the globe either engaged with the disaster response efforts online or physically by going to the disaster sites to help people in need. Through effective rhetorical practices, these flows are expedited by the circulation of information and communications that happens in digital spaces, creating affective connections among people through narratives, thus allowing the “global” to participate in the “local” affected by the disaster.

In effect, a disaster initiates the creation of a global culture that helps transnational assemblages thrive and territorialize. This ecosystem is mostly mediated via computerized technologies that expedite the process of sharing, interacting, and participating in the culture. An example of such a culture could be as simple as changing one’s profile picture on Facebook to one that includes a “Pray for Nepal” frame or the culture of creating hashtags like #NepalEarthquake, #PuertoRicoRiseUp,

#NepalRises, and #HurricaneMaria. The response of this culture is instantaneous, and narratives and stories with the human element are transformed into data, voices, videos, pictures, and emotions. Data is therefore humanized, and subjectivity is computerized, thus allowing humans to join in and be a part of the transnational assemblage (Hayles 39). Bruno Latour argues that “we don’t assemble because we agree, look alike, feel good, are socially compatible, or wish to fuse together, but because we are brought by divisive matters of concern into some neutral, isolated place in order to come to some sort of provisional makeshift (dis)agreement” (3). When disaster happens, boundaries are blurred and it becomes a global phenomenon where people, despite differences in culture, geographical locations, economic statuses, and expertise, are assembled and are motivated to work together in solving the disruptions created by the disaster.

The agential possibilities of transnational assemblages create different contact zones and create boundaries where the global and local populations come together to form a collective globalized action composed of actors responding to the tragedy. Karen Barad in her article “Posthuman Performativity . . .” argues that “it is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the ‘components’ of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful” (815). For example, even though the disasters happened in physical locations, users from around the world instantly reached to local community members and supported them by using various digital technologies and the components which help in embodying the concept of disaster response. That support and its users represented both official and unofficial sectors that demonstrated agency and took responsibility for faster rescue and relief operations. By accelerating their work, communication technologies helped actors connect with people working on the ground as well as with people experiencing and suffering through the aftermath of the disasters. Indeed, Bennett believes that the distinctive efficacy of a working whole made up of somatic, technological, cultural, and atmospheric elements is the agency of assemblages. These elements allow people to connect, interact, and engage in creating ambient contact zones that include aspects like feeling, mood, intuition, and decision-making. Thomas J. Rickert says, “[A]mbience involves more than just the whole person, as it were; the ambience is inseparable from the person in the environment that gives rise to ambience” (8). In other

words, ambience during a disaster develops among people who are suffering and the people who want to support those who are suffering. This relationship leads actors to make decisions based on connections established via, and expedited by, social media. Such decisions, which are faster in times of struggle, were part of the process when actors responding to the Nepal earthquake and Hurricane Maria worked to undertake activities like organizing relief, volunteering, fundraising, and curating information.

Rhetorics of disaster initiate rhetorical interactions and actions from various sociopolitical contexts and often from people with intersectional identities across time and space. While the rhetorical theories might help in exploring the complexities of the formation and expansion of the networks and flows of communications that occur in response to a calamity, understanding the rhetoric of disaster is a complex task. It requires an understanding of the varied intersections of perspectives that are affected by culture, language, and rhetorical contexts, identities, race, class, genders including the nature and type of any disaster itself. This is because the systems of oppression get materialized in the newer context of disaster and affect the most marginalized and vulnerable populations. With climate change and the frequency of disasters in the world that create severe impacts in vulnerable communities, we need to establish mechanisms to understand not only how to respond to the consequences of compounding disasters, but also to understand how we can challenge the systems of oppression that exacerbate the impacts of such crises, especially to the marginalized and vulnerable populations. While the rhetoric of disaster functions differently in situations of disaster, the understanding of how it functions in any kind of disaster will help prepare in non-disaster situations. As the rhetoric of disaster keeps on evolving, we need a transnational assemblage framework that can help us understand disaster rhetorics in a more nuanced way, grounding the disaster response efforts and related rhetorics in the community and in the people responding to a disaster. Doing so will help us identify systems of oppression by understanding resistances, actions, and interactions amongst people.

Transnational Assemblages in Disaster Rhetorics

Disasters create ecological disturbances by shifting geographies, displacing lives, and destroying infrastructures. During these chaotic times, an ecology comes into existence in the form of assemblages

(DeLanda) of both human and non-human actors (Latour) often mediated by social, communal, and technological networks. As technology has advanced, scholars in rhetoric as well as technical and professional communication have studied networks, ecologies, and the transformation of these networked spaces. This “ecological turn” in rhetoric and writing has led scholars to analyze public distribution models of writing during disasters as they relate to issues of agency, public sphere, networks, and ambience (Edbauer; Cooper; Rickert; Edwards and Lang). Ongoing world events, such as protest movements and uprisings, have motivated scholars to study the relevance of networked connections, communications, and agency. Madison Jones states, “Today, ecology is a threshold concept, offering a rhetorical framework which indexes the study of networked discourse, new materialism, and systems thinking . . . and connotes many types of relational systems” (5). Similarly, Dan Ehrenfeld argues that the ecological turn is not a radical break from foundational models of public sphere but a deeper engagement toward how strangers enact their relations with one another via ecology, network, or systems (307). Such concepts spontaneously come into existence in the aftermath of a disaster as they circulate globally within and beyond digital infrastructures initiating communities, coalitions, or assemblages. Hence, moving toward rhetorical ecologies helps us understand how events (like disasters) extend beyond the limits of spatial-temporal boundaries (Edbauer 20). In vulnerable situations, then, “networked publics,” composed of journalists, social media users, government officials, healthcare providers, volunteers, and the affected population, conduct “networked actions,” such as volunteering, requesting aid, and donating, thus becoming transnational assemblages. These assemblages are material in nature, and, in a digitally advanced world, they are robust because of technologies such as the internet, mobile phones, and the digital social web (Bennett).

As discussed previously, the dominant version of assemblage theory explains that networks are formed via personal, social, and technological interactions. According to Deleuze and Guattari, an assemblage establishes connections among multiplicities, and it is always in the process of becoming or emerging. An assemblage is always in the process of becoming when it establishes its existence by interacting with other beings—both human and non-human. An assemblage is rhizomatic in its ability to emerge and spread. In assemblage theory,

a rhizome is a networking mechanism that helps connect one entity (human or non-human) to the others in the assemblage. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that a rhizome has no beginning nor end because “it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo” (25). An assemblage is therefore adaptable, connectable, and accessible to many people, organizations, and entities that are responding to a greater phenomenon like a disaster. The emergence of an assemblage happens within boundaries that are created in physical space, such as a community, city, or nation-state; it can happen within boundaries in online spaces, such as a Facebook group, a group message chain, and a specific hashtag on Twitter; or an assemblage can even emerge within a combination of both physical and virtual spaces. In any case, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that the process of emergence can be described as “territorialization,” by which an assemblage establishes its identity by claiming space.

Manuel DeLanda further elaborates upon the concept of territorialization by explaining that territorialization refers “not only to the determination of spatial boundaries of a whole—as in the territory of the community, city, or nation-state—but also to the degree to which an assemblage’s component parts are drawn from a homogenous repertoire, or the degree to which an assemblage homogenizes its own component” (22). In other words, an assemblage creates or claims certain spaces by self-organizing, which involves establishing rules, regulations, and traditions. As an assemblage continues to emerge and evolve though, some of its links to other rhizomes may break; within those broken spaces, the rhizome will mend by either rebuilding one of its old connections, or it will form new connections by returning to the state that existed prior to the creation of that part of the assemblage (DeLanda; Deleuze and Guattari). This process is called “deterritorialization.” Deterritorialization makes the assemblage lose its influence, such that the components of the assemblage seek other flows, or points of connection. This means that components can either join a different assemblage or they can create a new one by reinventing their relationship to other elements in the assemblage. While the current assemblage theory allows us to understand the multiplicity of society and concepts such as rhizome, territorializing, and deterritorialization, it somehow fails to deeply explore and understand how the rhetoric of each disaster is different and how in the transnational context such rhizomatic assemblages evolve, become, or emerge. Furthermore, using

assemblage theory during a disaster, specifically in a transnational context, needs an expansion into transnational assemblages so that we understand rhetoric of disaster in transnational contexts.

Thus, it is also important to consider that, since disasters and their consequences are location- and context-specific, responding to them requires first responders, which include government employees, non-governmental agencies, informal networks of volunteers and activists, and community members, to become enculturated. Fortunately, in current disaster situations, because unofficial networks and transnational assemblages are formed via interpersonal, social, and technological spheres, that seems to better acknowledge the networked rhetorical situation, cultural and language differences, thus better adjusting to the needs of the affected community. These assemblages would represent new “territorializations.” The existing “territories, assemblages, are the established and structured organizations that take the form of a cluster” (DeLanda 20). Such clusters might act in a more formal way that is forced to follow certain required protocols but that may not actually provide the support the suffering community needs at the time it needs it. Given this consideration, our understanding of an assemblage must go beyond the current research examples, such as disaster organizations. We must consider the rhetorical situation of the affected community and their ability to be agents, to respond to a disaster by holding space and by using varied available technologies. To achieve this new definition, there should be a transnational integration into the power networks of community leaders, volunteers, and responders that support marginalized communities. Therefore, there should be a redefinition of assemblage, one that recognizes how transnational communities can act unhindered by established protocols for their own survival.

The current specific framing of assemblages does not allow scholars to gain a deeper understanding of the culture, context, and, most important, the systems of oppression that some networked mechanisms can perform. Existing rhetorical and communication scholarship has focused on the study of networks, ecology, and assemblages to understand social movements, hashtag/digital activism, activist rhetorics, and coalition formations. It has focused on how a collective affective economy creates participatory actions and interactions. Oftentimes, however, varied forms of oppression are performed through similar historical networks, which are unfortunately overlooked by rhetoric

scholars. And non-Western, decolonial, and transnational scholars have also pointed out that while conducting rhetorical research concerning grassroots communities, activism requires careful study of the histories, contexts, and struggles of the affected community. Nikki Sanchez in her TED Talk video reminds us that “decolonization is a work that belongs to all of us.” Hence, we need to learn how to study and create a “good assemblage,” as Kristin L. Arola and Adam C. Arola argue. Here, a good assemblage is responsive in addressing the social justice needs of a people by enacting new functions and articulations. Such work should contain an acknowledgment of histories of place, activism, and struggle (Soto Vega) as well as an understanding of how techno-material infrastructures characterize national sentiment, people’s sense of belonging, and the diaspora (Z.Wang). Then, informed by intersectionality and non-Western or decolonial rhetorics, a newer conceptual “assemblage” research framework would consider how transnational perspectives will help in understanding the discursive patterns that are formed across online and physical spaces by marginalized communities to address the consequences of catastrophic disasters.

Transnational Connectivities: Building Coalitions across Borders

Transnational assemblages, then, formed in response to a disaster, act as an active site of critical engagement with global power, asymmetries, and inequalities which Bo Wang reminds us should be considered as “coeval contributions to knowledge about transnational rhetoric” (136). Events, incidents, and happenings force the emergence or evolution of a transnational assemblage as it creates spontaneous moments where situations are intense and require the attention of people who can address such circumstances with the help of technology. Such assemblages help in building coalitions through transnational connections among people across borders, languages, cultures, and contexts. Such connections are shaped by the transnational affect that “may involve bodies passing from one state to another as a result of transnational interactions on a computer or mobile phone screen” as well as differing social media platforms, websites, and applications (Leurs 95). Jenny Rice suggests that “affect is not a personal feeling but is instead the means through which bodies act in context with each other” (203). Affect in a transnational assemblage helps in creating flows within and among people and motivates them to take an action and develop a

rhetorical communication and disaster response mechanism that is flexible in nature. Such rhetoric, therefore, creates a space that invites and encourages digital or nondigital actions.

The idea of transnational connections that help create a space for actions replaces the language of “territorializing,” which implies “taking over,” and generates a space for coalitional building, which is necessary when addressing complex situations like a disaster. Such transnational rhetoric *enables* interventions that build coalitions across borders by using differing digital tools to establish networked connections, which aid in a) sharing information about health, food, security, and people’s needs; b) confronting unjust practices or inequalities that are often ignored; and c) supporting communities by collecting resources (monetary and non-monetary) from a variety of sources across the world. This intersectional approach, that primarily focuses on coalition-forming as opposed to solely focusing on territorializing, helps in acknowledging that those who are marginalized and who live with various experiences of oppression. This approach also recognizes that effective activism and social transformation can be achieved through coalitional thinking that helps in the formation of a collective force against oppression (Walton et al.).

Importantly, this framework also values the oppressed knowledges of marginalized communities. The transnational affective connectivities that emerge in the aftermath of a calamity and that help build coalitions across borders result in enclaves. Karma Chávez reminds us that “[w]ith coalition-building, in particular, enclaves function as a site of meaning production” (13). Such coalitions help to disrupt the traditional beliefs, power flows, and established protocols. Papacharissi calls such disruptions “[a]ffective gestures’ [that] contribute to spheres of political expression in ways that pluralize, organize, and disrupt conversations” (28). Gestures that form enclaves could be recognized as what Chávez suggests to be the center of social movement and counter-public scholarship. Technology becomes both space and medium, where affective response helps in creating conversations among people of multiple cultures as they interact with each other through their transnational connectivities to form “nontraditional” communal frameworks. Additionally, such conversations and interactions lead to disaster response efforts that involve actions like volunteering, fundraising, curating informational materials, and supporting communities in need that traditional disaster relief organizations fail to undertake. Indeed, during

a crisis, spontaneous coalitions that are formed via transnational affect and connectivities require forms of labor, such as digital labor, care, and empathetic labor, that attempt to highlight unjust practices that happen as an aftereffect of catastrophes (Leurs).

In detaching themselves from the traditional disaster framework and assembling into another, the rhetorical agency of each assemblage plays a vital role in shaping the narratives that impact disaster rhetoric. Amy Koerber defines rhetorical agency as “negotiation among competing alternative discourses, that grants individuals some ability to reject discursive elements that they find problematic” (94). Transnational assemblages do not abide by one narrative because that one narrative is typically the inaccurate, official narrative. Instead, transnational assemblages utilize their rhetorical agency, powered by the privileges of access and knowledge of how to use technology and their time dedicated to labor in digital spaces, to search for multiple narratives and tell the marginalized community members’ real stories. Transnational assemblages transfer their actions so that actors may closely listen to their communities, interact with the community members and leaders, and create a place for unidentified, unofficial, and difficult counterstories (Martinez) that deserve their own space. Additionally, actors’ self-organized assemblages exhibit rhetorical agency by displaying what Natasha N. Jones in her article “Rhetorical Narratives of Black Entrepreneurs” refers to as “a) an awareness of the rhetorical situation, including exigency, Kairos, and an understanding of existing discourses or arguments, and b) the ability, opportunity, or rhetorical space to act” (325). Transnational assemblages during a disaster dig across the system to gain an understanding of the rhetorical situation and share such understanding with the public to motivate people and the institutional system to act and interact with the affected community.

Technological apparatuses further enhance assemblages’ rhetorical activities thanks to their ability to share alternative narratives from the affected communities and the work completed by these assemblages. Cheryl Geisler suggests that the concept of rhetorical agency *also* concerns itself with another set of nontraditional contexts—those connected with media. This connection of, for example, sharing photographs, information, or videos via the internet “call[s] attention to the complex ways that rhetorical agency may be dispersed, as a series of articulated networks that connect speakers and hearers in multiple ways” (Geisler 11). The transnational assemblages’ disaster response is

nontraditional, articulated in various forms of rhetorical agency, and enacted to navigate the complex systems and rhetorical situations. Carolyn Miller has argued that such agency is a property of the rhetorical event, and, disaster becomes the event that motivates people to move beyond their regular life and toward showcasing their rhetorical capacity to perform across geographical boundaries, time zones, and cultural and language barriers. Marilyn Cooper argues that “complex systems (an organism, a matter of concern) are self-organizing: order (and change) results from an ongoing process in which multitude of agents interact frequently and which the results of interactions feed back into process” (421). Some examples of rhetorical agencies displayed by the actors involved in disaster response efforts included not waiting for the government before beginning to help each other, joining or forming groups to self-organize rescue and relief work, motivating themselves to save lives and support people in need, and creating opportunities for outsiders to make donations by using assorted technologies. As Cooper further notes, actors, or agents, are entities that act; by virtue of their action, actors necessarily bring about changes, and such actions during a disaster can come in the form of highlighting inequalities, decentralizing aid, raising funds, and curating information. This becomes important in disaster response as various issues of social justice arise during a disaster, and transnational assemblages could establish themselves as a force to challenge the systems that disregard community needs and well-being.

Intersections of Communities and Identities

Transnational assemblages are characterized by intersections of communities, cultural identities, and global cultural flows, which is why the theory of transnational assemblages should be grounded in the theory of intersectionality. The grounding in intersectionality helps us perceive that social problems and injustices, along with race, gender, caste, and sexuality, are interconnected with each other (Crenshaw, Collins). The intersectional approach to disaster response helps in understanding advocacy and activism that create room for coalitions across different positionalities, geographies, cultures, and contexts (Yam). Transnational assemblages are formed via the interconnections of culture, identities, and groups of people who are invested in supporting communities in need. Despite differences, transnational assemblages come together by recognizing the interconnectedness of

people, social problems, and ideas, which intersectionality helps recognize as a form of critical inquiry and praxis (Collins). Given that this critical inquiry and praxis typically forms spontaneously in a complex environment and situation, transnational assemblages help when examining the interlocking networks of power that influence disaster response efforts, the circulation of disaster discourse, and the relationship among disaster responders, humanitarian actors, governmental networks, and volunteers (Yam). Disaster response can never be achieved with one sole actor, organization, or community; it requires the involvement of multiple organizations, people, and actors across the globe. Hence, disaster response is chaotic and complex. Approaching this work from an intersectional point of view helps in identifying alternative perspectives that recognize how a disaster instigates social problems with deeper roots that should be handled with nuanced critical inquiry and problem-solving approaches. In the context of Nepal, for example, I found that social problems involving caste and geographical location were exacerbated by the earthquake. The same can be said for Black communities, women, the elderly, and people living in remote locations throughout Puerto Rico in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria.

Transnational assemblages bring people from different cultural contexts, language abilities, perspectives, places, and times together in a space where intersectionality enables them to share points of view that are formerly forbidden, outlawed, or simply obscured, creating a platform where uncomfortable conversations can occur. Therefore, transnational assemblages become that space where difficult conversations have a chance to take place, and they create an opportunity for such conversations to be addressed and acknowledged. As we think about transcultural spaces from a non-Western perspective, we can see how global forces create these spaces by circulating information, messages, and collective challenges (Appadurai). In these spaces, what Arjun Appadurai calls “production of localities,” human beings exercise their social, technical, and imaginative capacities, including the capacity for violence, warfare, and ecological selfishness (66). In extending such capacities, various transcultural forces unite to work against the systematic violence or warfare present in a community affected by a disaster. Such connections are established via affective emotions that become a global force, disrupting the systems of oppression, injustices, and marginalization.

While transnational assemblages can form transnational connectivities, they can also disconnect. To disconnect, these assemblages either quickly disperse and expand their space for multiplicity or they simply remove themselves, seizing to exist. This phenomenon replaces the idea of deterritorializing. Potts argues that the communities that form in the wake of a disaster quickly disperse. This idea of disconnections helps in identifying patterns from which connections are established, how such connections lose their significance, how they become disconnected, and how they once again reconnect. In a disaster, connections are established based on the immediate needs of the afflicted community. As that immediate need is satisfied, that connection loses its significance until it completely disconnects once the need is entirely satisfied. However, beyond the immediate needs of the community, there are also other larger needs that must be addressed. While this book only concerns itself with the urgency in which transnational assemblages are formed, what happens after the disconnection and urgent needs are met and the community is going through recovery and reconstruction is something that scholars can explore.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH: MIXED-METHODS APPROACH

Achieving the research goals contained in the concept of “transnational assemblages” ultimately comes down to a question of research methodology. Any methodology chosen would require consideration of what socially just and culturally appropriate approach could be used to explore such transnational events, people, and work. Traditionally, when researching underrepresented groups, individuals, and spaces, researchers tend to be self-reflexive about their academic training, their cultural background, and how this background might affect the people and the contexts they are researching. As a researcher invested in community work, I also chose to adopt a self-reflexive methodology that would produce unbiased research concerning two different marginalized communities while simultaneously negotiating my own training in the Western institution with my upbringing and years of professional field work as a journalist and communications practitioner in the non-Western context in Nepal. Furthermore, my lived experiences as a disaster responder in the role as a journalist, and communications practitioner and as a PhD holder are also entangled in this research. Yet, Chanon Adsanatham argues that “the reflexive act [allows] for

troubling our own mode of thinking through comparative analysis that critically attends to historicity, specificity, and incongruity in our own tradition and others” (77). Hence, in methodologically conducting this research, I have been aware of my standpoint on highlighting marginalized experiences in disaster response and my subjectivities that come from my cultural, professional, and educational background as a researcher and also a disaster responder.

Through reflexivity, then, I trouble my own thinking and constantly push myself when making methodological decisions in collecting, analyzing, and writing about the data concerning these two communities. I constantly approach the work in a way that highlights the participants and their stories, rather than me and my subjectivities. I took a long way around this approach where I learned from my past work and approaches as a practitioner. I have told this story elsewhere (Baniya et al.). For this book project, I wanted to do radically different things to prioritize people’s voices and stories, and since I have more autonomy in my own research project, this was possible. From the very beginning of this project, however, I wanted to work and conduct this research with self-reflexivity. Hence, it was important in this research to avoid the surface-level analysis. Here, in each participant’s story that I have collected, I have provided them space to tell their stories. And I wanted the theory to develop from the stories rather than an application of any theoretical framework.

Beyond self-reflection, my methodological intervention included both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Combined, these methods allowed me to gain a nuanced understanding of how to listen to and represent marginalized voices while also analyzing a large data set that showcased the work of those transnational actors. That is, the goal of this mixed-methods approach was to feature community voices in the form of narratives and to then visualize transnational actions from around the world. John W. Creswell and Viki L. Plano Clark state that a mixed-methods approach uses a combination of methods, research design, and philosophical orientations to collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative data rigorously in response to research questions. A mixed-methods approach, therefore, integrates two forms of data (quantitative and qualitative) and their results (how transnational networks function on a people-to-people level and how they function on a societal, cultural, and global level). I chose mixed-methods to provide space to cultivate reflexivity in data collection, analysis, and writing. In the following sections, I describe both of my

methods as well as my strategies for data collection and analysis and end with limitations of the study and conclusion.

Qualitative Research: Narrative Inquiry

Here, my focus was to understand the experiences of disaster responders who actively participated in community work during the Nepal earthquake and Hurricane Maria. To understand the community members' work and contributions, I conducted a narrative inquiry (See Appendix C for guiding questions) as this method provides a holistic view of social phenomena while ceding agency to the research participants so that they may narrate their own stories (Watkins and Gioia). It is important to represent the lived experiences of people who have contributed their time and energy to supporting others, not to mention the value such experiences have when conducting community-based research. Narrative inquiry allowed what Natasha N. Jones refers to as the "unique sensitivity to participants' epistemological and ontological perspectives by tapping into their lived experiences" ("Rhetorical Narratives" 327). With this in mind, I worked to listen to the in-depth description of my participants' experiences, gathered their stories, and analyzed their motivations and the work that they did for their community during the Nepal earthquake and Hurricane Maria.

As someone who experienced the Nepal earthquake, I have an emotional connection to my hometown and my own personal opinions as well as bias regarding the interpretation of the event and the global response. To overcome these challenges, I tried to rely on the eyewitness accounts of my participants, as well as objective research that was conducted on the event. While acknowledging my personal bias, I have tried to become as objective as possible to avoid interpreting my data based on my personal opinion. Instead, I did my best to allow my data to reveal the themes themselves. Puerto Rico was a completely new area for me. I wasn't part of the Puerto Rican community and had very limited in-depth knowledge of the cultures and histories of its communities. Moreover, I experienced a language barrier, since some of my interviewees spoke only Spanish. To understand the culture of the community, I allowed the participants to tell me their stories. Conversations with them about the social, cultural, political, and religious contexts of Puerto Rico helped me understand the communities. Moreover, as someone who is always concerned about Western researchers interpreting and imposing their definitions onto

Nepal and Nepali culture, I wanted to avoid conducting my research in ways that interpret Puerto Rico from an outsider's point of view. Recognizing that I am an outsider in their community, I again relied on my participants' narratives and tried to analyze those narratives as objectively as possible without any preconceived notions. While interpreting these interviews, I also made comparisons between two different countries and contexts. To make my comparison unbiased, I again went back to comparative rhetorics and the idea of self-reflexivity (Mao et al.). Comparative rhetorics offers a method for making comparisons between two different cultures, creating a common context by putting both cultures side by side and not making one superior to the other. While comparative rhetorics have mostly analyzed ancient texts, with the same grounding, I worked with very different data sets. Here, self-reflexivity allows researchers to think deeply about their methods and analyses and avoid imposing their personal understanding on the interpretation of the behaviors of the cultures they aren't a part of.

As part of this IRB-approved research, I interviewed 28 participants, of which 14 had experiences with the Nepal earthquake and 14 had experiences with Hurricane Maria. Some of the interviews were conducted via Skype. To find participants for this research, I searched publicly available social media profiles, reached out to potential participants, and relied on my contacts to recommend other possible contacts, thus using the snowball sampling method. Once I had gathered all of my contacts, I invited online and offline activists, government representatives, community leaders, community-based organizations, and members of the Nepali and Puerto Rican diaspora to the interview. All my participants had a direct involvement in performing networked activities, disaster relief work, and crisis communications work during the two disasters. They were activists, journalists, non-governmental organization (NGO) workers, government representatives, students, teachers, and members of a diaspora. It was important to me to include women participants; thus, half of the participants were female and half were male.

The interviews were conducted in English, Nepali, and Spanish. In these interviews, which lasted 45 to 90 minutes each, my goal was to listen, record, and understand the narratives of the participant. Interviewing diverse individuals provided me with varied and unique perspectives on how disaster response was conducted from the official and unofficial sectors. The interviews provided the participants with a

platform, and oftentimes, as they shared their stories, the interviews became intense and emotional, making it difficult for me to maintain the researcher and participant boundaries. Each interview became an informal sharing of stories, experiences, and the work that my participants did during the time of the disaster. All the recorded interviews were transcribed, and a qualitative data analysis was conducted via NVivo for Mac. NVivo is a qualitative data analysis application that allows for the scientific coding of interview-based research. I used NVivo because of its efficiency. NVivo provided me with a space to organize, store, and retrieve the qualitative data that I collected for my project. Moreover, NVivo provided me with data management, query, and visualization tools. As part of the IRB approval, I am not allowed to provide a name or a pseudonym for the participants. Using “participants” in the text that follows, however, should be seen as a failure to recognize their profound individual and collective humanity.

In making the methodological choice for this study, I carefully chose my participants who were part of the transnational crisis publics in order to highlight their work in supporting the communities that suffered through disaster in both Nepal and Puerto Rico. As such, all the participants had access to a phone, computer, and internet as well as language proficiency and educational abilities that helped them advocate on behalf of their communities. Highlighting their work is important for this research as they represent and provide alternative narratives of the marginalized community, their needs, and their suffering, which often were ignored by the governmental and big humanitarian actors. These participants, whom I call actors in this book, had access, privilege, and knowledge of using social media platforms and the power of challenging the status quo of the respective government and providing a more nuanced understanding of disaster-suffered communities. Hence, in this way, the project is limited because participants who were interviewed had an active role in disaster response through digital or nondigital means.

Quantitative Research: Social Network Analysis

For my quantitative research, I used social network analysis (SNA) to study the formation and mobilization of networks among Twitter users from various countries during the Nepal earthquake and Hurricane Maria. SNA uses graphs and visualizations of networks to understand and analyze social phenomena (Borgatti and Everett;

Wasserman and Faust). My purpose for conducting SNA was limited to the following:

- Visualizing the transnational networks in terms of how actors from different countries relate to each other
- Comparing the visualizations of transnational networks during the Nepal earthquake and Hurricane Maria
- Understanding how the patterns of relations have affected disaster response efforts during the Nepal earthquake and Hurricane Maria

The SNA of Twitter data from the Nepal earthquake and Hurricane Maria helped me observe the various networks that formed during these two events and how people joined or left a social network on the basis of tasks to be accomplished, as well as their levels of interests, resources, and commitments. Stanley Wasserman and Katherine Faust define social networks as “a set of nodes (or network members) that are tied by one or more types of relations” (20). Social networks are usually studied on two levels—egocentric, where the network of individual actors is studied, and whole network, where all the actors (individual, community, and organizations) are studied together (Goswami et al. 3). Network analysis typically determines the presence and degree of connectedness among actors in terms of a variety of relationships, such as information, resource sharing, and emotional support (Goswami et al. 5). I thus had to choose the appropriate platform, the right tool, and, once I had those, I had to analyze the collected data.

While there are countless social media platforms that were used during both the Nepal earthquake and Hurricane Maria, choosing one particular social media platform would narrow down the scope of research and make the study very specific. Twitter was one of the major platforms that people used during the two calamities. Moreover, Twitter users reveal considerably less private data, and their main activity is sending tweets, which is meant to be a public message and thus publicly available (Moffit). I therefore chose Twitter as my area of focus for understanding how it became a space for transnational interactions during the Nepal earthquake and Hurricane Maria because a) it has a representative population of users from around the world, b) it displays users’ geo-locations, c) most of the data is public and easily accessible, d) the purchase of the historical tweets is easier when compared to other social media, and e) Twitter can provide a corpus of data (tweets) for analysis. I had also

personally used Twitter during the Nepal earthquake, and I observed the activity related to Hurricane Maria on the platform. I was therefore familiar with Twitter as a space where people around the world would participate in disaster response.

After choosing Twitter as my social media platform, I decided to explore its data collection methods. Eventually, I decided to purchase data from Twitter's sister organization, Gnip; however, there were many processes that were associated with the data purchase. The first step in data collection was to identify an appropriate corpus of data. There were two different options: Historical Power Track and Full-Archive Search. Both options would provide publicly available tweets from March 2006 onward. A Historical Power Track would generate a data set containing tweets that were tweeted within ten-minute periods. From this option, one can limit their data set to the specific things they are looking for, such as dates, locations, hashtags, and keywords. Thus, because of this option's specificity, I chose the Historical Power Track data purchase.

For me to purchase the data, my case had to be approved. As determined by Gnip, a case explains a) the scope of my study, b) the purpose of my study, and c) the specific kinds of tweets I needed. The details of my explanation are in Appendix A. I have also included my contract with Twitter in Appendix B. Table 1.1 displays the choices I made when purchasing the data. Because I was trying to purchase the data from the Nepal earthquake and Hurricane Maria, I explored and identified various popular hashtags that were used during these two disasters. Then, I narrowed down the dates. The start date for the data was the day the event happened, and the end date was the eighth day after the event. Next, I narrowed down the locations from where I was purchasing the data. As shown in Table 1.1, the region for Nepal included Nepal, Asia, Europe, the United States, Latin America, and Australia, and the region for Puerto Rico was only Puerto Rico and the United States due to limitation of funding. The total number of tweets purchased was 36 million tweets from Nepal and 20 million tweets from Puerto Rico. Gnip delivered the data in a JavaScript Object Notation (JSON) format. The corpus of data consisted of a user's ID, screen name, location, protection (if a user's tweets are protected), verified status (some user accounts are verified by Twitter, which indicates that a Twitter account genuinely belongs to a notable user), followers, friends, listed (if users are listed in certain groups), favorites, status, reply, retweet, favorite, language, and timestamps.

Table 1.1. Twitter Data Purchases

Location	Hashtags	Time Frame	Regions
Nepal	#NepalEarthquake, #earthquake, #QuakeNepal, #quakeNepal, #earthquakenezal, #EarthquakeNepal, #Pray4Nepal, #NepalQuake, #Nepal-EarthquakeRelief, #NepalQuakeRelief, #prayfornepal, #NepalRelief, #Nepal-Rises	4/24/15– 5/1/15	Nepal, Asia, Europe, US, Latin America, Australia
Puerto Rico	#Hurricane, #HurricaneMaria, #Relief, #PuertoRico #Boricua, #Stay-Strong, #ReliefEfforts, #PuertoRico-Strong, #PuertoRicoRelief, #United-ForPuertoRico, #PuertoRicoWillRise, #Maria #PuertoRicoLoHaceMejor, #HuracanMaria, #UnidosPorPuertoRico, #PuertoRicoStrong, #Comfort4PuertoRico	9/17/17– 9/24/17	Puerto Rico, USA

After collecting the corpus of the Twitter data, I conducted the SNA. I only focused on finding out whether users from around the world created transnational connections via Twitter. I wanted to understand how people responded to disaster online during the first week of the two disasters, specifically analyzing connections made by using features such as reply or retweet. I asked Dr. Takahiro Yabe (a graduate student friend at that time and currently an assistant professor at New York University Tandon School of Engineering) to help me create graphs and visuals using the Python programming language based on what I specifically wanted to visualize. I regarded the actors' locations as a node, and the actors' replies and retweets as the relationship or connection between actors. I have not separated the replies and retweets in my data because I considered both to be actions that describe a connection. All the actors whose geo-location in the data was set to Nepal were counted as a part of the Nepal "node." The nodes from Nepal are connected to other nodes (e.g., United States, Australia, etc.) by replies and retweets. SNA also involves creating matrices, so I changed the JSON file of the Twitter data into matrices by creating weights, where the weight of each link corresponds to the number of replies and retweets that occurred among the countries.

Additionally, there was a limitation involved with the Twitter data I purchased as well as SNA. Due to budget limitations, I could purchase only a limited data set from both Nepal and Puerto Rico. The purchase of Twitter data also took me longer than expected. This delay limited my ability to engage with the data as much as I would have liked. Hence, I had to seek help from an expert to visualize the data quickly so I would be able to use it in my research. The data I purchased is only from a seven-day time frame; hence, due to the limited time frame and limitation of scope, the data reflects transnational connections created only within these seven days. As a result, my research was limited to looking at the initial disaster response; nevertheless, the limited data did allow me to answer my overall research question.

By gathering the experiences of ordinary people who have been actively involved in relief and rescue during these two catastrophic events, I aimed to not only highlight individual experiences but also to explore the social, cultural, and familial narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted (Clandinin; N. N. Jones). Likewise, the quantitative data helped me in creating visual representations of the social relations, which I present in the following chapters. These representations offer a broader picture of the networks that formed during and after the Nepal earthquake and Hurricane Maria that revealed social relationship among Twitter users during these two disasters. With these methods, in this book, I attempt to understand the rhetoric of disaster in the globalized world, via an in-depth understanding of the operation of transnational assemblages during a disaster. I used a narrative approach to recognize my positionality as an international researcher. Using a mixed-methods approach allowed me to identify some interesting results which help in understanding both the micro- and macro-levels of disaster response. A mixed-methods approach was also ideal for answering the research questions with which I began this study.

CONCLUSION

Transnational assemblages during a disaster create a moment where people from all around the world can come and participate. The rhetoric of disaster within such assemblages creates space for people to discuss racial, caste-based, geography-based injustices and unequal distribution of resources in addition to creating pressure on the formal entities, like the government, to act. While it may not resolve

all the deep-down societal issues, such a rhetorical moment helps to create awareness of root causes and systemic oppressions. The formation of transnational assemblages during a disaster is inevitable, and those assemblages help in disaster recovery. When we ground crisis communication in intersectionality and social justice, it will help us to contextualize information based on the local context where there are many different types of intersections. Likewise, the work of actors who emerge during a disaster is dynamic and powerful. I will further elaborate on this in the next two chapters and showcase how identifying those actors and their assemblages might help in supporting the most marginalized and vulnerable communities. Understanding the work of the actors within their transnational assemblages will allow us to focus on marginalized communities suffering through systemic oppressions. Furthermore, this will showcase a path to advocacy.

This chapter covered the discourse surrounding technology, rhetorics, and disaster by locating disaster and networks in rhetorical theory and creating space to discuss how we can rethink the rhetoric of disaster and how such rethinking supports TPC, rhetorical scholars, and practitioners. I extended the theoretical framework of transnational assemblages and showcased how such expansion is required to implement ethical and socially just disaster response. With this expansion, my hope is that we as scholars continue to study disaster with a grounding in social justice and create a platform where we can discuss how our scholarship can support marginalized voices across the globe. In the following chapters, I will showcase the actual work of the various transnational assemblages and actors during the Nepal earthquake and Hurricane Maria and how they have created rhetoric of disaster via transnational assemblages that allowed them to support their communities suffering through these two catastrophic crises.