# Introduction

Disasters are uncertain, yet inevitable.

Disasters impact marginalized communities disproportionately, yet this does not need to be inevitable.

We need to rethink the scholarship and practices related to disasters.

Currently, disaster scholars call for stronger crisis preparation, investment in community resilience, and the development of technological and communication infrastructures. I intend to expand this disciplinary call by focusing on global crises and their effects on marginalized communities. I hope to disrupt deeply rooted inequalities that create severe imbalances in communication and aid distribution during a disaster to those most in need. To this end, I argue for the need to integrate the knowledge and the lived experiences of marginalized community members into the collective goal of social change. I demonstrate how transnational knowledge-making and community-based practices by these very communities tackle social injustices in the wake of global disasters. I demonstrate how locals in marginalized and colonized spaces like Nepal and Puerto Rico respectively overcome the complexities created by disasters through transnational coalitional engagements. To draw out the value of their insights, I expand the boundaries of traditional assemblage theory through a framework infused with theories of social justice and intersectionality. This new theoretical framework highlights how locals in marginalized and colonized spaces overcome disaster-created complexities via coalitional and transnational engagements. Ultimately, I argue that during a disaster, technical communicators can play a crucial role in creating a network that deconstructs the complex networks of communication with critical approaches and a social justice-oriented framework. Such a framework will highlight, recognize, and value the actions of marginalized communities in the face of catastrophic disasters (Jones et al.).

## DISASTERS AS GLOBAL CONCERNS WITH LOCAL INTERVENTIONS

A disaster shifts geography, people, and culture. It also initiates movement in space, causes various networks to form, and creates a local

space for global stakeholders to act. Different types of networked communications begin to occur. Daniel Aldrich defines a disaster as "an event that suspends normal activities and threatens or causes severe, communitywide damage" (3). Indeed, larger-scale crises create disruptions in normalcy by causing threats to living entities' well-being and natural or infrastructural damages. The United Nations Office of Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) defines a disaster as "a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society at any scale due to hazardous events interacting with conditions of exposure, vulnerability and capacity, leading to one or more of the following: human, material, economic and environmental losses and impacts" ("Disaster"). Therefore, disasters are events that have extreme, large-scale impacts that affect a great number of lives. They can have a multidimensional effect that requires the involvement of national, local and international entities to address the aftermath. So, disasters disrupt people's normal lives, but they also bring local people together to form various communities both in online and offline spaces via public discourses on the web, collective interactions in transcultural ways, and through the sharing of the affective sentiment (Ding; Papacharissi; Baniya "The Implications of"). As such, the discourses of local catastrophic disasters transcend boundaries as these disasters become a global concern.

The sharing of data, information, and resources needed to address the consequences of a disaster also helps in the formation of a transnational discourse. Catastrophic events create multidisciplinary networked participatory actions within the local and global communities such that the global community participates by responding to the local disasters (Aldrich et al.; Kim and Hastak; Murthy and Gross; Baniya "Transnational Assemblages"). Such networked actions (Castells) have been made possible with the advances in information and communication technologies that use social networking to make information more accessible (Toya and Skidmore). Going back to the history, technical communication was used in the context of World War II to explain about weapon operations (Connors). However, in the current context where technologies have advanced, we are living in a golden age for technical and professional communication where worldwide there is more engagement in these platforms than ever (Kimball). Digital technologies and resources make the local discourse on disaster reach global communities in a faster, easier, and more effective way.

People around the globe can engage with the discourse of the victims of local disasters, thus providing those actors with platforms and communities with whom they can collaborate and take action to address their immediate needs.

While disasters are uncertain, currently, inequities in response seem to be inevitable. Such injustices result in the loss of lives, displacement, and permanent damage to the most vulnerable of populations. These inequities will continue unless we take steps to change the way we understand and approach a crisis. Take Nepal and Puerto Rico. These two culturally, geographically, and contextually different locations confronted surprisingly similar battles in the aftermath of the disasters. Recorded as one of the biggest disasters in nearly a century, the Nepal earthquake created chaos in 14 districts by taking the lives of 8,979 people, injuring 26,000, and sparking a humanitarian crisis. The disaster added to the burden of existing social, political, and climate-related crises in Nepal, which is still recovering from the ten-year-long civil war (1996–2006) manifested in its current political instability. Due to climate change, millions of rural, marginalized, and vulnerable Nepalis also suffer from problems such as reductions in agricultural production, food insecurity, strained water resources, loss of forests and biodiversity, and damaged infrastructure (*Climate Risk Profile: Nepal*). The earthquake put the already vulnerable Nepalis at risk, resulting in the rise of poverty, human trafficking, and debt (Chandran). Due to a lack of understanding of community needs, difficulty in communication and logistics, as well as a centralized approach to disaster response during the earthquake, many rural communities did not receive the support they needed (Hall et al.). These discrepancies were challenged by local grassroots activists and disaster responders who, using digital media, invited the global community to stand in solidarity and help the suffering Nepalis by sending unprecedented volumes of technical, financial, and humanitarian aid (Government of Nepal, 4). Yet these voices are not part of our research or seen as part of the solution to such disasters.

Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico along with several other Caribbean islands, causing an estimated $90 billion in damages, making it the third costliest tropical cyclone in the United States since 1900 (Kishore et al. 163). Initially, the official death count in Puerto Rico was only 64. A report by Nishant Kishore et al. claimed that the death toll exceeded 4,645, which is 70 times more than the official estimate.

Much like the Nepal earthquake, Hurricane Maria exacerbated the vulnerability of Puerto Rican communities who are suffering through "an ongoing recession, insurmountable debt, and coloniality" (Soto Vega). The lack of electric power and mobile phone networks after the hurricane caused a serious communication crisis which cut the island off from the rest of the world. The hurricane, as Hilda Lloréns argues, also brought endemic risks, vulnerabilities, and hidden crises into view, affecting the infirm, the disabled, those without access to transportation, those living in isolated areas, and those living in extreme poverty (159). The hurricane also brought to light the ongoing sovereignty struggles and how colonialism, the severity of protocols, and negligence by the US government impacted the most vulnerable. Here again, many local disaster responders and grassroots activists both on the island and the mainland (the Puerto Rican diaspora) launched a decentralized disaster response effort informed by decolonial practices (Cortés; Lloréns; Soto Vega). These actors need to inform our research as they play a larger part in the solution.

My experiences from the Nepal earthquake were still fresh in my mind while I observed the devastation created by Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico. I recognized comparable aid distribution complications, and I understood and emphasized the communities who resisted and overcame the consequences of the catastrophe and political incompetence at the same time. Moreover, Nepal is a country that is facing many of the consequences of climate change and is often prone to compounding crises including political unrest, such as a ten-year-long civil war that killed thousands, and years of political instability. The earthquake further embattled the country and stalled the nation's development by pushing an additional 700,000–982,000 people below the poverty line (Sapkota). Likewise, in Puerto Rico, the colonial consequences led to a lack of support and negligence by the United States. The consequences of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico unraveled ongoing sovereignty struggles and pushed activists toward grassroots, decolonial practices (Cortés; Lloréns; Soto Vega, "Colonial Causes and Consequences"). Additionally, the demographics of each country have very specific identity markers that make people more vulnerable and marginalized based on their race, class, gender, sexuality, and, in the case of Nepal, caste. In both Nepal and Puerto Rico, the failure of systems and governmental mechanisms caused the suffering of vulnerable communities and led to the emergence of local activists

to support such troubled communities by developing survival praxis with global reach. The disasters, therefore, brought the world together to network, participate, and act and help in the emergence of transnational networked communities in Nepal and Puerto Rico (Frost; Potts; Baniya "Transnational Assemblages"). These communities, both online and offline, worked together to build their knowledge about each disaster by developing unique composition and communication practices. Such practices helped the Nepali and Puerto Rican communities in disseminating information, drawing the attention of stakeholders, raising funds, and performing relief and rescue operations. Because of this realization, I have chosen to put the Nepal earthquake and Hurricane Maria side by side when analyzing the aftermath of a calamity. My hope is to bring these voices to our field and into disaster response practices.

I believe these activists' rhetorical practices should inform our field as it prepares scholars, students, and practitioners to work during any kind of future disaster. I hope to expand upon the rhetorical discourses on global disasters by creating a space that brings the experiences of people from marginalized communities to the forefront. And I hope my comparative study of the Nepal and Puerto Rico disasters, contexts, and cultures presents a nuanced representation of these rhetorical practices by providing a grounding for understanding similarities and differences in multiple marginalized contexts. As such, I argue for the inclusion of the voices of people who have been overlooked by current scholarship, because their actions and communication practices enrichen our understanding of disaster rhetoric. And I am not alone in this call. Rhetoric and technical and professional communication (TPC) scholars have long recognized that uncertainty plays a key role in the deliberation over risks, and these scholars urge communicators to adopt a consistent rhetorical framework for navigating uncertainty. Over the years, disaster scholarship has focused on industrial disasters, environmental disasters, war, bomb blasts, shootings, oil spills, epidemics, and climate change (Angeli; Ding *Rhetoric*; Frost; Lee; Potts, "Designing for Disaster"; Sauer; Richards; Walwema; Grace and Tham; Powell; Hawhee; Clark; Welhausen). Recently, however, the focus on disasters within the United States and beyond has expanded and shifted toward studying the importance of a) writing, information design, and delivery; b) networked communities and digital actions; and c) transnational work, including global grassroots movements,

issues of climate change, and human rights (Dingo; Hesford and Schell; Kynard; Parks and Hachelaf; Schell; Sackey; Simmons). Given this shift in focus, Huiling Ding believes that there is a need for a "transcultural risk analysis model that [features] transcultural forces, global flows, power dynamics, knowledge production and negotiations and impacts of local contexts on risk communication practices" (240, *Rhetoric*).

While disaster issues concern scholars, we need studies that incorporate both qualitative and quantitative research to develop a model that better frames the rhetorical situation of global disasters. We need to expand the disaster rhetoric such that it incorporates social justice theories to recognize how local populations use technology to create oppositional global rhetoric in the aftermath of a disaster. Such a framework needs grounding that is easily adaptable and can be contextualized to understand the counter models of disaster response, aid distribution, and the community's perspective. Angela Haas and Michelle Eble argue that globalization affects three critical spheres of technical communication's influence—technological, scientific, and cultural—and in highly complex ways. Hence, as various disasters continue to rattle the world, TPC scholars must develop newer and innovative studies that showcase how activism from marginalized communities can help in shaping writing and communication as well as the use of technology as a resistance mechanism to traditional oppressive disaster relief practices. And by doing so, they can provide practical solutions to incorporate activism in disaster response, hence expanding the possibility of social justice in the face of natural disasters.

By framing technology as a resistance mechanism, I am suggesting that digital spaces are powerful platforms to showcase local voices and empower local communities during a disaster by sharing information about the aftermath of a calamity with the global community. We need to understand how these actors use different forms of digital media technologies to appreciate people's reactions, sentiments, and networks in a disaster situation. For this work to happen, we need collaborative efforts between academics and practitioners. The disaster relief industry and practitioners can benefit from academic research regarding such local/global crisis communication because large-scale disaster requires a multidimensional rhetorical approach. It is therefore necessary for researchers and practitioners to collectively think about innovative frameworks created by local activists that can help

in addressing social injustices during disasters. By introducing a social justice-oriented framework for intervening in disaster rhetoric, we, as researchers and practitioners, would be putting the local narratives of resistance and ways of forming knowledge above implementing what local communities understand as "Western standards of communication and disaster response." By using activist-derived frameworks, we can incorporate social justice-oriented communication and disaster response that will help us in understanding how current disaster relief models strengthen systemic oppressions, creating newer forms of injustice in post-disaster situations. We can also begin to understand alternative humanitarian actions that challenge social injustices in a post-disaster situation. This is why I have worked to establish theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions to scholars, researchers, and practitioners. I have also developed efficient solutions that should help technical communication practitioners, disaster responders, and technology experts respond to a disaster according to a social justice framework that serves as a guide for managing and rethinking the approaches to global disaster management.

### EXPANDING UPON DISASTER RHETORIC AND CRISIS COMMUNICATION

To explore the formation of the coalitions that conducted transnational disaster response, I am extending the theoretical framework of assemblage theory, whose case studies typically draw from Western contexts that would not be applicable when studying transnational contexts. While assemblage theory has been used to understand emergent networks and connections, the theory has often overlooked the transnational contexts, cultures, and languages within the emergent marginalized local disaster activist networks described above. In this way, I concur with Ian Buchanan, one assemblage theory critic, who argued that "if everything is or must be an assemblage then the term loses precision, indeed it loses its analytic power altogether" (391). Assemblage theory has been poised as a tool used to analyze every context, every network, and every incident. It is thus necessary for assemblage theory to become less all-encompassing. It must become more malleable, and flexible, such that the theory itself can expand in its utility. I am proposing that the incorporation of a social justice-oriented framework informed by marginalized experiences is essential if such a theory is to be used to study the rhetoric of disaster.

As such, a grounding in non-Western and decolonial rhetorical as well as theoretical perspectives is necessary to push back against the supremacy of the Western European rhetorical traditions in disaster response and crisis communication to develop a social justice emphasis. Broadly speaking, the Western knowledge-making system grounded in a monolithic worldview delegitimized other ways of knowing as savage, superstitious, and primitive (Akena 600). Such a knowledge-making system was also often considered universal knowledge. When operating in a disaster, applying monolithic and universal knowledge to understanding the local issues and challenges will be harmful. We can argue that due to the phenomenon of globalization, the binary of West and non-West has been blurred (Appadurai), which can be explicitly seen in fashion, trade, and finance. However, in cases of knowledge making and communication by disaster relief agencies, I will demonstrate that there are still Western influences of a similar monolithic worldview where one-size-fits-all kinds of disaster response and communication are more apparent and can be more damaging than supportive. Hence, in this context, I define non-Western disaster response and decolonial disaster response as rhetorical perspectives that help challenge the monolithic/universal knowledge systems and arguments by disaster relief agencies in disaster response.

I will argue that non-Western disaster response is grounded in local community needs and is informed by the sense of collaborative actions that address the injustices that suffering, marginalized communities are forced to endure. This effort, which I term *swa-byabasthapan* (loosely translated as "self-management"), is typically localized and acts as an alternative way to respond to a disaster. *Swa-byabasthapan* entails not waiting for the government, but undertaking actions that lead to organizing and self-managing events during and after disasters. It involves communities working together to achieve the goals they set out for themselves, which, in times of disaster, often involve saving lives and providing aid. Non-Western response strategies are in part influenced by local frameworks, and in part by the opposition to disaster response provided by Western relief organizations or governments. Often the non-Western actors in disaster response might be hidden because of the influences of the presence of Western disaster response mechanisms, people, or ways of thinking. While the Western actors' support in disaster response cannot be denied, this book is only making arguments for recognizing and

valuing the work of non-Western actors and working together with them to support humans who are suffering.

*Swa-byabasthapan* will not, however, be used to describe the work of activists in Puerto Rico. The decolonial context in Puerto Rico is different from other parts of the United States. Puerto Rican scholar Teresa Delgado believes that the Puerto Rican people's story of oppression and resistance must be understood in the context of their sociohistorical experience of colonization. This is because Puerto Rico is still a US territory and there is a constant struggle for sovereignty from the United States. Karrieann Soto Vega argues that Puerto Ricans and the Puerto Rican diaspora responded to Hurricane Maria via "autogestión" (loosely translated as "self-management") a Puerto Rican concept defined as a coalitional counter-praxis of survival. This counter-praxis allowed for the establishment of newer sovereignty initiatives such as food, territorial, and energy sovereignty (Bonilla; Lloréns; Reyes Curz). Soto Vega further suggests that the disaster response to Hurricane Maria consisted of decolonial performatics and communal acts of place-making. Furthermore, decolonization is a path forward to creating systems that are just and equitable, addressing inequality through education, dialogue, communication, and action ("What Is Decolonization?"). Hence, decolonial disaster response involves communal acts of recognizing the community's needs and supporting such communities by reimagining sovereignty and developing an alternative grassroots disaster response effort that resists the US's colonial power and the Western paradigms of knowledge implemented by the colonizer. Moving forward then, I use both terminologies *swa-byabasthapan* and *autogestión* to further explore the disaster response performed by various actors in both Nepal and Puerto Rico respectively with examples, narratives, and other sources of data.

It is important to acknowledge that in the field of rhetoric as well as technical and professional communication, non-Western and decolonial rhetorical theories and perspectives have come to the forefront due to the work of scholars of the non-Western world and colonized spaces. Comparative rhetoric scholars such as LuMing Mao, Bo Wang, and Keith Lloyd and others have uncovered non-Western ancient texts and traditions, which are then compared to Western texts to challenge the established canons via recontextualization. Moreover, comparative rhetoricians, while researching underrepresented groups, individuals, and spaces, tend to underscore the necessity for researchers to be

self-reflexive about their academic training, their cultural background, and how these factors might affect the people and the contexts that they are researching. In addition, Aníbal Quijano argues that decoloniality is needed to clear the way for new intercultural communication, for an interchange of experiences and meanings that provides space and legitimacy for knowledges other than the Eurocentric one (177). Furthermore, Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang emphasize that decolonization takes a different shape in different contexts. For example, in the United States, many Indigenous peoples have been forcibly removed from their homeland. Such forceable removal has led to the destruction of communities. Hence, decolonization in exploitative colonial situations could involve the seizing of imperial wealth by the postcolonial subject (Tuck and Yang 7). In decolonizing knowledge, as Angela Haas suggests, decolonial methodologies could serve to redress colonial influences on the perception of people, literacy, language, culture, and relationships, and support the coexistence of cultures, languages, literacies, memories, and having a reciprocal dialogue between and across them (297). To study transnational contexts and marginalized spaces through assemblage theory, then, we need to be mindful of how current disaster theories forcefully impose Western theories upon non-Western contexts. We too easily dismiss the value of *swa-byabasthapan* and *autogestión* in the name of traditional disaster relief methods.

It is possible, however, to put assemblage theory in the service of activists confronting their marginalization through forming collective responses to disasters. As framed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their book *A Thousand Plateaus*, an assemblage establishes connections among other beings, human and non-human, and it is always in the process of becoming. What Deleuze and Guattari fail to address in their analysis, however, is how this process of becoming spans multiple spaces, countries, cultures, and human and non-human actors across the globe. Furthermore, Manuel DeLanda defines an assemblage as "a multiplicity, which is made up of heterogenous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes, and reigns—different nature" (1). This definition of an assemblage invites a rethinking of the idea of heterogeneity, one that is informed by the cultural and contextual backgrounds of the people and places where the assemblages form. In the case of disasters, multiple communities perform actions via digital platforms, and that choice helps in establishing the assemblage's identity as being transnational. In the current

technological context, these assemblages can either be real (physical) or online. A transnational assemblage is a becoming that brings various human and non-human elements together from multiple geographical, social, and cultural spaces within local communal practices (Slack and Wise). These are moments captured by terms such as *swa-byabas-thapan* and *autogestión*.

Acknowledging these non-Western and decolonial perspectives, embedded in such transnational assemblages, will allow us to examine inequality, discrimination, exploitation, and global colonial domination in the Nepalis and Puerto Rican communities with self-reflexivity and without othering the experiences of the people of these spaces (Agboka; Itchuaqiyaq and Matheson; Quijano; B.Wang). Such perspectives allow us to expand to value people and ideas that come from overlooked communities. Thus, I define transnational assemblages in the context of disaster as collectives of people, organizations, or entities who are connected transnationally via online and offline mediums and who gather to respond to a certain situation of natural or political crisis by challenging the dominant narratives and practices. These transnational assemblages are complex because, within these assemblages, transcultural and transdisciplinary interactions occur to address the countless social inequities and injustices brought on by a disaster.

In bringing various elements together, transnational assemblages create a variety of points like a rhizome that help in creating networks to perform "transnational collective action which is coordinated by international campaigns on the part of networks of activists against international actors, other states, or international institutions" (Schell 599). Transnational assemblages therefore bring transnational communities together to coordinate relief, rescue, and community-based campaigns during a disaster by thriving in online spaces such as Facebook or X (formerly Twitter), holding space. Delanda refers to this phenomena as *territorialization,* which 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 parts are drawn from a homogenous repertoire or the degree to which an assemblage homogenizes its own component" (DeLanda 22). However, rather than creating a territory, holding space makes for justice-oriented actions and showcases a sense of solidarity. As a transnational assemblage emerges and evolves, some of its links may break at a given spot; within those broken spaces, the rhizome

will mend by rebuilding one of its old lines, or it will form new lines by returning to the state that existed before the creation of that part of the assemblage (DeLanda; Deleuze & Guattari). This process is called *deterritorialization*, which may signal the end of networked partnerships or geographical dispersion, or it may signal the elimination of some rituals, which further invites the invention of newer forms of communal participation (DeLanda). However, we can reframe this as moving away to hold other spaces.

As I will discuss in greater detail in later chapters, transnational assemblages are motivated by affect—the cultural, social, and global contexts mediating the way communities interact with one another, and how people outside of these communities support each other. The 17th-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza defines *affect* as "variations produced in the body by interactions with other bodies, which may lead to increased or diminished activity" (qtd. in Papacharissi, 13). Affect helps human beings act, react, or not act in certain situations. Brian Massumi characterizes affect by recognizing the importance of intensity. Events, incidents, and disasters create spontaneous moments where situations are intense and draw global attention. In transnational assemblages, affect helps bodies react or act to form newer ties or relationships across the globe. Affect helps to form new habits and rituals via intercultural understanding and communications, disrupting the established norms and thus leading toward disaster response that is different from the official one. Affect, as an element of transnational assemblages, could be the perception of a situation that leads to a modification of the body, which then triggers the emotion of consciousness of the mind (Deleuze and Guattari, qtd. in Papacharissi). Thus, the conceptual framing of transnational assemblages helps in understanding how transcultural communities from transnational spaces are motivated by affective reactions created by the event to participate in responding out of a social justice framework to catastrophic disasters.

### CRISIS PUBLICS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Crisis communication and crisis management as a field has been active since the 1980s (Frandsen and Johansen) and has expanded into research, teaching, and a full-time job. However, in the field of rhetoric, writing, and technical communication, though discourse on disaster is evident, there has been less scholarship that directly addresses crisis communication; instead, scholars have written on risk communication

(Grabill and Simmons). W. Timothy Coombs defines crisis communication as "the collection, processing, and dissemination of information required to address a crisis situation" (20). The problem with this definition is that, rather than describing crisis communication that supports people and helps them get accurate information, it mainly characterizes crisis communication as a method for salvaging the image and reputation of a publicly outcast organization or company. A disaster, however, goes beyond an organizational crisis. A disaster also requires communications that help people safeguard their and their loved ones' lives. In contrast to Coombs's definition, Pamela Walaski defines crisis communication as "those messages that are given to audiences during an emergency event that threatens them either immediately or at some foreseeable point in the near future" (9). Effective and accurate communication during a crisis is an essential lifesaving tool as the impacts of catastrophic disasters are ultimately unpredictable and span multiple countries, cultures, and contexts. Therefore, we need a communications mechanism that is more contextual, which is why the traditional definition of crisis communication needs modification.

I argue that crisis communication should be inclusive and social justice-oriented. As such, I argue that transnational assemblages model a form of crisis communication where transnational actors share information, messages, pictures, and data within the varied contexts and multiple languages that incorporate a cultural grounding. This definition goes beyond the traditional interpretation of crisis communication because it acknowledges the entire rhetorical situation that arises amid a calamity. Crisis communication during a disaster is transmitted through both traditional and newer means of communication, such as mobile phones and social media platforms that organizations or transnational assemblages use to communicate in multiple languages. These transnational assemblages are composed of people who represent transcultural communities and have roots in the communities suffering through a disaster. The communications that transnational assemblages perform can take countless multimodal forms, and members of the assemblage can perform such communication both formally and informally. In many cases, transnational assemblages help in identifying the gaps in communication that may be created by the official disaster response system, and they may also encourage actors to stand up for the community. Hence, theorizing transnational assemblages will help us understand the role, work, and contribution of the various

transnational actors involved in disaster response efforts. Such a new theoretical framework will lead toward the practical contributions needed to develop effective tools for tackling the challenges of a disaster.

The transnational assemblage theory that I therefore posit is informed by social justice and intersectional frameworks that aid in understanding the dynamic and complex nature of communication during a crisis. These assemblages can be defined as "collectives of people, organizations, or entities, who are connected transnationally via online and offline mediums and who gather to respond to a certain situation of natural or political crisis by challenging the dominant narratives and practices" (Baniya, "Transnational Assemblages" 4). As such, I argue that crisis publics emerge during an emergency not only to facilitate crisis communication in their respective communities, but also to challenge the privileged narratives and to address social injustices created by unequal distribution of aid or information. The crisis publics who emerge on both social media and other offline spaces can help identify the gaps in communication that may arise within the official disaster response systems like governments and humanitarian organizations. Such assemblages highlight and respond to injustices and, as such, such assemblages help communities organize in response to their self-defined needs.

Disasters are uncertain, yet inevitable.

Injustices are apparent, yet solvable.

Assemble *swa-byabasthapan*.

Assemble *autogestión*.

### CHAPTER OVERVIEW

#### Chapter 1: Transnational Assemblages in a Globalized World

In Chapter 1, I redefine the traditional concept of the rhetoric of disaster by arguing that, in the contemporary world, such rhetoric is an emerging discourse between, within, and among multiple transnational assemblages across the globe. I extend the concept of transnational assemblages by integrating theories of intersectionality to rethink how coalitional actions are performed globally while marginalized communities respond to their local disaster as well as address social inequities. With this grounding, I show that disaster rhetoric is shaped by flows and networks of communications as well as affective engagements in both online and offline spaces. I end by introducing the mixed-methods research approach of narrative inquiry and social network analysis to

frame how the Nepal and Puerto Rico case studies were developed. The following chapters then apply transnational assemblage theory to the specific natural disasters faced by these communities.

**Chapter 2: Non-Western Disaster Response during the April 25, 2015 Nepal Earthquake**

In Chapter 2, I conduct a detailed case study of the Nepal earthquake and provide an overview of how Nepalis and global actors responded to this disaster. This chapter describes how Nepalis and various international actors responded to the disaster by using various internet-based technologies and social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and blogs. I present an analysis of the interviews I conducted with 14 individuals (both Nepalis and non-Nepalis) who showcased rhetorical agency in supporting their communities either by forming transnational assemblages or by being a part of such transnational assemblages. I also present the results of a social network analysis of millions of tweets that were posted during the first week of the Nepal earthquake to show how digital platforms like Twitter help in motivating and regulating the transnational assemblages when responding to a crisis. With these results, this chapter introduces the non-Western ways of disaster response and argues that, while a larger formal global disaster response happens, various local contexts and knowledge are ignored, thus leading toward the marginalization of vulnerable communities.

**Chapter 3: Decolonial Approaches to Disaster Response during Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico**

Chapter 3 focuses on Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico and provides an overview of decolonial approaches to disaster response. I also discuss the background and a historical overview of colonialism and how such a political situation exacerbated the consequences of Hurricane Maria. As in the previous chapter, this case study will highlight how Puerto Ricans resisted colonial practices by not relying on the government and by forming transnational assemblages. I present the results of my narrative inquiry, which involved 14 Puerto Rican activists, community-based organizers, and journalists, to showcase the survival practices of marginalized communities who have navigated the oppressive systems to restore peace and stability in their society. I also focus on presenting an analysis of millions of tweets that were posted during the

first week of Hurricane Maria to show how people in Puerto Rico and around the globe participated in responding to the disaster. With these results, this chapter introduces the decolonial approaches of disaster response and how Puerto Ricans used digital technologies to respond to the crisis their communities were facing.

**Chapter 4: Social Justice-Oriented Technical Communications in Global Disaster Management**

In Chapter 4, I offer both theoretical and practical contributions to make a case for why social justice-oriented technical communication is necessary for global disaster management, and I present how researchers and practitioners can take up this call in managing a future disaster. With this demonstration, I argue that there is an urgency for the field to explore how global technical communications praxis helps to address injustices in a contemporary networked world. I further this argument to showcase how technical communicators can perform transdisciplinary research in disaster management to minimize the impacts of catastrophic disasters affecting the world's most vulnerable populations. I conclude that intersectionality and a social justice framework will help in contextualizing information based on the local context, finding various places where marginalization may occur. I also describe ways to identify and work with various transnational assemblages, create strategies to work with the community organizers, and lead disaster response efforts by putting the local knowledge at the center of all endeavors. This chapter ends with takeaways where I will suggest some strategies for developing social justice-oriented technical communication for practitioners. I also lay the groundwork for future studies and incorporate pedagogical implications of this research in various university courses.