RETHINKING HUMANITARIANISM AND THE NATION: HOW AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY FACILITATED THE CHARITABLE RESPONSE TO THE 2004 SOUTH ASIAN TSUNAMI

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Abstract
Social theory often advances post-national conceptions of cosmopolitanism as the sole
solution to global problems. In the context of humanitarianism, this paper provides an
alternative position by highlighting the positive role national cultural sentiment played in
Australia's record charitable response to the 2004 South Asian tsunami. Where the national
imaginary in various ways marginalised the other, this cultural distance facilitated charity by
international generosity being interpreted as symbolic of the national character and providing
cultural resources for fundraising events. The findings challenge existing literature in the
field of humanitarian communication in two ways. Firstly, they highlight the need for
appreciation of the ways technology and risks are mediated by cultural frames. Secondly,
they make us attentive to the enduring influence of cultural systems and the limitations of
cognitive approaches to comprehending culture. The paper ends with contemplation over how
national identification can be used in productively addressing climate change.

Keywords: *distant suffering, ritual, national identity, politics of pity, humanitarian
communication*

Introduction

This paper analyses the Australian media reporting of the 2004 South Asian tsunami

(henceforth tsunami) and its role in promoting Australia's record charitable response. At

0.255% of Gross Domestic Product[1], this is estimated to be the most generous amongst

Western nations in a disaster that internationally recorded an unprecedented humanitarian

response (Flint and Goyder 2006:21). At one level the media reporting and charitable

response to the tsunami seems naturalistic, reflecting the scale of devastation. Having taken

the lives of approximately 230,000 people it is one of the worst natural disasters on record. It

also has a trans-national significance. Whilst Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand were

the nations primarily impacted, those that lost their life came from over fifty countries.

International awareness and engagement was also brought about by the availability of user-

generated footage of the disaster, with both the immediate onslaught of the wave and the

aftermath captured and globally distributed through new digital technologies. As shot on

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[1] http://www.reliefweb.int/appeals/fts_tsunami.html

amateur digital cameras and 'smart' mobile phones, these images are thought to have provided viewers with a greater sense of 'being there', something widely perceived to have translated into greater levels of empathy and charitable giving (Chang 2006; Kellner 2007).

Yet the problem with such an understanding is that it fails to consider the multi-dimensional aspects of meaning-making. It tends to perceive that societies rationally respond to disasters and that technologies have inherent effects as opposed to their influence being mediated by cultural frames and discourses. Rather than the narrative understanding of the tsunami that developed in the Australian public sphere being naturalistic, I will argue that its outcome was contingently constructed by the interaction between various attempts at assigning meaning to the disaster. This occurred in particular through interpreting its foreign dimensions in reference to familiar symbolic representations attached to national identity. As a starting point for this endeavour I ask a number of key questions that are common amongst sociological studies into humanitarian communication and disaster discourse: what victims became the focus of media attention and how were they portrayed (Boltanski 1999; Butler 2006; Sontag 2003); did the extent of the disaster and the risk of tsunamis get amplified or regionalized (Beck 2009; Cohen 2001); and what types of solidarities were used in justifying state aid and in prompting public fundraising (Cottle 2009; Mestrovic 1997)? However, in analysing the answers I attempt to move beyond the dominant theories of humanitarian communication that have tended to assume that in an era of globalisation effective humanitarian relief can only be produced by moving beyond national identification and the construction of cultural difference.

As outlined below, in the reporting of the tsunami in the Australian public sphere, national cultural frames can be understood as facilitating a generous public response to the disaster. This occurred in three principal ways: 1) through initial media concern with ex-patriots establishing cultural relevance; 2) amplification of risk posed by tsunamis; and 3) the linking of charitable responses with national identity. These national discourses related to humanitarianism are contrasted with the individualised ones typically used by aid agencies to elicit giving which emphasis notions of universal citizenship and cosmopolitanism. Towards the end of the paper I contemplate the advantages of national humanitarianism in addressing future global disasters in a world affected by climate change.

Humanitarian Communication and Cultural Systems

Scholarly understandings of humanitarian communication can be divided into two intellectual perspectives. While both conclude that the humanitarian relief can only come about through post-national cosmopolitan sentiments, they significantly differ in the extent to which they see these evident within contemporary Western discourses on suffering in the lesser-developed world. The first perspective emphasises the role of new communication technologies and global flows in increasing our attention and ability to address humanitarian issues (Chouliaraki 2012; Cottle 2009; Nash 2008; St John 2008). Taking as a turning point the Live Aid concerts of the 1980s to raise funds for the Ethiopian famine, this literature points to the ritualistic dimension of aid generation in our mediated age and notes how this taps into a new form of identity politics. This has included documenting the influence of celebrities in popularising humanitarian causes (Lester 2006) and the centrality of communication technologies in the establishment and affective influence of new global social movements (Castells 2009; McDonald 2002). Both are seen as providing a path towards a new post-national citizenship, thought to be significant not only in providing humanitarian relief but more broadly in addressing global injustices and inequalities that contribute to such disasters. This scholarship thus can be considered consistent with the general theorising of globalization whereby the solution to global social problems is the formation of post-national organisations and cultural sentiments (Beck 2009; Held 2010).

The second scholarly tradition has a more critical emphasis. It points to the ideological role of the media in maintaining a symbolic exclusion of others (Silverstone 2006). This occurs by media portrayals de-legitimising suffering, typically employing orientalist discourses to portray victims as the 'other' (Sontag 2003; Szorenyi 2009). On top of this, various scholars have pointed to the psycho-social effects of the global electronic media increasingly making us witnesses to the suffering others. The assumed result is a kind of compassion fatigue and viewer desensitization (Moeller 1999). From this perspective there is in fact thought to be an inverse relationship between media exposure to suffering and our willingness to provide humanitarian relief. A common belief within this literature is that we have moved into a post-humanitarian era in which Western viewers have become spectators of suffering, being engaged by the media portrayals of suffering, but not emotionally moved to take action (Mestrovic 1997).

Such themes are highly evident in Luc Boltanski's (1999) influential thesis of 'distant suffering'. Boltanski (1999) acknowledges that an increased awareness of global disasters has seen some individuals willingly identify with victims and become moved to take action in providing humanitarian relief. However, this interpretive frame, which he labels 'abstract universalism', is limited by its basis in a Western tradition of pity. This sees a resorting to emotional pleas for charity by international aid agencies which inadvertently reinforce Eurocentric notions of the 'other' (Boltanski 1999:35). Meanwhile, a majority in the West will rationalise their witnessing of suffering by displacing responsibility and arguing that attention should in the first instance be concerned with inequalities closer to home, which he refers to as 'local particularism'. Although Boltanski (1999) offers no particular solution to this dilemma, in his exploration of local particularism he tends to assume that national consciousness is antithetical to providing relief and aid even while arguing that the 'crisis of pity' has emerged by suffering becoming disconnected from grand narratives about social justice. Boltanski's (1999) focus upon the individual decoding of the media is based on this dual idea of culture at once being weakened and powerful. Like others in this perspective he is representative of a broader cognitive turn in the social sciences (Zerubavel 1997). The focus in his work is on the actor's point of view in order to allow for the possibility of critique and alternative constructions of reality in a reflexive age. This is in contrast to the traditional sociological presumption "that culture is organised around national societies…" (DiMaggio 1997:264). However, Boltanski's (1999) starting point of individual consciousness sees him unable to adequately appreciate the contingent dimensions of culture, including the diversity of attention given to different cases of suffering and the possibility of new collective discourses around humanitarianism.

Drawing on Clifford Geertz' theories concerning the operation of cultural systems (1973; 1983) and cultural sociological literature on crisis (Alexander et al. 2004; Jacobs 2000; Smith 2005; Wagner-Pacifici 1986), this paper proposes an alternative perspective on humanitarian communication. The dominant theories on humanitarian communication emphasise that distant suffering can only be effectively addressed by abolishing of cultural distance. By contrast, the idea of a cultural system sensitises us to the constructive influence of cultural patterns in which any new making of meaning in predicated to some extent on reference to familiar symbolic conceptualisations and boundaries (Schwartz 1996). For Geertz's a cultural system relates to inherited conceptions of the world and their use by social actors to "communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life"

(Geertz 1973:89). In Geertz' (1973) terms this occurs by cultural systems working simultaneously as both a 'model of' the social world, something that makes it seem tangible and realistic, and a 'model for' acting within it. In other words, culture is both directive as well as a kind of 'toolkit' for individuals to use strategically (Swidler 1986). As such cultural systems do not conceive of social life as being overly prescriptive, as we find in the critical tradition of humanitarian communication where analysis can simply be focussed on the individual's decoding of the media, as Geertz (1973) sees culture as facilitating action, with symbolic markers such as myths, icons and ritual events allowing actors to meaningfully navigate their way through social life. This appreciation of cultural precedent though also sees the cultural systems approach differ with the literature on new social movements that has focussed on the worldviews of various activist groups to argue for the inevitability of a post-national global future. Where the cultural systems perspective that I employ is appreciate of ritual effects such as that in popular public protests like Oxfam's Make Poverty History campaign (Nash 2008), following developments in cultural sociology (Alexander and Smith 2010) I point to the need to avoid assumptions and generalisations about the significance of the spectacle itself (cf. Collins 2004; Kertzer 1988). In the case of the tsunami my concern is with the way such events are given meaning through their narration in the public sphere rather than through mere public participation (Schwartz and Holyfield 1998).

To appreciate the potential influence of the cultural system in the narration of the tsunami in the Australian public sphere I examine a data set of 624 articles to do with the disaster that appeared in major Australian broadsheet and tabloid newspapers *The Age*, *The Australian*, and *The Daily Telegraph* between 27th December 2004 and 27th January 2005.[2] The sampled newspaper articles were initially read with significant themes inductively identified. Following Geertz's (1973) comprehension of the cultural system, particular consideration was giving to the media's perceptions of the tsunami as established through a process of pairing "in which an object (or an event, an act, an emotion) is identified by placing it against the background of an appropriate symbol" (Geertz 1973: 215). As will be argued below, this most prominently occurred by aligning the tsunami with dimensions of Australian national

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[2] With a daily circulation of 397,924 and total readership of 1,194,000, *The Daily Telegraph* is based in Sydney, owned by News Limited, and is Australia's leading tabloid. *The Australian* has a daily circulation of 133,926, and a total readership of 416,000. With around a third of readers living in rural areas, it is Australia's only national daily. While also owned by News Limited it is more likely to run stories of national interest. *The Age*, a Melbourne based broadsheet, with a daily circulation of 193,500 and a total readership of 721,000, is owned by Fairfax Inc, the principal rival to News Limited newspaper publications.

identity, with global and national frames of meaning becoming aligned. Consistent with an appreciation of the narrative understandings of disaster, I not only interpreted the tsunami reportage with reference to frames of meaning but also place this data sequentially since plots "have beginnings, middles, and ends" as well as "heroes and anti-heroes, epiphanies and denouncements, dramatic, comic, and tragic forms" (Alexander and Smith 1993: 156).

Ex-patriot witnessing and the mediation of risk

The narration of the tsunami in Australia leads to a cultural puzzle: how can a foreign catastrophe become relevant for a nation that has not directly suffered or even has a history of collectively responding to such a threat? Natural disasters within Australia have long had a close association with national identity, particularly in the cases of droughts and bushfires that are symbolically consistent with the national imaginary of Australia as a dry and harsh continent (West and Smith 1996; 1997). However, prior to 2004 there is no cultural tradition in Australia related to tsunamis, principally due to a lack exposure as the nation is protected by archipelagos to its north and has a prominent continental shelf.[3] Australia might be geographically close to many of the countries directly affected by the tsunami in 2004 but there is a broad consensus that it remains culturally distant from Asia. For these reasons the national narration of the tsunami did not follow a well-established cultural script but, as outlined below, was something established more imaginatively (Anderson 1983).

At its crudest level, the media's transcending of difference occurred through the concentration on Australian victims of the tsunami, which drew attention away from the suffering of the majority. [UniSA1]Although the death toll of twenty-six Australians is minor in relation to that of local populations, the lifeworlds of expatriate victims and survivors attracted disproportionate media attention. This particularly focussed on Australian tourists in the disaster zones, particularly Thailand. This form of local particularism (Boltanski 1999) saw the foregrounding of Australians in the reporting of the disaster, which is clearly evident in the headline "Aussies at centre of catastrophe" (Anonymous 2004: 7). Illustrating the

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[3] There have been cases of tsunamis affecting the Australian coast, however, most Australians had never even heard the word 'tsunami' before 2004 (McPhedran, 2005a: 22). As the Australian Prime Minister John Howard stated in the immediate aftermath of the disaster: "Tsunami, because it is a Japanese word, doesn't mean a lot to Australians (McPhedran, 2005a: 22). The New South Wales coast had been struck by a 1-meter tsunami generated by the 1960 Chilean earthquake and on 17 July 2006 a magnitude 7.7 undersea earthquake south of Java generated a tsunami that affected largely unpopulated parts of the Western Australian coast. Indigenous Australians also maintain special significance for City Beach in Western Australia where, according to legend, the first tsunami hit Australia 5000 years ago (Gee, Gosnell and Clifton, 2005:6).

prominence of this genre in the first week of the crisis *The Daily Telegraph* printed the request: "tell us your stories about Australians returning home" (Casella and Sun, 2004: 7). Instead of compassion being directed at the tragic circumstances of devastated villages, the media focussed upon individual Australians and the sorrow of their families. To the extent that these individualised accounts acknowledged the suffering of others, it was typically with that of other Australians embedded in a Judaeo-Christian tradition of mourning.

> Richard Nott wept as he spoke yesterday of "his beloved son, who I loved so much". Yet through the tears, he was able to acknowledge the despair of so many others in his position. 'There are a lot of Australian families my sentiments will echo into, and my heart goes out to them,' he said. 'May God help them throughout this terrible process.' (Lawson 2005).

Consistent with the critical tradition on humanitarian communication, such discourses often were embedded with dimensions of orientalism (Prakash 1995), promoting a construction of the lesser-developed nations directly impacted by the tsunami as simple, corrupt and disorganised. This was particularly targeted at Indonesia and its Islamic population.

> Colombo's first response, predictably bureaucratic and highly centralised, took several days to evolve after the disaster. The centre became fully operational only last Thursday, four days after the tsunami (Farouque, 2005: 6).

> On the day that the extent of the destruction in Aceh was first revealed, where was Aceh's governor, Abdullah Puteh? Facing the first day of his corruption trial in relation to padding out the purchase price for personal gain of a Russian-made helicopter (Backman, 2005: 2).

> Experts have warned that Indonesia's budget is particularly inefficient, raising concerns that the saving could be whittled away on expensive subsidies and bureaucracy (Gordon, 2005: 8).

> A deeply religious Muslim province, many of the Acehenese believe the tsunami was a sign from God, a punishment for sins (Wockner, 2005a: 23).

The depiction of Australia as a rational, efficient and generous country forms part of this orientalist discourse. This representation was apparent in media reports regarding the absence of a tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean, as there is in the Pacific. The

possibility that the disaster could have been mitigated by modern science and technology fed directly into the domain of Western rationality and economic superiority. Along these lines Australia is cast as an 'advanced' nation in the Asian region able to play a lead role in preventing future deaths. However the romantic dimension of this heroism and the prominence of such discourse were limited by a counter-sentiment in the reporting that lives could have been saved if Western nations had been more generous in sharing their technological expertise.

> AUSTRALIA will push for a tsunami warning system for the Indian Ocean region, even as it concedes that the offer "looks a bit like closing the door after the horse has bolted" (Schubert and Gauchi, 2004a: 3).

> An Australian seismology expert has claimed thousands of lives could have been saved if the Australian Government had come forward 10 years ago with the $10 million it is now giving to help tsunami victims and used it instead to help fund a regional early-warning system (Alford, Creswell, and Reuters, 2004: 8).

Such cases aside, overall there is very little discourse about a causal link between suffering and levels of development in the directly affected nations; for example in relation to the construction quality or buildings permits for tourist resorts being issued in areas of risk. Rather the focus on Australian victims and the need to make sense of this suffering made it more likely that the disaster itself was portrayed in terms of nature's fury cast against innocents rather than as a result of human action or negligence.

> But we are not in control - the tsunami has demonstrated this ancient truth. …The tsunami has demonstrated that nature, and not mankind, is still the real master (Rees-Mogg, 2004: 8).

> It is a disaster of catastrophic if not biblical proportions (English, 2004:29).

> So the tsunami reminds us of our fragility and vulnerability. To some it suggests we are God's playthings, given free will so that we can choose love or hatred, goodness or evil, as our moral options (Murray, 2005: 26).

As part of portraying the tsunami as a 'natural' occurrence that indiscriminately caused destruction, the media gave a discursive emphasis to the equality between locals and Western victims. This tended to pair together the (minor) loss of Australians with local suffering. This is obviously also highly Eurocentric and helped legitimise the attention given to Australian victims and survivors. As Eric Cohen has pointed out, it in the case of Thailand it also hides the fact that in the tsunami's aftermath foreign tourists were given preferential treatment by authorities (Cohen 2009). However, this portrayal differs significantly from the orientalist binary reporting of the tsunami as outlined above.

> The killers did not discriminate. They came for them all. And tens of thousands more. … villages would be obliterated, tourist resorts wiped out, and sunbathers and fishermen alike swept out to sea (Anonymous 2005b).

As Silverstone emphasises (2006) to demonise or incorporate the other are two sides of the same immoral coin. However, as we will see below in terms of providing humanitarian relief the two differ markedly.

The notion that the tsunami caused devastation indiscriminately provided an important basis for the broader discursive construction of the risk posed by tsunamis and the perceived cultural relevance of the disaster for Australia. As outlined above, the risk of tsunamis to Australia is minimal but as part of the emerging national narration of this global crisis it gets amplified, in part through scientific knowledge, to a level where not only were Australians in Asia at risk, but the continent of Australia itself. The backdrop to this discourse is that the vast majority of the population in Australia live close to the coastline, with the beach being an iconic national symbol and a frequent choice of location for apocalyptic narratives (Weaver 2011).

> This is the call to all of us in Australia. This disaster is on our doorstep. It could well have been our coastline and our towns and defenceless beach-lovers devastated (Costello, 2004: 13).

The move came as geologists warned that the Australian eastern seaboard and Western Australia were at risk of tsunamis (Schubert and Gauchi, 2004b: 3).

As outlined below, not only were national frames employed in comprehending the disaster but in terms of the dynamics of the public sphere I argue that this had a significant 'real world' consequence of enhancing state aid and public giving in charity appeals.

International aid and national identity

The amplification of the threat posed by the tsunami and the subsequent application of national frames provided the tsunami with a cultural relevance that is likely to have generally helped foster the public giving to tsunami appeals. However, these factors played a more specific role in establishing a national narrative of giving by providing a cultural frame through which the media would depict the Australian state's initial pledges of foreign disaster relief. While it is standard practice for national governments to offer immediate aid to foreign countries following disasters,[4] this was not a typical case of reporting international diplomacy, a genre that Frye (1971) would refer to as low-mimetic (cf. Smith 2005). What is unusual is that the pledges of aid by the Australian state and their deployment by Australia workers on the ground in the disaster zone were championed popularly by the Australian media and linked to celebrations of the national character.

> We were the first foreign country to get assets in and we followed up with this very big aid package. It all adds up to a very swift, generous and long-lasting response (McPhedran, 2005b: 22).

> AUSTRALIANS are known for their resourcefulness. To prove it, in Banda Aceh, a medical team built an emergency department out of empty water bottles. 'There's nothing you can't do with a drink bottle' (Gibbs, 2005: 6).

The patriotic framing of this state aid was likely a significant factor in the Australian federal government increasing its initial pledge of ten million to an additional twenty-five million late in December 2004. Domestic politics were certainly a factor in the government's

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[4] Such aid though is nevertheless culturally significant for both the donor and recipient, as Mauss (1969) notes in relation to gift exchange, binding the two parties together in a reciprocal relationship. For this reasons the Indian government, an initially Sri Lanka, declined international assistance for the relief operations, declaring that sufficient resources were available in the country to assist those made vulnerable.

subsequent highly publicised relief scheme targeted at Indonesia that was released on the 5th of January 2005. This involved a billion dollars of aid for Indonesia in the aftermath of the tsunami. However, not only was a large part of this in loans but only fifty million was for the nation's main tsunami devastated Provence of Aceh, with the remainder reflecting Australia's development strategy for Indonesia agreed upon prior to the tsunami (O'Connor et al. 2006).

It was the financial response by the general public though which distinguished the tsunami from other humanitarian events, having donated more than AUD$330 million to non-government organisations through tsunami appeals (AusAID 2005). My argument is that this does not inherently reflect the death and devastation caused by the tsunami as it is difficult for the public to rationally conceive of such facts. However, neither can it be singularly explained by the dramatic disaster footage which helped keep the tsunami prominent in the media. Rather the public's response was significantly influenced by a more nuanced mediation of the tsunami in the national and global public spheres. A significant dimension of this in Australia was the expansion of the symbolic connections between humanitarianism and national identity, central to which was the media favourably measuring Australia's generosity against countries to which it is culturally aligned on the world stage.

> Before the USA, it was Australia that reacted quickly and with such compassion. This country showed how to take care of the rest of world. Australia is a very caring county, a very generous country (Phillips, 2005: 4).

> Individual Kiwis have donated $NZ9million but the official contribution adds up to just $NZ2.45 a person, compared with Australia's $NZ57.25 per person (Harvey, 2005: 4).

> In an hour of need Australia had provided greater help to Indonesia than any other country (Walters, 2005: 1).

Such discussions of aid were not as individual world citizens but Australians being called to duty. Monetary donation totals similarly were never declared in relation to cities or regions but in terms of the country as a whole.

It is not only that the sum of giving was framed in national terms but that much of the mobilisation of the Australian population around this cause engaged with national sentiment

and symbols. This is particularly evident in the music concerts and sporting matches designed to raise money for victims. These national symbols remain relevant in a global era, with sporting heroes still largely being framed in reference to ideas of national cultural difference (Miller et al. 2001) and popular music stars in Australia forming a significant part of an increasingly prominent domestic celebrity industry (Turner et al. 2000). For example, while the World cricket tsunami appeal one-day match was officially organised by the International Cricket Council, it was largely seen as sponsored by Australia and involved a number of nationally iconic cricketing personalities. This included the retied former Australian team captain Steve Waugh, who through his demeanour, playing achievements and leadership has been understood as embodying the spirit of the late Don Bradman, someone widely romanticised as Australia's greatest ever sportsman (Hutchins 2002). This heroism includes Waugh being championed for establishing the Australian Cricket team's 'pilgrimage' to the WWI Gallipoli battlefields when journeying to England to play in the Ashes series. Shane Warne also played in the match, someone who is considered as representative of a recent characterisation of the anti-heroic national 'larrikin' archetype in Australia (Bellanta 2012), and one that is consistent with nationalism in a commercialized age (McKay et al. 2009). The match was played at the home of Australian cricket and Australian Rules Football, the Melbourne Cricket Ground. It was the Australian Prime Minister John Howard who tossed the coin at the start of the game and its national significance was further embedded with two Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) C-130 Hercules aircraft conducting a fly past, with one of the aircraft then continuing its journey to Indonesia to undertake relief efforts.

Evoking national symbols in this way encouraged a strong sense of community within the nation, what Victor Turner refers to as communitas (1969). The national significance of the tsunami was also fostered by charity rituals creating high levels of emotional energy, something popularly associated with times of national celebration, commemoration and mourning. As Dayan and Katz (1992) note in relation to media events, this liminality includes a strong sense of bi-partisanship. This is clearest in Australia's principal tsunami telethon suitably titled "Australia Unites". The normal fierce competition amongst television broadcasters was suspended for the event with the three free-to-air commercial television networks in Australia pooling resources to co-produce and co-host two concerts for the telethon. Official rating calculations were dropped for the broadcast which starred iconic figures from the national music industry and a number of distinctive national forms of

popular music (Stratton 2007), with one of the principal concerts held outside a key national symbol, the Sydney Opera House.

This form of narrating the tsunami and public giving celebrated Australian national identity but it was not a case of traditional nationalism or local particularlism overcoding global sentiment. Rather it is better conceived as a hybrid between national and global discourses, whereby the national context allows for a way of responding to distant suffering through a kind f gift giving ritual (Mauss 1969), one that does not require a pure form of cosmopolitan compassion for and comprehension of the Other. The complexity and contradictions of this nationalism/cosmopolitanism nexus is evident in the case of the cricketer Adam Gilchrist who was particularly prominent in the media, not only due to playing in the World Cricket tsunami appeal but as a consequence of his position as an official ambassador for the aid organization World Vision. Representing a well established tie between celebrities and global politics (Lester 2006), he strongly argued for the need to look beyond this particular crisis moment to attain long term solutions in addressing global poverty, highlighting that the annual deaths in nations such as in Africa exceed the death toll of the tsunami. Such hybridity, though, did not exist without tension and conflict, and as such was largely short lived. Where the national narration of the tsunami appeals provided international aid agencies with a welcomed financial boost for ongoing operations, the fundraising efforts soon reverted to notions of global citizenship, often echoing the globalisation mantra of individuals acting locally and thinking globally. For example, the Red Cross highlights "the *power* of humanity" which they describe as "the strength of individual commitment and the force of collective action. Both must be mobilized to relieve suffering, ensure respect for human dignity and ultimately create a more humane society".[5] A return to such divides following the end of the media event surrounding the tsunami was also evident in conservative elites using the tsunami to illustrate the problems with dominant ideas of international citizenship and governance. The United Nations, in particular, was the object of criticism, with its perceived limitations contrasted with what was seen as the practical and generous aid given through achieving national unity.

> The UN bureaucracy's self-serving response is a laughing stock. This lesson must
> not be forgotten when the UN's multi-lateralists jump on their soap boxes in the

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[5] http://www.redcross.int/en/conference/proceedings.asp

future and presume to tell Australia, and other advanced nations, how they should conduct themselves (Akerman, 2005: 20).

Mr Howard and Foreign Minister Alexander Downer are long-standing critics of the UN and what they see as its bloated and ineffective bureaucracy (McPhedran, 2005a: 4).

A view persists among some people in rich countries, such as Australia, that in such circumstances developed nations should simply take the leadership role in managing the response to disaster (Anonymous, 2005: 14).

As discussed below, the narration of the tsunami as a whole can be thought of as overcoming the traditional binary responses that Boltanski (1999) finds in relation to cosmopolitan calls for aid.

Discussion

In showing that the tsunami as a global crisis was narrated through national discourses and that these played a positive role in providing humanitarian relief to victims, the paper has highlighted the limitations of existing understandings of humanitarian communication. On the one hand it demonstrates that scholars need to comprehend the influence of global technologies and risks in relation to the way they are mediated by cultural frames. While in recent decades the determinist dimensions of globalization theory have been tempered by acknowledging the enduring significance of local traditions and their ability to combine with global influences (Appadurai 1990; Robertson 1994) there remains a strong deterministic dimension within this literature and little comprehension of how the national may provide enduring source of identity in a global era (Alexander 2007; Calhoun 2007). In contrast, the proposed cultural systems approach (Geertz 1973; 1983) to comprehending humanitarian communication has the advantage of drawing our attention to the relevance of existing cultural frames for interpreting and adapting themselves to new social circumstances. In highlighted the ways individual behaviour can be directed through broader narrative constructions of particular disasters, the cultural systems approach also highlighted the limitations of the critical scholarship on humanitarian communication. In particular it demonstrates how the analytic neglect of the nation and the methodological focus on individual decoding of the media fails to appreciate the ways in which the nation can play a constructive role in regards to humanitarianism.

These conclusions force us to consider the broader significance of national identification in addressing the need for humanitarian relief efforts and related global problems. Both scholarly traditions of humanitarian communication as well as other prominent sociological theorists (Bauman 2011; Beck 2009) argue that only a post-national cosmopolitan politics can adequately address the new social and environmental problems that now traverse the boundaries of nation-states. In the tsunami case, however, we saw how not only organisationally but also culturally the nation can play a role in affectively mobilising populations around global problems. This was not merely an everyday utilisation of national frames in the understanding of the world, nor a retreat into simple and safe understandings by individuals when faced with uncertainty and complexity. Rather it is representative of a new application of the national in comprehending the global context, demonstrating the potential of the nation to attain new relevance in an era of globalisation. As demonstrated above, the cultural traditions of the nation provided significance and meaning to the tsunami as well as allowing for the ritualization of charity drives. This involved, on the one hand, the nation working to make a global issue culturally relevant for those who would otherwise choose to downplay its legitimacy, what Boltanski (1999) refers to as representing the perspective of local particularism. On the other it provided humanitarianism with a collective framing that tempered the individualistic and elitist dimensions of cosmopolitanism (Calhoun 2007; Turner 2002), what Boltanski (1999) terms abstract universalism. This in turn facilitated the state's willingness to act globally on behalf of its citizens, even if somewhat deceptively. This relates to what Nash (2008) terms the 'cosmopolitanizing state', one where its legitimacy is based on effectively acting within global governance structures and abiding by international agreements and laws.

However, Nash (2008) sees the relevance of the nation in such cases being connected to their ability to operate as a bureaucratic or organisational entity in a world that can otherwise be connected by a global citizenship. The Australian state though was far from a mundane actor in the domestic media reporting of the tsunami, being bestowing it with charisma (Shils 1975) and seen as a protector of the sacred. It is likely that the level of activity in civil society in response to the tsunami would also not have been possible if the cultural focus was only looking outwards towards the other, rather than internally to celebrating national identity and being concerned with how this was displayed within a global arena.

The significance of this national narration prevailing in the case of the tsunami though is not only ideological but one about the real world problem of how adequate humanitarian relief can be generated in the aftermath of disasters in lesser developed countries. This includes that related to rise in catastrophes related to climate change. Nation-states, particularly Western ones, are certainly responsible for exploiting natural resources and foreign countries in a way which has contributed to the global problems we face today. However, this does not mean they cannot play an important role in addressing them. Anthony Giddens (2009) has already argued that a strong nation-state has an essential role to play in relation to climate change, both preventively and in providing assistance for suffering from the predicted increased in environmental catastrophes, which amongst others includes a greater number of tsunamis. Like Nash (2008), the limitation of this analysis is that Giddens (2009) sees the state principally deriving its power from its functional role. From the perspective of cultural sociology this is problematic as culture is reduced to a kind of dependent variable arising from shifts in technology, power and social organisation rather than as a powerful constitutive force in the playing out of history.

In the context of increasing instances and awareness of global disasters we need to think not only how national identification might positively contribute to strategically fostering humanitarian relief in the aftermath of global disasters but more broadly the desirability of cosmopolitan theorists and activists working to weaken national identities in the pursuit of a post-national citizenship. If we work on the basis that national citizenship and cosmopolitan sentiment do not necessarily exist in relation to a zero-sum game (Brett and Moran 2011; Eckersley 2008; West 2008b), then it is worth giving greater consideration to how global problems can be addressed by promoting dimensions of nationalism that are orientated "to common liberty and justice at home and abroad" (Eckersley 2007:675). This would involve national concern for social justices that occur outside the boundaries of the sovereign nation-state but without having to forfeit notions of cultural different and distinction in the world. To use Durkheim's words, this is "not a matter of putting a completely new society in the place of an existing one, but of adapting the latter to the new social conditions" (1957: 246-47).

The 'dream' (Calhoun 2007) of cosmopolitan social theorists and international aid organisations for a new ethical order based on a universal sense of compassion for others is undoubtedly morally commendable. However, this cosmopolitanism tends to derive from

elitist and overly individualist conceptions of citizenship and as such there are important questions to be asked about whether it could be an enduring source of solidarity to (Calhoun 2007; Turner 2002), and particularly if it could effectively mobilise entire populations during times of crisis. This includes establishing unity and a culture of giving in the face of new social divisions that may emerge in a world affected by climate change (Urry 2010).

Conclusion

This paper has examined how national frames of meaning were established in the Australian public sphere to narrate the 2004 South Asian tsunami. It was argued that during this international crisis the Australian nation broke away from its typical association with isolationalism to be an important source for understanding and addressing the suffering of others. In this way national discourses overcoded the typical discourse of aid that places an emphasis on individual moral duty and attachment to a universal sense of citizenship. Establishing links between the tsunami and existing Australian symbols and myths is key to the establishment of a national discourse. This principally occurred through the disaster agent being seen as posing a universal risk; state and public charity being interpreted as symbolic of the national character on a global stage; and charitable events ritually celebrating iconic national figures.

In comprehending how the nation can be relevant for understanding and positively responding to such cases of global disaster I drew on Geertz's (1973; 1983) notion of a cultural system. This allowed not only for a general appreciation of the symbolic dimensions of giving but how this can become connected to and informed by existing frames of meaning. From this perspective, existing literature on humanitarian communication can be seen as providing reductionist accounts that either understand technology and other global forces as operating independent of culture or conceive of culture as only reflective of a dominant and seemingly unchanging ideological system. From the perspective of the former, the charitable response to the tsunami is generally thought as a product of the audio-visual capturing of the devastation on personal video recorders and the ease by which this footage was globally disseminated. Whilst the availability of such images may be responsible for elevating public interest in the disaster, even possibly to a level at which it can be considered a ritualised media event, this fails to explain the particular genres and codes that accompany such

footage. In doing so it assumes that the national has little role to play in relation to such global events. The critical tradition examining humanitarian communication, by contrast, under-appreciates how the symbolic dimension of this reporting can positively result in a greater humanitarian response. The nation as a constructive source for responding to the suffering of others is in particular dismissed. This is in part a result of conceiving of the nation only in reference to its association with dominant ideas about race and Western rationality rather than its progressive qualities. The nation is also neglected as a consequence of methodological issues with this literature being heavily influenced by a cognitive approach to understanding the media, being concerned with individual decoding of images and portrayals of suffering rather than the ways in which social actors are influenced by broader narrative constructions in the public sphere. Media reporting of the tsunami did begin to evoke orientalist construction of us and them and this was limited by the media deploying national frames of meaning whereby symbolic links were being established between local and foreign victims and the risk of tsunamis being amplified as to be relevant to Australia. The paper reflected on how such discursive constructions raise important questions about the future of national identification in an era of globalisation and also the relevance of the nation for responding to future instances of global disaster.

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