Multiscalar Narratives of a Disaster:
From Media Amplification to Western Participation in Asian Tsunamis

By Sara Bonati

Abstract

The international recovery system responds differently to disasters with similar characteristics. It answers to specific motivations that are not necessarily connected to the nature of the disaster. The variability of the answers given not only depends on the type of disaster but also, in particular, on the local social structure and on the transcalar narrative of the disaster used to move communities not directly affected to action.

This paper therefore analyses the level of Western involvement in two Asian tsunami recovery plans and the role of the media in attracting Western private donations. To this end, Italian involvement in the two cases is discussed.

Beginning with a literature review to support the argument that the media are crucial in stimulating private participation through 'spectacularizing' the disaster, this paper illustrates that, when spectacularization is insufficient, the media additionally adopts the strategy of 'transposition', leading to 'appropriation' of the event. In particular, during the Boxing Day tsunami of 2004, the transposition became the 'Westernization' of the narrative of the disaster. The process of transposition or Westernization, however, did not happen with the same modalities in the narrative of the Tohoku tsunami of 2011. In this case, the focus was more on the technological disaster that followed the natural hazard.

The author concludes that emotional transposition of the disasters by the media played an important role in stimulating private donations and in spurring governmental relief in both the disasters. Foreign governments, however, are mainly moved by other factors such as 'flag policy' or what Olsen et al. (2004) identified as the concept of 'donor interests'.

Keywords: spectacularization; humanitarian aid; tsunami; mass media; disasters narrative.

Introduction

This paper aims to understand Western involvement in the Asian recovery processes following the Boxing Day tsunami 2004 and the Tohoku tsunami in March 2011. It takes Stromberg's words (2007: 200) – "the decision about what to call a disaster and how much relief provided depends on who is suffering" – as a point of departure. It analyses the role of the media in attracting Western attention and private donations, with a particular focus on the Italian response. The Boxing Day tsunami of December 2004 and the Tohoku tsunami of March 2011 are the two most devastating Asian tsunamis of the last hundred years in terms of victims and ecological and social effects. In analysing the media accounts, this paper will use *transcalarity*, *spectacularization* and *transposition* as key analytical terms. It is a preliminary study on the usefulness of these concepts in disaster narrative analysis. In particular, transcalarity will be used with the aim of defining the indirect experience of events[1] that can be consequent to the interconnection of places and geographical scales. The concept is useful in understanding how a geo-localized event can also have impacts in other places not geographically contiguous. As a consequence, we can have a perceptive reduction, or loss, of distance. This paper maintains that spectacularizing and transposing events are two communication strategies used to implement this process, which is described further in the next section. Spectacularization means the amplification of information given by media in order to emotionally move the audience, whereas with transposition the author identifies the process of transcalar victimhood that can occur when the audience perceives the disaster, in Ulrich Beck's words (2005), as an "individual experience".

Kasperson (et al. 1988) states that, when experience is lacking or minimal, individuals learn of risk through other people and information systems:

> Most people in a particular society do not experience disasters first-hand. Rather, they learn about disasters through the experiences of others, as told by survivors, expressed by others, or conveyed in a movie or media account. Cultural representations shape a group's understanding of disasters and may influence the way in which that group prepares for, responds to, and recovers from actual disasters (Webb, Wachtendorf and Eyre 2000: 7).

Accordingly, images offered by the media can alter the image of the condition of a place struck by disaster in the minds of those people who have no direct knowledge of said place.

Therefore, "cultural representations of disasters play an essential role in transmitting knowledge between individuals, groups and generations" (Webb, Wachtendorf and Eyre 2000:7). One part of these representations is the narratives of disasters. According to narrative theory, disaster narratives are the result of cultural and individual factors (Daly 2011). In the nineteenth century, they were produced by all popular forms of communications such as narrative fiction, poetry, drama, opera, fine art history and landscape paintings; contemporary forms of disaster narrative

include on-site graffiti, which survivors draw in order to send messages of hope and humour, to provide basic information, or to protest against government recovery processes (see Hagen et al. 1999; Webb, Wachtendorf and Eyre 2000).

Accordingly, the process of making information must pass through several filters (geographical and cultural), all of which shape individual interpretation. The actors involved (directly or indirectly) in a disaster thus have a different image of the event. They perceive benefits and damages (defined "goods" and "bads" in Beck 1992) according to a different range of values that depend on their perception. Public perceptions are identified as the products of "intuitive biases and economic interests" that "reflect cultural values" (Kasperson et al. 1988: 178). Stromberg (2007) recognized a number of central factors that move humanitarian aid, including the historic and cultural proximity of the location, economic and geo-strategic interests, colonial history, geographic distance, and trade values. Indeed, an awareness of the benefits modifies the perception of risk (Finucane et al. 2000). Today, there is a vast amount of literature supporting the hypothesis that international aid is conceived according to more factors than the level of the emergency. Some of these factors are the media narrative of disasters, foreign policy, and economic outlook (Stromberg 2007).

Indeed, as Beck (1992) states, all events (local and global) are also always subjective events. Subjectivity is the tool through which people interpret situations and make decisions. Accordingly, the scientific community talks about "subjective risk" and investigates the role that this dimension plays in disaster risk production and reduction (see Lewis and Kelman 2012). According to Beck (1992), the weight of subjectivity is low in local events because we can 'touch' and experience the objective dimension. Indeed, in the face of extreme events, experience reduces the level of concern of people and determines their sensitivity to risks (see Richardson, Sorensen and Soderstrom 1987; Barnett and Breakwell 2001). Thus, "distance" (Beck 1992, 2005) is the new geographical element for defining individual processes of event interpretation. However, distance must be interpreted not only in physical terms but also in cultural terms. We read global events through our own eyes (see Beck 1992), filtered by our geographical identity (see Delage 2003; Bonati 2015) and perception. Thus, subjectivity becomes the tool for interpreting these phenomena due to the absence of experience of the event.

Role of Media in Disaster Communication

The media has a role to play in reducing distances. This paper therefore argues that there are today two ways to "bring a disaster near" to people who have not had direct experience of it. First, through the media telling stories that produce an indirect experience (transcalar narrative). Second, when indirect impacts or extra-border impacts occur and are experienced by members of the same community (transcalarity of impacts). In the first case, the media usually employs the strategy of

spectacularizing the disaster narrative in order to catalyze attention and obtain an audience. As a consequence of this process, the media have the power to stimulate an audience into action. In the second case, the media adopt the strategy of transposing the disaster, leading to the appropriation of the condition of the 'victim'. All the auditors become victims when a part of their community is involved in a disaster. In particular, during the Boxing Day tsunami, the transposition became the Westernization of the disaster narrative, in accordance with the high number of Western victims. Given global interdependence, all disasters can have repercussions on an international scale, with people living far from the place where the event occurred also becoming victims.

In the context of globalization, the sociological notion of disaster (see Quarantelli 1985) assumes special importance. The social system 'mediates' a physical event, amplifying or containing its consequences. Therefore, according to De Marchi et al. (2001), the global system can decide to ignore thousands of victims in marginal and deprived areas. It cannot avoid concern, however, if the people affected are from the vital centres of the economic and financial world, the collapse of which would inevitably affect the present global system. In this context, the role of the media is central in catalyzing audience opinion.

Etymologically, the word 'medium' (the plural of which is 'media') comes from Latin and has been adopted by the English language with the meaning of "median", "mean", "middle" or "intermediary". In the process of building communication, each transmitter operating as an intermediary alters the original message. This impacts the way people process information (Kasperson et al. 1988). According to Kasperson's considerations, in a humanitarian crisis the media do not report events objectively, but rather in a number of different ways (Robinson 1999). Indeed, in the media's communication strategy, the method of conveying an event is usually adapted to the audience it is directed at. Salience, style and frequency of message are communication strategies that can alter risk perception (Mileti and Fitzpatrick 1992; Tekeli-Yesil et al. 2011). Moreover, dramatization is an important instrument in risk communication (Kasperson et al. 1988). Accordingly, all disaster narratives demand the 'pleasure' of the destruction "of people, poverty, hopes" (Daly 2011: 255). This 'pleasure' may recall both the terror of Aristotelian tragedy and the innate Freudian death-drive. There is a contemporary familiarity, however, with disaster narratives (Daly 2011).

The media therefore appear to play a fundamental role in stimulating private emotional and economic participation (Rosemblatt 1996; Olsen et al. 2003) through spectacularization of the disaster. The process of spectacularization involves amplifying information by the media and can also demand a loss of distance (transposition). In Kasperson et al. (1988: 178), social amplification of a risk framework is provided through "the ways in which individuals receive and process risk information and their role in affecting the ways in which risks can be intensified or attenuated". In the system, individuals act as "stations of amplifications"; according

to a psychometric model elaborated by Trumbo, they can be classified as "amplifiers" or "attenuators".

Moreover, an event is said to be on a global scale when it catalyzes international attention – reaching an international audience through the media, for example – and when it contributes to shaping harbingers of a global culture (Roche 2000; Dansero and Mela 2007). According to the theory of the 'CNN effect', the media can influence political decisions and the granting of humanitarian aid (Olsen et al. 2003). 'CNN effect' refers to the capability of the media to influence leaders' decisions, in particular as regards the foreign policies of Western countries. Examples of this have been identified by Robinson (1999) in situations of humanitarian emergency and troop deployment as part of non-coercive operations.

The role of the media, however, appears more important in the production of public stimulation than in governmental action. Over the years, the scientific community has in fact noted a gradual process of declining media influence on politics. Instead, it can be argued that the media today has become mere servants of governmental messages, or impersonal intermediaries between the government and the public (Robinson 1999, Conoscenti 2004). They are interpreted by Conoscenti as political expediencies, used for obtaining the emotional consensus of the population (according to language engineering theory, see Conoscenti 2004). In particular, Conoscenti (2004) argued that the power of the media decreased during the Kosovo, Afghanistan and Second Gulf Wars. Only Iraq-Kurdistan and Somalia appeared as examples of the CNN effect. The instrumental use of information pertaining to wars is only one metaphor of media control, which is vested with governing powers. This does not rule out the fact that some forms of manipulation can be used in the case of environmental emergencies to obtain and provide the desired image or message.

Political forces are not always able, however, to show the image they desire. During Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the situation was out of control and the governmental image in the media was one of weakness, displaying an inability to manage the crisis. In Europe, Katrina was perceived as a reflection of socioeconomic inequality and political incompetence. On the other hand, Hurricane Sandy in 2012 was interpreted as a reflection of global warming (see Bonati 2014). The media created highly different images of the two disasters. Furthermore, it used different elements and event characteristics to arouse a special range of emotions.

The role of the media therefore seems to depend on political interests, as opposed to influencing such interests, until the time when political forces are able to impose their vision. On the other hand, the media loves telling stories that can catalyze mass attention, as discussed above. The selected news must stimulate people's emotions. The attention focused on disasters decreases if they are unfamiliar or distant to the viewers. As anticipated at the beginning of this paper, the media narrative of disaster can reduce this distance. The reduction of distance can be achieved through the process of transposing the disaster, as analysed below in the two case studies.

The Case of the 2004 Tsunami in Southeast Asia

One example of the transposition of a disaster is the process of Westernization in the narrative of the Southeast Asian tsunami of December 2004. In this paper, the Westernization[2] of disasters is taken to mean the process interpreting events according to Western culture and experience. This may follow a process of geographical transposition and a Western appropriation of disasters that occurred in non-Western regions, as justified by the high number of Western victims. During the 2004 tsunami, international intervention was officially justified by the consistent number of foreign tourists in the areas engulfed by the disaster. This gave the hazard greater Western media coverage (Keys et al. 2006). The tsunami, which struck during the holiday season, killed many Western tourists and was covered extensively in the Western media. Approximately 9,000 tourists (most of them European, in particular from northern Europe) were killed or went missing. The country worst hit was Sweden: 428 of its citizens were killed and 116 were missing. Sweden was the ninth largest country in terms of international aid in the aftermath of tsunami.

As the tsunami affected a lot of tourists from several countries, it was immediately identified as an international disaster – or, rather, it became a catastrophe for all the countries that suffered directly or indirectly. On January 5, 2005, all EU member countries participated in a day of mourning for the tsunami victims. It was the first time that the European Union officially proclaimed a European day of mourning; it should be noted that it happened in memory of victims who died outside national territories, and not in a war situation. The tsunami tragedy helped create a temporary sense of European citizenship, as was also demonstrated during the recovery process. Immediately after the disaster, all of the member countries sent relief autonomously and in a disorderly fashion. Later on, however, the EU entrusted coordination of the aid to Italy, in accordance with this new sense of common participation in mourning. The internationalization of the disaster was also perpetrated by media propaganda, which "authorized" a number of countries to intervene and make decisions in the recovery process. Foreign countries contributed a total of approximately seven billion US dollars.

The Westernization of the narrative is also the result of telling stories from a 'Western point of view'. Accordingly, in the aftermath of the Boxing Day tsunami, a number of documentary films were produced in order to tell the disaster: *Tsunami: The Aftermath* (directed by Bharat Nalluri, 2006); *The Third Wave* (directed by Alison Thompson, 2007); *The Impossible* (directed by Juan Antonio Bayona, 2012); and *Hereafter* (directed by Clint Eastwood, 2010, which has among its main characters a French journalist who survived the tsunami). All of these shared similar features: the narrator is from a Western country, the main characters are Western people who experienced the disaster and/or the post-disaster first-hand; and the Asian people appear as secondary characters – both in the roles of innocent victims and saviours. This Western-centrism of the movie narratives could be the result of

the transcalarity of victimism condition, due to the great impact that Western people experienced directly and indirectly. The media attention on the disaster was high; if we adopt the idea that climate change is still a risk[3], then for the first time since the 'Great Flood' and the Ice Age, we have had a natural disaster that was also a transcontinental disaster (directly affecting Asia and Africa, and indirectly, Europe, Oceania and America).

This Western victimhood can be also interpreted as the result of the "unexpected" and of the need to learn from experience. No one in Western countries has expected a similar disaster; this caught them unprepared. It is not a coincidence that Thailand is the country that is most represented in Western post-tsunami narrative. It was the place where the greatest number of tourists died and served as a comparison between the outsider and insider, but it was also presented as an example of the flaws in the relationship of the Western world with nature. In Thailand, many island populations – on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, in particular – survived the catastrophe because they anticipated the disaster, relying on their traditional knowledge of the area. Other communities – both immigrants and tourists in particular – did not understand the natural signals of what was happening (e.g., Arunotai 2008; Baumwoll 2008; Gaillard et al. 2008; Mercer et al. 2013). These events challenged the excessive confidence in the human capacity to control nature and moved scientists' attention to focus on the role of indigenous knowledge in reducing the exposure to risks.

The Tohoku Tsunami of 2011

In the aftermath of the Tohoku tsunami, the process of transposition was different; it is only indirectly and partially possible to discuss the Westernization of the disaster. Furthermore, we can talk of the transposition of risk. Western involvement in the Japanese disaster was not as high as it was in the Southeast Asian tsunami of 2004. In the former case, transposition was not justified by the number of victims or by the direct impact on the Western population. The Japanese tsunami introduced the risk of technological disaster (national and international), due to the damage to the Fukushima nuclear power plant, which immediately brought to mind images of Chernobyl. Faced with the risk of radioactive diffusion, an international debate therefore followed and the media focused its attention on that. Accordingly, this disaster had an impact on international policies regarding nuclear power. Germany decided to accelerate the closure of seven old nuclear power plants operating on its national territory; in Italy a referendum said 'no' to nuclear energy in the country.Additionally, in Switzerland, a project with three new nuclear power plants was temporary stopped. Additionally, prudence and new controls on national nuclear power plants were requested in France, Russia, China, Taiwan and India.

In the media narrative of the disaster, the Tohoku tsunami was presented as a local disaster, which obtained a global dimension when the risk of radioactivity

diffusion reached an international scale. Indeed, Japanese requests for assistance reached an international scale only after the risk of radiation diffusion became real and the Government of Japan recognized the nation's inability to stop it. Accordingly, the media focused on the international debate on nuclear energy that followed the disaster.

Confirming interest in the nuclear debate, the analysis of three Italian newspapers (*Il Corriere della Sera*[4], *La Repubblica*[5] and *Il Giornale*) showed that the most frequently-used words in articles about the Tohoku disaster were "(anti-) nuclear" and "radioactivity". During the period analysed (March 2011–December 2011), the word "nuclear" appeared in association with "disaster" and "Japan" in 49 articles published by *La Repubblica* (source: *Repubblica.it),* 33 of which were published in the first two months after the tsunami. In *Il Giornale,* the words appeared together 33 times (source: *Ilgiornale.it*), while in *Il Corriere della Sera,* they appeared together 60 times (source: *Corriere.it*). A total of 145 articles with a reference to the tsunami in Japan were published during this period in *Il Corriere della Sera* and 142 in *La Repubblica*. Only 44 are the articles published in *Il Giornale* to which it is possible to access on the newspaper website using the key-words "tsunami" and "Japan". Thus, about one-third of the articles published defined the Tohoku disaster as a nuclear disaster. Moreover, about half of the articles published used the word "nuclear" in association with "tsunami" and "Japan" (e.g. 87 articles in *La Repubblica* newspaper). References to the Chernobyl disaster appeared frequently in the three newspapers. In *La Repubblica*, it appeared 16 times in association with "nuclear, disaster, Japan" (3 times in the title); 19 times in *Il Corriere della Sera* (two times in the title); and 20 times in *Il Giornale* (3 times in the title). Thus, *Il Giornale* associated the disaster of Fukushima and the disaster of Chernobyl in about 50% of the articles analyzed. While some of the articles discussed the differences between the two disasters and disputed possible comparisons, others underlined the possible risks of experiencing an Asian Chernobyl. References to the Ukrainian disaster thus fueled the debate on the safety of nuclear power.

The debate on the topic was confirmed by the contents of the articles published. *Il Giornale* accused the international community of being too focused on the technological risk and ignoring the large number of victims of the tsunami. In an article from March 20, 2011, titled "Japan: The world thinks only of the nuclear and forgets the post-earthquake humanitarian drama"[6], the newspaper reproached other national newspapers for paying more attention to the risk of a second Chernobyl (according to the article, this was the case in *La Repubblica*) rather than talking about the people who had died in the natural disaster. After these statements, the newspaper was accused of being politically influenced. Indeed, in 2011, the newspaper was being published by the Berlusconi family; Silvio Berlusconi – a supporter of nuclear power at that time – was Prime Minister of the Italian Government at the time. Additionally, the nuclear debate was reaching a peak in Italy: the Italian people had been called to decide on nuclear energy with a referendum in June 2011,

where 94.05% of voters said 'no'. On June 14, *Il Giornale* published two articles, the first entitled "Nuclear power: Nuclear plants terrify only Italy", and the second "France and Japan confirm their nuclear choice. Saudi Arabia opens 16 nuclear plants".

On the other hand, *La Repubblica* affirmed its 'no' to nuclear power in several articles: "And Germany speeds up its farewell to nuclear power in May: Only 4 reactors out of 17 in operation"[7]; "Why it's possible to give up nuclear"[8]; "Chernobyl: After 25 years, risk of tumours in survivors still high"[9].

Therefore, the process of transposition in the Tohoku disaster was associated with the 'possible' condition (the risk) of European people becoming victims. In front of the news and images of Japan, all the Western communities – with or without nuclear facilities – became aware of (or could no longer deny) the risks associated with nuclear power. The process of Westernization that followed was associated with the idea of the risk affecting every country with nuclear power plants, rather than with the disaster and the possible consequences of radioactive diffusion from Japan.

In particular, what emerged in an article published in March 22 in *Il Corriere della Sera* (Maraini,[10] "Human arrogance before nature: Shouting emotional choices in the face of the nuclear makes no sense") was that all Europeans can become victims of progress; this requires deep reflection on the vulnerable condition of technology in the face of the strength of nature. In conclusion, according to the articles published by the three newspapers, we can say that the Japanese disaster moved from to be a natural disaster, due to earth surface movements, to an anthropic disaster (the nuclear disaster). Thus, it inevitably introduced also the human guilt (the resposibility of humans in producing disasters) that prevailed in terms of effects on the responsibility of nature (the earthquake and the consequent tsunami).

Role of the Media and Italian interventions in Asian Tsunamis

In light what has been discussed up to now, people's interest appears to be directly linked to communication engineering by the media. Public opinion is mainly driven by media communications; this can have various impacts such as a decrease in tourism or economic investments in the affected area and an increase in people's attention to the crisis. At the same time, the media can directly or indirectly become an instrument of action, for example moving people to send private donations as demonstrated after the tsunami in Southeast Asia. In contrast, when the media stops talking about an emergency, people's attention towards the event wanes. Images of disasters are forgotten and regular touristic and economic flows in the affected regions are re-established (Olsen et al., 2003).

According to data from the Italian Foreign Ministry, in an analysis of the 'wave' of aid that followed the Boxing Day tsunami, national private donations reached

€43.3 million (the Italian Government and local public administrations donated €115 million). The funds were collected thanks to television spots and newspaper articles. A telephone number for SMS donations was promoted by TIM, Vodafone, WIND, 3, Telecom Italia (the five biggest telephone companies), *Un aiuto subito* (a solidarity committee organized by *Corriere della Sera* and TG5 news), and RAI TV, and was adopted by all the mobile companies operating in Italy. RAI and Mediaset, the biggest national television networks, broadcast the telephone number for two weeks until January 9, 2005, and €28 million was collected. It was the first time in Italy that all of the main national media broadcasters were promoters of a fundraising campaign for an international disaster. Later, the funds collected were turned over to the 'Protezione Civile Italiana' (Italian Civil Protection, the national body of emergency response), which guaranteed the transparency of the fund's use through its website www.protezionecivile.it and the control exercised by the media.

Other funds were collected through other media initiatives. *La Stampa* (one of the most widely-distributed national newspapers in Italy) appealed to its readers in order to fund the *Specchio dei Tempi* foundation, which rebuilt schools and houses in Sri Lanka and a professional school and an orphanage in Thailand, as well as a nursery school in India. The foundation also donated boats and tuk-tuk (a three-wheeled automotive rickshaw) to people who had lost everything in the disaster. And finally, *Il Giornale* decided to fund some NGOs involved in Southeast Asia.

In the aftermath of the Japanese tsunami, fundraisers and the use of the funds were entrusted to CRI (the Italian Red Cross). The telephone number used for the fundraiser was activated by CRI and was broadcast by all national media until the end of operations on March 30, 2011. There are no data regarding the total number of donations collected by the National Red Cross, though there is information regarding the donations to the International Red Cross. The funds were sent to the Japanese Red Cross, however, and used to promote local programmes for assistance to victims, health prevention, and education, and to improve the living conditions of the displaced. The media thus had a secondary role in this disaster compared to the Southeast Asian tsunami, when the Italian media was promoter of the 'wave of aid'. Indeed, in the aftermath of the Tohoku disaster they operated simply as a means through which to collect donations, rather than as promoters.

Comparing the two disasters, the data on the outcomes are clearly different. In the 2004 tsunami, 11 countries were affected and there were about 240,000 victims, while the 2011 tsunami was primarily a national disaster in which 16,000 people died. The characteristics of the disasters, however, are similar in terms of magnitude and depth of the earthquake, as shown in Table 1.

Disasters/Data	Number of Deaths	Number of Countries Affected	Description of the Earth-quake	Description of the Tsunami
Southeast Asia, 2004	About 240,000	11	Magnitude: 9.3 Depth: 30 km Distance (nearest coast): 160 km	Max run-up: 27 m Upthrust of impact: about 10 m
Japan, 2011	About 16,000	1	Magnitude: 9.0 Depth: 32 km Distance (nearest coast): 72 km	Upthrust: 6-8 m

Table 1 – Data on the tsunami disasters in Southeast Asia (2004) and Japan (2011).

A second important difference between the two disasters is the level of development of the countries affected. In 2004, all the countries directly affected by the tsunami were developing countries with poor warning and defence systems, whereas Japan is one of the most well-equipped countries in this respect.

The reaction and role of the Italian government – and of the Italian Civil Protection in particular – were different in the two disasters, as shown in Table 2, and had different justifications.

Interventions of Italian Civil Protection	First phase of intervention	Second phase of intervention
Southeast Asian Tsunami, 2004	- Italy intervened for a number of the 4,000 Italians affected. - Sanitary teams were sent to the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Thailand. - Established the first flight bridge (4,308 Europeans aided).	- ICP became coordinator of the European intervention. - €28 million (private donations via SMS) was donated to ICP for post-tsunami recovery. - In Sri Lanka, 24 projects were completed.

| Japanese Tsunami, 2011 | - ICP intervened in Tokyo to support the Italian Embassy.
- ICP was called to monitor the air level of radioactivity in the city. | - ICP intervention was confined to the metropolitan area of Tokyo.
- ICP continued to monitor the air level of radioactivity close to the Italian embassy and in the neighbourhoods where Italians lived.
- ICP promoted information on radioactivity risks
- A pocket guide to radioactivity risk was published and distributed |

Table 2 – Italian Civil Protection intervention in Asian tsunamis.

In the first phase of the recovery process, the role of the Italian Civil Protection was limited mainly to responding to national needs in both disasters, in accordance with the flag policy[11]. The needs were those of Italian citizens directly affected by the disaster. In the second case, while the role of the ICP did not substantially change in Japan, in Southeast Asia it was extended to assisting local relief and launching reconstruction projects. The difference can be attributed to three conditions present in the Boxing Day tsunami: first, as already discussed, private donations collected by mobile operators and national broadcasters were donated to the ICP in order to promote reconstruction in the affected countries; second, the countries affected immediately asked for international assistance because of their inability to respond by themselves to the emergency and the dimension of the impact, and because of the absence of local coordination; third, the condition of the affected countries – viewed as developing countries – created a feeling of responsibility in Western people (as a consequence of the comparison between the European tourists and the local populations). This was associated with transposition or Westernization of the disaster, which elevated the disaster to a transcalar dimension.

Conclusion

Ulrich Beck (2005) described the Southeast Asian tsunami of 2004 as a personal/individual experience, according to the different geographical levels of experience people had. The entire international community went into mourning. The number of European victims, the media narrative and the political interests of Western countries, however, transformed the tsunami into primarily a Western catastrophe. It became a collective experience as a consequence of the reduction of distance, which also contributed to spurring the incredible generosity of the European people. According to the statements of the ICP project manager, Dr. Miozzo (Bonati, 2007), media spectacularization of the tsunami in 2004 was the start of a European wave

of generosity; the role of the media in this tragedy was therefore recognized as fundamental. Analysis of donations confirmed that a higher percentage of financial aid came from private donations, which were stimulated by media images broadcast worldwide. The Southeast Asian tsunami led to massive private solidarity, which 'forced' Western governments to take action. The initial rescue efforts, however, were completely directed towards recovering European nationals involved in the disaster, in accordance with the flag policy and confirmed through analysis of the Italian case study.

Moreover, the media 'tsunami' unearthed several problems that had been experienced in other international disasters. In fact, the international media claim moved a great number of 'well-wishers', who would not usually be involved in the recovery process. As a consequence of the great number of stakeholders involved in the disaster, there was confusion and rescue efforts were slowed down (Bonati, 2007).

On the other hand, the Tohoku disaster – which began as a local tragedy – rapidly became a potential international catastrophe. The risk of radiation leaks alerted all of the international communities, and the nuclear risks went from a local level to an international one. At a global level, the situation challenged and impacted the policies of nuclear power. The media became promoters of transposing reflections on the risks of radioactivity, feeding the political debate. An analysis of foreign relief makes it clear that it was mainly directed towards its citizens in the areas affected by the tsunami and by the radiation. The ICP, in particular, was limited to 'monitoring' the situation. This was, however, a consequence of Japanese (i.e., local) control of the recovery process – something that did not occur in the Southeast Asian regions.

In conclusion, the disaster narratives were different in the two aftermaths, according to the different images of the role played by humans in producing disasters. In the Japanese tsunami, human responsibility (linked to the inefficiency in managing the nuclear emergency and to the obsolescence of the nuclear plant) overtook the tsunami and the nuclear risk predominated in the natural disaster. Here, man was both a victim of the natural disaster and responsible for the technological disaster. On the other hand, in the Southeast Asian tsunami, man appeared to be vulnerable and powerless in the face of nature. The people that were killed were tourists during the holiday season – innocent victims of the violence of nature.

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Notes

[1] In this paper, event is interpreted as a space-time point (see Dansero and Mela 2007).

[2] The Guardian, 22 June 2015 "New study links global warming to Hurricane Sandy and extreme weather events"

[2] The word 'Westernization' is usually used to designate the process of standardization or globalization of Western culture. Edward Said, in *Orientalism*, argued that Westernization coincided with the process of colonization. In the dictionary, the word is used to define the act of influence with ideas, customs, practices, etc., characteristic of the Occident or ofb the Western USA. However, in this paper, the word is used in order to identify the process through which the Western world appropriates a disaster that occurred out of the Western geographical borders.

[3] Indeed, climate change can be responsible for disasters, or rather it is the possibility that a disaster happens, thus it does not fall into the category of disaster as defined in literature

[4] This is the first newspaper for the number of copies sold in Italy, founded in Milan in 1876.

[5] This is the second national newspaper, after *Il Corriere della Sera*. Eugenio Scalfari founded it in Rome in 1976. It has always been associated with the Italian socialist movement.

[6] Giappone, il Mondo Pensa Solo al Nucleare e Scorda il Dramma Umanitario del dopo Sisma

[7] Published on 21st March, 2011, original title "E la Germania Accelera L'addio al Nucleare a Maggio in Funzione Solo 4 Reattori su 17"

[8] "Perché è Possibile Rinunciare al Nucleare"

[9] "Chernobyl: Dopo 25 Anni Ancora Alto il Rischio Tumori Nei Superstiti", Repubblica.it

[10] L'arroganza umana davanti alla natura. Gridare a scelte emotive davanti al nucleare non ha senso

[11] The 'flag policy' is when a foreign country takes action autonomously and is disrupted by cooperation logic in order to safeguard its interests and recover its dispersed people. It usually produces an uneven and unequal distribution of goods among the people involved. In such cases, local interests are accorded the least priority (see Oslen et al., 2003).

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