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POLITICIZATION AND ITS EFFECTS IN THE HAIYAN CRISIS IN THE PHILIPPINES: INSIGHTS FOR DISASTER MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT
The primary leitmotif of this paper revolves around the occurrence of the super typhoon Haiyan as a natural cataclysm that took thousands of lives and inflicted economic loss in untold billions of pesos in the Philippines. Considered as among the strongest typhoons that ever made a landfall in history and regarded as among the most catastrophic in terms of damages and death tolls, super typhoon Haiyan is more than just a meteorological or natural phenomenon that buried a country in deep crisis; it was, in fact, a socio-political phenomenon that raised a number of issues that have had effects along political, economic, social, cultural and administrative dimensions. In this paper, the researcher looked into how this crisis was politicized i.e., how political and social actors, both government and non-government, brought the issue in the arena of public discourse in the spheres of politics. Using documentary analysis and social media analysis, the researcher argued that the politicization of the super typhoon Haiyan led to an inefficient mechanism and improvisation for response, recovery and rehabilitation efforts of state actors. On the basis of the lessons learned from the "Haiyan crisis" the researcher presented some insightful inputs for policy recommendations along the domain of disaster management.

KEYWORDS: *Climate change, Climate change adaptation, Super Typhoon Haiyan, crisis response, disaster and risk management*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The occurrence of natural disasters has become more frequent and their extent more damaging compared to those which have taken place in the past. Accordingly, there exists a steady increase in the incidence of natural catastrophes since the 1970. It is estimated that around 270 million annually are being affected by natural disasters since the 1990. There was thrice as much as number of natural disasters that took place between the years 2000 to 2009 as there were during the year 1980 to 1989. It is interesting to note that around 80 percent of such an unprecedented increase was brought about by climate-related events. Due to climate change, it is expected that natural disasters will be a frequent incidence in disaster-prone regions of the world and their effects are likewise more severe that they were in the past years (Leaning, Jennifer and Guha-Sapir Debarati, 2013).

Due to the massive impact of natural disasters to people and the immediate society, they have become more and more sensationalized thematic contents of discussion both in the political and social arena. In

conjunction to this, the occurrence of a natural disaster as a crisis phenomenon can be regarded both a social and political construction. The perception of the public to the occurrence of Super Typhoon Yolanda as a crisis was shaped to a large extent by the dynamics of politics and the political actors involved in it. How politicians frame the crisis as an event, their reactions to it vis-à-vis the actual impact of the event in people and society, how they act and react with oppositions and criticisms, how they make decisions in the face of the crisis and how they improvise and coordinate with concerned bodies and agencies in-charge of the crisis to address the issues of decision-making and response are important aspects of politicization of the crisis. It can be fairly argued that the politicization of the Yolanda/Haiyan disaster contributed a lot to the dynamics of response and reactions of the various sectors of the Philippine society and the international community at large. This paper explored the politicization aspects of the Haiyan/Yolanda disaster and how it affected the dynamics of crisis management response in the country.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In general, this paper aimed to determine and describe the effect of politicization in crisis management. Using the case of the Super Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda crisis in the Philippines, the researcher sought to address the following main research problem:

> What are the effects of politicization in the crisis management mechanism of the Philippines government in dealing with the Super Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda crisis?

Anchored on the foregoing main research question, the researcher envisaged to give answers to the following three (3) sub-questions which are bound by some theoretical mechanisms pertaining to the effects of politicization and mediatization in the dynamics of crisis management respecting the Super Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda, to wit:

> (1) What aspects of politicization were visible in the occurrence of the super typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda in the Philippines?
>
> (2) How did politicization affect the sufficiency of crisis management response of the country in dealing with the impact of Super Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda?

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

By design, this paper made use of the single-case study. As used in this context, it refers to an in-depth inquiry of a particular situation. The case studies, according to Yin (2012), are the preferred strategy when "how" and "why" questions are being inquired upon and explored, when the investigator has little control over events or when the focus is on the contemporary phenomenon within some real life context. The single-case study design used in this paper can be categorized as an explanatory case study inasmuch as it seeks to trace explanation for a question. In this paper, the researcher looked into explanations how politicization and mediatization of the Yolanda/Haiyan crisis impacted crisis management dynamics in the Philippines, how mediatization altered public perceptions of the nature and magnitude of the crisis and other similar questions. In effect, the case study which was used in this paper, being explanatory and exploratory in approach, dealt with questions with operational links needing to be traced in time (Yin, 2009).

4. SAMPLING DESIGN

This single-case study focused on the occurrence of Super Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda as the principal subject matter of study.

For the politicization inquiry of this paper, the researcher made use of press releases and speeches from the Office of Malacanang (Office of the President of the Republic of the Philippines), interviews from broadcast media both local (TV Patrol and 24 Oras) and international (CNN, BBC, ABC, Al Jazeerah, etc.) and newspaper articles from The Philippine Daily Inquirer, The Manila Bulletin and the Philippine Star which are considered as the three biggest print media companies in the country.

5.0 RESULTS

5.2.1. *Visible Aspects of Politicization in the Occurrence of Super Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda*

The first hypothesis posed in this paper is that the high level of politicization more likely results to insufficient crisis management response. To test this hypothesis, the researcher looked into three angles of politicization and analyzed how these impact the adequacy of crisis management, to wit: on decision-making, positions/oppositions on issues surrounding the crisis and blame-games and scapegoating.

5.2.1.1. On Politicization of Decision-Making and Framing of the Decision Situation. There are a few identified situations where decision-making process was politicized in this crisis. Firstly, the confrontation between then Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Mar Roxas and Tacloban City Mayor Alfred Romualdez on the issue as to which decision-making unit should take charge of the crisis relief efforts, i.e., whether the national government or the local government. The former claimed that according to existing protocol the first

front-line responders in times of crisis are the local government units and that the national government will not take over unless the local government unit concerned passed an ordinance authorizing the national government to take charge.

With respect to decision-making on matters of natural disaster, the local government units are empowered under the law to take initiative and assume the frontliner's role. That was the point of Secretary Roxas. But Mayor Romualdez was quick to imply that in a crisis of this magnitude and extent, the national government can take over when it is beyond the local government unit's power and resources to remedy the crisis. This top-down versus bottom-up hierarchy mechanism in decision-making in times of crisis inevitably becomes politicized when heated political arguments and emotional sentiments come to play. This example best illustrates what may be rightly called a "politicization of crisis decision."

Another notable example politicization of decision is that of some politicians, both local and national who allegedly took advantage of the crisis to frame their political agenda in the 2016 Philippine Presidential election. It has been reported that some relief trucks and aid carried the names of local and national politicians. Tarpaulins, bags, canisters and even pack of noodles bore the logo, names and photos of politicians.

It is interesting to note that three years after the crisis, both DILG Secretary Mar Roxas and Vice-President Jejomar Binay ran as President of the country. Both of them lost the election. The politicking they portrayed during the crisis backfired to both of them during the election. They lose the race from a candidate with less popularity and logistics, now President Rodrigo Duterte.

Another manifestation where the humanitarian aid was politicized was when China, the second largest economy was criticized by both media and some analysts on the paltry aid it has given to the Philippines, which is less than that which was given by IKEA, a Swedish furniture company. This criticism was made in reference and in comparison to the amount of aid and assistance given by other economic powers such as the US, UK, Japan and Germany. The Time Magazine described it as "measly," while Reuters used "meager" to describe it. (Beech, 2013; Rajagopalan, 2013). It has been speculated that the actuation of the Chinese of giving less was a result of the diplomatic row between the Philippines and China that occurred when President Benigno Aquino of the Philippines filed a suit in the international tribunal regarding China's assertion of ownership of certain islands which are part of the exclusive economic zone and maritime territory of the Philippines. This rather sour relationship between the two countries arising from the maritime dispute was thought of as the main reason behind such actuation. Even this act was highly politicized in the international community. With this criticism, the Chinese government stepped up the aid it had previously pledged and even sent humanitarian teams in the Philippines. (Perlez, 2013).

5.2.1.2. On Conflicting Positions and Oppositions. If there exists politicization of decision, there likewise occurred politicization in terms of the positions taken upon by political actors in the field on a number of issues surrounding relief, recovery and rehabilitation efforts of the government. There were several instances when the positions of the government and/or ruling party were different from that of their oppositions and critiques: conflicting claims on the death toll and damage inflicted by the crisis and opposing claims on the progress of relief efforts in Tacloban.

One illustrative case is the conflicting claims between the government and other sources relative to the death toll. The party-list group Bayan-Muna (which is a nationalist party group in the country) pressed the Congress for the conduct of inquiry about the actual death toll on the basis of some claims that the casualty reached as high as 18, 000, a figure which will pale in comparison with the government's final head count of less than 7, 000 (Santos, 2014). The government tends to downplay the effect of the crisis to attenuate the negative publicities that emerged in the first few days of the crisis. It has been likewise reported that the NDRRMC stop counting the number of casualties when it almost hit the 7, 000 mark. Furthermore, the Palace sacked a police regional director from his post who once told the media in an interview that the casualty may reach as high as 10,000.

5.2.1.3. On Blame Games and Scapegoating. The delayed and slow rehabilitation efforts for the victims of Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda became a hard-fought political battle among and between crisis managers of the country. And with the arrows of heated arguments and finger pointing in all directions, some people unwittingly became casualties of strayed political bullets. The issue on slow rehabilitation efforts served as a favorite recipe among the Office of the President, Office of the City Mayor, the Office of the Department of Interior and Local Government and the Office of the Presidential Assistant for Rehabilitation and Recovery. Tacloban City Mayor Romualdez blamed the national government through President Aquino and Interior Secretary Roxas for the delayed relief efforts

contending among other things that the national government refused to extend help to the city because of politicking. Secretary Roxas was quick to defend the side of the government and passed the buck to the local government, even going to the extent of unsheathing his political sword with his infamous quote: "Remember you are a Romualdez and the President is an Aquino."

Oppositionists put the blame to the government, more particularly to Interior Secretary Roxas and NDRRMC Chair Gazmin for their alleged ineptitude even before the crisis took place.

Both the national and local governments blamed the state bureau, the Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical Astronomic Services Administration (PAGASA), for not giving accurate and prompt forecasts on the status of the typhoon so as to give adequate warning to the people who will be most likely hit by the disaster. The state bureau was heavily blamed and criticized for failure to give ample and prompt warning about the onslaught and potential damage that can be caused by the storm surge. Accordingly, "while state weather bureau PAGASA accurately forecasted Yolanda's path and strength, it was wanting in terms of warning the public of the storm surges." The German Aid Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) indicated that 94% of the casualties in Tacloban, Palo, and Tanauan can be attributed to storm surge while 5% were death caused by high wind speeds (Pedrasa, 2014). The weather bureau cited the outdated weather facilities and lack of staff as rationalization from public criticism.

5.2.1.4. Effect of Politicization on the Sufficiency of Crisis Management Response

The effect of politicization in the adequacy of crisis management response is clear and evident in the Haiyan/Yolanda disaster during the response and recovery phases. It also impacted the crisis communication both during the preparation and response phases. While it can be said that crisis managers did their best on their own merits, it appeared that their best is not enough.

The effect of politicization was clearly felt during the transition from response phase up to the recovery phase. During the response phase (starting November 08, 2013), the politicians have already been bickering as to who should take charge. The national government claimed that the local government unit should take the lead role and serve as the backbone in crisis response, claiming among other things that the existing law provides for it. But the former contradicted this claim arguing that the national government should take over in times like this where

the magnitude of the crisis far exceeded the local government units' resources, capacity and capability. The Interior and Local Government Department even asked the local government unit to pass an ordinance before the national government can act to legalize the former's operation, which expectedly irked the local government unit of Tacloban City.

Clearly, this slowed down the process of response. While the two decision-making units were quarreling over petty matters, survivors who urgently needed water, food and shelter were caught between two raging political behemoths. While they were busy defending themselves in the media, thousands of bodies still piled up in the street, in the bridges, along houses leaving a horrible death trail. The effect of politicization in the response phase is so evident that supposedly the crisis responders should have taken action early on November 09, 2013 when typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda sailed out the Philippine seas, but help came out only three days after. Poor coordination and failed collaboration are evident in this case. Politics got the better of them and the country.

Two important things could have been done. Firstly, the national and local government units could have improvised on the existing protocol by allowing the national government or both of them hand-in-hand to immediately take over. Secondly, the national government can immediately take over of the crisis even without the local government unit's passing of ordinance (I am critical whether the passing of local ordinance is still necessary considering the nature and gravity of the crisis the national government can immediately step in taking the lead role) by virtue of exercise of its police power. But these commonsensical and rational acts were not done; instead, the bickering and tirades went on and on in front of spotlights and lenses of both the national and international media.

In fact, it took the Office of the President three (3) days before it declared a state of national calamity by virtue of issuance of Proclamation No. 682 or Memorandum Circular No. 56 (Gutierrez, 2013). Given a disaster of this scale and magnitude, many critics of the President argued that the President should have not waited that long before it declared a state of national calamity. There is an element of truth to this criticism. For one thing, the declaration does not require legislative consent and concurrence and it is within the sole power of the President to declare a state of national calamity. The earlier declaration of a state of national calamity is crucial at this point. Full police powers could have been exercised; the national government could have assumed full blanket authority to lead the crisis on a national scale. Three days is too

long before help could reach the survivors of the tragedy. Water, food, clothing and immediate medical attention were needed exigently on the first one or two days after the typhoon left the Philippine soil. Apparently, this caused delayed relief and recovery efforts.

In this boiling political swirl, the clear losers are the survivors of the tragedy, who until this point in time are still awaiting shelters for their families; some chose to remain in Manila where they were evacuated four years ago realizing that Tacloban city remains unfit for habitation. It can be argued that instead of blaming, the crisis managers could have dedicated their full energy to resolving the crisis at a hand so that they may be remembered by the survivors for rebuilding a city from ruins. They will go down in history unscathed by the bad memories of the tragedy.

In terms of crisis communication, it can be fairly assessed that there was not enough coordination and communication during the pre-crisis and crisis stage. In the pre-crisis stage, crisis communication can be assessed as less adequate. The public were not adequately informed by their local government leaders about the possible effect of storm surges and high speed winds. The local government units and the national government, on the other hand, did not exercise and exhaust all efforts to evacuate the people from their homes, either by consent or by force, which are mostly situated in the coastal areas where the worst impact of storm surges took place. It should be noted that the greatest number of deaths were from the coastal communities. While the weather bureau correctly gave forecasts, its failure lied on the insufficient warning on the effect of storm surges for those people living in the coastal areas.

Politicization resulted to less than adequate crisis management in the domain of crisis communication. The political maelstrom between and among the public officials resulted to poor coordination and collaboration. There was even confusion as to the roles of different departments such as Social Welfare Development and Health Department as to the humanitarian aid coming from foreign entities. The aid donors were at a loss to whom coordination should be made since there was no existing mechanisms as to the coordination of humanitarian aid coming from other countries. The problem is no existing mechanism on the coordination of foreign humanitarian aid. The law is silent about this matter. Existing policies and regulations and even practice did not anticipate this and therefore it is absent from the existing normative framework of crisis convention that the country had at the moment. Did

this affect the sufficiency of crisis management response? The answer to this is in the affirmative. It slowed down the giving and doling out of survival stuffs and kits to the victims of the calamity. The crisis manager of the country failed to improvise under the situation. They have waited for a long period of time before they could have done so.

Over-all this insufficiency of crisis management response brought about by politicization can be gleaned from the percentage of reconstruction and rehabilitation made by the Philippine government. As of September 2016, of the 205, 000 homes which was committed to be built by the government, only 25, 000 of these were already constructed and only 2, 500 were occupied. This is a mere 1% of the actual number of houses which was promised by the government though almost three years have passed after the tragedy (Doyle, 2016).

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, the hypothesis postulated at the outset that the high level of politicization more likely results to the insufficiency of crisis management response is therefore accepted.

6. CONCLUSION
On the basis of the analysis and findings of this paper, the following conclusions were drawn:

(1) The occurrence of super typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda crisis is a highly politicized phenomenon. One visible proof of politicization are the actions and reactions from political actors both in state and non-state levels. Politicization has many faces in this crisis which includes but is not limited to politicization of decision-making situations and politicization in terms of the positions taken by dominant political entities and corresponding oppositions from rival entities. Politicization also surfaced in such vicious crisis management behavior such as blame games and scapegoating;

(2) It was illustrated in this paper that the high politicization of a crisis results in most likelihood to less adequate crisis management. The politicization of super typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda crisis can be considered a classic example of this proposition. The politicization in the context of this crisis brought about negative repercussions, among of which includes inadequate and ineffective preparation, delayed and inefficient response and poor and snail-like recovery and rehabilitation of the areas devastated by the typhoon;

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