


VICTIM ARTICULATION IN MAINSTREAM ONLINE NEWS COVERAGE: A
CASE STUDY OF HURRICANE SANDY

by

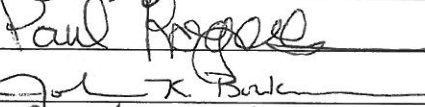
Patricia K. Ro
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Committee:



Paul Rogers

Director




John K. Burkman



Robert M. [unclear]

Department Chairperson



[unclear]

Dean, College of Humanities
and Social Sciences

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Sandy

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
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by

Patricia K. Ro
Bachelor of Arts
George Mason University, 1987

Director: Douglas Eyman, Professor
Department of English

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Fairfax, VA



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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my mom, for telling me to find the people who don't have a voice.

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ABSTRACT

VICTIM ARTICULATION IN MAINSTREAM ONLINE NEWS COVERAGE: A CASE STUDY OF HURRICANE SANDY

Patricia K. Ro, M.A.

George Mason University, 2013

Thesis Director: Dr. Douglas Eyman

This thesis intends to review and integrate disaster research and their myths, media's use of frames, and theory of *homo sacer* and marginalization to determine how disaster victims can potentially be marginalized through the way they are articulated through mainstream online news media. This thesis will review how disaster victims can be articulated as understood through already existing works and frame analyses of Hurricane Katrina; and then, determine how those directly affected by Hurricane Sandy are articulated by carrying out a frame analysis of select online news media coverage.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Within the past six years we have borne witness to a slew of major natural disasters not only around the world but within our own borders. Tsunamis, earthquakes, oil spills, and hurricanes have riddled our headlines and embedded themselves into our cultural memories. In early 2011, Japan was hit with a trifecta of an earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear crisis; shortly after, our own headlines were reading of tornadoes ripping through the Southeast area of the United States. In 2005, we experienced one of the most illuminating and shameful disasters in our nation's history, Hurricane Katrina. And this past year in 2012, "Frankenstorm" Sandy tore its way through the Caribbean and up the eastern seaboard, particularly devastating New Jersey and New York.

How we come to know, read about, and thus understand these disasters are through news coverage of these events. A disaster is an extraordinary event that happens suddenly and commands attention. However, there are lasting effects to natural and manmade disasters we tend to forget. A disaster becomes a spectacle committed to cultural memory but only in its initial occurrence—something to be buried once it's no longer the "big story." According to the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (2010), "In the three and a half years that PEJ

has been regularly tracking news coverage, most disasters have been covered as ‘one week wonders’—stories that generate a major burst of media attention and then quickly drop out of the headlines” (para. 1). In this burst of media attention and in the reporting of these disasters, what happens to the people who are most affected by disasters? How are they written about, if at all?

If we look at victim articulation, we must first look at who these victims are. Across all disasters, it is the same demographic of people who are affected most—the most socially vulnerable who exist on the margins of society. Hurricane Katrina was a disaster that set a precedent in the United States and exposed how the most socially vulnerable citizens became explicitly marginalized. No other disaster and its coverage to date in the United States has previously lain bare such blatant social and political inequalities, prejudices, and marginalization of its victims. While Hurricane Katrina might be the “extraordinary case,” it might not be an isolated one. Marginalization may or may not be happening but it is a potential danger enough to warrant awareness in continuing disaster coverage. As witnessed in the coverage of Katrina and as discussed by scholars who have already analyzed this coverage, it is possible to write about disaster victims in a marginalizing way. Disasters present a strange catch-22: They are focusing events that can bring attention to socially vulnerable citizens we might not see otherwise; but through certain ways that American mainstream news media articulate victims, marginalization can become a very realized possibility within disaster coverage.

Through a review and integration of disasters and their myths, how we interpret information through media and its use of frames, and theory of *homo sacer* and

marginalization, this thesis intends to set the groundwork for how disaster victims can potentially be marginalized through the way they are articulated through media. This thesis intends to first, review how disaster victims can be articulated as understood through already existing frame analyses of Hurricane Katrina news coverage; and second, find out how disaster victims of Hurricane Sandy are articulated by carrying out my own frame analysis of select online news media coverage.

This chapter will begin with a literature review that sets up the theoretical groundwork for the thesis goals in which I will discuss each section—disasters, media, frames, social vulnerability and marginalization—separately, but in the order that they relate and feed into each other. Before I introduce and discuss both storms, I will briefly explain how I will approach Katrina and explain the methods I will use to analyze Sandy. I will then introduce and discuss Hurricane Katrina as an example of marginalization through news coverage as understood through already existing works, and how this justifies the analysis of how disaster victims are and can be written about. Following this discussion, I will introduce Hurricane Sandy and the methods used to sort and analyze the data derived from the impact and post-impact period of the disaster and its news coverage. Finally, this thesis will discuss the frames used to depict those directly affected by the disaster, how they were articulated in the overall narrative of Hurricane Sandy, who might have been left out of this narrative, how it relates to the theories articulated in this thesis, and potential future research avenues.

Literature Review

What is a disaster?

For the purposes of this thesis, disasters are presented through three distinct but related approaches. The first comes from a sociological angle in which the definition covers the social and theoretical dimensions of a disaster and its causes. This approach defines disasters as socially constructed with differentiating effects on different demographics, which I will relate to the theory of Agamben's *homo sacer* and marginalization of disaster victims. Second, for consensus and enactment of policies, disasters must be defined in a clear and measurable manner. Third, in a scientific-based research approach, disasters are identified by type and categorized into time periods.

In sociological terms, it is important to distinguish between *natural hazard* and *human disaster*. Cannon et al. (2003) argue,

In order to understand how people are affected by disasters, it is clearly not enough to understand only the hazards themselves. Disasters happen when a natural phenomenon affects a population that is inadequately prepared and unable to recover without external assistance (p. 4).

Not explicitly stated in the definitions cited by organizations such as FEMA or the U.N., much of the havoc that disasters create is the result of human failure and is socially constructed. The United Nations (Terminology, 1992) defines "disaster" as a "serious disruption of the functioning of society, causing widespread human, material, or environmental losses which exceed the ability of affected society to cope using only its own resources." FEMA (1990) defines it as "An occurrence that has resulted in property

damage, deaths, and/or injuries to a community.” Charles Fritz (1961), a pioneer of disaster research, defined disaster as

[an] actual or threatened accidental or uncontrollable events that are concentrated in time and space, in which a society, or a relatively self-sufficient subdivision of a society undergoes severe danger, and incurs such losses to its members and physical appurtenances that the social structure is disrupted and the fulfillment of all or some of the essential functions of the society, or its subdivision, is prevented. (p. 655)

"Disaster" distinguishes itself from "natural hazard" in that a "disaster is not the inevitable consequence of natural hazard" (Priestley & Hemingway, 2007, p. 25). While the natural hazard might be the agent, a human disaster is "rooted in the interplay of social and economic factors in the environment, exacerbating the vulnerability of people and environments and intensifying their impacts when they occur" (Oliver-Smith, 2006, para. 1). These social and economic factors are influenced by race, class, and age, which may generate unequal exposure to risk by making some groups more vulnerable to disasters than others (Bankoff, 2006, para. 3).

Therefore, a disaster is not a singular, natural event. Rather, it is multidimensional and complex—the convergence and result of these interrelated facets of society *with* a natural hazard. In political terms, disasters are widely known as spectacles that arrive suddenly and create physical as well as internal damage to a city and its infrastructure, and create a devastating impact on human lives and conditions. While these definitions differ only slightly, the consensus among these definitions lie in a substantial human

and material loss and society's inability to function normally as a result of the disaster. This is what sets disasters apart from accidents or other types of emergencies; the damages a disaster creates are large enough in scale and scope to disrupt and change the very face, function, and structure of a society.

For scientific research purposes, disasters are also identified by type and are typically divided into two categories: natural and technological, as they are differentiated by the agents that cause them. For the purposes of this thesis, only the category of natural disasters will be discussed. Natural disaster agents include earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, volcanoes and tsunamis.

Disasters are also categorized into time periods. Disaster researcher H.W. Fischer (1998) divided disasters into five time periods: pre-impact, the impact period, the immediate post-impact period, the recovery period, and the long-term reconstruction period, with each period containing different elements of behavioral and organizational response (p. 15). Since the focus of this thesis is on media coverage of disasters, this thesis will examine the immediate post-impact period. In the immediate post-impact period, the disaster has already struck and essential services such as electricity and communication services are restored, and cleanup and search and rescue efforts begin. In this period, Fischer (1998) states, "[e]mergency organizations respond and attempt to coordinate the community response to the disaster. State and federal agencies, when applicable, initiate their support." Most importantly, "[t]he local media initiates coverage providing helpful information to the community while national media venues begin continual coverage about the event" (1998, 2008, p. 16). How we come to understand

disasters and their impact lies in this period and is greatly influenced by the way the media reports the disaster.

Media

This thesis will take a top-down approach and discuss the role of media in informing and shaping our social world, the tools through which these messages are relayed (frames), and then discuss how disasters are typically reported by news media and read by the public.

Role of Media

Much of what we know and what we remember about our social world is relayed to us through news media. Sue Robinson (2009) explains the press' role in our collective memory:

collective memory [. . .] is an agreed-upon version of a news event's remembrance according to the contemporary circumstances of society. Collective memory scholars suggest that the journalists' role is to explain tragedy through stories that help to guide society in healing while reaffirming the dominant set of values and ideology. (p. 797)

To sift through all that goes on in the world, information is selected and filtered through media. It is then packaged and presented to us through frames to become what we know. In other words, "the media set public priorities just by paying attention to some issues while ignoring others. They determine what issues are important and in this way play an important role in structuring our social reality" (Trent & Friedenber, 1991, p.107). News media function around the ethos of neutrality when presenting and relaying information

and this relay is a two-part process: 1) determining what is told, and 2) how it is told, thus translating into what we know and how we interpret. What we're told is not objective; it is rhetorical and persuasive. Although news reports, in principle, are factual, impersonal, and objective, media theorists regard these reports as "value laden and ultimately ideological, as a social force typically acting to support the interests of various economic and political elites" (Ventola, 2000, p. 379). This ethos of neutrality makes news reporting, as a distinctive genre of text, implicitly persuasive. As such, it has the rhetorical potential to influence beliefs, assumptions, values and expectations, and the ability to influence how we interpret our social world (Ventola, 2000, p. 379).

Frames: What they are and what they do

The way information is packaged for us is presented through frames. Frames direct and focus our attention and are the central organizing principle of news coverage and helps makes sense of the issue (Kuypers, 2005). Frames also give meaning and a method of interpretation to facts, which remain neutral until framed (Gamson, 1989, p. 157). Facts "take on their meaning by being embedded in a frame or story line that organizes them and gives them coherence, selecting certain ones to emphasize while ignoring others'" (Gamson qtd. In Kuypers, 2005, p. 196). Jim A. Kuypers (2005) extends this view by noting that "[f]raming...is the process whereby communicators act—consciously or not—to construct a particular point of view that encourages the facts of a given situation to be viewed in a particular manner, with some facts made more or less noticeable than others" (p. 187).

For example, welfare and poverty can be framed in polarizing ways. On one hand, poverty can be framed as the result of governmental and societal failure, where forces bigger than the impoverished—the government, economy, politics—are to blame. On the other hand, the issue of poverty can be framed in such a way where the poor are blamed for their own disadvantaged status (Nelson et al). Welfare is often framed and argued as either a system that reinforces poverty or as a system that helps those willing to work out of poverty. In another example, Thomas Nelson et al (1997) studied the effect of news frames on tolerance for the Ku Klux Klan (p. 567). Using tolerance as the controlled frame, they presented their audience with one of two local news stories about a Klan rally that utilized different frames (Nelson et al, 1997, p. 567). One of the stories framed the rally as an issue of free speech, while the other story framed the rally as a disruption of public order. Those subjected to the free speech issue expressed more tolerance for the KKK than those who were exposed to the public disorder issue. Focusing on the facts or swing of one side is a way of framing an issue, and as a piece of communication—explicitly or implicitly persuasive—elicits a specific response.

Kuypers (2005) identifies the “what” and “how” functions of media as “agenda setting” and “agenda-extension.” Agenda-setting determines *what* we read. It is when media focuses the public’s attention on a specific event or issue over another by simple exposure—how much attention media gives that event sets the agenda (Kuypers, 2005). It is also important to note that continued coverage of an issue or event can create a press-supported context. Agenda-extension is the second step in which media plays a role in *how* we read the event or issue and evaluate it in relation to content of media coverage, or

a press-supported context (Kuypers, 2005). A press-supported context, according to Kuypers (2005), directly involves the influencing of public opinion by making particular points of an issue more salient than others, thus advancing a particular agenda (p. 189).

How frames are identified

One important aspect of framing is the lexical choices news media make in the stories they tell. Zhongdang Pan and Gerald M. Kosicki (1993) proposed that “the words chosen by a news reporter reveal the way that reporter categorizes what he or she is reporting upon,” with word choice signifying the presence of a particular frame (pg. 62). Robert M. Entman (1991) suggests “frames reside in the specific properties of the news narrative that encourage those perceiving and thinking about events to develop particular understandings of them.” These specific properties are key words, metaphors, concepts, symbols, and visual images, which appear consistently within a narrative and create and convey thematic meaning (Entman, 1991, p. 7).

Why we accept frames

Frames follow the historical and social narrative that makes up our cultural memory. They are situated in stories we already know so as events are reported, facts that do not fit our familiar frames are ignored. Frames that are imposed on events are more successful if they follow the schemata of larger cultural frames that bolstered by widely help cultural beliefs. In this sense, writers communicating a story must tell it in a way that makes sense according to our cultural narrative (Binder, 1993, pg. 755).

News Media Portrayal of Disasters

If much of what we know about our social world is relayed to us through news media, then what we know and understand about disasters is also relayed to us through

that same outlet. Disaster myths have come to perpetuate the content of the stories reported by news media and are, unfortunately, common frames used to communicate these events. They are beliefs about behavior that the public have come to know and expect in the event of a disaster. However, there are two sides to this story: public perception of how people behave in a disaster (disaster myths), and *actual* behavior that is more prominent in response to a disaster.

When we think of disasters we think of the event itself—the physical chaos and visible damage caused by the disaster’s agent. In terms of public perception of disaster behavior and disaster myths, we’ve come to believe that the behavioral response to a disaster mirrors the physical and visual chaos caused by the disaster agent. While the normal functions of a society are disrupted, that doesn’t mean society members lose all sense of social control and immediately start engaging in socially disruptive behavior. Disaster researcher J.D. Goltz (1984) states, “[t]here is widespread belief in the United States that those faced with a violent disruption of everyday routines react in an irrational or exploitative manner” (p. 346). It is assumed that disaster victims become incapacitated by psychological trauma or partake in forms of exploitation, particularly looting, that contribute to the ubiquitous “breakdown” imagery associated with disasters (p. 346). These disaster myths, including severe looting, social disorganization, and deviant behavior, have come to be widely believed by the general public and organization actors (Tierney et al, 2006, pg. 57). While these acts might and do take place, the severity of such behavior is greatly exaggerated. Media play a significant role in this as they communicate these events and choose which frames to embed the story in. Unfortunately,

mass media rearticulate these myths in their reports, which promote and reinforce inaccurate expectations and beliefs about disaster behavior (Tierney et al, 2006, pg. 57).

Media Reporting Patters of Disaster Coverage

The way a story is reported has an important impact on whether disaster myths are used, and if so, are reported as typical and as fact: “[t]hese factors include the type of news story, the disaster period being reported on, the size of the newshole devoted to the disaster, and the disaster type” (Fischer, 1998, p. 76). Following Fischer's work, I will discuss the following factors: soft versus hard news, the post-impact period, types of sources, newshole size, and variation by disaster type—all of which constitute media reporting patterns during disaster coverage.

Soft versus Hard News

A hard news story is objective and relays factual information to the reader such as the type of disaster agent, whether that be a flood, hurricane, tornado, etc., the duration of the event and the time it takes to restore essential services (Fischer, 1998, p. 76). On the other hand, a soft news story is a human interest story. These pieces are centered on interviews from officials in charge of organizational responses to the disaster, survivors, emergency personnel and bystanders (Fischer, 1998). According to Fischer (1998), “[t]hese news stories often focus on the tales the survivors have to tell about their ordeal. It has been observed, the greater the emphasis on soft, versus hard news, the greater the likelihood that myths will appear in the story” (p. 76).

Post-Impact Period

The post-impact period is when news media start reporting the effects of the disaster and the period in which myths are commonly used and reported. Media personnel

cannot access the affected area until after impact, so the immediate post-impact period encompasses the rush of publicity that largely involves interviewing victims of the disaster and their personal accounts. Reporters search for the most dramatic stories, the ones that will make headline news. Fischer (1998) states, “[w]e tend to hear the story of victims who most dramatically relate their disaster experience. Once again, we end up with the perception that the account is both true and typical of disaster events” (p. 77).

Sources

In reporting disasters, information comes from people who experience the disaster first-hand (victims) or sources of authority that are charged with mitigating the effects of the disaster. These sources of authority are usually social control agencies such as the police force, National Guard, or city officials, and are the sources that are predominantly quoted and sought after as sources for disaster news coverage. Quarantelli (1987) identified that authority sources in charge of social control are disproportionately represented in news media coverage of a crisis, and are often relayed to us in what is known as a *command-post* point of view. This point of view reflects these agency’s particular activities and perspectives. According to Gortz (1984),

The emergency functions of these agencies include the restriction or control of certain types of emergent behavior, especially activities connected with physical convergence on the disaster site (e.g., looting, observation of damage, unauthorized entry, etc.). Featuring the activities of social control agencies usually means that the behaviors these agencies are charged with controlling will be mentioned in news coverage, whether or not they actually occur. (p. 361)

Many disaster myths revolve around the perception of consistent socially deviant behavior. If information reported by news media predominantly comes from sources that are charged with social control, it makes it much more likely that if a disaster myth that deviates from normative behavior is perceived by these agencies, that myth will be communicated to the public. Since this source focuses directly on social disruption and is one of the main sources used by news media, these types of stories will be disproportionately represented.

Newshole Size

“Newshole size” is simply the amount of time and space allotted to a story (Fischer, 1998, p. 78). Obviously the more time or greater the newshole for a disaster story, the more likely it becomes for myths to be used. According to Fischer (1998), newsholes devoted to disaster coverage has steadily increased:

Since 1944 the size of the newshole devoted to disasters has dramatically increased in news magazines. Only a few column inches used to be allotted to a hard news account of a disaster event, i.e., reporting the type of disaster agent, the location of the event and the response of the local and state officials. Since 1945 the national print media has devoted an ever increasing number of column inches to reporting on disasters. (p. 78)

This increase is in print only, but with ever increasing exposure to news via television and online sources, coverage of disasters and our awareness of them has likely increased as well.

Variation by Disaster Type

Previous research and studies on disaster myths have proven that the use of disaster mythology also depends on the type of disaster being reported. For example, Fischer (1988) found that print media reporting on natural disasters were much more likely to utilize disaster myths. Fischer (1998) explains, "when the disaster was technical in nature, e.g., chemical spill, transportation accident, nuclear power plant radiation leak, the media was much less likely to portray myth" (p. 78). The type of disaster, technological or natural, can determine the narrative of the report.

All of these factors: the tools and function of news media itself, media reporting patterns, and disaster myths, all play a part in crafting the story we come to believe as fact and history. It also shapes how we view those affected by the disaster. On one hand, how disaster victims are depicted can empower them and give them agency. On the other hand, there is the potential for disaster victims to be stripped of agency, power, and visibility (or visibility as one-dimensional) through the process of marginalization.

Social Vulnerability and Marginalization

If disasters are defined as serious disruptions that create major damage and suspend society's ability to function normally, disasters, then, are events that are out of the norm and can qualify as a state of exception—a state that does not conform to the general rule. While each disaster differs in size and scope, the common thread among them is that the most socially vulnerable are the most readily marginalized if they aren't already, and are the ones most affected by disasters.

Social vulnerability can be a way of conceptualizing, or predicting, what may happen—marginalization—to this particular population under the conditions of a disaster. Cutter and Emrich (2006) define social vulnerability as, “the product of social inequalities. It is defined as the susceptibility of social groups to the impacts of hazards, as well as their resiliency, or ability to adequately recover from them” (p. 103). “*Vulnerability* is the term used to describe the condition of such people. [. . .] *social vulnerability* is [. . .] crucially about the characteristics of people” (Cannon et al, 2003, p. 4). In terms of disasters, socially vulnerable groups are predominantly the underprivileged, those who live in high-risk areas and without the resources to protect themselves.

The socially vulnerable exist on the periphery, outside of visibility, and are what this thesis proposes can become “marginalized citizens”—citizens who are subject to the law but not necessarily protected by it. Ferguson, Gever, Minh-ha, & West (1990) describe marginalization as “that complex and disputatious process by means of which certain people and ideas are privileged over others at any given time” (p. 7). It is a process “by which, through shifts in position, any given group can be ignored, trivialized, rendered invisible and unheard, perceived as inconsequential, de-authorizes, ‘other,’ or threatening, while others are valorized” (Ferguson et al., 1990, pg. 7).

The line between socially vulnerable and marginalized is a very, very thin one. But for the purposes of this thesis, social vulnerability will be defined as a *quality* and marginalization as a *process* where one can become *marginalized*—a point and process that can be predicted by social vulnerability. In the event of a disaster, socially vulnerable

populations can become marginalized citizens. However, I present this one caveat: socially vulnerable groups touched by disasters are not all equal. For example, if you take a common victim demographic depicted in news coverage from the Alabama tornadoes in the Spring of 2011, this might look like a poor, white rural male residing in a mobile home. This economic disadvantage and high-risk housing/location identifies this individual as socially vulnerable and unequally susceptible to disaster. But compare this to the poor, urban black male in New Orleans: many can argue that this demographic is one that is not only socially vulnerable, but already marginalized based on history and racial stereotyping. In the event of Hurricane Katrina, research shows that this specific demographic was quickly "other-ized" and readily (re)marginalized. However, for simplicity's sake and to avoid getting caught up in the confusion of marginalized and re-marginalized, this thesis will place all disaster victims in the socially vulnerable category but acknowledge that social vulnerability can be applied to different degrees. This thesis' purpose is to find out if *text* can marginalize; if *how* we write about these populations can cause them to *become* marginalized through news coverage as these populations are all susceptible in the event of a disaster.

Giorgio Agamben and Homo Sacer

Due to the unpredictable and non-normative nature of disasters and their impact, and if looked at as a potential site for marginalization, it is important to draw upon Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995). Theoretical grounding in Agamben's work is important to this thesis because it identifies the constant

possibility of becoming *Homo Sacer*, or becoming marginalized, and identifies when and in what state this can occur.

Agamben develops the concept of *Homo Sacer* as a condition of “bare life” that exists to reify sovereign power yet holds no political power or recognition of its own. It is life that is disposable and can be sacrificed without any political repercussion; in essence, it is a life that has been depoliticized and marginalized. Agamben begins by making the distinction drawn by Aristotle between the two separate spheres of *zoe*, the life we are born into, or mere life; and *bios*, the life of political participation we enter into. To more comprehensively understand Agamben’s theory of *homo sacer*, it is helpful to turn to Ewa Ziarek’s “Bare Life on Strike, Notes on the Biopolitics of Race and Gender” (2008). With the shift to modernity, these two separate spheres of *zoe* and *bios* (the state of nature and state of law) have fused due to the politicization of bare life, taking its shape in the “state of exception.” As the state of exception starts to become the rule, however, a “zone of indistinction” is born, where life hovers and is in a continual transition between both *zoe* and *bios*. In other words, we are never fully and exclusively in just one state—the boundaries between the two become indistinct, making the potential for becoming *homo sacer*, life that is politically insignificant and disposable, a constant threat. A disaster as a “state of exception” fosters this “zone of indistinction” where *homo sacer* is possible.

The embodiment of *homo sacer* can be seen historically as well as currently in prisoners of concentration camps during the Holocaust, gulag workers in Soviet forced labor camps, refugees, death row inmates, the mentally ill, and as this thesis puts forth,

disaster victims. In making a distinction between these embodiments, I believe Agamben moves through different notions of *homo sacer*—true *homo sacer* and those merely presented as *homo sacer*—depending on the subject. True *homo sacer* can be seen in those who experience death as life. Camp victims, both Holocaust and Soviet labor for example, can be considered true *homo sacer* in that *homo sacer* becomes a sentence, an immovable and permanent state of being until physical death takes over the body. On the other hand, the mentally ill, refugees, and disaster victims, can be those merely presented as *homo sacer* because their life as *homo sacer* is not indefinite. Their life and presence in society is on a knife's edge rather than the excommunicated state the essentially dead, true *homo sacer*, exist in. In other words, they can still move into the political/public sphere; theirs is a more transient state than a permanent one. *Homo sacer* is a threat more than a sentence because these people do not regard themselves as essentially dead; they still act in ways that may be construed as political but these acts may be obscured from the press and or articulated to us in ways that reinforce/present their identity to us as merely *homo sacer*.

For example, refugees who might ally themselves with rebel groups for aid, create communities out of camps, and partake in activities that can be considered political in nature, but are still regarded and articulated as “bare life” by humanitarian aid groups and thus kept in a state of “bare life.” In other words, “[p]eople who find themselves refugees have now become, precisely, thinkable as a (‘problematic’) social category in the national order of things, an exception made familiar through the media and through humanitarian appeals on behalf of their ‘bare humanity’” (Mallki, 2002, p. 356). Malkki worked with

Burundian Hutu refugees living in a camp named Mishamo in western Tanzania and observed this phenomenon. Malkki (2002) describes the camp as

geographically, spatially in the middle of nowhere, but it was not a social void.

The people of Mishamo lived in complex systems or relationship. These systems of relationship were social, political, juridical, mythico-historical, economic, etc.

Their lives in the camp were also marked by a chronic tension between their presence there as 'bare life' (following Benjamin, Agamben, Foucault, and Arendt) and as political actors, subjects of history. (p. 359)

Malkki (2002) observed that U.N. officials and other humanitarian aid groups regarded the refugees as objects to humanitarian and development assistance rather than as actors, as their "presence as 'bare life' was more manageable than their politics" (p. 359). The way these refugees are presented to us through news media are articulated through the same view by which humanitarian aid groups manage them: dehistoricized, apolitical, and a presentation as bare life—merely *homo sacer*. The images—bodies and faces of refugees—that disseminate through our media are glossy spectacles that are devoid of the "involved narratives and historical or political details that originate among refugees," which mutes all other connections to this person other than a bare, or "mere" underlying humanity (Malkki, 1996, p. 388).

Many disaster victims are subject to forced migration and have become known as "internal refugees" or "environmental and disaster displaces" as they are displaced by natural or technological hazards (forcedmigration.org, n.d.). The Citizens Disaster Response Center (CDRC) expressed similar concerns as Malkki, arguing that "[v]ictims

should be actors in disaster response and development, and not merely recipients of aid" (Malkki, 1996, p.388). Disaster victims who are relayed to us through media as apolitical, devoid of the capability to act, much like refugees, can also be presented as *homo sacer* – the socially vulnerable in a marginalized state.

Disasters play out as a public drama: disaster coverage provides a narrative and focus for an event that might otherwise seem larger than life. We learn what happened, where, and who the event directly affected. While we hear of human tragedy, heroism, and individual accounts of the event, these are all just fragments—pieces of the puzzle that make up the entire picture of the disaster. It is through analysis of continuous coverage that overarching themes, frames, and focus start to emerge, which goes beyond simply *what* is told, into *how* and *why* we believe it. While Hurricane Katrina is an extreme case among others and is the most explicit in terms marginalization of its victims, it raises the issue of how victims are articulated in overall disaster coverage. Disasters as potential sites for marginalization and as focusing events can lay bare social and political fault lines, and expose citizens that are the most vulnerable. Disaster coverage can thus bring political and public focus to these citizens, or do exactly the opposite. If a human disaster is a result of the interplay between our social, political, and economic factors in the event of a natural or technological hazard, then when it comes to victim articulation in disaster coverage, *how* this event is reported becomes a reflection of our cultural assumptions, and our structural and economic inequities.

Unseen, socially vulnerable and readily marginalized, *homo sacer* as a person and potential, can be realized and recognized in the aftermath of disasters. How we, as

viewers and consumers of information, come to recognize this figure can be determined through the way we read about the disaster. Thus, this theory will be the constant backdrop whenever those most affected by disasters are articulated during the impact and immediate post-impact news coverage of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Sandy.

To establish the need for this type of study, I will first present a case review of Hurricane Katrina. Hurricane Katrina is the absolute worst case scenario—the disaster in which the most socially vulnerable weren't protected. As understood through existing research and frame analysis of Hurricane Katrina, I will apply the theories of marginalization and *homo sacer*. For Hurricane Sandy, I will carry out my own analysis to 1) identify what frames were used when those directly affected by the disaster were articulated, 2) determine if disaster victims were given agency, power, or familiarity—or if they were stripped of it, depicted as an *other*, criminalized, or sacred. 3) In this state of emergency, were the most socially vulnerable protected and included, or were they marginalized and discarded?

Methods: Sandy

This thesis will collect and analyze articles from three news sources that cover Hurricane Sandy when it formed (October 27, 2012), the initial impact of when it hit New Jersey and New York (October 29, 2012), to when the storm dissipated (October 31, 2012) and one week of immediate post-impact. The data I will collect dates from October 27–November 7, 2012. My sources of data will be from online news sources. As we move into a digital era, the accessibility and likelihood to consume news from online sources has and will increase. According to the Pew Research Center's Project of

Excellence in Journalism's (PEJ) annual report on American journalism, conducted in 2012,

Traffic to the top 25 news sites was up 17%, with a total of 342 million average monthly unique visitors in 2011 – up 17% over the prior year, according to Nielson Online. As readers migrate to the web, however, one thing has remained remarkably the stable: the news organizations Americans turn to. The traditional players remain the most popular sources for digital news (Olmstead and Rosenthal, 2012, para. 8, 9).

I triangulated Nielson Online, comScore, and Experian Hitwises' (three major services that measure online readership) top ten online news sources with the highest readership. The top sources named in all three services were: Yahoo news, MSNBC, Huffingtonpost, CNN, FoxNews, and NY Times. Using LexisNexis Academic to collect news articles with the search term "Hurricane Sandy", my top three available sources were MSNBC, CNN.com, and NY Times. The NY Times differed from the other two sources in that it yielded three different categories of news: NY Times print, On the Web, and NY Times Blogs. Since NY Times print articles are also available online, I used the articles from NY Time print and On the Web as my data. I cut Yahoo news as a source because it is an aggregator of news rather than a singular publisher; Huffingtonpost was not available in the LexisNexis database, and FoxNews did not have news archived for the dates I needed.

For my Findings/Analysis section, I will use the search term "Hurricane Sandy" to collect news articles from MSNBC, CNN.com, and NY Times dating from October

29–November 7th, 2012. From this pool of data, I will determine how many articles actually talked about those directly affected by the disaster, and determine what percentage of attention was allocated to this topic out of all the articles that were collected. Of those articles, I will conduct a brief rhetorical analysis to determine what frames emerged and were consistent across coverage.

CHAPTER TWO

Hurricane Katrina

Considered the deadliest and most destructive hurricane to ever hit the United States, Hurricane Katrina made headlines and history as it devastated the Gulf Coast, hitting New Orleans, displacing thousands, and killing over 1,800 people. In a more detailed timeline:

- Friday, August 26th, National Hurricane officials predicted that Katrina was shifting its path to New Orleans. Concurrently, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco declared a state of emergency and activated the Louisiana National guard.
- Saturday, August 27th, Katrina officially becomes a Category 5 hurricane and Bush issues a federal state of emergency for Louisiana. Evacuation of the New Orleans begins but is not mandated as mandatory.
- Sunday, August 28th, the Superdome is opened as a shelter of last resort and many citizens start to seek refuge (History¹).
- Monday, August 29th, Hurricane Katrina makes its historical and deadly landfall and breeches the city's levees, ripping a hole in the Superdome's roof, right above those seeking the last resort shelter (History). As Katrina ravages

¹ <http://www.history.com/topics/hurricane-katrina>

the city, access to the city is impeded due to flooding; a quarter-mile breach in the levee allows water to flow freely into the city; 80 percent of the city is underwater, people are stranded on their rooftops, and bodies are seen floating in the water (History).

- By Tuesday, August 30th and the days following, the devastation and destruction is clear to see, thousands are trapped in the city, and the media maelstrom begins.

To give a quick picture of the city at the time the storm hit: New Orleans, a city with a higher than average crime rate, had a population of about 484,000 people, in which 27 percent of households lived in poverty (Fox News, 2005). 67 percent of the population was black and 28 percent white. And an incomplete levee system, only capable of protecting against a Category 3 storm, was the city's best defense against natural hazards (Fox News, 2005). I believe, and studies support, that these demographic facts, when confronted by a natural hazard, create a disaster where victims can be marginalized rather than helped. Frames of criminality rooted in fear and cultural stereotypes, exacerbated by disaster myths, are activated and utilized by mass media to become the main lens through which the disaster is understood and portrayed to the public. National focus shifted quickly to that of criminality in New Orleans and the breakdown of law and order, "a frame that activated a familiar stereotype about black criminality" (Harris & Carbado, 2006, p. 91).

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, former FEMA director Michael Brown stated, “We’re seeing people we didn’t know exist” (PBS, 2005). Those most affected by disasters are typically those consigned to undesirable areas—areas that are more susceptible to flooding, housing that won’t be able to withstand a storm, areas where access to resources are limited—and those assigned to these areas are largely poor and disenfranchised. They are relegated to the margins, geographically and socially, and are rendered invisible.

Victim demography of Katrina consisted mostly of the elderly, mentally ill, poor, and African American. Essentially, those without political power were disregarded and not saved. This description sounds eerily similar to that of homo sacer—those without political power and abandoned by the law. According to Henry Giroux (2006),

The bodies of the Katrina victims laid bare the racial and class fault lines that mark an increasingly damaged and withering democracy and revealed the emergence of a new kind of politics, one in which entire populations are now considered disposable, an unnecessary burden on state coffers, and consigned to fend for themselves. (P. 174)

Revealed was the absence of a safety net that could prevent certain classes of people from becoming homo sacer in a state of emergency; in other words, “the state no longer provided a safety net for the poor, sick, elderly, and homeless” (Giroux, 2006, p. 175). Viewed as casualties of a natural hazard rather than as casualties of politics, class and social inequity, their *political significance* was rendered invisible. Rosa Brooks states,

“13 percent of Americans—and 18 percent of American children—live in poverty. They live in poverty all year round, not just on special occasions like during hurricanes. And they’re all over the nation, not just in New Orleans” (Sept. 9, 2005, p. 11A, *IPC*). How does 13% of the entire population go unseen? In his observations on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Giroux (2006) argued the poor, especially people of color, not only have to fend for themselves in the face of life’s tragedies but are also supposed to do it without being seen by the dominant society. Excommunicated from the sphere of human concern, they have been rendered invisible, utterly disposable, and heir to that army of socially homeless that allegedly no longer existed in color-blind America. (p. 175)

Negated from the conversation or national view as politically humanely meaningful and now as politically invisible, these people became sacred men not in terms of being executed by the state, but as sacred men whose death held no repercussions.

On the other side of being negated from the conversation lies the equally destructive method of being demonized in the conversation. In this case review of Katrina, this thesis will draw upon Tierney, Bevc, and Kuligowski’s (2006) study *Metaphors Matter: Disaster Myths, Media Frames, and Their Consequences in Hurricane Katrina*, as it comprehensively covers victim articulation and framing in select mainstream news outlets. In the media maelstrom that followed Katrina, all sorts of rumors were reported as truth. Disaster myths such as severe looting, social disorganization, and deviant behavior (although proven to be greatly exaggerated) were picked up by the media and used to focus our attention on Katrina as an apocalyptic

event. Ignored by most is the body of disaster research indicating that social cohesiveness and informal mechanisms of social control actually *increase* in the wake of a disaster, yielding an even lower amount of deviant behavior as compared to during nondisaster times. (Tierney et al, 2006, p. 58). Nevertheless, according to Tierney et al, 2006,

post-Katrina reporting led directly to the social construction of negative images of residents of the impact area, particularly African American victims as the very poor. Later shown to be inaccurate, slanted by sources that were themselves biased, and based more on rumor than on direct observation, reports constructed disaster victims as lawless, violent, exploitative, and almost less than human in the days following Katrina. (p. 62)

For example, tales of murder, child rape, gun violence and death in the Superdome were sensationalized and promulgated in the immediate post-impact period of Katrina. These reports were later found to be false and grounded in nothing but rumor.

In their study, Tierney et al. examined the coverage of three newspapers: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *New Orleans Times-Picayune* during the impact and post-impact period of Hurricane Katrina, from August 29, 2005, to September 11, 2005. In their article, Tierney et al. stress that the series of reports they offer from these sources are “typical comments that were made in these media outlets, not unusual ones” (2006, p. 66). Since my thesis will also be utilizing *The New York Times* as a source, I will present the specific quotes as found by just *The New York Times* in their study.

As discussed earlier, rampant looting is a disaster myth that contributed to the social construction of disorder and chaos in New Orleans. On August 31, 2005, *The New York Times* reported that

“These are not individuals looting. These are large groups of armed individuals.’ . . .”Looting broke out as opportunistic thieves cleaned out abandoned stores for a second night. In one incident, officials said a police officer was shot and critically wounded.” (Treater and Kleinfield, 2005)

On September 1, 2005, reports read:

“Chaos gripped New Orleans on Wednesday as looters ran wild . . . looters brazenly ripped open gates and ransacked stores for food, clothing, television sets, computers, jewelry, and guns.” (McFaddent and Blumental 2005).

Further reports, such as the one that follows, painted New Orleans as a city drowning in turmoil and lawlessness:

“Chaos and gunfire hampered efforts to evacuate the Superdome, and, the New Orleans police superintendent said, armed thugs have taken control of the secondary makeshift shelter in the convention center. The thugs repelled eight squads of eleven officers each he sent to secure the place . . . rapes and assaults were occurring unimpeded in the neighborhood streets . . . Looters set ablaze a shopping center and firefighters, facing guns, abandoned their efforts to extinguish the fires, local radio said.” (Treater and Sontag, 2005)

As representative accounts, these stories demonstrate the rhetorical choice to frame the aftermath of Katrina as an insurgency, a warzone within our own borders where chaos,

gunfire, and violence reign. Focus and exposure alone reinforces the belief that social and civil disorder is the inevitable result of a disaster. The word “chaos” is used repeatedly and a stark divide is immediately created between authorities—“officials”, “police”, “firefighters”, and those who are not—“looters”, “armed thugs”, “opportunistic thieves”. Those in need of aid and assistance are relegated to the margins as the story turns into an “us versus them” narrative. Because of the focus on criminality and breakdown of law and order, residents of the impact area, depicted as violent, became the antagonists of Hurricane Katrina’s narrative. These negative images were reinforced through frames of looting, burglary, violence, which were embedded in the larger frames of social breakdown and urban warfare, thus making the breakdown of law and order a ubiquitous image in the ensuing coverage. With the aftermath of the storm likened to urban warfare, military response was given the go-ahead, and become the largest there has even been for a natural disaster in the United States.

These vivid accounts are pathetic appeals that engage the reader’s emotions and imagination, and here, the focus and word choice appeal to our sense of fear and uncertainty. As a hard news provider, the ethos of this source centers on its appeal to objectivity, as credible in the information it gives. This perceived credibility lends itself to the information’s logical appeal, or its logoi. Although the credibility of these accounts were later questioned, at the time, however, these stories were accepted and spread as accurate by news producers and consumers due to the fact that they were “consistent with the emerging media frame that characterized New Orleans as a “snakepit of anarchy,” a violent place where armed gangs of black men took advantage of the disaster not only to

loot but also to commit capital crimes” (Tierney et al, 2006, p. 68). This frame provided the logical support needed in the portrayal of post-Katrina, and while it was an emergent one, it caught traction because of deeply embedded cultural frames and stereotypes media use to portray minorities(in this case, young black men and the very poor).

What makes this interesting is that deeply embedded cultural memories and stereotypes, no matter how far removed they may seem as our country progresses civilly and socially, is how easily these beliefs can be evoked by these frames. What makes frames successful is when readers fill in the blank for themselves, when they hear the story and recognize it as one they’ve heard before. What this proves is that demographic alone can dictate what frames media immediately jump to, dictating the narrative that is constructed—the implication being the effect and influence it has on decision-making organizations that can help or hinder disaster relief and the rescue of those affected by disaster. In this sense, what to cover and how much of the event to cover is a reflection of our “judgments about the social value of disaster victims and on conception of social distance and difference” (Tierney et al, p. 62, 2006). Hurricane Katrina laid bare the social inequalities and prejudices produced in our cultural psyche—the impact of the disaster was so great that there was nothing left to hide. While the socially vulnerable were forced to the forefront where they were at least seen, danger and damage was attributed to them and not the disaster itself. Those articulated in Katrina were depicted as sources of violence, a hindrance to their own rescue, and as *homo sacer*.

CHAPTER THREE

Hurricane Sandy

Hurricane Sandy formed October 22, 2012, and dissipated October 31, 2012. It peaked at Category 3 when it made landfall in Cuba and became a Category 2 storm off the coast of the Northeastern U.S., becoming the largest Atlantic hurricane on record (Gutner, 2012). Sandy claimed a total of 285 lives and \$75 billion in damages, making it the second costliest Atlantic hurricane, behind only Hurricane Katrina. While Sandy hit the entire eastern seaboard, this thesis will focus on Sandy's course through New Jersey and New York because damage was particularly severe in these states, and as major cities (New York City, in particular), provides parallel to that of Katrina's course through New Orleans.

In New Jersey, preparations began on October 26 with advised and voluntary evacuation. President Obama signed an emerge declaration for New Jersey, allowing the state to request federal funding and other assistance for actions taken before Sandy's landfall (FEMA, 2012). In New York, also on October 26, Governor Andrew Cuomo declared a statewide state of emergency. As streets, subways, and tunnels started to flood, power cut out in areas in and around the city. On October 28th, under the coastal emergency plan, subways closed and residents in areas previously hit by Hurricane Irene in 2011 were evacuated to one of the 76 evacuation shelters around the city. On October 29th, when Sandy made landfall, Mayor Michael Bloomberg ordered a mandatory

evacuation of Zone A, comprised of areas near coastlines or waterways (“NYC Evacuation Zones: Bloomberg Orders a ‘Zone A’ Residents to Evacuate” Retrieved 2012-10-29). 200 National Guard troops were deployed in the city, U.S. stock trading came to a halt on October 29–30, and NYC Langone Medical Center had to cancel all surgeries and medical procedures (NY1, 2012). Furthermore, due to the failure of one of NYU Langone Medical Center’s backup generators, hundreds of patients, including those in intensive care units, were evacuated (Moise and Lupkin, 2012, para. 8). An estimate of 100,000 homes on Long Island were destroyed and more than 2,000 deemed uninhabitable (Chrichton, 2012). On November 26th, Governor Cuomo stated Sandy was “more impactful” than Hurricane Katrina, with estimated cost to New York at around \$42 billion (Kaplan and Hernandez, 2012).

Findings/Analysis

MSNBC.com

MSNBC yielded 37 articles with the search term “Hurricane Sandy” from October 27–November 7, 2012, of which eight articles focused on the human victims of Sandy (total of 22% in the given coverage). Of these articles, victim articulation remained neutral with fairly little embellishment or appeal to emotion. Descriptions of the disaster’s aftermath were straightforward and numbers-based, used for fact building, (other than the deaths of the ten individuals listed as of Monday²) used. Sources quoted throughout MSNBC.com’s coverage weren’t those who were affected by the storm directly, but those of authority or on the outside. For example, an entire article was about

² Catastrophic flooding as Sandy plows into coast:
<http://www.nbcnews.com/id/49593609/ns/weather/t/catastrophic-flooding-hits-northeast-sandy-plows-ashore/>

Foodnetwork star, Sandra Lee, urging people to get involved in storm recovery³. Another example of sources from the outside were quotes and stories focused on marathon runners who volunteered and delivered supplies to those affected by Hurricane Sandy. What was interesting in this coverage was that in stories where accounts of the storm came from the outside—as in sources used to observe the damage—agency was the main focus and frame. These articles were about goods being requested or delivered to those in storm damaged areas.

CNN.com

CNN.com yielded 139 articles, of which 43 articles were directly about Sandy survivors (about 31%) The majority of these articles focus on the altruism and community efforts of those affected by the storm—they consisted of positive, affirmative, and supportive pieces that relayed very little panic on part of the survivors. For example, in the article “As Sandy descends, tips from Katrina survivors”, which was published on October 28, 2012, a day before Sandy touched down in New York, the disaster myth of “every man for himself” is directly confronted. As stated by a Katrina survivor,

“What we can control is our reaction. And researchers report that contrary to popular myth, during disasters most people don’t adopt an ‘every man for himself’ attitude. Most react with responsibility and concern for their neighbors. I have seen it myself, over decades covering blizzards, floods, hurricanes and more.

This focus on altruistic behavior is more consistent with disaster research and is a frame that emerges in this disaster coverage and is used consistently. However, significant

³ Sandra Lee urges: Get involved in storm recovery: http://www.today.com/id/49714475/ns/business-us_business/#.UXQuI8p48b0

damage has been wrought by Sandy and as coverage continues the tone of the hurricane narrative does get slightly negative about six days after impact as those affected are still waiting for power, heat, and housing. There is discontent, brief mentions of looting and burglary with quotes like

“It’s eerie. It’s very quiet and, as soon as it’s dark, you see nothing, you hear nothing, there’s nothing going on, she says. That sense has only been amplified for New Jersey residents as stories of looting and petty burglaries have started to circulate. We’ve had a 6 p.m. curfew since the storm and heard some and heard some alarming rumors about stores being robbed or armed break-ins by people pretending to be from PSE&G,” said Ted A’Zary, of Bayonne (Letrent and Gross, 2012, para. 16).

While looting and burglary are mentioned as a fear, it is not used in this article as a frame. Social disorder isn’t the focus and isn’t the backdrop of what is portrayed as the aftermath of Sandy. Damage and disaster are attributed to Sandy through the descriptions of the physical state the city was in, many likening it to a warzone:

“In all honesty it looks like a war zone,” Breezy Point, Mike Long said. “It looks like during the night, that fighter planes or bombers came through and just bombed the entire area.” (Smith and Shoichet, 2012, para. 9).

What’s important to note here is that this warzone metaphor is used to describe just the physical attributes of the disaster, not the social. The dangers mentioned have to do with the physical aftermath of the storm—swirling waters, downed wires, electricity, etc.

Social dangers like looting and burglary are mentioned significantly less than these dangers.

Only one article from this source talks directly about the effect of the storm on low-income families. As discussed earlier in this thesis, it is usually this demographic that is affected most disproportionately as a result of a natural disaster. According to this article, New York City's poverty rate has been increasing according to census bureau data for the third year in a row, with one in five New Yorkers not being able to afford basic necessities (Wright, 2012). As a natural disaster rolls through, these financial pressures are exacerbated through loss of work, displacement, and homelessness as homes become flooded and unlivable (Smith and Shoichet, 2012). While this demographic may be included generally in articles that articulate those touched by the storm, this is the only one in this data sample that specifically pinpointed the challenges low-income, socially vulnerable citizens will face after a disaster and made them visible.

Overall, agency, once again is the default frame used as community efforts are highlighted as quoted by a Sandy survivor, "We've really come together as a community. We were all so lucky that our friends had power and, therefore, let us share the bounties of our freezers," (Letrent and Gross, 2012, para. 32). As stated by New Jersey Major Bill Akers, "We're going to just do the best we can and give the support. When it's tougher, we're the best community" (CNN Wire Staff, 2012, para. 25). As a whole, victims are articulated as agents in their own rescue. This agency is the focus of these stories—recovery over panic—and is supported by language that is communal; it's more "we", "us", "together", rather than "they", "them" or someone other-ized.

The New York Times

New York Times yielded 389 articles for the search term Hurricane Sandy, of which 77 were directly about Sandy survivors (about 20%). What is interesting about this source overall is its style. Compared to the other two sources, this source is much more descriptive and utilizes more firsthand and first-person accounts. Thus, this source read more as soft news as compared to the other two, which read more as hard news. As such, there seems to be much more appeal to emotion throughout these pieces. Furthermore, the storm itself is anthropomorphized throughout the narrative through descriptive adjectives such as “the mammoth and merciless storm”; Gov. Martin O’Malley’s statement that the state was “very, very fortunate to be on the kinder end of this very violent storm”—as if the storm has a kinder side, or the capability of being kind; or the description, “Hurricane Sandy, in the wily and savage way of natural disasters, expressed its full assortment of lethal methods as it hit the East Coast on Monday night”, with its ability to *express*, or be “wily”—an adjective requiring thought and predetermination (Barron, 2012, para. 2; Kleinfeld and Powell, 2012, para. 2; Schwartz, 2012, para. 5). Consequently, the storm takes on a persona and quality of its own. It acts, it creates, and it devastates, and is the clear antagonist.

Because the data from this source is the biggest pool of data, multiple frames are observed. In addition to agency, frames of resiliency, community, social disorder, and class divide are utilized.

Agency is once again the predominant frame used, as a number of articles focus on relief efforts, community, and altruistic behavior. However, in this source, agency appears in frame clusters and is often accompanied by and overlapped by frames of

resiliency and community. For example, agency and resiliency is the focus in the article “Patient Cannot Leave Home, Visiting Nurses Endure the Storm to Help” in which

Nurses and home aides, who often earn minimum wage or just above it, had to make a decision: go out in the storm or its aftermath, possibly risking their lives and ignoring conditions in their own homes, or make life possible for the patients depending on them. (Leland, 2012, para 5).

This piece and this passage serve to highlight selflessness and altruism that lend itself to painting a narrative that depicts those surviving Sandy as strong and capable. This depiction is reinforced throughout the narrative of Sandy in the multitude of articles that report on relief efforts by volunteers and especially community members. As bolstered in the article “Relief Efforts of All Sizes and Forms Spring Up Across New York”,

Several volunteers said the relief provided by their small-scale community efforts was the first to arrive in some of the most hard-hit parts of the city, outpacing large organizations like the Red Cross and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. (Otterman, 2012, para. 2).

This is a clear representative example of agency and community as disaster victims are framed positively and as first responders for each other.

The frame of resiliency was the most common in human interest pieces that grounded the extraordinary situation of Sandy to the ordinary. Sandy victims in these articles were framed as resilient through the focus on an individual’s life as mundane activities and chores meshed with their ability to cope with the storm and its aftermath.

These activities were ordinary but depicted as resilient in the face of an extraordinary situation. For example, carrying out Halloween in the aftermath of Sandy:

After days trapped inside, “it couldn’t have fallen on a better day,” said Earl Walton, 39 and dressed as the Incredible Hulk. “I have never seen so many people out. This is more Halloween than ever. New Yorkers, we always find a way.”

(Robbins, 2012, para 2)

The quote “New Yorkers, we always find a way” encapsulates all three of the frames mentioned: “New Yorkers” and “we” demonstrate *community*; “find a way” demonstrates both *agency*—the ability to act, and *resiliency*—the ability to sustain and return to normal. The same sentiment and all three frames were highlighted for New Jersey as well in the article “A Shared Determination to Rebuild and Restore the Jersey Shore”, in which the resounding sound bite was “We’re from Jersey. We’ll rebuild, and things will be good again” (Applebome, 2012, para 22).

As expected, frames of social disorder in telling the aftermath of Sandy were also used. Burglary and looting were predominant forms of social disorder that were reported. In the article “Burglaries Are Up After Storm, City Police Say, While Other Crimes Have Dropped,” it is reported that overall crime is down. While this is consistent with disaster research, it is released hesitantly:

Across the city, there have been reports of looting since the storm hit, leading to a 7 percent rise in burglary complaints from Monday through Thursday, compared with the same period last year. Over all, reported crime is down, although some

police officials caution that a full accounting is not yet possible. (Goldstein, 2012, para. 3)

As if to still cling to this belief in inevitable looting and burglary after a disaster, this article breezes past this point and focuses solely on the accounts of burglary, listing how many people were arrested, what was stolen, and in what areas. This coverage makes exploitation seem ubiquitous as “some officers warned that more property crimes may be reported as people return to their homes. [. . .] ‘It’s a burglar’s paradise when you think about it,’ said Ed Mullins, the president of the police sergeants’ union” (Goldstein, 2012, para. 11). The choice to relay the burglary information as ubiquitous, potentially greater than currently reported, and as from a source of authority such as the president of the police sergeants’ union, makes the social disorder frame a deliberate rhetorical choice. However, this is only one article out of many that *do not* make social disorder the sole focus. What puts this into perspective is another article that, while mentions looting, does not focus on it. Titled “Region Faces Rescues, Looting, and a Rising Death Toll,” looting in this article seems like it would be a main focus since it’s in the headline; however, it’s merely a blip in the article and is not a frame that is used. Rather, the physical destruction of the storm is the focus of the article. This example, as a general reflection, may show that social disorder, among other effects of Sandy, is not the priority and is not the way Sandy will be told.

Class divide was an interesting frame that emerged from this source in particular. As disasters tend to exacerbate preexisting social problems, class divide in terms of access to goods, electricity, and the ability to bounce back became a noticeable frame

within victim articulation. On November 1, 2012, the story “Glimmers of Light Downtown” was published, illustrating the experience of the privileged. For example, one account reads:

A FONDUE pot and a pack of Sterno helped Nicole Miller, the fashion designer, weather Hurricane Sandy and the stubbornly persistent blackout that followed it in the apartment she shares with her family on the 10th floor of a building in TrBeCa. “Last night I made a mean fondue,” Ms. Miller said Wednesday, mildly surprised that so many neighbors seemed to have cleared out.” And this morning, I made my coffee in the same pot. We were pretty well prepared, and my husband and son are fine with roughing it.” (Cooper, para. 1 and 2)

Their experience was also likened to “glamping”⁴, or “Glamour camping” as explained by Amar Kuchinad. “You are not in a tent in the middle of the woods—you have a lot of amenities” (Cooper, 2012). These accounts illustrate the stark difference between those who are well off and enjoying a “glamorous” version of enduring the storm and those who have been left homeless and devastated by the storm; theirs is not a story of loss but of inconvenience and privilege. Class divide is also explicitly discussed in the article “Class Divide Jumbled by the Storm”, acknowledging that both classes were hit, but

“The real class divide exposed by Sandy [. . .] is the way in which money makes natural disasters more bearable. Finding a hotel room and perhaps a taxi to take you there is tough this week in New York, but at least the rich can afford both.”

(Freeland, 2012, para. 7)

⁴ See article here: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/01/fashion/glimmers-of-light-in-downtown-manhattan.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

This precise scenario is demonstrated in the article by Cooper, November 1, and in the article by Nir, November 4, which gives further substance to this line of thought as the “have nots” are given a voice. In the article “In Sight of Manhattan Skyline, Living Forlorn and in the Dark,” published November 5, “the accusations of neglect seemed colored by a growing belief that the recovery from Hurricane Sandy has cleaved along predictable class lines” (Nir, 2012, para. 6). When Mayor Michael Bloomberg visited the Rockaways that Saturday, frustrated residents were quoted as saying, “They got electricity already? It’s par for the course. Who is the population of Manhattan? The wealthy people”, “Since the day it happened, and afterwards, we’ve all had to fend for ourselves. We need to know when we’re going to have gas, light, electric. Everywhere is getting something but us”, “We’re like an orphan. It’s like we don’t even exist” (Nir, 2012, para. 26, 30, 32). Those without the resources to cope were left feeling neglected and unseen. These completely different accounts and experiences make their frustration palpable and reinforces the frame of class divide as it applies to the narrative of Sandy as a whole.

CHAPTER FOUR

Discussion

In the coverage of Hurricane Sandy, frames of agency, resiliency, and class divide were the predominant frames used. Throughout the narrative, Sandy was anthropomorphized and given personality traits, emotions, and the ability to act and devastate, thus becoming the clear antagonist of the disaster story, making those surviving the storm the protagonists. Frames of social disorder such as looting and burglary were also used in Hurricane Sandy coverage, albeit briefly, and was reported as hard news and stand-alone information in a stand-alone-frame that was not embedded into any negative cultural stereotypes.

Coverage of Sandy also evoked the warzone metaphor as seen in research done on Katrina. However, the metaphor as used in Sandy was purely descriptive of the physical damage and dangers that Sandy created, not as social dangers that attributed blame to other disaster victims. For example, a few accounts from The New York Times read: “The city is under siege,” said Thomas Foley, the city’s chief of emergency management (Kaplan, 2012, para. 6). “Sandy is pretty furious at Atlantic City” and “To describe it as looking like pictures we have seen at the end of World War II is not overstating it,” the mayor said (Barron, 2012, para. 29). In these examples, Sandy is personified and is the actor, with the ability to be furious. As such, it is Sandy, the natural disaster, putting the New York and New Jersey under siege, unlike Katrina, where it was the social

breakdown that put New Orleans under siege. Furthermore, the warzone metaphor was used purely in terms of visual and physical damage, which is kept separate from a larger social breakdown frame.

The resounding conclusion from the analysis of all three sources is that victims of Sandy were framed as active in their own rescue through frames of agency, resiliency, and community. While another consistent frame, class divide, and other lesser frames such as looting and social disorganization were present, they weren't detrimental to those being articulated. Victims of Sandy were written as having power and agency, as being present. However, I noticed headlines were relatively clean of the most socially vulnerable, of those who are most susceptible to becoming *homo sacer*. People of low-income, who would have a harder time bouncing back from the storm, as embedded in the class divide frame, were mentioned in a few of the articles, but where were the homeless *before* the storm, the inmates on Rikers Island, the elderly and mentally ill in nursing homes?

Homeless (before the storm)

There are plenty of accounts of people *becoming* homeless or displaced because of Sandy; however, there are very few articles about those who were homeless before the storm and what happened to them. The article "As Students Move Back in, Some Evacuees Are Set Adrift Again" was one of the few that did (Bernstein, 2012). During the storm, the High School of Graphic Communication Arts was turned into a shelter for evacuees. As the storm subsided and students started going back to school, these shelters,

which house many homeless before the storm, had to empty out. Here are some of their accounts:

The atmosphere turned ugly after officials of the city's Department of Homeless Services officials took over the shelter from the American Red Cross, several evacuees said, describing workers who yelled through bullhorns at those who did not follow directions fast enough. [. . .] By dusk Monday, several men and one couple emerged with \$5 Metro cards and orders to make their own way to wherever they were going. "They kicked us to the curb, like that," said Eugene Randolph, 56, who had been in the Bellevue Men's Shelter when its boiler failed in the flood. He trudged off with his girlfriend, Eurgine Cassimir, saying they would try to get to her storm-damaged apartment in Far Rockaway. (Bernstein, 2012, para. 9, 12, 13).

According to the organization Coalition for the Homeless, homelessness in NYC was at an all-time high even before the onset of Sandy, standing at 47,000 people, including 20,000 children, who "crowd the municipal shelter system each night" (Markee, 2012, para. 2). In addition to these numbers, about 5,000 homeless sleep in other public and private shelters, and thousands more sleep on the streets and in the subway system (Markee, 2012). The NYC Department of Homeless Services was lauded for its efforts in re-locating thousands of homeless and hundreds of families, as many of the municipal shelters were located in "Zone A," which was ordered evacuated by Mayor Bloomberg (Markee, 2012). While evacuation was a common theme in many of the stories told throughout all three sources this thesis draws upon, focus on homeless residents before

the storm and the affected shelters was curiously missing from the headlines. Vulnerable citizens who lived in facilities that serviced those living with HIV/AIDS were left without power and heat, but never mentioned. Much of the homeless populations who live on the streets and sleep in the subway system have gone unaccounted for and are assumed to have endured the storm and its aftermath without shelter (Markee, 2012). Homeless populations by and large are expected to go unseen. In cases like Sandy, where news coverage glosses over the pre-existing homeless population to focus on those made homeless by disaster, this population continues to exist, largely unseen, unacknowledged, and less protected when recovery efforts are under way.

Rikers Inmates

Rikers Island is NYC's main jail complex and sits between Queens and the Bronx, and is only accessible by one bridge via Queens (Linton, 2012). On a daily basis, it houses around 12,000 inmates who are awaiting trial, in transit to a longer-term facility, or are serving sentences that are less than a year (Linton, 2012). When hurricane Irene hit the area in 2011, it was discovered that Rikers had no evacuation plan and was not listed in city evacuation plans either (Lennard, 2012).

One, only one of the hundreds of articles this thesis collected, mentioned the inmates on Rikers Island in relation to the onset of Sandy. This article, "What Do I Owe My Neighbor?" is a first-person account of Hanna Pylvaninen, author of "We Sinners." While this piece isn't directly Hurricane focused, it does affect her story. She tells the story of her neighbor and her conflicted sense of responsibility towards him. His arrest

and placement into Rikers prison coincides with the onset of Sandy. In a text from Pylvanenen (2012) neighbor's friend that is used in her story,

"So Davids a little nervous, they're fighting like crazy in there. He said they shut down the bridges closed the courts and aren't letting anyone out. [. . .] (para. 21)

And later: "Let's just say a prayer." (para. 22)

But I could not say a prayer, not really, having left behind a fairly fundamentalist Lutheranism. Instead I read the news, about how Rikers was built on a landfill, how there's only one exit bridge. I read old posts from Hurricane Irene, about guards who had told prisoners they'd abandon them if it got bad. And I despised the mayor for seemingly worrying more about whether prisoners would escape than about their safety. I watched the image on my screen of Sandy moving safely past Bed-Stuy, past Rikers, and felt, at least, released of that possible burden. But I was stuck with the knowledge that for David, the hurricane was not over; the hurricane was in prison with him, in the anger of the cellmates, in the fear that there was no way off the island. (para. 23)

Prisoners contained in a prison with no clear evacuation plan are a clear example of *homo sacer*. Convicted and held by the state, their deaths will be, for the most part, not punishable. Coverage or concern about Rikers was only covered in alternative sources such as Mother Jones, Salon, and The Daily Beast. When asked about the safety of the inmates at a press conference before the storm, Mayor Bloomberg said

"Rikers Island, the land is up where they are and jails are secured." Apparently unable to fathom that anyone's main concern would be for the welfare of the more

than 12,000 prisoners on Rikers, Bloomberg then reassured listeners: “Don’t worry about anybody getting out.” (Ridgeway and Casella, 2012, para. 1)

One of the consistent fears by those who had relatives or people of importance at Rikers, was the fear that the jail would end like the jails and prisons in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, where there had also been no evacuation plan in place. The day before Katrina hit New Orleans, the sheriff ordered that prisoners at the Orleans Parish Prison would to stay despite the mayor’s order to evacuate the city. The prison flooded, lost power, and those manning the prison left their posts. Without food, fresh water or ventilation, these prisoners were locked in their cells as the water continued to rise for days before they were evacuated (Linton, 2012). While Rikers did endure the storm with little to no damage, it once again raises the question asked in the aftermath of Irene, still not yet answered, if inmates will ever be truly safe if a disaster breaches its defenses, and more importantly, whether or not Bloomberg or the people of New York actually care about their lives at all (Ridgeway and Casella, 2012). “[We need to] demand that DOC have a plan for the people living in Rikers Island,” said Francisco Quinones, another member of JAC [(New York City Jails Action Coalition)]. “Remember that those jailed there are also human and deserve a chance to live” (Ridgeway and Casella, 2012, para. 12).

Nursing Homes

Of those groups just listed, the elderly and mentally ill are discussed more frequently than the rest. Vulnerability of the elderly was discussed in the New York Times blog entry “Old, Frail and in Harm’s Way” in which Lisa Brown, a psychologist at the University of South Florida, states, “Adults 65 and older are consistently the least

prepared of any subgroup of the population. They're most likely to have increased levels of mortality and morbidity" (Span, 2012, para. 7). For example, 70 percent of the dead after Hurricane Katrina (of which the elderly were only 15% of New Orleans' total population) were people over 60-years-old, and almost half of those dead in the aftermath of the tornados in Joplin, Missouri, were seniors (Span, 2012). According to this article,

New York City now fits this grim pattern: The census says 17.2 percent of residents are over 60, but of the 40 people whose deaths the medical examiner's office attributed to Hurricane Sandy at last count, 37.5 percent were older than 60.

They ranged in age from 62 to 91; most had drowned. (Span, 2012, para. 9)

Dr. Campbell surmises, "being old, being frail and being unconnected turned into a terminal condition" (Span, 2012, para. 14). However, this article states that since then, "state and local agencies have made considerable progress in disaster preparedness for the elderly" (Span, 2012, para. 14). While the narrative of Sandy did read of rescues for the elderly, nurses exhibiting altruistic behavior, risking their own lives to care for their elderly patients, not much of nursing homes—where the elderly are left in large numbers and in a system—are accounted for. What wasn't mentioned, at least in this immediate-post impact coverage of this thesis' data, was Bloomberg's recommendation, "acting on the advice of his aides and those of Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo [. . .] that nursing homes and adult homes stay put" (Preston, Fink, and Powell, 2012, para. 2). These homes included the Sea Crest Health Care Center in Brooklyn, which was ready to evacuate and was home to 305 residents who would be forced to ride out the storm there; and the Ocean Promenade nursing home in Queens, with 105 residents (Preston, Fink, and

Powell, 2012). These homes were only a few that made it into the news. Thousands of elderly, disabled and mentally ill residents endured the storm in over 40 nursing homes in flood-prone areas in New York City, of which 29 facilities in Queens and Brooklyn were severely flooded, generators experienced failures or were just completely absent, leaving residents with no access to power, water, heat and food (Preston, Fink, and Powell, 2012). According to reports,

While no immediate deaths were reported, it took at least three days for the Fire Department, the National Guard and ambulance crews from around the country to rescue over 4,000 nursing home and 1,500 adult home residents. Without working elevators, many had to be carried down slippery stairwells. “I was shocked,” said Greg Levow, who works for an ambulance service and helped rescue residents at Queens. “I couldn’t understand why they were there in the first place” (Preston, Fink, and Powell, 2012, para. 8).

The immediate-post impact data this thesis covered only discussed the existing vulnerability of the elderly and the rescue of the elderly from their homes. Of my sources, only The New York Times reported this story and not until November 9, 2012, two weeks after the storm had hit. Further investigation into this story wasn’t published until late December/early January by sources outside of this data set.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

The majority of survivors depicted, quoted, and talked about in the aftermath of Sandy, were articulated through frames of agency, community, and resiliency. While class divide was a predominant frame throughout the coverage, the coverage read largely of middle class, and depictions of the social inequalities disasters can illuminate were not covered. The socially vulnerable population, the population most susceptible to becoming *homo sacer*—the elderly, mentally ill, poor, inmates—are *also* the most susceptible to disaster and are consistently the demographic that gets the least attention when they are the ones who most clearly need it.

Like Katrina, there is an absence of a safety net for the most socially vulnerable. The elderly and mentally ill in nursing homes were ordered to stay put in New York City as their facilities flooded, cutting out power and supplies, their age condemning them to a significantly higher rate of morbidity during disasters. Homeless shelters that existed before the storm and their residents weren't given a voice as their facilities flooded and access to supplies was cut off. Inmates at Rikers were negated from mainstream news altogether. Rather than concern for their safety during the storm and a safe evacuation plan, Mayor Bloomberg framed them as an *other* by viewing them as a threat that must be kept separate from the rest of society. While that is the point of a detention center, in a state of emergency such as Hurricane Sandy, however, their lives have to be taken into account as well. Their

lives as governed by the state but not necessarily protected by it in this incident, is an example of when *homo sacer* can be become realized and lives can be discarded.

These are all stories we didn't read about because they weren't there. While we saw the socially vulnerable forefront and center in the aftermath of Katrina, possibly because of how damaging it was, this population is still hidden within the margins for lesser-scaled disasters such as Hurricane Sandy. Is it a population that we subconsciously want hidden from view? Is it only when we're forced to, do we see them? What does it truly take for them to be visible? Further research into when and how socially vulnerable populations are depicted in mainstream news, not just in disasters but in general, would help illuminate this problem more clearly.

I posed a question in the beginning: are victims of disaster empowered by agency, or are they stripped of agency, power, and visibility through marginalization? The results of this thesis indicate both: Positive frames of agency and resiliency were used to depict the survivors of Sandy, but those survivors read mostly of those who are not threatened by becoming *homo sacer*. Coverage consisted of accounts from authority, volunteers, and what read as mostly middle-class victims. None of my news sources, however, mentioned or covered consistently the socially vulnerable populations—I had to seek them out in other sources. What we can gather from Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Sandy is that in disaster coverage, marginalization is a possibility that looms over the most socially vulnerable. Mainstream news media can both reflect and reinforce marginalization through the frames they use to depict those affected by disaster, or negate them from the narrative altogether.

As for implications for teaching, writing, and research in PWR, from the viewpoint of this thesis, news—or any communicative piece of work—is inherently rhetorical. Being involved in this field requires one to be able to understand how information can be rhetorically constructed or deconstructed, and not only what this information means, but what it does. As writers, researchers, and teachers, we take into account that framing is a rhetorical choice and tool with powerful implications. As discussed and demonstrated in this thesis, framing not only directs our attention, it shapes our ideas and understanding of the information that is being relayed to us. How victims of disaster are articulated and framed influences how we read them, understand them, judge and treat them. As framing directs our attention at select information, we have to also take into account what information the frame is leaving out. In terms of the socially vulnerable and populations who are not acknowledged as present, looking into what is *not* said can completely redefine what *is* said. It adds another rhetorical dimension to how our attention is directed and how our information and what we know is constructed.

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BIOGRAPHY

Patricia K. Ro graduated from Brentsville District High School, Nokesville, Virginia, in 2005. She received her Bachelor of Arts from James Madison University in 2009. She was employed as a curriculum development editor at Diplomatic Language Services and received her Master of Arts in English from George Mason University in 2013.