2015

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Interrogating the Ruling Relations of Thailand's Post-tsunami Reconstruction: Empirically Tracking Social Relations in the Absence of Conventional Texts

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This paper discusses methodological strengths and challenges in doing institutional ethnographic (IE) research in communities devastated by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami in Southern Thailand. IE is a mode of inquiry used to describe institutional mechanisms of reconstruction, aid, and recovery and to show how recovery efforts affected real people and communities over time. The chaotic nature of a disaster zone, combined with the more common difficulties of conducting research in a developing region relying on a translator, posed various challenges in the conduct of this IE study. Textual data, one of the important tools used in IE research, were scarce and what texts emerged were unusual. Our study reveals a disordered and uneven aid distribution. We show how private interests and pressure for economic redevelopment coordinated government practices which could be portrayed as "corrupt." Our paper highlights the strengths of the IE method in assessing reconstruction, aid, and recovery in a disaster zone by focusing on the everyday lives of people as they moved beyond the immediate turmoil. We discuss the methodological techniques used to uncover empirical data to support analytical work when actual texts were not available. Further, we describe how IE is an effective approach for examining peoples' recall of past events, where experiences described can provide insights into the current social organization and ruling relations. These insights lead to our understanding of changes and developments that occurred in the landscape and in the community after recovery. We discuss how the reconstructed environment,

including new buildings and signage, coordinated and changed people's day-to-day activities and their ways of making a livelihood.

From February 2011 to December 2012, we employed institutional ethnography (IE) as a method to assess the everyday experiences, processes of aid, reconstruction and recovery, and the ruling relations that established and coordinated these processes in a region devastated by the 2004 tsunami in Southern Thailand. Institutional ethnography provided critical information in assessing the long term recovery of the specific Thai region following the disaster. It allowed us to investigate the actual everyday world of people affected, providing a rich, thick description of the issues, problems, conflicts and disjunctures that have characterized post-tsunami events. Using IE, we worked to discover the social and ruling relations that coordinated what happened in the immediate months and ensuing years following the tsunami. IE contributes an analysis of the "social organization" of the disaster recovery in contrast to the existing conceptual frameworks being used to describe and analyze what happened in Thailand. Our research offers new insight into the long-term recovery of a region that was severely damaged. Knowledge gained from tracing what happened at the local and trans-local levels produces a useful view into understanding the overall mechanisms and realities of reconstruction and recovery.

As with most IE research, we relied on the understandings and the actions and experiences of those who know the situation from living it. However, in contrast to IE that is conducted in highly textualized settings, the chaotic nature of a disaster, as well as the nature of tsunami aid and recovery policy implemented by the national government, required ongoing adaptations to the focus of the fieldwork. This is the simple contribution of this paper. Beyond a brief synopsis of the research findings, the paper provides an account of an IE study that did not unearth very many analytically useful textual documents but that, even with a scarcity of texts, developed a warrantable, empirical analysis of "the social" as it arose in people's actual experiences in specific locations.

The 2004 Tsunami Event in Southern Thailand

On December 26, 2004, a magnitude 9.3 earthquake occurred off the northwest coast of Sumatra (Bagla, Stone, & Kerr, 2005). The earthquake generated a tsunami that traveled across the Indian Ocean and Andaman Sea, striking coastlines directly in its path, including the west coast of the Malay Peninsula in Southern Thailand. The effect on human populations from the disaster was staggering, resulting in an estimated death toll of 240,000 people (R. A. Kerr, 2005; Paz, 2005; Thanawood, Yongchalermai, & Densrisereekul, 2006; Wisner, College, & Walker, 2005). Although the majority of casualties occurred in Indonesia and Sri Lanka, portions of Thailand's Andaman Coast were also devastated by this tsunami. Phuket, Phang Nga, Krabi, Ranong, Trang and Satun provinces were most severely affected, with 5395 people killed and 2822 reported missing after the event (Thanawood et al., 2006).

However, these official figures from Thailand do not account for the population of illegal Burmese workers or other ethnic groups within Thailand with no official status or official record of living in the country (Thanawood et al., 2006). Subsequent to the disaster, it became evident that many survivors would face long-term economic, social, and environmental upheaval, which would have permanent repercussions for surviving populations of affected regions (Manuta, Khrutmuang, & Lebel, 2005; Rigg, Law, Tan-mullins, & Grundy-warr, 2005).

The Stages of Recovery and Sustainability as They are Currently Discussed

There is a considerable literature on the initial stages of recovery following the 2004 tsunami, including the natural mechanisms of the event, the disjointed and chaotic period of the immediate aftermath, policies of aid and recovery, and the environmental effect of the tsunami (see Keys, Masterman-Smith, & Cottle, 2006; Montlake, 2005; Paz, 2005; Rigg, Grundy-Warr, Law, & Tan-Mullins, 2008; Rigg et al., 2005; Thanawood et al., 2006; United Nations Country Team in Thailand, 2006). A number of literature sources we reviewed refer to strategies

and policies for the redevelopment and rehabilitation of the
regions developed by different levels of government, private
developers, the United Nations (UN), Non-Governmental
Organizations (NGOs) and various relief organizations. Initial
reports on the results of these rehabilitation and redevelop-
ment initiatives showed a disjointed effort, which, according
to these authors, has ultimately benefited only prominent and
powerful stakeholders, such as local elites and resorts (Haynes
& Rice, 2005). Although policies from various levels of gov-
ernment, the UN, aid agencies, and financial institutions were
designed and expected to direct more equitable reconstruc-
tion and recovery processes, little is known regarding how or
if they were implemented through action on the ground. We
were interested in this apparent gap between these policies
and plans and action and implementation on the ground in
the years following the tsunami.

Research on disasters and disaster recovery on the 2004
Indian Ocean tsunami and other disasters have heretofore
been theorized within the context of sustainability (see Asian
Development Bank [ADB], 2007; Garcia et al., 2006; United
Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2005).
Sustainability encompasses a broad discourse that includes
cultural, environmental, and economic sustainability from
multiple perspectives, interests and focuses (Bruntland, 1987;
Draper & Reed, 2009; Haynes & Rice, 2005; Holden & Jacobson,
2007; Morris, 2004; Nadeau, 2002; Nathan & Reddy, 2012;
Stone, 2003). Those authors researching and writing about sus-
tainability frame it conceptually as "intergenerational equity,"
development and resource use must not benefit present gen-
erations at the expense of future generations, and "intragen-
erational equity," development and resource use must have
benefits which are equitably shared among members of the
current generation (Holden & Jacobson, 2007; Nadeau, 2002).

The discourse of environmental management, sustain-
ability and sustainable development is often analyzed and
critiqued within a framework that seeks to incorporate ideas
about environmental protection within workable transforma-
tions of society, culture and economy (Draper & Reed, 2009).
Specifically, in research on disasters and disaster recovery,
sustainability is often conceptually framed in association with
"resilience" (Adger, Hughes, Folke, Carpenter, & Rockström,

2005; O'Brien, O'Keefe, Rose, & Wisner, 2006; Rigg et al., 2008; Schipper & Pelling, 2006). In their work on the immediate aftermath of the tsunami in Thailand, Rigg and his associates (2008) assess the resilience of specific communities in the recovery process. Resilience is measured by considering each community's standing in Thai society in terms of its economics, its resources to recover, and its environmental vulnerability, in relation to the community's risk and location within the hazard zone.

Prior research conducted into the disaster aftermath that is most congruent with IE is the work of Katz (2008). In her paper on the aftermath and outcomes for communities in post-Katrina New Orleans, Katz uses the conceptual framework of "social reproduction," where social reproduction is defined as broad material social practices and forces that sustain production and social life in all its variations. Her framework outlines social reproduction as being influenced and encompassing three social practices: political economic, cultural, and environmental (Katz, 2008). Katz digresses from analytical processes that are congruent with IE in that she theorizes how pre-disaster "disinvestment in social reproduction" left many communities and individuals within New Orleans vulnerable to the hazard event and in recovery. While useful and interesting, Katz's revelation of disinvestment is not directed towards uncovering the "everyday practices" (D. E. Smith, 1987) that organize and coordinate systemic vulnerability to environmental disaster. This is the contribution that IE research can make to disaster and recovery; IE focuses on studying how recovery work produces uneven or perhaps even "disinvested" practices. IE offers a different approach to disaster research that directs the researcher to avoid theorizing about the problems, and, instead, to discover how people's experiences are coordinated with institutional practices.

Our research focused on how people activate and produce the material conditions of their lives, or their recovery under the most difficult conditions. The analytic focus of IE on ruling practices within people's everyday lives was the key tool to being able to better understand the processes and results of coordinated aid reconstruction and recovery that orchestrated peoples' livelihood and housing. It also uncovered the social organization of the distribution of aid and offered insight into

how the changed geographical and human environments were positioned inside ruling relations. Explicating the social organization of what happened within tsunami-affected communities is an important contribution to the specialized field of human geography. Most of the prior work by human geographers on this topic is focused on understanding the effects on the economy, culture, environment, politics, and demographics of people living in disaster regions. Our IE research is a unique contribution to the post-disaster field insofar that "the field" is not broken into economic environmental categories. Rather, using IE, the aim of this project was to knit all these facets together to allow a view into lives, livelihoods and land that cannot be categorically separated. Underlying this goal was the assumption that the post-tsunami landscape extends beyond the physical landscape to include all the features of survivors' daily lives. The complexities of these activities as they intersect with the mechanisms of the recovery process provide a rich ground for analysis to determine how post-disaster management arises as the social landscape in which people live and work.

Fieldwork and Strategies

The fieldwork for our study, part of a Ph.D. dissertation for Aaron Williams, with Janet Rankin as a graduate supervisor, was conducted from February 2011 to December 2012. It involved extensive fieldwork, conducted exclusively by Williams, who used an institutional ethnographic lens to describe the everyday experiences of aid, reconstruction and recovery in a small southern coastal region.

Recognition of the uneven aid, reconstruction, and recovery in Thailand that is reported in the literature is congruent with Williams' observations from his experience as an undergraduate field study instructor in Thailand. He gained this experience both before and after the tsunami event. We relied on this experience as a foundation for the research; however, for formal fieldwork to begin, we had to consider ethical and logistical considerations in conducting fieldwork. Accuracy and the method of Thai to English translation in fieldwork were important for securing informed consent, both written and verbal, and determining correct meaning in interpretation of

interviews from the informants. Translation services for interviews and transcription were secured through Williams' longstanding contacts in Thailand. A Thai reporter who works for a prominent U.S.-based news conglomerate in Bangkok was hired by Williams. In her day job as a reporter, she conducts interviews, interpreting and transcribing them from Thai to English. Her job requires accuracy of information on the ground as well considerable logistical skills to track down critical leads for information. Without this effective translation and logistical resource, this study could not have been conducted.

Analysis included paying attention in the field but also reviewing and discussing the data in between each subsequent trip to the field. Initially we focused the research on the perplexing puzzle of the grossly uneven distribution of aid across distinct but geographically proximal communities. While it is to be expected that a disaster of the magnitude of the 2004 tsunami would put the future lives of survivors into disarray, we uncovered certain aspects of aid distribution and reconstruction in Thailand that contributed to unevenness in recovery efforts and outcomes. The unevenness of the recovery efforts can be attributed to a number of complex conditions, many of which, heretofore, have not been fully understood or documented. We work here to explicate how serious disparities between groups equally devastated came about.

Our fieldwork focused on an area of Thailand's Andaman Coast. Williams visited the study area eight times, each visit lasting two to three weeks. To Williams, an outsider landing in the area, the effects of the tsunami were not immediately obvious. The 'human' aspects of the physical environment have, for the most part, been restored to a sense of 'life as the new normal.' There are people, homes, shops, hotels, roads and cars; however, nothing is as it was prior to the tsunami as the destruction of the built environment, community, and aspects of the physical landscape was almost completely total. The apparent normalcy of the day- to- day work of the tsunami survivors and their families, as well as newcomers and tourists, belies the magnitude of change that has accompanied the recovery work of local people and the ongoing tsunami relief work carried out in the municipal, national and international realm. This is work that sits behind the unremarkable "business as usual" impression of present-day life on the Andaman

coast. As analysts examining the field, in the face of the apparent coherence of daily life, we were cognizant that "reconstruction" is an ideologically loaded term that coordinates (ruling) practices embedded in the construction—the ongoing activity, physically taking place within 'the social' to be explicated.

To explicate the "reconstruction" process, Williams' fieldwork focused on people's actions and their memories of these activities. The fieldwork practices concentrated not only on the villagers' reality, including their recovery efforts following the tsunami, but also on the complex organization of power, politics, economy, aid, social structure, and religious affiliations, that together contribute to the emerging post-tsunami society. The methods employed can be characterized as a snowball sampling method approach wherein, during analysis, people's accounts were carefully analyzed for other people and the traces of the institutional processes that led from one informant to the next.

There were definitely no discreet "stages" to research—where initial attention is focused on the 'standpoint informants' and that data are analyzed as a foundational "stage" before deciding who else should interviewed. The concentrated weeks of fieldwork required that every lead be followed, often that same afternoon, as villagers were introduced to Williams, remembered what happened and described what they knew. IE researchers use an empirical approach to understanding problems that drives data collection. We used the tools of IE as they have been designed, as a pragmatic method that requires researchers to pay attention, in a very specific way, to everything that has traces of institutional practices that may be useful to gaining understanding into how the participants' experiences are organized (Campbell & Gregor, 2005). In the field Williams needed to be constantly curious and overly sensitized to all the 'goings on,' even if at first they did not seem relevant to the analysis.

In this case, photographs proved to be an important analytical resource. It was in reviewing the photographs together—Rankin never having been in the field, and Williams expressing sensory overload—that we began to notice institutionally relevant data (such as power lines, garbage cans and satellite dishes). We used a somewhat haphazard analytical process wherein, during discussion, we were questioning,

noticing and linking as we worked together to reveal and map the forces, policies, and ruling relations that have influenced the overall outcomes of reconstruction, aid, and rehabilitation of affected communities.

Analysis

In the initial stages of our research we uncovered evidence of efforts of coordinated aid and recovery within the study area. However, the informants we interviewed revealed no clear connections between what was documented in the literature as policies and plans to be implemented by governments, NGOs and corporations, and the memories and descriptions of the aid and recovery efforts that the informants recounted. What was apparent on the ground was that Thai government policy produced uncoordinated access for many entities offering aid and recovery. To date we have uncovered no clear links to texts in the form of policies and plans that clearly defined and coordinated work and outcomes for reconstruction, aid, and recovery.

Moreover, data from the initial observations and interviews uncovered "corruption," or at least this is how the informants framed what happened. Initially it was this explanation of corrupt people that we, too, began to use to explain the uneven coordination of aid reconstruction and recovery within tsunami-affected communities. The lack of material evidence in the form of conventional texts tying powerful agencies accountable to local actions was confusing and created a juncture in the research process that led us to question whether and how IE could be effectively applied to this research setting. The body of IE publications did not seem to provide us with directions about how to understand the data emerging from the fieldwork.

In 2011, at the IE workshop of the Society for Social Problems Meetings in Las Vegas, we had two brief informal consultations with Dorothy Smith, whose work founded IE research. We explained the issue of not being able to find the direct linkages in the data between the written texts (the government strategy that many of the informants referred to but that remained elusively unavailable as a material document) and its coordination and activation on the ground. We briefed

Smith on the data, describing what we knew about the actions of people in the government, elites, and outside corporate institutions that were described in the accounts of the people in the villages—that the informants understood were the forces coordinating aid reconstruction and recovery. We explained that the empirical evidence of these practices seemed chaotic and difficult to trace. In this apparently less bureaucratic (from western standards) form of ruling relations and actions of reconstruction, there appeared to be no formal documentation of plans and action. Additionally, there were no textual traces implicating individuals who were reported to have gained from the reconstruction. Smith responded that the data being gathered and people's conceptualization of 'corruption' are all accomplished through activities—the material processes of social and ruling relations that, she insisted, could be empirically tracked in people's accounts and descriptions. Texts are not necessary to the discovery of ruling relations. Smith further noted that, while using textual data is one of the important contributions of the IE method, they are not absolutely essential to develop an IE analysis. Other data embedded in people's talk and activities can be used to link people's activities across time and geography.

This conversation with Smith and our subsequent meetings to discuss the analysis provided us with a way to think of the processes of aid reconstruction and recovery entirely differently from how Williams had first entered the field: that is, he was determined to locate texts. In the next visit to the field, rather than focusing and collecting evidence that the policy texts and post-tsunami literature referenced but that consistently led nowhere on the ground, Williams began to focus more intensely on the actions of people, the physical infrastructure that was being built, and the everyday lives of people which resulted from reconstruction processes. Consequently, by learning from people what had actually happened and what continues to happen as land disputes continue to unfold in the processes of reconstruction and recovery, a picture of the ruling relations being activated in each of the communities being investigated began to emerge. This did not mean that the processes of aid and recovery occurred independent of texts, and that the ruling relations that texts coordinate were

absent in this post-tsunami setting. Rather, we learned that the actual texts were buried behind layers of various people's activities and reconstruction and aid processes carried out by the military, NGOs, local governments and the villagers. In this setting, the texts and their authority seemed to hold less power within the various complicated events and histories that preceded the tsunami and during its aftermath.

Even though the official government dictates and the army's responses to the immediate post-tsunami efforts could not be located for this research, as we worked with the data, including the many photographs, it became apparent that there were other texts and 'signage' being activated that we had not immediately recognized as data. Billboards, for example, and public posters that were being erected were important clues into ongoing disputes and struggles over the changed post-tsunami landscape. We learned that in some villages, ethnic frictions regarding who had a right to live where had intensified and that land grabs were being made in the name of future tsunami safety and evacuation policy. Most often linked to commercially valuable 'tourist' properties, these disputes were mediated by the ruling relations at play prior to the tsunami. The interactions between levels of government, and the relationships between business interests and government—conceptualized by the locals as the corrupt activities of people working in their own interests—could be linked to an overarching urgency related to economic development and the need for rapid economic recovery. The ruling activities expressing these interests included signs that were erected. In lieu of building plans, and processes and guidelines developed by people working in aid and recovery, described vaguely in informants' accounts, the actions that arose locally, such as a 'no trespassing' sign on beach-front property that held traces of people involved in a land dispute, provided empirical evidence of the ruling relations.

Explicating Uneven Recovery

The Moken

Thuungwa is one of five communities within a 20 kilometer range selected for this study. The village, a Moken community

(ethnic minority group within Thailand), is seen to be a 'model' of effective reconstruction (T. Kerr, 2005; UNWTO, 2005). According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization report, the public infrastructure, homes and services have surpassed pre-tsunami conditions in Thuungwa. The villagers now have electricity and garbage removal, services that were not in place prior to 2004. Despite documentation of a "sustainable aid and recovery" (T. Kerr, 2005; UNWTO, 2005), we learned from the villagers that Thuungwa is not a thriving community that has successfully recovered from the tsunami, as claimed. Our field data revealed profound divisions among the residents on the future of the community. People's livelihoods had completely changed since the tsunami. Most notable was the deep concern of several village elders who were witnessing the disappearance of language and culture. They believed the future health of the community was threatened. This situation was being coordinated by a complex of local ruling relations and forms of service that the post-tsunami infrastructure (heralded by the experts) had introduced since the disaster.

Following the tsunami, the traditional houses of the Moken at Thuungwa could not be replaced. Villagers understood this was due to the lack of availability of trees, the traditional construction material. As a result, the new houses were built in a design that is completely different. One informant told us that the housing at Thuungwa had won an architectural award for its efficiency and quality, although we could not trace the organization that made the award. However, we also learned from the village elders that the new design has fundamentally changed the way the Moken live. When we looked at the photographs, we began to recognize how the introduction of services requires institutional and economic infrastructure to maintain. In Figure 1, a photograph of the reconstructed Moken community Thuungwa, note the garbage cans, the power poles and electricity lines.

The infrastructure of garbage collection, electricity, satellite dishes all require the community to have stronger connections to the local economy for livelihood that provides them with monetary income. Figure 2 is a replica of a pre-tsunami traditional style of house.

Figure 1. Housing Built in Moken Sea Gypsy Village of Thuungwa.

Copyright 2011 by Aaron Williams.

Figure 2. Replica of Traditional Moken House at Thuugwa Moken Village.

Copyright 2011 by Aaron Williams.

This photographic evidence of the stark contrast between the pre- and post-tsunami built environment at Thuungwa is

the data we used to explicate the troubles that the villagers de-
scribed. The villagers had a subsistence livelihood prior to the
tsunami; the former dwellings did not require much monetary
income, and the villagers were not completely harnessed by
capitalist economies. Analysis of the interviews with the vil-
lagers confirmed that the subsistence fishing livelihood and
built environment that existed before the tsunami did not and
could not support the economic costs of the new goods and
services available since the tsunami. The practices of economic
development that we discovered are a marker of successful
relief efforts are starkly apparent in these photographic texts.
However, the social upheaval that accompanied these relief
practices, such as language loss, changed schooling, youth
leaving and disruption of a traditional way of life are not ap-
parent in the 'authorized' view of the successes of post-disaster
'recovery.' The empirical evidence of new needs for infrastruc-
ture that we examined in the photographs provided an impor-
tant thread for this line of analysis that drew our ethnographic
attention to the ruling relations that organized the post-tsuna-
mi lives of the Moken people. These insights developed after
Williams had completed the fieldwork, and the textual analy-
sis linked to paychecks, bills, banking and/or taxes remain the
focus of future research.

Changes in the style of housing, the infrastructure and the
addition of services in the reconstruction of Thuungwa village
coordinated the cultural, social, and economic make up of
Thuungwa. Historically, the Moken were nomadic and their
traditional housing was designed to be practical and tempo-
rary due to the fact that they may not occupy the same house
for long periods (Bernatzik & Ivanoff, 2005). With the build-
ing of permanent housing following the tsunami, the Moken
at Thuungwa are now, in a sense, fixed to the land along with
the trappings of modern living that require economic capital.
Evidence of this transition is everywhere in the community,
from satellite dishes, to garbage bins, and the Head Man's
cell phone. At Thuungwa, this form of evidence on the land-
scape was compelling proof upon which we developed an
analysis of the processes of reconstruction, aid and recovery
in this village. Satellite dishes, roads, cell phones, electricity,
and garbage collection all require textual processes of services
and billing; they require interaction with and links into the

institutional (ruling) practices of a capitalist economy.

Other evidence contributing to the IE analysis included signs erected throughout the community documenting aid organizations, corporations and governments involved in supporting reconstruction at Thuungwa. For example, religious aid organizations erected signs documenting their delivery of aid to the community in the form of infrastructure. When Williams inquired about these signs, he was told that aid money to individuals and families from religious aid organizations came with the stipulation of attending church. This was a threat to the belief system and culture of the Moken, whose traditional religious beliefs are primarily based on Animism (Bernatzik & Ivanoff, 2005).

Other signs, indicating corporate donations to the reconstruction of Thuungwa, were a form of permanent advertising of corporate branding in the community. These were the textual clues into the complex set of practices that mediated processes of reconstruction—the ruling relations that were elaborated by the memories of the informants. In the absence of any further textual clues, they provided the data upon which we could make analytic assertions about what happened, and is still happening. The data did not match the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2005) official characterization of the village of Thuungwa as the 'model success' for tsunami community reconstruction.

Ban Sak

In contrast to the government-imposed housing design and the rebuilding of Thuungwa on the pre-tsunami village site, in the coastal town-site of Ban Sak, the government prevented people from reconstructing their homes in the same location following the tsunami. Like Thuungwa, ethnographic observations in Ban Sak revealed material clues vested in signage and activities of construction. In this town-site, land use was a major source of conflict and uncertainty wherein the village people continue to seek the right to rebuild their homes on the village land that was impacted by the tsunami. One of our informants was actively contesting her right to rebuild on the location where her previous home had been destroyed. In an ongoing dispute, the local government was working to get the land where the village was formerly located dedicated for

a public park. As shown in Figure 3, the Village Head Man had erected signs stating that villagers should not be allowed to invade 'public land.'

Figure 3. Local Government Sign Condemning the Rights of Villagers to Rebuild on their Land at Ban Sak.

Copyright 2012 by Aaron Williams.

Translation of above sign:
People of Bang Sak community in village 7 and 8 and people in Thambon Bang Muang are against everyone, every group, civil servants, politicians and everyone from every party who want to turn this 64 rais of land to be community deed for particular person.
Please stop what you are doing immediately*

The sign is contesting villagers' rights to rebuild their homes on their former home sites prior to the tsunami. Further, the sign is also contesting the legal right of villagers to rebuild on "public benefit land," even though this was the site of the village of Ban Sak prior to it being destroyed by the tsunami. The text is written to declare the land as "public benefit," to be used in other ways than to rebuild the village. In addition, concrete construction waste has been dumped on the contested property, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Construction Waste Dumped on Property of Ban Sak Villager.

Copyright 2012 by Aaron Williams.

This was an effort by the local headman to stop any construction on that plot of land by a village woman who had been given permission from the Princess of Thailand to rebuild on the site of her previous home. Williams obtained a copy of letter from the Princess of Thailand instructing the local government to allow the village woman to rebuild her home at its former location; the document is too lengthy to include in this paper. This is an example of the material processes involved in how contested land is being used and occupied. Another important observation related to the Ban Sak town-site is that the former village is adjacent to a beautiful undeveloped, golden sand beach that stretches many kilometers, as shown in Figure 5.

In our interview with the village woman discussed above, she showed us the plans created by the local government to build a public park in the location of the former village and her house. From other examples of 'land grabs' following the tsunami, we suggest that the building of the public park on the former village site is unlikely. This beach land is an extremely valuable tourism industry property. It is likely that public park plan is being used as ruse to control the land for future tourism

commercial development. This observation links to the practices encountered in the other villages studied, where development of tourism drove the post-tsunami decisions and practices. It is likely that a similar opportunity for industrial growth is organizing the regional government's strong opposition to return of the villagers of Ban Sak to their land on the coast.

Figure 5. Beachfront of Ban Sak Villager's property.

Copyright 2012 by Aaron Williams. (The contested land from Figure 4 with the concrete construction waste is beachfront property directly facing onto the beach above.)

In Ban Sak, as with Thuungwa, photographs became the textual data used for the IE analysis. In Ban Sak, the photos of the billboard signs and the construction waste along with reports about of what had happened gathered in interviews with local and extra-local informants were the data that provided analytical insight into the ruling relations being activated.

Ban Nam Khem

In a third community, Ban Nam Khem, villagers related how they worked to resist the pressure for fast decisions and speedy rebuilding. These actions happened in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami when the villagers were still living in an emergency tent city. It was inside the temporary housing that the villagers established a community organization to

respond to the disaster. These informal community leaders were critical of the initial government plan for reconstruction of housing. Many of the villagers did not own their land, or could not prove that they owned it. Hence, according to the government plan, these villagers had two options: (1) accept a small lump-sum payment; or (b) settle for military reconstruction of their homes.

Under the government plan, money allocated for the reconstruction was not enough for most people to construct adequate housing. The initial Thai government offering of 30,000 Thai Baht, approximately 1000 USD, fell short of resourcing the rebuild of even a basic house. The government plan provided the army as the primary source of labor and planning for the reconstruction of housing. This led to construction inadequacies. Williams learned about these problems from informants, from his own observations of substandard finishing (such as plumbing problems) and from reports about the post-tsunami reconstruction (Kerr, 2005). As a result of the speedy, underfunded, haphazard government plan that excluded many villagers who did not own land, a resistance movement to the government plan arose with support from NGOs.

Villagers who organized the resistance to the government plan for reconstruction described the immediate chaos after the tsunami when they were living in the camp. They related how they gathered daily for 'coffee shop meetings' to support one another. The informal meetings provided a forum for them to identify and criticize the erratic decisions being made under pressure. In their view, the rapid way the aid was being controlled and distributed undermined the community's interests. As a result of these meetings, a grassroots cooperative emerged. With NGO support, the villagers launched a successful lobby to convince the government to allow them to establish a community banking system to aggregate the aid funding that provided the means to construct more sustainable housing. Data from Ban Nam Khem revealed that in this grassroots organization, where the reconstruction decisions were made more slowly and with broader consultation with the people directly affected by the wave, there was less residual tension than in those communities who reported following the government plan more closely.

Conclusion

This analysis describes data collection and analysis from three of the five communities where fieldwork was conducted. In a fourth community, a brand new village built on a new site of crown land, the informants also provided clear links to the elusive government plan. Nonetheless, in each community, the government plan was taken up differently, resulting in uneven outcomes of reconstruction and recovery both within and between communities. Despite the plan being so present in people's talk, an overarching government plan did not appear to coordinate what happened on the ground, and therefore, was not the principal factor in helping us uncover the ruling relations within the area of study. Furthermore, the government plan did not appear to coordinate extra-local interests across time and geography. Instead, the more dominant influences in reconstruction and in establishing ruling relations were a mixture of the interests of local government, NGOs and ruling elites. In the communities of focus, these influences took different forms that resulted in entirely different outcomes for reconstruction and the establishment of ruling relations within each community. However, this form of generalizing relation arising from the government plan was not completely absent.

An enduring set of practices that arose across all five communities studied was the emphasis on carrying out a 'speedy recovery.' Notwithstanding the seemingly erratic and uneven approach to rebuilding homes and livelihoods in the post-tsunami landscape, a 'constant' arose across all the various activities being generated. These practices were driven by knowledge that a speedy recovery was important, and a sense of urgency arose in interviews with government officials who emphasized speedy recovery as an important "measure of success."

This interest in speed is also mirrored in literature documenting the recovery period in Thailand (UNWTO, 2007). In the villages, pressure to move quickly was organized by a worry that access to aid was limited by time. Villagers were concerned that if they did not act fast, they would forfeit the government funding of 30,000 Baht per household (approximately $1000 US Dollars administered in a variety of ways)

targeted for housing. This knowledge pervaded all the data gathered in each of the villages.

Due to the chaotic nature of a natural disaster, tracing the organization of reconstruction aid and recovery and the ruling relations that coordinate these efforts is challenging. In this research, we relied on the ontological premise of IE: that careful attention on 'the social,' as it arises within the activities of actual people, will reveal the empirical traces of how what is happening is socially organized. People were interviewed to learn from 'the source' about what they did, what happened, and how their daily lives unfolded. Moreover, and critical to this research, the materiality of the changing social landscape, such as garbage bins, power lines, billboards, hotels, beaches, septic fields and the like, were important clues into people's activities that were relevant to the reconstruction. All these sources provided credible data that we used to generate a reliable account of what happened. The data Williams gathered across different sites of 'institutional' activity were analyzed to build an account that empirically links people across time and geography. This is the 'institutional' account generated to reveal to scholars and experts on disaster recovery how the tensions and inequities embedded in the disaster recovery in these communities was organized—in a world that was put together within people's everyday activities. The villager's activities, as well as those of NGO workers, people in the army, and government bureaucrats, established the "dynamic complex of relations" (Smith, 2005, p. 2) that organized the post-tsunami reconstruction to proceed as it did.

There are lessons to be learned for those people interested in disaster and aid recovery. This research examined how current formulations of the need for speed as a measure of good recovery and the current theoretical formulations of sustainable recovery are inadequate to understand what went on, and is still going on, in Thailand as a result of the tsunami and its aftermath. In this study, evidence of the ruling relations that mediated reconstruction aid and recovery point to problems embedded in practices that link 'good disaster management'to rapid relocation of displaced people and restored economic viability.

This paper highlights the important contribution of IE as a

method of inquiry to document a complex and disjointed field setting of a natural disaster. We can recommend that others take up IE as a method to learn more about disasters, and the interactions and interconnections of the agents and institutions involved in disaster relief, aid and recovery efforts.

This study merely scraped the surface of the complex institutional regimes that are activated in the face of disaster. There is a great deal more to be learned about how chaos and human suffering creates a terrain for capitalist expansion under the guise of "aid" and how the work of well-intentioned people is coordinated towards this agenda. The challenges provided in applying IE in this research raise many questions moving forward. Of methodological interest is the usefulness of our account about how we navigated the issues of what we call 'phantom texts' and how we proceeded to conduct analytical work when the actual text was not available to be included in the evidentiary data amassed to build and support the IE account of the ruling institutional relations.

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