Taiwan Journal of Anthropology 臺灣人類學刊 7（1）：35-65，2009

"Never Again":

Narratives of Suffering and Memory of the 9/21 Earthquake in Taiwan*

Shaw-wu Jung

Graduate Institute of Anthropology,

National Chi Nan University

A paradigm shift of the features of narrative from the structural view of language of representing reality to the constructionist one of creating reality primarily emphasizes language not only as a conveyor of structure, but as a practice of initiating normalcy as well as ruptures. This theorizing about language practice can be adopted to clarify the relation of language to suffering precisely because language may be available to cope with suffering while still unable to reveal it wholly. Expressing the emotions of pain means to establish varied links with linguist forms. Even silence and no language point to a discourse strategy that accommodates and resists existing social forces.

In keeping with the idea of language as practice, this article examines narratives about the 9/21 earthquake in Taiwan as articulating life experiences against the realities of social structure. I will look at personal stories as a form of social action, a cultural resource, and a subset of socio-cultural practice. When scholars treat language, culture, and society as mutually constituted, the focus is on the micro-processes of language interaction because these are the ways speaking subjects are shaped by narrative and in turn have the potential to alter narrative.

Keywords: narrative, language, discourse analysis, suffering, the 921 earthquake

* Earlier version of this article was presented at the International Workshop on Narration and Genre at Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, June 2008. I am thankful to Fei-wen Liu, the organizer of the Workshop, for her invitation and encouragement. I am very grateful to the participants in the Workshop who provided suggestions on earlier draft. Special thanks to anonymous reviewers for TJA who pushed me clarify my arguments in this paper. Finally, I must thank people in Dongshih who agreed to tell their stories, and those who accompanied me within the hard days.

Introduction

Telling stories of suffering is not just an emotional appeal for empathy, it is a cognitive act of calling up understanding of the world in which the storyteller lives. Telling stories is a way people explain and narrate actions and sequences that are both cause and effect of a particular event. Various scholars have pointed out that narrating stories establishes, enhances, and thereby creates and even distort social realities (e.g., Gal 1991; Ochs and Capps 1996; Sherzer 1987). More importantly, telling stories makes intelligible what happened, especially in time of existential crisis, by following a culturally available narrative framework. Certain kinds of narrative are inevitably more acceptable than others and certain ways of narrating more legitimate than others. This involves issues of genre and power in the sense that since no stories are possible without relations between storyteller and audience (even in monologue there exists a speaker and an implied listener, as Bakhtin (1981) has long argued), social relations and social contexts determine what, when, and how to narrate and receive. Within a given culture, unequal authority and opportunities are granted to different people, for example, men and women. In fact, social reality and social inequality are mediated through narrative. The ways people understand the world, and describe the world as well, are consequences of genre conventions mostly determined by power Paradoxically, inequality is often the cause of the misfortune narrative seeks to explain, and even to change in a symbolic way. Narrative, as one feature of language, is a valuable mechanism that should be explored because our understanding of the world is tied up in how we make it intelligible, an act that reflects social relations and power.

No instances of narrative's power are more compelling than the cases of suffering and silence. In sharp contrast with the human tendency to tell, these are instances that deny or surpass people's ability to tell stories, at least complete ones. In developing Wittgenstein's idea of the "language game" into possibilities for an imagination of pain, anthropologist Veena Das describes pain—and suffering, with which it is so often paired—not as something inexpressible that "marks an exit from one's existence in language," but as "a claim asking for acknowledgement, which may be given or denied" (1997: 70). Every society has communicative systems for coping with suffering, but often these systems fail and may even further repress or contribute to distress. The well-documented cases where suffering leads to loss of language have caused authors such as Isaac (1993), Morris (1997), and Taussig (1987), to suspect whether human suffering is fully representable. The more extreme suffering is, the more it rejects the ordinariness of communicative systems. Paradoxically, while suffering is being silenced, repressed, denied, or converted to approved

forms, it persistently presents itself in substance and action that demand meaning. When normal communicative systems break down and silence suffering, suffering asks to be recognized. Suffering drains away words that might come to terms with tragedy, and at the same time it hides a world of emotion, of forbidden ideas in need of communicative forms. On the other hand, to follow Das's suggestion, the ways suffering is conveyed and acknowledged have the potential to destabilize and renew normalcy.

The connection of language to suffering is crucial because it exposes how we construct a linguistic of borders whenever we ignore suffering's power to transcend linguistic tools. It is commonly accepted that language is viewed as a significant form of social action, and as such, a resource for participants and anthropologists. For example, the pioneer sociolinguist John Gumperz once said, "Language differences play an important, positive role in signaling information as well as in *creating and maintaining* the subtle boundaries of power, status, role and occupational specialization that make up the fabric of our social life" (Gumperz 1982: 6-7, emphasis mine). Put another way, social and political hierarchies always present themselves through different language usages. Also, William Labov examines how hierarchical differences between white middle-class kids and black working-class kids are reflected in their varieties of linguistic practice such as verbality, [1] verbosity, grammaticality, and logic (Labov 1970). Yet, insofar as sociolinguists are concerned with actor's strategic and pragmatist use of lexical, grammatical, sociolinguistic and other knowledge in daily conversation contexts, I would say that their emphasis falls on how language use reflects culture in the production and interpretation of messages. In other words, while Labov examines the interpretive framework of interactional dialogue conveyed in the meaning and content of a sentence as well as through pronunciation and speech style, he nonetheless presupposes stable and unchanging speaking subjects, fabricated and determined by specific language disciplines. He goes on to describe, in an extreme conclusion, "lower-class Negro children have no language at all" (ibid.: 156). Language becomes, in this light, nothing more than a device for acculturating and oppressing the dominated rather than a communicative tool.

I argue in this article that social differences and borders are constituted by forms of contextualized language. Language may well entail the ability to define social reality, to impose visions of the world, but it is more important for us to specify the precise ways in which language use—in oratory, narrative, discourse, and document—produce particu-

---

1 Labov's word. He describes it as a vernacular culture of the street Negro (sic.) children have learn to construct their vocabulary, quite fruitful and meaningful as opposed to so-called deficit theory might have assumed (1970: 154-157).

lar social effects according to diverse cultural principles. What people say is inseparable from *how* they say it. When we turn from concern with acculturation and oppression to inscription and enactment, the ways text-making, rhetoric, and metaphor are embedded in language use and narrative become the focus. I would cite Joel Sherzer's assertion (1987: 300) that "language does not reflect culture but that language use in discourse creates, recreates, and modifies culture."

Attention to the ways self-knowledge and social and cultural borders are conceived and transmitted through language and its specific frames, e.g., discourse and narrative, has increasingly appeared in recent work on language, symbolic interaction, political economy of language, narrative, etc. (Becker, Beyene and Ken 2000: Brison 1995; Bruner 1991; Caton 1985; Duranti 1990, 1993; Gal 1991; Kirmayer 1996; Ochs and Capps 1996). When Jerome Bruner talks about the features of narrative from the structural view of language of representing reality to the constructionist one of creating reality, this paradigm shift (1991: 5) primarily emphasizes language not only as a conveyor of structure, but as a practice of initiating normalcy as well as ruptures. This theorizing about language practice can be adopted to clarify the relation of language to suffering precisely because language may, among other things, be available to cope with suffering while still unable to reveal it wholly. Expressing the emotions of pain means to establish varied links with linguist forms. Even silence and no language point to a discourse strategy that accommodates and resists existing social forces. Because discourse strategy is always practice-oriented and contextual, it is attuned to the negotiation of agency, ideology, and power, in contrast to social linguistic view of language.

In keeping with the idea of language as practice, this article examines narratives about the 9/21 earthquake in Taiwan as articulating life experiences against the realities of social structure. In the following I look at personal stories on the individual level. Taking cues from the above-mentioned works in linguistic anthropology, I will look at personal stories as a form of social action, a cultural resource, and a subset of socio-cultural practice. When scholars treat language, culture, and society as mutually constituted, the focus is on the micro-processes of language interaction because these are the ways speaking subjects are shaped by narrative and in turn have the potential to alter narrative.

The narratives of suffering I explore have permeated every aspect of social life in the devastated areas, consciously and unconsciously propelling daily patterns of existence from social geography to problems of identity and belonging. They not only have meanings, but also have ideological values that reveal the constituency of the culture system. Particularly, I believe, narratives of suffering have implications for understanding causality, action, agency, and hence responsibility. Personal stories involve continuous communication between actors, exemplifying collectively shared symbols from a seemingly

incoherent flow of oral statements and social actions. Creating narrative, inseparable from self and meaning construction (Ochs and Capps 1996: 20), has been a critical task for people in the devastated areas. Narrative provides a manifestation and construction of reality for individuals and the culture alike.

I begin with a series of events that gives a sense of how the government controlled the chaos and the challenge that people narrated against the official narrative. Next, through ethnographic dialogue and encounter, I examine how people made sense of the traumatic event and reordered their world in its wake. I then show how survivors contested and negotiated the reconstruction framework established by the government. We can only understand the event's multiple meanings by the way survivors talked about the reconstruction process. Finally, I demonstrate how memories were recalled through narrative practices that reach beyond the private mourning and public commemoration. From all these accounts, I conclude that tensions between official and vernacular cultural forms, and for that matter, between normalcy and disorder, were common, and that narrative practices both sustained and subverted the boundary between the two.

Background

At 1:47 a.m., on September 21, 1999, an earthquake with a registered magnitude of 7.3 on the Richter Scale ripped open the central part of Taiwan. The epicenter of the earthquake was located in Chi-Chi, in the Central Mountain Range, literally at the heart of the island. No part of the nation was left untouched, although two counties, Taichung and Nantou, sustained the most severe damage. The seismic wave traveled between two fault lines stretching 90 kilometers in an island that is only 384 kilometers long and 140 kilometers wide. In less than a minute, it claimed 2,494 lives, injured over 12,000 persons, destroyed 106,159 households, and left some 230,000 people homeless. It has been estimated that the damage caused by the earthquake cost Taiwan almost NT (New Taiwan Dollars) 100 billion.[2] For an island that is not unfamiliar with varieties of disaster, such as typhoons, debris flow, and even industrial hazards, the earthquake of 1999 was worse than anything the Taiwanese had imaged, let alone experienced. It was the most devastating catastrophe in one hundred years in terms of loss of life and economic damage.

2 The damage data reflected the situation as of January 2000 (source: Post-the 921 Earthquake Reconstruction Commission, Executive Yuan). At that time, one US dollar equaled approximately 33 NT dollars. The exchange rate usually fluctuates between 32 to 35 NT.

This article is based on my research in Dongshih, Taiwan, in a series of segments in the years 1999 and 2000, 2003 to 2004, and again in 2007. The ethnographic information presented combines participant observation, fieldwork diary, and formal interviews. I had been conducting fieldwork in Dongshih for my dissertation from May 1999, four months before the catastrophe struck. Within the first months of the earthquake I went to various tent sites where survivors chatted and convened meetings. I heard many stories of the earthquake, but did not systematically examine them at the time because my original research concerned legal measures designed to assist the reconstruction. There was little chance to do interviews during this period, so I kept notes of the stories I heard in my journal; some of them are therefore sketchy but they demonstrate similar and repeating patterns of rupture in normal lives. As soon as the rebuilding process started, I followed and participated in three "Reconstruction Organizations" formed by the local people and non-governmental organization (NGO) volunteers. It was on these occasions that I encountered the numerous viewpoints of various social actors on the earthquake and the reconstruction.

I completed nineteen interviews in 2004 and 2007, along with continuous participant observation. Most of the interviewees were informants I became acquainted with during my first period of fieldwork, and this allowed me to distinguish the continuities and discontinuities between before and after the earthquake for research purposes.[3] Interviews were mainly driven by open-ended questions, with a few structured questions such as how they remembered the earthquake. In view of my interest in understanding how the event was remembered, the interviews began like a normal conversation to avoid making the informants uncomfortable recollecting those tragic moments. Naturally, people's stories covered multiple intertwined topics. Informants, thirteen women and six men, focused on their experiences of resettlement and reconstruction, and reflections on their past lives and their daily lives now; this way they knitted together an interpretation that inextricably linked the event, blame of state and others, and complaints about their economic situations. Against this ethnographic backdrop, I also combed national newspapers and local journals for related reports. These stories of suffering, despite their

3 Interviewing acquaintances made this particular project easier because most of them knew what *we* had been through together during those harsh times. Yet I am also concerned with the limitations of my interviews—whether personal contacts affected the responses they gave me. In other words, while the conversations were flowing about our shared knowledge of the event, I was simultaneously implicated in the traumatic processes I attempted to represent afterwards. I was aware that this intimacy would have an impact on my representation as not objectively assessed, but I want to stress the importance of trust in gaining access to the extreme emotions of victims.

different sources under quite varied circumstances, are assembled and examined below for what they illustrate about embodied lived experience, especially during the time of crisis, and for what they reveal about people's feelings and thoughts about what others did and thought. I am not pretending to be holistic, since I am conscious that the practice of writing ethnography of this sort is also a way of making a narrative of what it purports to represent—the traumatic event. This does not make it more subjective, I hope, in comparison to comprehensive descriptions. After all, a narrative, as this article turns out to be, addresses itself to an audience, just as the victims' narratives were addressed to me. In a similar vein, my audience may experience empathy with the narrative I provide, and, at the same time, of course, lay judgment on it.

Chaos and Normalcy

Dongshih, an agrarian town in the hilly regions of northeastern Taichung County, was one of the areas hit hardest. The death toll here was the highest of any township. Three hundred and fifty-eight people were killed; thousands of houses were crushed in this town alone. In the first days after the earthquake confusion reigned, as different reports of the devastation in the afflicted areas were broadcast on TV and radio, one after another. No one really had any idea how bad it was and everyone feared the worst. In the once-crowded downtown area, no buildings had been spared; many structures that had not been leveled leaned precariously. Others that appeared to stand unharmed were riddled with cracks. Where houses had once stood, only piles of brick, mortar, beds, refrigerators, and children's toys remained. In some places, the ground had disappeared into gaping holes. The entire downtown had become one big campground. Tents, mostly provided by charity groups, huddled together in public open spaces, parks, in sports fields or in school courtyards. The government set up a command post in River Bank Park near downtown, where local officials, civil groups, and the army worked around the clock to provide food and services of many kinds for the survivors. In the first days, aftershocks, sometimes very strong, still roared from underground, and people sat around frightened and in shock, waiting for more bad things to happen. In this span of time, it was easy to collect personal accounts of the earthquake. Victims were eager to share their stories, and hence their anxiety and appreciations, with all kinds of people from journalist to NGOs workers and interested researchers, while sitting in makeshift tents. Stories of who survived, who was killed, and what they got and what they needed, were narrated with anger, despair, disbelief, and sometimes optimism.

The town that I had been studying was destroyed. My role as an ethnographer had become somewhat dubious at this point: I worked as an aid volunteer while at the same time I was also a person in need of help. For almost a month I depended on the rescue centers for water and food. "What was it like?" "Is Dongshih OK now?" "To what degree has Dongshih recovered?" These kinds of questions have been raised over and over by acquaintances and strangers, beginning on day 1 of the earthquake and continuing even to the present day. People are anxious to grasp what happened during and after the huge earthquake. They are, I suppose, looking for information the way an anthropologist would get it from an informant, because they know I was there in Dongshih at the time. What is there to say about a time like this, as personal event becomes history? I have never been comfortable with such questions although I eventually give some answer. I feel uncomfortable because the questioning suggests that catastrophe is abnormal not just because it is destructive both to the physical and social landscape, but also because it is seen as unpredictable and hence does not conform to common notions of order and regularity.

While I was confused and hesitated to talk about the event, the state had ample to say and needed to say it affirmatively and quickly. No state can afford not to respond to its citizens' anguish and turmoil. The challenge facing the Taiwanese government was to generate the resources and social capital sufficient to tame the chaos. Key to this effort was how the government responded to the natural disaster: it quickly contained the disorder all around the island by deploying a tripartite program: the first stage was saving people; the second was destroying unsalvageable buildings; and the third was providing compensation and rebuilding. Government actions attempted to answer the questions being asked in the wake of the earthquake. In so doing, the state engineered the perception that everything was under control, that programs were in place for every problem that arose. The basic plot structure, more or less, was: disasters happened, and the government was there to back up the people.

But what stories came out of the government's actions? What problems lay behind the stories? In its urgency to return things to their normal order, the state repeatedly claimed the earthquake was abnormal, a once-in-a-hundred-year happening. The disorder and disturbance caused by the natural disaster were reckoned destructive and so had to be contained and handled *properly*. Nature, in administrative terms, was not a natural phenomenon *per se* but rather another field to be governed. In other words, the official account of nature in this regard identified it as a risky, unpredictable phenomenon that was nevertheless scientifically manageable. It was through this narrative that the ruin the quake caused, and the misfortune, were acknowledged and administered. It is easy to

understand the state's impulse to immediately deal with and tame the tragedy, through a comprehensive framework of and national scope.

Following Hayden White's theory, narrative frames explanation as a process of "reduction to the familiar". He describes the narrative effect when narrator and reader successfully follow a story of a particular type: "[T]he original strangeness, mystery, or exoticism of the events is dispelled, and they take on a familiar aspect... They are rendered comprehensible by being subsumed under the categories of the plot structure in which they are encoded as a story of a particular kind" (1978: 86). In the endeavor to make sense of chaos, the narrative form renders social relations coherent, plausible, and natural; it provides comfort and meaning (White 1978, 1987). Narrative in its linear and sequential form carries the causal and moral evaluations of agents, events and historical factors, as White has suggested (1987: 13).

Presenting a narrative in which environmental phenomena are both "natural hazards" and manageable has created a dilemma for the state, however. On the one hand, the state and the scientific profession directed how society should respond to this catastrophic event. As a seismologist once told me, "It is not the earthquake that kills people, it is the human built houses that kill. The earth moves all the time. It causes damage only when humans live on fault lines." The state could claim itself a legitimate, responsible agent by constructing the earthquake event as natural phenomenon. On the other hand, and more importantly, inasmuch as the earthquake was rendered a natural phenomenon, it was the state's job to prepare for the consequences. The action and inaction of the state in the wake of the earthquake were certain to come under the close scrutiny of the whole nation.

How was this devastating event narrated at the individual level? First came the rumors. One minister of a Christian church in Taichung county claimed that the earthquake had been caused by President Lee Teng-hui's irritating confrontation with mainland China back in July 1999. Throughout Chinese history, popular belief has connected political power to the divine, a concept known as the mandate of heaven. Emperors, now presidents, with the blessing of heaven, are supposed to take care of the needs of the people. Catastrophe strikes when things fall out of balance between political power and the natural divine. Also, some claimed there had been omens warning that something extraordinary was going to happen, which, of course, people ignored. Local people told me they had noticed strange phenomena in the days before the quake: thousands of earthworms emerged from the ground for no apparent reason; swarms of frightened bees and ants abandoned their nests; and the air was unusually stifling and still for the usually breezy autumn season. Sandra Pannell reports a similar "indigenous sense of the environmental changes" during an earthquake in Eastern Indonesia (1999). But rumor control is

the number one priority of any authority (Douglas 1992). Containing rumors is not only intended to curb anxiety, but even more to monitor the blame game, thereby exercising some control over the assignment of responsibility. It is no wonder that scientists wasted no time in dismissing the omen explanations of the earthquake as superstitious and ill-grounded rumors, citing instead the natural fact that animals and insects are more sensitive than humans to changes in the environment.

The earthquake was also an occasion for social commentary by people inside and outside the afflicted region: the earthquake was a god-sent punishment to the island where, it seems, sudden wealth had ruined the people's spirit. Taiwanese were now getting richer by virtue of their individual labors but at the cost of respect for the gods, nature, and the past. Runaway greed had ruined the balance of social and natural order and may have caused a backlash from the invisible forces. Individual wealth was, in this regard, unstable, as if it rested on "shaking ground." Even in Taoyuan county, hundreds of kilometers from the epicenter, a newspaper reported that a monk at one temple warned of six major disasters that would strike before the end of the year, including a strange whirlwind and the outbreak of contagious disease. Humans behaved, and nature would respond, even punish, in the long run. As Allen Feldman cogently points out, "Rumor is prognostic, not in terms of actual prediction, but in terms of a culturally mediated sense of possibility, structural predilection, political tendency, and symbolic projection" (1995: 230). Whether rumor is deemed reliable or not, and the way by which rumor is spread, depends on how people *assess* others' intentions, status, and actions in the resulting event. In other words, rumor is not a vice or an aberration but reflects people's underlying perception of what others should do, a kind of moral principle.

Personal social relationships, too, played a role in accounting for the difference between who lived and who died. A man pointed out a demolished house adjacent to his home and told me, "Look, nearly every house on our block was safe, only his building was hit hard. The man is a KMT *zhuangjiao* (literally, pillar)." He was referring to a neighbor who was a front man for a local faction. Like a pillar rooted in the ground, a *zhuangjiao* is a locally powerful man who is widely connected. It was commonly assumed that the KMT (Kuomingtang), the then ruling party, would pour resources via that man to mobilize voters, usually by vote-buying, around the neighborhoods during elections. *Zhuangjiao* are often disliked by the opposing faction. Members of opposing factions don't talk to one another even if they live next to one another. In a similar vein, some said that they were lucky to escape tragedy because they had been doing virtuous things and the Bodhisattva had sent down his blessing to them. Blaming others, or crediting oneself for that matter, tend to look *post hoc* for the contexts of actions and their possible causal

antecedents, a practice that might be better characterized as individual political and social statements.

What I have shown here is that a native model of causation somehow connects human actions and natural events. Even earthquakes strike because of human choices. Whether those choices were laid at the feet of politicians or one's neighbors, they reflected growing uneasiness at both the national and local levels in Taiwan. In fact, such prophetic elements did not surface or become consequential until the native causation model reconstructed them retrospectively to be portents of the disaster. Plots were constructed that pieced together things seen as "meaningful" afterwards as if they were part of sequencings leading to what happened later. In so doing, a quite distinct narrative about the earthquake-as-event was established, a narrative that connected the omen-generating power of the divine and the turbulence of human affairs with moral lessons. Unreliable stories, or rumors, allowed people to revisit and repair their relationships with others, and with nature when possible. People's narrative practices were an attempt to grapple with the causes of this horrible disaster. As opposed to the linear official narrative of the earthquake, the native model of causation associated multiple agents and factors at different times to account for what had happened. The state attempted to produce an omniscient representation of the earthquake, while people's more subjective stories intersected with and diverged from the official narrative.

It is interesting to note that a growing disaster literature in anthropology is developing models to explain what, exactly, constitutes a disaster (e.g., Alexander 2000; Oliver-Smith 1996; Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 1999). It focuses on human actions, behavior, decisions, and values in every phase and aspect of a disaster, that lead to disasters. In opposition to commonly held belief, for example, Oliver-Smith argues (1996: 308-309), nature only produces phenomena; it does not create hazards. There are cultural and political forces involved in preparedness, results and response, and reconstruction that in the end determine the contours of a disaster. Both native models of causation and recent disaster literature concomitantly take account of human causes in the ways natural phenomena occur in the world. I am not saying that these two ways of relating the human to nature merit equal value scientifically. The point is, when Taiwan's government activated emergency measures to manage the after-effects of the ***natural*** disaster, this amounted to establishing an ordering narrative that reverted the blame to nature and hence wrote off ***human*** accountability. Native narratives about the causational aspect of human wrongdoings, by comparison, signaled ambiguities in the meaning of the disaster that were not represented in the official narrative.

Disrupted and Reorganized Self

For the first few weeks, shelters set up by the government and charity groups housed homeless residents in parks and on public lands. Throughout the quake-hit region, uncertainty about who lived and died added to the mental anguish. The dissolution of structure occurred all around the town, and in all fields— physical, political, social, spiritual, and emotional. The disorganized self became pretty much dependent on the kindness and assistance of others, sometimes outsiders. I frequented one of the shelter centers, the one at the Old Train Station Plaza, where I was able to associate with its chief spokesman, Mr. Wang, who had been selected by the "villagers" there to coordinate the distribution of aid.[4] Usually, informants such as Mr. Wang were in such shock—and this was the mental state of most of the victims— they kept telling the same stories over and over, so much that I found myself overwhelmed. I tended to follow the informants' flow of words instead of (re)directing their stories. Wang, a 46-year-old businessman, recounted the first minutes of intense fear and helplessness:

> I lived in a 15-story apartment and I had just retired to bed when I heard a man's voice outside anxiously shouting "Dizhen, Dizhen!" [Mandarin for earthquake]. Then I felt the ground shake in every direction. It shook side-by-side east and west then shook north and south, then in circular motions. And the shaking got worse by the second and it sounded like a wind storm was approaching. I guess the shaking was amplified by the height of the building. Immediately after the shaking came to a halt, I gathered my family and ran to the ground floor. It was late at night and I saw that many people were in their night clothes. When sun rose next day, Dongshih was like a war zone. Only then did I realize the entire neighborhood was affected by the tremors. The street was filled with people walking up and down, helpless and full of anxiety. Rescue troops arrived at our town and worked day and night. People were found under the ruins but few of them were alive. Bodies, and pieces of bodies, were unrecognizable.

---

4 In order to secure their anonymity, I use only surnames throughout this article for the people from whom I got stories. Background information is provided for the ethnographic contexts within which the stories were collected.

In fact, stories of this kind told in the first days after the earthquake were not as well organized as this example—understandable in a messy situation. I have preserved the long and nonstop sentences of Mr. Wang, just adding a few commas for clarity. But I have been very careful to repeat the same words and the spoken order of accounts given by my informants with little alteration to make them "understandable." Worthy of further note, occasions around camps in which such stories were shared were always ones got together by men. Mr. Wang's passage clearly shows the kinds of expressions mainly used by male residents, such as the war zone metaphor and the direction judgment used to describe the magnitude and impact of the earthquake. Moreover, his immediate grip of the condition of the whole town was certainly made possible by the daily experience and knowledge characteristic of a local middle-aged man.

In the course of many nights of talking and gossiping with Mr. Wang and other people at the Old Train Station Plaza, it sometimes seemed callous for me to continue asking Mr. Wang questions to get at details of particular sequences because parts of his account were "out of focus." Those questions forced Mr. Wang to revisit scenes he might want to forget. Still, there were times when informants, Mr. Wang included, clearly enjoyed telling their stories and stories they heard about elsewhere, especially when Mr. Wang convened meetings with representative members of the tents at the Old Train Station Plaza. Several persons told me that before the earthquake Dongshih had enjoyed the best quality of life in Taiwan, according to a study run by the magazine *Tianxia Monthly*. Dongshih has been called the "Kingdom of Fruit" in Taiwan; it is especially famous for its pears. Residents were certainly proud of it being called "Mountain Town." Everything changed, however, in less than a minute on September 21, 1999. Mr. Wang was really sad that the old way of life was gone forever. The unfamiliar expression I saw on the faces of these people was that of a profoundly existential and life-changing shock that suddenly called into question the meaning and scope of human experience.

People could find no appropriate words in the face of the tragedy, and they injected nostalgia for a past that had been wiped out into stories about the good old times. The fragments of that past were always pleasant representations of idyllic rural life in contrast with the present conditions, which were all in turmoil and unpredictable. Mr. Wang's stories highlighted the victims' efforts to wrest the Dongshih past from underneath the debris and to search for a meaningful existence going forward.

Stories heard at the shelters reflected the bad conditions there; victims living there feared for their health and safety. The injured hobbled with aching wounds, some sobbed quietly by themselves. Anguish was written on their faces. Survivors were so traumatized that they were unable to eat, drink, or sleep. Even in the middle of the night, crowds gathered here and there around the shelters because many people could not sleep properly.

Rumors of assault and theft added fear to the already multiple sufferings of the earthquake survivors. The following account was given by a thirteen-year-old boy:

> Father returns to our tent late at night and eats voraciously saying nothing. And then my parents turn in to sleep, murmuring about the sights they had seen that day. Most of the children in the tents slept well, but I could not for each time I felt a tremor. I would sit up, ready to run again. At midnight one night, a shriek given by someone prompted people to run and scream in fear of another earthquake.

The boy at the Old Train Station Plaza shared a small tent with his parents. The aluminum and canvas tent grew hot in the daytime, but was cold at night. There was no soundproofing and little privacy. With no solid buffers between families, fear was contagious and easily spread, contributing to a fragile self, a self repeatedly re-experiencing both real and imaginary shocks. As rural people from the Dongshih area, it was a difficult adjustment for him and his family to suddenly live cheek by jowl with neighbors.

It was evident that survivors at the "tent city" shared stories of the earthquake as if mere storytelling might create solidarity. Representation of what was going on in the tents contributed to uncertainty every day, but, for a moment, the horror was transformed into outward forms that could be shared. By so doing, the horror was no longer merely personal; narrating was certainly as individual as it was social.

The boy's reference to the breeched divide between inside and outside the home and the resultant lack of security was readily be intelligible because everyone had had a home. That is to say, people constructed self/other oppositions along the boundaries of living space. Home was familiar and predictable, while the outside was unknown, dispersed, and unlimited. Ironically, it was the familiarized home that killed the humans living inside and homeless survivors had to share space with others on the outside in the quake's aftermath. We can expect the once-stable self situated in the home to become disrupted and ill-organized to a degree. Shelters provided a temporary border between inside and outside and hence self/other, although this new border was entwined with the trauma and was effortlessly transgressed by physical as well as emotional intrusions.

No occasions encouraged disrupted people to tell their stories of loss and hope in the wake of the earthquake like funerals. One might come across funerals taking place almost every week in Dongshih during that first month. A dirge played over the loudspeaker seemed to envelop the whole town. I jotted down notes during one such funeral, organized by the Township Hall as a memorial for several families jointly. In the middle of a large makeshift tent stood enlarged photos of the victims positioned at a long table.

Religious offerings were presented. As the monks began to chant scripture to pray for the dead, a chorus of women wailed over the loss of loved ones; the men stood by in silence, paralyzed by the storm of emotion. Surrounded by incense and the sound of prayer, other spectators soon began sobbing, as if the funeral were an outlet for communal sadness.

The traditional ritual repertory is full of ceremonies to mourn the dead and exorcise evil. People who lost loved ones were somewhat able to overcome their pain by performing ritual activities. Women took lead in funeral processions. Their demonstrations of pain usually went beyond language and included body movements and expressions, such as sobbing and flailing their arms, which gave their words greater power. If traditionally men articulated their pain via stories told in public and to strangers, women spoke of theirs mostly in private and with acquaintances. Thus men were expected to suppress their emotions in public and instead to express their feelings through oratory, while silence in public was characteristic of women whose self was repressed and distorted. Funerals were one occasion when women were sanctioned to express their pain publicly in gestures mixed with words, usually by wailing. One woman cried, "My daughter has been dead for a few days. I still can't believe it is true. From now on, I only have the memory of her left. What an injustice this is to me!" Another mother seemed to respond,

> I worked so hard to raise my son and then he left me suddenly. Why did you leave me to grow old alone? He was so nice and smart, and I put all my hope in him. He was supposed to support me when I grow old. It's beyond my understanding. But I am also grateful to have had him. There must be a special fate that brought us together, and I want to be his mom in the next life.

Distressed stories of loved ones' sudden death were heard all over the anguished town. Yet, the stories exchanged between tormented persons at funerals had other connotations. What I want to say is that a funeral is a boundary between life and death; it constructs a ritualized bridge between the living and dead, but at the same time it really divides the two. The weeping mothers were talking to themselves, convincing themselves of what had happened already. They were also talking to their absent loved ones. This narration truly functioned as a bridge between life and death. More importantly, the distressed mothers were talking to one another. Exchanging personal stories played an important cathartic role as well as an explanatory one; it interpreted the inexplicable and sustained psychological bonds. Narration in this regard was also a bridge between self and other. During a disaster, there is comfort in being able to share with another human being. As a means of sharing suffering from a fateful event, narrating stories of this sort built a new self-other continuum in the sense that the disorganized self might find empa-

thy in others' suffering. I believe that the very action of telling and listening to stories of suffering make possible a kind of traveling back and forth between the self's and others' pain, thereby (re)establishing the self-other interdependence. Funerals after an unexpected tragedy are thus no longer a boundary between sufferers and spectators. They may even be an occasion for the regrouping of a community, though an aggrieved one. To use Veena Das's characterization, suffering, as asking for recognition and acknowledgement, (1997: 88) is not about the intellect but about the spirit. Narration of suffering created a series of boundary crossings: from the living to the dead, from one self to another self, and from the unexpected to the normalcy. I argue that the stories of mothers' suffering offer insights into how mothers account for their dilemma between being an ideal mother caring for children and loss of that ideal self with the loss of those children. Bereaved mothers present a moral and damaged self in empathy with other mothers' sufferings. In other words, the tales of suffering that mothers tell are presentations of the self and its discontent.

The grieving and disrupted self, whether that self is a middle-aged man, a teenaged boy, or a mother in pain, finds solace in narrative practice; this is almost a universal human act, through which the self transcends grief and begins to reconstruct. We may find cases from other regions where extreme sufferings are converted to a more recognizable form mainly through narrative act (e.g. Becker, Beyene and Ken 2000; Green 1994). From the examples I discussed above, I would venture to say that storytelling is a way of bridging the self and others to construct a moral community; it reaches between chance and certainty, across gender and age. Storytelling may provide a key to the problem of understanding extreme events and experiences involving sudden death and horror.

Reconstruction as Memory Archive

The ensuing suffering, due to ineffective government assistance and reconstruction measures, compared to what various NGOs, especially the religious relief foundations, had accomplished, gave rise to fierce finger pointing. The dissatisfactions and anger threatened to undermine the government's attempt to regain social cohesion and confidence in time of crisis. The state tried with extraordinary speed to distribute aid such as temporary housing, basic amenities, and compensation as if this would answer the victims' questions. But in the face of delayed and inconclusive investigations into construction flaws, most victims simply could not wait for answers and got on daily business. More crucially, compensation money surprisingly converted the whole debate from one of accountability to one of whether the money was being allocated appropriately or legal-

ly. The processes of normalization, or the monetization of the disaster, through which the state deemed certain damages worthy of compensation while finding others to be merely natural hazards, powerfully remade the political, social, economic and cultural landscape of the afflicted areas.

When the tent camps were phased out, everyone whose house had been demolished and still had no home was moved into a different sort of the temporary housing complex that had a clinic, play areas for children, and basic amenities. Although not comparable to a permanent home, those prefabricated homes at least provided roofs and concrete floors for survivors. With a disrupted self regrouped on a seemingly solid ground, survivors moved on to a no less harsh situation whose primary concern was long-term of reconstruction. As soon as reconstruction began, government emergency measures once again came under critical scrutiny. In many ways, survivors in Dongshih tried to settle back into familiar rhythms of life. But they did this in a milieu grounded in government measures established in the wake of the earthquake; these were aimed at a return to "normalcy." The government issued money and resources and legal measures to help survivors climb out of their messy, traumatic situation. Consequently, survivors' feelings about the event were translated into efforts to rebuild their homes. While acute mourning had become unnecessary and to a degree illegitimate in this phase, rebuilt houses stood as material proof of a new future and a denial of the past. Suffering was hence consigned to the private sphere. Two cases of reconstruction will be given to illustrate the power of the statist narrative in shaping the meanings of the event. At the same time, the overall situation continued to carry an important degree of ambiguity via the suffering narrative. Given an authoritative political structure that controlled resources and defined the plot of the event, people were drawn to its legal and financial reconstruction measures. But their stories still reveal different faces of the event.

A woman, Mrs. Hsiao, 39 years old, unemployed since the earthquake and living on the government's social welfare subsidy, complained to me sharply as I was sitting with others in one makeshift tent nine months after the earthquake: "What has the government done to help us since the earthquake? Nothing really, except distributing compensation money, pulling down damaged houses. All the other measures just cheat us." As a mother who lost one of her children and her husband, Mrs. Hsiao went on to say:

> Township hall did nothing, the central government did nothing either. They were just talking as if they would give us justice. I thought the government would help us but there was no one there for me. I haven't cried but I should. No one was responsible; in the end, the whole system failed me. I don't want compensation; I just want someone held accountable. My child should not have died. I don't want this to hap-

pen again. I still don't know why this should have happened to my family. Never again.

Mrs. Hsiao narrated a scene different from that the government promoted. A battle raged between the official account of the disaster—deadly but recoverable, systems failed but correctable—and victims' oral accounts of actual persons, not some anonymous system, being punished. When Mrs. Hsiao said that she was not pursuing wealth but just needed justice, she was clearly declaring herself a subject, the voice of a structure of accountability, instead of an object of statistical compensation and of history. She reiterated her children's stories while, according to her, many of her relatives, once desperate to tell of their helplessness, had been quieted with compensation money. Her suffering and outrage remained so intense that existing social forms proved ineffectual in reducing them. Yet, there was a framework put in place by the state, mainly the reconstruction measures, that made the pain something manageable as it transformed victims into compensation beneficiaries. And so, by her need to tell stories demanding accountability and her need to be heard, Mrs. Hsiao remains an active agent, a distinct person who rejects being co-opted by the state into silence.

Stories calling for an accounting need an audience, as Bakhtin (1981) has argued for language practice that bridges relations between storyteller and audience; in this case me and a few others in the tent. Not long ago, her stories and those told by hundreds of thousands had been heard throughout the whole country. Accounting stories need believers, too, who experience empathy based in the related event. Mrs. Hsiao had me recording her at the very moment. Not long before, believers, herself included, cried for "social justice" and "legal duty" after sharing their words of pain and stories of cheating. At a point the public would forget the tragedy, and we would arrive at a moment when the 9/21 earthquake would be successfully immersed and normalized within reconstruction process. When there were no legal tools for Mrs. Hsiao to really resolve the precise cause of her family loss, her stories stood and persisted. My ethnographic inquiry once again engaged her need to make sense of the tragedy in a way the state and most of us no longer wanted to do it. Her stories once again conveyed suffering and the feeling of injustice that the state wanted to do away with. Suffering lingered on the border of normalcy.

The second case is more revealing in that it shows the effects of trauma in the struggles among survivors over material elements of their ravaged building during the long term of state-supervised reconstruction. Let me start from an eventful day, a day of an end *and* a beginning. On April 5, 2004, almost five years after the earthquake, the day of *Qingming Jie* (Tomb-sweeping Day) when Taiwanese honor their ancestors, survivors from a demolished condominium, Dongshih Dynasty, No. 2, took an important tangible

step toward recovery. Above the dusty empty ground, a small hill of clay with a red pole stuck in its middle was used to commence a ground-breaking ceremony. Some spectators were murmuring about the hill looking like a tomb on this gloomy day. With many questions unanswered, the tone was conciliatory at the hour-long ceremony. The ceremony was tempered—as were all events in the wake of the earthquake—by the inescapable shadow of lives lost, specifically the seventeen who had died at Dongshih Dynasty, No. 2. In a speech accompanied by the screech of passing cars on the street, the director of the ad hoc Council of Post 921 Reconstruction, Executive Yuan, Yow-chi Kuo, told her audience that the future 22-story apartment complex would provide positive energy in the air down here in Dongshih. "To honor and remember those who lost their lives and as a tribute to the event, we have made it happen," Kuo affirmed. "By this time in 2005, if all goes according to plan [it actually completed until 2006] the new Dongshih Dynasty, No. 2 will have begun its ascent into the skyline of Dongshih, a bit higher than the original one," the energetic female voice from microphone guaranteed.

An hour and 20 minutes later, after the high-ranking officials and some 100 invited guests had dispersed, relatives and friends of survivors came with bags holding paper money, incense, and firecrackers. The paper money would be burned for the victims to use in the afterlife; the firecrackers would ward off evil spirits. After all, *Qingming Jie* is the day for families to burn incense for their deceased ancestors, while at the same time marking the remembrance of lives once lived by performing a ritual offering. "Today is renewal," stated Ms. Lin, the chairwoman of Dongshih Dynasty, No. 2 Post-Earthquake Self-Help Coalition, but she quickly added, "I still have hurt in my heart. Every time I go down here, I always have the same kind of breathless feeling. But to celebrate a rebirth, that's something totally new. It's like an ongoing affirmation of our willingness to be better."

Along with all the administrative and financial quandaries in the course of prolonged reconstruction, issues I will not examine here (see Jung 2003), the inescapable fact that people had died there made the rebuilding incredibly difficult, if not impossible. Conflicts over the rebuilding among the designers and among the surviving families had been heated, but many people also expressed a desire for greater creativity. While a hasty reconstruction was urged by many families who needed to bury their dead and move on, others felt the site would forever be a cemetery no matter how it was used. The families' voices were potent and numerous; and the spot where the old Dongshih Dynasty, No. 2 once stood continued to have varied layers of meaning for different people. Some families yearned to preserve the demolition site untouched; local artists dreamed of a memorial expressing the essential horror of the tragedy, and they were afraid that the reconstructed building was likely to be reborn as an ugly but practical concrete block empty of reflec-

tion. Ms. Lin, 44 years old with two kids, a housewife of a quite affluent family who was able to take on the task of heading the coalition, said,

> We're stuck. We were so overwhelmed by the enormity of this event that we aren't able to put it in the context of our community. This is a devastated place in every sense - physically, spiritually. We feel we want to rebuild a new house that provides a powerful, tangible connection for current and future generations. It was designed from the very beginning to serve as a reminder that the perished once lived, worked, loved and dreamed here.

The April 2004 ceremony was a bittersweet coda to the rebuilding program that had hovered, day after day for more than 1,550 days, at the numbing and difficult design process sponsored by the state. Like many who lost loved ones in the collapse of Dongshih Dynasty, No. 2, Ms. Lin had her doubts, initially, about the rebuilding program. But in the end, the program was accepted as a better option to bring closure to this chapter of the traumatic event. Questions were asked from time to time by persons who were still unhappy, however. What pictures do people have in mind when they propose full recovery? On what grounds do people measure the success of reconstruction and then put a closure on the earthquake? What kinds of discourse make this event mere "history"? How can activists and residents remake government? Is the rebuilt Dongshih Dynasty, No. 2 a social action of new creativity or testimony that the event is already a memory?

Time was no longer linear for families at Dongshih Dynasty, No. 2, once it had been interrupted by the earthquake. But Council of Post 9/21 Reconstruction, Executive Yuan, along with certain families, eagerly tried to cementin the rupture. The new Dongshih Dynasty, No. 2 appears to have risen from old locale as if a new narrative would begin where the old one left off. With the completion of the new condominium tower, what places and spots remained as obvious points of rupture? With the ruins and debris, evidence of the historical event and even of accountability, buried under the new building, what structure of accountability remained in place? Only stories, personal stories, formed an archive that preserved the place before and after the earthquake as two distinct spaces. Only stories like Ms. Lin's ambiguous account of the reconstruction process interrupted the official acclaim by Council of Post 9/21 Reconstruction, which desperately tried to forge links of continuity between past and present. Narratives of suffering by the survivor families reiterated the fact that the past was past, unrecoverable, and unspoken; they nevertheless discounted the new Dongshih Dynasty, No. 2 as representative of the old tower. There is no way for Ms. Lin to regard it as a replacement of No. 2. It is simply a whole new building in the name of No. 2.

I have been participating in the activities of the Dongshih Dynasty, No. 2 Post-Earthquake Self-Help Coalition since 2003. I have shown here that statements about reconstruction do indeed represented the interests and aspirations of narrators. The struggle to enforce or destabilize social forms defines the contested terrain of politics. Immediately after the earthquake, unity and love were the dicta. Then came rebuilding, and the contentiousness began. It became a question of what vision and what concept of meaning would prevail. This is not to say that the concern for meaning simply depends on the politics of interpretation; rather, it involves the complex interplay of points of views, modes and metaphors of power and legitimation, and the narratives that these subsequently created. The ways suffering due to the earthquake were met by the state-initiated system invited a reexamination of the relationship between the dominant narrative and resistance, and between the state and the individual. Both could reproduce and transform the norms. However, suffering alone does not constitute collective action. In the words of Das and Kleinman (2001: 26), "The diverse configurations within which the institutional and the experiential, the public and the private, the spectacular and the quotidian come together to define the realm of politics" remain to be explored. And will anything ever change? That will be another story.

To Remember or Not

The moment the earthquake struck has provided a shared reference point for people living in the disaster area, constituting a beginning for a narrative, or narratives, though these narratives must entail a variety of reactions and questions. That is why the victims always began stories of the event with the frightening moment when the shaking occurred. However, "(F)or to be worth telling, a tale must be about how an implicit canonical script has been breached... This usually involves what Labov calls a 'precipitating event'" (Bruner 1991: 11). The interruption of normal time marks the beginning of a narrative about the event. Their peaceful Mountain Town, as the Dongshih people had known it, was no more. Accounts of the event invariably began with individual reactions and everyone had one or two stories of suffering to tell. Social relationships, property, jobs, and personal integrity all changed, and suddenly. The earthquake was not a precipitating event just for individuals, it was even more so for the collective community. No words could express the horror of the devastation; no words could convey the individual and collective sorrow. And still the stories had to be told again and again. The vast amount of suffering defined the duty of society, specifically the government, to achieve its greatest possible reduction.

As we have seen, while the start of the earthquake narrative is not contested, both its ending and its plot are. It is obvious that the development and the point of closure for "the event" have been different for different victims. What of the victims several years after the earthquake? When I revisited Mr. Wang and conducted an interview in his newly furnished home in January 2003, he said:

> By all measures I was lucky in the earthquake, having suffered no actual damage at all. The 15-story apartment where I was living was unscathed by the earthquake. Certainly, the emotional stress took months to go away, maybe it never will completely. It all seems so surreal to me to go through such a disaster and yet not really be harmed. That earthquake was so large. I can't imagine what I will do next time. I am not looking forward to it. It is simply a blessing that I can focus on being with family and friends instead. My children have gone back to school and have no health problems. That is what I am doing now. I thought that it was important to reestablish a normal routine rather than dwell on the earthquake. I breathed a sigh of relief when my family finally got across.

Ever so slowly, Mr. Wang and his family began picking up the pieces, literally, of their lives. Little by little, everything went back to normal for Mr. Wang. But soon after the quake he noticed that he had erected barriers separating him from some of the best parts of himself: "I started to forget what my life had been. I tell myself that I need to live life. I usually kept a journal; but after the quake I did not work on my notes, because I don't want to remember it." He clearly recognized "the unhealthy" aspect of lingering on the event and devised a personal meaning for the phrase "never again." Having moved back into a high-rise residential building in 2001—only two years after the earthquake—Mr. Wang, being of high social class in the local context, appeared to forget, or didn't mind, that he had also lived at a high elevation when the quake struck. His earlier stories of barely getting out immediately after the earthquake revealed his terror at the shaking and his family's narrow escape. Nonetheless he opted for a brand new high-rise for his new home. Had he forgotten the horror? His story obviously reveals his tendency to get past the tragedy and instead stick with the familiarity of the status quo. The earthquake brought down the town, the building where he lived and the social order he was most familiar with. As a locally successful businessman, Mr. Wang made a fortune from his knowledge of and connections within existing social networks. His act of forgetting suggests a reclamation of what once was, just as his moving again into a high-rise signaled a kind of return to normalcy, a way of framing the disaster as but an episode in a broader narrative.

While survivors like Mr. Wang just wanted to leave behind everything related to the earthquake, others experienced unimaginable scenes of horror whose shock left them unable to talk, leave the house, or interact with other people. Still others went into a depression that never seemed to go away and would tell stories of suffering the rest of their lives. In telling her story to me in 2003, when she was still living in Hsinyuan No. 1 Village in Dongshih, the first temporary housing community built by the government back in 1999, Mrs. Liu showed a glimmer of a smile as if she were remembering happy days:

> I remember watching him stagger over to the glass windows and then fall to the floor. It was quite comical at the time [because he looked so clumsy]. In fact, I still smile at that moment; I recall how his eyes filled with tears, not actually realizing what had happened. Now, we are in two different worlds. I keep asking myself questions until I come back to myself, and live through yet another upheaval. By this stage I was quite disconnected from any pain. If it comes down, it comes down. As I watched him disappear, suddenly a fierce emotion seized me, and I began to tear through the concrete to find my 6-year-old son. By the time the earth's shaking had stopped, everything stopped. I'll never forget his angel face. I've tried to remember every single day.

Raised in a working-class but protective family, Mrs. Liu left home to come to Dongshih and work at a low-paying job when she was 17 years old, immediately after dropping out of high school. Marrying early and having children soon, she remembered her family as loving and kind. She considered herself a devoted mother who had done everything she could to make her children the happiest kids in the world. But was it enough? Was there anything that she should and could have done to alter their fate? She kept blaming herself for not telling more bed-time tales to her son that doomed night when he had demanded more. It would have been the last time she could spoil him. But she did not do it simply because she was tired. She would have had more loving memory of him if she could have told more tales. But it is too late to do anything. Mrs. Liu has been going through changes and still her memory of her loss was still sharp and entwined with a deep sense of guilt. There was just no explanation why she had survived when her beloved son had perished. Neither was there any mechanism by which to ease her guilt. After a four-year period of self-reflection and revelation, Mrs. Liu said she could only hope that when she woke up one day she would find it had all been a nightmare. Similarly, Mrs. Chang, 37 years old, also living in Hsinyuan No. 1 Village without no prospect of getting a new home soon, had an especially hard time dealing with the loss of her husband. Mrs. Chang received the government relief money that compensated families of every individual who had died

from the earthquake. While the money would support her and her children for a period of time, she was still not sure how she felt about it.

> I just built a big wall around me. It still feels like it happened yesterday. I feel that time has passed, and I haven't done anything. The compensation money given to families who had relatives killed in the earthquake was an intense emotional experience for thousands of people. There were families who filed documents early because they wanted to get the process over with and move on. There were families who got in ugly fights over who was eligible for the money. I just don't understand how much the lives and the injuries were worth. I was so paralyzed by grief that I barely applied in time. I don't want their money; I just want my husband back.

Before the earthquake, it was clear that Mrs. Liu and Mrs. Chang were loving mothers in supportive families. Then came the earthquake and they were not sure who they were any longer. When the state converted their loss of loved ones into monetary compensation, they felt ambivalent about that system because it led to hard feelings, chaos, and discomfort among surviving families. Simply because the government had given away money did not eliminate the need to seek justice. Moreover, there was the opinion, not widespread but not uncommon among people outside the disaster areas, that the earthquake victims were greedy and out of line always asking for more money from the government. The more victims asked for accountability, the more they were seen as craven. Unlike Mr. Wang, these women's silence and isolation have become their means to express their trauma, the perpetuation of their pain, and the ongoing unintelligibility of their lives. Mr. Wang could proceed toward recovery with his own resources, but these women must rely on the government for help. Can they demand justice from the very government to which they look for assistance? Silence and disassociation, the cultural forms available to these poor women, both cut them off from the system of accountability but at the same time provide them a form of voiceless protest.

Scholars have called for the social and political analysis of experience and phenomena that construct selves and consciousness out of the complex interactions of society and culture (Ahearn 2001; Becker, Beyene and Ken 2000; Connolly, Lambek and Antze 1996; Perera 2001). My contention that narrative is plot is not meant to suggest a series of fixed and linearly evolving genres whose timeframe is strictly set from the beginning to end. The meaning of a past event may change its meaning as long as the plot structure grows and shifts in complexity. In effect, the narrative effort is driven by a perpetual tension between agency, narrative conventions, and power. It becomes a dance of language, material, and social relations, all of which interact in a spatio-temporal matrix. Strict and

coherent though the normality structure may be, in practical terms it still finds itself in the difficult position of expressing differences. The cultural forms available for people to construct messages from an event evidently change the extent and magnitude of the event, its content, and its relevance to other events. In a similar vein, addressing embodied experience in yet another way, Linda Green (1994: 238-240) reports examples from Guatemala of widows and other survivors living in a state of continuous fear, one of whom talks about the headaches she had for seven years, from the day her husband was taken away and disappeared. Green illustrates that an ongoing conversation among widows about aches and pains may, in some sense, be a form of social memory, a performative expression of protest when justice is unlikely to be served, and when there is no explanation for the survivor's horror.

Survivor stories—of Mr. Wang, Mrs. Liu, and Mrs. Chang—demonstrate how a massive horror is remembered, even though the case of Mr. Wang shows how he wanted to *not remember* and to move on with his life. Mr. Wang's memory of the event is altered by attempts, by the government and himself, to rebuild a home above the debris. Mr. Liu provides an on-the-ground narrative of the consequences of how the event, victims, and persons responsible for the loss of life are forgotten in the public consciousness. Mrs. Chang' silence about the death of her loved ones shows that even silence is a way of recounting the event. Remembrances of the tragedy clearly vary according to the manner in which different survivors were situated many years after the earthquake. But the point is that since the disaster has not been completely documented and has to a degree been suppressed and reworked by the official narrative, individual sufferings remain, in a word, individual, lodged in the private domain.

Concomitantly, every personal account of the event manifests an underlying negotiation of selves. Variability in performance, local context, and individual agency certainly play roles in constructing selves. This view of the multiplicity of narrative practices is different from the earlier paradigm of language ideologies that emphasize homogeneity within language use. In my examination of those personal narratives, an intelligible and coherent picture emerges of how social relations conditioned these survivors' lives in the wake of the earthquake. Whether or not an individual chooses to participate in reproducing a back-to-normal discourse, that discourse has an impact on how he or she narrates and remembers the event. Nevertheless, the seemingly fragmentary and contradictory life stories of survivors are not to be seen simply as a medium of communication, but more importantly are themselves viewed as experience. In other words, telling personal stories not only conveys the message of the narrator's sufferings, but is how they answer the event and society. "To remember or not to remember," as we can see from these stories, is an action that situates one's voice in the making of history, a practice that projects

one's account of the event onto the outside world. Thus it can reasonably argued that the claim to normalcy and the expression of guilt have to do with what society should be doing with the event and then what one should do with it. I am not saying that the world is changed simply by narrating stories, what I suggest is that an individual may realize his or her agency by taking account of the self and others' actions and accountability during and after the disaster event.

Concluding Remarks

Building on the personal stories I collected between 1999 and 2007, I have shown how different agencies—individual, community, and state—present the linkages of memory, history, accountability, and justice in narratives about the 9/21 Earthquake in 1999. I explored relationships between individual and official actions, and between individual and official narratives. While state-initiated narratives dominated, in effect directing the survivors to see the earthquake as an event with closure, narratives of lingering suffering have been able to question the state's account of normalcy. When suffering can no longer be attributed to a natural agent but is rather the result of socially constructed arrangements, and especially of government's actions, the demand for restitution and recovery, or more generally, justice, is well represented in suffering stories.

By considering personal stories as vehicles that articulate the life-worlds of subjects and the agency of the narrator, this article brings to light hidden sufferings that are socially constructed . All the stories presented here—those of Mr. Wang, a teen-aged boy, a bereaved mother, Ms. Lin, Mrs. Hsiao, Mrs. Liu, and Mrs. Chang—point to a recognition of painful loss that resists straightforward statist closure. Suffering is a field of plentiful meanings to which we should pay attention. In particular, I have argued that narrative presupposes a moral community and its practice in turn preserves that community (White 1987; Morris 1997), and yet at the same time "the boundaries of a moral community are flexible and often paradoxical"(Morris 1997: 40). Many people expressed deep resentment over losses and looked for ways to redress their grievances and furthermore to make sure such losses would never happen again. Whether or not the accounts of the event I analyze were sufficient to challenge the boundaries of a moral community and even redraw them must be discussed within larger political and social systems. Large-scale disasters and the ensuing suffering open up the possibility for fundamental social and cultural change, but even more often they seem to reinforce the preexisting social order. I have organized these personal stories more or less chronologically, as the structure of a narrative would, from the moment of the quake to the reconstruction phase years

later, to address issues of the personal and the political, the natural and the cultural, the possible and the impossible. Does a disaster event ever come to an end? The stories may continue, so much so that we wonder one day, what was the event, and what to remember?

References

Ahearn, Laura M.

2001 Language and Agency. Annual Review of Anthropology 30: 109-137.

Alexander, David

2000 Confronting Catastrophe: New Perspectives on Natural Disaster. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bakhtin, M. M.

1981 The Dialogic Imagination. NY: Schocken.

Becker, Gay, Yewoubdar Beyene, and Pauline Ken

2000 Memory, Trauma, and Embodied Distress: The Management of Disruption in the Stories of Cambodians in Exile. Ethos 28(3): 320-345.

Brison, Karen J.

1995 You Will Never Forget: Narrative, Bereavement, and Worldview among Kwanga Women. Ethos 23(4): 474-488.

Bruner, Jerome

1991 The Narrative Construction of Reality. Critical Inquiry 18(1): 1-21.

Caton, Steven

1985 The Poetic Construction of the Self. Anthropological Quarterly 58 (4): 141-151.

Connolly, William E.

1999 Suffering, Justice, and the Politics of Becoming. *In* Moral Spaces: Rethinking Ethics and World Politics. D. Campbell and M.J. Shapiro, eds. Pp. 124-153. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Das, Veena

1997 Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain. *In* Social Suffering. Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das and Margaret Lock, eds. Pp. 67-98. University of California Press.

Das, Veena, et al. eds.

2001 Remaking a World: Violence, Social Suffering and Recovery. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Douglas, Mary

1992 Risk and Blame: Essays in Cultural Theory. London: Routledge.

Duranti, Alessandro

1990 Politics and Grammar: Agency in Samoan Political Discourse. American Ethnologist 17: 646-666.

1993 Intension, Self, and Responsibility: An Essay in Samoan Ethnopragmatics. *In* Responsibility and Evidence in Oral Discourse. Jane H. Hill and Judith T. Irvine, eds. Pp.24-47. NY: Cambridge University Press.

Feldman, Allen

1995 Ethnographic States of Emergency. *In* Fieldwork under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival. Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius C. G. M. Robben, eds. Pp. 224-252. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gal, Susan

1991 Between Speech and Science: The Problematics of Research on Language and Gender. *In* Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era. Michaela di Leonardo, ed. Pp. 175-203. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Green, Linda

1994 Fear as a Way of Life. Cultural Anthropology 9(2): 227-256.

Gumperz, John

1982 Discourse Strategies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Isaac, Rhys

1993 On Explanation, Text, and Terrifying Power in Ethnographic History. The Yale Journal of Criticism 6(1): 217-236.

Jung, Shaw-wu 容邵武

2003 Between Law and Community: An Ethnographic Study of State and Governance in the Reconstruction after the 9/21 Earthquake in Dongshih, Taiwan. Ph.D. thesis. Department of Anthropology, New School for Social Research, NY.

Kirmayer, Laurence J.

1996 Landscapes of Memory: Trauma, Narrative, and Dissociation. *In* Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory. Paul Antze and Michael Lambek, eds. Pp. 173-198. NY: Routledge.

Labov, William

1970 The logic of Non-Standard English. *In* Language and Poverty: Perspective on a Theme. William La bov, ed. Pp. 153-187. Chicago: Markham Publishing Co.

Lambek, Michael, and Paul Antze

1996 Introduction: Forecasting Memory. *In* Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory. Paul Antze and Michael Lambek, eds. Pp. xi-xxxviii. NY: Routledge.

Morris, David B.

1997 About Suffering: Voice, Genre, and Moral Community. *In* Social Suffering. Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das and Margaret Lock, eds. Pp. 25-46. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ochs, Elinor, and Lisa Capps

1996 Narrating the Self. Annual Review of Anthropology 25: 19-43.

Oliver-Smith, Anthony

1996 Anthropological Research on Hazards and Disaster. Annual Review of Anthropology 25: 303-328.

Oliver-Smith, Anthony, and Susanna M. Hoffman, eds.

1999 The Angry Earth: Disaster in Anthropological Perspective. New York: Routledge.

Pannell, Sandra

1999 Did the Earth Move for You? The Social Seismology of a Natural Disaster in Maluku, Eastern Indonesia. The Australian Journal of Anthropology 10(2): 129-143.

Perera, Sasanka

2001 Spirit Possessions and Avenging Ghosts: Stories of Supernatural Activity as Narratives of Terror and Mechanism of Coping and Remembering. *In* Remaking a World: Violence, Social Suffering and Recovery. Veena Das, et al. eds. Pp. 157-200. University of California Press.

Sherzer, Joel

1987 A Discourse-Centered Approach to Language and Culture. American Anthropologist 89: 295-309.

Taussig, Michael

1987 Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

White, Hayden

1978 Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

1987 The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality. *In* The Content of Form. Hayden White, ed. Pp. 1-25. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Shaw-wu Jung
Graduate Institute of Anthropology,
National Chi Nan University
No. 1, University Road,
Puli, Nantou County, 545 Taiwan
swjung@ncnu.edu.tw

「永遠不要再發生了」：創傷與記憶敘事——臺灣921大地震的例子

容邵武
國立暨南大學人類學研究所

以往語言人類學家只著重敘事結構，分析它如何反映社會真實。隨著典範的改變，研究者轉向重視敘事創造社會真實的建構性面向，強調語言不只是結構的承載者，而且可以同時是創發社會常規與斷裂的社會實踐。這樣對語言實踐的理論立場可以用來澄清語言和創傷的關係，因為語言能夠處理創傷但卻也不能全面揭露創傷。人們表達痛苦的情感就必須經過許多轉折才能和語言形式連接起來。所以，即使是沉默和無法言語都指出了一個論述的策略，既包含也拒絕了現存的社會秩序。

本文採取了語言即實踐的理論，檢視臺灣921大地震的各種敘事，試圖顯現它們表達對抗社會結構的生命經驗。本文將分析筆者在東勢所收集到的個人所說的故事，看看它們做為一種社會行動形式、文化資源以及社會文化實踐的各種意涵。相對於許多官方對於921大地震敘事，災民的個人敘事是甚麼呢？它們有可能挑戰官方的敘事嗎？本文指出敘事策略，表示出說話者的選擇、意圖與聽眾的關係，說話者在敘事過程中，具現出它的自我和能動性。

關鍵詞：敘事，語言，論述分析，創傷，921地震