When the Crowd Doesn't Want to Speak:
Potential challenges for crowdsourcing in traumatized communities

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Working Paper

With all the excitement surrounding technologies such as mapping, social media, and mobile telephony as mechanisms for conflict response, political dialogue, and post-disaster recovery, it is easy to forget that different cultures heal in different ways. Generally referred to as "ICT4D" (Information Communication Technology for Development), the value of crowdsourced information (data and information contributed by the general public using social media or mobile phones) for conflict and disaster recovery is predicated on the distinctly Western notion of public healing, reconciliation and projection of the individual voice. In this paper I will perform a critical analysis of the crowdsourcing information regime, drawing on lessons learned form transitional justice and TRC commissions which have displayed many of the same intercultural disconnects. The findings of the analysis point out interesting frames for analyzing the technology for crisis response and recovery realm, where it could be easy to have processes meant to help people be co-opted into the larger system of Western donor development, which favors political economy over human needs.

Suggested Citation:
Martin-Shields, Charles (2011). "When the Crowd Doesn't Want to Speak: Potential challenges for crowdsourcing in traumatized communities". Working Paper. Available at: http://charlesmartinshields.wordpress.com/papers-articles-etc/

Crowdsourcing Recovery: A Western Notion of the Individual

The explosion of mobile and social technology has been associated with uprisings in the Arab world, the blossoming of civil society in Kenya, and access to real-time information for first responders in disasters such as the 2009 earthquake in Haiti. The talk of where this technology will take us as a global community has been admittedly exciting; with tools such as GeoPoll, a SMS text messaging platform that can perform thousands of polls across a sample population in hours (as opposed to traditional evaluation which can take months), the international development and conflict resolution community has tools that can provide it with exceptional qualitative data on peoples' needs in near real time.

The potential for this kind of data collection capacity to change the way that humanitarian and development agencies operate is epochal; an entire professional sector built around response programs measured in months and years could soon be able to develop programs that respond to new data in days and weeks. GeoPoll already has over 90,000 qualitative data points gathered through SMS evaluations in support of a World Bank program on gender-based violence; in a recent conversation with GeoPoll's founder he noted that the World Bank was stunned by the results of the poll. If one were to accept the poll data, their previous estimates of incidents of violence were underestimated by almost 200%. Along with quantitative event data, the qualitative information respondents shared demonstrated that the intensity of the violence was far higher than estimated[1].

This level of information and data collection is exciting for the response community, but it also raises theoretical questions that have never previously had to be asked. Chief among these

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[1] Disclosure note: I am currently working on a data analysis project with GeoPoll and the U.S. Institute of Peace. My comments in this paper are my own and do not reflect the opinions of GeoPoll or the U.S. Institute of Peace.

are the cultural and ethical questions surrounding this kind of information gathering, especially in situations where the sample population has experienced significant trauma (Levinger, 2011). What are the implications for power dynamics in the social media and mobile technology-for-aid regime? Are we creating a "global panopticon", as Levinger discusses with regard to geographic information systems analysis of the violence in Darfur from 2004-2006 (2009)?

To begin a discussion of these topics, and to better understand how theories of power, communication, and the person help us better understand why the new global information regime could fall into the systematic traps other development programs fall into, we will first cover a set of critical analyses of transitional justice. What is analytically critical within these case studies is the role that the person plays within a system that has morphed into a process brought from the outside to impart healing in a post-trauma setting. By analyzing these cases with an eye toward how communication within a traumatized public sphere is undertaken by actors at the international, state and local levels we hope to identify a framework that lends itself to better understanding the global social media information regime as a tool for crisis and violence response and recovery.

Once we have this analytic framework, we will look at two cases of recovery and response where mobile and social media were noted as a significant factor in the process. The core themes we will seek to understand are the roles played by local actors versus external actors, the power dynamics at play, and impact (if there is any reliable data). The goal of this analysis is not to claim that social media and mobile technology are normatively "bad", but to more fully understand the assumptions implicit to an aid regime that relies on the voluntary input of a traumatized population.

To conclude the paper we will discuss how this knowledge enhances our broader understanding of peacebuilding within traumatized cultures, and improves our ability to analyze our underlying assumptions about how individuals process trauma in the public sphere.

The Transitional Justice Regime: Relevant Case Critiques

The way people deal with trauma is as varied as there are people to create variation. The process can be analyzed psychologically, sociologically, politically and legalistically. Some communities place monetary value on recovery (such as the U.S. system of civil courts), while others focus on community building and healing, or in the case of Samoa extended banishment from the family unit. What is inherent to these systems is a shared notion among the affected individuals of what constitutes recovery. The problem we will see repeated in this brief critical review of transitional justice is that in many cases, there is not a shared notion of recovery, and instead a process of recovery is put in place. This process is often driven by external forces, and supercedes the core purpose of transitional justice which is ostensibly supposed to be healing and recovery.

The TRC in South Africa: Problems of Gender

The impact of transitional justice for women brings up problems that span the role of the individual in the public sphere. It is not just in transitional justice settings that women are at greater risk for speaking out, both in terms of their bodily safety and their continued role in their community, but also in any setting where they are reporting on social issues or dynamics. Thus, we expect within this section to find dynamics that will prove critical to understanding why communication technology programs must be gender aware.

Since the role of gender is still comparably new to the ongoing body of knowledge on transitional justice, it is still under theorized; the debate though needs to center on how to make the system of transitional justice more able to response to the needs of women at a systematic level, instead of trying to fit a sub-genre of feminist transitional justice into the larger construct of transitional justice (Bell and O'Rourke 2007). What we see in the example of the South Africa TRC is a recognition that women needed a space to discuss how they were uniquely effected during Apartheid, but that this was pursued as a sub-genre instead of being inherent to the whole system (Borer 2009, Ross 2010).

In 1996, the TRC of South Africa recognized the need to include women's issues in the process, and provide a space for women to share their experiences. The TRC leadership put together workshops, press releases and lists of methods for integrating women's issues into the TRC (1996). But we are still led to ask: what was the impact of this process in helping women actually address their grievances in a whole-of-society way?

The failure of the TRC to adequately address women's issues meant that while women suffered terribly during the Apartheid era, the post-conflict reconciliation process failed to address their needs in a sustainable way (Borer 2009). This failure to fully integrate a gendered component into the TRC process led to problems with the reparations system, as well as continued violence against women in the post-Apartheid "peace time" (2009).

In the transitional justice process we have seen that women's needs and a space for handling the ways that women are uniquely affected by conflict has been of secondary importance. We could argue that this is due to a power structure that starts from the perspective of men and fills in as need is recognized, like the TRC in South Africa, but this kind of ad hoc response fails to recognize the unique risks women face when publicly recounting a trauma. In

what will be a theme, this approach to gender inclusion is treated more as a part of the political economy of recovery, where a project checks the gender inclusion box in order to make sure they receive as much funding as possible from the contributing international entities.

Reconciliation in Burundi: The Problem of Silence

What happens in cases where the trauma is so deep that people do not want to talk about it? We often assume that when people are healing, part of the healing process is talking about the experience and seeking justice or apology. Much of the focus has been on the national level political process, where parties had been jockeying for position and international organizations were attempting to cajole and force the Hutu and Tutsi parties to find a space for agreement (Prendergast and Smock 1999). Much of what Prendergast and Smock talk about focuses on governmental negotiation, regional stability, democratic governance and economic stability as a means for achieving stable peace, but little attention is paid to peacebuilding at the local and individual level (ibid).

Haken, Imbriano, Nun and Tobias broach the topic of reconciliation from a traditional conflict resolution perspective, but their analysis focuses on how reconciliation generally operates within a Lederachian framework (2011). While effectively identifying the traditional peace making process of *bashingantahe* as a means through which to solve disputes at the local level, they do not address the deeper psychological or social factors that go into recovery. They succeed in providing depth to the discussion of Burundian peacebuilding by going beyond the track one analysis offered by Prendergast and Smock, but their paper does not provide in-depth analysis of the social-psychological factors that are part of recovering from trauma or the perceptions of the *bashingantahe* process among the general population.

This kind of analysis is important since traditional processes of reconciliation, especially after being tapped as the preferred method of peacebuilding by outside actors, can lose their value or tangibility to local populations; this is the case in Burundi, where the *bashingantahe* method for dispute resolution no longer holds the same value across the population (Nee and Uvin 2010). Some Burundians still find it valuable while others have come to consider it less relevant as it has become part of the preferred process of conflict resolution by the donor community (ibid). A political economy analysis brings us back to the theme in the previous section regarding gender as a check box; donors see local reconciliation processes as value-added in the peace making process, and thus NGOs and the government try to make them part of the larger recovery package in order to check the "native peacebuilding method" box that can lead to increased aid funding.

Even more critical though is the role that silence plays in the process of healing. Most respondents in Nee and Uvin's surveys preferred to forget about the violence that racked Burundi, than to go through a process of prosecution or truth-telling (2010). Nee and Uvin almost uncover a fatalism among the Burundian population, where many respondents point out that truth telling could create new rifts in the community or point out that what happened has happened and that truth telling will not change that (2010). There is a distinct ripple to this though; their work in highly politicized settings demonstrated that when pressed Hutu respondents preferred truth telling, while Tutsi respondents preferred prosecutions (2010). The analysis points to the fact that Hutu were not part of the judicial power structure and would prefer a system that does not rely on Tutsi courts, while the Tutsi have always used the justice system and would prefer not to publicly admit to crimes against humanity in front of a committee of their peers (2010).

The role of silence is not unique to Burundi in this case. Dwyer points out in her work on the mass killings in Bali in the 1960s that the population dealt with the trauma by remaining silent (2009). Under the Suharto regime it was safer to say nothing than risk being labeled a communist, which led people to be silent for their own safety as while finding an inner space to cope with the violence around them (ibid). From both of these cases the core lesson for Westerners is that not everyone wants a megaphone to voice their pain to the world; in some cases people heal by forgetting, or by remaining silent. To assume otherwise is an imposition of power, and puts expediency ahead of healing.

Justice in Uganda: Problems of the ICC

The final case we will look at is the ICC warrant for Joseph Kony, and the effect that it had on the peace process in northern Uganda as well as the perceptions and opinions of the warrant among Ugandans. This ICC warrant drew a clear line between legal and justice systems that have divergent goals, one focusing on justice and legal precedent while the other focused on healing and not exacerbating the conflict. The case was complex and was a first example of a case being referred to the ICC for prosecution by a state government (Akhavan 2005). While this case was an example of a pragmatic referral (ibid), it caused a variety of ethical and political problems ranging from the political to the local while ignoring the violence perpetrated by the Museveni government (Branch 2007, Finnström 2010).

On a macro level, the choice to pursue the case of the LRA and the warrant against Joseph Kony demonstrated political pragmatism on the part of the ICC, but the secondary effects of the decision, which have included increased violence and damage to peace processes at the sub-state level, demonstrate a lack of regard for the processes of reconciliation and healing going on in northern Uganda on the part of the ICC (Branch 2007). Branch goes on to point out that the ICC process damages the development of local processes of justice and peacebuilding (2007), which is analytically correct, but the claim that the damage is done due to the depolitization of the process is arguable, and Finnström argues that the process is damaging because it is indeed very political (2010).

When the ICC accepted the referral from the Ugandan government there were very real political consequences for the ongoing process of reconciliation and peacebuilding at the local level in northern Uganda. When the ICC entered the process they were not part of a restorative system of justice, but instead became a part of the political conflict between the government and the LRA (Finnstöm 2011). The court itself has not played the role of the independent, disinterested third party, making very pronounced, aggressive statements about the prosecution; they are also easily associated with supporting the Museveni government, since the government is immune from prosecution by the ICC (ibid). What we see is a process meant to achieve the goals of the international legal system, which carries with it the assumptions about the roll of the state as paramount actor and Western values of justice, being injected into a context where the desire of the people is to end the violence and move on with their lives. There is an interesting conflation with criminal prosecution as a mechanism for moving on, but Finnström makes a very telling point at the end of his paper where a young man explains to him that what happened has happened and that it is time to move on (2010; 156). In end what is at odds in Uganda is the

desire of the West to see justice done in a way that satisfies the legal procedures associated with common law, while Ugandans see a system that is only exacerbating a conflict that they want to see ended.

Defining a set of problems

Before moving into an analysis of social media, we will list the problems faced by the transitional justice regime in preparation for analyzing them comparatively with the global technology for peacebuilding regime. We will focus on three areas in the analysis:

- Gender mainstreaming and providing safe spaces for women to voice their needs and concerns
- Recognizing the Western-ness of wanting to speak out. Not all cultures and people want to speak out as part of the healing or community development process.
- The desire to find solutions and implement them quickly; the ICC is treated as the proper course for post-conflict reconciliation even when it is not an appropriate mechanism for achieving reconciliation; this should lead us to carefully consider whether technology is treated the same way in conflict management and governance development.

As we analyze the role of social media in conflict and disaster effected zones, we will be attempting to further understand whether the problems associated with power structures that we see in transitional justice, which ignore the person as the center of the healing process, manifest themselves in the technology for peace sector.

The Social and Mobile Media Regime: Issues and Cases

As we transition from transitional justice and begin to analyze the role that communication technology plays in we will try to focus on how the three aforementioned issues are addressed. How well do communication technologies deployments to conflict and disaster affected communities address the needs of women, are they adaptable to provide a voice to those who may not want to speak out in another way, and is there a problem with the development and response community trying to use communication technologies as a catch-all cure for problems that are too complex to manage in a uniform, cookie-cutter way?

The cases we will look at are the classic case of mobile phone enabled event mapping, led by the Ushahidi project, in Kenya in 2007 during the election violence, and the mobile phone event mapping work done two years later in Haiti after the earthquake. Kenya has become the darling of communications technology for development and peacebuilding schemes since 2007, going beyond just election monitoring and violence prevention to include mobile phone banking and mobile phone health. If Kenya was the birthplace, Haiti was the place where mobile phone enabled mapping came into adulthood. After the earthquake in 2009, Ushahidi, which started in Kenya during the 2007 violence was asked to set up a map of the crisis so that Haitians could text in to a number that would be received by the mapping team and uploaded to a public map that could be viewed by local residents and agencies operating in the recovery process.

Ushahidi, Kenya and election violence

During the 2007 presidential elections, disputes over who won the presidential office boiled over into large scale violence. There was a distinct fear that the country would descend into civil war, which would have had serious implications not just for Kenya itself, but for the region broadly

and the geo strategic interests of the wider world (Hanson 2008). Ory Okolloh and a small team of programmers quickly went to work setting up a mapping platform that could receive SMS text messages, so that the public could easily text in information about violence and tell their stories (Ushahidi 2011); the system has been continually upgraded to handle multimedia messages.

What makes this system so critical is that it was developed in Kenya, by Kenyans to address a Kenyan issue. The system used mobile phones as the data collection device, which makes sense given the distribution of phones across the population and the ability to use mobile phones as an unbounded public collection system, as well as being able to target specific populations of mobile phone users (Hellstöm, 2008). Because of the density and access to mobile phones and relatively good internet access, and because the Ushahidi system was a Kenyan construct designed by Kenyans using knowledge of how people prefer to communicate in an emergency; during the violence the general population was actively using the Ushahidi platform and map to share information and engage in citizen journalism that helped provide important supplemental information during the violence (Mäkinen and Kuira, 2008). This activity has been crucial to the development of citizen participation in democratic processes since the violence, and has led to the expansion of mobile phone based governance development programs (ibid).

What has been impressive since the launch of this platform is both the expansion of the information communication regime in Kenya, with notable positive effects, and the growth of the Kenyan built Ushahidi platform as a mechanism for addressing challenges facing the developing (Okolloh 2009). While this is exciting, there is ample evidence that there was also active use of the mobile telephone network for organizing violence and spreading hate speech during the lead up to, and during, the violence (Goldstein and Roditch 2008).

When thinking about the importance of this example in relation to the previously defined problems gleaned from our critiques of transitional justice, the most important take away is that this was a program developed by Kenyans knowing what their compatriots needed to respond to the violence surrounding them. It was not a mapping project designed by a large international organization that framed its data collection process on what information *it* needed or deemed valuable. Thinking about this program in terms of how it affected the person, what we see is a program that was not built to meet the operational needs of an external organization, and was certainly not built by a government with the aim of winning aid dollars. The program was designed to meet the needs of the people; the "person", a Kenyan effected by the violence in the aftermath of the election, was at the center of the Ushahidi project and in this way the use of mobile telephony for conflict response was more effective than any top-down agency led process could hope to be.

The Earthquake in Haiti and SMS Messaging

When a powerful earthquake devastated Haiti in January 2010, Ushahidi, which had expanded beyond Kenya since 2007, was able to set up a digital map and receive text messages within hours of a request from aid agencies (Ushahidi, 2010). This was the first large scale launch of the Ushahidi platform, and would be its "coming out party" showing the world what it could do when put to full use. It was also a chance to see where assumptions about communication, needs and responses differed between responders and the traumatized population.

Positively, what we saw was responders being able to be guided by those in need; Ushahidi provided a two-way communication channel so that people were not merely waiting to be saved. They could text in and many responders claimed that this two way system led to a

large number of lives being saved (The Daily Beast, 2010). In a truly interactive experience that recognized that the project was being driven with people, not institutional needs, at the center, the Ushahidi Haiti team was able to pull together a huge number of volunteers to translate the messages from Creole into English; this was a participatory event where the responders were in intimate contact with those in need (Munro 2010). The independent evaluation of the project touched on technical aspects of the project, using traditional analysis of response methods and monitoring, and found that the humanitarian world had to adjust its approach to information management in a two-way communication system (Morrow, Mock, Papendieck and Kocmich 2011). Recognizing that there were aspects of SMS/mapping responses to disasters that go beyond technical issues related to integration and data management, Meier and Munro have talked about guidelines and a code of conduct for the humanitarian community when working in a disaster setting with information drawn from disaster victims (2010).

This final aspect of the analysis of the Haiti response is the most important; the idea of a code of conduct was not a consideration when Ushahidi was developed in Kenya, since the entire program was built by Kenyans for Kenyans. Problems of differing cultural expectations or perceptions of the situation were not apparent because everyone was from the same culture experiencing the same violence. Haiti was the first large scale operation where Ushahidi was dropped in as an outside program, following a model of deployment that begins to resemble the global transitional justice regime. We also begin to see a need for things like codes of conduct that help keep the process framed around people; this was not always so easy during the Haiti deployment. A traumatized population was looking to a system that was less meant to meet their needs, and more meant to meet the needs of a larger response system made up of organizations. While it was still successful at creating space for the person in a process that often focuses on

logistics, we can begin to see a shift away from the person and toward a more systematic top down approach.

Comparative Analysis and Lessons

Seeing some comparative cases, we can revisit our four bullet points from earlier in the paper.

1) Gender mainstreaming is harder to define in the mobile telephone and mapping context, since anonymity is part of the process. While there are systems like the one mentioned at the start of the paper (GeoPoll), which can be designed to collect demographic data, the added-value of anonymity makes speaking out potentially easier. In this way gathering data from the crowd using mobile phones provides a space for women to have their needs heard without the risk of doing so in front of a village or larger public audience.
2) Recognizing the Western-ness of wanting to speak out. This is harder to define, since we cannot directly compare transitional justice to emergency response. In Kenya and Haiti, people definitely wanted to speak out since their safety was directly at risk. An interesting comparison would be to find out if people were more comfortable sharing stories after the event in a TRC-type setting with the added anonymity of a mobile phone.
3) The problem of the cookie cutter. As we noted in the previous paragraphs, Ushahidi was developed in Kenya for Kenyans. Thus, it was not a system brought in from the outside by aid agencies with very different cultural norms than the people they are working with. While more adaptable than standard transitional justice, we do see some aspects of cultural disconnect in the Haiti case. Ushahidi was brought in, and with it came the expectations of the Ushahidi Haiti team for how it would work. In some cases Haitians tried to use it differently than we would have expected; this led to essentially a document

outlining the ethical responsibilities of teams leading these kinds of missions knowing that there is a traumatized population expecting and needing help (Meier and Munro, 2010).

Conclusion

What was aptly demonstrated in the cases of transitional justice is how easy it is, with the best of intentions, to take a process for people and turn it into a process to support systems. While mobile phone driven systems like Ushahidi are less prone to complete top down control, since they require active participation from the affected community, there are still risks involved with programs like Ushahidi losing the thing that makes them so powerful: making people central to the process of recovery. When these systems are used by large organizations to monitor results of projects or manage logistics, we risk losing the centrality of the person to the process, and we risk ending up with another silo in the disaster response and recovery regime that puts process ahead of people.

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