



Metaphorical Representation of a Natural Phenomenon in Newspaper Discourse on Natural Catastrophes

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Abstract

The metaphoric conceptualization of a natural phenomenon employed in newspaper discourse on natural catastrophes is examined through a data-driven analysis. The focus is put on the representation of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and 2005 Hurricane Katrina in three newspapers published in Western English-speaking countries: The New York Times, The Guardian and The Globe and Mail. The major metaphoric themes discerned include the depiction of the natural phenomenon as an ANIMATE BEING, a MONSTER and a WARRIOR. By demonizing nature, such a representation reinforces Western nature-culture dualism, puts the blame for the catastrophe on the natural phenomenon and hides social and historical factors contributing to the disaster.

Keywords: natural catastrophes, metaphoric concepts, ideology, allocation of blame, newspaper discourse

1. Introduction

1.1 Objectives, Data and Methodology

This article identifies major metaphor themes employed in newspaper discourse on natural catastrophes to represent a natural phenomenon. The main aim is to reveal what ideological perspective is embedded in such a metaphorical conceptualization, with the focus on the examination of the allocation of blame for the natural disaster.

The research examines newspapers published in Western English speaking countries: Great Britain, the USA and Canada. The motivation for the choice of these countries lies in the prevalence of nature-culture dualist thinking in the West, seeing humankind as dominating nature. Since natural catastrophes are a joint outcome of a natural phenomenon and social, political and economic factors (Pielke and Pielke 1997; Birkmann 2006; Gunewardena 2008; Schuller 2008), nature-culture dualism typical of Western Enlightenment thinking is deconstructed during these events (Johns 1999). In other words, it is revealed that nature cannot be viewed as isolated from society, and socio-economic processes and structures cannot be divorced from natural world. Whether this is reflected in the way newspaper discourse portrays natural disasters is to be explored in the present paper.

Three newspapers considered to be representative of the selected countries have been chosen for the analysis: *The New York Times*, an American national newspaper, *The Guardian*, a British national newspaper, and *The Globe and Mail*, a Canadian national newspaper. They all belong to broadsheet newspapers, which are perceived to be more objective and factual, and the language of which is viewed as a more neutral mediator of reality than in the case of tabloid newspapers, which overtly purport to entertain and sensationalize. Concerning the content of the articles, two major natural catastrophes that happened in the last decade are analyzed – the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami (occurred on December 26, 2004) and Hurricane Katrina (made a landfall in New Orleans on August 29, 2005). The corpus consists of 15 articles per newspaper for each catastrophe, which makes the total number of the articles gathered 90. They cover the time span of two weeks since the disaster occurred, i.e. December 26, 2004 – January 8, 2005 for the Indian Ocean tsunami and August 29, 2005 – September 11, 2005 for Hurricane Katrina.

The methodology applied in the present study combines the cognitive theory of metaphor and critical discourse analysis. Following the cognitive theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Dobrovolskij and Piirainen 2005), it views metaphor not just as a matter of language, but as a matter of thought as well. In other words, metaphor constitutes an important tool by means of which we conceptualize reality, which has an impact on the way we behave. Metaphor is defined as a mapping of structure from one conceptual domain, *the source domain*, to another conceptual domain, *the target domain*. This mapping is not based on similarity between the two concepts, but rather on the correlation of our experience in these two domains and our ability to structure one concept in terms of the other. Metaphorical concepts are then materialized in the language that we use every day to speak about our experience, including abstract concepts.

Drawing upon Critical Discourse Analysis (van Dijk 1993; Fairclough 1995; Wodak 2006), this study examines the link between metaphor, ideology and power, where ideology is understood to stand for *socio-cognitive schemata which function to reproduce, challenge or resist asymmetric power relations* (van Dijk 1995). The present paper asks what ideology lies behind the metaphoric representation employed in the newspapers to depict the tsunami and the hurricane, mainly focusing on the question whether the metaphors serve to reproduce, undermine or transform the power asymmetry between nature and society rooted in Western thinking.

1.2 Background Information

The Indian Ocean tsunami formed as a result of a Sumatra earthquake of a magnitude 9.15 on December 26, 2004. It travelled 4500 km across the Indian Ocean and affected twelve countries within about seven hours. About 250,000 people were killed and around 1.7 million more were displaced in the disaster. Indonesia was the worst hit country, with more than 80,000 dead and 100,000 injured, followed by Sri Lanka with almost 30,000 deaths, India about 15,000, and then Thailand, East Africa, Malaysia, the Maldives, Burma, and Bangladesh. The tsunami also affected foreign tourists, killing more than 2,000 of them. It destroyed houses, marketplaces, commercial, public and

municipal buildings, and transportation networks, with the economic impact estimated to be in the billions of dollars (Rodriguez et al. 2006; Gunewardena 2008; Fuller 2010).

Hurricane Katrina made a landfall in New Orleans on August 29, 2005; yet, the landfall itself did not cause much damage. It was the following breaches to New Orleans' levees that led to the catastrophe. Throughout August 29 and 30, levee breaches resulted in the flooding of 80 percent of the city, the loss of more than 1,500 lives, damage to 183,000 housing units, and an around \$200 billion in economic damage. Although most New Orleans inhabitants obeyed the mandatory evacuation order issued by Mayor Nagin and left New Orleans ahead of the storm, tens of thousands residents stayed stranded in the city, with around 20,000 in the Superdome sports centre, 20,000 in the city's convention centre, and others in their homes (Fitzpatrick 2006; Sanyika 2009).

Sociological and anthropological research into both the tsunami and the hurricane (Cooper and Block 2006; Greene 2009; Sanyika 2009; Waterhouse 2009; Gamburd and McGilvray 2010; Niman 2010) reveals that the damage and destruction during the catastrophes was not caused by the natural phenomenon itself, but was compounded by human-made aspects. Both disasters were complex phenomena, which resulted from an interaction between **natural events** and **vulnerabilities of a society**, determined by human contact with environment, social organization, infrastructure and economy. It was the poor, the marginalized and the disempowered that were affected more than the rest of a population.

In the case of the tsunami, one of the human-made factors contributing to the disaster was a destruction of protective environmental features provided by nature (Niman 2010). Historically, the low-lying areas across the Indian Ocean have been protected by coral reefs tempering waves, and mangrove swamps, which break tsunami forces. Yet, over the past years, these have been destroyed by irresponsible human actions connected with shoreline development, such as the use of pesticides, coral mining, dynamiting and mangrove logging.

In Sri Lanka, the majority of fatalities and the worst affected by the tsunami were among the low-income fishermen families living along the coastline. Their settlements lacked safe water, sanitation systems and proper local infrastructure. Frerks (2010: 150) reveals that '80 percent of the affected households lived on less than one dollar per day/per person before the tsunami struck'. At the same time, women were hit harder by the catastrophe than men, especially because of embedded gendered cultural norms and behaviors. The vulnerability of people to the tsunami in Sri Lanka was also aggregated by an over 20-year-long civil war between the Tamil people and the Sinhalese government. The war had worsened economic and social conditions of the populations, thus making them particularly sensitive to the impact of the disaster. The catastrophe that occurred in Sri Lanka was therefore rather an intersection of a tsunami, a civil war and poor living conditions of people (Gunewardena 2008; Frerks 2010).

Importantly, the consequences of the tsunami could have been mitigated if a warning system had existed in the Indian Ocean, as it does in the Pacific

Ocean. While earthquakes cannot be predicted, it is possible to give an about three-hour notice of a tsunami set off by the earthquake, which would have saved many lives on December 26, 2004 (Gunewardena 2008). It is not only the lack of a warning system, but also the failure of science communication that contributed to the disaster. As Dickson (2010) points out, seismologists in many countries all over the world, such as Australia and California, detected the earthquake and were aware that it would result in a massive tsunami. Yet, without the existence of direct channels of communication, the information was not spread to the communities under threat. Apart from the lack of technology, there was also a lack of adequate disaster preparation and mitigation efforts across the Indian Ocean. As Rodriguez et al. (2006) reveal, public awareness and knowledge, and public alertness to a hazard were almost absent in the countries threatened by the tsunami.

In the case of Hurricane Katrina, the worst affected were the marginalized ones: the poor, the black, the old and women (Levitt and Whitaker 2009; Sanyika 2009). They represented the most vulnerable residents, the have-nots, who were fully exposed to the catastrophe as they did not have the means to escape or live anywhere else than in the inner city where the worst flooding occurred. Katrina exposed racial, class and gender inequalities that had troubled New Orleans for years. At the time of the disaster, the city 'claimed the second highest percentage of its residents (38 percent) living in high-poverty census tracts' and belonged to the most racially segregated U.S. cities, with the black poverty rate (35 percent) three times higher than the rate for whites (11 percent) (Levitt and Whitaker 2009: 6). This was a result not only of individual choices but also of a long history of social and institutional structures existing in New Orleans.

Investigation following Hurricane Katrina revealed that it was not only the failure of the levee system that led to the damage and destruction, but also the failure of local, state and federal government (Cooper and Block 2006; Greene 2009; Waterhouse 2009). Greene (2009: 208) reveals:

The Committee on Homeland Security observed that government officials failed to heed disaster warnings, made poor decisions before and after the hurricane hit, failed to provide effective leadership, and failed to develop the capacity to respond to catastrophic events.

Government and bureaucracy failed both in the preparation for and response to the natural catastrophe. For four days, thousands of people were trapped in the Superdome, the convention centre, or their homes, without food, water, sanitation and medical care (Sanyika 2009). FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) and Homeland Security responsible for the help had not delivered the basic needs to the survivors, who were thus left to struggle on their own (Cooper and Block 2006).

2. Analysis

The analysis of the newspaper articles gathered in the corpus reveals that all the three newspapers heavily employ metaphorical expressions with reference to both the tsunami and the hurricane. The aim of this article is to trace back

the metaphor concepts which are thus materialized in discourse and through which the newspapers make sense of the natural phenomena. The significance of such an analysis lies in the belief that the conceptual metaphor themes drawn upon in the articles form the basis of a framework through which readers are made to comprehend natural catastrophes. They help to construct readers' mental models or representations of the natural phenomenon and thus influence the way readers think and feel about the event, and consequently behave.

Significantly, the metaphors employed to represent the tsunami and the hurricane come out from the same set of underlying themes. Basically, three major metaphor themes can be discerned in all the three newspapers: the representation of the natural phenomenon as an ANIMATE BEING, a MONSTER, and a WARRIOR. These themes are systematically realized by both lexical and syntactic devices, and occur over the whole spectrum of a 14-day time period under study. The metaphoric expressions can be found not only in the representations of the events provided by journalists themselves, but also in the quotations conveying eyewitness accounts of the disaster. As it is the newspapers' choice who and what to quote, I argue that the metaphoric representations of eyewitnesses selected to be quoted also play a significant role in the construction of the conceptual framework of the natural phenomenon offered by the newspapers.

2.1 Natural Phenomenon as an ANIMATE BEING

The portrayal of the natural phenomenon as an ANIMATE BEING is realized by a number of lexical and syntactical means. One of them is the ascription of a life of its own to both the tsunami and the hurricane. The formation of the tsunami is described in analogy with the production of eggs by aquatic animals; similarly, the formation of the hurricane is described as if an animal came into existence:

Huge quake **spawns** tremors and tsunamis in Southeast Asia (headline, The New York Times, 26 Dec 2004)

Tropical Depression 12 **was born**, giving few hints that it was an **embryonic** monster that would **grow** into Hurricane Katrina. (The New York Times, 29 Aug 2005)

The independent existence of the tsunami and the hurricane is also conveyed by the syntactic structure of a number of sentences referring to the phenomena.

The whole sea just **lifted up**. It **swelled up**. There was no sound. The sea just **poured** on to the island. (The Guardian, 27 Dec 2004)

It [Hurricane Katrina] **churned** directly over an oceanic feature... (The New York Times, 29 Aug 2005)

These sentences represent the processes as self-engendering, i.e. as being brought about from within. Halliday (1985) refers to such a syntactical structure as the middle **ergative** option. He uses the term ergativity to distinguish between sentence structures that represent a process as brought

about from outside and those that represent a process as brought about from inside. He illustrates it with the following example: *Mary sailed the boat/the boat sailed* (1985: 145). In the first case, there is a participant that functions as an external cause of the process of *sailing*, which is referred to as ‘the agent’, while in the second case, the process is represented as being brought about from within, with no separate agent. Ergativity thus concerns the representation of causation, of the source of a process. Going back to the examples from the data, the processes are depicted as being instigated by the natural phenomenon itself, with no external agent. It results in the portrayal of the tsunami and the hurricane as having their own energy and thus having the ability to initiate change.

Another animate characteristic that is ascribed to the tsunami is an animal body. Apart from the centre of a hurricane being referred to as an *eye*, the natural phenomenon is portrayed as having teeth:

The hurricane [...] continued to putter along into adjoining states, though its **teeth** were gone. (The New York Times, 31 Aug 2005)

When describing actions of the tsunami and the hurricane, the articles often use verbs whose denotative meaning implies performance by parts of an animal body: the sea *swallows* and *sucks* people (uses a mouth, a tongue and lips), and the hurricane *pummels* (hits with fists).

The hurricane is further personified by being given a human name. Such a characteristic, which is missing in reference to the tsunami, provides the hurricane with a unique identity and portrays it as though it is a being of a sort. Many times, the newspapers refer to the natural phenomenon just by its name, omitting the word ‘hurricane’.

Camille was a girl compared to this hurricane. (eyewitness account in The Globe and Mail, 30 Aug 2005)

Apart from the name, the eyewitness uses the word ‘girl’, which includes the semantic feature ‘human’.

Another characteristic that both the tsunami and the hurricane share with animate beings is the sound that they make: commonly, the newspapers refer to the natural phenomenon as *roaring*, a sound made by people when in rage or distress. What is more, emotions are ascribed to nature. There are a number of explicit references to negative feelings of the tsunami and the hurricane in the articles.

The waterline was dipping off to the sides and rising **furiously** in the middle. (The New York Times, 31 Dec 2004)

This hurricane killed dozens and cut a swath of **fury** across the U.S. South. (The Globe and Mail, 30 Aug 2005)

‘I want to send pictures back home to the United States so that my family and friends can see **the wrath** of Mother Nature,’ he said. (The Globe and Mail, 4 Jan 2005)

The natural phenomenon is thus characterized as being extremely angry. The reason for such an emotional state is left unspecified; yet, the employment of the word *wrath* implies that the motive of the actions of nature is one of vengeance and punishment. The punishment theme is made explicit in the following examples:

‘Our mother has **punished** us.’ (The New York Times, 5 Jan 2005)

The storm was potent enough to rank as one of the most **punishing** hurricanes ever to hit the *United States*. (The New York Times, 30 Aug 2005)

Such accounts portray the event as a result of retribution by nature, which is in the first example personalized by being portrayed as ‘our mother’. The view of nature as our mother, capable of inflicting punishment on people for their wrongdoings, is a common mythological motif (Larue 1975). What wrong deeds people have committed though ceases to be specified. Thus, the punishment theme seems to be employed for the sake of an illusion of providing an explanation of the disaster, in this case rather a simplistic one, so that human desire to make sense of the world is fulfilled. Consequently, a search for the real causes of the catastrophe is suppressed.

Apart from lexical means, the metaphor theme of ANIMATION is also realized syntactically. One of the syntactic devices that imply animation is the use of a possessive genitive ‘s, generally employed with animate beings, instead of an ‘of-phrase’, generally employed with inanimate objects, when referring to the natural phenomenon, as in *the tsunami’s power* and *Katrina’s wake*.

Furthermore, animation is established in the transitivity pattern of sentences referring to the tsunami and the hurricane. The majority of the sentences are in an active voice of the following type:

the natural phenomenon	verbal group	(nominal group)	(adverbial group or prepositional phrase)
Actor	Material process	Patient	Circumstances

Raging waters swept villagers out to sea and tore children from their parents’ arms. (The Globe and Mail, 27 Dec 2004)

Winds of more than 100mph punched holes in the metal roof of the Superdome Arena. (The Guardian, 30 Aug 2005)

The natural phenomenon takes the role of an actor in the articles, to which material processes are ascribed. The function of the patient in such clauses is performed by people, objects and places. This recurring transitivity pattern ascribes the responsibility for the destructive actions to the natural phenomenon, and suggests that it acts with force and volition. It portrays the tsunami and the hurricane as being in control of the actions and implies that they act on purpose, which consequently helps to establish the natural phenomena as animate.

As can be seen, the newspapers heavily draw upon personification, i.e. depiction of nonhuman entities in terms of human goals, actions and characteristics (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Since the portrayal of the events is given from a human perspective and because of the Western belief in the unique status of man, it is not surprising that the newspapers incorporate human characteristics and motivations in the representation of the tsunami and the hurricane (cf. Pavelka 1982). What is significant is whether positive or negative human features are associated with the natural phenomena. As the newspapers depict the tsunami and the hurricane as full of negative emotions, i.e. anger and vengeance, they portray them in a negative light.

By conveying a negative portrayal of the natural phenomenon, newspapers demonize it. This, consequently, has impact on people's attitude towards nature and the complex event of a natural catastrophe, influencing people's behavior and actions. Demonization of the tsunami is further intensified by the employment of the metaphor themes of a MONSTER and WAR, which are discussed below.

The main function of the metaphoric theme of an ANIMATE BEING is to help people make sense of the catastrophe. By mapping features from the source domain of an animate being to the target domain of the tsunami, it enables us to understand a complex and unfamiliar aspect of reality in terms of a more concrete, clear and familiar phenomenon. As Ana (1999: 195) points out, 'metaphors are conceptual instruments that embody otherwise amorphous or remote concepts in ways that the public can readily understand'. Thus, instead of an abstract picture of a mass of water, the metaphor employed in the newspapers evokes a concrete and vivid image of an entity, more specifically an animate being.

Another implication of the metaphor theme of an ANIMATE BEING is the ascription of extraordinary power to nature. As a result of Enlightenment ideology and a long tradition in Western philosophy and cosmology concerning the relationship between humans and nature, mankind is viewed as dominating nature (Hawkes 2003; Goatly 2007). Humans are considered to be at the pinnacle of creation, with animals occupying the position below them and inanimate objects standing at the bottom of the hierarchy (Goatly 2007). Yet, by providing the tsunami with human characteristics, the hierarchy is disturbed. The natural phenomenon is portrayed as being at the top of the imaginary ladder, which gives it an enormous power.

Significantly, the employment of the metaphoric theme of animation mystifies the real causes of the catastrophe. It portrays the disaster as stemming from the extreme anger of nature and the will of the natural phenomenon to punish people. This obscures the fact that human actions and social conditions also contributed to the impact of the disaster.

2.2 Natural Phenomenon as a MONSTER

Another major conceptual metaphor theme that is systematically employed by all the three newspapers is the representation of the tsunami and the hurricane as a MONSTER. In other words, the articles portray the natural phenomenon as a large, powerful, frightening, violent and cruel creature. This

metaphoric theme is materialized mainly by the use of emotionally colored lexis and hyperbole.

There can be found a number of references in the articles which directly and explicitly portray the tsunami and the hurricane as a monster. These include the employment of a simile, as in the following sentence:

The deadly wave was unimaginably big, stretching to the horizons, and it struck suddenly, looming up with a roar **like a monster from the deep**. (The New York Times, 27 Dec 2004)

or the adoption of the word *monster* to characterize the natural phenomenon, as in:

Now they understood why such **a monster tsunami** had been unleashed. (The New York Times, 31 Dec 2004)

Officials in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama said it was too early to calculate the number of lives lost in the **monster** storm. (The Globe and Mail, 31 Aug 2005)

Apart from explicit expressions, the newspapers draw upon a number of other discursive devices to convey the MONSTER metaphor. Referring to the size of the natural phenomenon, the articles are replete with hyperbolic adjectives, such as *massive*, *colossal*, *huge*, *giant*, *mammoth* and *gargantuan*. The portrayal of the natural phenomenon as having abnormal physical power is realized through the verbs denoting material processes demanding a great force, such as *batter*, *smash* and *ravage*, which also imply violence of nature. Apart from these, the extraordinary power of the tsunami and the hurricane is conveyed through the connotations of the verbs used in the sentences of the following type:

It **picked up cars** and **swept them** hundreds of yards inland. (The New York Times, 31 Dec 2004)

The rising flow pushed them upward and **pinned them against the ceiling** and the top of the door frame. (The Globe and Mail, 27 Dec 2004)

Winds of more than 100mph punched holes in the metal roof of the Superdome Arena, **peeling away aluminium sheets**. (The Guardian, 30 Aug 2005)

Our common associations with the material processes *pick up*, *sweep*, *pin* and *peel* are: the actor is a human being and the object of the action is something relatively small. The employment of the verbs in the sentences above, on one hand, implies animation of the natural phenomenon, and, on the other hand, initiates a comparison of a small object with cars in the first case, people in the second case, and aluminium sheets in the third case. Such a comparison leads to the conclusion that something which picks up and sweeps cars, pins people against the ceiling, and peels away aluminium sheets must be extraordinarily powerful. The effect of these sentences is based on the contrast between what commonly stands for the object of the actions – something small – and what stands for the object when referring to the actions of the tsunami and the hurricane – something heavy and big. These representations imply that the

natural phenomenon is more powerful than people. The Western Enlightenment ideology of the domination of people over nature is thus disrupted.

Another characteristic that is attributed to the tsunami and the hurricane by the newspapers is cruelty. The articles explicitly refer to the natural phenomenon as *merciless*, portraying it thus as having no sympathy with people. Cruelty is also implied in the frequent representation of the tsunami and the hurricane as striking suddenly, giving no warning to people to prepare for the disaster.

Then, **without warning**, the sea turned ferocious. (The New York Times, 27 Dec 2004)

Out of the blue, a deadly wall of water (headline, The Guardian, 27 Dec 2004)

With Few Warning Signs, an Unpredictable Behemoth Grew (headline in The Guardian, 29 Aug 2005)

Apart from suggesting heartlessness of the natural phenomenon, in case of the tsunami such depictions conceal the fact that it was the government, officials and the media that did not warn the people, mainly because of the lack of a warning system in the Indian Ocean and the failure of technological communication. Thus, rather than allowing people to accept the responsibility, the representations above divert the blame to nature.

To sum up, discursive devices employed by the newspapers describe the natural phenomenon as a giant, extraordinarily powerful, violent, frightening and cruel creature. If we trace back a conceptual metaphor theme that underlies such a representation, we arrive at the metaphor 'tsunami as a MONSTER'. Such a metaphor draws upon themes from mythology and has the main effect of demonizing the natural phenomenon.

As the metaphor of ANIMATION, the MONSTER metaphor renders the natural catastrophe comprehensible to people by applying a framework of thinking about something more concrete and easily imaginable, i.e. a monster, to the tsunami. It thus helps readers to grasp the reality.

Yet, it pictures the natural phenomenon in a strongly negative light. By demonizing it, the metaphor evokes intense negative emotions, mainly fear. This has impact on the formation of people's attitudes towards nature, most probably resulting in dislike and hostility. Such attitudes do not allow people to cope with the natural disaster in a rational way and hinder constructive action.

2.3 Natural Phenomenon as a WARRIOR

The third major metaphoric theme by which the newspapers conceptualize the catastrophes is representation of the natural phenomenon as a WARRIOR. The articles compare the situation to a war, often employing a simile.

Almost every building has been leveled or gutted, **as if a bomb had exploded**. (The Globe and Mail, 30 Dec 2004)

It brought back images of **the war**, which I lived through as a boy. It looked **like after a heavy bombardment**. (eyewitness account in *The Guardian*, 31 Dec 2004)

The function of such representations is to compare the tsunami to something that people are more familiar with, and thus bring the event closer to people's experience and help readers to comprehend it.

Apart from drawing upon comparisons, the newspapers also categorize the natural phenomenon as a warrior. While comparison points out resemblances between two phenomena, categorization implies that the two phenomena are not just similar but rather belong to the same category and thus share relevant features (Cacciari 1998). One of the features that the tsunami shares with a warrior in the articles is that it attacks people, as in: *'The water separated, then it attacked.'* (*The New York Times*, 31 Dec 2004) The natural phenomenon is seen as acting with volition, aiming to physically set upon people. Such a view is also conveyed in the following two examples:

'We all immediately turned and ran towards the main road with **the water following us**.' (*The Guardian*, 27 Dec 2004)

The hurricane **targeted** the heart of U.S. oil (*The Globe and Mail*, 29 Aug 2005)

Instead of revealing that the waves and the wind move because of geophysical forces, the newspapers portray the natural phenomenon as having a desired goal, a target – to hurt and kill people, and cause damage to their property. Nature is thus represented as hostile and aggressive, implying that it is people's enemy, which is expressed in: *the sea suddenly turned **enemy*** (*The New York Times*, 27 Dec 2004).

Overall, the WAR metaphoric theme creates animosity against nature. It draws a sharp division between people and nature by portraying the natural phenomenon as a people's foe. It thus prevents people from establishing a harmonic relation to nature.

2.4 Origins of the Metaphors

The origins of the metaphoric representations of the tsunami and the hurricane as an ANIMATE BEING and a MONSTER can be traced back to the mythology of Western culture. In ancient and aboriginal societies, myths portrayed the whole nature as animate. Natural phenomena were bestowed with life and energy, and were depicted as primal beings that are granted with volition and mind. Ancient myths depict the earth as a Mother, which can be either beneficent or hostile, evil and punishing. The world is portrayed as full of demonic powers and forces that can take people's lives and bring destruction (Larue 1975; Taylor 1994).

The main function of the ancient mythology was, by introducing a human element into the world full of uncertainties and puzzles, to provide an explanation and make the phenomena intelligible to people (Grimal 1965). Grimal (1965: 9) points out that myth is 'an attempt to escape from the powerlessness that is our fate'. Myths thus gave people an illusion of being in control of the universe.

What follows is that the way people explained the unknown, such as natural disasters, thousands of years ago is adopted even in a modern era of scientific and technological progress. As Cassirer (1946: 280) points out:

In all critical moments of man's social life, the rational forces that resist the rise of old mythical conceptions are no longer sure of themselves. In these moments the time for myth has come again. [...] [Myth] is always there, lurking in the dark and waiting for its hour and opportunity. This hour comes as soon as the other binding forces of man's social life, for one reason or another, lose their strength and are no longer able to combat the demonic mythical powers.

Natural disasters are an example of a critical moment of man's social life when people are overwhelmed by the events and resort to mythical thinking.

When asking about the reasons for the employment of a conceptual domain of a WARRIOR to be mapped onto the domain of the natural phenomenon, a plausible answer is that it stands for a concept that people all over the world are more familiar with and understand more easily than natural catastrophes. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 61) point out, 'fighting is found everywhere in the animal kingdom and nowhere so much as among human animals'.

3. Discussion of the Findings

The three major metaphoric themes – the natural phenomenon as an ANIMATE BEING, as a MONSTER and as a WARRIOR – do not offer conflicting conceptualizations of the tsunami and the hurricane, but rather build upon each other to provide a coherent world view of the natural phenomenon. In spite of the fact that the tsunami and the hurricane are normal, naturally occurring, phenomena, the three metaphoric themes provide a conceptual framework that portrays them as abnormal, angry, monstrous creatures, the aim of which is to attack and harm people.

As has already been pointed out, one of the primary functions of such a metaphoric representation is, by mapping the structure of our experience from a concrete and more familiar conceptual domain onto an unknown concept of the tsunami and the hurricane, to make the natural phenomenon more comprehensible, intelligible and tangible for readers. As Radman (1997: 167) points out, metaphor 'represents a cognitive shift from initial puzzlement to an articulated pattern'. This fulfills the basic need of people to make sense of events in the world, which gives them an illusion of being able to influence the world (Grimal 1965; Larue 1975). By categorizing the natural phenomenon, the metaphors bring order to the universe, without which people feel frustrated. Therefore, in a certain way, the metaphoric conceptualization helps to overcome people's anxiety resulting from the natural catastrophe.

By ascribing mainly negative attributes to the tsunami and the hurricane, and adopting the mythical theme of the personification of evil, the metaphors transform the natural phenomenon into a demon. They thus call forth emotion, mostly fear, rather than reason. Consequently, they transfer the anxiety resulting from something unknown and ungraspable to the fear of something concrete – a constructed villain, a cruel monster.

In their effect, the metaphors draw a sharp boundary between people and nature, and thus reinforce Western nature-culture dualism. Instead of pointing out that nature cannot be viewed as isolated from society, the metaphoric themes portray nature as deviant and as people's enemy. Such a representation renders harmonious co-existence between people and nature rather difficult. Moreover, the metaphoric portrayal puts all the blame for the damage and destruction on the natural phenomenon. It hinders analytical coverage of the event and hides the fact that it was also social, political and economic factors that contributed to the catastrophe. The natural disaster is wrongly depicted as something uncontrollable that could not have been avoided. As a result, the government, officials and the society in general are void of any blame for the event.

Since the major metaphoric themes do not provide alternative viewpoints, the constructed picture of the events becomes naturalized and viewed as commonsensical. The metaphors call forth unconscious associations and emotions, which often remain unquestioned. Their effectiveness thus stems from the fact that the portrayal that they provide tends to be taken for granted; as Fairclough (1989: 85) points out, 'ideology is most effective when its workings are least visible'.

As ideology functions to reproduce, challenge or resist power asymmetries between two groups, the question is whether the representation of the tsunami and the hurricane by the newspapers sustains or challenges the established power domination of mankind over nature in Western thinking. The analysis provides a rather contradictory answer. On one hand, by providing nature with human characteristics, the newspapers position it at the pinnacle of creation. They portray it as having all the power over people and thus subvert the asymmetric power relations between nature and humankind. On the other hand, by representing the natural phenomenon negatively as a villain, the newspapers discursively invest power over nature (Hawkins 2001). Such a seemingly contradictory ascription of power perfectly serves a single function: it hides human failure, diverts attention from negative human actions and social factors, and puts all the blame for the damage and destruction on nature.

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