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Article

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Abstract

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Introduction

On June 3, 2015, torrential six-hour floods in Ghana's largest and capital city of Accra claimed more than 150 lives. By many accounts, this disaster was considered one of the worst to have hit the country in its history, the fatalities resulting not just from the floods, but also from fire explosion from a nearby gas station in the business district of the city. In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, a section of the population believed the unprecedented destruction of life and property was partly a result of governmental inefficiency, including the poor planning of a network of drainage systems, inefficient implementation of previous preventive frameworks, and the city authorities' abysmal waste management. Clearly, the causes were as human as they were natural, and while the natural disaster was unavoidable, the scope of destruction could have been mitigated. Not surprisingly, criticism of the government was swift, and a disconsolate citizenry was left in need of support for rehabilitation. In response, the government moved in with relief efforts and declared a three-day period of national mourning, culminating in a memorial service at which the President, John Mahama, paid a moving tribute to the memory of the victims. The president's speech was followed by a series

of other responses—fact-finding and assessment reports, for example—all of which may be construed in terms of rhetorical genre, or what Miller has famously theorized as "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" (1984, p. 159).

Unarguably, a disaster of this nature required a multifaceted and collaborative approach involving municipal authorities, the national government (Ghana being a unitary state), citizens, and potentially, international development organizations that lend humanitarian support in such situations. Because of this disaster's unique character as both natural and human-caused, responses to the need for support and action were as varied as they were, in some cases, unpredictable, making this case particularly suitable for the analysis of public rhetoric that lends itself to multiple responses in the form of rhetorical genres.

Scholars studying rhetorical genres have long been interested in how genres operate in multiple settings. In addition to studies that focus predominantly on academic settings, Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) has been taken up in other social contexts, including workplace and professional settings like financial institutions (Devitt, 1991; Freedman & Smart, 1997), engineering companies (Winsor, 1999; Artemeva, 2009), and medical fields (Berkenkotter, 2001; Schryer & Spoel, 2005). Common to these diverse studies is the understanding that genres contain values and assumptions and embody the conditions of their existence. For RGS scholars, the boundaries of genre activity are therefore ever-expanding, creating room for research into how genres operate in multiple milieus of social interaction.

In discussing the relations between genres within academic, workplace, and other professional contexts, RGS scholars have turned to the idea of genre uptake (Freadman 1994, 2002), the notion that a genre invites the emergence of other genres, that it "selects, defines, or represents its object" (Freadman, 2002, p. 48), and that by this selection, definition, or representation, genres *predict*, rather than *determine*, the existence of other genres. Reiff and Bawarshi (2016) have explained that genre uptakes "account for the dynamics of agency and the contingent, impromptu, multidirectional performances of genre" (p. 3). By applying this concept of genre uptake, we may, for instance, readily perceive connections between a court verdict and its execution, or a student's response and the writing prompt on which it is based (Reiff & Bawarshi, 2016, p. 4). It is important here to clarify my use of terms. In this article, I use the term genres to indicate the typified, recurrent responses such as news and opinion articles, presidential speeches, assessment reports, etc. to an exigence, the "need or obligation or stimulus that calls for a response" (Bawarshi and Reiff, 2010, p. 63), in this case, the June 3, 2015 flood and fire disaster. Drawing on Spinuzzi (2004), I consider genre ecology, or an

ecology of genres, here as a collection of genres related to a common exigence. Figure 1 clarifies the relationship between the exigence (the disaster) and its uptake in the form of rhetorical responses. Considering genre uptakes is crucial in understanding the necessary interconnection between genres, for the idea of uptake affords a holistic view of responses, an insight consonant with Freadman's (2012) argument that genres considered outside the orbit of uptake is essentially unproductive (p. 560). Freadman's insight resonates with earlier research on genres and uptake within public contexts, such as Thieme's (2006) discussion of Canadian suffragists and sceptics' uptake of the idea of militancy in newspaper articles and commentaries, and Giltrow and Stein's (2009) work on genres on the internet, like blogs and Amazon customer reviews. Further expanding on the application of the concept of uptake, Reiff and Bawarshi (2016) have pointed out the predominance of the concept, in what they term "fairly stable activity systems"—like academic, workplace, and professional domains—, arguing that scholars have paid little attention to how uptakes manifest in less bounded settings like public domains (p. 4).

With their publication of *Genre and the Performance of Publics*, Reiff and Bawarshi (2016) have drawn specific attention to less regulated and more dispersed environments of the public domain. This focus suggests a definitive claim about what has come to be considered the public turn in genre studies, for Reiff and Bawarshi not only acknowledge research on the publicness of genre activity as we have seen in the work of Thieme (2006) and Giltrow and Stein (2009); they also explicitly reveal their aim: to bring into scholarly conversation the shared orientations of public sphere studies and RGS, while expanding upon scholarship in this area. In contrast to what they observed to be the disciplined and more predictable uptake of genre within activity systems, Reiff and Bawarshi (2016) raise a pertinent question about and for the study of public discourse. They ask:

> But what about *less clearly defined public contexts* [emphasis added] that function less as systems and more as assemblages in which object-motives are not as shared, in which the mediational means are more wide ranging and subject to transformation, in which participants are not as institutionally ranked and roles are not as clearly demarcated, and in which genre uptakes are less "disciplined" and predictable? (p. 4)

Research on some of these less clearly defined public contexts has been forthcoming. For example, Wegner (2020) has discussed the ways in which uptake of public genres related to homelessness transform as they move from one context to another, and Auken and Sunesen (2021) have examined how public genres shape the ideologies at play in climate change debates. In expanding on these studies, I take the Ghanaian flood and fire case with which this article opens as a paradigm of a less

clearly defined public context, one that invites (studies of) multiple, diverse genres such as a presidential speech, news reports, and assessment and strategic action documents. In the context of this disaster, the less hierarchical nature of participants' roles in the uptake of genres defies the confines of regimented institutional settings within which most understandings of uptake have traditionally been considered. A natural disaster might, for instance, be taken up by a news or research report and/or a presidential address to citizens, all genres with important stakes for rebuilding efforts of various sorts. Given the absence of institutional structures, one genre may invite another, but only in ways that allow for divergence from—yet complementarity to—an initial object-motive of responding to the disaster. My analysis of the ecology of genres, then, is driven by the following two research questions: (1) What values are embedded in the different genres? (2) How did this genre ecology operate to enable specific performances of public life?

Because "few studies of genre have focused on the *more dispersed, dynamic performances of public life* [emphasis added] and on genres that occasion public deliberation" (Reiff & Bawarshi, 2016, p. 6), I suggest that attending to genres like those emerging in the aftermath of the June 3, 2015 flood and fire disaster in Ghana provides powerful insights not only into how diffused contexts of genre interaction in the public sphere shape individual and group responses, but also, how these interactions, in turn, enact publics, or audiences that emerge "in relation to texts and their circulation" (Warner, 2002, p. 50). Genres surrounding this disaster respond to situational requirements created by the disaster, affording opportunities for RGS scholars to consider how publics are created and how questions of responsibility are negotiated. My analysis of the ecology of genres demonstrates that within the contingent environment of public spheres, genre uptakes may be relatively highly unpredictable, but they may also serve multiple, varied functions that together respond to the exigence presented by the diffused contexts of publics. While news reports and opinion articles may be predictable sources of response, others like World Bank reports are unpredictable insofar as they are occasioned by historical relationships. The emergence of this latter group is therefore tied to specific contingencies. By attending to multiple genres in this analysis, I enrich the literature on the genre/publics dialectic, showing how genres may enable specific actions in the public sphere. As public incidents, disasters such as the June 3, 2015 flood and fire disaster provide an opportunity to consider genres that emerge in the public sphere, and because genres in the public sphere (as opposed to those that arise in private contexts) hold enormous *public* impacts for various kinds of publics, analyses of such genres contribute to RGS research on how response and responsibility can be negotiated in such contexts.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. First, I provide a brief overview of the relationship between and among genres, the role of genre uptake in this relationship, and how both relationships and genre uptakes stand vis-à-vis the concept of publics (of the flood and fire disaster). Next, I discuss and analyze a genre ecology consisting of news reports and opinion articles; a presidential speech; an intergovernmental assessment summary; and a World Bank Group report. I conclude with implications of the analysis for the study of public genres and questions of response and responsibility.
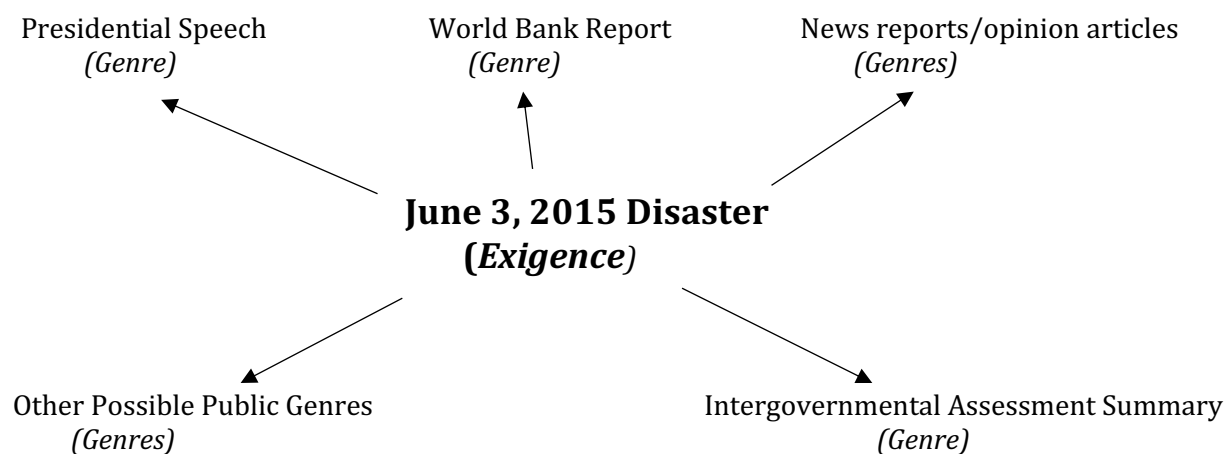
Figure 1. Relationship between exigence and multiple genres in the June 3, 2015 flood and fire disaster.

Genre Relationships, Uptakes, and Publics

RGS scholars have long maintained that genres are more productively understood in their relationship with other genres, rather than in their singularity (Moeller & Christensen, 2009; Spinuzzi, 2004; Yates & Orlikowski, 2002). In their emergence and response to rhetorical situations, genres typically team up with other genres through uptakes. Spinuzzi (2004) has provided a description of this kind of relationship by delineating four types of assemblages: genres sets (Devitt, 1991), genre systems (Bazerman, 1994), genre repertoires (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994), and genre ecologies (Devitt, 2004). For the purposes of this article, I limit the discussion to Spinuzzi's articulation of genre ecologies. For Spinuzzi (2004), genre ecologies highlight the interconnectedness

of genres within a network that allows for contingencies and adaptability, dynamism, and the distribution of work. Unlike other forms of assemblage (like genre sets and genre systems) that emphasize sequential relationships, genre ecologies favor overlapping relationships. They serve mediational functions through empirical verification of the relatedness of the genres; in mediating activities, they ensure dynamism by facilitating the "importing, hybridizing, and evolving [of] genres" (Spinuzzi, 2004, p. 6).

One way these relationships in genre ecologies manifests is through the concept of genre uptake. For Freadman (2002), genre uptake "is first the taking of an object" and its subsequent selection, definition, and representation (p. 48). Genre uptake describes the relationship among genres as they take up one another within defined spheres of activity. In her account of an execution case upon which her foundational study of genre uptake was based, Freadman distinguished between more formal and less formal uptakes. More formal uptakes of the case, for her, manifest in the "formal chain that leads from the sentencing to the execution," with examples such as legal appeals for clemency and cabinet deliberations. Less formal ones were those that encompassed anything from editorials, press reports, banners, to protest letters (p. 50), those that are part of an "infinite semiosis" not restricted to one domain of activity. Freadman's idea of genre uptake enables us to consider the relationship between the genres: how, for example, cabinet deliberation and press reports, both as genres, are connected overall to the execution case.

In discussing the necessity of genre uptake for genre study, Bawarshi (2015) emphasized the need to examine the extratextual factors at the core of genre performances, including "history, materiality, embodiment, improvisations, [and] emotions," the necessity of these factors deriving from the complexity of the scene of agency of uptake, a scene that prevents genre uptakes from being sometimes "textually visible" (pp. 188-189). And because this sense of invisibility may further be magnified within dispersed public domains, understanding the idea of publics remains necessary for the discussion in this paper. Warner (2002) has posited three senses of the idea of publics: "*the* public" as a reference to individuals in general; *a* public as a concrete audience, recognized within the context of a particular activity; and a third understanding of public—those that emerge "only in relation to texts and their circulation" (pp. 49-50). Warner's second and third senses of public relate to the present discussion in terms of the genres that emerge in the aftermath of the flood and fire disaster. Given the crucial importance of the notion of genre uptake within the context of genre performances of public life, I shall return to these senses of public. In the next section, I turn to the data and the methods I employed.

Data Selection and Analysis

Data selection for a genre ecology in dispersed environments of the public domain is necessarily fraught, for as has already been noted, there is an indeterminable array of possible genres that may constitute responses to a disaster. Thus, based on genre knowledge (of what genres *may* likely constitute a response), I limited the primary data set for this analysis to four: (1) news reports and opinion articles contextualizing the disaster; (2) the only presidential post-disaster speech delivered by Ghana's President John Mahama, intended to provide comfort to a grieving nation; (3) a government assessment summary by the Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology, and Innovation, providing a record of the intergovernmental efforts aimed at finding a solution to the causes of the disaster; and (4) a report published by the World Bank Group detailing a roadmap for preventing future disasters and fashioning solutions beyond the immediate context of Accra to other metropolitan areas. For analytical economy, I excluded news articles and World Bank reports published after 2015 on the disaster. Given the multitude of news and opinion articles available, I selected news articles representative in content of those that circulated on two major news portals in Ghana, *CitiFmOnline* and *Daily Graphic*. In selecting this data set, I first chose news reports and opinion articles to contextualize media reports on and citizen perspectives about the disaster. Second, the presidential speech delivered at the memorial service for the victims was a fairly predictable source of response and was therefore included. Third, following Bawarshi's call to consider extratextual factors such as history in tracking genre relationships (2015, p. 188), I relied on historical relationships of humanitarian support between the Ghanaian government and the World Bank Group and assumed a collaboration in the aftermath of the disaster. I searched World Bank databases for country profiles on specific events and selected the World Bank's report on the disaster. Finally, the World Bank report also provided semantic cues based on which I selected the assessment summary collaboratively produced by the Ghanaian government and the World Bank.

To analyze the data, I adapted guidelines on the analysis of genres developed by Devitt, Reiff, and Bawarshi (2004), an approach involving four steps, namely (1) a collection of the samples of the genre; (2) a description of the scene and situation in which the genre is used; (3) a description of the patterns of the genre's features; and (4) an explication of the connection between genre feature and rhetorical situation (pp. 93-94). This approach is particularly suited to the analysis of public genres because it illustrates not just the need to which the rhetorical action of the genres responds, but also how both that need and rhetorical aims of the genre then foreground the rhetorical and political

dimensions of the genre ecology (Read, 2016). Further, channeling the approach by Devitt et al. also enables an examination of the values revealed in the genres (2004, p. 94), and to draw connections between the public genres identified and the rhetorical functions they perform. Moreover, because values are brought to life through frames, the concept of framing undergirds the analyses. I follow Huckin's (2002) definition of a frame as "a socially abstract, high-level knowledge structure that organizes certain information about the world into a coherent whole" (p. 354). Especially crucial for my purposes here is Huckin's claim that "[w]riters and speakers commonly frame public issues by mentioning certain relevant topics and subtopics while ignoring others" consequently giving the text "a certain 'slant'" (p. 354). In relation to the genres analyzed, the idea of framing highlights how the genres embed values in specific ways. Table 1 below illustrates the genre ecology analyzed and the relationship between the genres.

Table 1. Ecology of Genres and their Relationships

Genre	Document analyzed	Other representatives of this genre	Extant scholarship on this genre type
News Reports & Opinion Articles	Newspaper Reports and Opinion Articles from Ghana's *Daily Graphic*, *CitiFMOnline*, and *ModernGhana*	In Hurricane Harvey's Wake, We Need a Green 'New Deal' (2017)	Littlefield & Quenette (2007); Potts, Bednarek, & Caple (2015)
Presidential speech on disaster	Ghanaian president John Mahama's speech on disaster (June 10, 2015)	Hurricane Katrina Aftermath Presidential Address (2005)	McClure, 2011; Liu, 2007; Neüff, 2018
Natural disaster assessment report	Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation. (2015). Floods in Accra, Assessment Summary	State Flood Assessment: Report to the 86th Texas Legislature (2019)	Rutherford, 2005; Read, 2016
Resilient cities report	Enhancing Urban Resilience in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (2017)	Addis Ababa—Enhancing Urban Resilience: City Strength Resilient Cities Program	Bowers, 2010; Read, 2016

Contextualizing the disaster and locating citizens' quest for solutions

Ghanaian newspapers reported on and amplified the relief efforts by non-governmental organizations. They provided a channel for donations to affected families and mobilized humanitarian support by organizing blood donation drives for disaster victims (e.g., Sparks, 2015). The newspapers also reported on the regional and national governments' efforts at deploying relief assistance to victims and highlighted the scope of the destruction of life and property. In reporting the tragedy, Ghana's leading national newspaper, the *Daily Graphic*, for example, captured the mood of the day: "[S]everal stranded commuters are making the long journey back home from work or markets on foot and in the rains" (Baiocchi, 2015). In addition to its report on the scores of people who lost their lives, the newspaper further gave an account of a major showroom of Toyota Ghana that was completely flooded, with millions lost in property. The flood and fire disaster left major roads unmotorable, as smoke from burnt vehicles filled the sky, and charred bodies were left across the Goil Fuel Station near Kwame Nkrumah Circle in Accra, the site of the explosion.

Further, the newspaper reports carried a sense of gloom and despair characteristic of the national mood. In the headlines, the stories felt palpable: "Accra Floods: More than 100 feared dead after explosion"; "Apocalypse in Accra: 150 dead so far in floods, inferno"; and "June 3 disaster: Ghana mourns." Outside Ghana, *The New Humanitarian,* a United Nations publication that reports on worldwide disasters, declared what had become a perennial national challenge: "Ghana hard hit by flooding, once again." As genres, then, these newspaper reports provided avenues for information dissemination to citizens and contextualized the impact of the disaster for national and international readership. They framed the disaster in specific ways by highlighting the scope of destruction and capturing the national mood.

In addition to the reports, citizens expressed their positions on the recurrent floods in several opinion articles. Three selected for analysis here are reflective of the general sentiments of these opinions. First, in a piece published on Accra's *CitiFMOnline* titled "Changing Accra: One Month After June 3 Disaster," Nana Ama Agyeman Asante argued that although the national government's humanitarian and relief efforts were commendable, those efforts would only amount to short-term fixes unless major structural changes followed. Asante believed the demolition of slums in major areas of the city without attendant efforts at solving Accra's homeless situation only creates additional homelessness: Slum dwellers would relocate to other areas of the city and inefficient housing planning, especially on waterways, would in turn exacerbate flooding when the rains set in.

As citizens continue to litter, rubbish would accumulate, and coupled with the annual rains, floods would be inevitable. Asante's opinion piece was both a criticism of the government's half-baked measures and a call for attitudinal change among citizens. Her wide-ranging proposal for renewal balanced governmental action and civic responsibility:

> Managers of the city can start with an intensive education campaign, completely overhaul the building permit system to halt the planless development, work their way through well planned demolitions to a sewer and an efficient waste management system for the city... Accra will only change if residents and authorities insist on a comprehensive approach to urban planning and social programs (Asante, 2015, paras. 10-11)

Second, and like Asante, another citizen's opinion piece framed the disaster in terms of the attitude of Ghanaians who ignore their responsibilities to the state yet expect efficient governmental response to disasters. Written by Mahamadu Huzeima, "Awakening Call to All Ghanaians—June 3rd Disaster (Who is To Be Blame?)" posited that the "poor attitude of Ghanaians towards their duties and responsibilities" is responsible for the disaster and that a solution to the perennial floods requires *both* governmental action and citizen effort. Huzeima argued the government would need to enforce building permit regulation and "every Ghanaian should have a sense of duty to the country." For Huzeima, rebuilding efforts in the aftermath of the disaster ought to be concerted: "citizens, developers, planning authorities, city engineers, utility companies and politicians should work together to make June 3rd disaster the last and worst nightmare in Ghana" (2015, para. 7).

Finally, Okyere Bonaa's "Flooding in Accra, Ghana: How Can We Help the Victims" takes a much more expansive approach to the problem. Bonaa identified the problem to be multifaceted: that "most parts of Accra lie in a lowland area and by disposition can easily be flooded with an average rainfall"; that the city's poor coordination of relief efforts halts attempts at temporary solutions; that a long-term solution was needed immediately. Among these solutions, Bonaa believed the government ought to "enforce the country's laws and statutes to avert a recurrence"; "ensure that those in water passageways are evacuated" and alternative accommodation provided for them; and "work with appropriate ministries to provide public education and awareness." Like Huzeima, then, Bonaa's solutions are varied and multifaceted, and account for *both* citizen and governmental effort.

Held together, Asante, Huzeima, and Bonaa's pieces epitomized citizen perspectives on the disaster and expand on the new reports' informative details. As only a few in several possible indeterminable articles responding to the disaster, these pieces framed citizen sentiments on the disaster, shared critiques of Ghanaian society, and proffered solutions to the perennial floods. The

news articles contextualized the disaster while the opinion articles articulated citizen's sentiments. By framing the disaster and solutions to it the way they did, these genres highlight a pertinent value— that of citizens' vested interest in their own affairs and advocacy to develop lasting solutions to the disaster. Read alongside other genres like the governmental assessment report, the presidential speech at the memorial for the victims, and the World Bank Group report, the citizen perspectives expressed here provide a comprehensive account of the disaster in the genre ecology, and the opinions expressed position citizens as active stakeholders committed to solving a recurrent problem.

Negotiating human culpability and divine action

As the official presidential speech following the disaster, President Mahama's speech falls within McClure's (2011) classification of presidential natural disaster rhetoric. Its significance for this analysis lies in the rhetorical situation: given the context of the disaster, the speech offers an opportunity to observe the rhetorical strategies used especially when, in addition to the natural flood, some citizens believed human (in)action contributed to the disaster. In analyzing this speech, I examined the values underlining the delivery.

In his study of the emergent genre of the presidential natural disaster rhetoric, McClure (2011) posited the rhetorical elements of the genre, arguing that as a response to a recurrent situation, this genre is distinct from similar rhetoric during crisis: it invites rhetorical responses involving six key elements. Presidents (1) acknowledge an awareness of the disaster and the extent of damage to both life and property; (2) outline plans and actions aimed at reconstruction; (3) express compassion and emotional support to the survivors; (4) pledge support for survivors; (5) praise rescuers and request for public donations; (6) inspire hope while promising restoration (McClure, 2011, p. 3). McClure's conceptualization of rhetorical strategies was based mostly on natural disasters. The June 3 disaster, in contrast, involved the element of human culpability, thereby deviating partly from McClure's work.

The June 3 flood and fire disaster reveals a complex rhetorical scene that called for a response to a multiplicity of needs. In responding to the needs of the public, President Mahama's disaster rhetoric reflected the rhetorical features identified by McClure, with significant differences that stem from the speech's unique rhetorical situation, including Ghanaians' perception of governmental negligence. In using the rhetorical features identified above in his speech, the president navigated the challenges

presented by citizens' perception of governmental culpability, thereby minimizing the negligence that partly caused the disaster.

Seeking to express compassion and emotional support for survivors and the public, President Mahama used the genre as an occasion for a philosophical reflection on human mortality and the inevitability of death. In several important passages, the figure of "truth" predominates and serves to fend off anticipated critique of the government's inaction that partly contributed to the disaster. For instance, in an apparent response to the potential criticism, the president states:

> And suddenly we find ourselves with nothing but a thin line separating certainty from doubt, comfort from instability; separating grief from joy; life from death. And that single thin line, the only thing that remains when all else has been stripped away, is truth. (Mahama, 2015, para. 5)

This idea of truth runs through much of the speech and could be understood in terms of the strategic function it serves in the rhetorical situation. "Truth" here not only draws attention to humanity's mortality as an unavoidable fact. It also obscures human agency for required action, as conversations about culpability and responsibility for the disaster give way to interpretations that cast the disasters as acts of nature and/or the divine over which humanity has little to no control. This rhetorical strategy is not uncommon in the face of perceived criticism. President George Bush used similar rhetorical strategies in his major speeches in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina to evade responsibility and quell the backlash against his administration for its failure to effectively prepare for and respond to one of the worst natural disasters to have hit the United States (Liu, 2007).

Other references to truth were common in the speech and were reliant on Biblical allusions that positioned human beings as subordinate to God who then directs their affairs. Alluding to the Apostle Peter's statement in the Bible that God shows no partiality, President Mahama notes:

> Yet as I stood there [at the site of the disaster], the words that came to heart and mind were those from Scripture: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons."

This reference to religion is consonant with Liu's (2007) findings that President George Bush invoked religious references to express "how religion help[ed] Katrina survivors heal and move forward" (p. 43). Like Bush, Mahama's invocation of Biblical language is a strategic framing technique that positions the disaster as an act of God, suggesting that human action may not forestall divine action: regardless of whatever actions individuals take, divine action is contingent only upon the wishes of the divine entity. By inference, then, the President may be seen to be saying criticism of him and his government's perceived negligence was unwarranted. As Huckins' (2002) perspective on frames indicates, by framing the disaster as such, President Mahama draws attention to one thing (his

government's innocence) while simultaneously directing attention away from another (his perceived culpability).

In addition to these reflections on truth, the speech was also a meditation on the inevitability of death, an example of which is illustrated in the following excerpt:

> We were all, those of us there that morning, just human beings. We were all just Ghanaians, stunned by the senselessness of the tragedy before us. The only identities and labels that separated us that fateful day were "the living" and "the dead." And at the very core of our realities that is and should always be the only thing that separates us. We, the living, are one, and we are the same.

By calling attention to the unity of the Ghanaian citizenry, Mahama once again strategically fended off potential criticism especially from opposition politicians. These opposition politicians constitute part of the larger public to whom the president's address is oriented. Invested in the politics of the country as much as the president is, these politicians' call for governmental responsibility (and of course their criticism of the government) was to be expected in the face of the tragedy. Meanwhile, if life and death ought to be the only determinants of division among humans, the trope of a united living community would demand that division be avoided, especially those based on partisanship of any sort. In concluding the speech, the president returns to the idea of truth, coming full circle to why "the truth," for the Ghanaian people, of the inevitability of death, should be harnessed at that moment of national grief, rather than be relied upon as a wedge that divides a grieving public.

Overall, the president's rhetorical strategies provided foundations to fend off potential criticisms especially from the public and opposition political leaders for whom, even in a time of grief, a disaster of this magnitude could easily become political capital. By anticipating, acknowledging, and subsequently deflecting attention from blame, President Mahama addresses the question of the human component of the disaster, while catering to the expectations of a speech of this nature—providing emotional support to the public. Ultimately, the genre serves a crucial purpose of assuaging the grief of the public and providing direction for restorative action. At the same time, and perhaps more important for the analysis in this paper, the characteristic feature of genres to adapt to the particularities of their rhetorical situation is apparent here. The president responded to the exigence of the natural component of the disaster, but also effectively addressed the question of culpability by strategically framing the location of responsibility—the divine rather than the human. Indeed, presidential speeches are but one aspect of typified rhetorical responses to recurrent disasters. Disasters require responses, and because the responsibility for city management falls squarely on the shoulders of city and national authorities, paying attention to the local government's response in

this regard would yield additional perspectives on the response to the disaster. Thus, I turn to the next genre within the genre ecology, the Ghana government's inter-ministerial assessment summary.

Multiple sites of agency and responsibility

In order to illustrate the city authorities' position on responsibility, assessment, and action in this genre ecology, it is crucial to pay attention to the values embedded in the assessment summary report (See Figure 2 below for section of report).

Table of content

Figure 2. Page showing Table of Content of Assessment Summary. The enclosed section shows subheadings dealing with exigence and aim, as well as selections showing values relevant to this analysis.

Commissioned by the Ghanaian government, the assessment summary was a 26-page report collaboratively produced by a coalition of several government departments including the Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology, and Innovation; the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies of the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area; the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development; and the Ministry of Water Resources, Works, and Housing. These ministries are government departments with direct responsibilities over several different aspects of city development, including housing, urban planning, and physical environment. According to the document, the World Bank provided technical support in producing the report, but the document itself functions as a collective voice of government agencies and departments acting as rhetorical actors with responsibilities on the assessment of the flood and fire disaster and post-disaster rehabilitation.

Like Read's (2016) analysis of the executive summary report that contained snapshots of decision-makers' actions, the "Introduction" section provides useful summative insights into the values embedded in the report, two key paragraphs of which are reproduced below:

(a) Following the floods the Minister of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation called upon the World Bank to assist the government in (i) developing an action plan of assessing the damages and needs, and effectively responding to the recent floods, (ii) identifying and prioritizing suitable short and medium term flood recovery and reconstruction measures, and (iii) initiating the development of a strategic framework approach to address long term urban development and management challenges to systematically reduce the underlying causes of the flood vulnerability for the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA). It was agreed to pay particular attention to three sectors, which were particularly affected by the floods and to which reconstruction efforts activities would possibly focus upon: Water and sanitation, housing and transport.

(b) This note [the report] summarizes the current knowledge on the events and underlying causes of the floods and provides an overview of the damages identified by the Government of Ghana and possible needs for reconstruction in the three priority sectors. The damage assessment is based solely on data collected by metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies, as well as estimations of sector ministries and related agencies. It does not imply any statement of the World Bank on the figures and their accuracy.

The first excerpt directly harkens back to the disaster by framing the World Bank as an important rhetorical actor whose intervention in humanitarian situations of this nature is necessary. The

"Introduction" identified the report's purpose as a fact-finding endeavor intended to uncover the underlying causes of the disaster and strategic policies for future prevention. Given the reference to causal factors of the disaster, we may juxtapose the "truth" of this report to the framing of the "truth" articulated by President Mahama in his memorial speech on the causes of the disaster. That parallel reading does two important things. First, it allows for a contrast between the president's version of events and those of the intergovernmental agencies. And second, it highlights the different values (in this case, including the ways the World Bank casts itself as collaborative actor, and the sites of responsibility that differ from those identified by President Mahama, for example) embedded within the ecology of genres that emerged in the aftermath of the disaster.

In the subsection of Section 2 titled "Underlying Risks and Vulnerability," the report addressed three key issues: "Accra's flood prone areas and causes of flooding"; the "underlying risks and vulnerability related to infrastructure"; and the "legal, policy, and institutional aspects" of the floods." The section highlighted the phenomenon of Accra's perennial floods, and reveals, first and foremost, that despite Accra's flood prone situation, drains within the city's watershed hydrology are either inadequately unlined or poorly lined. This hydrological problem and the city's rapid expansion, insufficient storage, and drainage capacity are identified and then framed as collectively responsible for the perennial flood. And added to these problems are infrastructural challenges related to hydraulics, transport, and waste management.

Thus, in its framing, this assessment summary reveals the multiple sites of agency and responsibility for the disaster and demonstrates anthropogenic dimensions at the core of the disaster. By providing valuable information on policy directions for the prevention of future floods, the assessment summary highlights the genre's purpose within the genre ecology—that purpose is investigative and is oriented toward finding lasting solutions to the problem of perennial floods. Further, in contrast to the presidential speech that identified global climatic conditions as one cause of the disaster—a framing that potentially obscures governmental culpability—, the assessment summary points to infrastructural, structural, and legal constraints. Oriented toward fact-finding as well as causal and needs assessment, the report therefore reflects some degree of values of disinterestedness. Because its primary audience is not the immediate grieving public but government bureaucrats, the tone is disinterested and technical, removed from the challenge of direct response to victims. By so doing, the assessment report provides an additional dimension and linkage to the presidential speech through evidential support for the acknowledgement of the causes of the disaster.

Transnational interventions as collaboration

Given its provision of technical support, what role, if any, does the World Bank play beyond assisting with the assessment summary? Published two years after the disaster in May 2017, the World Bank report responds beyond the immediate concerns of Accra's flood-prone areas to include a comprehensive approach to developing resilient urban cities in Ghana. As Dingo (2012) has found in her discussion of the interplay between rhetoric and networks of public policy, globalization has enabled "the flow of knowledge and rhetorics across international borders," thus requiring rhetoricians to be attentive "not only to individual speech acts or occasion-bound rhetorics but the circulation of arguments" (p. 13). The Bank's report exists as part of the genre ecology given the possibilities of circulation and the historical relationship between Ghana and the Bank. The Executive Summary details the objectives and findings of the report, as it harkens back to the disaster in Accra as the originary moment that called forth the need for actionable plans extending beyond the immediate environment of the flood to potentially risk-prone cities. It references the flood and fire disaster as the impetus for the response. Although a collaborative effort between the Government of Ghana and the World Bank, the report is mainly a World Bank publication that sought to develop capacity for a lasting solution to the city's challenges. And although the introductory pages indicate it is the product of a collaboration between agencies of the Ghanaian government and the World Bank, the report itself is copyrighted by the Bank, suggesting the Bank's ownership and perhaps primary authorship.

Figure 3. Page showing Table of Content of World Bank Report. The enclosed section shows subheadings dealing with exigence and aim, as well as selections showing values relevant to this analysis.

The "Foreword" to the report indicates an additional purpose beyond the response to the disaster: that Ghana's rapid urbanization demands the development of resilient cities capable of withstanding the challenges of rapidly developing cities. An important excerpt notes that in the wake the 2015 disaster,

> [...] the government of Ghana approached the World Bank in 2015 to undertake the CityStrength Diagnostic. The objective of the CityStrength Diagnostic was to engage a wide range of stakeholders across Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs) in GAMA and other government agencies to jointly identify the root causes of the many shocks and stresses confronting the GAMA region and identify priority actions and investment to address them. [Foreword to Report]

Important in this document is the World Bank's acknowledgement that the report provides a baseline for further collaboration between the Bank and the government. The evidence and actions outlined

suggest the Ghanaian government may "request further support from the World Bank and other development partners to implement follow-up actions" [Foreword]. Beyond individual national interventions in the wake of the disaster, the report points to the frequently collaborative efforts that follow responses to disasters and risks, a practice increasingly common within the larger context of globalization, where the flows of ideas, capital, and people combine to address complex national challenges.

As noted in the report's objective, "The June 2015 floods demonstrated the urgent need for urban resilience in the Accra region" [Executive Summary]. Also included in the Executive Summary are findings reporting the causes of the disaster: implementation bottlenecks and challenges in coordination; institutional capacity that is outstripped by urbanization; reactive response, rather than proactive planning; and a lack of long-term planning and data collection. The solutions identified were to "enhance resilience in vulnerable communities" and "improve preparedness and response to multiple hazards." Thus, the Foreword and Executive Summary, in particular, and the report in general, reflect, in part, values of collaboration between governments and transnational organizations in finding solutions to local problems. The report assumes the collaborative nature of responsibility. In other words, the framing reveals the logics that drive transnational collaborations between the World Bank and Ghana, and how those logics may differ from those embedded in other genres, such as the President's speech as we have seen. Significantly, then, the report is one more avenue through which we can examine a holistic sense of response and responsibility in the face of disasters of this nature.

Conclusions and Implications

What are the implications of this analysis for RGS scholars? This paper has focused attention on a flood and fire disaster in Ghana and the genres that constitute responses to it—among others, news reports and opinion articles; a presidential speech; multi-departmental government assessment summary; and a World Bank strategic action report. The emergence of these genres in the form of uptakes constitute varying responses to the disaster. The genres have enabled a study of the discursive constructions of publics within a genre ecology as they intersect with questions of response and responsibility of stakeholders.

Warner's (2002) conceptualizations of publics is productive for considering the specific publics to which the responses to the disaster were aimed. On the one hand, the news reports, opinion pieces,

and the presidential speech took as *a* public the Ghanaian grieving population. This public is a concrete audience. The news reports and opinion articles were geared toward disseminating information about the destruction and framing citizen perspectives on the prevention of future disasters. The presidential speech responded to the disaster to restore hope, fend off charges of negligence, and fashion a roadmap for a post-disaster rebuilding program for a grieving public. On the other hand, both the assessment summary and the World Bank Report reflect Warner's third iteration of publics, those that emerge "only in relation to texts and their circulation" (2002, p. 50). The public for both reports in this genre ecology is heterogeneous, given the multiple strands of audiences they call into existence—Ghanaian publics, government agency workers, multinational financial institutions, among several others. These publics are part of a genre ecology of participants with potentially varying roles who, together, collaborate to respond to the multiple needs presented by the disaster. Some of these publics emerge in response to the circulation of the reports, but all work, arguably, toward responding to the rhetorical situations created by the disaster. At first glance, the responses to the disaster in the form of the World Bank report may appear unlikely, given that the disaster occurred in Ghana, within a specific geographical location, and far from the Bretton Wood institution, but its emergence and inclusion in the genre ecology analyzed could be traced to considerations of the historical relationship between the government of Ghana and the Bank.

Given the complex scene of agency that followed this disaster, examining the genre ecology unravels the varying levels of response and responsibility in the search for solutions. The genres within this genre ecology responded to different publics, but they were all ultimately oriented toward the common object-motive of solving the challenges created by the disaster and the divergent but complementary actions demanded in its aftermath. The textual instantiations of these genres are mediated by the flood and fire disaster of June 3, 2015, and function individually and in concert within the dispersed genre ecology that emerged in the public sphere to respond to the disaster.

As this analysis has demonstrated, following the trail of public genres to describe a genre ecology is fraught with challenges. Unarguably, multiple genres could potentially emerge in the aftermath of this disaster, but given the frequently—and necessarily—diffused environments of public spheres, assembling an exhaustive list of genres poses significant challenges, quite unlike may be encountered in the genre ecologies of bounded (institutional) contexts, like those of a classroom. This challenge is a limitation of genre ecologies that may be assembled within diffused public contexts. And such a challenge has implications for where, as RGS scholars, we look for responses and responsibility. The genre ecology analyzed here potentially glosses over several genres. Insofar as genre uptakes in the

public domain are as unpredictable in some cases as they are rhizomatic, a major challenge of genre uptake within public rhetoric remains that of tracing and locating a near-complete ecology of genres. Consequently, it is important that as RGS scholars research genres within diffused public domains, we consider how place-bound events (like the disaster) enable and constrain seemingly unlikely wide-ranging, and even transnational genre uptakes. This way, we can better address questions of response and responsibility that genres—individually and collectively—make possible.

Furthermore, historical relationships occasioned certain kinds of genre uptakes. For example, although the World Bank report may not immediately appear as a likely genre given its indirect connection to the local context of the disaster, genre knowledge—an analyst's knowledge of what genres *may* likely emerge as a response—informed the inclusion of the report. As RGS scholars, our own genre knowledge matters. Our genre knowledge informs where we may look for questions of response and responsibility when we assemble genre ecologies, particularly when we take the emergence of genres as responses to recurrent situations to no longer be limited to bounded settings. In the case of the June 3, 2015 flood and fire disaster in Ghana, the genre ecology I have constructed here allows for an appreciation of the demand for concerted, collaborative action that attends disasters and calls attention to the complex dynamics of responsibilities. The analysis in this article also holds relevance for how we might consider studying multiple, varied responses, such as genres that emerge in the public domain in the aftermath of police shootings, for example. Given both their public nature and the accountability and responsibility demanded in such circumstances, police shootings and similar such public incidents lend themselves to analyses in which genre ecologies undergirded by framings from multiple actors help to locate burdens of action and responsibility. Ultimately, my analysis in this article has revealed that as they operate within the contingent environment of public spheres, genres in the public domain serve multiple, varied functions that together respond to the multiplicity of challenges presented by the diffused contexts of publics.

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