In the wake of Cyclone Mora

#ResearchMatters

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AS the news of the cyclone named Mora (a Thai word which means 'star of the sea') erupted on social and traditional media, I couldn't help recall the 1991 cyclone. While we experienced torrential rains in Dhaka, Chittagong and other coastal cities/islands like Swandip and St. Martin's were being washed bare.

We had visited our extended family members in Chittagong soon after the cyclone. Our cousins filled us in: there were balls of fire in the air on that night and the next day when they emerged there were dead bodies stuck to trees.

That mental image never left me. It's almost as if I had seen it myself. That's the thing with children's imagination, I suppose, they can be surprisingly realistic.

I remember how disease came with death as it became difficult to bury the dead, as the rains wouldn't stop. I remember our Bangla teacher's husband went to the coastal region to provide relief, but was taken ill, and subsequently died. As a 10-year-old then I thought of it as the worst thing that had happened in the world.

Those were the days when Bangladesh made the news for reasons such as – natural disasters, cyclones, floods, and its human cost, and nothing else.

Mora made international news, like old times, but the news read differently. The BBC, for example, said ahead of the cyclone: "Bangladesh tries to evacuate 1 million people." Early reports about the cyclone have very low estimates of the number of people who died – seven to be exact – which means that the human cost has not been high yet, although reports indicate that various places have been "flattened."

This is incredible news as far as disaster preparedness and management goes.

However, disasters like these have a way of disproportionately affecting the most disadvantaged. That among the worst affected by Mora are the people in the Rohingya camps exemplifies this statement.

The effects of disaster are wide-ranging, from experiencing prolonged displacement to trauma to violence. The next steps should involve housing the thousands of people who have been displaced, giving them access to basic necessities including housing and clothing, providing them mental health counselling to those who experience disaster-related stress, and preventing violence against women and children.

As post-disaster work begins, my best hope is that relief, including food and clothing, reaches those who need it the most. I remember, for example, the relief-related corruption in the past which meant that certain people in power amassed great wealth by siphoning off goods meant for the disaster-stricken people while they starved.

I hope such forms of corruption no longer occur.

Symptoms of disaster-related stress include disorientation, headache, depression, mood swings, low attention span, and fear of crowded places. To overcome some of these symptoms individuals need to practise self-care to maintain their mental and physical health by exercising, meditating, and eating well. If symptoms like recurrent nightmares about the hurricane, for example, persist for more than two weeks, individuals probably need help from mental health professionals, as it may be indicative of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Not everyone responds to trauma in the same way, which means care must be taken to not make presumptions about individuals based on their traumatic experiences. Instead, cues should be taken from *responses* to their experiences. We must also remember that in addition to direct victims of disaster, those who respond to disasters as part of rescue efforts are also at heightened risk of experiencing PTSD.

A problem that is heightened at times like these, but is often ignored amidst apparently grander problems, is violence against women. A good example comes from post-tsunami Sri Lanka. After the tsunami in 2004 reports of rape, sexual assault, physical assault, and gang rapes were on the rise in the country while 30,000 people were killed and more than 860,000 displaced. Similarly, a study from 1992 shows that in Bangladesh, sexual violence was on the rise after the aforementioned 1991 cyclone. Studies from the United States and Canada, similarly, indicate that violence against women, including domestic violence, in the aftermath of disaster, is indeed common. In other words, disaster research consistently shows that natural calamities like cyclones bring women disproportionate hardship, which means their vulnerabilities and associated needs have to be seen through a gender-informed lens.

This means we need to think of the needs women have in terms of menstrual hygiene and sanitation; the added vulnerability of losing their communities and social support as they move to shelters where they are at higher risk of stranger rape as well as partner violence. We need to think about the stress that comes with loss of livelihood and housing, and how that may cause relationships to become strained, or even change traditional gender roles. We need to think about the effect of disrupted lives and disrupted roles on women, because women often bear the deepest scars of those changes. We need to think about the role of relief workers and how their positions of power may become a source of coercive control for women.

We need to be particularly aware of this problem because the incidence of violence against women in Bangladesh is among the highest in the world, not counting conflict zones like Afghanistan. That our "normal" levels of violence are so high means that when violence is exacerbated by incidents like cyclones, women and children need further protection, particularly low-income, marginalised ones who are at the highest risk of experiencing violence.

So, while I applaud the structural changes that led to this level of disaster-preparedness in the face of natural disasters, I would like to call for substantial structural change with equal zeal to dismantle the patriarchal system that makes women and children vulnerable in the aftermath of such disasters.

The 1991 cyclone in Bangladesh ended up killing more than 138,000 people and leaving at least 10 million people homeless.

PHOTO: **AP**

The Macron Method

MARK LEONARD

EMMANUEL Macron's election to the French presidency provides the European Union with an opportunity to move past the internal conflicts that have hastened its disintegration. Rather than standing exclusively with the old elites or the new populists, Macron has promised to rally broad political support under the banner of European reform. But can he really breathe new life into an ailing project?

When Macron met with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, he offered a plan for ending the cold war between northern and southern Europe – which is to say the tension between advocates of austerity and those in favour of growth policies.

Likewise, Macron has tried to reconcile the idea of a welcoming Europe with advocacy of a fortress Europe. He wants to take in more refugees, while urging the EU to create a border force of 5,000 soldiers, and to accelerate repatriation of illegal migrants.

But while many EU leaders were relieved to see Macron elected, it is often because they hope he will give a new lease on life to the old project, rather than a radical break with the past. To bring true change, Macron will have to transcend the two contradictory but mutually reinforcing political models that have defined the last decade of EU governance: technocracy and populism.

Technocracy has been a central feature of European integration from the beginning. Jean Monnet, the French economist who is considered one of the modern EU's founders, was renowned for his ability to turn big political conflicts into smaller technical issues. This method was highly successful during the post-war period of European reconstruction, because it allowed diplomats and officials from different countries to bypass national disagreements or lingering resentments and address the continent's most pressing problems.

But, over the years, EU policy discussions have departed from Monnet's model. They now tend to be disconnected from national politics altogether, driven as much by the logic of EU institutions as by member states' needs. Moreover, EU-level decisions have been pickled into rigid codes to which member states must adhere, even if their governments or electorates do not support them. Together, these trends have fed the widespread perception that there are no alternative forms of EU governance, and that Europe is being run by elites who have little concern for the interests of the people they are supposed to be serving.

The populist explosion in recent years is a natural reaction to this disconnected form of technocracy. It is no accident that leaders such as Marine Le Pen in France, Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, and Nigel Farage in the United Kingdom have all posed as tribunes of the "people." Through referenda – their favourite political tool – they have been able to inflict damage on the EU constitutional treaty, the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, refugee-repatriation deals, and, with the UK's Brexit vote, the composition of the EU itself.

As European technocrats have pushed for covert integration to resolve the euro and refugee crises, the populists have struck back even harder. And every time populist-driven referenda against EU treaties force governments to retreat into technocracy, the populist narrative is reinforced.

The UK's Brexit negotiations have already become a battleground between technocrats and populists, with each side vying for an outcome that will support its narrative. When British Prime Minister Theresa May says that she wants to "make a success of Brexit," she sets off alarm bells in Brussels and other European capitals, because such an outcome could inspire populist anti-EU movements elsewhere.

To forestall that scenario, some members of the German government, fearing that they will be unable to accommodate Macron's other demands (particularly concerning eurozone reforms), are hoping to work with him to make Brexit unattractive. This also seems to be what EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker was getting at recently. "Brexit will show how much more attractive it is to be a member of our Union," he said. "Thanks to Europe, people enjoy the freedom to live, buy, love, and trade across borders."

It is understandable that European leaders would latch onto Brexit as the one thing EU member states can agree on. But, unfortunately, the Brexit debate tends to bring out EU elites' worst instincts, not least because it encourages them to fight for the status quo, rather than for reform and innovation.

If the EU continues to look inward, consumed by the questions posed by Brexit, the next five years will be as sterile and unproductive as the last. The big question now is whether Europe can accept the lifeline that Macron is offering, and look forward to a new project, rather than backward to old struggles.

To be sure, many observers have poked fun at Macron for refusing to commit himself to one side in any debate. And satirists have pointed out that he starts almost every sentence with "en meme temps" (at the same time). But for a long-gridlocked EU, Macron's proposed grand bargains could offer a valuable way forward – one that relies not on institutional changes, but on political trade-offs.

Macron's security policies try to square tough anti-terrorism measures with a more humanitarian approach to refugees. On economic policy, he has offered reform in exchange for investment. And, given his tough stance on Russia and support for action in Africa and the Mediterranean, he might even be able to rally the EU's southern and eastern members around a common foreign-policy cause.

If Macron lives up to his promise, he will not stand for technocracy or populism, but for a genuine third way. That is an admittedly shopworn term. But Macron could imbue it with new meaning if he can combine, rather than accept, today's false choices. He will have to bridge the EU's geographic divides, and position himself as pro-European and patriotic, establishment and anti-establishment, open and protectionist, pro-growth and fiscally restrained.

Can Macron's method allow EU leaders to break the vicious circle of technocracy and populism, and end the paralysis of the last decade? For the time being, the only certainty is that – to invoke another hackneyed phrase – there is no alternative.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron in Berlin, May 15, 2017.

PHOTO: **JOHN MACDOUGALL/AFP**
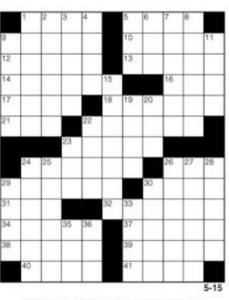

A WORD A DAY

ENNUI
noun

A feeling of listlessness and dissatisfaction arising from a lack of occupation or excitement

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CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Standard
5 Ship pole
9 Zellweger of "Chicago"
10 Be patient for
12 Past plump
13 Yo-Yo Ma's instrument
14 Book checks
16 Find a sum
17 Highlands family
18 Loathing
21 Cow chow
22 Rots
23 Office clerk, at times
24 Scoreboard units
26 Court concern
29 Hotel area
30 Long story
31 Picnic invader
32 Come back
34 Odometer units
37 Like some skirts
38 Irritate
39 Chorus songs
40 Hearty dish
41 Transmit

DOWN

1 Interstellar cloud
2 Eventually
3 Amber source
4 Come together
5 Comic Bernie
6 Stunned wonder
7 Pay
8 Spanish squiggles
9 Kitchen pest
11 "Sweeney --"
15 Refuge
19 High cards
20 Paver's goo
22 Bell sound
23 Shark feature
24 You can bet on them
25 Plug's place
26 Designer Ralph
27 In unison
28 Wizard's props
29 Reader's light
30 Shoplifted
33 Omelet start
35 Preceding time
36 Use a needle

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

BEETLE BAILEY — BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES — BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT