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## Analyzing Rana Plaza crisis discourse from a postcolonial perspective: Implications for identity and crisis communication studies

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ANALYZING RANA PLAZA CRISIS DISCOURSE FROM A POSTCOLONIAL  
PERSPECTIVE: IMPLICATIONS FOR IDENTITY AND  
CRISIS COMMUNICATION STUDIES

An Abstract of a Thesis  
Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

Mir Ashfaqzaman  
University of Northern Iowa  
December 2017

## ABSTRACT

An inherently managerial commitment, functionalist/positivist theoretical orientation, and Western/U.S. bias characterize the dominant stream of crisis communication research and scholarship in the United States. These characteristics render analysis and assessment of crisis and crisis communication especially in non-Western settings somewhat limited in scope and coverage. This limitation becomes all the more apparent when crisis is conceptualized as a social phenomenon, not merely an organizational one. Such conceptualization decenters the organization as the sole source of power to initiate crisis response and management, foregrounds the discursive terrain related to a crisis whereby multiple sources compete with their respective realities about the crisis, and thus challenges the dominant organization-centered logic of crisis communication research and scholarship in the U.S.

This thesis presents a postcolonial theory-driven critical discourse analysis of news coverage on the collapse of a multistoried garment factory building in Bangladesh, which killed more than 1,100 people and wounded more than 2,000 others, and its aftermath, by two newspapers each from the United Kingdom, United States, and Bangladesh. The analysis illustrates how (re)conceptualizing crisis as social phenomenon and crisis communication as discourse destabilizes certain taken-for-granted assumptions that undergird the dominant crisis communication scholarship and research in the U.S.

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This Study by: Mir Ashfaquzzaman

Entitled: Analyzing Rana Plaza Crisis Discourse from a Postcolonial Perspective:

Implications for Identity and Crisis Communication Studies

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts

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To my parents.

I am who I am, what I am, and where I am all because of you.

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When I started the program in the fall of 2015, I did so with trepidation, not least because, for me, it was back to school after 20-odd years, and so far away from home. As I look back now, these two years and a half would certainly rank as one of the best periods in my life and the credit goes to all the wonderful people I met during the program. Thank you, all.

I would like to thank my parents: I am who I am, what I am, and where I am because of them. I would like to thank my family, especially my eldest brother, who is a professor of finance at the University of Northern Iowa, for believing I could do it when I myself was not quite sure.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Two contrasting features, namely, a rapid proliferation of research and a slow pace of theory building, have marked the emergence of crisis communication as “a distinctive area of study” (Coombs, 2010, p. 477). The modern history of crisis communication began with the “notoriety created by Johnson & Johnson Company’s successful handling of the Tylenol scare in 1982” (Heath & O’Hair, 2009, p. 5). In more than 30 years since, although the number of published works on crisis communication has increased significantly (An & Cheng, 2012; Ha & Boynton, 2014), theory building has been slow (Fisherman, 1999). Debates continue as to if there is or should be a unique and independent crisis literature, and disagreements about the usefulness of proposing a unifying metatheory for crisis communication research remain largely unresolved (Heath, 2012). Meanwhile, certain theories (e.g., situational crisis communication theory, image restoration theory, apologia theory) have frequently been, and continue to be, cited while many published works do not even propose research questions or hypotheses based on theories (An & Cheng, 2012). Falkheimer and Heide (2006) also complained of an absence of “systemic knowledge and theoretical framework analysis” (p. 180) in crisis communication research. As such, I argue, mainstream crisis communication research in the United States has remained somewhat limited in its scope and coverage, especially in respect of analyzing and assessing crisis communication in a non-Western setting.

I begin with a review of different definitions of *crisis* and *crisis communication*, arguing that these definitions project unidimensional and unidirectional views, and are

designed and deployed primarily to protect the interest of an organization in crisis. Then, I proceed with an examination of the trends in contemporary crisis communication research, tracing its roots in, and tying its modus operandi with, public relations research. Here, I also discuss how mainstream research on public relations, and subsequently crisis communication, in the U.S. has taken a distinctively different route than the one taken by organizational communication research. The discussion is relevant because of the use of organizational communication as an expansive term to cover any type of communication that the organization engages in, including public relations and crisis communication (Johansson, 2007). This difference in research trends, I argue, is constitutive of certain biases that characterize dominant crisis communication research and scholarship in the U.S. Later, I articulate the purpose of the thesis, and introduce the case I will analyze for the thesis, and explain the reasons why I have chosen it. Finally, I detail the chapter outline for the thesis.

### Definitions of Crisis and Crisis Communication

Multiple definitions of crisis have emerged over the years; however, each conceptualization shares certain common assumptions. Fearn-Banks (1996/2002) defined crisis as “a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting the organization, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services or good name” that “interrupts normal business transactions and can sometimes threaten the existence of the organization” (p. 2). Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer (2003) viewed crisis as “a specific, unexpected, non-routine event or series of events which creates high levels of uncertainty, and significant or perceived threat to an organization’s high priority goals”

(p. 7). Meanwhile, Heath (1995) defined crisis as risk manifested or, in other words, the fallout of a risk either ignored or not effectively addressed. Hearit and Courtright (2003) summarized crisis as “a generally predictable series of events that occurs when an organization’s values are under assault by an external agent or there is a perception that an organization has committed some wrongdoing” (p. 83). A common theme that emerges from these definitions, despite their different points of emphasis, is that a crisis disrupts an organization’s normal operations and compromises its reputation.

Similarly, the varying definitions of crisis communication also have common themes across each conceptualization. Fearn-Banks (1996/2002) defined crisis communication as “the dialog between the organization and its publics prior to, during, and after the negative occurrence” that is “designed to minimize damage to the image of the organization” (p. 2). Notably, *public* in crisis communication does not mean people in general; public or publics in crisis communication denote certain groups of people (e.g., employees, customers, stakeholders, board members) on whom an organization “depends... for survival because they have some stake in the organization” (p. 3). Coombs (2012) defined crisis communication as “the collection, processing, and dissemination of information required to address a crisis situation” (p. 20). Seeger and Sellnow (2013), on the other hand, argued that crisis communication could be understood as “the ongoing process of creating shared meaning among and between groups, communities, individuals and agencies, within the ecological context of a crisis, for the purpose of preparing for and reducing, limiting and responding to threats and harms” (p. 13). These definitions are built on the assumption that crisis communication is a

practice and strategy intended to protect and promote, and repair and restore the image/reputation of a crisis-hit organization.

A key concept that characterizes the definition of both crisis and crisis communication is perception. For example, Coombs (2009) suggested that crisis is “largely perceptual” and that “[i]f stakeholders believe there is a crisis, the organization is in a crisis unless it can successfully persuaders it is not” (p. 99). Thus, he postulated crisis communication as a practice that seeks to “influence how the stakeholders react to the crisis and the organization in crisis” (p. 100). Hearit and Courtright (2003) also emphasized the perceptual dimension in their postulation of crisis communication in terms of “terminological influence” to “symbolically ‘resolve’ the crisis by argumentatively altering perceptions in a manner favorable to organizational interests” (p. 83). Inherent in these definitions is the recognition that multiple perceptions exist surrounding a crisis event but the emphasis, again, is to ensure that only one of these perceptions prevails, the one that favors the organization’s interest.

Overall, the different definitions of both crisis and crisis communication have at their core an overarching concern and consideration for the organization’s interests. This centrality of the organization’s interests in crisis communication and crisis communication research, as I discuss in the next section, is an inheritance from public relations and public relations research.

### Trends in Crisis Communication Research

Crisis communication remains essentially an extension of public relations as an area of both practice and research. Fearn-Banks (2009) observed that crisis has generally

driven the profession of public relations and that most public relations programs are about either recovering from or preventing a crisis. Moreover, a great deal of crisis communication scholarship draws on public relations research and practices (Coombs, 2012; Falkheimer & Heide, 2006), and a sizeable majority of crisis communication research is produced by academic experts on public relations and corporate reputation (Heath, 2012). It is, thus, important to contextualize crisis communication research within the broader discipline of public relations (Coombs, 2010). Such a contextualization is also necessary to understand the public relations focus in crisis communication research, which, I argue, is at the heart of some of its other biases. At the same time, it is necessary as well to distinguish public relations and crisis communication research from organizational communication research. Although organizational communication is generally understood to be an umbrella term for whatever communication that an organization engages in, including public relations and crisis communication, public relations and crisis communication research has taken a distinctively different route from organizational communication research. The difference is discussed in the next section.

#### Disconnect between Organizational Communication and Public Relations Research

Organizational communication research barely provides the context for understanding the trend in public relations research. Public relations, in fact, has had little to no space in organizational communication research. Most organizational communication scholars have maintained a distinction between communication within and beyond the organization, regarding “most communication aimed at *external* audiences...as alien to the field” (Cheney & Christensen, 2001a, p. 231; emphasis in

original). They also dismissed public relations as “too closely tied with a particular profession” (Cheney & Christensen, 2001b, p. 170). Questions and concerns of professionals and practitioners have always driven the public relations research agenda, and professionals and practitioners predominantly conducted early public relations research (Karlberg, 1996). Moreover, public relations research has often been sponsored and thus seen as “wed to the self-interest of specific clients” (p. 265). These reasons could well explain the historical reluctance of many organizational communication scholars to associate with, let alone own, public relations.

That said, public relations scholars are no less to blame for the “lack of interaction, networking, and cross-fertilization of ideas” because they “have tended to avoid contact with organizational communication, at conferences as well as in the pages of communication journals” (Cheney & Christensen, 2001b, p. 170). This preference for a closed network may be a reason why “[p]robably more than any other subdivision of communication, public relations has developed its own specialized journals, professional and scholarly associations, publishers, and network of collaborative relationships” (Botan & Taylor, 2004, p. 646). Subsequently, with public relations researchers rarely publishing their works in other journals, communication and mass communication researchers have not had wide access to public relation scholarship and the erroneous understanding of public relations as “an applied technical area” has persisted.

Of late, though, communication scholars, especially in Europe, have begun to argue against the internal-external communication divide in general and the organizational communication-public relations disconnect in particular, postulating



“strategic communication” as a “transboundary concept that captures the complex phenomenon of an organization’s targeted communication processes” (Falkheimer & Heide, 2014, p. 124). Yet, this counterintuitive and counterproductive mutual exclusivity continues to characterize the relationship, or lack thereof, between organizational communication and public relations research. Moreover, public relations research has also had a distinctively different theoretical orientation than that of organizational communication. It has typically had a functionalist approach with the focus on “techniques and production of strategic organizational messages” (Botan & Taylor, 2004, p. 651). This functionalist theoretical approach has also been transferred to crisis communication research and scholarship because of its predominantly public relations focus, which is discussed in the next section.

### Public Relations Focus

To understand the public relations focus in crisis communication research, it is first necessary to examine the conceptualization of public relations in contemporary scholarship. Berger (1999) likened the conceptualization of public relations with “a process intended to construct an ideological worldview... a self-interested and partial representation of the world based on a particular set of beliefs, ideas, attitudes, and objectives” (p. 186). Most organizations, as Grunig (1989) argued, seek to construct a worldview where they know best and where the public “would willingly ‘cooperate’ with the organization” if they “had ‘the big picture’ or understood the organization,” and should do so for their own benefit (p. 32). So, the objective is to create ‘the big picture’

or, to put it differently, the organization's version of the reality, and persuade publics into buying it.

Crisis communication apparently has a similar focus: propagating a 'big picture' that minimizes or condones an organization's responsibility and/or culpability for a crisis. The emphasis is on "strategies and processes that organizations ought to take to secure favorable positions in times of crisis" (Kim & Dutta, 2009) and "avoid legal sanctions and punitive damages" (Waymer & Heath, 2007, p. 88). The transference of the public relations focus to crisis communication research is largely due to the fact that crisis communication scholars are "mostly based in public relations" and interested in "protecting and defending an organization's reputation" (Falkheimer & Heide, 2009, p. 56). In other words, with public relations scholars conducting much of the research, crisis communication is bound to have a public relations focus.

#### Informal vs. Formal Research

That questions and concerns of professionals and practitioners have driven the research agenda has also been a contributive factor. In fact, as Coombs (2012) noted, practitioners authored initial crisis communication research for non-academic journals, describing cases without any analytic framework. Subsequently, academics took up crisis communication research for publication in academic journals, and "introduced specific theoretical frameworks or principles for analyzing cases" (Coombs, 2012, p. 23). However, crisis communication research has remained predominantly concerned with developing best practices for crisis managers on how to protect and defend the organization's image/reputation.

Formulation of tactical (e.g., how organizational spokespeople should interact with the media) and strategic (e.g., how organizational spokespeople should align their messages with organizational objectives) advices, in other words, remain the mainstays of crisis communication research. In making a distinction between informal and formal crisis communication research, Coombs (2012) argued that the former employs such rhetorical theories as corporate apologia, image restoration, and renewal discourse “to dissect and to interpret cases and to generate insights into crisis communication” (p. 30) while the latter theories like situational crisis communication to explain and predict how particular crises necessitate particular communicative responses. However, I argue, the distinction is more often stylistic than substantive since both formal and informal research in crisis communication ultimately have the common objective of developing tactical and strategic advices for crisis communicators.

For example, as per Coombs’s distinction, Littlefield and Quenette’s (2007) study is informal since it drew on Kenneth Burke’s perspectives on “the nature, functions, and consequences of language as symbolic action” to explain how the media framed the crisis response from the federal, state, and local governments and agencies in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (p. 28). On the contrary, Liska, Petrun, Sellnow, and Seeger’s (2012) study, which employs chaos theory to explain predictive and explanatory ineffectiveness of the local authorities’ crisis communication efforts, belongs to the formal research category. Yet, in terms of objective, both essentially sought to offer insights into how organizational spokespersons should not communicate (i.e., tactical) and formulate message (i.e., strategic) at times of crises. I would also argue that Coombs’s (2012)

classification of informal crisis communication on the basis of corporate apologia, image restoration, and discourse renewal is rather tenuous since these frameworks should be viewed as parts of a continuum. In fact, image restoration and renewal rhetoric both draw on corporate apologia's denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence strategies.

Overall, crisis communication research remains, largely, unidirectional in its objective (i.e., formulation of tactical and strategic advices for organizational managers) and unidimensional in its orientation (i.e. assessment and evaluation of communication in terms of effectiveness). These objectives and orientations ultimately account for its inherent biases and weaknesses that have rendered crisis communication research deficient by ignoring areas of investigation that should be a part of its purview. In the ensuing section, I discuss the managerial and Western/U.S. biases, and exclusively positivist/functionalist disposition of dominant crisis communication research, and how these factors limits its scope and coverage, especially in terms of crises in non-Western settings. The discussion also sets the stage for articulation of the rationale and purpose of my study, and introduction of the case I have analyzed.

#### Weaknesses in Crisis Communication Research and Scholarship

Much of crisis communication research has followed a somewhat predictable pattern, from describing the crisis event to explaining its cause to evaluating the effectiveness of an organization's communication through its different stages (e.g., Cole & Fellows, 2008; Hearit & Courtright, 2003). Researchers have generally investigated crisis events and consequent responses, communicative and otherwise, with the same set of variables, not recognizing factors (e.g., culture and race) that play crucial roles in

instigating crisis and influencing crisis response. Such inflexibility of research orientation boils down to researchers' commitment to a managerial perspective, inclination to positivist theorizing, and bias to the West/U.S.

### Managerial Bias

Dominant crisis communication scholarship in the U.S. views crisis from an organizational perspective (i.e., as a disruption in normal operations, and a threat to image/reputation) even when an organization may be responsible for the crisis (e.g., Liska et al., 2012). Consequently, crisis management and response is driven by a logic of organizational damage control in terms of image and economics. However, as Heath (2012) noted, it is often the case that ordinary people suffer infinitely more than organization's owners and managers. The Bhopal tragedy is a case in point. Although more than 3,000 people were killed and thousands more were affected in the aftermath of the deadly gas leak from the Union Carbide plant, crisis communication researchers were more interested in "the role of rhetorical strategies in repairing damaged corporate relationships" (Waymer & Heath 2007, p. 94). Kim and Dutta (2009) attributed such marginalization of victims in mainstream crisis communication literature to "the managerial commitments of crisis communication researchers" (p. 143). The managerial bias, as discussed previously, is an inheritance from the broader discipline of public relations.

Such a bias is apparent in the suggestions that researchers offer for effective crisis communication. Although Coombs (2012) asserted that recent research, especially on renewal discourse, emphasizes how the audiences "react to crisis events and crisis

response strategies,” instead of examining “the messages the crisis managers create” and inferring their “effects on the audience” (p. 35), it is anything but a shift from organizational to public perspective. The study by Smith, Coffelt, Rives, and Sollitto (2012) is instructive in this regard. They interviewed 29 victims of the 2009 ice storm in Kentucky and found out that they “remembered their overall experience through positive terms and positive interpersonal communication” (p. 53). The finding led the researchers to conclude that “message designers for organizations, media outlets, and governmental agencies should be mindful of the unique attributes of the victims they serve and determine if positive communication can occur post-crisis” (p. 53). Simply put, the audience perspective and perception is important insofar as it helps the organization improve its crisis communication efficacy, meaning that the organizational perspective ultimately holds the upper hand.

### Positivist Theorizing

The prevalent managerial bias or commitment informs the theoretical orientation of crisis communication research, which is overwhelmingly positivist in paradigm whereby communication is “conceived as simple expression,” and “evaluated in terms of its effectiveness” (Mumby, 1997, p. 4), and rhetorical in tradition whereby communication problems are viewed as “social exigencies that can be resolved through the artful use of discourse” (Craig, 1999, p. 135). Notably, as Curtin and Gaither (2005) and Karlberg (1996) pointed out, the emphasis is on formulation of persuasive messages towards effective diffusion of crisis. Simply put, dominant crisis communication

scholarship invests in a linear transmission-based model where the information flow is unidirectional, from the organization to the public.

The most commonly cited and/or employed theories in dominant crisis communication research (e.g., corporate apologia, image repair/restoration, renewal discourse, situational crisis communication theory, attribution theory) are grounded in empiricist epistemology (i.e., reality can be knowable through systematic observation), non-actional ontology (i.e., meaning is predetermined), and value-neutral axiology (i.e., scholarship is value free) (Littlejohn, 2002). In other words, crisis communication research is largely invested in the understanding that meaning lies in the text and is independent of context, and, most importantly, that meaning is preordained and the receiver (the public) essentially deciphers the message as intended by the sender (the organization). Thus, most literature conceptualizes the efficacy of a crisis message rests in how the organization formulates it.

Such an understanding discounts any role an individual's interpretation may have in the process of communication, let alone their culture, ethnicity, sex, gender, age, and so on. Troublingly, dominant crisis communication treats individuals as being above and beyond their identity — cultural, ethnic and otherwise. Furthermore, there is an underlying assumption that people across geographic and cultural borders react and respond to crisis and crisis messages as Westerners/Americans do. As Lee (2005) noted, not only is there a scarcity of crisis communication studies in non-Western cultures, the very “conception of crisis communication is dominated by and unchallenged in a Western-oriented paradigm” (p. 276). What this West/U.S.-centricity does, as I argue

later, is that it renders the dominant theoretical framework inadequate and/or ineffective to analyze and assess crisis communication in a non-Western setting.

### Western/U.S. Bias

Explanations on why much of crisis communication research in the U.S. focuses on crisis and crisis response in the Western/U.S. setting range from the benign to the baneful. The most charitable explanation could be that theorizing in public relations and, by extension, crisis communication has mostly “taken place in the United States... and [is]... based on empirical evidence gathered by analyzing U.S. organizations” (Sriramesh, 1996, p. 171). However, as Lee (2005) argued, it could very well be reflective of “underlying ethnocentrism among researchers and practitioners” (p. 287). It could also be an “‘America knows best’ cultural worldview” (Wakefield, 1996, p. 25) that frames Western scholars’ explanations and evaluations of crisis communication regardless of contexts or geographic and cultural borders.

Such ethnocentrism may, in fact, be typical of cross-cultural communication studies in general. Yum (1988) complained of a tendency in cross-cultural communication studies to “simply describe the foreign communication patterns and then compare them to those of North America” without quite going “beyond the surface to explore the roots of such differences” (p. 374). In their theorizing of crisis and crisis communication in settings outside the West/U.S., crisis communication scholars have displayed a similar tendency. Heath and O’Hair (2009) observed that understanding crisis communication requires examination of “the nature of people and the society they build” and “insight into society as a foundation” (p. 5). Yet, when it comes to crisis in non-



Western settings, theorizing has been done with theoretical frameworks developed in and for Western/U.S. context. In the next section, a few such cases are discussed.

### Crisis in non-Western Settings

A number of crisis communication studies in non-Western contexts exemplify the way that Western theorization constrains scholarship in the crisis communication field. For example, Liu, McIntyre, and Sellnow (2008) employed narrative theory to analyze the Chinese government's crisis communication exercise in the wake of the SARS outbreak. They demonstrated how it successfully used the state-owned newspaper to advance a heroism narrative, highlighting the efforts of healthcare workers to contain the outbreak and ensure proper care of the afflicted, thus restoring public faith in its ability to manage the epidemic. Heath, Li, Bowen, and Lee (2008) also analyzed and assessed the official crisis communication during the SARS outbreak in China. Their focus, however, was on how the initial narrative that the Chinese government espoused proved dysfunctional in a culture of secrecy and noncooperation that pervades Chinese society. Overall, albeit conducted in non-Western settings, these studies, too, focused exclusively on the organizational perspective of crisis and positivist/functionalist understanding of communication that characterize dominant Western notions of crisis communication.

The social dimension of crisis is largely absent from such studies, be it in Western or non-Western contexts. Of course, exceptions are there. For example, Thombre (2008) highlighted the domination of denial, dismissal, dread, and discrimination in the dominant discourses over HIV/AIDS pandemic in India, arguing how such discourses could precipitate an unthinkable crisis in one of the most populous countries in the world.

He also advanced a *coherence discourse* aimed at “creating a model of comprehensive dialogue-based prevention programs that are backed by holistic care, treatment, and support services” and “broader involvement of families and communities, keeping in mind different contexts, cultures, and resources” (p. 194). This focus on contexts, cultures, and resources becomes rather unavoidable when crisis is defined for not just its organizational dimensions but also its social ramifications (Heath & O’Hair, 2009), something that dominant U.S.-driven crisis communication scholarship has largely not done so far.

Such a (re)definition of crisis is not possible within an organization/manager-centric, positivism/functionality-driven, and Western/U.S.-biased crisis communication research. Several scholars (e.g., Kim & Dutta, 2009; McHale, Zompetti & Moffitt, 2007; Waymer & Heath, 2007) challenged the largely uncontested logic of crisis communication and its ideological assumptions, advancing analytical frameworks grounded in theories belonging to critical (e.g., hegemonic theory) and postmodernist (e.g., subaltern theory) paradigm. However, these scholars and their studies constitute a minority in contemporary crisis communication scholarship. My thesis project, described in the ensuing section, continues with the conversation these scholars have initiated.

### The Purpose of the Thesis Project

This thesis project looks at a crisis in a non-Western setting, namely the Rana Plaza collapse and its aftermath in Bangladesh, from a theoretical perspective rarely used in contemporary crisis communication research and scholarship, namely postcolonial theory. As indicated in the preceding section, one of the purposes of my thesis project is

to challenge the dominant logic of contemporary U.S.-based crisis communication research and scholarship by foregrounding the social dimension of crisis. Such a disruption can complicate the understanding of crisis and crisis communication in several ways. For example, crisis could be understood in terms of social discourse (Davis & French, 2008) or in terms of competing social realities constructed by different stakeholders (McHale et al., 2007). In such understanding of crisis, context, and not merely text, becomes crucial in crisis communication.

To understand the crisis communication surrounding the Rana Plaza incident, the thesis project analyzes the news coverage of the industrial disaster by the local and international print media. The reason to select media text for analysis is twofold: first, the media are regarded as a crucial conduit for crisis communication; and two, there are many instances whereby the media informed and influenced social discourse on individual and collective identities (e.g., Mădroane, 2012; Sing, 2011).

Crisis communication scholars are unanimous in their recognition of the centrality of the media's role in the information dissemination and knowledge management objectives of crisis communication (Coombs, 2010; Veil & Ojeda, 2010). Sellnow and Seeger (2013) emphasized the media's "central role in crisis communication" for their capacity for rapid dissemination of "information to mass audiences during crises" (pp. 138–139). Fearn-Banks (2009), in fact, designated the media as the conduit for organizational crisis communication and ranked organizational relations with the media as one of the ten best practices related to crisis communication. Meanwhile, Holladay (2009) suggested that organizations should actively participate in the "crisis framing

process” to have “a positive influence” on how the media report a crisis (p. 216). This suggestion is understandable in view of the media’s propensity to transition from being “a vehicle providing the public with information to clarify the chaos surrounding the start of the crisis” to “assuming a privileged position of pointing blame toward legitimate authorities” (Littlefield & Quenette, 2007, pp. 27-28). This suggestion also reflects a recognition of the media’s capacity to create a crisis of public perception for an organization even when the organization’s action does not warrant it. For example, Sellnow and Sellnow (2014), and Spence, Lachlan, Lin, Sellnow-Richmond, and Sellnow (2015) studied how the media may negatively frame an organization’s standard operating procedure through exemplars, created through frequent use of shocking visuals and catchphrases. Overall, the suggestion for organizations to actively work with the media underscores the knowledge management function of crisis communication.

Critical communication scholars often point to the existence of multiple contrasting and contesting discourses surrounding a crisis event (e.g., Hearit & Courtright, 2003; McHale et al., 2007). The news media play a dual role in crisis discourse: convey and contribute. Most importantly, they shape the crisis discourse, using “nuanced language and labels... to both facilitate and to limit knowledge about social phenomena” while maintaining “[the] pretense of neutrality” (Davis & French, 2008, pp. 245-246). These nuanced language and labels structure public perceptions about crisis events, discursively constructing, in other words, the phenomena on the one hand and the identities of those involved. Such discursive constructions of phenomena (e.g., “tragedy”

or “disaster”) and identities (e.g., “victims” or “survivors”) are seldom neutral or natural but almost always political (van Dijk, 2001).

In view of such realities relating to the media’s role in social discourse surrounding crisis events, the purpose of the thesis is ultimately twofold: to identify differences in discursive (re)construction by the local and global news media of the Rana Plaza tragedy and the identities of the people who experienced it; and to explore how these differences are informed by postcolonial awareness or neocolonial/imperial impulses.

### The Rana Plaza as a Crisis

The collapse of Rana Plaza at Savar in Bangladesh was the worst industrial accident in South Asia since the leak of deadly gas from the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal, India, left at least 3,800 people dead (“Disaster in Bangladesh,” 2013). It was inarguably the worst industrial disaster in the readymade garment industry in Bangladesh and, for that matter, anywhere in the world. However, it was not the first time that a factory building had collapsed in Bangladesh:

Building collapses are unsettlingly common, especially in the overcrowded capital where construction laws are frequently ignored. An estimated 500 people have been killed in similar disasters over the past decade, including 73 garment workers in a similar factory collapse in Savar in April 2005. (Campbell, 2013)

Also unsettlingly common are fire incidents in readymade garment factories. Exactly six months before the collapse of Rana Plaza, a devastating fire at an apparel factory at Ashulia, on the outskirts of the capital Dhaka, left 112 workers killed. A subsequent

government inquiry found “a host of violations at Tazreen Fashions” (Manik & Yardley, 2012):

Managers on some floors closed collapsible gates to block workers from running down the staircases, the ground-floor warehouse was illegal and the building’s escape plan improper, and the factory lacked a required closed-circuit television monitoring system. None of the fire extinguishers in the factory appeared to have been used on the night of the fire, suggesting poor preparedness and training.

The inquiry recommended that the owner of the factory should be pressed with criminal charges for “unpardonable negligence.” Yet, it took international pressure, sustained protests in Bangladesh, and more than a year to have the owner of the factory behind bars. It was not until January 2016 that his trial began in the court of law.

In case of the Rana Plaza tragedy, a high-level government inquiry, which reported its findings within a month of the incident, indicated that the building’s collapse was a long time in the making (Yardley, 2013). First and foremost, substandard materials were used during the construction of the building while building codes were blatantly disregarded. In fact, the government inquiry accused the mayor of the local municipality of unlawfully granting approval for the construction of the building, named Rana Plaza after its owner Sohel Rana. Moreover, it was built on a piece of land developed through earth-filling of a pond. Besides, while the approvals were for five stories, Mr. Rana constructed three additional levels; these floors were rented out to readymade garment factories that employed several thousand workers. Large power generators were also placed on these floors, which were necessary because of frequent power outages, a regular feature in Bangladesh. The poorly constructed building would shake ominously

whenever the generators were switched on. Apparently, the owner of Rana Plaza and the factory bosses chose to ignore the risk that they were putting the apparel workers as well as other tenants of the building.

Then, again, on the day before the collapse, cracks developed in the building, making so much noise and shaking the structure so much that many workers fled the building and refused to come back. An engineer was called in, to inspect the cracks; he concluded that the building was unsafe. The engineer appeared on a private television channel saying that he had told Mr. Rana, after his inspection that the building should be evacuated because it was not safe (“Bangladesh Official: Disaster Not,” 2013). He also claimed that he had asked government engineers that the building needed to be examined further.

Meanwhile, the police had ordered that the building be evacuated and, within hours after cracks had developed in the building, the branch of a private commercial bank and several other shops housed in the lower floors evacuated. The next morning, however, Mr. Rana, a local leader of the ruling Awami League’s youth wing, dismissed the engineer’s warning and widespread concern about the building’s safety as “nothing serious” (Campbell, 2013). He and owners of the clothing factories ordered the workers into the building on the morning of the fateful day. Soon after they went in, there was a power outage and the heavy generators were switched on, shaking the weakened structure. In about 15 minutes, the building came crashing down on the hapless hundreds.

The rescue operation was itself at the receiving end of widespread complaints and controversies:

The rescue operation was a fiasco, with the area not even cordoned off. Tens of thousands of bystanders besieged the site, some entering the wreckage. Soldiers and firemen were present, but it was mostly left to locals to drag out survivors and corpses. At one point bystanders pelted volunteers with stones for making such slow progress, prompting police to use tear gas. Every day the stench of rotting bodies grew. (“Disaster in Bangladesh,” 2013)

When the rescue efforts were officially called off, about three weeks after the building collapsed, the death toll had topped 1,100 and many workers still remained unaccounted for.

Just as in the case of the Tazreen Fashions factory fire, the Rana Plaza cases have gone through delays and deferments. Mr. Rana, the owner of Rana Plaza who had gone into hiding immediately after the collapse, was arrested near the Bangladesh-India border on April 28, 2013. It took the police more than two years to press charges of culpable homicide and negligence against him and 41 others in three criminal cases on June 1, 2015. Worse still, the trial began only in June 2016. While Mr. Rana, the prime accused, and five others are in jail, 23 are out on bail and 13 others remain fugitive (Islam, 2016). Given the notorious backlog of cases in Bangladesh’s judicial system, justice could be delayed indefinitely, if not denied altogether. Thus, it comes as little surprise that one of the survivors of the Rana Plaza tragedy, who lost her husband in the building collapse, wondered “the culprits will be punished” (Manik & Najjar, 2015).

#### Proposed Chapter Outline of Thesis

The thesis has four more chapters. In Chapter 2, I review the literature on postcolonial theory, and crisis, media and news framing, leading to the two research questions that will guide my thesis. In Chapter 3, I explain and justify my use of critical



discourse analysis as my research methodology, and also my source of data. In Chapter 4, I present the data analysis. In Chapter 5, I first discuss the implications of my research, in view of the limitations that I have identified in the dominant crisis communication research and scholarship in the U.S. Then, I discuss the heuristic directions that the thesis project offers.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The dominant crisis communication scholarship in the U.S. is driven by an organizational/managerial commitment, characterized by a positivist/functionalist understanding of communication, and grounded in a Western/U.S. bias. These multiple biases make crisis communication research somewhat limited in scope and coverage, especially where a crisis in non-Western settings is analyzed. To break away from such rigidity and predictability, I argue, a foregrounding of the social dimension of crisis is needed. This, as I have discussed and sought to demonstrate in the previous chapter, complicates our understanding of crisis communication in several ways. I am especially interested in understanding how local and global media outlets contributed to the discursive (re)construction of the crisis in the aftermath of the Rana Plaza incident in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is a country with a strong postcolonial legacy. The nation had been ruled by the British colonizers as part of the Indian subcontinent and then by the West Pakistan-based political and military elite before it secured its political freedom in 1971 after about nine months of bloody armed struggle. At the same time, Bangladesh has been swept by the globalization of capitalist economy and transnational media, with the two working hand in hand “to ideologically condition a moral order, to transform the way people conceptualize their lives, shape common sense, or even to limit the boundaries of imagination” (Artz, 2003, p. 56). In other words, social discourse in Bangladesh is in the

midst of contrary pulls of colonial legacy, postcolonial awareness, and neocolonial/imperial impulse.

Again, as Davis and French (2008) argued, the media do more than disseminate information during a crisis; they shape social discourse about the crisis and discursively (re)produce identities of those affected by it. News-framing is often the process that media organizations employ in such discursive (re)construction of a crisis and also the identities of the individuals and institutions it affects. I am, thus, interested in examining, through a postcolonial theoretical lens, how the media, both local and global, frame the Rana Plaza tragedy and discursively (re)construct the crisis and the identities of individuals affected by the crisis. As such, in this section, I proceed with a review of the literature, first on postcolonial theory, and then on crisis and news framing. The review culminates in the research questions for the thesis project.

### Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory is often defined in terms of what it does, rather than what it is. For example, Burney (2012) noted that it has been used as a “critical tool” to deconstruct the underlying layers, structures, and forms that are embedded in the colonial past and the postcolonial present” and as a “theoretical lens” to critique “[w]ide-ranging issue relating to nationalism, history, socio-economics, geopolitics, and international relations” (p. 42). Nayar (2010), on the other hand, defined postcolonial theory as “a method of interpreting, reading and critiquing the cultural practices of colonialism, where it proposes that the exercise of colonial power is also the exercise of racially determined powers of representation” (p. 25). Others have defined postcolonialism as a wide array of critical

practices that seeks to “dismantle the West as the normative center of the world, to move beyond West-centered historicism, beyond imperial binary structures of Self/Other and center/periphery, and ultimately beyond any form of imperialism” (Rao, 2011, p. 792). In other words, postcolonial theory has been conceptualized as a critical tool, a method of reading and interpretation, a conglomeration of critical practices, so on and so forth.

Its origin is also contested. *Orientalism* (1978) is often dubbed the precursor to postcolonial studies, and its author, Edward Said, as its father, “a paternity he strenuously denied but a designation he could not escape” (Parry, 2013, p. 107). Then, of course, there is the school of thought that traced postcolonial discourse in the work of Franz Fanon, for example. What is, however, beyond doubt is that the works of Said and Fanon were instrumental in the emergence of colonial discourse analysis, which also explains “modern colonialism and imperialism as integral to capitalism’s beginnings, expansion, and ultimate global entrenchment” (p. 107). Said, in particular, introduced a new way to make meaning of texts, literary and otherwise, and interrogated the hitherto taken-for-granted assumption that canonical Western literature, especially as it pertained to how the Orient was conceptualized or, to use his own word, imagined, was above and beyond the worldliness of politics.

Said’s (1978) interrogation of Orientalism, the study of the Orient in post-Enlightenment Europe, was predicated on two core arguments. First, the “ontological and epistemological distinction” (p. 2) between the Occident and the Orient was as imagined as the geographical boundaries between the West and the East; and second, production of such distinctions and, for that matter, the Orientalist discourse in general was inherently

part of a greater political project. The central thesis of Said's text was that Orientalism was essentially designed to argue for, and thus legitimize, intervention—political, cultural, and even military—by the European powers. His argument, at the time, was seen as blasphemous due to the way it decentered the commonsense view of Western normalcy, if not superiority. Most importantly, it changed the terrains and trajectories of literary and cultural studies forever.

The enduring legacy of Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is the postulation that knowledge generation is not an apolitical exercise, just as the Orientalist study in the post-Enlightenment Europe was not. He drew on Foucauldian *discourse* and Gramscian *hegemony* to explain how the study of the Orient proved to be effective and enduring because it was “a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts...” (p. 12, emphasis in original). Said also asserted that Orientalism was an “enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period” (p. 3). Such production and management was based on how identities of the West and the East were discursively constructed as *us* and *them*, *self* and *other*. It is important to note that such dichotomies were undergirded by a value assignment. In this imagination, as Said argued, the East was *inferior* and needed to be salvaged by the *superior* West.

Said's interrogation of discursive construction of individual and collective identities (e.g., Oriental and Orient), as indicated, has come to be the critical tool for

postcolonial studies. What he employed as a tool to dissect colonial discourse of subjugation is now used to understand the postcolonial discourse of resistance and counter-hegemony. There is, however, the tendency to unduly emphasize the spatiality and temporality of postcolonial theory (e.g., Kavoori, 1998). Shome and Hegde (2002) argued that the postcolonial scholarship is “committed to theorizing the problematics and contexts of de/colonization” but not exclusively focused on “chronicling the facts of colonialism” (p. 250). They added that its commitment and critical goals are “interventionist and highly political” and thus not limited to theorizing “just colonial conditions but why those conditions are what they are, and how they can be undone and redone” (p. 250). What such commitment and critical goals enable postcolonial studies to do is to widen its scope and coverage to critique disparity of power relations that produce and perpetuate the dominant-dominated dichotomy.

In contemporary times, though, the East-West and North-South divides are not as clear as it used to be, for example, during the height of the British colonial enterprise. The distinctions have become increasingly “porous under the conditions of globalization” (Shome & Hegde, 2002, p. 257). Globalization, as Shome and Hegde reminded us, “inevitably heralds a connected world of utopian possibilities—the ultimate dream of corporate slogans” but conceals “the realities of deep divisions and inequities of exchange” (p. 261). To Rao (2011), understanding globalization requires the understanding of “the structure of global power relations which flourishes in the twenty-first century as an economic, cultural, and political legacy of Western imperialism” (pp. 782-783). Murphy (2003) also argued that colonialism has evolved from the physical

to the political and mental, and that the globalization of capitalism is “intimately connected with colonialism and imperialism” (p. 58). Grossberg (2002) made a similar argument that “the contemporary organizations of nations, states, ethnicities, and races are the product of a colonial history and its continuing rearticulation in contemporary local and international, economic and cultural, relations” (p. 369). Postcolonial theory, thus, provides the theoretical and methodological tools to critique globalization.

However, while postcolonial theory provided different disciplines with the conceptual framework and the methodological tool to critique a wide array of issues, its influence on and application in communication studies remain somewhat limited. Kumar (2014) argued that postcolonial studies and communication studies exist in “a rather ambivalent relationship” although both are “centrally concerned with the study of language, communication, and culture in specific contexts” (p. 380). Shome and Hegde (2002), too, wondered why postcolonial theory has remained largely ignored in communication studies although “the politics of postcoloniality is centrally imbricated in the politics of communication” (p. 249). Not surprisingly, thus, save a few rare exceptions (e.g., Kim & Dutta, 2009; McHale et al., 2007; Waymer & Heath, 2007), postcolonial theory has not been used to analyze the role of media discourse during crises.

Surprisingly still, although postcolonial theory is invested in understanding discursive (re)production of identity, its deployment in explication of how the media use particular linguistic and semantic registers to inform and influence social discourses has been rather rare. Most analysis of discursive (re)construction of social phenomena and

(re)production of identities of people associated with those phenomena has been done using critical discourse analysis as both theoretical framework and methodology.

For example, Sing (2011) conducted a critical discourse analysis of the *Guardian* news coverage the old vs. new Europe debate, triggered by the “notoriously unforgettable words—‘You’re thinking Europe as Germany and France. I don’t. *I think that’s old Europe*—issued in 2003 by the then American Secretary of Defense” (p. 143, emphasis in original). Similarly, Mădroane (2012) employed critical discourse analysis of a press campaign by a large circulation Romanian broadsheet to explain how it influenced policy deliberations on the one hand and “dynamic and strategic construal of collective identities” in the Roma, Romanian, and European identity debate on the other (p.103). Both these studies have shown how identities are discursively (re)created through particular linguistic representations.

Relevant to crisis communication, Davis and French (2008) employed critical discourse analysis, in tandem with social constructionism, to explicate, among other things, how the media in their post-Hurricane Katrina coverage used “rhetorical devices, semantic strategies, and normalized terminology (e.g., victim and survivor) that constructed citizens in a particular way” (p. 248). For example, “recurring references to both socioeconomic status and race” were made to “construct a particular identity as the ‘typical’ victim.” (p. 249). The study showed how the media used language and label to project particular identities in respect of the natural disaster. The study also showed how critical discourse analysis could be used with other theories for theoretical frameworks for such analysis.



The ensuing discussion on crisis, media and news framing shows that postcolonial theory offers a potent theoretical tool to examine how media organizations select and produce news frames and thus inform and influence crisis discourse, and how their political/ideological consciousness/conviction (e.g., neocolonial/imperial, postcolonial) (re)shape the discourse and discursively (re)construct a crisis and (re)produce identities of individuals that experience it.

### Crisis, Media, and News Framing

Crisis communication scholars recognize that the media play a crucial role in crisis communication — for two reasons in particular. First, the media can and do quickly disseminate information to the mass audience during a crisis (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013). Typically, people seek information before, during and after a crisis, to assess where they are and what they should do (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003). For example, when Hurricane Katrina ripped through the Gulf Coast of Louisiana and Mississippi in 2005, there was a spike in public demand for information, with those in the area of impact seeking to find out what evacuation plan the local authorities had in place and how they could remain safe while those outside seeking to know the path that the storm would take (Littlefield & Quenette, 2007).

Second, most people learn about crises from the media. Notably, however, as Holladay (2012) argued, the media do not extensively cover every crisis although they may be significant to the affected communities. Crisis communication scholars strive to understand and explain why as a part of their view of the media's agenda-setting role and news framing effects (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013). While agenda-setting underscores

positive correlations between the media's emphasis on certain issues and the audience's attribution of importance to these issues, news framing presupposes that how the media portray an issue influences its understanding by the audience (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Media scholars continue to argue, though, if the two are the two sides of the same coin or if news framing should be subsumed under agenda setting (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). It is beyond doubt, however, that how the news media emphasize an issue or portray an event significantly influences people's perception of the issue and the event (Entman, 1993). Thus, it is important to understand what factors play into news framing.

Societal norms and values, organizational compulsions and constraints, pressures from vested interests, professional routines, and journalists' political and ideological orientations are believed to play significant roles in news selection and production (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2010). Any of these or other factors may translate into "systematic bias in media framing of issues, actors, and events" (Entman, 2010, p. 333). Hence, it is only expected that different media organizations would characterize the same crisis differently (e.g., Tian & Stewart, 2005). Meanwhile, unprecedented advancement of information technology in recent years has resulted in a fast globalization of the media landscape (Christians, 2005). Critical scholars (e.g., Artz, 2003; Murphy, 2003) argue that such media globalization has coincided with the globalization of capitalist economy and led to the rise of media monopoly that essentially dictates what is news and what is not, and, for example, how news is framed. Needless to say, there often is a stark contrast

in how the so-called global, and essentially Western, media frame a crisis compared to the local media.

The very term framing suggests giving prominence to certain elements of reality. In terms of news production, it means highlighting particular aspects of an event or an issue that promote particular understanding of that event or issue. Entman (1993) postulated four functions of frames (i.e., definition of problem, diagnosis of cause, passage of moral judgement, and suggestion of remedies). These functions, he argued, occur in several locations in the communication process, including the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture. Appreciation and analysis of news frames, thus, require a factoring in of the context wherein the communication is taking place. Context, in other words, determines how the framing functions play out (e.g., how the problem is defined, the cause is diagnosed).

De Vreese (2005) drew on Entman's definition of framing, and posited framing as an integrated communicative process that involves "frame-building, frame-setting, and individual and societal level consequences of framing" (pp. 51-52). In news production, the frame-building stage entails selection of frames and its translation into news items while, in the frame-setting stage, interactions between the media frames and the audience's extant understanding and inclination take place. The final stage refers to the impact that the media frames have on the individual as well as the society. Frame-building may entail structural and/or rhetorical processes, with the media including certain information and excluding others on the structural level, and/or taking recourse to

stereotypes and other culturally-dependent constructs on the rhetorical level (Wiesman, 2011).

As indicated earlier, the selection of news frames is a site for conflicts and contests, with societal norms and values, vested interests, professional routines weighing in along with political and ideological orientations of journalists/media organizations (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2010). D'Angelo and Kuypers (2010) noted that, amidst pressure from “politicians, issue advocates, and stakeholders use journalists and other news professionals to communicate their preferred meanings of events and issues,” journalists often add or superimpose their own frames in the news-making process (p. 1). News framing is thus not immune to ideological and political influence and intervention.

The preceding discussion on news framing and associated institutional and individual bias could raise the suspicion that the notion of objectivity in news selection and production, especially in the mainstream media, local and global, is ultimately a myth. The classical definition of good journalists as individuals serving their society through collecting and disseminating information that the members of that society need to be free and autonomous (e.g., Elliott & Ozar, 2010; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001) may be misleading at best and deceptive at worst. As Hartley and Montgomery (1985/2016) noted, news is “active in the politics of sense making, even when the stories concern matters not usually understood as political... and even when it is striving for impartiality” (p. 260). After all, in the current world order, freedom and autonomy for some often entail subjugation for other, and the mainstream media, global and local, often

feed, wittingly or unwittingly, the creation and perpetuation of the divide between the empowered and the disempowered.

### Research Questions

The preceding discussion leads to two broader conclusions. First, the managerial, post-positivist, and pro-West/U.S. logic and its underlying political/ideological assumptions render the dominant crisis communication research and scholarship deficient, and thus themselves need to be questioned and contested. Second, such questioning and contestation ultimately extends the scope and coverage for crisis communication scholarship into examining issues that have so far been largely ignored (e.g., how the media organizations contribute to crisis discourse and associated discursive (re)construction of crisis and identities of institutions and individuals that experience it). These conclusions, in turn, inform the two research questions that guide the present study:

RQ1: What insights about crisis communication emerge in shifting from a traditional, functionalist to a postcolonial theoretical framework for analysis?

RQ2: How do Western and Bangladeshi newspapers support and/or resist a colonial legacy in their framing of the Rana Plaza crisis?

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

Certain broader epistemological assumptions undergird my thesis project. First, the media—both local and global—informed and influenced the crisis discourse surrounding the Rana Plaza tragedy and, in so doing, discursively (re)constructed the crisis and (re)produced the identities (e.g., “victims” and “survivors”) of institutions and individuals who experienced it. Second, the media organizations brought their own politico-ideological biases and assumptions into such discursive (re)construction of event and (re)production of identities. Finally, they employed news framing as a tool for their discursive (re)construction of the crisis and (re)production of relevant identities. Based on these epistemological assumptions, I set out to analyze the coverage of the Rana Plaza tragedy by Western and Bangladeshi English-language newspapers. In the ensuing sections, I first describe the sources that I collected my data from and the procedure that I followed to collect the data. I also put forth explanations as to why I have chosen these sources and not others. I finish the section with a discussion on Critical Discourse Analysis, which I will use as the analytical framework for data analysis.

#### Data Source

The Lexis-Nexis Academic database was accessed for reports in the Western and Bangladeshi newspapers on the Rana Plaza tragedy. “Rana Plaza,” “Rana Plaza tragedy,” and “Rana Plaza disaster” were used as search parameters for reports, features, and editorial comments published between April 24, 2013 when the disaster occurred and April 24, 2016. The search returned more than 900 entries. Texts from two newspapers

each from the United States (i.e., the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*), the United Kingdom (i.e., the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph*), and Bangladesh (i.e., the *Financial Express* and the *New Nation*) were selected. The reason for the selection of U.S. and British newspapers for the analysis was twofold. First, several retail chains operating out of the U.K. and the U.S. (e.g., Children's Place, Walmart, Cato Fashions, Mango) were at the receiving end of the public outrage, both national and international, over the Rana Plaza disaster; these companies had outsourced their readymade garment products from the factories housed in the ill-fated building. Second, Bangladesh was under the British rule for nearly two hundred years from 1757 to 1947, and is very much within the arc of the present-day U.S.-led capitalist hegemony.

The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* were selected from among several U.S. newspapers because of their position in the American media industry and place in the American media history. The two newspapers are among the oldest, most circulated and acclaimed, and most influential news publications in the U.S. The *New York Times* has been in circulation since 1851, sells nearly 1.5 million copies a day, and is the winner of 117 Pulitzer Prizes. The *Washington Post*, on the other hand, has been in circulation since 1877, sells nearly half a million copies every day, and is the winner of 47 Pulitzer Prizes. Similarly, from among newspapers published in the United Kingdom, the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph* were selected for analysis because they are among the most acclaimed, having won the Newspaper of the Year award several times since the award was introduced in 1962, and the most influential. The *Guardian*, which began publication on May 5, 1821 and was known as the *Manchester Guardian* until 1959, predates the

*Telegraph*, which started circulation on June 1, 1855, by more than three decades. In terms of daily circulation, though, the *Telegraph* is substantially ahead, selling, as of December 2016, 460,054 copies compared to the *Guardian*'s 161,091. However, the online edition of the *Guardian* was the fifth most widely read in the world in 2014, with over 42.6 million viewers<sup>1</sup>.

The *New Nation* is one of the oldest English-language newspapers in Bangladesh; it began as a daily paper in 1981 after three years of publication as a weekly. It is also the first independent English-language daily in the country; the two other English-language dailies in circulation at that time were both state-run. In comparison, the *Financial Express* is new; it began publication in 1993. However, it is the first financial English-language daily in Bangladesh with syndication arrangements with the London-based *Financial Times* and the Prague-based *Project Syndicate*. It is important to note here that English-language newspapers have a very limited readership in Bangladesh. The highest-circulated English-language daily sells less than a tenth of the number of copies that its Bangla-language counterpart sells every day. According to the 2014 government figures, the English-language *Daily Star*<sup>2</sup> sold 41,150 copies every day, compared to 553,150 by the Bangla-language *Bangladesh Protidin* (“Bangladesh Protidin Tops Circulation,” 2014). However, the English-language newspapers have “made a niche among the elite, middle class, and decision-makers” and are thus “considerably influential in spite of their smaller circulation figures” (Genilo, Asiuzzaman, & Osmani, 2016, p. 130). This

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<sup>1</sup> Information on the selected British and U.S. newspapers has been sourced from Wikipedia.

<sup>2</sup> The *Daily Star* was not included in the analysis because there was no report by the newspaper on the Lexis-Nexis Academic Database.



influence factor informed and influenced my decision to choose Bangladeshi English-language dailies, and not Bangla-language dailies, for the analysis.

The Lexis-Nexis Academic Database had more entries for Rana Plaza against the two Bangladeshi newspapers (i.e., 179 for the *Financial Express* and 131 for the *New Nation*) than the four international newspapers selected for the study (i.e., 31 for the *New York Times*, 8 for the *Washington Post*, 68 for the *Guardian*, and 16 for the *Telegraph*). Moreover, these entries included duplications and news advisories (i.e., lists of news reports and features). Besides, some of these reports and features only made a passing reference to Rana Plaza. For example, the *New York Times* piece dated August 27, 2015 on a Bangladesh court's embargo on the release of a documentary film on the industrial disaster was not included in the analysis as it focuses exclusively on the court's ruling and its implications. Similarly, the *Financial Express* report dated April 23, 2015 on the Human Rights Watch recommendations for improvement in working condition across Bangladesh's readymade garment industry was excluded because it deals primarily with the 78-page document released by the New York-based human rights watchdog. Furthermore, some more reports and features were excluded from the analysis because they primarily dealt with the daily updates on the rescue operations, and casualty figures. For example, the *New Nation* report dated April 25, 2013 was not selected because it essentially tallies the number of bodies recovered and of people rescued from the rubbles on the day that the building collapsed. These reports were thought to be of limited relevance insofar as the purpose of the thesis is concerned (i.e., how local and

international media discursively (re)constructed the Rana Plaza tragedy and the identities of individuals and institutions that had experienced the crisis).

In the end, 20 items were selected from the *New York Times*, 6 from the *Washington Post*, 23 from the *Guardian*, 4 from the *Telegraph*. These news reports, features, and editorial comments reasonably represented the trajectory of news coverage of the Rana Plaza disaster and its aftermath by the international media organizations. As can be understood from these texts, these newspapers pivoted to the issue of financial compensation for the dead and the wounded within a couple of months of the disaster. This shift in focus, as I argue in the results section, contributed significantly to the discursive (re)construction of the disaster itself and of the identities of the institutions and individuals who experienced it.

The texts selected from the selected British and U.S. newspapers were used to develop a timeline, which subsequently provided the matrix for selecting reports, features, and editorial comments from the two Bangladeshi newspapers. To illustrate, one of the *New York Times* reports is dated April 26, 2013 and, thus, the reports published in the *Financial Express* and the *New Nation* on the same date were selected for analysis. In cases where there were multiple reports in the Bangladeshi newspapers on a particular date, those with similar focus or emphasis vis-à-vis the British and/or U.S. newspapers were selected for analysis. For example, on April 26, 2013, the *Financial Express* published two pieces on the Rana Plaza disaster and the *New Nation* four but only the *Financial Express* items were analyzed because the focus/emphasis was similar to that the *New York Times* report of the same date. Moreover, if the two Bangladeshi

newspapers carried reports on the same incident/development, one of them was selected for analysis. For example, both the *Financial Express* and the *New Nation* reported the arrest of the Rana Plaza owner five days after the building collapsed but the *Financial Express* report was selected for analysis because there was no significant difference in the content and emphasis of the reports. In the end, 26 reports from the Financial Express and 23 from the New Nation were analyzed. Overall, thus, 102 reports, features and editorial comments were analyzed for the study (see Appendix A and B).

#### Data Analysis

My thesis project examined how the local and global media organizations discursively framed the crisis surrounding the Rana Plaza disaster and, in the process, contributed to the (re)production of identities of individuals and institutions that experienced the crisis. Such an examination essentially presupposes that the meaning of any media text is assigned, not innate, and dynamic, not static, warranting an understanding of not just the text and textual structure in news coverage but also its socio-politico-cultural context (Meadows, 2014). As van Dijk (1988) noted, a news analysis could only be socially, politically, and ideologically relevant insofar as it made “explicit implied or indirect meanings of functions of news reports: What is not said may even be more important, from a critical point of view, than what is explicitly said or meant” (p. 17). The emphasis of the analysis was, thus, not on determining how many times a term or a phrase appeared in a news item (i.e., quantitative content analysis) but rather on how it was used to create meaning (i.e., qualitative discourse analysis).

Moreover, implicit in the central assumption of my thesis project is the understanding that media organizations bring their own political and ideological biases into their coverage of incidents and issues, and often give precedence to one particular discourse over others. Given such a critical edge to the project, I have chosen to employ Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary analytical tool. CDA aims to “investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, signaled, constituted, legitimized and so on by language use (or in discourse)” (Wodak, 2001, p. 2), is premised on the assumption that “all discourses are historical and can therefore only be understood with reference to their context” (Meyer, 2001, p. 15), and theorizes “discourse as a moment of social practices” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 122). The description of discourse as social practice, according to Fairclough and Wodak (1997), “implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), the institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it” (p. 258); discourse is not just shaped by but also shapes situations, institutions, and social structures. What it means, among others, is that discourse “constitutes... social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people” (p. 258). As such, CDA is frequently employed to examine and explicate how identity, especially collective identity, are discursively formed and negotiated (e.g., Richardson & Langford, 2015). CDA also views the mass media “as a site of power and social struggle, as well as a site where language is often only apparently transparent” (Wodak & Busch, 2004, p. 110). Several studies have shown the mass media to be active participant in discursive construction and negotiation of collective identities (e.g.,

Mădroane 2012). Overall, the theoretical position, proposition, and preoccupation of CDA is consistent with the critical and postcolonial traditions that frame my project.

In view of the ongoing debate as to whether CDA is a theory or a method or both, questions may arise if it could or should be employed as a methodological tool to complement a theoretical perspective. CDA has been used exclusively as a methodology (Mădroane, 2012), as both a theoretical perspective and a methodological tool (e.g., Alexander, 2013; Cheregi, 2015; Richardson & Langford, 2015) as well as in combination with other methodologies as an analytical tool (e.g., Sing, 2011). Thus, when Van Dijk (2001) argued that CDA is “not a method, nor a theory that simply can be applied to social problems” (p. 96), it could have been an affirmation of CDA’s ontological fluidity as well as flexibility.

It is also important to note that there is not a single methodological model of CDA to follow. Van Dijk (1993) noted that certain *persuasive moves* (i.e., argumentation, rhetorical figures, lexical style, quoting credible witnesses) are used to enhance a particular discourse and, at the same time, undermine others. The discourse analytical study of the selected text for my thesis project was limited to examining and explicating how these persuasive moves were used as discursive strategies. To this end, the selected texts were closely read, which led to the identification of several common points of emphases such as the cause of the disaster, the need for the readymade garment industry to recover, and redress for those affected by the disaster. However, surrounding these points of emphases, the local and global media organizations presented and persisted with

different and sometimes contradictory discourses through employment of the persuasive moves discussed above.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described how the data for my thesis project was collected. I have stated the rationale for the selection of the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph* from the United Kingdom, *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* from the United States, and the *Financial Express* and the *New Nation* from Bangladesh as sources of data. I have also explained the process undertaken to put together the 102 items from these newspapers, including reports, features, and editorial comments. Furthermore, I have offered a rationale why I conducted a qualitative textual analysis, not quantitative content analysis, for the study. Finally, I have reasoned why I chose CDA as the analytical tool, explaining how its theoretical position, proposition, and preoccupation are consistent with the critical and postcolonial bent of for my thesis project. In the next chapter, I present the results of the data analysis.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

For this project, I conducted a qualitative textual analysis of 102 news reports, features, and editorial comments on the Rana Plaza collapse from six English-language news dailies—two each from the United Kingdom, the United States, and Bangladesh. The analysis was aimed at identifying if and how the Bangladeshi newspapers differed with their counterparts in the U.K. and the U.S. in the discursive creation and negotiation of identities of individuals and institutions that experienced—directly and indirectly—the crisis in the aftermath of the collapse of the multistoried building, which killed more than 1,100 people and wounded over 2,000 others. Several common points of emphasis related to the Rana Plaza incident emerged upon a close reading of the texts from the six newspapers. These included the cause[s] of the collapse, its impact[s] on the industry and individuals, and the redress, financial and otherwise, for the dead and the wounded. However, these common points of emphasis did not produce one overarching discourse that one might expect. In fact, there appeared to be two discernible discourses surrounding the Rana Plaza crisis, one advanced and maintained by the Western and the other by the Bangladeshi newspapers. The identities thus created and negotiated were different, too. The analysis also revealed that the difference in the two discourses was directly linked to how the Western and Bangladeshi newspapers framed the collapse of the Rana Plaza. In sum, the discursive creation of identities of individuals and institutions that experienced the Rana Plaza crisis was consequent upon and/or occasioned by the news framing of the Rana Plaza collapse.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section deals with how the Western newspapers framed the collapse of the Rana Plaza, and how their framing was different from that by the Bangladeshi newspapers. In the second section, I describe how these newspapers framed the Bangladesh garment industry (in particular) and Bangladesh (in general) and how such framing is consistent with their discourse on the Rana Plaza collapse. In the third section, I discuss how the Western media approached the compensation issue and how its approach differed from that of the local newspapers. The fourth section traces how the Western media portrays the factory safety initiatives by European and U.S. factories. The fifth and final section depicts the two sets of identities that emerged from the discourses advanced by the Western and Bangladeshi newspapers, and illustrates the connections between the discursive dynamics described and discussed in the preceding sections.

#### Accident vs. Murder: Framing the Rana Plaza Collapse

Within a week of the collapse, it became clear that the number of fatalities would be in several hundreds and could even exceed the 1,000-mark. As the death toll climbed, there were numerous reports in the national and international media on what had caused the collapse and how it could have been averted. The British and U.S. newspapers generally framed the incident as somewhat inevitable. The *New York Times* wrote on April 26, 2013:

What is increasingly clear is that the collapse should not have been a surprise. Factory fires have killed hundreds of garment workers in the past decade. At the same time, many factory buildings are substandard and unsafe.



It was a reference to the frequent occurrence of industrial accidents and the grim record of factory safety in Bangladesh, especially in the readymade garment industry. The *Guardian*, on the other hand, blamed it on systemic dysfunctionality in its April 29, 2013 report:

Rana's [owner of the building] dramatic capture raises a broader question: whether Wednesday's disaster was all the fault of one man, or, as some suggest, was the product of Bangladesh's dysfunctional system, where politics and business are closely connected, corruption is rife, and the gap between rich and poor continues to grow.

The British daily traced the cause of the collapse back to the dysfunctionality of Bangladesh's socio-politico-economic system. The government inquiry report, which was released on May 22, just about a month after the collapse of the Rana Plaza, drew similar conclusions. The *New York Times* summarized the inquiry findings in one short paragraph of its May 23, 2013 report:

Rana Plaza was a disaster waiting to happen, the government report suggested. Mr. Rana illegally constructed upper floors to house garment factories employing several thousand workers, it said. Large power generators placed on these upper floors, necessary because of regular power failures, would shake the poorly constructed building whenever they were switched on, according to the report.

The inquiry report clearly bolstered the British and U.S. newspapers' perspective on the Rana Plaza collapse that it was neither unprecedented nor isolated and might have been inevitable.

The Bangladeshi newspapers were also aware of the systemic dysfunctionality that had contributed to the Rana Plaza disaster. The *New Nation* reported on April 25,

2013 that the owner had not secured approval from the capital city development authorities, known as Rajuk after its Bangla acronym, for the building but gone ahead with its construction, making most of the existence of two contradictory laws:

One such law said a person who want [sic] to construct a building at Savar before 2008 was not required to take Rajuk permission, since it is not located in the city area. Another law said it is mandatory to take such permission. There is a total chaos and dishonest people have taken advantage of it.

It was even more critical in a subsequent editorial comment, published on April 27, 2013:

The building cracked one day earlier, but no authority showed any concern about protecting the lives of few thousand garment workers. The government has become so unaccountable to the people that nobody in the government takes people [sic] lives seriously. The truth is, the country is in the grip of greedy incompetent persons who are busy serving self-interest. The success of the government will be best judge [sic] how many of them have been able to amass how much wealth.

The *Financial Express* was equally scathing in its April 26, 2013 editorial comment:

Tragedies starting from Tazreen Garments to Rana Plaza tell the same story. One need not have to abide by the rules of the country; things are disposed off [sic] by the ‘grace’ of almost ‘almighty’ money and political power. Look at Tazreen. Was the owner arrested for violation of laws? Will the owners, both of the building and factories, be arrested for the ‘murder’ they allegedly committed on Wednesday? The answer is probably a big ‘No.’

Clearly, the Bangladeshi newspapers acknowledged the underlying systemic failures but, unlike their Western counterparts, insisted that the responsibility rested on individuals/institutions that had exploited these failures to their benefit, economic and

otherwise. In other words, factory buildings did not just happen to be unsafe; deliberate use of substandard materials by the owners rendered these structures unsafe.

The use of the term *murder* in the *Financial Express* editorial comment is also instructive in that it emphasized the Bangladeshi newspaper's view on the collapse of the Rana Plaza — that it was the fallout of a series of devious and deviant acts by the owner of the building, the owners of the factories housed therein, and people in power who had overlooked their deviance and deviousness. Simply put, the Bangladeshi newspapers framed the Rana Plaza as a criminal act that warranted retributive measures. Hence, much of their Rana Plaza-related reports was concerned with the public demand for, and progress in, the law enforcement, legal and judicial processes surrounding the collapse of the building. For example, between April 28 and May 15, 2013, the *New Nation* carried reports with headlines such as “Voice for justice gets louder,” “Rana placed on 15-day remand,” “Arrest local MP Murad Jong,” “Rana Plaza engineer held,” “Savar Poura [Municipal] Mayor suspended,” and “Victims’ families for capital punishment to Sohel Rana.”

On the contrary, the British and U.S. newspapers chose to frame the Rana Plaza collapse as an accident/tragedy that was beyond anyone's control and thus incriminated no individual or institution in particular. Such a framing warranted emphasis on assistive measures such as monetary compensation and preventive measures such as factory inspections and factory safety improvements. Intriguingly, the *New York Times* on April 27, 2013 quoted the Bangladesh information as saying: “I wouldn't call it an accident... [but] a murder.” Clearly, just as its Bangladeshi counterparts, the U.S. newspaper, too,

had the option of framing the Rana Plaza incident as an act of crime occasioned by deliberate (in)actions by certain individuals and institutions but chose not to.

Subsequently, the *New York Times* and other Western newspapers also chose not to persist with questions that they had raised earlier in their coverage of the Rana Plaza crisis, questions that pointed to not just moral but, perhaps, also legal responsibility of the Western companies and institutions.

In its report published on April 26, 2013, the *New York Times* quoted a University of California, Berkeley professor as saying:

Even in a situation of grave threat, when they saw cracks in the walls, factory managers thought it was too risky not to work because of the pressure on them from U.S. and European retailers to deliver their goods on time.

He also suggested that “these factories are cutting corners on fire safety and building safety” because Western companies pay low prices for their products. In a similar vein, the *Guardian* reported on April 26, 2013: “The tragedy has focused attention on the low wages paid to Bangladeshi staff, whose cut-price labour allows shops in the west to clock up large profits.” The *New York Times* also mentioned that three of the factories housed in the Rana Plaza were given clearance by well-known Western factory monitoring groups. It reported on April 27, 2013:

A leading factory monitoring group, the Business Social Compliance Initiative, which is based in Brussels, said that two of the factories in the building — New Waves Style and Phantom Apparel — were inspected and had complied with the group’s code of conduct. Another factory in the building, Ether Tex, said on its website that it had passed an inspection by a monitoring group in Düsseldorf, Germany, the Service Organization for Compliance Audit Management. The

website said Ether Tex was being evaluated by the Business Social Compliance Initiative.

The report added though that these groups focused on if factories had smoke detectors or whether they keep their exit doors locked, and that they left building structure or fire escapes for the government inspectors to assess. Nonetheless, these explanations could appear as mere excuses and the inspection by these groups, thus, as mere *ethical whitewash*, which, apparently, the Western newspapers did not want to be part of the discourse that they were advancing or maintaining. These incriminatory instances would surely have come to the fore had they chosen to frame the Rana Plaza collapse as the fallout of deliberate, and thus criminal, negligence. Such a framing would then have implicated not just the owners of the building and the factories housed therein but also the Western companies who outsourced their products to these factories at very low prices. That was apparently never the intent. In fact, as I argue later, the discourse that the Western newspapers advanced/maintained required the Western companies to be placed on a high pedestal — moral and otherwise.

In sum, a *murder/crime* frame, which Bangladeshi newspapers generally pursued, would have made Western companies vulnerable to be implicated, morally and perhaps legally, for the Rana Plaza collapse and the concomitant loss of life and limb. On the other hand, an *accident/tragedy* frame, which the Western newspapers espoused, made these connections less obvious and allowed the Western companies to be projected as the good Samaritans. To this end, the Western newspapers also cast Bangladesh in poor light, which I discuss in the next section.

Poor and Primitive, Inept and Inefficient:  
Diagnosing Bangladesh as Cause

Governmental ineptitudes and governance failures in Bangladesh constituted a common theme in much of post-Rana Plaza collapse reports, features, and editorial comments by the U.K. and U.S. newspapers. From the beginning, these newspapers sought to blame the Rana Plaza disaster on what they characterized as the country's systemic dysfunctionality. Governmental ineptitudes and governance failures, they implied, made the Rana Plaza incident and the like in Bangladesh hardly surprising. The *Guardian* reported on June 4, 2013 that a survey by Bangladeshi engineers had found 60 per cent of the garment industry buildings at risk of collapse. The British daily pointed out though that the survey had only covered "a sixth of 600 buildings that house more than 3,000 clothes factories" and quoted the survey team leader as saying that "there may be lots of very vulnerable (factories) we don't know about" but they "did not want to create panic so we are saying they can run for the moment." A day earlier, the *New York Times* reported:

Inspecting Bangladesh's garment factories is an acutely complicated task. No government agency is certain of precisely how many such factories operate in Bangladesh, or where they are. Some inspectors are discovering that building plans filed with government agencies do not always match the actual buildings. Many factories built during the 1980s and 1990s have no architectural drawings at all.

In the wake of the Rana Plaza collapse, there was a surge in factory inspections, with the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, a platform for apparel factory owners, recruited 10 engineers for inspections. However,

... the inspection process quickly took on an ad hoc quality. One factory executive complained of submitting to inspections from five different entities. Most factories have not yet been inspected at all. Some brands have sent their own inspection teams, including Tesco, the British retailer, which stopped placing orders at one local garment maker, Liberty Fashions, after the chain's inspectors found structural problems in the factory — a finding angrily disputed by the factory's Bangladeshi owner.

On June 6, 2013, the *Guardian* reported a British government minister's visit to the Center for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed, a specialized medical facility funded by Britain's Department for International Development. The minister for international development commented: "Bangladesh lacks the capacity to police employment rights, health and safety measures, and building standards. The result is a tragedy like Rana Plaza." His assessment fit perfectly into the discourse the British and U.S. newspapers apparently preferred—that systemic deficiency and dysfunctionality in Bangladesh had made the Rana Plaza collapse an inevitability. Such a discourse preempted any possibility of implicating the moral, if not legal, responsibility of the Western companies that essentially exploited the systemic deficiency and dysfunctionality for their profit margins.

Moreover, these newspapers suggested, Bangladesh was incapable of not just preventing a crisis of this magnitude but also handling post-crisis exigencies. Besides, they indicated, the country did not have the capacity to even appreciate the assistance afforded to it by the Western countries and companies at different times. The *Telegraph*, for example, reported on May 1, 2003:

Bangladesh discarded hi-tech search equipment that could have saved people trapped in the Dhaka building collapse. Thermal imaging and telescopic search

cameras were given to Bangladesh in a UN aid package for disaster management partly funded with £18million from Britain's Department for International Development.

The newspaper quoted the UN's humanitarian affairs adviser as rebutting the Bangladesh fire service training director's assessment that the search equipment was not appropriate for the conditions and lamenting that more lives could have been saved if the equipment had been "correctly used." It also quoted the project manager of the UN disaster management project as suggesting that senior officers who had been trained how to use the equipment did not pass on the knowledge to rescue workers at the Rana Plaza site. The report ends with the UN disaster management official saying: "This is Bangladesh." It is noteworthy how the British daily pitches the opinions of two UN officials against that of a Bangladesh fire service official, who apparently was more in touch with the reality on the ground. The use of the UN official's suggestive comment to end the report is also noteworthy in that the statement was used as a kind of authoritative endorsement of the newspaper's damning indictment of Bangladesh's disaster management capability.

Inadequacy of key facilities related to post-crisis exigencies was also the theme in the May 31, 2013 report published in the *New York Times*. The report focused on the struggle that Bangladesh's only DNA laboratory was in, trying to identify the Rana Plaza dead whose bodies were disfigured and/or decomposed beyond recognition. The U.S. daily reported:

Founded in 2006 with a grant from the Danish Embassy, the lab is now overwhelmed. Completing the DNA profiles could take months. New machines are needed to decalcify the bone samples. Approval is still pending for expensive



software capable of sorting through the tens of thousands of possible DNA matches.

The report provides a detailed account of the personnel and logistics constraints that the lab had to work under, not to speak of the pressure for expeditious identification of the dead amidst allegation that the government was trying to save on compensation money by concealing the actual fatality figures. The U.S. daily quoted the operations manager at the lab as saying: “To handle normal situations, the lab is O.K. But now a whole year’s caseload has come up, all of a sudden.” While the quote indicated the gravity of the situation, the newspaper was more interested to use the lab as a representative case of institutional and infrastructural inadequacy in Bangladesh. Hence, it wrote:

From the moment Rana Plaza collapsed, the scale of the disaster outstripped the capacities of the Bangladeshi government. In the initial days, as dozens of bodies were being pulled hourly from the wreckage, a nearby high school served as a staging area for thousands of people looking for missing relatives or just gawking. Bodies were placed in plank coffins and sprayed with disinfectant as lines of people walked slowly past.

The suggestion seems to be that the government failed to protect not the just the lives but also the identities of many killed in the Rana Plaza collapse because of inefficiency and ineptitude of personnel, and inadequacy of infrastructure.

The predicament was grave for the survivors of the Rana Plaza collapse as well as the rescue workers who pulled out people from the debris, dead or alive, according to the Western media. The *Washington Post* reported on September 8, 2013 about the acute shortage of trained mental health professionals in Bangladesh to help the survivors and

rescue workers cope with the psychological trauma that they had been exposed to. It wrote:

Nearly five months after the deadliest incident in garment manufacturing history, the suffering is far from over for the victims, their relatives and the rescue workers... activists and health-care professionals decry a lack of psychological and financial support for scores of survivors and rescue workers stricken with invisible handicaps.

To illustrate their predicament, the newspaper focused on the Center for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed. The center

... has worked beyond its capacity to care for Rana Plaza's injured. But because of a dearth of trained mental health professionals, patients with symptoms of acute psychological trauma receive "a minimum" of counseling before they are discharged, said Hossain Mehedi, a doctor at the center.

It is notable that the institutions and initiatives in Bangladesh that were cast in positive and sympathetic light by the British and U.S. newspapers were either funded or founded by one Western country or the other. The underlying message apparently is that whatever good there is in Bangladesh owes its existence to the West somehow.

In contrast, the public-sector institutions and initiatives were often either downplayed or denigrated. The law enforcement and judicial failures were especially highlighted. For example, the *New York Times* reported on May 3, 2013 the arrest of the engineer who had warned that the Rana Plaza was unsafe a day before it collapsed. The newspaper wrote:

The arrest of the engineer, Abdur Razzaque Khan, was a surprise twist since he was regarded as something of a hero for trying to avert the April 24 disaster. A day before the building collapsed, Mr. Khan had been summoned because cracks

had suddenly appeared in the structure, forcing an evacuation. He concluded that the building had become dangerous and should be closed until experts could conduct a more thorough investigation — advice that turned out to be grimly prescient.

Apparently, the arrest was made after the owner of the Rana Plaza as well as the owners of the readymade garment factories situated therein had told the police, during interrogation, that the engineer had told them that the cracks were not serious. Notably, the U.S. newspaper had two days earlier depicted the owner of the Rana Plaza as “the most hated Bangladeshi.” It wrote on May 1, 2013:

And perhaps no one wielded power more brazenly than Sohel Rana. He traveled by motorcycle, as untouchable as a mafia don, trailed by his own biker gang. Local officials and the Bangladeshi news media say he was involved in illegal drugs and guns, but he also had a building, Rana Plaza, that housed five factories. Upstairs, workers earned as little as \$40 a month making clothes for retailers like J. C. Penney. Downstairs, Mr. Rana hosted local politicians, playing pool, drinking and, the officials say, indulging in drugs.

Yet, the suggestion seems to be, the law enforcement and investigation authorities banked on the words of a villain to arrest a hero, whose words, if heeded to, could have averted the death and injury to so many thousands. Implicit in this narrative seemed to be yet another damning indictment — that such a system can hardly deliver justice.

Subsequently, the *New York Times* reported on June 30, 2013 the delay in a case against Delwar Hossain, the owner of Tazreen Fashions, which caught fire in November 2012 because of what the government investigation concluded as gross fire safety violations and negligence. The fire killed 112 workers “who were making clothes for retailers like Walmart and Sears.” The newspaper wrote:

The more pertinent question might be this: In Bangladesh, where the garment industry powers the economy and wields enormous political clout, is it possible to hold factory owners like Mr. Hossain accountable?

The question was pertinent because

Many garment factory owners are now entrenched in the nation's power elite, some as members of Parliament. Garments represent 80 percent of the country's manufacturing exports, giving the industry vast economic power, while factory owners also finance campaigns during national elections, giving them broad political influence.

Moreover, the *New York Times* added:

Bangladesh's legal system has rarely favored anyone confronting the power structure. Much of the legal code has remained intact since the British imperial era, when laws were devised to control the population and protect the colonialist power structure.

Hence, it continued:

Bangladeshi factories have always suffered fires and accidents, usually without attracting international attention. One study estimated that more than 1,000 workers died in hundreds of factory fires or accidents from 1990 to 2012. Not once was a factory owner charged with any crime, activists say.

Read together, these two reports in the *New York Times* suggest that the legal and judicial systems are rigged in favor of the moneyed and the politically powerful, and that justice in the Rana Plaza cases would remain elusive as that in the Tazreen Fashions case. Such an undermining of any prospect for justice foregrounded compensation as a more viable option for redress. Foregrounding compensation also meant that the Western companies could be discursively afforded an elevated position. As will be shown in the next section,

the British and U.S. newspapers reported the compensation in a way that make the Western companies appear as the good Samaritans, contributing to the compensation fund out of moral obligation, not out of any sense of guilt or remorse and/or real guilt or remorse.

### The Compensation Deal and the Good Samaritans

The British and U.S. newspapers never really framed the Rana Plaza collapse as a fallout of the Western retail chains' relentless pressure on apparel manufacturers to keep the prices low, which, according to a workplace monitoring expert quoted in the *New York Times*, forced the latter into "cutting corners on fire safety and building safety." Rather, they castigated these companies for not living up to, as the U.S. publication reported on April 26, 2013, a promise that they had made in the wake of the November 2012 fire at Tazreen Fashions, "to take steps to ensure the safety of Bangladeshi factories that make the goods the companies sell." The Rana Plaza collapse, wrote the *Washington Post* on October 24, 2014, exposed "earlier safety programs touted by Western retailers" as "an ineffective and ultimately self-defeating ethical whitewash." It was implicit in their narrative that the Rana Plaza collapse with its staggering death toll was exclusively the outcome of governmental ineptitudes and governance failures in Bangladesh and that in no way should the Western companies be implicated, even morally, for the criminal negligence surrounding the disaster. The *New York Times* carried a report on May 17, 2013 about two separate letters sent to the U.S. retailers, requesting them to "act together to force changes in overseas workplace." One of the letters, signed by religious groups and investors, said:

They [Tazreen Fashions fire and Rana Plaza collapse] are a grave indictment of the human rights record of Bangladesh, and illustration of the failure of the global companies that manufacture and source their products there to ensure humane working conditions.

These lines aptly reflect the distinction that the Western media narrative made between criminal responsibility for the Rana Plaza disaster, which befell Bangladesh and Bangladesh alone, and humanitarian responsibility for its victims, which the Western companies chose to bear in the form of the global compensation fund. Thus, *New York Times* on March 29, 2014 quoted a Gap spokesperson reminding everyone that the company was “never linked to production at Rana Plaza” but contributed to the fund anyway because it wanted “to see lasting change occur in Bangladesh.” The *Guardian* similarly reported on March 28, 2014:

Asda and Gap have not been linked to Rana Plaza, but have chosen to make donations alongside Walmart and The Children’s Place. The four retailers and other unnamed companies have paid more than \$5m to a humanitarian fund operated by BRAC, a Bangladeshi anti-poverty organisation. It, in turn, is paying \$2.2m to the ILO-backed compensation fund and using the rest of the money for counselling and rehabilitation for garment workers involved in the Rana Plaza incident and for a “social safety net” for those affected by other workplace disasters such as the Tazreen factory fire of 2012.

Again, in reporting Primark’s donation of £1 million in short-term aid for Rana Plaza victims, the British daily quoted on June 8, 2013 a senior official at Associated British Foods, which owns the British retail chain, as saying: “It is the right thing to do.” Thus, the contribution by the Western companies to the compensation fund came to be projected as a moral act, not an admission of guilt.

At the same time, the compensation fund was itself trumpeted as a breakthrough, a landmark. The *New York Times* reported on December 24, 2013:

The new fund is considered a landmark in compensating families of garment industry victims, in terms of both the amount to be paid and the sophistication of the arrangements... the families of the dead would receive, on average, more than \$25,000 each, while hundreds of workers who were injured or maimed would also receive compensation. Per capita income in Bangladesh is about \$1,900 a year.

The newspaper quoted the international coordinator of the Clean Clothes Campaign, a European anti-sweatshop group, as saying:

We think the agreement is a really good result. The agreement will deliver to all the victims and the families of the Rana Plaza disaster full and fair compensation in a credible manner.

The daily also included a quote from the program director of an International Labor Organization affiliate that glorified the compensation initiative at the expense of Bangladesh's reputation: "If you look at the history of compensation efforts in the Bangladesh garment industry, it's not a good one. But this is a potential breakthrough."

An earlier *New York Times* report dated May 31, 2013 made a similar suggestion, noting:

[Bangladesh] Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has announced a compensation package for families of those killed at Rana Plaza that could exceed \$12,000, with the money coming from public and private sources... Yet so far, only 150 families have received the first installment of about \$1,100...

In fact, the Western newspapers tended to highlight Bangladesh's poor record in a particular area whenever they introduced a Western initiative relevant to the area.

Bangladesh was not always the only one at the receiving end of criticism, though. Surrounding the compensation fund, the *Guardian* hardly missed an opportunity to highlight the fact that Primark, a British retailer, was the first Western company to commit and disburse compensation money for the dead and the wounded in the Rana Plaza collapse. It reported on June 8, 2013:

After previous factory disasters, victims and their families have waited up to two years for compensation. Primark, whose supplier employed less than 10% of the Rana Plaza workforce, has pledged compensation to all victims. The company, with the help of a local non-governmental organisation, has set up bank accounts for victims to avoid money being siphoned off by unscrupulous middlemen.

In fact, the British daily frequently ran updates on Primark's compensation initiative while covering the initial refusal by Walmart and other U.S. retailers to contribute to the fund. When the Walmart eventually donated to the fund, it quoted on March 28, 2014, the general secretary of an international trade union as criticizing the contribution as "paltry." The newspaper did not forget to contrast Walmart's contribution with Primark's, either:

The sums are dwarfed by the efforts of the British retailer Primark, which has paid \$1m into the ILO-backed fund and is giving \$9m in formal compensation approved by the ILO to 580 people working for its supplier New Wave Bottoms, which was on the second floor of Rana Plaza.

Moreover, when the compensation fund reached its \$30 million target, the British daily again singled out the U.S. retail chain as an example of why the fund took more than two years and a substantial downward revision of \$10 million to meet its target: "Walmart, the world's largest retailer with net sales of \$482.2bn, donated an estimated \$1m." It was as if the newspaper was on a mission to prove that the European companies in general



and the British companies in particular, and even companies based in Canada, were more conscientious and morally responsive than their U.S. counterparts. Most importantly, it reflected the Western newspapers' general preoccupation with the Western retailers in respect of the compensation fund rather than how the delay in the fund's meeting the target affected the family of the dead and the wounded in the Rana Plaza disaster, on which the Bangladeshi newspapers reported regularly.

Whenever the *Financial Express* or the *New Nation* reported on compensation for the dead and the wounded in the Rana Plaza disaster, be it arranged or disbursed by the Bangladesh government or the International Labor Organization or somebody else, the report generally described the victims' ordeal in the absence of such assistance. For example, the *Financial Express* reported on October 24, 2013 about the predicament of a young woman who worked on the third floor of Rana Plaza and survived its collapse. She was quoted as saying:

I am lucky to survive while my brother is still missing... I have to look after the two kids of my brother... I got the Primark payment but I am scared thinking about the future when there would be no penny in my hand... how can I feed those kids?

Again, on April 17, 2014, the Bangladeshi daily quoted a 15-year-old girl who worked on the second floor of the ill-fated building as saying: "I am totally in the dark about my future. I am unable to work and even can't move easily." The *New Nation*, on the other hand, reported on April 22, 2014 the anti-corruption watchdog Transparency International Bangladesh's allegation of lack of transparency in the disbursement of compensation payment and its recommendation for a "Garment Sector Governance

Authority’ to ensure transparency and accountability during implementation of different initiatives and pledges by the government in the apparel sector.”

Moreover, albeit not so explicitly, the *Financial Express* questioned how the global fund calculated the compensation package for the dead and the wounded. The newspaper reported on May 15, 2013:

It is based on 500,000 taka [approximately \$6,200] for pain and sufferings per worker, and loss of income, based on an average salary of 5,833 taka [approximately \$72] per month (which includes two months bonus per year) for 10 years (injured workers) and 25 years (deceased workers).

It also mentioned that the same calculation was used in case of previous factory accidents that took place in 2012–13. In contrast, when reporting on the individual compensation package, the Western newspapers provided the total figure of \$25,000 without any detailed breakdown. A detailed breakdown would have shown, as the *Financial Express* report did, the average wage factored into the compensation was not significantly more than the “cut-price labor” that these papers consistently decried. Yet, the Western newspapers portrayed the compensation plan as a landmark. The *New York Times* on February 24, 2014 quoted an International Labor Organization representative as saying:

The significance of this is we have a mechanism that the whole industry can support. We haven’t been able to say that before. What we had before was the blame game.

The newspaper added in the very next paragraph:

Much of the finger-pointing has centered on the question of what responsibility global brands should bear for accidents that occur in the factories that produce

their garments. Some brands have been concerned that agreeing to participate in a compensation fund for Rana Plaza victims could be interpreted as an admission of guilt and become a vulnerability if litigation arises.

This essentially justified the initial reluctance to and subsequent delay by some Western companies in committing money to the global compensation fund. Overall, the Western newspapers appeared willing to gloss over the failure of several Western companies to respond promptly by projecting the compensation fund as a breakthrough. The *Guardian* on June 11, 2015 quoted the representative of an international labor union as saying:

The most important thing is that we did manage it — the workers of Bhopal are still waiting for their money 30 years later. Next time, let's make sure we get the money faster so that we don't have years of painful campaigning in order to get \$30m, which is peanuts in comparison to the profits of this sector.

Again, the suggestion seemed to be that the compensation fund would not have materialized had there not been mediation by the West. In other words, the reports in the Western media had the strong undertone that international players had to join the compensation efforts because the Bangladesh government did not have the capacity for, and track record of, efficient management of such funds. The framing of the Western establishments in general as good Samaritans, in turn, provided them with moral superiority, which, coupled with their often touted skills and sophistication—technical, technological, and otherwise, afforded them a kind of legitimacy to decide and dictate the fate of Bangladesh's garment industry. The Western newspapers trumpeted these dictations and decisions, too, as the best the industry in particular and the country in general could hope for.

### Moving Forward or Back to More of the Same?

In the immediate aftermath of the Rana Plaza collapse, Western retailers were in a bind. As the British and U.S. newspapers reported, their first impulse was to distance themselves from the factories housed in the ill-fated building. The *New York Times* reported on May 1, 2013: “Several American and European retailers have sought to minimize any ties they had to factories inside the building....” There were, according to a *Washington Post* editorial comment published on October 24, 2014, even “discussions about boycotting firms that do business in Bangladesh or punishing the country with trade restrictions.” At the same time, there were pushbacks against such talks of boycott and trade restrictions, with the major argument being that such measures would destroy the life and livelihood of millions of garment workers in Bangladesh and, worst still, bring the country’s economy crashing down. The *New York Times* on May 14, 2013 quoted an influential member of the Bangladesh government as likening the country’s readymade industry with “the goose that lays the golden eggs,” which needed to be nurtured and strengthened, not killed. The *Guardian* on June 6, 2013 quoted the then British minister for international development as saying that Bangladesh’s garment industry was a “massive success story that must not be allowed to go sour.” He added:

The industry has been built from nothing in the past 30 years and now needs to be turned into a long-term development success... Regulations and enforcement need to catch up with the rapid growth of this sector.”

The argument, thus, was not to punish the industry for sustained indifference to factory safety and other transgressions but bring it under a system that would address its many deficiencies and drawbacks.

Besides developing their reports, features, and editorial comments around such positive and sympathetic quotes and comments, the Western newspapers would also advance, not so implicitly, humanitarian obligation as a further reason why Bangladesh's apparel industry needed to be sustained and strengthened. There were even suggestions for overlooking gross malpractices that marked the industry. The *Guardian*, for example, wrote on June 7, 2013:

The garment industry in Bangladesh employs about 3.5 million people, mainly young women... Pay at factories is better than in other industries and despite long hours, abuse from employers, poor job security and danger, sewing is less arduous than alternative employment such as agricultural labour, construction work, cleaning homes or ship-breaking.

In other words, the British daily acknowledged the malpractices that blight the industry but maintained nonetheless that it was a price that workers had to pay because they had very limited viable alternatives. The *Washington Post* offered a similar line of argument in an editorial comment published on October 24, 2014:

The clothing industry has largely been a blessing for Bangladesh, a densely populated country with huge amounts of spare workers seeking employment. Actual per capita gross domestic product and actual income have doubled since 1997, in part because the country established itself as a center of ready-to-wear apparel manufacturing... Demands for worker safety should not become a pretext for protectionism, which would hurt the masses of poor who would be put out of jobs.

The major argument against any punitive Western measures against Bangladesh's clothing industry was ultimately not about any humanitarian ethic, although the Western newspapers sought to project it as such. The *Washington Post* editorial dropped the hint when it described the "\$22 billion garment manufacturing business" as "a crucial global production hub." Simply put, the Western retailers could not afford to lose its service. However, they could not publicly admit their dependence on cheap labor in countries like Bangladesh that sustained their bottom line; they needed the cover of humanitarian ethic, and the Western newspapers provided it.

The Western newspapers were critical of the Western retail chains' tolerance of non-compliance by their Bangladeshi suppliers with fire safety and factory construction standards. The *New York Times* reported on May 14, 2013:

For years, Bangladesh has seen some of the worst practices in the global garment industry. Wages are the lowest in the world, starting at roughly \$37 a month. Factory conditions are often unsafe. Yet global brands have often sought to deflect any direct responsibility for the problems, while the government has often been tepid in protecting worker rights.

The description followed right after the news that several European companies had agreed "to a landmark plan to help pay for fire safety and building improvements after the collapse last month of the Rana Plaza factory complex, which killed more than 1,100 people." However, the report was generally positive in its coverage of the agreement, and generously used positive quotes and comments about the European companies for leading the initiative. The H&M was especially highlighted:

H&M is the largest purchaser of garments from Bangladesh, and its endorsement was seen as influential to other brands. The agreement calls for independent, rigorous factory safety inspections with public accountability and mandatory repairs and renovations underwritten by Western retailers. It also enhances the roles played by workers and unions to ensure factory safety.

Three days later, the U.S. daily reported two separate initiatives by religious groups and investors, imploring Walmart and other U.S. brands to join in the safety plan for Bangladesh's garment industry. In an open letter, a coalition of 118 religious groups and investors urged these companies to reconsider their plans to institute individual factory inspection programs. The letter read:

Acting alone, companies can and do bring about meaningful and positive changes in human rights in the countries where they source and manufacture. But when faced with intransigence of the type we have historically seen in Bangladesh on worker safety issues, we are convinced that systemic change will only occur when companies take action together.

The other initiative featured a similar open letter that read:

Regardless of whether products are being sourced from Bangladesh, Guatemala, China or the Philippines, morality dictates that the price/value calculus for all manufactured goods must begin with the fundamental human rights of workers...

The letters fit well into the narrative that the *New York Times* and other Western newspapers advanced — that Bangladesh cannot improve the working condition in its apparel industry on its own and that the Western retailers are morally bound to work together and effect systemic change there.

The *Guardian*, too, reported on July 4, 2013 the British government's plan "to use its muscle to help drive up standards in factories supplying UK retailers" after the Rana

Plaza tragedy. Subsequently, the U.S. retailers did not join the European platform but launched their own factory safety initiative for Bangladesh. The two initiatives were generally described in favorable terms in the Western newspapers. The *Washington Post* on April 24, 2015 quoted an International Labor Organization official as touting the progress of the two initiatives as “unprecedented” and not done “anywhere else in the world... as quickly.” In sum, the West’s intervention was again projected as crucial, bringing about changes in the garment industry that Bangladesh could not have hoped for, let alone accomplish by itself.

As the preceding discussion indicates, two key factors characterize the coverage of the Rana Plaza collapse and its aftermath by the newspapers under examination. First, despite certain points of emphasis (e.g., the cause of the collapse and its impact on the industry and individuals), the Western and Bangladesh newspapers framed the incident differently. The difference in the *identification of problem* function (i.e., accident/tragedy vs. murder) had a ripple effect on the other functions of the frames (i.e., *diagnosis of cause*, *passage of moral judgement*, and *suggestion of remedy*; see Entman, 1993). Second, the different frames that they deployed and their functions either informed or were informed by the different discourses that the foreign and local newspapers advanced or maintained surrounding the crisis. Despite the differences, these discourses also had at least one point of convergence, in (re)shaping and (de)centering the identity of the people who were most affected by the Rana Plaza incident: employees of the garment factories housed in the building. In the next section, I discuss how the identity of the dead and the wounded in the Rana Plaza collapse in particular and the Bangladeshi garment worker in



general was discursively (re)created and (re)negotiated by the Western and Bangladeshi newspapers.

A Case of Convergence: Discursive (Re)creation of  
Worker/Victim Identity

The hero in the Western media discourse (i.e., the Western companies/West) needed victims and found them in Bangladeshi garment workers, not just those killed or wounded in the Rana Plaza collapse but the entire population of around 4 million, mostly women. Right from the start of their coverage of the Rana Plaza disaster, the British and U.S. newspapers described the Bangladeshi garment workers as a collective with very little control over their life and livelihood. They worked long hours on the apparel factory floors, and endured abuse from employers, poor job security and danger because sewing was *less arduous* than agricultural labor, construction work, ship breaking, or home cleaning, and, more importantly, because if they did not do it someone else would since there were huge amounts of spare workers seeking employment in Bangladesh. The Rana Plaza incident, in the Western media discourse, encapsulated and amplified the helplessness and desperation that garment factory employees work with. Despite anxieties about the crack that had developed in the building, they still went into the factories and began working lest their refusal should render them jobless. On the other hand, rampant and sustained violation of factory safety standards and worker rights violation was the result of a general absence of trade unions in the country's garment sector. Just as garment workers had to rely on the whims and wishes of their employers for their livelihood, the Rana Plaza victims and survivors also had to rely on the government, the factory owners' association, the Western retail chains, the international

labor organizations for compensation. Overall, the Western media discourse lumped the Rana Plaza dead and wounded in particular and garment workers in general into a collective identity that was weak and helpless, denied and disempowered — the perpetual victims, in other words.

The Western newspapers also used wage as a tool in their discursive construction of the identity of the Rana Plaza dead and wounded. In fact, these newspapers displayed a tendency to identify the dead or the wounded in terms of their wages. For example, in its April 26, 2013 report, the *Guardian* described one young woman who worked in one of the factories housed in the Rana Plaza:

Fatema Khatun Moni, 21, said she had come to Dhaka to ensure a better living for her family back home in Naogaon. Her basic monthly wage was £38, £79 with overtime. With that amount she financed her younger daughter's education and supported her parents.

Similarly, the *New York Times* reported the predicament of a young woman who lost her sister in the Rana Plaza collapse:

Like so many young women in the country, the two sisters had gotten work in garment factories to help support their families. Ms. Begum makes about \$85 a month; her sister made \$56.

The identity marker thus was how much a person earned, not what they did on the factory floor. Such discursive constructions, in turn, made the determination of compensation of the Rana Plaza dead and wounded based on their lost income appear not just acceptable but also normal. A human life was, thus, priced at some \$12,500 and a human limb a little less.

As noted earlier, the Bangladeshi newspapers were implicitly critical of the way that the compensation package for the Rana Plaza victims had been calculated. However, their criticism appeared to be about the flaw in the calculation, not about the reduction of identity that it entailed. Simply put, they might not have had any reservation if the Rana Plaza compensation package had not been calculated based on the same rate as that related to previous such industrial disasters. However, although these newspapers more often than not portrayed the people affected by the Rana Plaza collapse as helpless and reliant on national and international assistance, financial and otherwise, they did not paint the garment workers as a hapless and helpless lot. In their discourse, workers were willing to take to the street for their rightful dues.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described how, despite emphasizing certain common points related to the Rana Plaza collapse and its aftermath, the Western newspapers advanced a discourse that was distinctively different from that advanced by the Bangladeshi newspapers. I have also traced the difference in how they framed the Rana Plaza collapse, arguing that the difference in problem identification subsequently led to differing cause diagnosis, moral judgement, and remedy suggestion functions of their news frames. In my discussion on the functions of the frames, across the first four sections of the chapter, I have offered instances of the Western media's use of a discursive strategy that glorified the Western retail chains in particular and the West in general and, at the same time, undermined Bangladesh. In the process, as I have argued in the fifth section, the Western media discursively created the identity of anything Western as the quintessential hero

while the Rana Plaza dead and wounded and the employees of Bangladesh's garment factories as the perpetual victims. I have also argued that the Bangladeshi media advanced a discourse that might not have fully countered the Western media discourse but nonetheless contradicted and critiqued some parts of it. In the next chapter, I discuss how the findings tie in with the research questions of my thesis and, importantly, relate to crisis communication research and scholarship.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION(S)

My thesis project takes as its point of departure the questions “What insights about crisis communication emerge in shifting from a traditional, functionalist to a postcolonial theoretical framework?” and “How do Western and Bangladeshi newspapers support and/or resist a colonial legacy in their framing of the Rana Plaza crisis?” Two core epistemological exigencies frame these questions. First, an inherently managerial commitment, functionalist/positivist theoretical orientation, and Western/U.S. bias render analysis and assessment of crisis and crisis communication (especially in non-Western setting by the dominant stream of crisis communication research and scholarship in the United States) somewhat limited in scope and coverage. Second, the media articulate local and postcolonial discourses when framing a crisis, advancing and/or maintaining ideologies that (re)construct the crisis and (re)create the identity of individuals and institutions that experienced the crisis. In this chapter, I discuss how the findings of my critical discourse analysis of reports, features, and editorial comments on the Rana Plaza collapse and its aftermath, by two newspapers each from the United Kingdom, United States, and Bangladesh, tie back to the research questions and epistemological assumptions that my thesis project is based on.

This chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section, I discuss how the *Guardian* and *Telegraph* of the U.K., and the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* of the US, in their framing of the Rana Plaza collapse and its aftermath, facilitated a discourse that centers the Western apparel companies and the West by decentering the

dead and wounded in the disaster, and the millions of employees in the Bangladeshi apparel industry. I argue that the U.K. and U.S. newspapers' discursive (re)construction of the Rana Plaza crisis, and (re)creation of the identity of individuals, institutions, and Bangladeshi government that experienced the crisis is colonial/imperial in both content and effect. Next, I discuss how these findings complicate certain taken-for-granted assumptions made by the dominant stream of crisis communication research and scholarship in the U.S. In the second section, I argue that the Bangladeshi newspapers (in some instances) contested the colonial/imperial discourse advanced by the foreign newspapers and that these resistances were more sporadic than systematic, which may reveal a lack of postcolonial awareness. However, I note that such sporadic discursive resistance has certain implications for practitioners and researchers of crisis communication. In the third and final section, I summarize how my thesis project addresses certain limitations inherent in the dominant crisis communication research and scholarship in the U.S. vis-à-vis crises in non-Western settings and, in the process, contributes to a growing call for alternative ways of approaching and analyzing crisis communication. I conclude with certain practical applications and heuristic directions that my thesis project offers.

#### Discourse of Domination: Media Role in Crisis Redefined

Entman (1993) defined framing as selecting and making salient certain aspects of an incident/issue “*to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation*” (p. 52, emphasis in original). In case of the Rana Plaza collapse, the Western newspapers emphasized frequent factory

collapses and fires in Bangladesh's readymade garment industry and thus defined the incident in question as "not a surprise," "a disaster waiting to happen" or, in other words, an accident or tragedy that was inevitable and, hence, beyond anyone's control. This definition subsequently led to diagnosing Bangladesh's systemic dysfunctionality, governance failure, and governmental ineptitude as the cause. Bangladesh was projected as a primordial hinterland, so to speak, where the nexus between politics and business, rampant corruption, and ever-increasing socioeconomic inequity made such incidents as the Rana Plaza collapse and associated loss of lives and limbs a recurring reality, and rendered legal and judicial redress for people affected by these incidents elusive, if not non-existent. Such *problem definition* and *causal interpretation*, in turn, led to the *moral evaluation* that the authorities in Bangladesh were either unable or unwilling to adequately compensate the dead and wounded of the Rana Plaza collapse on the one hand and effectively initiate measures to prevent recurrences of such incidents on the other, and that it was a moral imperative for the Western companies and, by implication, the West to compensate the affected Bangladeshi apparel workers as acts of compassion amidst an unfolding humanitarian crisis. Finally, the accident/tragedy frame provided the *treatment recommendation* that the Western companies/West needed also to extend financial and technical assistance for effective safety and standards inspections and requisite corrective measures for apparel factories in Bangladesh so as to prevent recurrence of similar incidents in the future and thus make sure that the "massive success story" of Bangladesh's garment industry does not "go sour."

The accident/tragedy frame, in its different functions, thus facilitates a discourse that affords the Western companies/West, to borrow from Said (1978), a “positional superiority” in their various interactions and relationships with the Bangladeshi garment industry/Bangladesh wherein they never lose “the relative upper hand” (p. 7). It does so in two distinctive ways. First, the portrayal of the Rana Plaza collapse as an exclusively Bangladeshi problem effectively distances the Western apparel brands from any legal culpability and/or moral responsibility for the death and injury of the several thousand people who worked in the garment factories. Second, the characterization of their involvement in and contribution to the compensation fund and factory inspection initiatives as “the right thing to do” puts the Western companies on a moral high ground. This *positional superiority* of the Western companies/West is carefully maintained even when the Western media are critical of their past inactions and indifferences in respect of, say, low wages for Bangladeshi apparel workers and unsafe conditions of Bangladeshi apparel factories. These inactions and indifferences are, in fact, justified as acts of compassion. For example, according to the British and U.S. newspapers, the companies could have boycotted Bangladeshi apparel products as a punitive measure against these malpractices but such a boycott would have resulted in the collapse of Bangladesh’s garment industry and, in the process, adversely impacted the life and livelihood of millions of Bangladeshis. In other words, the newspapers seem to suggest that the decision not to boycott Bangladeshi products reflected farsightedness on the part of the Western companies/West, which Bangladeshis in general might not have readily recognized. The justification that the Western newspapers offered for the decision is,



thus, an extension of the logic that what the Western companies/West do is sometimes beyond the comprehension or capability of the Bangladeshis in general.

This dichotomy between “what ‘we’ do and what ‘they’ cannot do or understand as ‘we’ do” (Said, 1978, p. 12) is also reinforced in the way local individuals and institutions that worked tirelessly during the Rana Plaza rescue operation are portrayed in the Western media. For example, although local fire fighters and service personnel worked for days on end, rescuing the wounded and recovering the dead from the rubble, the Western media discourse seeks to establish that they “could have saved more lives” but for their inability or unwillingness to use the thermal imaging and telescoping search cameras that the United Nations had provided Bangladesh with under a disaster management program funded partially by the British Department for International Development. In other words, the Western media overshadowed the heroics of the local fire fighters and service personnel with these people’s purported lack of appreciation for and/or ability to use the ‘sophisticated’ Western technology. Similarly, in case of the part-time teacher who, according to a *Washington Post* report dated September 8, 2013, “spent three days and nights mining the rubble for the living,” “searched the rows of remains for items—cellphones, nose rings, scraps of paper—that might help with identification,” and fought off “a pack of dogs that had gotten hold of an open body bag with a corpse inside” late one night, the focus is also on his apparent lack of emotional and psychological fortitude that has left him a psychological wreck self-medicating “with a cocktail of antidepressants.” Such accentuation of institutional failures and individual follies is unlikely to be coincidental since it, too, works towards maintaining the

positional superiority of the Western companies/West vis-à-vis Bangladeshi garment industry/Bangladesh.

Overall, the impression that one will likely get from the Western media coverage of the Rana Plaza collapse and the crisis thereof is that, in Bangladesh, the social and political elite are corrupt and exploitative, the government is inept and governance nonexistent, and the people are well-intentioned but ill-equipped to take care of themselves, let alone others. The garment industry, the readers are reminded time and again, is a rare success story that, too, risks “go[ing] sour” amidst rampant malpractices ranging from low wages for workers to life-threatening working conditions. Importantly, these are often cast as “worker” (i.e., Bangladeshi) rather than managerial (i.e., Western) problems. The apparel workers, the readers are told, have to bear with the gross mistreatment and injustice because pay in the garment industry is better than other sectors and employment is difficult to come by in this densely-populated country. Here, it is important to point out that the typical Bangladeshi garment worker in the Western media discourse is a vulnerable young woman whose life revolves around the pittance that she gets in wage from the garment factory she works in. Much like the Egyptian courtesan that Flaubert encountered (Said, 1978), she too cannot speak for herself and needs to be “spoken for and represented” (p. 6). In sum, Bangladesh is discursively (re)constructed as being in the civilizational backwaters (i.e., dysfunctional system, absence of governance) and the people of Bangladesh being either ethically/morally compromised (i.e., corrupt and exploitative social and political elite) or financially/legally vulnerable (i.e., millions of unemployed people and millions more exploited workers).

The British and U.S. newspapers' reports, features, and editorial comments on the Rana Plaza collapse and its aftermath discursively (re)construct Bangladesh and Bangladeshis as antithesis to the West/Western companies, much like the Orientalists (re)imagined the Orient and Orientals vis-à-vis the Occident and Occidentals (Said, 1978). This discursive (re)production of the West/rest, us/them, self/other dichotomies is driven by a similar motivation of dominance. The (re)assertion of the West as “the normative center of the world” (Rao, 2011, p. 792) ultimately (re)produces the justification for the Western companies to decide that financial compensation, not judicial redress, is what the dead and wounded of the Rana Plaza collapse need, and to dictate the present and future of the Bangladesh apparel industry that, regardless of mortal risk to and endless exploitation of workers, production must continue and its “massive story of success must not be allowed to go sour.”

Tyler (2005) noted that crisis renders the “dominant narrative” that an organization strives to advance/maintain about itself open to public contest (p. 567). The dominant stream of crisis communication research and scholarship in the United States often notes the media's formidable capacity to spearhead this public challenge to an organization's official story in view of their wider access and acceptability to the mass audience. Crisis communication scholars are unanimous that the media play a crucial role during crises (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013), advise organizations to maintain close links with the media (Fearn-Banks, 2009), and even suggest active participation in the media's framing of crisis so organizations could maintain a positive image (Holladay, 2009). They are also unanimous that crisis managers should learn from previous high-profile

crises such as the Challenger explosion or the anthrax scare in the U.S. and be cautious but candid with the media during crisis events to avert similar fallouts. In sum, crisis communication scholars often portray the media as a potential and formidable threat to an organization's image/reputation or another organization to be cultivated/exploited to further organizational goals (i.e., image repair/maintenance).

The post-Rana Plaza collapse news coverage, especially by the Western media organizations, complicates this taken-for-granted dynamic between the media and the organization during a crisis, though. The *Guardian*, *Telegraph*, *New York Times*, and *Washington Post* generally advanced these companies' world view (Grunig, 1989) and thus protected their interests. The Western media indeed criticized the international apparel brands based in North America and Europe on occasions but these criticisms did not, in any way, detract from their grand narrative about the Western companies and the West. On the contrary, these criticisms helped maintain their oft-trumpeted neutrality/objectivity and, in the process, reinforced the credibility of the discourse that they advanced/maintained. Millner, Veil, and Sellnow (2010) postulated how a third-party organization, preferably an industry representative, can step in as proxy crisis communicators to fill the information void caused by the reticence/reluctance of the offending organization(s), with the objective of such communication often being defense of the offending organization(s) and the relevant industry. They also argued that proxy crisis communicators "cope with media adversity" (p. 75) among many other constraints. In case of the Rana Plaza crisis, however, the Western companies did not face any media adversity in the true sense of the term. In fact, they found in the media effective proxy

crisis communicators that ultimately repaired their collective image and defended their long-term interest due to the intersecting interests of neoliberal capitalism and colonial paternalism.

The Western media could also be viewed as having played a public relations function in their discursive (re)construction of the Rana Plaza collapse and its aftermath and consequent (re)creation of identities of the institutions and individuals that experienced the crisis by affording the Western companies the relative upper hand through and through. Bergquist (1993) noted that every organization seeks to circulate a fiction in the name of an official story that “everyone is supposed to accept as true, yet which no one believes to be true” (p. 126). The Western media’s portrayal of the international apparel brands as morally responsive and socially responsible in their post-Rana Plaza news coverage looks to be an extension of that fiction. Munshi and Kurian (2005) critiqued the notion of corporate social responsibility as resting “on a platform of insincerity ... [that is] manifested in the privileging of key public such as shareholders over what are deemed to be peripheral publics (i.e., the masses of people who bear the brunt of corporate actions)” (p. 514). In case of the Rana Plaza crisis, the Western media actively privileged the interest of the Western companies by advancing/maintaining a discourse that first absolves them of any legal/moral responsibility for the incident and consequent loss of so many lives and then glorifies them as good Samaritans standing by Bangladeshi apparel workers, and not just the Rana Plaza dead and wounded, amid an unfolding humanitarian crisis. A compelling example of such privileging is their unqualified endorsement of the West-led international compensation initiative that

calculated the individual compensation package based on wages in the Bangladeshi garment industry that the Western media themselves have often critiqued as inadequate and inhumane.

In this section, I have argued how a postcolonial theory-driven critical discourse analysis of the news coverage of the Rana Plaza collapse and its aftermath, especially by the *Guardian* and *Telegraph* of the United Kingdom, and the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* of the United States, complicates and challenges, on at least three counts, how the mainstream crisis communication research and scholarship in the U.S. explicates the role of the media vis-à-vis organizational crises. First, it is more productive to view the role of the media in terms of conveyors of and contributors to the social discourse surrounding a crisis — and not merely as a conduit in a linear communication process that channels to the public information they gather from and/or provided with by the organization. Such a recognition facilitates a better understanding of the media's active and effective role in not just informing but also influencing the social discourse surrounding a crisis. Second, it is too simplistic to view the media exclusively as an adversary vis-à-vis the beleaguered organization/s during a crisis. Such a view precludes the possibility that the media can and may play the proxy crisis communicator and even the public relations manager for the organization/s in crisis when various dominant discourses (e.g., capitalism and colonialism) coalesce to create a coherent, preferred dominant script. Third, and perhaps most important, whether the mainstream Western media discourse surrounding a crisis will favor or disfavor the relevant organization/s is not necessarily consequent upon the candor and cooperation and/or caution exercised by

the crisis managers in their engagements with the media. As they are “largely subservient to corporate interests” (Kellner, 2005, p. 181), the mainstream corporate media are only likely to advance/maintain discourses that protect and promote such interests.

In the next section, I discuss the limited discursive resistance offered by the local newspapers to the West-centered narrative advanced by their Western counterparts, and also explain why and how recognition of this resistance could be productive for crisis communication researchers and scholars.

#### Discourse of Resistance: A Pushback from the Periphery

A crucial difference in the post-Rana Plaza collapse coverage between the four Western and two Bangladeshi newspapers was in how they framed the crisis. The *Financial Express* and *New Nation* defined the death of more than 1,100 apparel workers in the Rana Plaza collapse as “murder,” caused by individual/institutional negligence. Such problem definition and causal interpretation shaped the other two functions of the frame — moral evaluation (i.e., owners of the building and the garment factors, and their cohorts should be prosecuted in criminal courts), and treatment recommendation (i.e., judicial redress is key to preventing to recurrence of such incidents in future). The discourse that the murder frame, with its various functions, informed/was informed by, albeit disjointed, differed from and was, to a certain extent, defiant of/resistant to the Western media discourse.

A major instance of such resistance relates to how the Bangladeshi newspapers pushed back at the Western media’s discursive (re)production and reduction of the identities of the Rana Plaza dead and wounded as “victims” and thus without any agency.

They dedicated significant space to the coverage of demonstrations and agitations by the Rana Plaza workers for not just financial but also legal redress. Van Dijk (1993) noted that carrying placards and/or shouting slogans during such public events provides an avenue for the ordinary or marginalized people to access social discourse. Moreover, Kim and Dutta (2009) argued that such mobilizations signify the marginalized people's agency on one hand and their engagement in crisis communication on the other. Significant coverage of these agitations and demonstrations by the local newspapers, therefore, sought to reclaim the agency for Rana Plaza workers, which the Western media tended to discursively take away from them.

However, the local newspapers' resistance to the discourse advanced/maintained by their Western counterparts was too sporadic and incoherent to be regarded a manifestation of their postcolonial awareness. For example, although these newspapers pushed back at the Western newspapers' discursive denial of the Rana Plaza workers' agency, they also unquestioningly accepted and deployed Western terms (e.g., victim) in their news reports, features, and editorials. Moreover, their criticism of the individual compensation packages for the dead and wounded of the Rana Plaza collapse was mostly directed at what they identified as flaws in the calculation process, not in the process by which Western companies granted themselves the power to initiate, fund, and ultimately control the compensation process (usurping a judicial remedy to the situation). Similarly, that these compensation packages also reduced the Rana Plaza workers' identity into workers, determined only by their wages, did not appear to be much of the local newspapers' concern. In other words, had their discursive challenges been enabled by a



postcolonial awareness, they would have strongly criticized such capitulation to Western capitalism and the reduction of Bangladeshis' identity instead of accepting and perpetuating them.

Yet, albeit inconsistent and incoherent, this (re)assertion of the Rana Plaza workers' agency by the Bangladeshi newspapers, challenging the dominant British-U.S. media discourse surrounding the crisis, is significant for crisis communication research and scholarship in several ways. It shows how different individuals/institutions construct "their own social reality" surrounding a crisis and how these social realities "compete with each other" for ideological domination or, in other words, for collective acceptance as "right, just, or acceptable" (McHale et al., 2007, pp. 375–376). As is often the case, the reality of the marginalized people goes unsaid, unheard, and unheeded because, unlike business conglomerates, for instance, they do not have "access to the platforms of public sphere," let alone "the power to control information" or the "agenda-setting power" (Kim & Dutta, 2009, p. 147). However, in disrupting the dominant narrative, a crisis creates opportunities for the marginalized people "to make their positions public and to elicit support" (Waymer & Heath, 2007, p. 106). Moreover, whose reality ultimately wins the discursive struggle for ideological dominance depends on the convergence of "power and influence in favor of particular players over others at a particular time" (McHale et al., 2007, p. 378). The post-Rana Plaza collapse news coverage by the local newspapers suggests that the access to social discourse could be widening for the marginalized people and could over time afford them a stronger position in discursive (re)negotiations of reality, to successfully challenge the generally pro-Western corporate discourse.

The reports, features, and editorial comments on the Rana Plaza incident and its aftermath by the *Financial Express* and *New Nation* also indicate that local newspapers could be a productive site for exploration and examination of alternative discourses surrounding a crisis that occurs in a non-Western setting but involves Western organization/s. Globalization may have seen the rise of corporate media that largely serve Western interest (Artz, 2003; Kellner, 2005; Murphy, 2003) but it has also been marked by a “reassertion of local identities” (Christians, 2005, p. 3). In the event of a crisis involving Western companies and impacting Western corporate interest, this impulse to (re)claim and (re)assert local identities may lead local newspapers to seek out discourses that are different from, if not resistant to, the Western media discourse.

In this section, I have discussed how the local newspapers discursively challenged the Western media narrative surrounding the Rana Plaza collapse and the crisis thereof. I have argued that, although limited, these challenges have implications for crisis communication research and scholarship. In the next section, I summarize how my thesis project highlights certain inherent weaknesses in the dominant strand of crisis communication research and scholarship in the United States and offers explain how it contributes to the growing call for a reconceptualization of crisis communication.

### Reconceptualizing Crisis Communication

The organization-centricity of the mainstream crisis communication research in the United States has its roots in public relations research. Crisis communication is still viewed primarily as a public relations function (Fearn-Banks, 1996/2002). Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 1, public relations scholars have not only built the foundational

framework of crisis communication but also conducted the bulk of crisis communication research since its emergence as a discernible academic discipline. This organization-centricity has resulted in an essentially reductionist conceptualization of crisis as a phenomenon that *only* disrupts an organization's normal operations, and adversely affects its products and services, revenue and profit, publics or stakeholders, image and reputation, and crisis communication as a process that *only* an organization engages in to restore operational normality and minimize such negative impacts (Coombs, 2009, 2012; Fearn-Banks, 1996/2002; Seeger et al., 2003; Seeger & Sellnow, 2013). On the other hand, communication *per se* is viewed as a linear, top-down process where the message flows from the organization to its publics, and the receiver (i.e., the public/s) interprets and understands the message just as the sender (i.e., the organization) intends it to be interpreted and understood by the receiver (i.e., the public/s). In other words, the success and failure of crisis communication is seen in terms of the efficacy of the message; hence, the emphasis is on text without any consideration for context (Curtin & Gaither, 2005; Karlberg, 1996). This inordinate emphasis on text at the expense of context is the result of what could be called an ethnocentric understanding of organization and its publics, with the underlying assumption being that the Western/U.S. model for interaction between the organization and its publics is applicable across boundaries — geographical, cultural and otherwise (Lee, 2005; Wakefield, 1996).

A great deal of crisis communication research in the U.S. locates “all power to respond and to manage a crisis in the organization” (McHale et al., 2007, p. 378). Even studies that purportedly assess and analyze the audience reaction to and reception of

crisis communication do so with a view to enhancing the efficacy of the organizational communicative practices and strategies (e.g., Smith et al., 2012). Even the role of the media, crucial in respect of their capacity for rapid dissemination of information and access to the masses (Seeger & Sellnow, 2013), is mostly theorized in relation to their reaction to the organization's crisis management and crisis communication efforts (e.g., Littlefield & Quenette, 2007), as is the role of the government and other regulatory entities (e.g., Smithson & Venette, 2013). This postulation of the organization as the locus of power constrains the dominant crisis communication research in the U.S. — epistemologically, ontologically, and axiologically. Although ordinary people suffer infinitely more than an organization's owners and managers (Heath, 2012), their crisis-time communication is rarely explored as a productive site for crisis communication (epistemology). Similarly, crisis communication is seldom examined as discourse (ontology) and evaluated in terms of its role in maintaining or challenging power relations in society (axiology). Overall, the dominant stream of crisis communication research in the U.S. continues to overlook alternative epistemological, ontological, and axiological possibilities inherent in crisis communication in its preoccupation with the communicative practices and strategies put in place by an organization during crises, and their effectiveness or lack thereof.

On the contrary, if crisis is conceptualized as a social phenomenon (Heath, 2012), a central feature of the postcolonial approach in my project, it decenters the organization as the sole source of power to respond to and manage a crisis and locates such power also “in the audiences and all kinds of institutions that relate to it” (McHale et al., 2007,

p. 378). Such a (re)conceptualization of crisis and crisis communication, in turn, foregrounds the discursive terrain whereby multiple sources such as the organization/s, regulators, activists, and, to a limited extent, even the marginalized people affected most by a crisis, compete with their respective realities about the crisis (Davis & French, 2008; Hearit & Courtright, 2003) for ideological dominance (McHale et al., 2007). Such diffusion of power to initiate and maintain crisis response also means displacement of the organization as the sole site to explore and examine crisis communication practices and strategies, and thus warrants recognition of many other productive sites for such exploration and examination, including but not limited to the media, both global and local.

A focus on the discursive nature of crisis communication also foregrounds how communication in general perpetuates or challenges power relations in society. This attention to power dynamics renders problematic certain taken-for-granted assumptions of dominant crisis communication research and scholarship in the U.S. In case of the Rana Plaza crisis, for example, the Western media and the Western companies complemented, not competed, each other with a view to maintain a discourse that seeks to entrench West's neoliberal capitalism and neocolonial paternalism. This interest convergence between the Western companies and the mainstream Western media could seem far-fetched if, following the logic and practices of the dominant strand of research and scholarship in the U.S., media coverage is analyzed as disparate texts, not as part of a discourse. As noted earlier, the British and U.S. criticized the Western companies on

occasions but these criticisms did not detract from the overarching discourse that favored these companies and, by implication, the West.

Again, the implication of this reasoning is that it hardly leaves any space for crisis communication research and scholarship to claim, let alone assert, value-neutrality. The post-Rana Plaza crisis news coverage by the British and U.S. newspapers clearly obfuscates the moral responsibility of the Western companies in particular and the West in general for not effectively addressing, let alone redressing, the vulnerability of the workers to economic exploitation in terms of multiple malpractices in the Western-financed Bangladeshi garment industry and even mortal danger in terms of the unsafe factories they work in. Theorizing on this obfuscation as either a communicative technique or a discursive strategy has to recognize not just its textual efficiency but also its contextual effect, which, in this case, is the perpetuation of a status quo that gives precedence to the financial benefit of the Western companies over the existential angst of the Bangladeshi garment workers.

#### Implications and Future Directions

A relative novelty of my thesis project is the deployment of postcolonial theory as a theoretical framework and critical discourse analysis as a methodological tool to analyze Western and Bangladeshi media discourse surrounding the Rana Plaza crisis. A postcolonial theory-driven critical discourse analysis as a crisis communication research protocol promises considerable heuristic possibilities especially in examining crisis involving Western companies in postcolonial societies. Such examinations could be helpful to understand if the apparent corporate and colonial/imperial bent in the Western

media discourse surrounding the Rana Plaza crisis is an exception or the norm. Also, given that Bangla the language of nearly the entire population in Bangladesh and Bangla-language newspapers heavily outweigh their English-language counterparts in terms of circulation and access to the populace, it would be intriguing to carry out a comparative discourse analysis between these two types of publication. Such an analysis could be instructive insofar as assessment of their postcolonial awareness is concerned. In view of the English-language newspapers' access to and influence on the social and political elite, and in view of a general tendency of the social and political elite in postcolonial countries to hold on to a colonial legacy, it could be interesting to see if these media organizations are enslaved by the colonial/imperial discourse or enabled by a postcolonial awareness.

#### Conclusion

My thesis project diverges from the dominant branch of crisis communication research and scholarship in the U.S. in its (re)conceptualization of crisis as social phenomenon and crisis communication as discourse vis-à-vis the Rana Plaza collapse and its aftermath. This foregrounding of the social dimension of crisis and the discursive dimension of crisis communication brings into focus how events are (re)constructed and identities are (re)produced, discursively, to maintain or challenge power relations in society. Most importantly, such (re)conceptualizations create the scope and space to question certain taken-for-granted assumptions of the mainstream crisis communication research in the U.S., as my analysis of the coverage of the Rana Plaza crisis by Western and Bangladeshi newspapers does in respect of the relational dynamics between the media and the organization(s) in crisis.

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## APPENDIX A

A LIST OF SELECTED POST-RANA PLAZA COLLAPSE REPORTS, FEATURES,  
AND EDITORIALS IN SELECTED U.K. AND U.S. NEWSPAPERS

(In order of publication dates — from the oldest to the newest)

	<u>Date</u>	<u>Headline</u>	<u>Newspaper</u>
01.	04/26/2013	Outrage builds after collapse in Bangladesh	New York Times
02.	--	Cries from the rubbles: 'Save us brother, I beg you. I want to live'	Guardian
03.	04/27/2013	Bangladeshis burn factories to protest conditions	New York Times
04.	04/29/2013	Garment factory death toll rises as is arrested while trying to flee to India	Guardian
05.	--	Tears and rage as hope fades in Bangladesh	New York Times
06.	05/01/2013	Retailers split on contrition after collapse of factories	New York Times
07.	--	The most hated Bangladeshi, toppled from a shady empire	New York Times
08.	--	Bangladesh discarded rescue cameras	Telegraph
09.	05/03/2013	Bangladesh arrests engineer who warned of dangers	New York Times
10.	--	British retailers failed to sign up to safety rules in Bangladesh factory	Telegraph
11.	05/04/2013	Disaster raises pressure for labor reform	Washington Post
12.	05/11/2013	17 days in darkness, a cry of 'save me,' and joy	New York Times
13.	05/14/2013	Global retailers join safety plan for Bangladesh	New York Times

14.	05/15/2013	Wal-Mart won't sign Bangladesh accord	Washington Post
15.	--	Inhuman conditions (editorial comment)	Washington Post
16.	05/17/2013	Groups press big retailers on safety overseas	New York Times
17.	05/23/2013	Report on deadly factory collapse in Bangladesh finds widespread blame	New York Times
18.	05/31/2013	Grim task overwhelms Bangladeshi DNA lab	New York Times
19.	06/04/2013	Engineers warn 60% of garment industry buildings in Bangladesh at risk of collapse	Guardian
20.	06/06/2013	Bangladesh: Police fire at protest by collapsed factory staff	Guardian
21.	--	Bangladesh garment industry under scrutiny following factory collapse	Guardian
22.	06/07/2013	Alive but alone: Survivors of factory disaster stitch together broken lives	Guardian
23.	06/08/2013	Primark says factory victims will soon see cash	Guardian
24.	06/30/2013	Justice elusive in Bangladesh factory disaster	New York Times
25.	07/03/2013	After disaster, Bangladesh lags in policing its maze of factories	New York Times
26.	07/04/2013	Government says retailers must help raise factory standards	Guardian
27.	09/08/2013	Factory disaster haunts survivors and rescuers	Washington Post
28.	10/23/2013	Rana Plaza factory disaster: Victims still waiting for compensation	Guardian
29.	11/23/2013	U.S. retailers decline to aid factory victims in Bangladesh	New York Times

30.	11/30/2013	Christmas help for Rana Plaza victims	Guardian
31.	12/19/2013	After Bangladesh factory collapse, bleak struggle for survivors	New York Times
32.	12/24/2013	\$40 million in aid set for Bangladesh garment workers	New York Times
33.	12/31/2013	Clothing brands sidestep blame for safety lapse	New York Times
34.	02/24/2014	First companies give fund for victims of Bangladeshi clothing factory collapse	New York Times
35.	03/16/2014	Rana Plaza victims still awaiting compensation	Guardian
36.	03/17/2014	Workers still in fear but garment industry is thriving	Guardian
37.	--	Primark pays \$10m more to Rana Plaza victims	Guardian
38.	03/20/2014	Rana Plaza victims to get £1.2m in first payment	Guardian
39.	03/28/2014	US retailers' donation to Bangladesh fund 'paltry'	Guardian
40.	03/29/2014	3 retailers give aid to Bangladesh workers	New York Times
41.	04/16/2014	UN Rana Plaza fund still two-thirds short of target	Guardian
42.	04/24/2014	The fashion trade and the child labourer whose life was blighted in Rana Plaza	Telegraph
43.	04/28/2014	One year after Rana Plaza	New York Times
44.	06/19/2014	Rana Plaza disaster: Call for UK to press retailers over compensation fund	Guardian
45.	06/26/2014	Minister urges retailers to pay into Rana Plaza fund	Guardian

46.	07/28/2014	Matalan refuses to fund UN scheme for Rana Plaza victims	Guardian
47.	--	Campaigners target Matalan over disaster fund	Telegraph
48.	07/31/2014	Matalan makes late payment to Rana Plaza fund	Guardian
49.	10/24/2014	Unraveling a peril (Editorial comment)	Washington Post
50.	04/23/2015	Rana Plaza collapse: Compensation fund has \$6m shortfall two years on	Guardian
51.	04/24/2015	Two years after Rana Plaza, have conditions improved in Bangladesh's factories?	Guardian
52.	--	Bangladesh battles back from factory collapse	Washington Post
53.	06/11/2015	Bangladesh Rana Plaza factory fund finally meets target	Guardian

## APPENDIX B

A LIST OF SELECTED POST-RANA PLAZA COLLAPSE REPORTS, FEATURES,  
AND EDITORIALS IN SELECTED BANGLADESHI NEWSPAPERS

(In order of publication dates — from the oldest to the newest)

	<u>Date</u>	<u>Headline</u>	<u>Newspaper</u>
01.	04/25/2013	Rana Plaza had no RAJUK approval	New Nation
02.	04/26/2013	BGMEA demands death to culprits	New Nation
03.	--	Counting dollars at the expense of workers	Financial Express
04.	--	Savar tragedy triggers outcry worldwide	Financial Express
05.	04/27/2013	Govt in the dock for its incompetence	New Nation
06.	04/28/2013	Voice for justice gets louder	New Nation
07.	--	Savar building collapse a man-made disaster	Financial Express
08.	04/29/2013	Rana arrested from Benapole	Financial Express
09.	--	Owners fear unrest as factories open today	Financial Express
10.	04/30/2013	Rana placed on 15-day remand	New Nation
11.	05/01/2013	Arrest local MP Murad Jong	New Nation
12.	--	Vested quarter out to destroy RMG industry, says BGMEA	Financial Express
13.	05/03/2013	Rana Plaza engineer held	New Nation
14.	--	Rana Plaza tragedy: Savar Poura (municipality) mayor suspended	New Nation
15.	05/04/2013	Shop owners become paupers	New Nation
16.	--	Hard lessons from Savar tragedy	Financial Express
17.	05/15/2013	Victims' families for capital punishment to Sohel Rana	New Nation



18.	--	CCC estimates 54m euros compensation for Rana Plaza victims	Financial Express
19.	05/23/2013	Probe panel finds 5 reasons	New Nation
20.	--	Life sentence for Rana Plaza factory owners recommended	Financial Express
21.	05/26/2013	Pay for pain, sufferings	New Nation
22.	05/27/2013	US under lot of pressure over GSP facility	New Nation
23.	05/28/2013	BD must avoid Rana Plaza incident in future: Mozena	Financial Express
24.	05/30/2013	Canadian Loblaw outlines plan to help RMG workers	Financial Express
25.	06/01/2013	Compensation money eludes families of Rana Plaza victims	Financial Express
26.	06/06/2013	UK offer for RMG sector reform	New Nation
27.	06/09/2013	Primark begins paying compensation	New Nation
28.	06/27/2013	BGMEA holds Rana Plaza, 5 RMG owners responsible for disaster, shirks its responsibility	Financial Express
29.	07/06/2013	RMG exports up over 16pc in April-May this year	Financial Express
30.	07/15/2013	Are RMG buildings safe to operate?	New Nation
31.	07/25/2013	CCC calls meeting of brands in BD to fix compensation for victims	Financial Express
32.	12/08/2013	GSP suspension & Bangladesh RMG sector	New Nation
33.	09/03/2013	US won't buy apparels stained with BD workers' blood: Mozena	Financial Express
34.	09/09/2013	Pressure rising on brands to sign BD safety accord	Financial Express
35.	09/14/2013	Two British MPs call for RMG workplace safety	Financial Express

36.	10/23/2013	ACC not yet taken any action against Rana	New Nation
37.	10/24/2013	Compensation for Rana Plaza tragedy victims still a far cry	Financial Express
38.	01/21/2014	Tk 1.45m for each of the dead, missing, disabled	Financial Express
39.	02/14/2014	All attention to GSP action plan	New Nation
40.	03/12/2014	Safety problems still need to be resolved	New Nation
41.	03/23/2014	European parliamentary team arrives tomorrow to assess post-Rana progress	Financial Express
42.	04/17/2014	Compensations continue to elude Rana Plaza victims	Financial Express
43.	04/20/2014	Global buyers not raising prices despite compliance: BGMEA	Financial Express
44.	04/22/2014	Disbursement of donations not transparent	New Nation
45.	04/25/2014	Tears for dead and maimed comrades	New Nation
46.	10/03/2014	1,587 Rana Plaza victims get help from ILO-managed fund	Financial Express
47.	12/22/2014	Compensation estimate cut by \$10m	Financial Express
48.	04/22/2015	No major progress in compensation	Financial Express
49.	04/25/2015	Tears for Rana Plaza victims	New Nation