

## Collective Memories of Disaster through Community Radio: A Case Study of the Great East Japan Earthquake

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### ABSTRACT

From the time a disaster strikes to the time of restoration and recovery, community FM broadcasting can be an important information source at the time of the disaster and for the restoration efforts in the affected region. While the value of community radio for information transmission during a disaster has been well-documented, most previous research has not considered its role in the memory of disaster. This study shows that community FM broadcasting in disaster-stricken areas can play a supportive role in the making of a collective memory of the disaster, which can be important for future disaster resilience. In-depth interviews were conducted with staff members from 11 community FM radio stations in areas that suffered severe damages by the Great East Japan Earthquake. The study also analyzed regular programs related to the disaster and special programs on the Memorial Day of 3.11 aired by 27 community FM stations in the region in 2018 and 2019. This study illustrates how FM broadcasting can create a ritual space for the intergenerational transmission of memories and, in this case, the re-imagining of a collective identity of “Us, the disaster-survivors’ community.”

Keywords: community FM broadcasting, collective memory, disaster, media event intergenerational transmission

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### 1. Introduction

With the increase of the threat of natural disasters, it has become important to archive memories and records of disasters in societies at risk in order to strengthen disaster prevention and mitigation. The collective memory of disaster can thus be important for future generations. In our contemporary society, media plays an important role in recording and documenting disasters. Media can be a tool to interpret the past and generate a collective memory in a community (Zelizer, 2001). The sharing of local memories leads to the reconstruction and strengthening of local identity (Fukuda, 2005) and builds a bridge between those

who have experienced the disaster and those who have not by sharing personal stories across time and space (Abe, 2005).

At the time of writing, it has been eight years since the Great East Japan Earthquake and a massive tsunami struck the northeastern shore of Japan and six nuclear reactors at Fukushima No. 1 plant on March 11, 2011. The disaster was known as Japan’s triple disaster and was the most expensive natural disaster in recorded history (hereafter “Tohoku disaster”). A tremendous amount of media coverage on the Tohoku disaster was produced by both mass and local media. However, the amount of media coverage significantly decreased after the restoration assistance petered out after seven

years. In 2018, most evacuation areas were canceled by the government and the media portrayed this as the end of the recovery from the Tohoku disaster. The amount of coverage by national TV broadcasters has steadily decreased since 2011 (Hara & Ohtaka, 2019)<sup>1</sup>. With dramatically decreasing media coverage on the Tohoku disaster, it might become difficult to remember the disaster; as a result, memories of the disaster might fade away in society.

In Japan, community FM broadcasting (hereinafter "CFM") was an effective media during the recovery and reconstruction phases following the Tohoku disaster. CFM played an important role in the dissemination of disaster information and in the long-term recovery and disaster resilience of communities (Ichimura, 2012; Murakami, 2012; Kanayama, 2014; Ouchi, 2018). Over the past eight years since the Tohoku disaster, CFMs have listened to the voices of people who experienced the disaster and have conveyed these stories through daily programs as well as media events like the disaster memorial ceremony. CFMs have also functioned as a space where anonymous victims and evacuees could communicate with each other. The emergency broadcasting FMs (hereinafter "EFM") in the disaster-stricken areas became the space where community members gathered and exchanged information (Ouchi, 2015) and maintained the local identities and collective memories of communities that had been scattered nationwide due to evacuation procedures (Mizunuma, 2016).

Thus, CFMs have accumulated personal stories of the disaster, so, therefore, may be able to construct a collective memory of the disaster in the community through their broadcasting. This study aims to understand how CFMs can be an apparatus to remember personal stories of disaster, which could contribute to constructing a collective memory.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2-1 Community radio studies on the Tohoku disaster

A total of 30 EFMs was established for the Great East Japan earthquakes. Because the number was recorded in the past, the community radio has caught great attention from media researchers, media practitioners, and government officials nationwide. Terada (2017, p. 148) classified research on EFMs and CFMs in stricken areas of the Tohoku disaster into six types as follows:

- (1) Organizational and operational differences between CFM and EFM
- (2) The description of practices of EFM in coastal areas
- (3) Assistance to launch temporary radios by CFM from non-stricken areas
- (4) Framework of financial support from foundation and private corporations
- (5) Issues of transferring from EFM to CFM
- (6) The status of EFM due to prolonged disaster conditions

Most studies have focused on the functions of CFM/EFM, media contents, effects on the listeners, and the operation of the broadcasters, all of which were based upon the transmission model of communication. Among those studies, some studies in particular looked at the broadcasters and their programs as a community space in which victims and evacuees could communicate with each other. Kanayama (2014) studied the attempts of EFMs in Fukushima, such as ODAGAISAMA FM and HIBARI FM, to become "the crossroad of the diverse voices of victims." Ouchi (2015) also found that the EFMs including ODAGAISAMA FM, RINGO Radio, and HIBARI FM had become "a plaza" where community members could gather and exchange information.

Since CFMs and EFMs in the stricken areas have listened to people who experienced the disaster in the community and told their stories through their

programs, these community media have accumulated personal memories, which may contribute to constructing a collective memory of the disaster. As most previous studies were conducted within five years after the disaster, there is a lack of studies on how CFMs in the stricken areas of the Tohoku disaster have continued to play a role in broadcasting people's stories in the long-term.

## 2-2 Collective memory and storytelling

Halbwachs (1992) regarded collective memory as being constructed and reconstructed according to the interests and concerns of society at different time periods. In modern societies, collective memory is created through media coverage. Zelizer (1992, p. 214) pointed out, "the story of the past will remain in part a story of what the media has chosen to remember, a story of how the media's memories have in turn become our own." It has also been called "media memory," which means that "the systematic exploration of collective pasts that are narrated by the media, through the use of the media, and about the media" (Neiger, Meyers, & Zandberg, 2011, p. 1).

In the study of media memory, agency and context are pivotal—the capacity and authority of media to operate as memory agents and the circumstances and venues where representations of media memory are observed (Neiger, Meyers, & Zandberg, 2011). For instance, in terms of images or impressions of disasters in media, they often differ from people's real-life experiences (Goodall & Lee, 2015). Local collective memory is often different from the national memory because of various reasons, for instance, the cannibalization of memory (Zelizer, 2011) and the tension between routine programs and ritual ceremonies (Neiger, Zandberg, & Meyers, 2011).

While little research has considered the role of radio in the making of collective memories of disaster, one study describes how regional memory can be constructed through local radio broadcasting. This study found that "the media played a key role in both consolidating and defining the bound-

aries of the collective" and that in the absence of regional television, the local radio constructed the sole voice expressing specific regions and sectors of the population (Neiger, Zandberg, & Meyers, 2011, p. 171).

Since the experience of disaster is essentially personal, it is important for individuals to share their own stories, and in this way, to create collective memories of a community (Nobe & Tanaka, 2013). Collective memory becomes an avenue to connect daily experiences with past experiences and to create future community resilience. In this sense, CFMs play an important role by telling the experiences of disaster among local people. In particular, because most communities in the affected areas did not have other forms of electronic community media when the Tohoku disaster happened, the CFMs and EFM played a unique role in allowing communities to share stories and create memories. Communication infrastructure theory explains that having access to a neighborhood storytelling network that consists of three main players—neighbors, community-based organizations, and local media—is likely to help people understand and cope with disaster situations (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001). Based upon this theory, a survey was conducted with residents of Shinchimachi in Fukushima about their level of connectedness to local media sources and the influences these sources had on their life satisfaction and future outlook. The study revealed that the more they were connected to local media including local newspapers, PR newsletters from the local government and *Kairanban* (community notices circulated among households) and talked with their neighbors about neighborhood affairs, the more they were likely to think that "we" as residents can control and manage the surroundings based on trust and cohesion (Jung, 2019, p. 5940)<sup>2</sup>. The study showed that connectedness to local media had a direct positive effect on future outlook.

On the other hand, another study found that people in Shinchimachi in Fukushima perceived media including television, magazines, newspapers,

and online sources as sources of stigma, which were “bringing mistrust,” “saying only negative things,” and circulating “contagion rumors” (Kwesell & Jung, 2019). These studies indicate that it might be important for CFM as community media not only to tell personal experiences of the disaster over time but also to tell them in a way that the residents perceive positively.

### 2-3 Media event and disaster memory

A media event is expected to get people to remember the disaster. Yoshimi (1996) categorized media events as: (1) events planned and directed by mass media, (2) events that are widely broadcast and covered by the mass media, and (3) social events that become a media event through media coverage. A memorial ceremony of the disaster through media is regarded as a typical media event (type 2). A special program or event for a memorial of the disaster produced by media is also regarded as a media event (type 1).

Ogawa (2015) argues that storytelling comes about through three main forms: (1) the accumulation of news, (2) the narrative of community, and (3) the open space where people can exchange stories. CFM radio programs play a significant role as they provide a space where community members can listen and talk to each other. Action research has shown that storytelling through community radio can establish a sense of community with local pride in disaster-stricken areas (Atsumi *et al.*, 2016).

Kanayama (2019) showed how the collective memory of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake has been constructed through the media event, “1.17 Lightning on Kobe in Nagata” organized by the members of FMYY, a community radio station located in Nagata ward in Kobe city since 1998. Her study explored four aspects of the meaning of this event.

- (1) Recall of earthquake disaster by physical contact
- (2) Intergeneration of disaster memories through

- indirect internalization of the disaster-related stories and participation in the media event
- (3) Networking among affected communities in Japan and abroad
- (4) Passing on crucial information to those who do not experience disasters

Collective memory is generally thought useful for community resilience as life knowledge and community knowledge are passed on from one generation to the next and can be used to prevent and mitigate the adverse effects of negative events such as natural disasters (Brody, 2008; Nara, 2018; Pfister, 2009). Indirect internalization also occurs through the memorialization process. Memorials of past crises provide solace for those who directly experienced the crisis, but they also invite those who were not directly involved and future generations to internalize the lessons learned from the disaster (Sellnow & Seeger, 2019).

Thus, media events such as memorial ceremonies covered by CFMs may help to reconfirm and reconstruct memories of disaster and inform the younger generation.

## 3. Research Question and Method

Memory is not a fixed trace, but an ongoing process of construction and reconstruction through recollection. For collective memory, habitual ways of thinking among members of a group need to be reconfirmed, and this is often recorded and recalled with the support of media, including programs and events. In other words, communication media can evoke collective memory among the members of a society.

Where the media coverage of the Tohoku disaster dramatically decreased after seven years, this study postulates that the continued sharing of first-hand stories through CFM programs and media events can be a powerful mode of community recollection of the disaster and, in this way, may contribute to the making of the community’s collective memory of the disaster in the long run. It should be men-

tioned that few studies have explored the role of CFM in the making of collective memories of the Tohoku disaster.

Based upon theoretical perspectives on collective memory and community media, this study created the following research questions to understand how the CFMs in the disaster-stricken areas of the Great East Japan Earthquake can serve as an apparatus to construct collective memories of disaster.

RQ1: In what ways do community FM radio programs continue to engage with storytelling on the Great East Japan Earthquake after the disaster, and what motivates these broadcastings?

RQ2: How do community FM broadcasters cover media events on the Memorial Day of the Great East Japan Earthquake in the disaster-stricken areas after the disaster, and what motivates this coverage?

This study conducted in-depth interviews with 9 CFMs and 2 EFMs<sup>3</sup> located in regions that were severely affected by the disaster as shown below. All interviews were conducted at the interviewee's radio station between November 2017 and May of 2018 (see **Table 1**). The interviewees were broadcasting directors or producers of programs related to the disaster. The interviews were from one to

two hours in length and all were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

In addition, this study analyzed regular programs and special community FM programs broadcasted by 27 CFMs in the disaster-affected areas on 3/11 Memorial Day in 2018 and 2019. The analysis was primarily based on the broadcast schedule as found on each community FM's website.<sup>5</sup> In cases where the program titles were not clear on the website, the researchers listened to the program online or contacted the station staff.

These regular and special programs related to the disaster could be categorized into four types according to the distribution system and style: (1) 3/11 Tokyo Centered Memorial Program (produced by the Music Bird), (2) 3/11 Locally Networked Program (produced by the network of CFMs and EFMs in Tohoku), (3) 3/11 Related programs (special programs produced by each station), often accompanied by 3/11 Memorial Ceremonies, (4) Regular Programs on the Disasters (produced by each station). If multiple programs were aired by a single station, each program was counted separately.

#### 4. Analysis

Three main points have emerged from our analysis—(1) the importance of the annual memorial programs of March 11th, (2) the staff's struggle

Table 1 Interview list<sup>4</sup>

Prefecture	CFM/EFM interviewed	Interviewee (male/female)	Interview date
Fukushima	FM Iwaki	Broadcasting Director (m)	2017.11.17
	FM Poco	Broadcasting Director (f)	2018.2.13
	Hibari FM	Broadcasting Director (m)	2017.11.18
	Odagaisama Radio	Production staff (f)	2017.11.17
Miyagi	FM Iwanuma	Director (m)	2018.3.28
	FM Natori	Broadcasting Director (m)	2018.3.28
	FM Bay Area	President (m)	2018.3.28
	Radio Kesennuma	President (m)	2018.3.29
	Radio Ishinomai	Broadcasting Director (f)	2018.3.29
Iwate	FM Nemanine	Broadcasting Director (f)	2018.5.17
	Miyako Harbor Radio	President (m) / two Directors (m, f)	2018.5.18

to balance the traumatic past and optimistic future, and (3) the value of everyday storytelling among survivors to form aural “imagined communities.”

#### 4-1 The importance of the annual memorial programs of March 11th

Two or three years after the Tohoku disaster, programs were put under pressure to mourn victims and commemorate the disaster. However, our research conducted over six years or more after the disaster, shows that the situation has changed. The timetables on March 11, 2018 and 2019 (seven and eight years after the disaster, respectively) and our interview findings with the station staff (conducted between six and seven years after the disaster, see **Table 1**) show the following: 1) many CFMs seem to have difficulty keeping the audience's attention in terms of disaster-related programs; and, 2) different types of memorial programs (other than mourning or commemoration) have emerged.

The number of special programs and locally networked programs about the disaster gradually decreased over these eight years. However, on the 8th anniversary in 2019, most CFMs (22 out of 23) in the disaster-affected Tohoku area broadcasted special programs related to the disaster (3 EFMs stopped broadcasting in 2018).

As **Table 2** shows, compared to the programs in 2018, the number of special programs on the disaster by coastal stations, severely damaged by the disaster, decreased in 2019, whereas the num-

ber of special programs increased at inland stations. In coastal areas, municipal memorial ceremonies were broadcasted by six out of eight stations in coastal communities, showing a continuing demand for mourning.

Most of the broadcasters preserved recordings of their memorial programs but they had not yet decided how or if they would use them in the future. What follows is an explanation of each special program on the day.

##### (1) “Kizuna station” by the Tokyo-centered broadcasting company

“Kizuna (*being connected*) station,” a memorial program made by the Music Bird, was broadcasted in five stations in the disaster-stricken areas in 2019, in conjunction with the national music distribution system for CFMs. The program was led by two DJs with help from some famous musicians and a local CFM's DJ. Some DJs and musicians from Tokyo had close friends or relatives who suffered from the disaster. They cheered victims up through conversation and live music. The performers and location of the event were chosen by Music Bird in Tokyo, whereas CFMs in the affected areas recommended local guests for the program and aired the latest news stories of the community. A director of the FM IWAKI, in the coastal area, was slightly critical of these DJs from Tokyo, feeling “otherness” to them.

Table 2 Community FM broadcasters broadcasted disaster related programs

	Coastal Area(11→8 stations)		Inland Area 16(15) stations	
	2018	2019	2018	2019
<b>311 Tokyo Centered Memorial Program</b>	3(27.3%)	2(25.0%)	4(26.7%)	3(20.0%)
<b>311 Locally Networked Program</b>	9(81.8%)	6(75.0%)	8(53.3%)	9(60.0%)
<b>311 Related Program</b>	3(27.3%)	2(25.0%)	4(26.7%)	7(46.7%)
<b>311 Memorial Ceremony</b>	8(72.7%)	7(87.5%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)
<b>Regular Program on the Disasters</b>	8(72.7%)	6(75.0%)	8(53.3%)	6(40.0%)

*Of course, I know that national distributors have more power to gain attention from a larger audience outside our area, circulating what happened in our area after the disaster. But for me, it seems that their (DJs from Tokyo) reports lacked depth with little connection to the area. They are just collecting stories and leaving, not understanding what community people in the stricken areas were really thinking and worrying about.*

## (2) “Radio de Tsutaetai Omoi” by the local community FM network

“Radio de Tsutaetai Omoi (connect our thoughts through radio),” another memorial program launched collaboratively among CFMs and EFMs in the Tohoku area in 2012. The purpose of this network program was to broadcast individuals’ experiences of the disaster and also to support newly launched temporary stations. The CFMs carefully chose the interviewees and the focus of the memorial programs, and in this way, took seriously their role as a representative community station on Memorial Day.

The tone of the disaster coverage of this program gradually changed over time. Right after the disaster, they tended to report from the viewpoint of mourning and remembrance. However, a few years later, their focus had changed to the stories and voices of people who were trying to move on, not as victims but as survivors. For example, in the 2019 program, reporters from disaster-affected stations interviewed people who were trying to carry on despite their difficulties. These people included an elementary school principal together with a taxi driver on a small tsunami stricken island, a B & B owner who moved to the island from the Sendai metropolitan area, and another group of women; all were trying to start locally owned businesses on a small island. Under the new editorial decision to focus on people with positive future plans, these three stories were reported.

This local network program aimed to share individual stories and messages from those in the disaster-stricken areas stretching over 500 km to

bring together information on the current situation throughout the region and create a communal sense of “Us, the survivors”. Despite its originality in using first-hand perspectives of the disaster, the program came to an end in March of 2019 with the close of two EFMs—Odagaisama FM and Hibari FM, due to the lack of fundraising and human resources.

## (3) Original Programs for the Memorial Ceremony

Eight coastal stations and seven inland stations produced their own original programs or sections for the March 11 Memorial Day. The staff of these stations, most of whom were victims to some extent, were passionate about their mission, which they saw as reminding residents of the day and passing on people’s experiences of the disaster.

Among the programs, municipal memorial ceremonies were regarded as the most significant and were aired live in most coastal stations. Memorial ceremonies held in each municipality were considered a special time-space for the local audience to pay silent tribute to the victims on the date and share sympathy among community members. In fact, according to the interviewees, broadcasting local ceremonies is regarded as one of the most important tasks for community broadcasters on March 11th. An interviewee from RADIO KESENNUMA explained as follows:

*It is our role to remind community members of the anniversary and not to forget the disasters. (In order to do so,) ceremonies are broadcasted by many stations in our area. (...) We are very cautious about the time schedule of the anniversary day. In order to avoid broadcasting cheerful music just before or after the holy ceremony, we must sandwich the ceremony by our own programs. The nationwide network distributor doesn’t care what music to broadcast on that day. But we do.*

However, on the other hand, there seemed to be internal arguments among radio staff over whether

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to continue broadcasting memorial programs. For example, an interviewee from FM BAY AREA described the situation as follows:

*In our station, some staff members say that it's too monotonous to broadcast the ceremony. Broadcasting the municipal ceremony live, a message from the mayor, the police officer... It's the same every year. Listeners might not want to remember anymore... NHK also broadcasts national ceremonies. Should we do that again? But one day, our program council members insisted that the station should broadcast the ceremony every year to remind us of the tragedy. That discussion persuaded continuation.*

Thus, these municipal ceremonies were memorial media events that had become regarded as important rituals within the ongoing remembrance of the disaster among listeners in the stricken areas.

#### **4-2 Balancing Traumatic Past and Optimistic Future**

CFM broadcasters in this study faced a common problem. They were very aware of their responsibility as community media providers to promote disaster prevention through recollection. Media programs on the Tohoku disaster and reconstruction had been decreasing since the national budget for reconstruction petered out in 2016. CFM broadcasters felt it important for their audiences to remember the devastating experiences of the disaster and to hand it down to their descendants. However, as residents of the disaster-stricken areas, they also felt they wanted to forget about it, and move on by focusing on the future of their lives and their communities after eight years.

For example, FM POCO in Fukushima city, which is located inland and where residents around the Fukushima Nol nuclear power plant had evacuated to, decided to focus on the next steps. They criticized national and foreign media for not updating their images of Fukushima following the reconstruction. They wanted to transmit real local information

which meant the bright side of reconstruction and recovery, and they saw this as their responsibility.

Along these same lines, the staff of FM BAY AREA were trying not to use the term "reconstruction" because they thought it connotes feelings of an ongoing struggle among local residents. Thus, in many CFMs, they chose not to focus on the disaster as they had in the past. Rather, they chose to present a brighter future.

At all the community radio stations included in this research, staff members struggled with whether they should continue to air disaster-related programs, and with which voices they should broadcast. It is interesting to note that these struggles seemed to lead them to reexamine their mission and principles as a radio station in a disaster-affected region.

#### **4-3 Everyday storytelling to form aural "imagined communities"**

CFM staff in the Tohoku disaster-stricken areas often use the word "Yorisou," which means "standby/ close." An interviewee of the RADIO KESENNUMA described their mission as follows:

*As a peer "victim", we think we staff members also experienced the disasters so we'll understand you. That's our basic concept. Even though we are sometimes talking silly, listeners will understand us with our honesty as a peer.*

In this way, most CFM staff were trying to portray listeners' worries, complaints, and joys and to speak for them, and they regarded it as their advantage over larger media companies. Although they were not sure what they will do with their records and disaster archives, most of the broadcasters hung onto their programs as historical aural resources.

RADIO ISHINOMAKI produced the regular program as a peer, "Anata no Deban desu (It's your turn)", to let local residents express their stories and opinions on air. One of the station's staff members explained the following:

*Recently, I think people are gradually opening their minds and exposing their experiences. By exposing their thoughts, I guess they try to digest their harsh experiences of the disasters.*

Thus, RADIO ISHINOMAKI was focusing on the mental health of the listeners. The station also put on a program where people, including the younger generation, could discuss the future of the town. The respondent explained that this program intended to empower their listeners. They emphasized that everyone had a story to tell. They encouraged people's everyday storytelling in the region, including high school "reciters" who talked about the disaster.

Coincidentally, the staff of RADIO KESENNUMA also found that people's storytelling was useful, not only for recollection but also for the storytellers' mental health. In this community radio, recovery from mental breakdown, a hidden problem in the city, was also regarded as one of the radio's missions. They introduced a program operated by two local DJs with mental health disorders, titled "Sunny Days Rainy Days," which aimed to provide support to those struggling with mental health issues in the city. The station staff felt it was their role as a CFM to broadcast these kinds of programs for the sake of listeners in the stricken areas.

However, community storytelling is not easy. There are two difficulties. First, in disaster-stricken areas, there exists many small divides between residents depending on the scale of damage that was experienced. Particularly in Fukushima, the situation was even more complicated because of the radiation and the compensation from the electronic power company for Fukushima No.1 nuclear power plant accident. A staff member of HIBARI FM described as follows.

*We have tremendous numbers of divides among us, particularly relating to the compensation. Every morning, we'll check the local newspapers and pick up news stories to broadcast. Then we sometimes say, like, "Oh, here comes a court case",*

*"Ignore it". We wouldn't like to fuel the conflict in our community anymore. No one will be happy even if we discover and show the divides. Mass media could do this. But we really wouldn't like to.*

The second difficulty is the reporting of "peer's" tragedies. Although they have kept broadcasting information about the disaster for seven years, RADIO ISHINOMAKI had not covered the local tragic story of Okawa primary school, where 74 children and their teachers were swept away. As "a peer", the staff felt the experience was too severe for their listeners to handle.

Thus, the CFMs were trying to cross the invisible divides through everyday programs, since they were fully aware of the feeling among community members and the divided situation. That's why everyday storytelling is again regarded as one of the key factors that can unite divided listeners and bridge the gap.

ODAGAISAMA FM of Tomioka town in Fukushima, where all residents had to evacuate to Fukushima city and other areas for years, also valued storytelling, particularly in their local dialect. The town distributed a digital tablet to dispersed residents to allow them to share information and listen to their radio programs over the Internet. A staff member of the station considered everyday storytelling as essential to unite dispersed people, so she recorded residents' unofficial talk about news, shops, and neighbors and uploaded them. She believed that people's stories could remind dispersed residents of their home community and stimulate them to imagine the current situation in the disaster-stricken areas.

*ODAGAISAMA FM provided not only information, but also their lost bonds in the community, by transmitting our everyday conversation and storytelling in town, I guess. I don't fully understand what the radiation level means and whether we should come back or not, but anyway, I wouldn't like people to quarrel. (...) I found that personal stories won't split people. An individual*

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*story can connect people. For example, a listener can start ceramics, after listening to someone's story on it.*

As for ODAGAISAMA FM, Ouchi (2018) focused on the language of their talk and argued that a local dialect could be a great tool to retrieve their common past memories, to connect dispersed residents, and to form a re-imagined community. The director also explained as follows:

*I heard that an old lady, who was evacuated to Tokyo, was always told by her daughter not to speak in the local dialect in front of Tokyo people. (...) I believe they evacuees miss our local dialect, and also our everyday chat like "A new shop has opened" or "Someone is back". (...) I guess these aural stories will stimulate the evacuees' imagination about the community.*

These first-hand messages and personal stories of the disaster were regularly broadcasted in most CFMs' community programs. In addition, even though they broadcasted everyday programs, as peers of those in the stricken areas, they were careful not to bring more pain to victims or to broaden divides. For staff and residents of the stricken areas, storytelling from the point of view of "us" or of "peer victims" seemed to be a way to heal both listeners and the staff as residents living in the same community. Where municipal ceremonies were broadcasted as media events on special occasions, the everyday rituals of the CFMs contributed to forming a local identity as "peer" storytellers/listeners.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

This research examined local radio programming six to eight years after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami to explore how CFMs continue to contribute to the making of collective memories of the disaster and, in turn, community resilience against future disasters.

Our analysis was framed around two main questions. First, we were interested in how the CFMs have dealt with victims' and evacuees' storytelling over time and why their approach to the voices of the victims in the disaster-stricken areas had gradually changed. At the time of research, some radio stations had set up programs for local people to discuss the future of their communities and, in particular, inland broadcasters tended to avoid mentioning the disaster. With budget cuts to disaster recovery and reconstruction, some broadcasters were not able to continue broadcasting. Other CFMs had shifted their tone from mourning or reflection to looking to the future. In general, the interviews indicated that CFM staffs were fully aware of the significance of their work in collecting, sharing, and recording first-hand voices and memories in the disaster-stricken areas. In order to avoid division and bring about solidarity among residents, CFMs were wanting to promote everyday storytelling that would contribute to a sense of community or "we-ness" as survivors. However, most of the broadcasters had not decided or thought about how they would use their recorded programs in the long-term.

Second, we considered how CFM broadcasts on the memorial day of the disaster had changed over time and why the broadcasting of municipal ceremonies or special programs on March 11th continued to be important for CFMs six to eight years after the disaster. The CFM broadcasters felt it was their role to remind listeners about the disaster to prepare for the future, and to report and archive the related events as well as local people's voices. However, broadcasting memorial events or programs were sometimes thought to be monotonous. In fact, broadcasters were struggling with whether they should keep airing memorial programming each year. They were caught between two contradictory feelings. On the one hand, they wanted to remind people of the disaster. On the other hand, they wanted to move on and forget about past tragedies, and in this sense, some wanted to stop broadcasting memorial programs all together. However, as other research has shown, such as in

the case of the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake, memorial media events can help those with no disaster experience to internalize the tragedy indirectly.

The perspective of each broadcaster can be seen through their programming choices on Memorial Day. As noted above, there are three levels of media events that can contribute to the making of collective memories: the national-scale, the regional-network, and the community level.

The national network including NHK and other mass media tried to remind the public of the day from a bird's eye view: they used celebrities and told tragic or heart-warming stories. These programs tended to be regarded as done by "outsiders" by disaster victims including CFM staff. As observed, those residing in the disaster-stricken areas felt discomfort with these programs. At the same time, however, these programs could play a symbolic role by reminding people of significant events in Japanese society.

On the other hand, we saw that there was solidarity among CFMs in the disaster-stricken areas. A regional network was established among broadcasters in Fukushima and the affected broadcasters throughout the Tohoku region. These networks produced programs on the Memorial Day of the disaster as well as regular programs, taking turns to produce their own programs and to listen to and share other people's stories. These programs were contributing to the making of regional collective memories by building a sense of "Us, the disaster survivors." In addition, these programs promoted mutual understanding by drawing listeners' attention to what happened in the other disaster-stricken areas. Special annual programs on the Memorial Day were media events which helped people to keep remembering the disaster and which reconfirmed regional solidarity among a broader group of listeners.

Lastly, the CFMs in the stricken areas were also trying to focus on their own "neighborhood," in particular by setting up and broadcasting community memorial ceremonies. For survivors and evacuees, the memories of the disaster could be a

past they did not want to frequently remember. Furthermore, the routine annual ceremony was sometimes regarded with reluctance. Nevertheless, the broadcasting of memorial ceremonies was thought important to remind listeners of the disaster, and was done in a way to not stimulate "harsh" experiences among community members. For example, on-air moments of silence during the local memorial events brought listeners together to reflect on their experiences of the disasters and invited them to mourn collectively for the deceased. Through these broadcastings, the municipal memorial events had become "media events" that connected community members through the remembering or re-imagining of the day simultaneously by listening to their own CFM. In this way, these memorial media events had become regarded as significant rituals of disaster remembrance. The CFMs played an important role by continuing to provide a ritual space for this remembrance.

In addition to the making of community remembrance, such media events at the community level can help members to develop a sense of solidarity and overcome divides. From a long-term perspective, in the case of the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake, media events in the affected areas were found to help young participants internalize past experiences.

As for storytelling, it was difficult for those in the affected regions to listen to the voices of the victims or to tell their own experiences while in the midst of recovering from the disaster. However, almost all CFMs felt it was their responsibility to cover and archive the voices of local residents in order to digest these harsh experiences. In fact, as Schank and Abelson (1995) argued, stories about one's experiences and the experiences of others are the fundamental constituents of human memory, knowledge, and social communication. In terms of intergenerational transmission disaster memory, these everyday disaster stories may allow the younger generations to indirectly internalize the risk. Storytelling and broadcasting the events, as well as firsthand experiences, can form collective

memories of the disasters in the listeners' minds. The younger generations may internalize the experiences and the risk of disasters through these stories and programs. Disaster memorial events have become a media event that not only unites people into a re-imagining of a collective identity of "Us, the disaster-survivor community" despite the diversity of experiences of disaster and the varying scales of damage but also allows people with fewer disaster experiences to imagine what others have gone through.

In conclusion, this study showed that CFMs can continue to play an important role in the post-reconstruction period after a disaster by supporting community members to build a collective memory in the long-run. Further research on the audience side is necessary to see how the memory of the Tohoku disaster is inherited and internalized through programs broadcasted by community FM stations.

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### Note

- 1 Several studies investigated media coverage, media contents, and coverage period on the Tohoku disaster, most of which were concentrated in three years after the disaster (Hara & Ohtaka, 2019); for instance, unbalanced news coverage (Endo, 2011; Hashimoto, 2013; Miyawaki, 2013), regional disparity portrayed in the news coverage by both national and local newspapers (Numata

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et. al., 2011), change of topics and information in the media coverage (Tanaka & Hara, 2012; Niwa & Fujita, 2013), and the issue of information flow from central to local areas in mass media and social media (Kawai & Fujishiro, 2013).

2 The survey asked how important six types of local media were in keeping up with what was going on in the community including local newspapers, PR newsletters by the local government, SNS, talking to neighbors, newsletters by community organizations and *Kairanban*. The result showed that local newspapers, PR newsletter by the local government and *Kairanban* were important.

3 These two EFM were closed in March 2018.

4 The title of the interviewees was at the time of the interview.

5 Ohsaki FM in Miyagi prefecture was not analyzed because there was not a timetable shown on the website.



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