**Conversation on Disasters: Deconstructed on 13 October 2021**

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20 Years of Radical Disaster Interpretations: Reflections and Aspirations (RADIX @ 20!)
Conversation on Disasters: Deconstructed on 13 October 2021

Bob Alexander¹, Maureen Fordham²*, Rohit Jigyasu³, Mayfourth Luneta⁴ and Ben Wisner⁵

¹ Independent Integrated DRM, CCA, & Risk-Managed Development Researcher, Trainer, Consultant, and RCCE Specialist
²* IRDR Centre for Gender and Disaster, UCL, London, UK; Corresponding author: m.fordham@ucl.ac.uk
³ The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property, Rome, Italy
⁴ Center for Disaster Preparedness, the Philippines
⁵ Honorary Visiting Professor, Institute for Risk and Disaster Reduction, University College London, UK & Affiliate Scholar, Environmental Studies Program, Oberlin College, Oberlin, OH, USA

Structured Abstract

Purpose: This conversation presents the reflections from five prominent disaster scholars and practitioners on the purpose of Radix - the Radical Disaster Interpretations network – as we celebrate its 20th anniversary.

Design/methodology/approach: This paper is based on the conversations that took place on Disasters: Deconstructed Podcast livestream on the 13th October 2021.

Findings: The conversation reflects on personal and professional journey in disaster studies over the past 20 years, and on what needs changing in order to make disaster interpretations more radical.

Originality: The conversation contributes to the ongoing discussions around explorations of radical pathways for understanding and preventing disasters.

Keywords: Disaster; Radix; interpretations of disasters; shock; reflections

Ksenia Chmutina (the co-host; from herein Ksenia): I want to start today with a very short story from Eduardo Galeano’s Mirrors². It’s called “Lost and Found”:

“The twentieth century, which was born proclaiming peace and justice, died bathed in blood. It passed on a world much more unjust than the one it inherited. The twenty-first century, which also arrived heralding peace and justice, is following in its predecessor’s footsteps. In my childhood, I was convinced that everything that went astray on earth ended up on the moon. But the astronauts found no sign of dangerous dreams, or broken promises, or hopes betrayed. If not on the moon, where might they be? Perhaps they were never misplaced. Perhaps they are in hiding here on earth. Waiting.”

And as today's the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction, I thought that Eduardo Galeano summarizes our hopes and broken dreams and promises so well in this short piece. And this is what we’re going to talk about today - what could be better than marking the International Day Disaster Risk Reduction than with the relaunch of Radix³ and the celebration of its 20 years? Many of us over the years have been inspired by the discussions and debates on Radix listserv. And of course, many of us have been using resources collected over the years on the website.

Today we have some amazing guests for you - the people who I don't think need much of an introduction! So we have Ben Wisner, Maureen Fordham, Bob Alexander (or Barefoot Bob as many of us know him), Rohit Jigyasu, and Mayfourth Luneta, from whom you will hear shortly. We ask them to

¹ You can watch this conversation on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9eWw2y1t1Y
³ https://www.radixonline.org
reflected on their personal and professional journey in disaster studies since the launch of Radix 20 years ago.

**Jason von Meding** (co-host; from herein Jason): As many of you know, the Radix listserv has been a touchstone for Ksenia and me and many of us, as disaster scholars over the past 20 years. And the community of critical and engaged people is just really unique. And for me, it's definitely an honor to publicly recognize this today and thank all of those who have contributed in the previous decades.

I'd like to say a little bit about Radix for those of you who may be tuning in and hearing about the group for the first time. Radix was established by Ben Wisner and Maureen Fordham, from whom we will hear in a few minutes, in 2001, stimulated by witnessing yet more major disasters in the preceding decade: they were inspired to act by those affected in Gujarat India and El Salvador in the first two months of 2001. The original website and its companion mailing lists were created and curated by Maureen [Fordham] (later joined by Alberto Delgado Perez) and were designed as collaborative and open spaces to share comments and contents that could help to develop radical disaster scholarship and practice. Radix is a radical group because it's concerned with both root causes of disaster and structural actions to prevent disasters from the bottom up and the top down. Radix is non-sectarian, but by no means a-political, and argues that disasters are fundamentally about power distribution, preventing disasters, therefore requires political actions. Over the past two decades, Radix has evolved into a dynamic collective of people from around the world, and it continues to inspire an entirely new generation of disaster scholars to be more critical and explore radical pathways for understanding and preventing disasters.

Today is such an exciting day because we're going to share the relaunched website with you, which is online now. I'd like to hand over to our now quite well-established Disaster: Deconstructed co-host, JC Gaillard to talk more about the relaunch of Radix.

**JC Gaillard** (co-host, from herein JC): Okay. Thanks, Jason. Super glad to be here tonight (for me!) for this important occasion. And Radix had a similar formative influence on me back I think in 2002 or 2003 when I was in the Philippines, when I was teaching and researching at the University of the Philippines. That's when I discovered Radix as a fantastic community and as a source of information, inspiration, and motivation as well as a place to do research and challenge the status quo when it comes to understanding and reducing the risk of disasters.

I'm glad to be here to launch a new Radix website. We've worked hard over the past few weeks to revamp the Radix website without losing its ethos and the wealth of materials on the original website. So it's still meant and designed for being a good to place - as Ben told me earlier today - good to place for whoever is interested in studying disasters to share and to learn about the radical approach to understanding disasters. Jason, I am not sure, if we could show the new website on screen. Fantastic. Thank you so very much. It's been live since this morning, New Zealand time and it's still in the making, it's not a finished product in any way, we want the website to be permanently updated, and permanently changing in the spirit of this help for dialogue, and for learning, and for sharing about disaster. So you will see a block tab on the top, right? Where we have already uploaded a few blocks that we have classed as reference from different sources; and here are our partners, whether it's the GRRIPP projects or the African Center for Disaster Studies; and events being announced, including this one heretoday. And for these two things - the blog and the events - we are reaching out to you all for some articles. If you feel like you have something to share, whether it's a short piece, whether it's a blog you've published somewhere else, whether it's an announcement for an event, for a publication, for something happening in your neighborhood that's relevant to Radix, and that would help us in terms of brainstorming, and learning, and sharing about disasters, please feel free to reach out to any of us by email, send us some materials, and we will be super happy to upload these onto the website as soon as we can. Now, this [References tab] is where all references are stacked and where you are to find different archives including the original Radix archives, where all the materials that were on the original website have been stored and everything's accessible for the different themes that feature on the original websites, that's all still there. And we have a few other things that you can check out by yourself.

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4 For more information about the GRRIPP (Gender Responsive Resilience and Intersectionality in Policy and Practice) project, go to: [https://www.gripp.net](https://www.gripp.net)

5 For more information about the African Center for Disaster Studies, go to: [https://natural-sciences.mwu.ac.za/acad](https://natural-sciences.mwu.ac.za/acad)
The main thing I would like to introduce today and which is the second launch of the day after the actual website is this Accord. This Disaster Study Accord is a big thing for us. I guess, if you're a regular of the Disaster: Deconstructed podcast and livestreams, you're surely aware of the Disaster Studies Manifesto that we circulated two and a half years ago. We are super grateful we have more than 500 people who have signed the Manifesto, and following this document, some of us came up with a call for what we then called a ‘code of conduct’. And my friend Lori Peek would remind me that I need to mention the Nature paper where we issued that call a couple of years ago: we were calling for researchers to come together and try to think of how we could improve our practice of research to make it more fair, insightful, grounded, and just for all researchers with whom we work within the field, and practitioners as well. And this call received overwhelming support from all disciplines, from all parts of the world. But at the same time, it got a bit misunderstood by some as a call for a rigid set of principles or the list of prescriptive bullet points that we usually associate with the code of conduct.

So we've worked hard over the past few months to try to work on a document that we didn't give this kind of prescriptive impression because that was antithetical to what we meant by a code of conduct in the first place. And Ksenia came up with the word ‘Accord’, which is I think very appropriate for what we have here. So what we have here and what we launch now is actually a series of questions - and there are no answers to these questions. It's going to opportunity for all of us to ask ourselves these questions before we actually even think about doing research anywhere, anytime. So there's nothing prescriptive in there; it's just about asking ourselves: what do we want to do? Why do we want to do it? Who is going to do what at the benefit of whom? And how we're going to do this research? There's a sort of ontological and epistemological underpinning motivation there. It's all about how we understand the world, how we try to get to know about the world, and for the benefit of whom. It's building upon the Manifesto - and we've got a fantastic cohort of 100 signatories [of the Accord] already, most of them being early career researchers who have joined some of us mid-career researchers, and Maureen[Fordham] and Ben [Wisner] as our mentors to think about these questions.

Ksenia: Thanks, JC! Well, we have amazing guests today. And we have invited our guests to give us a kind of short reflection about their personal and professional journey in disaster studies.

The first guest I want to invite to join us today is Professor Maureen Fordham. Maureen is a professor of gender and disaster resilience. She is the Centre Director of the IRDR [Institute for Risk and Disaster Reduction] Center for Gender and Disaster at University College London. Maureen was a founding member of the Gender and Disaster network in 1997. I'm sure you're all following the network – and if you are not, please join. And of course, she is a co-founder with Ben Wisner of Radix in 2001. Maureen has been researching hazards and disasters since 1998 with a focus on gender and intersectionality, community, disaster risk production, resilience, capacities, and vulnerabilities, focusing particularly on the inclusion of a range of social groups and especially women and children. And currently, Maureen is focusing her research on issues of decoloniality and gender-responsive infrastructure. And for me personally, it's been an absolute pleasure and a lot of excitement to work with you, Maureen, on our GRRIPP projects, learning from you constantly. And thank you for joining us.

Maureen Fordham (from herein Maureen): Thank you. And this is rather an honor to be the first person to speak. The question was what does Radix mean to you? And my first sort of flippant answer that came into mind was, it means six weeks of slog to get a website up and running from scratch because actually, it wasn't Alberto who did the website, it was me (with due acknowledgement of my son Robin who provided the tech support behind it). In those days you could set up a website with nothing more than a simple text editor and HTML tags. And that's what we did. Because after going through a series of earthquakes at the time, in El Salvador on the 13th of January and 13th of February, and in Gujarat India, on the 26th of January, Ben [Wisner] and I had been exchanging emails and Ben asked me if I would like to write something with him about this, because, again, the usual feelings of anger and almost despair at seeing the same things happening again and again. I said I don't actually have time to write a paper, but what I could do was set up a website where we could gather this kind of evidence and critical analysis exposing the root causes of the disasters. So I

6 The Disaster Studies Accord and Disaster Studies Manifesto are available at: https://www.radixonline.org/manifesto-accord

7 See Beaven et al. (2023) “Post-Disaster Research: Challenges and Opportunities” conversation published in this Special Issue for a more discussion around the code of conduct.

8 Gaillard, JC and Peek, L., 2019. Disaster-zone research needs a code of conduct. Nature. Available at: https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-03534-z
suggested we could call it Radix, Latin for root. And then it took off and took over my life solidly for the
next six weeks! That was the beginning of it for me. And it just bloomed and blossomed.

You will hear Ben’s thoughts about all of this later, Ben’s energy, and the amount of work he could just
turn out 24/7 were extraordinary. So that was the beginning of Radix. And to me, in terms of the
meaning, it meant then, and it still means now, a platform for radical voices to move from the margins
to the center. So instead of being the lone radical voice amongst the dominance of technocratic neo-
liberalism, Radix was all about radical and grounded solutions and analyses and discourse. It was a
space to provide different answers to that question: What’s wrong with this picture? So whenever I
saw disaster images or disaster discussions, I seem to be seeing a different picture from the dominant
one.

I saw a lot at that time about hazard science, but I rarely saw anything about power, about politics,
especially gender politics, about risk creation. I saw plenty of examples of marginalized social groups,
marginized people, marginalized along race, ethnicity, class, gender, and other lines being
portrayed typically as a problem, as victims, as passive, as in need of education from technical
experts in order for them to act rationally and move from hazardous areas. What I wasn’t seeing was
those same marginalized people being portrayed as active agents, as having power and control over
their lives, neither did I see or hear about their context and their history. If you speak directly with
those same marginalized social groups, they’ll tell you about the history, their relationships to land, to
property, to relations of power. They’ll tell you about the organizing they do in the face of, quite often,
official neglect. Neglect sounds too passive. It’s more an active placing in harm’s way.

So Radix became the site then for the exchange of these radical ideas, rejecting the status quo and
burying uncomfortable truths. It maintained its commitment to radical ideas through time, especially
after 9/11, since when the term ‘radical’ has been appropriated and when used, it was likely to attract
the attention of the secret services. I hope they enjoyed the discussions that were going on the Radix!

Going forward, I see a stronger movement - and now more generally - towards democratization of
voices, an increasing urgency for explicit more de-colonial and often feminist practices and
relationships between ourselves and the people in locations of risk with whom we engage in different
ways. JC has introduced the new Radix. We stopped updating the original Radix website in about
2017. But that was okay because the email discussion was where most exchanges were taking place.
So it just sat there in the background. Yes, it was an archive and a repository but there was never
enough time to keep actively managing that and now there is. Now we’ve got Radix brought back
Radix redux and Radix with a new future which I think is just fantastic. And I’m really happy that it’s
moved on and that’s my thoughts about Radix.

**Jason:** Amazing. Thank you so much, Maureen, for kicking us off there with your reflections. And
again, it’s just such a pleasure to have you with us this morning. I want to now introduce our second
guest for this event. We’re so pleased to have you with us here today, Rohit. Rohit Jigyasu is a
conservation architect and risk management professional from India currently working at ICCROM as
a project manager on Urban Heritage, Climate Change, and Disaster Risk Management. Rohit served
as UNESCO chairholder professor at the Institute of Disaster Mitigation for Urban Cultural Heritage at
Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, Japan. And he was instrumental there in developing and teaching an
international and international training course on disaster risk management of cultural heritage. He
was the elected president of ICOMOS India from 2014 to 2018 and president of their international
scientific committee on risk preparedness ICORP from 2010 to 2019. Rohit served as an elected
member of the executive committee of ICOMOS since 2011 and was its vice president from 2017 to
2020. And before joining this organization, he was working with several national and international
organizations such as UNESCO, The Getty Conservation Institute, and the World Bank in
consultancy, research and training on disaster risk management of cultural heritage. So thanks so
much for being with us, Rohit. I’m looking forward to hearing some of your Radix reflections.

**Rohit:** Thank you very much, Jason. It’s an honor for me to be here, especially to relaunch and
celebrate 20 years of Raix. So I will give my own personal thoughts on how I got involved with Radix
in its initial years. And it all begins with Gujarat earthquake in January 2001, when I came in as part of
an interdisciplinary team that was created to assess post-earthquake challenges through field
investigations. In fact, I was originally not supposed to be there. I was a doctoral student in Norway at
the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, where I was doing my doctoral research and
very busy with my new kid, who was born actually on the day of the earthquake. And my supervisor
was actually supposed to joint but for some reason, he could not, and asked me to go and join this
team of experts, who were going to do a field visit after the Gujarat earthquake and make a report on
the situation. This is how I came there and met this extraordinary group of researchers and practitioners from diverse fields. Being a heritage professional, I was not really so much in contact with the world outside my own professional domain. And that's when I met Maureen and other excellent professionals who became good friends and with some of them, I had the opportunity of working in the future as well. I still remember that when I was there in the field, Maureen was expecting a senior Norwegian professor there. However, to her surprise she found a young doctoral student, who did not look so Norwegian. But what bound us together was that though there was this huge international team of professionals, there were very few, who were really concerned about non-technical issues. So there were all kinds of professionals and researchers and academics who were talking about what technology to use and how best to use it for housing and infrastructure for reconstruction. With all these top-notch experts, we found ourselves in minority, and therefore started to talk to each other and complain about lack of consideration of social and cultural issues, and slowly realized that a lot more needs to be done in this domain. And that's the time when Maureen was also thinking about setting up Radix and then after her return, when she set up Radix, I was in touch with her and all of a sudden I had access to this amazing platform to share what I have been researching on and slowly discovered that there were not so many takers for the issues connected with society and most specifically culture. Through this platform, I could share my ideas not just as an academic, and a researcher, but as somebody deeply concerned about these issues. And that's when I remember posting one of the papers that I had just written based on my research and titled it “From natural to cultural disaster” and posted it on Radix during those initial days. And then suddenly I found that there were quite a few other interesting papers that touched on similar issues and these proved very useful for my Ph.D. work that was still in progress as I could start referring to them and further enrich my research.

The platform also provided me with an opportunity to post my work during those initial days of the internet. In those days, it was not so common for scholars and practitioners to refer to internet for these kinds of articles and research work. I found that someone came across my paper on Radix and wrote a rejoinder to my work. This person was actually one of the decision-makers who was responsible for reconstruction after some of the previous earthquakes in India and was also going to be responsible for managing reconstruction following Gujarat earthquake. So I suddenly found in Radix a voice for myself and a channel for me to hear opinions of others on my work and have a dialogue with them.

One of the most significant outcome was that this got me connected to disaster professionals who were not from heritage sector. In fact, at that moment, probably, I was the only one who was speaking about cultural heritage in the community of disaster risk management professionals. So it provided me with an opportunity, where I was no longer a cultural heritage professional communicating and working only with my own fraternity, but had the possibility for this exchange beyond my professional domain. And that enabled me to make more efforts towards mainstreaming culture or cultural heritage in the larger disaster risk management. At first, I worked with some of those people I had met through Radix, virtually, and then met them in person as well. I also remember Teddy Boen who was also one of the experts during post earthquake reconnaissance visit following Gujarat earthquake that I had joined. He went through one of the papers that I had posted on Radix and invited me to write a paper jointly with him comparing similarities and differences between post earthquake reconstruction in India and Indonesia, since both of us were concerned about the lack of consideration for traditional building knowledge in post earthquake reconstruction in both contexts. He expressed his frustration that though he is engineer, others from his professional domain of civil engineering did not wish to talk about the socio-cultural aspects that are connected to technology and only wanted to focused on hardcore engineering solutions. So as a researcher, Radix provided me an opportunity to collaborate with other researchers, and this provided me confidence that heritage field has an important role of play in the disaster risk management sector. That led towards the beginning of the whole long journey that I have been continuing since the birth of Radix, because of which I feel very much a part of this larger fraternity with the common cause of reducing vulnerability and improving the quality of life for all sections of the community. Thank you so much.

**JC:** Thank you so very much for sharing this experience. And it's interesting because this is how I got to learn about your work and you. And I just checked my files and I downloaded a whole bunch of your papers from the Radix website in 2004. And I remember reading those papers on the Gujarat earthquake; that informed my work back then.

Our next panelist is Mayfourth Luneta who is the deputy director of the Center for Disaster Preparedness [CDP] in the Philippines. I had the privilege to be part of the CDP family as well. So I
know Mayfourth and I had the privilege to do some field work with you, Mayfourth, and I learned a lot from your expertise, from your passion in the field. I'm grateful and I'm super happy to have you here with us today. Mayfourth, for those who don't know her, trained as a community development practitioner at the University of the Philippines and eventually started to work for the Center for Disaster Preparedness, which is probably the leading local NGO in the Philippines when it comes to DRR and one of the most influential worldwide for sure when it comes to the creativity and pioneering – and in taking on the idea of Radix on the ground, in the practical space to inform how we actually reduce disaster risk on the ground. Mayfourth, we're super happy to have you, and we're very much looking forward to learning from you.

**Mayfourth:** Good morning. Good afternoon, everyone. I'm so happy to be invited here. And as JC was saying I am more of a community person. Our organization has a vision of having a safe, disaster-resilient and developed communities. And so all of our mission and interventions are focused on how the communities will be resilient. And Radix – well, I've learned about it from receiving emails from colleagues, friends, and mentors since I think 2008, and even earlier from Ben and also from Marla Petal at the course with the Prevention Web; and then I was introduced to the blog and also the Radix discussions. And maybe, what would be useful in this sharing is, as I look at the website now it's already very interesting, and it's also good to show this to researchers and community people, CSO [Civil Society Organization], workers who need practical research. As you've said, there's a lot of research that would talk a lot about semantics and other things. It's okay, as long as it's good also for the community people, I think what I've seen on your website that is interesting to know, is the different analyses of things, the perspective of the CSOs most likely would side on, you would always have a side on these things like- who benefits from this research, (just like in the Manifesto).

And it will always be interesting to know for whom it is. Because there's a lot of research going on and usually it is driven by the donor who funded it. But now little by little, I have also seen a lot of research, like the action research from the community. And then you ask what the community needs to know and their needs to research - that would be more interesting. And in Radix, you have a lot of different points of view that can really help in real risk reduction: the sharing of ideas and the sharing of actual experiences can help the practitioners in doing their solutions and more can also help in what to research on.

Now we're involved in one research, which is the ethics of closing a project. It's with a university in Canada. You talk about when the donor finished a humanitarian project how you close the project just after you give all the relief, then you go out of the community - or you also consider how your project will really help the communities and how it will close properly and then make it into a transition of a way forward something like that. That kind of research for me is very useful. And those things, it's all also good to see in a blog - and people can relax and enjoy the research, not the usual traditional research that you have.

So Radix is very radical, but at the same time very informative and it can really give you a lot of color in understanding the things that you would want to learn. So just like what I've said in the ethical consideration of closing a project. There's a lot of what the community would really want. What about the project? And probably you will also see, do you really need the project. And sometimes, amazingly we spend a lot of money on things that people do not really like. So, it's a good thing if we base a lot of our intervention on a good research, and then you make the research come from the community. So it's a very enlightening thing. If we always involve the people we want to serve or the people who want to benefit from the research in the first part of it, like building the conceptual framework and things like that. So I think, what is more for me as a reflection of things, is how can we use it on our end as CSOs or NGOs in different countries. And also practitioners in DRR, as well as the most vulnerable in the communities, how can they use the information that they see here, how they can contribute and how can they use it? The interaction would be very phenomenal if they can really have access to this, so that's why it's very good to see that you have also improved the website and it becomes more interesting. Hopefully, people can have more access to it and also contribute to it. That's it for now. Thank you very much.

**Ksenia:** Thank you so much, Mafoirth, and it's great to have you here. Thank you for joining. And our next guest - I'm so excited to introduce you! - is Bob Alexander, or as most of us know you, barefoot bob, bfb. barefoot bob is an independent researcher, trainer, consultant, and recording artist who has worked on participatory integrated studies of climate change and development, vulnerability reduction, and resilience strengthening for over 25 years all around the world. bfb focuses on prospective risk-managed community development, community-based risk management, and community-based
adaptation, livelihood, food, nutrition, social service, access security, socioeconomic vulnerability, identification, analysis, assessment, and reduction, and of course, effective risk communication and community engagement approach. bfb is currently in Malawi, but pre-COVID, I think you lives and worked pretty much in most of habitable regions of the world. And of course, I’ve got to meet you in some of those regions, and we’ve got to work together, which was great. So over to you.

**bfb:** Let me start by saying thank you, and happy International Day of Disaster Reduction, whatever part of that day you’re in around the world! I was thinking back as each of you took your trips down memory lane, and as Ben [Wisner] is about to take his as well after me. 20 years ago, I was also a young graduate student and I was actually an economist. I was a disaster risk reduction economist who was focusing almost exclusively on economic modeling for sustainable livelihoods in disaster-prone areas. And I found it very difficult to have conversations with most people because when I mentioned that I was studying the causes of disasters and the impacts and basically what could be done to address them, people would stop me and say, “oh, yeah - you do disaster relief”. And they would put me into a box and expect me to stay in that box. So the email listserve that came in the 1990s were such a breath of fresh air, of being able to find people with whom I could communicate. And then of course I found out about the papers and the books with Ben and others that helped me say, ‘Yes! There are other people who are focusing on these types of things!’.

I’m thinking back now to what Maureen was just saying about what’s wrong with this picture [disaster as destruction]. I was thinking at that time that everything was wrong with this picture. Everything that I was told it was about, wasn’t what it was really about – it’s about everything else that should be in the picture that we should be talking about. So I came into Radix. At the time, I was working in post-war Bosnia on a whole bunch of different things related to the confluence of conflict and natural hazards and many different root causes of why people could not sustain development because of the different disruptions of access that they were having. I was looking at this then, and when Radix came out, I said, “Yes! This is the natural extension of these types of things!”.

So even though I’ve been ‘one poor correspondent’ as an old song says - I’ve been a poor contributor at times - I love to contribute in bunches and I’ve been very appreciative over the years of what’s been there. As things have continued, since we’re supposed to talk about the journey, I remember a time just before Radix got launched when I had gotten involved in a bunch of participatory projects. And this shook my head back to my sustainable development perspective and the reason why I got into this in the first place: I was trying to figure out how to help people assess and solve their own problems rather than modeling for them from the outside. As I guess has been said about me, I’m naturally what you could call radical I guess, because I’m not employed by any university and not really employed by anyone at all. So I can be more free than others to be radical in some ways in challenging the status quo in terms of publishing it but also in trying to think of how we can best reach the local-level decision-makers. I was looking at that in a way similar to what Mayfourth was just talking about in terms of the community-based approaches. And I realized at that point that community-based disaster risk management, community-based adaptation, risk communication, and community engagement seemed to be my path.

There were so many things that were lacking that could be done in those areas. Initially, it was going in and trying to help people to help themselves, to understand how to do better assessments, and to integrate across the different stakeholders, across time, etc. And then it moved more into the types of communication. This is a lot of what I focus on now. But it’s still trying to understand the integration of how we make sure that the different people who are often neglected in the conventional ways of doing things are not neglected and how we make sure that we’re incorporating how things are changing over time. So it’s understanding assessment and decision-making through understanding the types of things that are not normally considered and also looking at prospective risks because so much is focused on the past conventionally, whereas we know that things are changing because of development and because of creeping environmental problems including climate change. So how do we incorporate these things that a lot of people are not necessarily incorporating?

My focus on community-based risk management has moved towards risk-managed community development. And a lot of that is on good practices communication. One of the wonderful things is that technology has allowed a lot of things to evolve. There are possibilities of using different technologies to enable people to participate in the discussion and to participate in what’s going on. So, rather than top-down communication, there can be hybrid models of co-creative knowledge approaches to figuring out what can be done including using songs, using videos, and using lots of other things that people can actually produce and not just be given. So this has been fascinating for me over the last few years, and, rather than being the passive occasional contributor, I’m dedicated
now to the new Radix. I’ve already said that I will be helping in the early goings. So at the end of this month, I will be hoping to encourage more people to get involved in contributing and discussing the different ways that we can use these different types of communication approaches, tools, and methods in order to get people involved in the conversation. So be on the lookout on Radix at the end of this month and early next month. We will be looking at good practices communication and different ways of doing it. And I hope people will submit a bunch of different songs, videos, poems, games, and all kinds of different things that we can discuss so we can think about different ways to engage people and how can we take this forward through Radix as we continue discussing this further.

**Jason:** Thank you so much. bfb, it's great to see you on the stream. Thanks for joining us. So our final guest for the day is Ben Wisner. Ben is the second co-founder of Radix joining us today. We're really glad to have you here. Ben has worked for 55 years on the use of village and neighborhood-scale vernacular knowledge in resource and risk management. He also studies weather and how national and international policy and practice acknowledge, respect, and learn from villages and neighborhoods. His works include Power and Need in Africa, first published in 1988 at “At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability, and Disasters”, editions of which he co-authored and published in 1994 and 2004, and “The Routledge Handbook of Natural Hazards and Disaster Reduction”, which he co-edited and published in 2012, and “Vulnerability as Concept, Model, Metric, and Tools” publish in 2016. Ben as always, it's just a pleasure to see you again, and we're looking forward to hearing your reflections on Radix.

**Ben Wisner** [from herein Ben]: All right. Thank you very much. To reflect on Radix, I really have to go back to 1965 when I wrote my master's thesis on the justifiability of civil disobedience and informed the Selective Service Administration in the US that I was a conscientious objector, and I wouldn’t fight in the Vietnam war. So that meant alternative service and I went off to Tanzania in 1966 and lived in a cooperative village for two years. Now, I mentioned all that because that because what it underscores is my concern for quite a while in my adult life with issues of violence and power. And in the particular case of the Vietnam war, I'm talking about hard power and organized violence. It was in Tanzania that sitting in Tanzanian village in 1967 I wrote something called “Reflections of Vietnam in Tanzanian Village Life”. It seemed to me, sitting in Tanzania at that time, reflecting on Vietnam, that there really needed to be a total refusal, in Herbert Marcuse's sense, of the Great Refusal, a total rethinking of the systems of exploitation and oppression that had brought this conflict to be. Everything I've seen since has reinforced that perception I had at the time, although what's happened as I grew older and eventually met Maureen [Fordham] and we created Radix, is that my understanding of power became much more nuanced.

It wasn't simply hard power that needed to be contested. What one might call soft power that influences what people take for granted, what people think of as common sense: in short, what they believe. So one had to question the notion that disasters are natural. Not only that, but to question other beliefs that people take for granted, such as the belief in development, belief in growth, belief in progress, belief in the normality of safety. One needed to encourage people to stop and think about those things and see them differently. And perhaps then organize with one another to act politically as Maureen suggested. To change things one needed to shock people; so that was when a number of us -- Phil O'Keefe (who sadly isn't with us any longer), Ken Westgate (who may be listening in from Australia), and Alec Baird and I -- wrote a Bradford University Occasional Paper and went on to write a paper in Nature and another one in Disasters declaring that no disaster is natural. We were attempting to shock. It was very extreme thing to say, and it caused people some dismay. Absolutely no disaster is natural. I've recently been involved in a correspondence about near earth object collisions. Collision with an asteroid, for instance, can't we consider that a natural disaster, I don't want to get into the details, but I argued even that is not natural. We could talk about that for some time. The point is that there are a number of beliefs that have to be contested.

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With the mainstreaming of the notion of vulnerability, we obtained the key to understanding disaster and why no disaster is natural. Vulnerability has been mainstreamed into the United Nations system and elsewhere. But with mainstreaming what's happened is the shock value has dissipated. And what I find with the new attractive entertaining website, the new Radix, I have to say, I don't know where the shock value is. And I'll leave that open for discussion. Don't we still need to shock people, wake them up? Even before we can begin this participatory dialogue.

The other thing I'd like to say about both the old Radix and the new Radix, is that the radical solutions weren't forthcoming. We had lots of radical interpretations of disaster. But as far as I'm concerned, really are no radical solutions. Now in part, that's the function of the Great Refusal I mentioned earlier. There have been many solutions proposed. Are they radical? We haven't decided what a radical solution is and I've been discussing with JC [Gaillard] a bit about the new website and asking if is it possible for a number of us to work together to come up with a system of assessing disaster risk reduction interventions and ranking them by the extent to which they simultaneously deal with the creation of new risks. I mean changing land use in order to reduce the impact of sea level rise is undoubtedly a necessary thing, a good thing, perhaps, but does it simultaneously affect decision-making and the allocation of people to places in the space economy and roles in territorial management? Does it actually affect those systems in such a way that it won't be necessary to take that kind of intervention again later? So I leave those two thoughts out there as perhaps challenges to the new Radix going forward to find a way to reclaim the power to shock and also to develop some way of assessing so-called solutions in a way that allows us to consider them truly radical solutions.

Thank you.

Ksenia: Thank you so much, Ben; as always, listening to you is amazing. And thank you for joining us today. I love what you're saying about reclaiming the power to shock, because we are very often scared of shocks. And we try and maybe tip toe around the problem a little bit too much, but I think you rightly pointed out that tip-toeing does not work. So thank you. And we will reflect on this, I think in questions and answers, and we will invite all our guests back on the screen. We have a few questions that we'd like to ask. We don't have that much time. We will perhaps go for about 10 minutes and just ask a few questions, but of course, we would like to continue this discussion offline as well in the best traditions of Radix, it will go on.

JC: I'd like to pick up Ben's final points and a sort of shock effect. It's a question for all of you: the priorities and the key questions in the coming years, in the coming decades; it should be for all of us researchers and practitioners as well. Because again, as Mayfourth said, it's not only about research as it's about practitioners as well.

Rohit: If I may reflect a bit, JC. My major concern is that we are talking too big these days and have got a lot of very nice words to play with. The question is whether we translate these on the ground, for which a lot of bridging needs to be done. While we definitely need to talk big and reflect on the larger issues at hand, we also need to think of way of finding local solutions, which unfortunately are not being discussed and implemented. Whether climate change or unsustainable development models, we need to go beyond merely spelling out the challenges and find innovative solutions that can be implemented at policy, planning and project levels. Moreover, the discourse should not be limited to English language speakers, and need to embrace the vocabulary of various languages.

Maureen: I had a thought after Ben was talking, about the importance of maintaining the shock value, maintaining the radical. And I guess what we're always going to do is try to get more people to recognize the legitimacy of the radical argument, the radical case. But then you get what seems to happen is you then get locked into this process of appropriation. The power of radical ideas is attractive to those who seek, and hold, power. So the radical that's appropriated suddenly starts to mean something else. All the other terms, vulnerability, sustainability, and resilience, soon get merged into the mainstream. When it gets into the mainstream, how can it remain radical? Okay. Just throwing another problem out there.

Ksenia: Thanks Maureen. I want to pick up on that then with the next question, really. In recent years, we've seen proliferation of descriptions, of kind of disaster studies, so 'radical', 'critical', 'innovative', you name it, disaster studies has been at all! But I think that we are hopefully trying to achieve the same thing. So how do we move into the future in that, we're not perhaps branding ourselves, but are actually working in solidarity, because maybe it's something we don't really talk about enough in disaster scholarship? And again, I'm just throwing it at all of you.

Mayfourth: I just remember it, when you talk about words and descriptive things, for example, the nexus of talking about sustainable development, the nexus of sustainable development, disaster risk
reduction, and the Paris agreement, all having the nexus of it making a grand solution for really
addressing the risks. But then again, as I've told you a while ago, my framework is more in the
community. When you talk with the community, talking about sustainable development, disaster risk
reduction, and things like that, they will just say: our problem is that we can no longer fish because of
the disasters, they have extreme weather events that affect their livelihood. And having more effect
when disaster comes to them, making them poorer and poorer. The thing is, sometimes all this
language and the things that you've researched when you go to the community and the people that
you want to really benefit from your research, it's actually lost in translation, as I've seen also in one of
those words. So it would be really very interesting to always have an involvement with them. And
that's why I'm also trying to also look into how we can engage these users on the platform that you
have.

**JC:** I agreed with Maureen's point about the proliferation of terms' objectives, new concepts. And to
me, this is antithetical somehow with the shock effect that Ben was talking about. And many of you
know my point about how we all claim to be critical, and it was definitely critical in the 1970s, but with
the proliferation of all these objectives and some concepts I don't think we are as critical as we claim
to be. And the very fact that we all claim and we've all come to agree that disasters are social
constructs, but at the same time, using all these concepts and terms and objectives that we take for
universal, doesn't make any sense to me. This is epistemological nonsense. We take things
universally and we apply them across very diverse cultures or around the world. But at the same time,
take these as a social construct. That doesn't make sense to me. So the more things we attached to
this core concept of disasters and all over the world in a blanket fashion doesn't make sense. There's
something wrong somewhere.

**Mayfourth:** I agree with you, JC. I'm sorry to interrupt. Is it okay? I agree with you that the thing is
maybe people in the areas that experience a lot of disasters would definitely understand the shocking
statements that Ben would say there's no such thing as natural disasters; if they were given the whole
story of it, then they would say yes, after then, it's something like if we do something like this in our
environment, it will go back to us as simple as that in their culture, in whatever culture there is.
Sometimes those shocking statements that we have, especially those who theorized a lot about
everything, if we go back to those people who do practical things, then they also can give you a lot of
shocking answers that are very practical and very usable.

**bfb:** From the beginning of this, I was trying to figure it out. I like Ben's question. Of course, I love
shocking, I love being shocked, but I was thinking of the question, who are we trying to shock? And it
seems there are different audiences and it seems that's coming out in our discussion as well. In terms
of the people who are coming to the website, they're already in the choir. I'm not sure who the new
members of the Radix website are, but I would believe that many of them are coming there for a
reason. It's because they're already part of the shock, the shockees, or the shockers. So I'm not sure
much of what we're going to put there is going to shake them out of that. I think we might be looking
more to inspire, to think further along with where, and to go further within that. So we haven't failed if
we haven't shocked them, but we've done well to continue to inspire them in those phases. If we're
thinking along this thread of communities, then I liked what Mayfourth was saying and others in terms
of, well, finding out what is it that shocking. It's rather than us putting something to them that we
don't need to use our terminology, but we can find out from them. What's shocking and what types of
things we need to actually do is the hybrid knowledge, the co-creation understanding like what it is.
That's different understandings, different perceptions that we can figure out together. I think it's
possible maybe we could use since this is about Radix, then we could use the site, we could use
Twitter, to try to engage with people and find out more about what is shocking. And so maybe in terms
of that preaching to the choir, maybe that isn't accurate, maybe we could actually be using that to find
out from everybody and engage in that conversation is what is it? Can we be doing maybe outside of
this site in real life, out there somewhere that can be shocking and actually inspiring at the same time.

**Ben:** Could I just clarify a little bit? There's a great deal of co-optation which has taken place over the
last 10 or 20 years. And as JC and others have said, it's no longer controversial at all to assert that
marginal people tend to be allocated to marginal places in the space economy, or that no disaster is
natural. These are essential maxims, you might say a set of summary notions that represent the
conclusions of the work that I've done over 50-odd years. No longer shocking. I wrote recently that I
found that the UNDRR had done something on resilience I found really problematic, in this respect. If
you look at the notion of resilience and follow it through, it raises all sorts of questions about blaming
the victim about about about relieving the state of its responsibilities. And so I pushed back against
that in something that I wrote. I think those sorts of things ought to find a place on Radix. Every time
we find that language is being corrupted and being misused, we need to push back. In this way, we have a responsibility to respond and to put reflections of this kind on the website. That's not going to shock the particular people who are attracted to the Radix website. Probably the notion of inspiring people is a better idea than shocking them. But what I was reacting to in what UNISDR wrote is the wholesale appropriation of a lot of concepts such as resilience and their dilution, so that the human consequences, the pain, the suffering, and indeed the shock of disaster situations are no longer on the surface. That's what I was trying to get at.

Ksenia: Okay. Thank you so much, Ben. And I'm I guess all of us are hoping that perhaps Accord would somehow stimulate this reflections further, and help us to go back to these conversations and really reintegrate them. And I absolutely hate to bring this to a close but I am this person who will. Thank you so much for all your time. This has been a fascinating, wonderful discussion as always! And we're just so grateful for your time and for joining us today, and we always learn so much from you all. To finish this livestream, we couldn't not ask bfb to perhaps do a little song for us, so over to you bfb and thank you again, everyone, for joining us today.

bfb: What I did was, I just took the general ideas that we had discussed; and one of the main things were to make sure that local people, the focus is on locally driven agendas, what's the priorities of the people themselves, not the priorities of the outsiders, the external people. And similarly, one of the other things was about focusing on making sure that the local researchers are not taken advantage of that it isn't people from the outside who were using them and taking credit for their work. But ensuring that somehow these questions are leading towards thinking through how to do both of those things in addition to some other things. So I just took the 49 questions or whatever there were [in the Accord] and tried to lump them together as much as I could to make them fit into a song framework of two verses and a bridge.

ACCORD!: The Disaster Risk Reduction Studies Accord Song

A way forward [AN ACCORD!]
For disaster risk reduction studies
Starts by asking how the local people benefit

Who decides that there’s a need for research, who does it, when, & who will benefit?
How is the disaster defined, for whom, & how could this research affect how they’re hit?
How does what’s proposed build on what’s already done and what’s being studied now?
Are local objectives, realities, views, & ways of knowing driving the design somehow? [This is…]

A way forward [AN ACCORD!] – for disaster risk reduction studies
Moving toward [AN ACCORD!] – for research that’s driven locally
To ensure [AN ACCORD!] – respect for local priorities
A way forward [AN ACCORD!] – for disaster risk reduction studies

[Now ask: are - local researchers - & processes being strengthened?]
How are local research language, knowledge, and processes prioritized?
Who is involved in how data is decided upon, collected, and analyzed?
Who decides who’s involved in what parts of the research & allocation of funds?
How do social structures get strengthened & ethics procedures decide what gets done?
[Now we have a way, we have…]
A way forward [AN ACCORD!] – for disaster risk reduction studies
Moving toward [AN ACCORD!] – to focus on better diversity
To ensure [AN ACCORD!] – that credit for work’s given equitably
A way forward [AN ACCORD!] – for disaster risk reduction studies

[finally, ask how local researchers & people benefit from findings]
Who should understand, who retains the rights,
& who gets acknowledged in research finding dissemination?
How do we share, with whom, in which language,
& who leads authorship of any subsequent written publications?
Who chooses which, who attends,
& who is up front for any media and conference presentations?
& who will follow up on policies, practices, partners, & people
that have been impacted in this research location?
[These questions should not be ignored – let’s ask each one before – ‘cause it’s…]
A way forward [AN ACCORD!] – for disaster risk reduction studies
Moving toward [AN ACCORD!] – for research that’s driven locally
To ensure [AN ACCORD!] – respect for local priorities
A way forward [AN ACCORD!] – for disaster risk reduction studies

A way forward [AN ACCORD!] – for disaster risk reduction studies
Moving toward [AN ACCORD!] – to focus on better diversity
To ensure [AN ACCORD!] – that credit for work’s given equitably
A way forward [AN ACCORD!] – for disaster risk reduction studies – AN ACCORD!