

CATASTROPHES IN CONTEXT:

A New Series of Engaged Social Science on Disasters from Berghahn Books

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Research has long since disproved the notion that disasters are “acts of God.” They are in very real ways material manifestations expressed in the most dramatic way possible of society’s pre-existing inequalities, exclusions, exploitation of nature, and ideologies that prop up these conditions. In November 2013, while the United Nations was deliberating on climate change, the most powerful storm ever recorded barreled through the Philippines in what might just be the clearest warning yet of increasingly global and severe storms wrought by anthropogenic climate change, too often analyzed separately from disasters.

This said, these lessons seem forgotten every time a new catastrophe occurs. It seems that the spectacle itself attracts attention to increasingly global and market-oriented media outlets that focus attention away from the lessons learned. The accounts appear as isolated, discrete, and exceptional events.

This series aims to bring critical attention to the social, political, economic, and cultural structures that create disasters out of natural hazards or political events and that shape the responses. Combining long-term ethnographic fieldwork typical of anthropology and increasingly adopted in similar social science disciplines such as geography and sociology with a comparative frame that enlightens global structures and policy frameworks, the series will mainly consist of edited volumes that bring critical scrutiny to the multiple dimensions of specific disasters and important policy/practice questions for the field of disaster research and management.

Social science research on disasters has grown considerably more sophisticated in the past decade. At the same time, political events and continued global connections facilitated by both media consolidation and evidenced by the chain reaction of the 2008 Global Recession have created phenomena that can best be termed “global disasters” because of their scale, scope, and profile. These events include the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the Sichuan earthquake in 2008, Haiti’s 2010 earthquake, the 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear crisis in Fukushima, the so-called “Super Storm” Sandy in 2012, and Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda in 2013. Increasingly disasters are transnational events, distal expressions of root causes of neoliberal globalization and anthropogenic global climate change.

Catastrophes in Context builds on these increasing theoretical and practical interests in the subject, providing a sustained space for institutional rethinking and growth in the field. We also explicitly aim to interrogate and integrate the separate spheres of scholarship, policy, and practice. As we detail below, and as the increase in the media profile of global disasters demonstrates, there is a large and growing potential market to be tapped. Building on this increasingly rich, sophisticated, and timely scholarship, *Catastrophes in Context* aims to be:

1. Theoretically innovative
2. Informed by in depth, longitudinal analysis
3. Critical cause focused
4. Policy and practice relevant
5. Holistic and integrated

Guiding principles of the series:

Recent social science scholarship on disasters has begun to include voices from impacted communities, and combine theorizing with readable prose. We are aiming for *Catastrophes in Context* to have a reach into practitioners, solidarity organizations, and active citizens in addition to students and other scholars. Especially given the opportunities provided by new media we aim to explore making timely scholarship on disasters accessible and actually engage various publics. While there is no compromising on solid scholarship, we aim for clear, engaging prose.

Following the examples set by recent work and setting a new standard, books in *Catastrophes in Context* will:

- Include a diversity of voices (practitioner, scholar, journalist, activist)
- Specifically work to include local voices, from the area affected
- Combine on-the-ground reporting of timely events with structural analysis
- Focus on the global connections, moving away from the fetishization of the discrete disaster events narrative
- Analyze the narrative construction of the disaster case

Works to be proposed in the series:

Alternating between very timely case studies and theoretically driven comparisons, we envision two books to come out every year. We aim to remain both readable and cutting edge theoretical scholarship, on issues within the study of disasters that are either timely, theoretically innovative, and/or relevant to policy or practice. Some topics can include: disasters and development, gender and disasters, archaeology of disasters, disasters and climate change, disasters and migration, humanitarian clusters, and impacted communities as first responders, among others.

To submit a book in the series:

Authors and volume editors are encouraged to contact the series editors (contact information below) with an idea for a volume. The editors will offer timely feedback about the idea and its fit within the series goals. When ready to submit a formal proposal, there is a short “New Book

Outline” [available on Berghahn’s website](#). Authors are to submit this New Book Outline to the series editors.

The proposal – and manuscript – will receive a full-blind peer review process. Series editors will work with reviewers to ensure timely and constructive feedback, regardless of the editorial decision. Decisions about publication will be made conjointly with series editors and Berghahn’s editorial team.

Workshops:

Series editors are seeking funding to workshop works in progress at a public research university, to enrich the process by offering contributors the opportunity to receive feedback from scholars, practitioners, students, and interested members of the general public. In addition the final manuscript will benefit from contributors workshopping their chapters with one another, to see how they fit within the overall narrative arc and theoretical contribution, which will also be strengthened by the collaborative group process. Ideally these workshops would be scheduled a couple of months before the final manuscript submission.

Public Engagement:

While not limited to anthropology, the series has a special affinity to the Society for Applied Anthropology’s new Disasters and Hazards Topical Interest Group, which, like this book series, has its formal launch at the 2014 SfAA meeting. One plan with the Disasters and Hazards TIG is to hold symposia with practitioners. This is only one audience that contributing editors and authors are encouraged to engage.

Catastrophes in Context aims explicitly to engage the public and private, local and international agencies working on disasters in order to influence policy formation and implementation. Editors and authors would be encouraged to host speaking events and engage traditional and new media in discussions. Volume editors will be encouraged to have a website that will empower contributors to post media stories and action alerts.

Series editors:

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