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Web Roundup: Disaster!

2014-11-25 07:10:11

By Melanie Boeckmann

This coming weekend I will attend the [Reframing Disaster conference](#) held under the auspices of the [Postcolonial Disaster](#) project at the University of Leeds. The conference motto is “disaster is not an event”, highlighting the processes and long-term consequences of catastrophes. I am leading a session on zine writing where we will collect offline and online voices on environmental justice. The conversation is open to everyone under the hashtag #RDzine, and the digital zine will go online after the conference.

Elsewhere on the web, disasters, displacement and recovery were discussed from various perspectives. Elizabeth Angell in her [guest post](#) on [Savage Minds](#) positions risk, blame and risk communication within the story of the 2009 earthquake in L’Aquila, Italy. In this case, seven experts and scientists had been charged with involuntary manslaughter for failing to adequately warn the public about the risks of an earthquake that struck L’Aquila in 2009 and resulting in 297 deaths (the ruling was reversed on November 11th for six of the seven convicted). Angell refers to Mary Douglas’ cultural theory of risk and argues that as an anthropologist she is interested in the cultural contexts of politics of risk and responsibility.

Risks of climate-sensitive environmental disasters include population displacement. The [Nansen Initiative](#), a governmentally funded process aiming to put climate change and displacement on the UN agenda, specifically refrains from defining [climate-induced displaced persons](#) as refugees. Over at [anthropologyworks](#), Barbara Miller and Sean Carey cite a report by Louise Redvers in [allfrica](#) that discusses the politics of funding allocation for (internally) displaced persons and refugees. The problem: labeling potentially creates artificial distinctions. On the other hand, as stated by the Nansen initiative, legally displacement and seeking refuge are separate processes. And, as [allafrica](#) quotes [Dawn Chatty](#), professor of anthropology at the University of Oxford: “not everybody wants to be called a refugee”. The potential for representational violence within these terminologies would be an interesting topic to look at.

Rising sea levels are one type of climate-induced slow-onset disasters. In [“Water’s Edge. The crisis of rising sea levels”](#), Reuters reports in longform about the risks and preparations U.S. coastal regions are facing.

Justin Elliott's "[Crisis of Trust at the Red Cross](#)" at Guernica covers a survey of American Red Cross employees, the majority of whom responded they did not see a bright future for the Red Cross. Finally, why do we help others during disasters at all? Michelle Trudeau at NPR writes about a scientific explanation: altruism is possibly [physically rooted in the brain](#).

Other links of interest:

A photo update on Ferguson: "[Scenes from Ferguson – and beyond](#)" – Slate

Disaster painted: "[Hieronymus Bosch, the Trendiest Apocalyptic Medieval Painter of 2014?](#)" - The Atlantic

"[Violence against women and girls](#)" – The Lancet

and related: "[Do online death threats count as free speech?](#)" - New York Times

And on a more lighthearted note:

Zombie disasters in "[Ghosts are back!](#)" – New York Times

"[How Bad Is Katniss' PTSD in *The Hunger Games*? We Asked the Experts](#)" – WIRED

AMA citation

Boeckmann M. Web Roundup: Disaster!. *Somatosphere*. 2014. Available at: <http://somatosphere.net/?p=9572>. Accessed November 26, 2014.

APA citation

Boeckmann, Melanie. (2014). *Web Roundup: Disaster!*. Retrieved November 26, 2014, from Somatosphere Web site: <http://somatosphere.net/?p=9572>

Chicago citation

Boeckmann, Melanie. 2014. Web Roundup: Disaster!. *Somatosphere*. <http://somatosphere.net/?p=9572> (accessed November 26, 2014).

Harvard citation

Boeckmann, M 2014, *Web Roundup: Disaster!*, *Somatosphere*. Retrieved November 26, 2014, from <<http://somatosphere.net/?p=9572>>

MLA citation

Boeckmann, Melanie. "Web Roundup: Disaster!." 25 Nov. 2014.
Somatosphere. Accessed 26 Nov.
2014.<<http://somatosphere.net/?p=9572>>