

Abstract

Since the 1970s, there has been a seminal shift in disaster relief from state-run aid agencies to community-organised emergency aid.

Once construed as strictly a responsibility of the state, the mitigation and management of disasters has shifted since the 1970s into a matter for civil society: a shift which has been heralded as progressive, democratic and inclusive by existing disaster research.

In my PhD research, I argue that this perspective that valorises the participation of actors from civil society in the fight against disasters fails to grasp the systematic reconfiguration of social life that has taken place in the last decades of the 20th century under the banner of disaster.

Focussing on the modifications to disaster management in the United States between 1970 and 2012, I show how the inclusion of civil society in the provision of aid services was accompanied by a structural withdrawal of the state from disaster relief and other welfare services. My account couples the notion of disaster with that of economic crisis on the one hand and structural violence on the other to examine disasters as a specific problem for social reproduction.