Pursuing the 'Disaster' of Managing Communication During a Natural Disaster 'Crisis': Zimbabwe's Unending 'Woes'

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Abstract

Zimbabwe is characterised as a 'disaster-prone' country, across every aspect of its existence. These disasters include both natural events, such as unending droughts, and the outbreak of diseases, but also human-made, most of which are either politically related, such as the management of national elections, or socio-economic, such as natural resources (mis)management, which involve the exploitation of land, minerals and so on. The 'disastrous' image the country seems to project, either known or purported, is exceptional, and far removed from the 'disasters' themselves. Droughts, pandemics, economic recessions, political skirmishes, natural resources (mis)management-inclined disputes, and so on, are a daily feature in Africa as a continent, and even around the globe. However, what sets the Zimbabwean case apart from the 'rest' is the (mis)management of 'communication', wherein the government voice, its practices and citizen reactions turn out to be discordant, and sometimes disjointed. Subsequent related debates, or those that emerge out of the discord, expose citizens to the impact of 'crises'. This leaves certain sections of the populace asking whether the country, through its government, is people-centred or is 'disastrously' operating on a self-destruction mode. Using semiotic aspects of representation, or (mis)representations, this chapter trails the concept of 'disaster' in the (mis)management of communication during crises in Zimbabwe. The chapter argues that disaster management begins at communication levels, and that the catastrophic communication systems in operation escalate the actual crisis on the ground.