

**Muzayin Nazaruddin**  
**University of Tartu**  
**Semiotic perspective for the analysis of natural disaster**

The paper aims at proposing a semiotic perspective for the analysis of natural disaster, focusing on the post-disaster recovery. I intend to combine ecosemiotic and cultural semiotic perspectives in this study. Ecosemiotics provides a basic understanding how nature and culture are tied through sign relations. Thus, according to the main tenet of ecosemiotics, human relations with the environment are essentially semiotic.

At the same time, cultural semiotic point of view allows to analyse how these culture-environment relations are preserved as texts and remembered as cultural memories. However, I would propose some further basic theoretical assumptions. First, the interaction patterns between human and environment vary from one place to another; being also dynamic over times. The same natural event, which occurs in different places or periods, may be interpreted differently.

Second, the structure of the relations between culture and its environment will be the basis for cultural identity. It is noticeable in many local cultures, in opposition to the global culture, that their identities are characterized by being intertwined with their own environment. These cultural identities have been constructed through a long period of adaptation to the environmental processes. Thus, cultural identity and self-description cannot be fully separated from the environment in which they arise.

A question worth exploring in the context of this study is, how cultures with instable environments integrate the fact of constant disruptions to their identity, which by definition should provide cultural stability? Third, disasters could be regarded as sign processes.

Disaster is characterized by two levels, namely external or objective variability and internal or subjective complexity. The first level refers to wide range of phenomena, whether natural, social, technological, political, or a combination of them, which cause harm to people, both material and immaterial. The second level is embedded in various perspectives on the event among the impacted individuals or groups. Thus, the idea of the disaster involves the interpretation of an event. Generally, by virtue of its negative impact and the lack of capacity of human beings to cope with it, an event would be designated as a disaster. Thus, disasters entail possibilities for multi-level significations in different sign systems.

**Keywords:** natural disaster, post-disaster recovery, ecosemiotics, cultural semiotics, culture-environment relations