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INTRODUCTION

Contested meanings of recovery: a critical exploration of the Canterbury earthquakes–voices from the social sciences

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The Canterbury earthquakes of 2010–2012 have been generation shaping. People living and working in and around the city during this time have had their lives and social landscapes changed forever. The earthquake response, recovery and rebuild efforts have highlighted unheralded social strengths and vulnerabilities within individuals, organisations, communities and country writ large. It is imperative that the social sciences stand up to be counted among the myriad academic research, commentary and analysis.

The purpose of this *Kōtuitui* special issue, 'Contested meanings of recovery', is to address a significant gap in New Zealand's disaster literature, wherein the voices, perspectives and analyses of those living through disaster situations have become material for, rather than contributors to, the knowledge base and debates in literature. One of the key challenges as editors has been how best to arrange the order of papers for this special issue. Each possible order emphasises particular themes over others. Given this overarching focus of the collection, we organised the papers in terms of how they articulated the contested nature of recovery.

The first three papers can be brought together through the theme of preparedness. As each explores specific sets of relationships between authorities and already existing and deeply embedded communities, the limits to and underlying power relations of existing models and practices of preparedness are laid bare. 'Ngā Mōwaho: an analysis of Māori responses to the Christchurch earthquakes' (Phibbs et al. 2015) generously offers routes to effective inclusion as a way forward from the marginalisation and missed opportunities embedded in the emergency planning approach enacted through Civil Defence protocols when the earthquakes began. 'Clergy views on their role in city resilience' (Brogt et al. 2015) likewise points out the missed opportunities that come from approaching affected communities geographically, and as vulnerable and therefore helpless, rather than as already standing networks of support (as is found in faith-based communities) that feed across geographic, class and cultural differences. 'Children with disabilities and disaster preparedness: a case study of Christchurch' (Ronoh et al. 2015) emphasises that while always already constituted as a special and particularly vulnerable group, children with disabilities and their care support networks have significant insight into and solutions to offer to bridge the gaps, contradictions and unintended exclusions generated in the spaces between generic disaster preparedness tools such as 'drop, cover and hold' and the realities of continuing care through emergency situations.

The second grouping of papers shifts emphasis as they push against the framing of resilience and vulnerability as mutually exclusive, and recovery as a process that can be socially engineered through pre-organised disaster preparedness protocols.

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Each explores alternative articulations of resilience through vulnerability from the point of view of children ('Disaster impact and recovery: what children and young people can tell us', Freeman et al. 2015), teenagers ('Rolling with the shakes: an insight into teenagers' perceptions of recovery following the Canterbury earthquakes', Pine et al. 2015) and communities ('Resilience? Contested meanings and experiences in post-disaster Christchurch New Zealand', Winstanley et al. 2015). Taken together these three papers make plain that resilience is contested, dynamic and emergent and so profoundly challenges the hegemony of science-orientated or economically based models of risk, resilience and recovery.

The last grouping is usefully themed as going beyond location-bound notions of resilience and individually framed understandings of recovery. 'Voices from the margins of recovery: relocated Cantabrians in Waikato' (Adams-Hutcheson 2015) shifts our gaze as it traces how recovery is multi-located and draws across insider–outsider dialogues. It helps us to question the insider/outsider framing imposed by those who assume that *only* those and *all* of those who were located in Christchurch are victims of the disaster. The second, 'Use of domestic craft for meaning-making post-disaster' (Maidment et al. 2015), takes this critique further by pushing beyond recovery through individual interpersonal intervention to recovery through shared meaning-making and community building by way of crafting. It is in its prosaic status that crafting is such a powerful avenue for transformative growth at personal and communitary levels. The final article in this collection, '"The confidence to know I can survive": resilience and recovery in post-quake Christchurch' (Du Plessis et al. 2015) pays particular attention to women's voices, so easily subsumed in the media clamour for particular types of heroism. Pushing resilience yet further by emphasising the extensive, informal, emergent networks that sprang into action when the ground started shaking, it pulls the whole collection together in its new theorisation: of recovery through networked, emergent resourcefulness.

As editors it is our intention to let the contestedness speak for itself and to celebrate the different voices of these papers. This indicates the multiple and diverse (and at times contested) nature of disaster recovery and resilience. While there will be differing views on what themes and continuities are across the papers, it is clear that diversity does not necessarily mean conflicting voices across the papers. Redefining resilience and recovery as diverse, mobilised networks moves debate on from resilience as a static capacity as it is insufficient to encapsulate what recovery from disasters means. It also challenges dichotomous thinking between authorities and communities; between resiliencies and vulnerabilities; between insiders and outsiders as a means to lay bare the complexities, contradictions and the ongoing contestation and negotiation over whose recovery, how and under what terms.

In their own ways each paper argues that existing models of disaster recovery would be more effective if responsibilities were more effectively devolved through existing and emerging networks. Nevertheless, the tension between the challenges of capturing the complexities of contesting meanings of recovery and over-simplification of that complexity. This leads to the glossing over of diversities and multi-layeredness of these boundary-crossing endeavours in social praxis and analysis. It is up to the readers of this special issue to take their own journey through these papers and in the process, we hope, gain deeper appreciation of the need to acknowledge and benefit that comes from acknowledging the legitimacy of contested meanings of recovery.

In conclusion, these papers confirm the wider global challenge that the new Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 recognises (UNISDR 2015), namely the need for including marginalised voices, ways to be inclusive, and ways to bring the insights of these marginalised voices into the wider global discussion on reducing disaster risk, enabling recovery and building resilience. This is our contribution to that wider global discussion.

Disclosure statement

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