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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Voices from the margins of recovery: relocated Cantabrians in Waikato

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No two disasters are the same. Accordingly, sociocultural geographers are aptly positioned to include the place-based and temporal aspects of disasters in their analyses. By examining the experiences of 19 Cantabrian families who have relocated to the Waikato region, this paper offers stories from the margins of ‘traditional’ disaster research. Often researchers know a great deal about the population at the site of the disaster, but little about the people who move away. Further, by investigating relocation, the insider/outsider dichotomy is challenged, as participants in this research are simultaneously inside and outside the earthquake events and their ongoing impacts. ‘Ownership’ of the disaster narratives, including research, lays open ideas of who can speak for whom. What and who is inside and/or outside a disaster event also allows a finer distinction of how place attachment filters experience and ideas of recovery, which are not diminished under internal migration.

**Keywords:** cultural geography; disasters; insider/outsider; recovery; relocation

#### Insider/outsider dialogues

Disaster recovery literature predominantly begins and ends at the site of the event. What is argued here is that this focus on the nexus of disaster events causes some voices to be silenced. Concurrently, there is considered to be a gap in disaster recovery literature concerning those who relocate in the post-disaster context. This paper aims to address this gap by challenging scholars to include nuanced analyses of what it means to be an insider or an outsider (or both) in relation to a disaster and its impacts. It is argued that the insider/outsider phenomenon in disaster research remains; like ‘the elephant in the room’, it is known but rarely formally acknowledged. This paper examines how the terms insider/outsider manifest in different ways. The notion of insider/outsider, often used in methodological literature (e.g. see Mullings 1999; DeLyser 2001; O’Connor 2004; Breen 2007; Sultana 2007), is given detailed consideration. Insider/outsider

dialogues are investigated and issue is taken with the often strict delineations of the two terms.

The boundaries that often surround insider/outsider framings are pushed by investigating the terms in three ways. First, researcher and researched relations are discussed as they can be structured through insider/outsider frameworks which have particular resonance in the disaster setting. Second, insider/outsider paradigms are examined by considering residents who may be more or less affected in a post-disaster context. Third, in relation to disaster relocation, the experiences of those who leave are explored and set in relation to those who have stayed. Relocated respondents challenge this dichotomy by being simultaneously inside and outside the disaster context. These three discussions are useful for pushing further into bounded conceptualisations of insider/outsider experiences. In the next section, the methods are described followed by a brief outline on relocation.

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### Context and time

Beginning on 4 September 2010, the people of Christchurch have had to endure more than 10,000 earthquakes and aftershocks. Of this estimated total of earthquakes and aftershocks, 400 have been greater than magnitude 4, and more than 40 have been over magnitude 5 (see Wilson 2013, p. 210). Christchurch's earthquakes have impacted on many people's lives in New Zealand. The residents of Christchurch were significantly affected by experiencing strong aftershocks for many months, which took an enormous toll on them. It was said that most people could cope with the first two major earthquakes and deal with the losses, but the next two on 13 June 2011 and 23 December 2011 'particularly dented psychological resilience' (Wilson 2013, p. 211). The last major jolt on 23 December 2011 was particularly upsetting, prompting a great deal of angst, doubt and (re)trauma among the people who stayed. In particular, having two major events six months apart was especially difficult for residents and in response some people decided to relocate.

The empirical work for this paper draws from a PhD project conducted between 2011 and 2014 which focused on the relocation stories of people who moved out of Christchurch (Canterbury region) to Hamilton (the Waikato region) in the North Island. Respondents had few prior contacts in the Waikato region and largely chose the area because of its relative geological stability. Generally, participants had been renting in severely damaged areas of Christchurch, some houses were unliveable, and they tended to be from either end of the economic spectrum. Some families left with 'just the shirts on our backs' (Hutcheson 2013, p. 483), while others had sufficient funds to re-establish in affluent parts of Hamilton city. Out of the 19 families, only six relocated directly after the second massive earthquake on 22 February. Relocation, then, was often considered to be a 'last resort' decision.

In order to locate potential respondents, the research was advertised in local and regional newspapers. In-depth and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 families, comprising 18

households (made up of 62 people) and one individual. On the whole, interviews were undertaken in October 2011 in the private homes of respondents, with only one couple deciding to meet elsewhere, and a single person in a disability day-care facility. A small focus group followed the interviews; the research then moved to less formal gatherings named 'spontaneous focus groups' and the construction of a semi-formal support group called Cantabrians<sup>1</sup> in Waikato (see Adams-Hutcheson 2014, p. 92). As respondents had been living in the Waikato region for short periods of time, some as little as two months, the timeframe impacted on the data collected. Interviews began in October 2011 and the attributes that affected the data included the following: families were often new to the Waikato region; their earthquakes experiences were still raw; the ground in Christchurch continued to shake; and many had not yet found permanent homes. Thus, five follow-up interviews were conducted approximately one year after the initial interviews to investigate changes in feeling about relocation over time.

### A note on relocation

Many disasters result in temporary displacement, but certain events in both developed and developing countries have led to the permanent relocation of affected populations. Uscher-Pines (2009, p. 1) claims that 'despite the frequency of post-disaster relocation and evidence of its effect on psychological morbidity, there is a relative paucity of studies'. It is argued here that this statement concerning the general lack of relocation research still holds. To date, most of the current research on Christchurch's earthquakes is concentrated around the 'disaster zone', including businesses and industry (Kachali et al. 2015), communities (Vallance 2011) and Māori (Lambert 2014). Further, the numbers of people who relocated out of Christchurch to regions beyond Canterbury have been difficult to find. Statistics New Zealand was due to conduct the census in 2011. The census is the official count of how many people and dwellings there are in New Zealand. Due to the earthquakes, the official

census was not completed until 2013. Estimated internal migration numbers (Christchurch to Waikato only) as at June 2015 are 1386; however, this figure was taken from 2008 and is not exclusively earthquake related (see Statistics New Zealand 2015). Other reports concentrate on internal migration across the city of Christchurch itself as people left damaged homes for non-specific time periods (see Statistics New Zealand 2011).

For the people who decided to move beyond the South Island, recovery from experiencing and surviving multiple earthquakes was not immediate. Riad & Norris (1996, p. 176) found that relocation may contribute to the environmental, social and psychological stress experienced by disaster survivors. 'Most studies show,' they argue, 'that relocation is stressful and increases victims' risk of experiencing depression or anxiety.' Indeed, three participants in this study required medical intervention for post-traumatic stress disorder two years after the initial earthquakes. For example, Holly<sup>2</sup> said:

I got very, very bad, I wouldn't go anywhere, and it wasn't just the earthquakes it was moving here [Waikato] and being totally unfamiliar with the place, away from everyone and not settled or anything. (Follow-up interview, 18 February 2013)

In post-disaster circumstances, such as in Christchurch, it is the 'forced' nature of relocation that was found to be stressful. Holly continues:

You can't even try to understand how it feels—if someone said to you, 'Well your home town is gone, it's destroyed', how would you feel? ... But what about people who relocate? For us, there was nothing ... there was no recognition of the fact that you didn't really want to be here [Waikato], so it wasn't a voluntary move, it was something forced on us. (Follow-up interview, 18 February 2013)

Sanders et al. (2003) explain that the removal of other alternatives makes relocation most stressful, but this research suggests the impact of relocating goes much deeper than a lack of alternatives. For many, it was family, friends and colleagues left behind that continued to affect their daily lives as well as knowing the city they loved had irreversibly changed (see Adams-Hutcheson 2014).

## Researcher/researched

Brun's (2009) paper interrogates disaster research on the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami from the perspective of outsiders (the international research community). She focuses on researchers coming into a disaster zone to produce critical knowledge that may contribute to understanding and influence recovery processes. More generally, she asks pertinent questions about conducting responsible research and validating local knowledge frameworks (Brun 2009). This feeling of academic 'ownership' of the Christchurch earthquakes may perhaps be connected to Christchurch researchers Gomez & Hart's (2013) comment about UK-based researchers Crowley & Elliot (2012). Gomez and Hart object to outsider perspectives when they state that: 'The crises affecting the Tōhoku and Canterbury regions may, *from the shores of the UK*, appear simple, perhaps even analogous' (emphasis added). However, the lesson learnt is that 'analysts must desist from creating imaginary paradigms based on offshore acculturised, decontextualised construals' (Gomez & Hart 2013, p. 277). Here, the authors link geographic locale to the importance of, and accuracy of, locally based insider knowledge which may be misinterpreted from the outside or offshore. Bearing these critiques in mind, the focus of my research was also shifted.

The decision to focus on people who relocated out of Christchurch was, to a greater extent, a political decision. My researcher position as an outsider to Christchurch and the earthquakes meant changing the focus of the PhD to reflect personal unease at conducting disaster research in Christchurch as an outsider. In following Brun's (2009) critical focus, social science research on disasters has a lot to add when thinking about who has the right to speak for whom and power politics. Important also is the emotional rigour of conducting research in highly stressful surroundings, where researchers and respondents can be subjected to significant trauma. Holly reflects on my position when she states:

You would pick up all the stress as well because hearing our stories must be horrendous for you

at times because you hear all the worst things ... I said to Bill, I don't know if you have enough balance, where you can just shut it off and move away. Because this is horrendous, everyone's got another horror story to tell you and I think, poor Gail! Do you know the impact it's going to have on you and your family? (Follow-up interview, 20 February 2013)

In general, respondents too were aware of the effects of research and were very careful about responding to the newspaper advertisements. They wished to know in advance which questions were going to be asked. All but two families met and/or talked to me in advance of the interview. Susan alludes to what talking about the earthquakes feels like:

The most obvious physical response that I still experience is that I don't want to be talking about earthquakes. No, don't worry I thought very long and carefully before I sent you an email and said yes I will, because I knew it [interview] would upset me, which is fine, my decision. But it's been interesting talking about it [earthquakes] and finding what an *immediate* response I'm having. No! Please don't worry. I knew what I was getting into and I was happy doing it for the same reasons I said at the beginning, very interested in your research. So, half an hour of feeling a bit emotional is absolutely fine. (Follow-up interview, 12 February 2013)

The validity of sociocultural geographies for disaster research is gaining significant traction in recent writings (e.g. Cupples 2007; Tapsell & Tunstall 2008; Lund 2012; Morrice 2013). Sociocultural geographies attend to power relations and ideas of difference, and pay close attention to research praxis and its impact on both the researched and the researcher. With ontological roots in feminist geographies, previously marginalised or silenced voices have found their place among the hegemonic dominance of both the Western view and positivist (scientific dominated) perspective. The insider/outsider framework will now be extended beyond the researcher/researched to include the communities that have had uneven disaster damage to their suburbs.

### More or less affected?

During a disaster, the outsider label becomes attached in different and nuanced ways. Apart

from those who do not live in the region, it is also attached to individuals who had to leave temporarily, who did not suffer significant losses (often to property) and people whose suburbs were relatively unaffected. The insider/outside situation is akin to 'when somebody dies, you really only want your family around, you don't want people coming to look' (cited in Cox 1997, p. 220). The places, homes and suburbs of Christchurch and the local population's intimate knowledge surrounding these environments can give rise to protective feelings of being an insider. These feelings of protectiveness open up conversations about authenticity of experience (see Robbie 2008). Because the sense of attachment to place draws upon memory, desire and experience of other people, it is as much social as personal, and a product of interaction between people at a specific location as much as the physical properties of that location (Cosgrove 2009).

Being an outsider, on the other hand, is akin to being alienated from people and place—with no sense of attachment. Notions of insider and outsider take on multi-layered meanings when examined from the perspective of the Christchurch earthquakes. Cox's (1997, p. 220) study on disaster relief work in Australian bushfire territory explains that 'new dimensions are added' when people relocate and when losses are uneven. Surviving a disaster embeds feelings of close bonds (an 'authentic sense of place') with an area and the people within it. In Christchurch there was a sense of loyalty to neighbours and to the places in which most of the post-disaster recovery phase took place. Susan and Greg likened the loyalty to suburbs as a 'sort of Suburban Stockholm Syndrome' (Interview, 25 October 2011), where people in badly damaged suburbs stayed in increasingly dire circumstances. Much as is the case in a war, the location of events in a disaster stimulates a deep sense of place and social connection for people otherwise spatially and culturally disconnected (Chamlee-Wright & Storr 2009). In this case, it galvanised people's feelings about the built environment and communities—including homes that had to be demolished. The 'Brookland-Stayers', for example, rejected government



offers of a payout for their homes and remain committed to their (largely abandoned) suburb (see Mead 2013).

In Christchurch, both before and after the earthquakes, there was considered to be division between the generally wealthier and less earthquake-damaged western suburbs and the generally 'poorer' (lower socio-economic) more damaged eastern suburbs. Within social and mass media, government officials and civil defence staff were criticised for taking too long to get crucial services into the eastern suburbs (Donnell 2011; Carville 2012). In general, the eastern suburbs were badly damaged, structurally as well as by silt infiltration on to land and into houses, making many uninhabitable. Respondents to this research agreed with the general sentiments of these criticisms, the issues of living in eastern suburbs and the east-west divide. Loren explains that:

The division [in Christchurch]—in some ways it's a really divided city between a real east-west mentality ... and of course the east side has been more affected. I have seen people in the west making blogs or something that said, 'Oh I get sick of people saying that the east side have had it so bad—we've all been through the same earthquake'. But the consequences have been *very* different, and that has created a bit more of a division. Where I live it's been like a war zone (Interview, 2 February 2012).

For me, I'm in the middle of it still. I'm not distancing myself from it. I'm living it. And basically you're coming to look at what makes me sad. And that's what gets me. I don't like that. (Cited in Coats & Ferguson 2013, p. 45)

'I'm living it' should be considered in a physical sense because as this research argues, respondents are still 'living it' from beyond the borders of Christchurch. In answer to the second part of the quote, there was public outcry about the 'rubberneckers' and the resulting earthquake tourism (see Freedman 2011; Backhouse & Bayer 2013). Accusations of disaster voyeurism was (and still is) levelled not only at mass media and non-Christchurch residents, but also at groups from non-damaged areas of the city. Holly (from a badly damaged eastern suburb) relates what her friend Carol in west Christchurch said to her:

Holly: Carol said that she drives through the eastern suburbs once every two or three months, she said: 'just to remind myself that this did happen in my city because it's so easy to believe where I live that nothing happened. Every now and then I find myself thinking, you know, I'm sick and tired of hearing what people over there [east] are going through. Then I pull myself up short and I drive over. But I don't take my children—I wouldn't risk them over there! Isn't that bad?' Holly said back to Carol, 'No, it's not bad, I wouldn't risk my car, let alone my kids, that's why we left!' (Interview, 4 October 2011)

Similarly, Loren states:

Of course the east side has been more affected. I have friends that live on the west side of town who have driven over to my house and they say 'It's just like a war zone'. They look around then drive back to their homes which are OK and *that* has caused a bit of a division. We were sick of people looking at our misery, and that was a part of why we moved. (Interview, 2 February 2012)

Disaster tourism, also known as dark tourism (see Stone 2006), has been a significant topic of exploration for scholars. But rather than exploring the ethical basis for such business ventures as outlined by Coats & Ferguson (2013), thinking is aimed at extending insider/outsider structures from within the disaster locale. Below is a discussion about the insider/outsider phenomenon through the contrasting experiences of those who left Christchurch and those who stayed.

### Left/stayed

Considering the left/stayed axes of insider/outsider framings, the focus is then placed on the porous connections between leaving a post-disaster zone and staying in one. However, those who left Christchurch are continually connected via telecommunications and the ongoing issues with sorting out damaged houses and maintaining close relationships with family, friends and colleagues. Susan says:

I am still so much in contact with my old team, at least daily. So I actually don't feel like I've left. (Interview, 25 October 2011)

Relocation does not entail leaving 'everything behind'. By including people who permanently

relocate, this research is able to trace how recovery is multi-located and draws across insider/outsider dialogues. There is a sense of deep, often linguistic barriers that can appear between those on the inside (who lived through the earthquakes and are experiencing the broken homes, suburbs and city) and those on the outside. Words are frequently inadequate to convey disaster experience to people who are uninitiated, as described by Holly:

It's disbelief, your house shakes like a dog, the trees sway and bend, that's not supposed to happen, there's no words for it, you can only know if you've been there. (Interview, 4 October 2011)

Immediate divisions also spring up between those who have (insiders) and those who have not (outsiders) survived a disaster. Almost all respondents mentioned that while the people in the Waikato region were nice, they actually had no idea of what happened in Christchurch. Susan, Holly, Alexis and Bill all said in the focus group:

A lot of well-meaning people up here [Waikato] want to talk about the earthquakes, but we don't—it's horrible, to put it mildly, it's a very lovely bonding activity that really, really doesn't work. (Focus group, 27 November 2011)

The concept of an insider is related to a deep sense of place. That is, the extent to which humans feel associated with important centres of their immediate experience of the world (Relph 1976). The idea of people having a deep-seated and emotional link to particular places which embeds feelings of place attachment during disasters rather than breaking them has been outlined in literature (e.g. see Erikson 1976; Tapsell & Tunstall 2008; Chamlee-Wright & Storr 2009).

The terms insider and outsider are also challenged by the respondents who relocated out of Christchurch. They are not outsiders (with no sense of attachment) and yet the families who left are considered at times to be just that. 'The people who left didn't care, and they put their own lives ahead of the community, they are making victims out of others, true Cantabrians who had the fortitude to stay' (Sachdeva & Levy 2011). People who leave are simultaneously

inside and outside of the disaster experience emotionally and geographically. Alexis explains:

When we were first here I didn't really know what my future held ... So, I guess I had my foot very much in the Christchurch camp still. But now, I guess I have got both feet up here [Waikato] and um my heart is still down there. But I've got both my feet here. So, I suppose I feel more connected to—well, no, not connected but just more committed to making it work here. (Follow-up interview, 19 October 2012)

The families, then, reside in liminal space where 'the past is momentarily negated, suspended or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun' (Buckingham et al. 2006, p. 898). When Holly's family were asked if they would ever call Hamilton their home—considering that the family had bought a house and business, the children were enrolled in schools and they had self-identified as relocating on a permanent basis—Holly said:

Someone said to me the other day, would you ever call this place your home? I said 'No, it's the place that I live, but it's not where I come from'. Always red and black [colours that signify the Canterbury region], always will be—it is just automatic that you support Canterbury. We won't be anything but Cantabrians. I will never give up being a Cantabrian. (Follow-up interview, 18 February 2013)

This creates a 'them and us' axis of difference between earthquake survivors and around 'ownership' of the disaster narrative in general. Host communities often feel greater emotional connections to the event in contrast to 'tourists' or outsiders. As relocated residents demonstrate, however, they too have significant emotional connection to Christchurch. Alexis said:

I still go through phases of really grieving [for] Christchurch and my family and my friends and my guilt around leaving ... it was my heart-home where I could always go back to. (Follow-up interview, 19 October 2012)

The conversations about emotional links to Christchurch bring forth some interesting challenges to the spatial ideas of proximity and distance. By moving away from Christchurch, the emotional distance is not diminished; it remains

strongly felt. The experiences of those who left have been largely forgotten by mainstream sources. People who relocated also become socially distanced from what was happening in Christchurch day to day, and their experiences are juxtaposed with the people who have stayed and who 'live it'.

## Conclusion

By concentrating on relocated narratives and including the insider/outsider phenomenon as a paradigm, this paper advances social science perspectives as an integral part of disaster scholarship. Through using relocated Cantabrian voices, at the very margins of disaster research, the insider/outsider dualism has also been questioned. Relocated Cantabrians are often engaged in a mostly unacknowledged process of grieving for the loss of their city and all it entails (homes, friends, family and so on). Surviving and living in the post-disaster environment galvanises feelings towards spatial scales such as home, community and suburb, city and region. But also, in the Christchurch experience the insider/outsider dialogue has sometimes deepened divisions between the eastern and western sides of the city, as well as the ideas of who has legitimate connections to the disaster event. Living in the disaster zone gives an extra sense of 'authenticity' and 'ownership' of the disaster narrative over and above those who have left. This insider/outsider narrative also begs the question of who has the right to speak for whom.

Pushing the tight framings of insider/outsider has allowed a deeper focus on who is an insider and who is an outsider. When approaching disaster research there is merit in thinking carefully about the various positionings not only of researchers but also the people with whom we conduct research. This paper comes at a time when scholars are questioning post-disaster research 'gold rushes' (Gaillard & Gomez 2015) as well as the emotional impacts of fieldwork (Mort et al. 2008; Parkes 2011; Lund 2012). The challenge offered here is to interrogate what we (as researchers) mean by insider/outsider and to continue to

examine the impacts of disasters beyond the site of the event.

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## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Notes

1. Christchurch city is located in the region of Canterbury. I use the term 'Cantabrians' throughout this paper to denote people who were living in Christchurch before the earthquakes and who self-identify as being from Canterbury and use the term to identify themselves.
2. Pseudonyms used throughout.

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