Belonging and Disaster Recovery: Refugee Background Communities and the Canterbury Earthquakes

The role of belonging in post-disaster environments remains an under-theorised concept, particularly regarding refugee populations. This paper presents a qualitative study with 101 refugee background participants from varying communities living in Christchurch, New Zealand about their perspectives and responses to the Canterbury earthquakes of 2010–11. Participants spoke of how a sense of belonging as individuals and as a wider community was important in the recovery effort, and highlighted the multiple ways in which they understood this concept. Their comments demonstrate how belonging can have contextual, chronological and gendered dimensions that can help inform effective and resonant disaster responses with culturally and linguistically diverse populations. This analysis also illustrates how the participants' perspectives of belonging shifted over time, and discusses the corresponding role of social work in supporting post-disaster recovery through the concepts of civic, ethno and ethnic-based belonging.

Introduction

The concept of recovery after a major disaster highlights the interplay of people's lived experiences alongside structural support systems, the wider society and their immediate community. Whilst the disasters that create refugees are humanly induced, through conflict and persecution, natural hazards such as earthquakes also have the potential to displace large segments of a population and seriously compromise or destroy people's well-being and livelihoods. Numerous authors now argue that 'natural' disasters do not exist, but, rather, there are natural *hazards* – what makes any particular natural hazard a disaster or not is how it is socially and politically mitigated (Gaillard, 2007). Taking this consideration into account, this paper presents how refugee-background communities experienced disaster recovery following a series of earthquakes that occurred in the Canterbury region during 2010–11. Participants highlighted the experience of belonging as a central component that influenced how their communities worked through the associated disaster. As this study was conducted in two phases over one year, the participants' experiences of and perspectives on belonging shifted over time and illustrate how this concept can inform recovery and disaster-risk reduction across contextual, relational and time-based considerations.

Refugee Settlement and the Canterbury Earthquakes

There have been four major earthquakes in the Canterbury region in New Zealand from September 2010 to December 2011, and more than 12,000 aftershocks by the end of 2013. The most significant event was the 22 February 2011 earthquake (magnitude 6.3) that resulted in 185 fatalities, making it New Zealand's second most deadly event in history. In terms of the financial costs, the New Zealand Government (2013) estimated the rebuild at forty billion dollars, making it the country's most costly disaster from a natural hazard (the equivalent of 20 per cent Gross Domestic Product). A large part of Christchurch's central business district was destroyed, meaning that people have had to reconcile experiences of loss with a vision of what could be, as new buildings and ways of (re)imagining the city develop. Because Christchurch was a key refugee resettlement locality before the earthquakes, several refugee-background communities experienced the disaster and the subsequent steps towards what recovery might represent for the city and its inhabitants.

The term 'refugee' is often obfuscated in the context of major disasters; the media, politicians and even the academic literature commonly utilise this word to describe the entire population that has been displaced or made homeless, thus confusing the specific legal definition of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (Marlowe, 2013). Whilst not marginalising the experiences of the displaced and affected general population, using the blanket term 'refugee' for everyone can cause groups from refugee backgrounds to become invisible and less likely to receive specific assistance following a disaster. A refugee defined under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention is:

> A person who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution (UNHCR, 2012).

The most recent report from UNHCR (2014) estimates that 51.2 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide in the year 2013 as a result of generalised violence, conflict, persecution, or human rights violations – the highest number on record. Approximately 16.7 million of these were refugees and twenty one countries received 98,400 refugees for permanent resettlement in 2013

(UNHCR, 2014). According to these latest numbers, less than 1 per cent (0.5) of individuals who have successfully attained refugee status are provided with the opportunity to resettle in places such as the United States, Canada, Australia, United Kingdom, Scandinavia and New Zealand.

Along with another 142 countries, New Zealand is signatory to the Refugee Convention and the subsequent 1967 Protocol that enshrines particular rights and protections to people with refugee status (UNHCR, 2014). Beaglehole (2013) notes that more than 30,000 refugees have been resettled in New Zealand since World War Two. The Government currently maintains a commitment to resettle 750 refugees each year, in accordance with the formal resettlement programme instated in 1987. There is great diversity represented in these numbers, and in the last decade alone New Zealand has provided permanent residency to refugees from fifty five separate countries (Mortensen, *et al.*, 2012). Upon arrival, refugees spend six weeks at an orientation centre in Auckland before moving to one of several principal resettlement localities. Particular and specialized support services are provided, and often newly arrived refugees are relocated to communities of the same ethnic background. The city of Christchurch was one of these resettlement localities before the earthquakes created a housing shortage crisis. Four main refugee background groups (Afghan, Bhutanese, Ethiopian and Somali) and several other smaller ones currently live in the city. As the Christchurch rebuild and renewal progresses, plans exist to reinstate the refugee resettlement programme for new arrivals in the near future.

Recovery in Disaster Contexts

The general concept of 'recovery' emerged from the mental health field in the 1980s (Rapp, 1998). Whilst the term's definition connotes a particular outcome of regaining health following an incidence of illness, Resnick *et al.* (2005) note that 'recovery' in the broader sense, now signifies a process that includes a belief in a more hopeful future, the ability to engage in meaningful activities, and opportunities to exercise autonomy. The recovery movement's main focus is on *process*, however, there are times in which recovery is measured and can be ascribed to a particular *outcome* (Resnick *et*

al., 2005). In the disaster context, recovery can also refer to both a process as well as a final outcome, and involves individuals, families, communities, cities and states/governments. Similar to a personal journey towards mental or physical health, recovery from disaster is a multi-faceted and complex process. Thus, recovery in disaster contexts also includes working towards a better future, the ability to engage in meaningful activities, participating in the rebuild, and being part of the re-envisioning and restoration processes.

Historically, the disaster literature has discussed recovery as a linear development, claiming that it progresses through a series of phases or stages that include sequences such as: impact, search and rescue, rehabilitation and recovery (see Aldrich, 2012, p. 19). However, the reality is less clear-cut as the aforementioned stages overlap and/or merge, making it difficult to clearly define when 'recovery' is achieved or what it necessarily means (Aldrich, 2012). In a disaster context, Tan and Yuen (2013) note the additional importance of local capacities and resources in mobilising to deal with a crisis and the subsequent rehabilitation and reconstruction as integral processes for facilitating community recovery. Thus, recovery from a disaster is intricate and multi-layered: it is a function of the affected populations' existing vulnerabilities and capacities, the scale of the disaster's impact, and the provision and access to funding and assistance (Finch *et al*., 2010).

In addition, numerous disaster-based studies demonstrate that the (re)creation of social connections is also a crucial component to recovery processes (Enarson and Meyreles, 2004; Pyles, 2007) where social capital is increasingly recognised as a key determinant for disaster-risk reduction (Eisenman et al., 2007; Mathbor, 2007). Aldrich (2012) argues that social capital resources/networks are critical for disaster recovery, and are often more important than traditionally referenced factors such as socioeconomic considerations, population density and the amount of aid and financial resources that flow into a particular locality. He maintains that 'survivors with strong social networks experience faster recoveries and have access to needed information, tools, and assistance' (p. 15).

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Whilst the role of social capital in disaster contexts has been widely discussed, the concept of 'belonging' has received relatively little attention. Belonging is often linked with social capital in the context of disaster-based recovery though it has not been adequately differentiated. For instance, it is possible for individuals to have various social capital resources and yet still not feel a sense of belonging to a particular place or community. Belonging is a frequently utilised term, but one that often escapes formalised definition within the disaster-based literature and represents an important consideration for disaster recovery as it sits alongside the resources and networks associated with social capital.

Civic and Ethno Belonging

The concept of belonging has become increasingly prominent in the refugee resettlement literature (Ager and Strang, 2008; Wille, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 2011; Fozdar and Hartley, 2014). This term, however, has contested conceptualisations across different fields of study. Antonsich (2010) notes that belonging should be viewed as a personal experience that simultaneously occur within socio-spatial forms of inclusion and exclusion. Yuval-Davis (2011) discusses the political dimensions of belonging and the ways in which it is fluidly defined across multiple forms of identity and situational contexts. Focussing on the interplay with the receiving host society, Wille (2011) argues that a sense of belonging for refugees is not achievable without agency. These synergies and tensions in how the belonging is defined make it difficult to achieve conceptual clarity. Because the term is familiar and widely used across so many frameworks and subject areas, the concept often escapes deeper theoretical consideration.

Responding to the experience of refugee settlement, Fozdar and Hartley (2014) distinguish between two types of belonging: civic and ethno. Civic belonging refers to a concept of membership that encompasses access to services and rights, and the ability to participate in civil society (i.e. employment, voting, accessing health services and social security, etc.). Civic belonging communicates a 'belonging *to',* thus emphasizing that an individual belongs *to* a place because s/he is

afforded the same privileges and rights as other fellow residents; the sense of fitting in is externally provided by the government or some other institution-based structure. Thus, civic belonging relates to objective criteria such as opportunities to work and entitlements *to* health assistance or education (Fozdar and Hartley, 2014).

Ethno belonging, on the other hand, refers to a more emotional and affective connection between people, wherein the sense of belonging stems from a sharing of similar histories, memories, culture, land, and facing a common future that helps to foster sentiments such as patriotism and loyalty (Fozdar and Hartley, 2014). Ethno belonging connotes a 'belonging *with'* because it alludes to a sense of 'fitting in' that stems from the mutual and reciprocal feeling of being amongst peers who share the same characteristics or collective vision. These authors note that this form of belonging is often lacking with refugee background communities as they often do not feel part of a wider societal or national based narrative.

This paper uses these conceptualisations of ethno and civic belonging, along with an additional 'ethnic' variation not discussed by Fozdar and Hartley, to examine the implications of post-disaster recovery for resettled refugee groups. By looking at the ways in which refugee background communities speak about belonging over time, this paper presents the destabilisation, emergence and possibilities of belonging in a disaster context and its associated implications for recovery.

Study Design

The study that informs this paper focussed on documenting refugee-background community perspectives of, and responses to, the Canterbury earthquakes. A particular strength of this study is that a Somali male and an Afghan female peer researcher, both from refugee backgrounds, were trained and employed to conduct focus groups and semi-structured interviews and to ensure the analysis was accountable (see Marlowe *et al.*, 2014). The recruitment process was done via a third-party approach, predominantly through community leaders from refugee backgrounds. By offering

opportunities to participate in interviews or focus groups, this approach helped address concerns of coercion and power dynamics within specific communities. Consent forms and participant information sheets were translated into three additional languages (Dari, Somali and Nepali), and interpreters were organised as needed. Twenty-seven participants took part in the semi-structured interviews, and a total of ten focus groups (seventy four participants) defined by ethnicity, with the exception of one focus group which was composed of university students from various ethnic communities, met from January 2012 to March 2013.

In total, 101 participants consented to and participated in the study. Most participants came from four primary countries of origin (Afghan, Bhutanese, Ethiopian and Somali), and the study included a near equal representation of men and women within each community group. As the term such as 'Afghan' actually represents a number of different ethnic identities, we conducted at least two focus groups with the larger ethnic communities and sometimes separated men and women when the community advised that this would be a helpful process. All participants were asked to comment on their perspectives of belonging *before* and *after* the four major earthquakes of 2010-2011. Participants interviewed later in the study (late 2012 to early 2013) were also asked to reflect on whether their experiences of belonging had changed two years after the most devastating February 2011 earthquake.

All discussions were audio recorded, transcribed and analysed through a process of initial and focused coding in order to identify and develop key categories and then create increasingly analytic memos of these, as outlined by Saldaña (2009). Ongoing supervision during data collection and approaching the analysis as an iterative process between the lead researcher and two peer researchers helped to address cross cultural considerations and unintentional bias in the associated interpretation of the data. Through this predominantly inductive process, the ways in which belonging was expressed over time and across gender, ethnicity and size of ethnic community were identified and writing further memos helped to unpack the emergence and destabilisation of this concept. Checking the ensuing analysis with the refugee background peer researchers and key informants within the refugee sector helped ensure that premature conclusions were not made from the data, and these discussions also helped

inform subsequent data collection to target more nuanced understandings of the concept. Inter-coding agreement was achieved by the lead author and a research assistant who reviewed the transcripts to confirm consistency in the identification of salient codes and categories. The study received ethics approval from the associated tertiary institution.

Participant Voices: Narratives and discourses of belonging

The participant voices illustrate the ways in which their experiences and perspectives on belonging shifted over the course of the Canterbury earthquakes – before, during and after. Distinguishing between *ethno*, *civic* and *ethnic* (now placed in italics for emphasis) belonging provides a focussed lens to see how participants conceptualised belonging and its meanings within a disaster context.

Pre-earthquake perspectives on belonging

Participants spoke of their perspectives of belonging in Christchurch before the earthquakes as a predominantly *civic* sentiment. Belonging was often understood as access to employment and education (or the possibility thereof), having the opportunity to resettle, and being granted the same entitlements accorded to all New Zealand citizens.

> *I like living in Christchurch because it taught me a lot of things. It got me to start primary, intermediate, high school and job wise it's really good, it has a lot of opportunities. (Somali interview, male)*

> *Better life means when I was back in my country I haven't got any chance of going to university, doing computer course or some sort of facility but when I came here I was very happy to get those facilities, those subsidised for caring of home and everything. (Bhutanese focus group)*

These comments focus largely on entitlements and the objective proof of being able to participate in civic society. Participants, however, generally commented on a lack of *ethno* belonging, as they were not as well connected to the broader Christchurch community. Their sentiments of belonging tended to relate to an *ethnic*-based type of belonging, with participants identifying links, supports, shared understandings and experiences with individuals from their own backgrounds.

> *It was still the same within our community. A lot of help – our community helped each other more than we got help from outside. (University student focus group)*

The interviews also revealed that very few participants readily identified themselves as 'Kiwi' (a national identifier for someone from New Zealand), even though some had been settled in Christchurch for more than twenty years. This reticence suggests that they did not share a strong collective narrative with the wider (largely New Zealand born) Christchurch community. Thus, the relational that most participants identified was in fact an intra-*ethnic* belonging that did not extend to the wider society.

Immediate post-earthquake perspectives after the four major earthquakes

Following the last major earthquakes of 2011, participant expressions of *civic* belonging were still present. In addition, the anticipated rebuild and recovery efforts provided the participants with a promise of further *civic* belonging through the possibility of more employment opportunities.

> *If you can get a better life condition, about health and job opportunity and other type of facility and then you feel better and you say okay, I'm busy and I can do whatever I like and then you're feeling better and you say okay, I'm hundred per cent belong to here, I can stay here. And then some better opportunity in the life to myself and my children if I stay here. (Hazara Afghan male)*

> *I think opportunities here in Christchurch compared to our lives [as refugees], nothing. If you compare the opportunities to our life then, that's nothing. We would like to stay here... To have that opportunity, to have that certificate for painting and other stuff. (Hazara Afghan men's focus group)*

> *Yes, I can drive and I am doing a carpentry course at the moment. That one I am getting progress. (Bhutanese focus group)*

When asked about belonging after the earthquakes, most participants also spoke of an *ethno* sentiment that was not experienced in the pre-disaster environment. They noted feeling that they knew their neighbours for the first time, and that people outside their ethnic community cared about them.

> *Actually, the host community of Christchurch, they are so great at the time of earthquake. Before the earthquake we don't know each other, but after the earthquake we developed some sort of relationship, that distraction bring some sort of relationship between our neighbours, they said they had some things and they come and discuss about something. As to my [Bhutanese] community, they are so great. We are connected. (Bhutanese focus group)*

Some friends helped me and my neighbour. We never say hi [before the earthquakes] and it's good, after earthquake [our relationship] was very close. Actually we stayed overnight at the same house which is good. (Ethiopian female)

But when earthquake happened, they [neighbours not from their ethnic community] came and knocked my door... They came and help us. That's my first experience to know them, how they cared. (Hazara Afghan men's focus group)

Thus, a common adversity seemed to present a shared solidarity and provided opportunities for new social connections and a collective identity. However, both the promise of further *civic* belonging and the sentiments of ethno-belonging had shifted by phase two of the study, only ten to fourteen months later.

Perspectives on belonging nearly two years after the most destructive earthquake

Almost two years after the devastating February 2011 earthquake, the way participants spoke about belonging had changed. Across the interviews and focus groups, examples of *ethno*-belonging once again were rarely mentioned. As there had not been a major seismic event for a year, participants explained that their neighbours had returned to their everyday lives as much as possible, which included their traditional/previous social networks. Whilst participants spoke of a relational and more emotive type of belonging, this sense primarily emerged from their intra-*ethnic* relations rather than as an *ethno* sentiment across the wider Christchurch community (much like before the earthquakes). Moreover, the promise of increased *civic* belonging due to the city rebuild had lost much of its lustre as participants noted that they were unable to gain employment and excluded from employment possibilities, even when they had done the appropriate and related training for the rebuild:

For example, if I apply for a job, straight away when I call them or I talk to them, straight away they can feel my accent and I'm not born here, I'm not Kiwi so sometimes I get a little bit rejected there so that's why I feel sometimes I'm not belonging here (Somali male)

It would be hard to say that our community will move back because now Christchurch is in a rebuilding state and in that rebuilding state, what part are they going to play in terms of employment? Are they going to find a job easily? (Somali male)

Most of the focus groups revealed that eighteen months after the February 2011 earthquake, a large number of community members did not have jobs, and this situation seemed to directly influence

participants' sense of belonging. As the last participant comment demonstrates, there were a number of people from refugee backgrounds who left Christchurch. For instance, Somali participants estimated that half their community had left, and Ethiopian participants suggested nearly 75 per cent of their community had relocated (predominantly due to work opportunities). The Bhutanese community, Christchurch's second-largest group but the most recently resettled (in 2008), was still considering their options – some were resolute to stay and others were not so sure. The already small Kurdish and Eritrean communities noted that there was almost no one left following the earthquakes. It is important to highlight that the participants' concept of community was mainly based around intra-*ethnic* connections. Whilst expressing concerns about the risks of another major earthquake, they noted that opportunities for greater *civic* belonging alongside an ongoing *ethnic* belonging greatly influenced their decisions to leave or stay in the region. Correspondingly, the departure of some refugee background communities had a significant impact on the associated communities' intra-ethnic relationships and networks. However, the ways in which particular community groups experienced the earthquakes and their related perspectives of belonging were also different. Thus it is important and necessary to consider the diversity within the term 'refugee' and move beyond an archetype of a singular refugee community to successfully incorporate them/their voices in response and recovery efforts.

Gender, Community Size and Time Resettled: Intersections with Belonging

It was clear that the size of particular ethnic communities influenced recovery; nearly every interview and focus group emphasised that intra-*ethnic* support was the most important aspect and provider of assistance in both the immediate aftermath and subsequent ongoing recovery.

> *Yes, you see because the community now is very big. We have lots of people, we are together and we bought a community house at the moment [and this was helpful for responding to the earthquakes]. (Hazara Afghan female)*

Talking with others in the community was not only a way to share information, but to provide practical and emotional support and for mental/emotional wellbeing. All but four interviews revealed

that the people who had been most helpful in responding to the earthquakes had an intra-*ethnic* based identity.

> *We have no community to get support. There is no Afghan community to get support. We just help ourselves. My family, just myself. There is no community to help us. (Tajik Afghan, male)*

This comment illustrates that, whilst the largest Afghan ethnic group (Hazara) living in Christchurch was able to identify and access forms of support for coping and recovery, Afghan nationals from distinct ethnic groups did not identify with this experience. Similar differences within other nationality groups were also documented, where individuals and groups did not identify with particular community leaders or different ethnic identities from the same country of origin.

The amount of time that a particular community had been resettled in Christchurch also influenced the participants' sense of belonging. Communities that had been in Christchurch for more than twenty years (for example the Hazara) were more likely to have greater, and more stable, community-led forms of support than newly arrived communities (for example, the Bhutanese who began arriving in 2008). Thus the smaller and recently settled communities experienced support and a sense of belonging in different ways to larger and more established communities. Participants also stated that the presence of a communal space (e.g. community centre) provided for a greater sense of belonging within their respective intra-ethnic and broader Christchurch neighbourhood communities (see Marlowe and Lou, 2013).

Men and women also spoke of belonging in different ways. The men focused mainly on *civic* features of belonging to a place, such as access to, and participation in, employment and education. On the other hand, the women more commonly spoke about an almost secondary *ethno* type of belonging that referred more to the relation their children had to Christchurch, rather than their own personal belonging. Female participants stated that 'my kids like it here', and that Christchurch was 'a good place for my kids to be'.

Yes, I love Christchurch because it's a quiet place and it's very good to raise children and it's very good education for the children. It's a good place to raise the children. That's why I like most of it. (FG Somali women)

Most of the women's comments alluded to *ethnic* (rather than *ethno*) conceptions of belonging, meaning that their sense of attachment and inclusion was more localised to their immediate, *ethnic* community. For example, women from the Bhutanese, Ethiopian and Afghan focus groups noted they were less likely to have a driver's licence, be employed or speak fluent English. They often took primary responsibilities for care of their children which limited opportunities for external support and access to important information.

Those women have no idea how to drive and – small kids, looking after their small kids, single mother with kids... Very difficult. (Bhutanese focus group)

Whilst the men had higher likelihoods of having access to transportation, holding a driver's licence was a key consideration for women as this lack of mobility also isolated them, in particular, from accessing intra-*ethnic* support.

Overall, the interviews and focus groups highlighted the necessity of acknowledging existing differences within the often generalised term of 'refugees'. Whilst individuals may be from the same country, distinguishing factors such as gender, community size and time resettled also affected how individuals experienced belonging prior, during and after the major earthquakes. This paper now combines these chronological, gendered and contextual considerations in order to examine the associated implications for belonging and recovery in a post-disaster setting.

Recovery and its Social Context: Belonging and Disaster-Risk Reduction

This paper argues that belonging, as described by Fozdar and Hartley (2014), is a critical concept related to post-disaster recovery and disaster-risk reduction efforts. The ways in which the participants spoke about belonging highlights that this concept requires gendered, chronological and contextual lenses to unpack its meaning and significance. Correspondingly, the roles of 'civic', 'ethno' and an

additional form not discussed by Fozdar and Hartley, 'ethnic', belonging are important for understanding a community's particular experience of recovery following a disaster.

Civic belonging relates to the rights and entitlements that people have to participate in public spaces – whether this is education, employment, health or access to social security. Social work clearly has a role in helping people to navigate into and participate within these spaces. Participants, especially the males, identified certain levels of civic belonging through their access to services and employment. However, as time passed, the promises of further inclusion in recovery efforts through employment waned as contractors failed to hire these individuals from refugee backgrounds, even when they had adequate training. Gaillard (2007) explains that extrinsic factors directly impact people's vulnerability to disasters and these include: political, social and economic exclusion; financial insecurities and poverty; inadequate health care and housing; and discrimination. Thus, as a profession built upon principles of social justice and human rights, social workers have a critical role to play with community capacity building and addressing marginalisation within wider systems (Marlowe, 2014). The concept of a civic 'belonging to' constitutes an exchange – these individuals, as residents and citizens, are obliged to work, contribute through taxes, participate in New Zealand society and be good citizens. In exchange, they are entitled to particular civic rights. Often, marginalised communities lack knowledge and access to these entitlements or meaningful participation as a result of these; social workers can support and progress the reception and recognition of such rights. Civic belonging is particularly important because it allows communities and individuals to return to a sense of 'normal' daily activities which is an important part/indicator of recovery (Aldrich, 2012)**.** Social workers can help identify particular training opportunities, work with employers to encourage them to hire people from diverse backgrounds and ensure that structural systems are knowledgeable of, and responsive to, culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Ethno belonging, on the other hand, is not rights or privileged based, but rather is identified with affective connections that include feelings of integration and being part of a recovery process. Immediately following the earthquakes, a shared experience of survival and the prospects of

Christchurch's recovery as a wider community allowed, at least temporarily, the participants to develop a sense of ethno-belonging, and thus augmented their hope for future integration into the Christchurch/New Zealand community. Nevertheless, these sentiments appeared to be predominantly ephemeral and signposts an opportunity for social work, particularly through community devleopment models of engagement (see Pyles, 2007; Tudor, 2013), to consolidate these newly formed social relationships and collective identities. Except for immediately following the earthquakes, when all residents of Christchurch were connected through the shared experience of survival and recovery from the disaster, the study's participants did not describe a sense of ethno-belonging. In the post-earthquake Christchurch context within refugee communities, this concept is seemingly secondary to civic aspects of participation. However, a shared narrative between the usually marginalised communities and the wider Christchurch society is particularly helpful to immediate post-disaster resilience and recovery as it relates to being able to participate as a peer in civil society. In this sense, disasters provide an opportunity to develop new social relationships across society as these events can create a shared solidarity whereby the social work profession can mobilise this relational dynamic to help embed it within community relations and pave the way for greater opportunities for meaningful civic participation.

Whilst noting that the responses in this study were both gender and community dependent, the sense of belonging most felt by participants was *ethnic* (as distinct from *ethno*). The interviews and focus groups revealed that the most helpful relationships and responses to disaster were intra-*ethnic*, both in the short and longer term. Effective community leadership and having established meetings centres to respond to a disaster were crucial for recovery efforts. These findings reinforce the importance of proactive community-driven and endorsed disaster plans across short, medium and long-term responses. Alongside this form of support, civic belonging, predominantly through education and employment, provided opportunities to participate in the wider society; the strength of these sentiments was one of primary determinants to whether a community would remain in Christchurch. Whilst ethnic belonging is an important starting point, it does not represent a singular end goal. Aldrich (2012) has clearly shown the associated dangers of strong bonding social capital characterised

by the exclusive presence of an ethnically defined identity and subsequent rigid power structures that can, at times, be oppressive in disaster contexts. However, the role of ethnic belonging in this study was clear – nearly every participant identified ethnic-based relationships as central to their resilience and well-being following the major earthquakes and numerous powerful aftershocks, as well as throughout the subsequent recovery process.

Finally, the roles of *civic*, *ethno* and *ethnic* belonging are influenced by time, gender, size of the associated refugee background community, the amount of time resettled and importantly, the wider society's acceptance of them. The social work literature also illustrates that disasters are gendered, dynamic and contextual events where considerations of power, who has voice and marginality come into focus (Enarson and Meyreles, 2004; Pittaway *et al*., 2007). Therefore, it is important as a disaster event unfolds that the social work and allied professions are responsive to the ways in which belonging can shift around relational connections, time and civic spaces. The mental health recovery literature has links with discrimination and notes that this experience limits people's decisions to seek assistance and care with the wider society and associated institutions (Corrigan, 2004) and so too is the case with disasters (Zakour and Gillespie, 2013). The ways in which social work can respond to making more inclusive spaces and opportunities within and across civil society represents a cornerstone of effective disaster risk reduction with culturally and linguistically diverse populations. This analysis specifically applies when a particular locality can be home to numerous refugee background communities that may have significant differences in their relationships with the wider soceity and their preparations, interpretations and responses to a given disaster.

Gaillard (2007, p. 523) asserts that disasters can be viewed as 'an extension of everyday hardships'. Thus, pre-existing socio-economic and demographic disparities can shape individual's and community's vulnerabilities and responses to a disaster, as well as produce inequalities in the processes and patterns of recovery (Cutter and Emrich, 2006; Zakour and Gillespie, 2013). Despite previous vulnerabilities, the sense of ethnic belonging helped refugee background communities to support and progress recovery effort as participants spoke about it giving them purpose and a reason

to remain in Christchurch, even in the context of daily aftershocks. Whilst it is critical to acknowledge that refugees are not inherently vulnerable, the international literature within refugee resettlement does demonstrate these groups can have fewer social capital resources and increased considerations of vulnerability that may include: limited fluency in the host country language(s), time resettled, previous exposure to trauma (Davidson *et al*., 2008) and higher rates of unemployment and underemployment than the wider society (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007; O'Donovan and Sheikh, in press).

Despite these potential vulnerabilities, others have noted the capacities of refugee-background groups generally (Rosseau and Measham, 2007) and in disaster situations specifically (Marlowe, 2013). The fact that refugees have already survived adverse circumstances as part of their forced migration journey can also provide them with forms of resilience that may not be available to others without this experience. Aldrich (2012) notes that the strength of an individual's (or a community's) assets depends on existing and newly formed relationships and both are pivotal in recovery. Thus, the strength and reach of social relationships can directly impact on survival and wellbeing, and this has also been found particularly with refugee groups (Osman *et al*., 2012; Marlowe and Lou, 2013). In a disaster context, these social links, both within the immediate community and with the greater society, strengthen a community's ability to recover. The roles of *civic*, *ethno* and *ethnic* belonging all have their respective places for disaster informed recovery and will have varying levels of importance depending on relational, contextual and time-based factors.

Overall, the term 'refugee' encompasses rich diversity, and the complexities of and opportunities for recovery in a disaster context relate to a particular community's characteristics such as time resettled, relative size, degrees of internal and external social cohesion and many others. Whilst this paper presents considerations across several demographic characteristics, it is important to recognise that this focus is not exhaustive. For instance, Osman *et al*.'s (2012) recent survey involving refugee communities living in Christchurch, found that spirituality and religious practices were particularly important for coping with the earthquakes and represents another key area for recovery. This study

also notes the value of comparative and historical analyses as different refugee groups may have had experiences of responding to disasters in prior circumstances, which can help inform disaster risk reduction praxis in settlement contexts. Mutch's (2013) work highlights the need to better understand children's experiences in relation to disasters. These considerations alongside linguistic competencies, age, socioeconomic status, health inter alia also influence understandings of belonging and must sit alongside this paper's focus. The emergence, destabilisation and possibilities of belonging in disaster contexts require an understanding of 'community' and social work is well placed to collaborate with refugee-background communities to map associated capacities and vulnerabilities that can help with disaster mitigation and response.

Conclusion

The need to consider proactive local and national disaster plans becomes an imperative in view of the numerous natural hazards in New Zealand and in other countries that offer refugee resettlement programmes. Seeing that nearly 900,000 refugees have been resettled globally in the last ten years alone as part of country-sponsored resettlement initiatives, and that millions more people are displaced within their own lands and in refugee camps (UNHCR, 2014), there is an urgent need to develop greater understandings of what informs recovery in disaster contexts for these groups. A sense of belonging through civic participation and social connection, within communities and across society as a whole, can help inform effective disaster-risk reduction initiatives and recovery processes.

The conclusion of the interviews and focus groups of this study ended with a question about participants' hope for the future. A member of the Ethiopian community stated in a focus group that he felt hopeful for the future, however, Christchurch would never be as beautiful as it once was. Another participant responded to this statement:

> *So if people work together... maybe the city might not be that beautiful but what makes a city beautiful is not really the buildings. Mostly the people actually make the city beautiful. As long as the people stay friendly and you feel you can belong then there's hope in it.*

Resettlement is about offering safety and possibilities for wellbeing – the advent of a disaster can disrupt such opportunities. By providing a local New Zealand context in which international refugee resettlement occurs, this paper offers commentary where the social work profession can proactively and collaboratively assist to mitigate the impacts of disaster within the purviews of preparedness, response and recovery.

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