

“KIA KAHA CHRISTCHURCH!”: STRENGTHENING IDENTITY IN NEW ZEALAND

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On 22 February 2011 a magnitude 6.3 earthquake struck the city of Christchurch in New Zealand's South Island, killing 185 people and severely damaging the city's infrastructure, its city centre and eastern suburbs. Christchurch, the largest city in New Zealand's South Island, was once renowned for its genteel 'Englishness' and is a bastion of pakeha (New Zealanders of British settler origin) identity. It was a stranger to natural disaster before the series of earthquakes which began in September 2010. Following a discussion of local and national identity in New Zealand, this essay discusses responses to the 22 February 2011 earthquake and collective interpretations of the event as recorded in the New Zealand mass media, primarily focusing on the country's most popular news websites *nzherald.co.nz* and *Stuff.co.nz*. The particular interest herein is in discussing how discourses concerning this disaster resonate with established constructions of local and national identity in the New Zealand context. The essay asserts that the 22 February 2011 event can be interpreted as a national myth which affirms the existing set of values in the imagined regional and national communities in New Zealand and that this extraordinary collective experience and interpretations of it bear close associations to New Zealand's existing reinforcers of national identity, particularly its sporting and military traditions.

Key words: Christchurch, New Zealand, earthquake, identity, media, discourse

Introduction: claiming indigeneity

Christchurch is a modern city of around 350,000 people, the largest city in New Zealand's South Island and the country's third largest urban area. It was established in the mid-19th century as a planned and utopian English settlement, a founding narrative that characterised popular perceptions of the city until the late 20th century. In its own promotional material and in the popular imagination, Christchurch projected an Englishness centred on its importation of cultural institutions which all carried a sense of social conservatism, be it

championing the city’s gardens, its single-sex schools, local sports teams (particularly rugby, cricket and netball), manor houses, and the Anglican church, whose ChristChurch Cathedral was the city’s central landmark.¹ While New Zealand did not take on the rigid English concepts of social class, being founded on a more egalitarian basis, projections of propriety have always been part and parcel of Christchurch society and remain present in the Port Hills suburbs overlooking the city and particularly in the wealthy suburbs to the north-west of the city centre, where “the carriers of these cultural values are concentrated”.² By contrast, the poorer suburbs to the east of Cathedral Square, which have a local reputation for higher incidents of violence and poverty, are not included in common representations of the city.

Christchurch’s social conservatism has often been commented on in a critical light. If mid-20th century New Zealand had a rather “stagnant, provincial and anglophile atmosphere”, then “nowhere did this stagnant provinciality assert itself more strongly than in the leafy parks and gardens and neat networks of streets dotted with churches in Christchurch”,³ an atmosphere vividly captured in Peter Jackson’s highly acclaimed 1994 film *Heavenly Creatures*. In more recent times, Christchurch has been portrayed in popular fiction as a passive and lifeless settlement, which was “a shallow-hearted English lookalike city with a typically vacuous supermarket culture and a dismaying abundance of goods”.⁴

However, such representations are simplistic and challenged on a daily basis by the complexity of the modern urban settlement. As Cupples and Harrison note:

The Anglophile veneer in Christchurch is, for example, contested by the existence of a number of subaltern geographies in the city. Perceptions of Christchurch as a socially harmonious place are threatened by the existence of gangs of white power supremacists, which create a criminal subculture of drugs, extortion and racist attacks on African refugees. The increasing awareness of inner-city poverty as demonstrated by the numbers of people having recourse to church-run food banks and the fact that Christchurch has a significant and visible prostitution industry, gaining the label of the ‘sex capital’ of New

¹COOKSON, J., cit. by PICKLES, K. A Link in ‘The Great Chain of Empire Friendship’: The Victoria League in New Zealand, p. 42; CUPPLES, J., HARRISON, J. Disruptive Voices and Boundaries of Respectability in Christchurch, New Zealand, pp. 192, 197 – 198; GINN, F. Extension, Subversion, Containment: Eco-Nationalism and (Post)Colonial Nature in Aotearoa New Zealand, p. 343.

²CUPPLES, J., HARRISON, J. Disruptive Voices and Boundaries of Respectability in Christchurch, New Zealand, p. 192.

³MITCHELL, T. Flat City Sounds: A Cartography of the Christchurch Music Scene, p. 86.

⁴SMITH, A. J. Nationalist without a Nation: Kapka Kassabova, p. 106. Also see CALLEJA, P. Migration, Travel and Identity in Kapka Kassabova’s *Reconnaissance*, p. 28.

Zealand, also work against the construction of middle-class respectability as a defining feature of the city.⁵

Furthermore, Christchurch's notorious "boy racer" subculture, who dominated evening traffic on the weekends by doing laps of the city's four main avenues until a recent legal ban on the practice, and the city's significant rock music and electronica scenes contradict projections of Englishness. Indeed, some of the most flagrant transgressions of Christchurch respectability have been committed by foremost members of the city's political and business communities themselves and can engender considerable public support even when accused of serious crimes. As Cupples and Harrison assert in their examination of the public reaction to the case of former deputy mayor of Christchurch Morgan Fahey, who was convicted and jailed of a number of sex charges in June 2000, public reaction in Christchurch was far from universally damning and in fact highly polarised to the extent that Fahey ran second in mayoralty elections even after claims concerning his behaviour had been publicised.⁶

Despite its outward appearances, Christchurch is not "the most English of places". Self-ascriptions (discussed below) rather suggest claims to indigeneity, a sense of belonging solely in the New Zealand milieu. A New Zealand episode of an international travel series shot in 1999 illustrates this dichotomy in Christchurch appearances most clearly: for the most part, the episode highlights Christchurch's establishment as an English settlement and suggests a maintenance of this tradition.⁷ However, while slowly punting down the city's Avon River, flanked by Oxford and Cambridge Terraces (Christchurch's city centre streets, which were established in the 19th century, commonly bear the names of British places, parts of the British Empire and important British personalities), presenter Ian Wright (dressed for the occasion in a blazer and straw boater) asks his punter Wesley the question, "What do people that live here [think]? ... Do they think it's like England?" to which Wesley confidently replies, "No. We think it's like New Zealand as far as we're concerned".⁸ However, the greater metropolitan area of Christchurch has become a popular destination for recent British immigrants, who have had few problems fitting into the dominant pakeha culture. They often head for the outer city suburbs and dormitory communities further afield to live a semi-rural lifestyle which is

⁵CUPPLES, J., HARRISON, J. *Disruptive Voices and Boundaries of Respectability in Christchurch*, New Zealand, p. 192.

⁶CUPPLES, J., HARRISON, J. *Disruptive Voices and Boundaries of Respectability in Christchurch*, New Zealand, pp. 192 – 193. Also see CREAN, M., BRUCE, M. *Moore Takes Mayor's Chain*.

⁷*Globe Trekker: New Zealand*.

⁸*Globe Trekker: New Zealand*.

increasingly unaffordable in their homeland; it is not Englishness that these people seek, but quality of life.⁹

The city's majority ethnic population are pakeha New Zealanders (i.e. of British settler descent), who have a stronger presence in Christchurch than in many other parts of New Zealand. According to Statistics New Zealand, around 89 percent of the city's inhabitants considered themselves either “New Zealand European” or “New Zealander” in the 2006 census.¹⁰ (Given its lack of universal acceptance by those to whom it refers, the term ‘pakeha’ has not been used in the national census since 1996.) Pakeha constitute a largely non-political community (in contrast to New Zealand Maori, there is no exclusively “pakeha” movement in mainstream politics) whose members share a historical and cultural affinity.¹¹ This sense of homogeneity is based upon common descent, which rather than direct biological inheritance is rather reflected in the sharing of a collective “sentient or felt history”¹² stretching back to New Zealand's colonisation by settlers of predominantly British origin in the 19th century and covering all key national events thereafter, such as New Zealand's participation in the two world wars. However, the pakeha identity is a troubled one. The term itself is problematic; many pakeha object to being thus ascribed, preferring instead to call themselves “New Zealand Europeans”, “New Zealanders” or just “Kiwis”.¹³ Furthermore, it is a blanket term with vague markers of cultural authenticity which does not recognise the varied ethnic backgrounds among pakeha themselves.¹⁴

While not entirely an ideal expression, “pakeha” is probably the best term available to describe New Zealand's majority population. Alternative terms are simply insufficient, for they either risk confusion between pakeha New Zealanders and recent immigrants to New Zealand from Europe (“New Zealand European”) or potentially encompass all inhabitants of the country regardless of ethnic or cultural background (“New Zealander”).¹⁵ Self-ascribed pakeha use the term to place themselves firmly in the New Zealand context as a marker of indigeneity: this is a stance which recognises a shared history with Maori and acknowledges Maori land ownership and cultural rights, while at the same time

⁹MATTHEWS, P. Brits Find their Replica in the Farthest Corner.

¹⁰QuickStats about Christchurch City.

¹¹ANDERSON, B. *Imagined Communities*, pp. 6 – 7.

¹²CONNOR, W., cit. by SMITH, A. D. Dating the Nation, p. 56.

¹³CORBETT, J., GAMBLE, W. Census Poses a \$38M Question; DEARNALEY, M., PICKMERE, A. Census Will Count the Beat of a Nation; GINN, F. Extension, Subversion, Containment: Eco-Nationalism and (Post)Colonial Nature in Aotearoa New Zealand, p. 350n2; MISA, T. Ethnic Census Status Tells the Whole Truth.

¹⁴WATSON, G. Sport and Ethnicity in New Zealand, p. 781.

¹⁵WATSON, G. Sport and Ethnicity in New Zealand, p. 793n4.

asserting the right of pakeha to belong in New Zealand.¹⁶ Nonetheless, a strong identification with Britain is still present. Pakeha folk culture is after all “significantly British – different, but still British, like Australia”.¹⁷ This connection was very strong until recent decades, and only with the citizenship and immigration law changes in the 1980s did “British immigrants become *non* New Zealanders in any ‘real’ sense”.¹⁸

Being a pakeha New Zealander certainly involves the (in)voluntary embracement of locally-specific symbols which act as identity reinforcers. In his analysis of symbols within popular culture, Roland Barthes demonstrated that the attachment of a national myth to concrete forms of representation carries significations which fulfil the myth’s “double function” of notifying and imposing the invisible concepts of national identity upon a national population.¹⁹ To illustrate this point, Barthes offered the example of the mythicised “French” properties of wine and the power of belief in the association between this concrete form and nationhood as a “coercive collective act” of national identity expression.²⁰ Because “[w]ine is felt by the French nation to be a possession which is its very own, just like its three hundred and sixty types of cheese and its culture”,²¹ Barthes asserted that a French citizen questioning the full extent of wine’s “French” properties would “expose [themselves] to minor but definite problems of integration, the first of which, precisely would be that of having to explain [their] attitude” to fellow citizens.²² In New Zealand, many salient reinforcers of national identity stem from pakeha culture, are masculine and embodied within a “mythology of New Zealandism”²³ centring upon the historical and contemporary exploits of the national men’s rugby union team the All Blacks,²⁴ the Anzac spirit, the idea of “the hard man” with strong morals,²⁵

¹⁶JACKSON, P. *Constructions of ‘Whiteness’ in the Geographical Imagination*, p. 102; KING, M. *Being Pakeha Now: Reflections and Recollections of a White Native*, pp. 238 – 239; PEARSON, D. *The Ties that Unwind: Civic and Ethnic Imaginings in New Zealand*, pp. 102 – 103.

¹⁷KUIPER, K. *New Zealand’s Pakeha Folklore and Myths of Origin*, p. 180.

¹⁸PEARSON, D. *The Ties that Unwind: Civic and Ethnic Imaginings in New Zealand*, p. 98. Emphasis in original.

¹⁹BARTHES, R. *Mythologies*, p. 117.

²⁰BARTHES, R. *Mythologies*, p. 59.

²¹BARTHES, R. *Mythologies*, p. 58.

²²BARTHES, R. *Mythologies*, p. 59.

²³SINCLAIR, K., cit. by NAURIGHT, J. *Myth and Reality: Reflections on Rugby and New Zealand Historiography*, p. 222.

²⁴NAURIGHT, J. *Myth and Reality: Reflections on Rugby and New Zealand Historiography*, p. 227.

²⁵BUCHANAN, R. *The Dementia Wing of History*, p. 175.

making do” and “Kiwi ingenuity”,²⁶ and a collection of rural and urban cultural markers, such as an attachment to the land and home ownership.

Christchurch is often seen as a bastion of pakeha masculinity. In addition to its fascination with rugby union, it is a place peculiar to many visitors from other countries for its lack of adequate home insulation and central heating, which is an institutional reinforcement of the “staunch” pakeha identity.²⁷ Another reinforcer of pakeha identity, specifically, its masculinity, is the outward appropriation of Maori culture for its expression. Christchurch’s boys’ high schools, all of which are modelled on English selective grammar schools and are predominantly attended by pakeha pupils, each have a specific school haka (Maori posture dance), which is ritualistically performed en masse at inter-school rugby encounters, often involving the entire school assembly. Such appropriations of this specifically Maori expression by non-Maori (particularly in sport, but also in a range of everyday situations)²⁸ can be seen as an example of a “third-order simulacrum”, where a cultural marker is used in a new context and entirely removed from its referential basis for new purposes.²⁹ Thus it appears as a substanceless simulation of Maori culture rather than its faithful appropriation. While the haka “can be seen to play a pivotal role in defining New Zealand identity [and certainly pakeha identity] both domestically and abroad”,³⁰ Maori observers are deeply concerned about this “bastardising” of a central cultural signifier by non-Maori, who are ignorant of its original meanings and quite possibly even hostile to current Maori aspirations.³¹ Despite appearances, the use of the haka by Christchurch schoolboys does not represent a profound understanding of Maori culture. Much like Christchurch’s Englishness, this appropriation of a Maori cultural marker is no more than skin deep; the use of the haka in this context is simply an expression of pakeha masculinity as an indigenous expression prioritising loyalty to school and local rivalries.

However, the predominant imagery of Christchurch as a male, pakeha and middle-class space belies the city’s other reputations and present realities. For

²⁶BELL, C. The Big ‘OE’: Young New Zealand Travellers as Secular Pilgrims, p. 150; JONES, D., SMITH, K. Middle-Earth Meets New Zealand: Authenticity and Location in the Making of ‘The Lord of the Rings’, pp. 935 – 936.

²⁷CUPPLES, J., GUYATT, V., PEARCE, J. “Put on a Jacket, You Wuss”: Cultural Identities, Home Heating, and Air Pollution in Christchurch, New Zealand, pp. 2883 – 2890.

²⁸ROBINSON, J. The Drunken Haka Abroad; WATSON, M. Ka Mate Haka ‘Hijacked by Rugby’ for Money.

²⁹BAUDRILLARD, J. *Simulacra and Simulation*, pp. 6, 20 – 22, 121 – 123.

³⁰JACKSON, S., HOKOWHITU, B. Sport, Tribes, and Technology: The New Zealand All Blacks Haka and the Politics of Identity, p. 130.

³¹JACKSON, S., HOKOWHITU, B. Sport, Tribes, and Technology: The New Zealand All Blacks Haka and the Politics of Identity, pp. 130 – 131; MIKAERE, A. Are We All New Zealanders Now? A Māori Response to the Pākeha Quest for Indigeneity.

instance, Christchurch had a foremost position in New Zealand's women's rights struggle; the women's suffrage movement of the late 19th century, which eventually secured the popular vote for women in New Zealand in 1893, was centred in Christchurch, and the country's first female MP and cabinet minister were both elected representatives of Christchurch electorates. Furthermore, the city has significant immigrant populations of considerable diversity who do not easily fit into prevailing pakeha cultural values, norms and identities by virtue of their appearance, ethnicity or cultural practices; as a result, they have reported being made to feel unwelcome on occasion.³²

Christchurch and the Cantabrian identity

Rugby union is a sport which is central to contemporary New Zealand identity (for both pakeha and Maori) and is the nation's primary sport for both players and spectators alike at amateur and professional level.³³ Rugby has also been particularly fundamental to building regional identities in New Zealand:

Indeed, it is thanks to sport in general, and to rugby in particular, that the provinces first became (and have remained) important to the construction of notions of regional identity and to the intensity of the allegiances that are associated with them. This is notwithstanding the fact that, as formal administrative units of the nation state, the provinces were actually abolished as far back as 1876.³⁴

Given their lack of political significance, regional identities are not noticed much in the New Zealand mass media outside of the sports arena, where regional affiliations are very closely observed. Christchurch is a part of the Canterbury region, the South Island's farming hinterland, and identifies with it so closely that the common term for someone from Christchurch, as it is for someone from Canterbury, is "Cantabrian" (exclusively urban alternatives such as "Christchurcher" or "Christchurchian" are not in popular use). This ascribed attachment to the surrounding non-urban area distinguishes the people of Christchurch from inhabitants of New Zealand's other major cities – Auckland (Aucklanders), Wellington (Wellingtonians), Dunedin (Dunedinites) and

³²HUMPAGE, L. A 'Culturally Unsafe' Space? The Somali Experience of Christchurch Secondary Schools, pp. 73 – 77; KOBAYASHI, A. 'Here We Go Again': Christchurch's Antiracism Rally as a Discursive Crisis, p. 62.

³³OBEL, C. 'Club Versus Country' in Rugby Union: Tensions in an Exceptional New Zealand System, pp. 444 – 445; WATSON, G. Sport and Ethnicity in New Zealand, pp. 780 – 783.

³⁴PERRY, N. Social Integration, Social Division and Media Representations of Sport in a Small Society.

Hamilton (Hamiltonians) – whose appellations primarily refer to the urban settlements themselves.

Christchurch is incorporated into the Canterbury region in sports representation; in New Zealand and transnational sports competitions, most prominently men’s rugby, this regional allegiance is vehemently followed by Cantabrians, who have a nationwide reputation as being extremely parochial, earning them the moniker “one-eyed Cantabs”.³⁵ At sporting encounters, the provincial colours of red and black are worn by Cantabrians in any way possible and this collection of individuals amassed in public spaces forms a sportive “neo-tribe” – a diffuse and temporary collective “characterised by fluidity, occasional gatherings and dispersal”³⁶ who are sharing the sporting experience and a common tenor of reciprocal allegiance. Despite its temporal instability, the diffuse manifestations of sportive fandom exhibited by the Christchurch population – otherwise strangers to each other – represent a key symbolic expression of attachment to the city and the region. It is foremost a positive recognition of regional identity which is associated with drama, pleasure and the practices of consumption. It is in the locally-focused practices of sports fandom that the Christchurch identity has been most vividly expressed, for until recently it has been rarely apparent outside of this context.

Shaken to a stronger sense of self

At 12:51 pm on 22 February 2011, a magnitude 6.3 earthquake of shallow depth hit Christchurch, causing 185 deaths and damage to buildings and infrastructure to an extent unseen in the city’s history. This earthquake was a severe aftershock to a magnitude 7.1 earthquake in the Canterbury region (which had seen no casualties) on 4 September 2010. The city’s most prominent and iconic buildings were damaged or destroyed, the central business district was effectively lost and the eastern suburbs were struck by soil liquefaction, causing extensive damage to housing and infrastructure. The economic loss from both earthquakes has been enormous, estimated to be in the area of 30 billion New Zealand dollars, or up to 18 % of GDP.³⁷ Poignantly, most deaths occurred when a building collapsed housing the local television station CTV, a prominent trumpeter of local identity, and an English language school, representing a major industry in the city. Given the scale of the disaster and the identities of the victims, of whom nearly half were foreign nationals, the response to the disaster took on an international character, with search and rescue teams from Australia,

³⁵SMITH, T. One-Eyed Cantabs Take Parochialism Too Far.

³⁶MAFFESOLI, M. *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*, p. 76.

³⁷BENNETT, A. Christchurch Quake Tab Could Reach \$30 Billion; CUBRINOVSKI, M., HENDERSON, D., BRADLEY, B. Liquefaction Impacts in Residential Areas in the 2010 – 2011 Christchurch Earthquakes, p. 812.

the United Kingdom, the United States, Singapore, China, Taiwan and Japan, and 300 Australian police aiding their New Zealand colleagues.³⁸

The earthquake struck the city's key signifiers at their very core. The buildings and monuments symbolising Christchurch's colonial past were severely damaged or destroyed and the statues of Christchurch's colonial founders were literally toppled from their bases; the symbolism of this, embodied in the iconic ChristChurch Cathedral losing its spire and being condemned to demolition was not lost on observers.³⁹ The city's major sports stadium at Lancaster Park was closed indefinitely, depriving the city's population of a focal point of neo-tribal congregation until a new stadium was completed in March 2012.

The earthquake also brought to the fore existing internal frictions. The extent of damage to infrastructure and buildings mirrored the city's socioeconomic topography to a remarkable extent, with Christchurch's generally poorer eastern suburbs experiencing major damage as a result of liquefaction, to the extent that around 6,000 homes there were abandoned and set for demolition, whereas the wealthier areas of the city to the west of the city centre were damaged to a much lesser degree.⁴⁰ One observer noted a clear imbalance in public attention, noting that whereas the city centre (dubbed "rescue city") was the centre of media coverage and the western suburbs were only mildly affected ("shower city" – having electricity, water and sewerage networks intact), the eastern suburbs ("refugee city"), which were without power, running water and essential sanitation services, were largely ignored by the media and public authorities in the weeks following the earthquake.⁴¹

There have been many results of the earthquake; thousands of people have left Christchurch, some certainly permanently.⁴² However, there has also been a noticeable intensification of identification with the city. In addition to answering public appeals for aid, people around New Zealand and overseas donned red and black to commemorate the disaster and show their emotional commitment to the city.⁴³ The website of the Auckland-based newspaper *The New Zealand Herald* (*nzherald.co.nz*), one of the most prominent news outlets in the country, changed its banner from its traditional blue to red and black for weeks after the event.

³⁸CHENG, D. Christchurch Earthquake: Search Teams Leaving No Stone Unturned; NZPA. Aussies Become NZ Cops in Quake-hit City.

³⁹PICKLES, K. A Natural Break from our Colonial Past; SACHDEVA, S. Councillors Ask for Cathedral Demolition Halt.

⁴⁰CUBRINOVSKI, M., HENDERSON, D., BRADLEY, B. Liquefaction Impacts in Residential Areas in the 2010 – 2011 Christchurch Earthquakes, p. 815.

⁴¹HYDE, P. Shattered City's Forgotten Victims.

⁴²CHATTERTON, T. Population Drop Linked to Quakes; COLLINS, S. Survivors of the Exodus: 'There is the guilt that we ran away.'

⁴³Colour Me for Christchurch; Country Goes Red and Black for Christchurch; MATHEWSON, N. World Turns Red and Black to Support Christchurch Earthquake Victims.

Through the collective wearing of these colours, the Christchurch/Canterbury neo-tribe was re-invoked in a context beyond the sports field as the main symbolic way in which Cantabrians and other New Zealanders could express their attachment to the Christchurch. Much media discourse in the quake’s wake revolved around ideas of resilience and quiet determination, which, as mentioned above, are considered to be characteristic reinforcing traits of New Zealand and pakeha identity.

The appropriation of one Maori cultural marker by non-Maori was highly evident in the wake of the disaster, with the widespread use of the phrase “Kia kaha!” (“Be strong!”) being highly noticeable. “Kia kaha Christchurch” appeared in the mass media, online forums, T-shirts, bumper stickers, various public appeals and even on the very materials to be used in the rebuild.⁴⁴ This Maori expression was serving a pakeha purpose, for there were no Maori significations other than the words themselves, which present a message central to notions of pakeha identity. When Prince William visited Christchurch in late March 2011 and addressed a deeply touched Cantabrian public, he made no mention of the city’s English heritage, but explicitly reaffirmed the “Kia kaha” message, praising in turn the “courage and understated determination of New Zealanders. Of Cantabrians”; like the post-earthquake usage of “Kia kaha” itself, this is a clear acknowledgement of the core reinforcers of New Zealand national identity mentioned above.⁴⁵ Another expression, “the people of Christchurch”, also entered public discourse and was widely used in media coverage as the verbal reification of a needy but brave and resilient community.⁴⁶ The collective expressions of solidarity with Christchurch transcended regionalism and reinvigorated New Zealand national identity. Echoing Benedict Anderson’s idea of “the imagined community”, Anthony Hubbard stated: “What the earthquake did was to awaken our sympathy and widen it: the ‘imagined community’ of New Zealand, imagined because each of us can never know more than a fraction of the people in it – became instantly real.”⁴⁷ The disaster revealed emotional bonds within the national society which are not noticed on an everyday basis. While New Zealanders not living in Christchurch were not necessarily affected by the disaster in a direct sense, its emotional impact was profoundly felt nationwide. After all, Christchurch is a place where many New Zealanders have worked, studied or grown up; the city for them is an important base of emotional

⁴⁴GATES, C. Silt Used to Strengthen Spirit.

⁴⁵Transcript: Prince William’s Memorial Speech.

⁴⁶An archival news search undertaken through Google’s New Zealand version (www.google.co.nz) clearly illustrates the emergence of this expression. As a set phrase “the people of Christchurch” appeared over 830 times in articles from the time of the first earthquake on 4 September 2010 to mid-June 2012 (the present time of writing), whereas it appeared only 32 times in the one hundred years preceding the date of the first earthquake.

⁴⁷HUBBARD, A. Thrown Together.

identification and a node of memory. Christchurch is also a primary destination for migrants from other parts of New Zealand, who link the city with other parts of the country through the maintenance of family relationships. The disaster's emotional impact on New Zealand cannot be overstated.

To place Brad West's comments concerning Cyclone Tracy, which devastated the Australian city of Darwin in 1974, into a different context, the 22 February 2011 earthquake was something of a "quasi-military event"⁴⁸ whose collective interpretation bears striking similarities to the central national myth of the 1915 Gallipoli campaign and the Anzac spirit, which emphasises courage, humility, comradeship and compassion. This makes the 22 February event a particularly powerful reinforcer of New Zealand national identity. The military associations were hard to ignore in the media coverage: alongside the stories of sacrifice, bravery and tragedy that emerged in the earthquake's wake, there was an extensive and immediate response by the New Zealand Defence Force, who mounted their largest operation on New Zealand soil in unison with international counterparts.⁴⁹ The help offered by these 'allied forces' of search and rescue, defence and police units emphasised the military and Anzac metaphor; this was most poignantly underlined by the extensive Australian police presence on Christchurch streets, which struck a deep chord with Christchurch residents.⁵⁰ As for the scene of disaster itself, the city centre was described as "burning" and a "bomb site",⁵¹ the residents were "lonely, stunned people walking almost aimlessly",⁵² and the city's Christchurch Cathedral with its fallen spire evoked comparison to its bombed counterparts in Coventry and Dresden.⁵³ Heroes were easy enough to find: some of the most conspicuous were part of the online initiative of the Student Volunteer Army, which through a social networking site mobilised thousands of university students and others to aid in cleaning up the city. The organisation was aptly named the Anzac of the Year for their exemplification of "comradeship, compassion, courage and commitment"⁵⁴ and founder Sam Johnson, portrayed as a down-to-earth modern-day hero, was named Young New Zealander of the Year.⁵⁵

⁴⁸WEST, B. *Mythologising a Natural Disaster in Post-Industrial Australia: The Incorporation of Cyclone Tracy within Australian National Identity*, p. 200.

⁴⁹MAPP, W. *Humanity Greater Than Any Act of Nature; Christchurch Earthquake – NZ Defence Force – Update 8*.

⁵⁰NZPA. *Australian Police Farewelled from Earthquake-hit Christchurch; John Key's Address to Australian Parliament*.

⁵¹CHENG, D. *Alien Landscape after Quake*.

⁵²MASTERS, C. *Christchurch Quake: Trail of Stunned People Look for Safety*.

⁵³MAPP, W. *Humanity Greater Than Any Act of Nature; OESTREICHER, P. Cathedrals Have Been Rebuilt*.

⁵⁴YOUNG, R. *Student Army Wins Anzac Award*.

⁵⁵ANDERSON, C. *Sam Johnson Named Young NZer of Year*. Also see DABNER, N. 'Breaking Ground' in the Use of Social Media: A Case Study of a University Earthquake

Concluding remarks

Natural disasters affect one's sense of identity. As Patrick Deeny and Brian McFetridge state:

“Self, identity and culture are intertwined in how individuals feel about themselves and how they feel about living in a particular social context. The natural or human-initiated disaster has potential to seriously disrupt the life and social networks of individuals, groups, and communities. It is reasonable, therefore, to suggest that a disaster may result in changes related to self, identity, and culture.”⁵⁶

Rather than talking about a crisis of identity, the Christchurch experience primarily suggests a strengthening of identity rather than its loss. After all, the vast majority of people have stayed in Christchurch and despite having their lives profoundly disrupted, the media discourse in the wake of the disaster stresses an attachment to the city which was perhaps not so vividly present beforehand. The experience of earthquake survival endured by the Christchurch population and the media discourse surrounding it are now part of the collective memories which shape Christchurch identity and reinforce the key tenets of New Zealand national identity itself. It was a historical event that was literally “felt” by Cantabrians and other New Zealanders, and the stories from this disaster, particularly its interpretation in the mass media, will inform future narratives reinforcing pakeha-centred New Zealand national identity as an indigenous identity.

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Response to Inform Educational Design with Facebook, pp. 74, 76; Student Volunteer Army Mobilises; WEBSTER, M. Christchurch and the Student Volunteer Army.

⁵⁶ DEENY, P., MCFETRIDGE, B., cit. by DUGAN, B. Loss of Identity in Disaster: How Do You Say Goodbye to Home?, p. 45.

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