

“Let’s All Go to the Marae”: Manākitanga in Māori Disaster Resilience

I’m a professor of Geography and Indigenous Studies at The Evergreen State College in Washington state, who focuses on Native/non-Native relationships, such as opposing racist anti-treaty groups, building rural alliances to stop fossil fuel projects, or collaborating for climate resilience. My current project, focused on Aotearoa New Zealand, looks at manākitanga (hospitality) in Māori Disaster Resilience, based on the marae community.

I’d like to thank the Waikato-Tainui people for hosting us, and thank the Medicine Creek Treaty Tribes of the Coast Salish, as the tangata whenua of the territory where Evergreen sits.

Evergreen has a longstanding relationship with Aotearoa, starting with multiple artists exchanges.

In 2006 at Evergreen, we started the Climate Change and Pacific Rim Indigenous Nations Project, in consultation with the Tulalip Tribes and visiting Ngāpuhi environmental scientist Ata Brett Stephenson.

Instead of looking at Indigenous cultures as merely the Miner’s Canary, or victims who have to die as a warning to Western society of toxic climate change, we began to view Native nations as models or exemplars of how to respond to the crisis. The canary could flee its cage, and lead the hapless white miner to safety.

Because of their treaty rights, Pacific Northwest tribes are ahead of white communities in restoring salmon habitat, planting community gardens, looking to renewable energies, and moving to higher ground.

In our book *Asserting Native Resilience*, Ata Stephenson observed that Indigenous nations are also a model because, compared to western societies, they have also retained a sense of community, using the marae as an example.

A top-heavy consumer society of strangers reliant on highly centralized global supply lines to keep its superstores open may be even more vulnerable than societies in which people know their relatives and neighbors, and have never lost systems of mutual aid.

Non-Native people wait for someone else to save them in an emergency, and as we’d just seen with Hurricane Katrina, FEMA doesn’t come in time. Recently in our state, grocery shelves went bare before the snowstorm even hit. Or settlers’ rugged individualism means that they can stick it out alone with their nuclear families in a state of siege. Relative to that idea, at least, Native communities have retained denser social networks that have enabled survival through the historical traumas of colonization and industrialization.

Manākitanga

Dr. Stephenson described how Māori prepare for and respond to disasters through cultural structures of manākitanga, or hospitality. The pivot is the marae, through which tangata whenua [people of the local land] host and care for others, including other Māori living in the area, and

Pākehā (European settler), Tauīwi (recent immigrant) neighbors, and foreign visitors.

The community strength of the iwi (tribe), hapū (subtribe), and whānau (extended family) is centered in the marae “which includes a meeting house and communally owned land and buildings that offer a physical space for gatherings and decision making . . . It is a hapū responsibility to provide such hospitality without limit for those who seek to use that marae. Marae have commonly provided manaakitanga on a long-term basis in natural disasters.”

Indeed, when Mount Tarawera erupted in 1886, Te Wairoa residents who took shelter in a whareniui (meeting house) survived, whereas many in European structures perished.

At international gatherings, you may have noticed that Māori are really good at planning and logistics. Or as Ahipara lawyer Catherine Murupaenga-Ikenn told me, “Whenever there’s an emergency, our first thought is, ‘Let’s all go to the marae!’”

Hirini Moko Mead observes, for funerals, “the whole complex becomes a hive of activity. . . . The hosts are honour bound, in terms of manaakitanga, to take good care of their visitors” (Mead 2003, 97-98).

With my colleague Kristina Ackley, we’ve taken three Native Decolonization in the Pacific Rim classes to Aotearoa, and we’ve stayed and been well fed in several marae. It was remarkable to me that marae still exhibited community strength in the face of colonization and the urban shift. I asked former Ngāi Tahu chairman Sir Mark Solomon why this was so, and he told me,

“[When] my uncle died. . . we fed ten thousand people in three days. The koha [financial gift] that was laid covered the whole cost. . . Manaakitanga. . . is the main guiding principle of Māori culture. It’s always been here, but I personally believe that colonization *reinforced* it because we had to work together, we had to support each other to survive.”

These descriptions intersected with two other areas of my work at Evergreen. In our class “Catastrophe: Community Resilience in the Face of Disaster,” we visited coastal tribal communities moving to higher ground away from coastal flooding, tsunamis, and sea-level rise.

We studied Naomi Klein’s concepts of the Shock Doctrine imposed after disasters such as Hurricane Katrina,

which she has counterposed with grassroots recovery practices of “People’s Renewal,” or what I call the “Resilience Doctrine,” after hurricanes in New Orleans, New York, and Puerto Rico.

We also read Rebecca Solnit’s classic *A Paradise Built in Hell*,

which documented the extraordinary collective communities that temporarily arise in disasters. Horrible disasters can ironically provide new models of social and environmental sustainability that otherwise conservative people are not open to, until their lives are upended.

For example, a Kansas town that was leveled by a 2007 tornado rebuilt with renewable energy technologies and a nonpartisan political structure.

At the same time, I was publishing my book *Unlikely Alliances: Native Nations and White*

Communities Join to Defend Rural Lands,

about tribal alliances with white farmers, ranchers, and fishers in the U.S. who had previously opposed treaty rights, but came together with the tribes to protect the water from mining, oil, and other threats,

much like the movement against deep-sea oil that I'd visited here four years ago.

It began to occur to me that disaster response could be another key area of collaboration between Native peoples and their settler neighbors to decolonize their relationships. When you're cut off from the rest of the country, you only have your neighbors to rely on.

Similar discussions of building relationships have been taking place in Aotearoa, expanding on the tikanga (principle) of whanaungatanga. Mead defined the principle as reaching "beyond the actual whakapapa [genealogy] relationships and included relationships to *non-kin* persons who became like kin through shared experiences" (Mead 2003, 28).

New Zealand's *National Disaster Resilience Strategy* draft document now includes a section on Māori cultural values (New Zealand Government 2018, 18),

drawing from manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, and other principles to deepen whakaoranga, or the restoration of well-being after an upheaval (Kenney & Phibbs 2017).

Māori Leaders Climate Summit

During our third class trip to Aotearoa last year, I was invited to observe the Māori Leaders Climate Summit in Wellington.

It was organized by the Iwi Leaders' Group and its current climate chair Mike Smith, who has been a leader in the deep-sea oil campaign.

Smith contrasted Indigenous models of disaster cooperation to the western "assumption that it's every man for himself. So you stock up on food, build a bunker, arm yourself ... Then ... wait for the zombie apocalypse and smoke anybody who crosses your perimeter. That ... speaks to the history of the pioneers... man against nature [and] Indigenous people... Everything's a threat, you're on your own."

At this Summit, I decided to interview Māori leaders, emergency planners, and community members on marae disaster response. I started there with Sir Mark Solomon, former chair of Ngāi Tahu iwi, on the South Island. He had been pivotal in the response to earthquakes in Christchurch and Kaikōura.

Christchurch

The quake in Christchurch was in February 2011, killing 185.

The earthquake damaged much of the CBD, making parts off limits for months or years,

but most deeply affected the Eastern Suburbs, with a large Māori population. Ngāi Tahu led the relief efforts, based on the theme "Aroha nui ki te tangata" (love to all people), regardless of ethnicity.

The iwi's post-quake role has been solidly documented by scholars such as Simon Lambert, Christine Kenney, and Suzanne Phibbs,

and used by the United Nations to incorporate Indigenous community-based responses into disaster planning.

With resources from considerable business holdings secured in its Treaty of Waitangi settlements with the Crown, Ngāi Tahu organized the relief effort.

In the immediate aftermath of the quake, he told me, Ngāi Tahu representatives and Māori Wardens went door-to-door for eight days, asking about power, water, and food.

Kenney and Phibbs quoted one of these door-knockers who offered frozen fish and vegetables to an elderly Pākehā woman, who burst into tears and exclaimed "It's the Māoris... that remember us. We haven't seen anyone since [the quake] happened!"

Chairman Solomon told me, "Christchurch has always been known as the redneck center of the country. But there is a dramatic attitude change since that earthquake.... The farmers arrived in droves ... And they spent the first fortnight digging [liquefaction] mud... it's just opened so many doors, knocked down so many barriers."

At the same time, the Red Cross and Civil Defense came under his withering criticism for their slower, more bureaucratic responses, for example sending too many clothes, bedding, and perishable food, or not documenting which families were evacuating.

The media only rarely highlighted Ngāi Tahu's crisis leadership, even when the conservative government gave full representation to the iwi in the recovery authority.

Solomon also coordinated with the city's large Asian communities, "because, like us, most of the people are at the bottom of the economic ladder," and some couldn't read English. A Korean man later asked him, "You have eels?... We buy everything... Not just once, every year now, our thank you."

One legacy of the bridges built after the quake from was seen in the aftermath of the recent terror attack. Māori expressed solidarity with the Muslim community in a series of haka.

Marama Davidson reported that Muslims had "seen the kaupapa Māori approach to our own trauma.... They are scared that they will get a mainstream response ... and they know that won't work" (Kupenga 2019).

Kaikōura

Five years after the Christchurch quake, a devastating 7.8 quake hit the South Island city of Kaikōura, in November 2016. I visited last year.

At two minutes, it was the longest earthquake in New Zealand's recorded history, with two deaths and \$1.8 billion in insurance claims, and damage to local and tourist shops.

A tsunami up to 7 meters high radiated across the country.

Slips (landslides) severed the coastal highway and rail line, isolating the city by land.

The coastline rose 70 centimeters, stranding shellfish and seaweed above the foreshore water line,

so they had to be rescued and later protected.

Sir Mark Solomon is from Kaikōura's Ngāti Kurī hapū , which used its treaty settlement to take over the local ecotourism industry (such as Whale Watch).

After the quake, Takahanga Marae opened its doors, with about 90 people sleeping in the marae whareniui (meeting house) in the first nights.

The marae fed the community with the namesake kōura, or large crayfish.

Volunteers fed 1.5 tonnes of crayfish in the wharekai (dining hall) to locals and stranded tourists, who were "absolutely overwhelmed" by the generosity. (Ensor & Eder 2016).

Solomon recalled, "anything that we had that was perishable at our fish factory, send it up to the marae....we served ten thousand meals in the first week. All food was donated... [S]ome of the biggest bigots ... turned up with their cattle, their sheep, their food supplies, to help support the marae....[I]n a disaster, people really come together."

But he also described how the Red Cross confiscated two tribal food shipments and iPhones brought in by helicopter, adding "we actually asked the police to meet the [third] helicopter , and the police officer had to threaten to arrest the Red Cross person to stop them confiscating this food." He also challenged Civil Defence for repeating the relief supply mistakes made in Christchurch.

Pākehā have joined Māori in the recovery journey, and the local museum had a special exhibition about the quake response and recovery.

Edgecumbe

My next case study concerns the disastrous April 2017 flood in Edgecumbe, in the Bay of Plenty region on the North Island. The unexpected flood on the Rangitāika River broke through a stopbank (levee) in the wake of Cyclone Debbie.

A 1987 earthquake had ravaged the town and led nearby marae to undertake long-term emergency planning.

At the Summit, Marcus Matchitt described in harrowing detail the unexpected "once-in-500-year" 2017 flood.

I twice visited Edgecumbe, and saw the low-lying mainly Māori neighborhood where 12 damaged homes were leveled after the flood.

Marae in nearby towns sheltered many of the 1,600 people who had to evacuate their homes in the flood and a subsequent storm, many on tractors and boats.

Several residents contrasted the warm welcome they received at Rautahi Marae in Kawerau with the colder reception at the war memorial hall run by the district council, which was mired in red tape such as ID procedures and the need to wait for paid staff.

Edgecumbe Collective coordinator Vicky Richards explained that marae have “a clear structure of command from kaumatua [elder] leaders giving direction, head cooks take charge in the kitchen and immediate mobilization of their whānau volunteers. There are very few organizations that can cater for high capacity of numbers and as quick as a marae. Some of those that had never been on a marae before were amazed at the engrained efficiency, the kind welcome and support they received.”

Marcus Matchitt and his sister Diane Maxwell explained that Rautahi Marae “made us feel welcome and warm....That’s the Māori way... they just opened up their heart and marae, put on beautiful feeds and clothes and access to the doctors.”

The people of Ngāti Awa iwi created the Ngāti Awa Volunteer Army (or NAVA), and invited the district council to send volunteers to join the tribal clean-up.

Nearly 1,500 volunteers signed up for “the Team that Mucked In.” They checked on 333 homes.

According to Tautini Hahipene, NAVA observed that “Manākitanga, it's really helping everyone out. Māori and Pākehā do have it when it comes to disasters... Māori will always be there.”

The volunteer coordinators were overwhelmed by support and gratitude from the community, connected by a Kia Kaha Edgecumbe facebook page.

A quarter of the buildings were damaged by floodwaters and black mold. Nearly all surviving buildings have been cleaned up.

The damaged stopbank has been reconstructed, where concrete walls were torn apart by the strength of the river flow.

A few weeks or months after a disaster, the crisis lessens, and the larger lessons are usually forgotten as society begins to return to “normal.” Cooperation is then seen as a fluke, even though social inequalities and climate change are meanwhile conspiring to provide the next crisis. The question is how can collaboration extend beyond the crisis?

Edgecumbe was a model for how an Indigenous community can recover from a disaster while extending the sense of community and unity. A recovery pod still provided services a year after to address Depression and PTSD.

The community held a Whānau Day to help in the recovery effort months after the disaster.

Two murals were unveiled last year, to emphasize the humanity of the flood survivors.

A simple and powerful mural, by Mr. G, was of a woman's face,

with visions of the future in her eyes.

It was featured on a poster for a festival on the first anniversary of the flood disaster, called "Kotahitanga (Unity from Adversity)." Anniversaries are often a difficult time for disaster survivors.

Another beautiful mural was painted by Regan Balzer, who later attended an artists' gathering at our Evergreen Longhouse. She told me the taniwha (or spiritual guardian) images symbolized "restoration, regeneration and even in the darkest times... death or loss is not the end, it just makes way for something new and beautiful to grow" (Balzer 2019).

Kokohinau Marae near Te Toko built five homes in a papakainga (village) development for flood whānau, with 14 more homes planned.

The Edgumbe Collective, a network of local NGOs that has met for two years, has developed a tikanga-centered plan for community recovery.

And just last month, the community published a moving book *The Day the Wall Broke*, that documented its experiences in residents' own voices.

Whanganui

My final case study examines flood events that occurred in 2015 and '17 on the North Island, around Whanganui (pronounced like a W in the local te reo dialect).

In Whanganui's first century as a city, floods occurred once every 14 years, but in the past three decades climate change has increased the rate to once every three years.

In the Whanganui rohe (region), Māori make up about a quarter of the population, and more in rural areas.

Iwi and hapū played pivotal roles in the evacuation, relief, and communication during the floods, as part of the Pan-Iwi Civil Defence Partnership with the Whanganui District Council.

Chris Kumeroa established a pan-iwi civil defence framework, drawing on his Army and Security Consultant expertise. He hopes that cooperation model can be replicated in the rest of the country, and wants to connect with Indigenous emergency planners around the world.

The Marae Emergency Management Plans track risk through the stages of Reduction, Readiness Response, and Recovery.

Kumeroa reports that Māori respond much more favorably to requests by tribal staff or Māori Wardens to evacuate, rather than Pākehā government employees. He has set up Civil Defence with a iwi liaison to iwi and then to hapū leadership.

The community around Putiki Marae, next to the river, had to be evacuated in the floods.

Many residents were sheltered in Tupoho Marae, with room for about 40 beds.

It also functioned as a Pan-Iwi Hub with Civil Defence, using radio communications, a coordination room, and access to the public on a bilingual Māori FM station.

Te Ao Hou Marae, also on higher ground, has been set up as a Civil Defence Center for future emergencies.

It has room for 60 beds and medical facilities. Geoffrey Hipango says, the “huge tribal network... will not sit back and idly watch. the old people used to say...about having a [food] basket...Everybody contributes to the basket ‘til it's overflowing, and then ... if everyone contributes, you'll benefit from that.”

Tama Upoko leaders have developed extensive emergency plans for four isolated upriver marae.

The project has made maps of all households, Civil Defence radios, and helicopter Landing Zones, and is setting up wi-fi hotspots. This is all information that Civil Defence has lacked, and begins to model a Pan-Iwi emergency response, based on data that iwi control. New Zealand's government should recognize *and resource* marae as leading CD centres for Māori and non-Māori alike. As Simon Lambert told me, outside agencies “can do their thing, but they should be in charge. As guests they should ask permission and default to the mana whenua [local power of the land].”

Conclusion

My research examined the flip side of the depiction of Indigenous communities as the first and most deeply affected victims of disasters, particularly the shocks resulting from climate change. Drawing from traumatic histories, Indigenous nations are also developing innovative models of preparing for and responding to emergencies. These stories also flip the “Native-peoples-as-dysfunctional” script, when clearly Māori responding to disasters have been far more functional than government or NGO agencies, and even local Pākehā see their own safety and security are better protected by Indigenous authority.

But as Mike Smith observes, most iwi have few resources: “We're not silver bullets to those problems.... we shouldn't overestimate our people's capacity... Where indigenous people have an added advantage is that we do have a fully-woven social fabric... Get the weavers out to weave that web again.”

To build capacity, Smith advocates training youth in doing a local census of the elderly and immobile who they'd need to help in a disaster. Instead of relying on social media, “re-invest in real social relationships that are meaningful... It doesn't have to be built around doom and gloom...” We should be “having ... a lot of street parties.”

The Māori goal after a disaster is not to “return to normal,” because that colonial and unequal “normal” is what created the crisis in the first place. Manākitanga toward all builds a healthier, indigenized future, which is more resistant to future disasters.