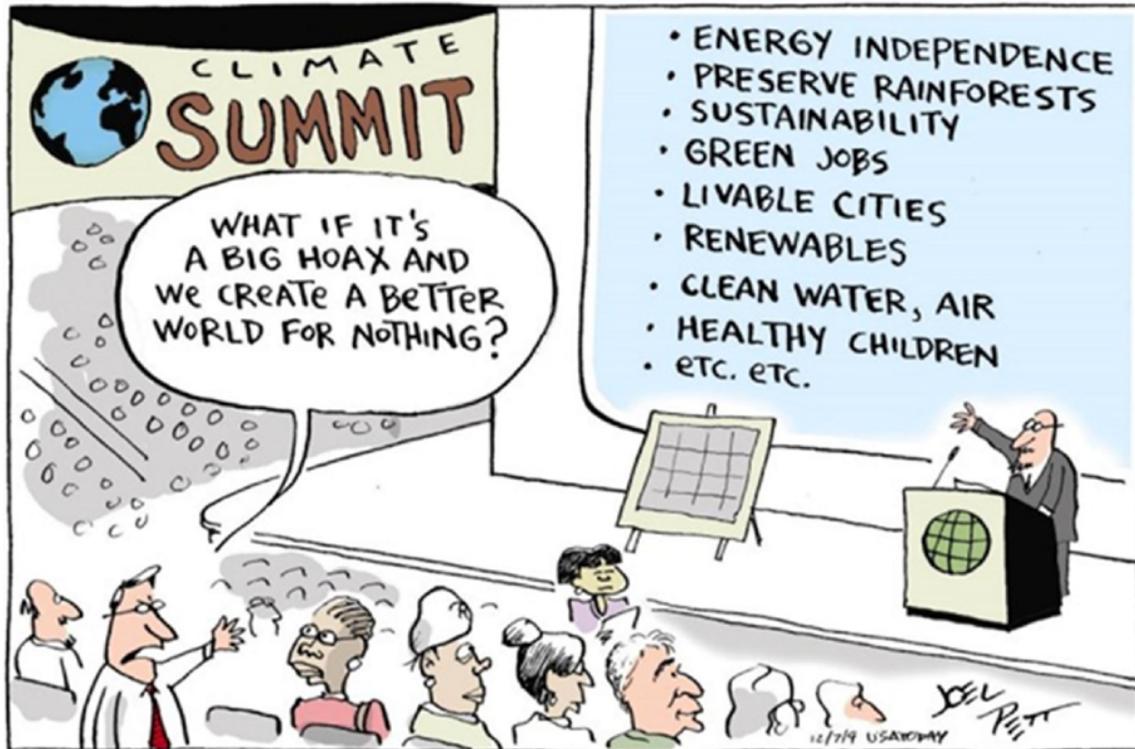


THE RESILIENCE DOCTRINE: A Primer on Disaster Collectivism in the Climate and Pandemic Crises

By Zoltán Grossman, *Counterpunch* (February 2021)



Joel Pett, Planning.org.au

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Part I: An Introduction to Disaster Resilience

Climate change and pandemics are sad and frightening topics, but they can also be viewed as an unprecedented opportunity for 21st-century societies. These crises can become an excuse to quickly make necessary changes for a healthier future for people and the planet that otherwise may take many years to implement. Times of disaster, whether or not they are triggered by climate or health catastrophes, are opportunities to focus on the need for social and environmental change, and our response to disasters may contain the kernels of a better world.

One cartoon depicting a climate change summit sums up the irony. The conference agenda displays the desperately needed measures to lessen greenhouse gas emissions: “Preserve rainforests, Sustainability, Green jobs, Livable cities, Renewables, Clean water, air, Healthy children.” A perturbed white man turns to a Black woman and asks, “What if it’s a big hoax and we create a better world for nothing?”

The cartoon could just as easily depict a COVID-19 summit, which advocates instituting universal health care and unemployment relief, suspending evictions and deportations, building the public sector, and promoting mutual aid among neighbors.

Public attitudes to climate change are often shaped by direct experience of climate instability and disaster. Climate change is accelerating disasters such as wildfires, floods, heat waves, droughts, storms, and landslides, depending on where one lives. But a wide range of other natural and human-made disasters also shape human society and consciousness, including pandemics, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic activity, wars, mass violence, and radioactive and toxic leaks.

We studied all these threats in the class “Catastrophe: Community Resilience in the Face of Disaster,” which I have twice co-taught at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. How we prepare for and respond to these emergencies speaks volumes about the values and priorities of our society.

Resilience can be defined as “the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness...the ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape; elasticity.” Indigenous cultures, which have persevered through the overwhelming odds of settler colonialism, environment destruction, epidemics, violence, and forced assimilation, embody the concept of resilience.

In the Pacific Northwest, the annual Tribal Canoe Journey brings more than one hundred canoes from dozens of Native nations to converge at a host nation, to share songs and dances and involve youth deeply in cultural revitalization. In the Great Lakes region, Ojibwe elder artist and author Rene Meshake (as quoted by Turtle Island Institute co-director Melanie Goodchild) beautifully described resilience using the Anishinaabemowin term *sibiskaagad*, “a river flowing flexibly through the land.”

Resilience can be applied to different scales: the resilience of individuals (to heal from physical and psychological harm, and live a healthier life), the resilience of communities (to recover from historical trauma by revitalizing cultures and rolling back inequalities

through social justice), and resilience of the planet (to reverse environmental and climate crises, and regenerate life). All three of these scales of resilience are bound up in the study of disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.

Studying Disaster Resilience

Between 1995 and 2015, more than 600,000 people around the world died from disasters and 4.1 billion people were injured. Academic studies have most often focused on government or NGO responses to catastrophes, and only recently focused on themes of grassroots community resilience in the face of disaster.

As Douglas Paton observed in his *Disaster Resilience: An Integrated Approach*, “Humankind has a long history of confronting and adapting to the devastation caused by war, pestilence, disaster and other catastrophic events. That such experiences can have beneficial consequences has, however, often been overlooked by research that has focused primarily on physical losses and the anguish of survivors in the immediate aftermath of disaster. However, when the time frame within which analyses are conducted and the range of outcomes assessed is extended, evidence for positive outcomes has been readily forthcoming.” Paton viewed community preparedness for a range of hazards as critical to the outcome of any possible disaster scenario.

Research studies generally agree that disaster preparedness “is not effective without the participation of vulnerable communities.” Key factors in community resilience are “citizen involvement in mitigation efforts, effective organizational linkages, ongoing psychosocial support, and strong civic leadership in the face of rapidly changing circumstances,” and “the ability of community members to take meaningful, deliberate, collective action to remedy the impact of a problem, including the ability to interpret the environment, intervene, and move on.”

One case study in North Dakota, for example examined preparations for the 2009 Fargo floods, in which residents had five days to lay sandbags along the Red River of the North, and successfully mitigated most harmful effects of the spring flooding. It concluded that resilient communities rely “upon pre-existing adaptive capacities (e.g., economic development, social capital, information and communication, and community competence) that can be mobilized during a disaster.” The Red River Resilience project educated residents to “foster hope, act with purpose, connect with others, take care of yourself, search for meaning.”

Another research study documented that “disasters attributed to an act of nature evoked a sense of shared fate that fostered cooperation,” but that “community civic capacity” is key to the success of that cooperation. It cited the example of a 1995 Chicago heat wave that caused fewer deaths in a Latin American immigrant community than in a neighboring U.S.-born communities, due to the interlocking family and neighborhood organization connections that caused community members to check on the elderly.

In crisis situations, a “brotherhood of pain,” or “a form of spontaneous social solidarity emerges that temporarily enables people to put aside self-interest and come together in common effort. And equally recurrent, this solidarity proves fragile and gives way to intense expressions of self-interest.” Contrasting the experiences of Salvadoran refugees

in two earthquake relief camps suggested that “elements of dignity, participation and respect for the capacity of the victims to control their own lives are relevant factors for effective individual and community coping after a catastrophe.”

The phenomenon of “adversarial growth,” drives “positive change following trauma and adversity.” The social-psychological process of reorientation affects individuals and communities navigating “the psychological, social and emotional responses to the symbolic and material changes to social and geographic place” that result from disaster.

Human geographers have studied “ways of relating” in engaging in generosity and hospitality toward others, and explored the “geographies of generosity,” particularly at a distance. The geographies of caring and hospitality are closely bound up with “geographies of responsibility,” including the relationship between identity and responsibility and the potential geographies of both.

Hazard geography researchers have sought to build place-based models for understanding community resilience to natural disasters. Within the U.S., “the “Midwest and Great Plains states have the most inherent resilience, while counties in the west, along the US-Mexico border, and along the Appalachian ridge in the east contain the least resilience.” Yet the most important resilience differential is not between regions or communities, but *within* communities.

Not surprisingly, “social groups within a community differ insofar as their levels of resilience and the threats to which they are resilient.” The factors of race, education, and age most consistently moderate “the impact of disaster exposure on receipt of postdisaster support,” and disasters tend to exacerbate existing social, gender, and economic inequalities.

Shock Doctrine vs. People’s Renewal

Disasters are often used to centralize political and economic control, and thereby deepen human inequalities, as Naomi Klein described in her classic 2007 study *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. She documented how after the “shock” of natural or human-made disasters, corporate interests move in to privatize the economy, institute the “shock” of austerity, and repress and “shock” (torture) citizens who resist. These neoliberal capitalist interests take advantage of a major disaster to push austerity policies that a distracted and desperate population would be less likely to accept under “normal” circumstances.

Klein used Hurricane Katrina’s devastation of New Orleans to explain how disasters provide windows into a cruel “and ruthlessly divided future in which money and race buy survival.” She predicted that with “resource scarcity and climate change providing a steadily increasing flow of new disasters, responding to emergencies is simply too hot an emerging market to be left to the nonprofits.”

Less noticed in Klein’s study was her assertion that the Shock Doctrine had a flip side, which she termed the “People’s Renewal,” represented by the Common Ground Relief community-based response to Katrina. She observed that “the best way to recover from helplessness turns out to be helping—having the right to be part of a communal

recovery.... Such people's reconstruction efforts represent the antithesis of the disaster capitalism complex's ethos.... These are movements that do not seek to start from scratch but rather from scrap, from the rubble that is all around.”

Klein concluded, “Rooted in the communities where they live, these men and women see themselves as mere repair people...fixing it...making it better and more equal. Most of all, they are building in resilience – for when the next shock hits” (589). She therefore tied the responses to climate change-induced disasters to how communities can increase awareness of sustainable methods to prevent future disasters, share resources among neighbors, and deepen lasting cooperation.

In her 2014 book *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, Klein analyzed a typhoon that devastated the Philippines and floods that ravaged Europe, noting that “during good times, it's easy to deride ‘big government’ and talk about the inevitability of cutbacks. But during disasters, most everyone loses their free market religion and wants to know that their government has their backs” (107).

Subsequent catastrophic storms, such as those that struck Texas, Puerto Rico, and Bangladesh in 2017, have reinforced how disasters can exacerbate economic and racial inequalities. Klein’s 2018 book *The Battle for Paradise*, showed how Puerto Rican community organizations have been trying to rebuild from the devastating Hurricane Maria by emphasizing renewable energies, agro-ecological farming, and decentralized, democratic management. These projects were coordinated by a network of Centros de Apoyo Mutuo (mutual aid centers), or community hubs with “the ultimate goal to restore power — both electric and civic — to the people.”



Centros de apoyo mutuo / Mutual Aid Centers (facebook)

Klein applied the same “shock doctrine” formula to “coronavirus capitalism” in the 2020 pandemic. She asserted “Look, we know this script. ... a pandemic shock doctrine featuring all the most dangerous ideas lying around, from privatizing Social Security to locking down borders to caging even more migrants...But the end of this story hasn't been written yet. Instead of rescuing the dirty industries of the last century, we should be boosting the clean ones that will lead us into safety in the coming century. If there is one thing history teaches us, it's that moments of shock are profoundly volatile. We either

lose a whole lot of ground, get fleeced by elites, and pay the price for decades, or we win progressive victories that seemed impossible just a few weeks earlier. This is no time to lose our nerve.”

The Resilience Doctrine

This concept could be called “Disaster Collectivism” or “Disaster Cooperativism”—the opposite of “Disaster Capitalism.” As a corollary to the “Shock Doctrine,” I would propose the “Resilience Doctrine.” Communities can prepare for and respond to a major emergency with cooperative ways to ensure immediate survival, and to engage people in exploring social and environmental solutions that they would be less likely to accept under “normal” apathetic circumstances.

In contrast to the Shock Doctrine, the Resilience Doctrine emphasizes public ownership over private property, the community motive over the profit motive, cooperation over competition, economic equality over austerity, sustainable planning over growth planning, public over private health care, planning for sustainability rather than only growth, and green energy over fossil and nuclear fuels.

Shock Doctrine:

Private property
Profit motive
Competition
Austerity on poor, middle-class
Private health care
Planning for growth, sprawl
Fossil fuels, nuclear energy

Resilience Doctrine:

Public ownership
Community motive
Cooperation
Wealthy pay fair share
Public health care
Sustainable planning
Green energy

The Resilience Doctrine strengthens the ability of local communities and cultures to sustain shocks, draws on precedents of “disaster collectivism” to rebuild communities across racial and cultural barriers, and promote greater social and ecological equality. Since disasters bring out the best in people, as well as the worst, they should be studied to lessen harm to the human and natural world, and to provide a little inspiration and hope.

Signs of hope are emerging from disaster-affected communities, regardless of their ideology, in cooperative relief projects and mutual aid networks based on “solidarity, not charity.” Mutual aid promotes the voluntary exchange of resources and services, respecting and learning from each other through horizontal, reciprocal interaction, rather than merely helping or assisting in top-down, vertical interaction. The mutual aid model has multiple historical roots, in socialist and anarchist movements, churches, labor unions, African American and immigrant community networks, neighborhood groups, and Indigenous nations. Some of these practices are rooted in ancient traditions, drawing from the past to build a present that prefigures a healthier future society of resilience and regeneration. As discussed later, mutual aid networks have vastly expanded in the context of hurricanes, wildfires, floods, and other climate change-fueled disasters, as well as during the coronavirus pandemic.

The concept of resilience has been commonly misinterpreted under neoliberalism, with its stress on how the individual, and not society, are responsible for their own lot in life. When faced with adversity, this version of resilience advocates, an individual should simply persevere, increase their own personal capacities, or “buck it up” to get through and survive. As the Flint doctor [Mona Hanna-Attisha](#) asserted, “Surviving life’s hardest blows should not be celebrated — or expected. Recovery and reconciliation require reparations and resources. To expect resilience without justice is simply to indifferently accept the *status quo*.” Resilience is not just about survival, because the capacity of human beings to withstand stress and recover from difficulties is only possible through transforming current social structures and our relationships with the natural world, and moving toward a thriving society of justice and regeneration.



“The Response” Shareable podcast (from KaneLynch.com)

Puerto Rican mutual aid organizer [Astrid Cruz Negrón](#) asserted, “The Mutual Aid Center definitely does not want to stay in the emergency mindset of surviving Maria. We want everything we do to build towards a new world, a new more just, more equal society.” According to [Robert Raymond](#), of the [Sharable Network](#), “climate resilience for the most vulnerable communities is often a byproduct of past efforts to organize and activate around a wide variety of causes that go beyond disaster relief. It is through the intersection of many ongoing struggles — from the realm of economics to that of race, immigration status, and so on — that communities can begin to not just build resilience to the storms, fires and droughts that await them, but to also ensure that they gain the political power to demand — and receive — the resources and aid that their governments owe them.”

Part 2: How Disasters Can Encourage Social Change

Disasters sometimes have a way of focusing public attention on basic human needs and long-term ecological survival. According to the Shareable network, survival is not even possible without a “sharing transformation,” or “a movement of movements emerging from the grassroots up to solve today’s biggest challenges, which old, top-down institutions are failing to address....Amid crisis, a new way forward is emerging...The sharing transformation is big, global, and impacts every part of society. New and resurgent solutions are democratizing how we produce, consume, govern, and solve social problems....The sharing transformation shows that it’s possible to govern ourselves, build a green economy that serves everyone, and create meaningful lives together. It also shows that we can solve the world’s biggest challenges — like poverty and global warming — by unleashing the power of collaboration.”

A focus on collaborative resilience can cut across ideological lines, and even take hold in normally conservative areas of the U.S. After a 2007 tornado leveled most of Greensburg, Kansas, city leaders decided to reconstruct the town using principles of sustainability. They rebuilt structures using energy-efficient designs, and ironically harnessed wind power to generate electricity. They also reoriented their local electoral systems around nonpartisan races, in order to increase political cooperation.



After a 2007 tornado leveled Greensburg, Kansas (Michael Raphael/FEMA), a new Art Center in Kansas was built with renewable energy technology (VisitGreensburgKS)

The connection between disasters and social transformation has been well documented. After Nicaragua was struck by a major earthquake in 1972, the Somoza dictatorship redirected relief funds for private use, and only seven years later Sandinista rebels toppled Somoza from power. The Revolution may have been successful without the earthquake, but most observers agree it was accelerated by the revelations of deep corruption. Similarly, after the extent of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster in Soviet Ukraine was covered up by Moscow, public resentment intensified of Soviet state secrecy and the treatment of national minorities in the clean-up process, so the meltdown is widely believed to have hastened the collapse and division of the Soviet Union five years later.

The disaster of war can shock a society, but also elevate the position of forces that meet the basic human needs of occupied communities. After the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq and 2006 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Shi’a theological seminaries and militias coordinated food and medical relief when governments were not responsive. This

practical response played no small part in the victories of Shi's political parties in subsequent democratic elections. A massive 2020 explosion in Beirut later turned Lebanese against some of those government parties. Similarly, as urban poor communities faced the shock of austerity in South America, the food relief of the *olla común* (collective cooking pot) popularized dissent that later led the 1989 uprising against Chile's military junta, and the 2001 popular rebellion and cooperative movement in Argentina.

After a 2004 earthquake off Sumatra devastated Indonesia's Aceh province, and unleashed a tsunami across the Indian Ocean, governments and rebel groups competed to respond, and the natural disaster in turn affected the civil wars between them. The response of Aceh separatist rebels legitimized them among the citizenry, and they were able to reach a peace agreement with the Indonesian government the following year. The same tsunami, however, widened the gap between Sri Lanka's government and Tamil separatist rebels, and led to a bloody military offensive. Achenese refugees from the tsunami were also unexpectedly welcomed in neighboring Malaysia. In the Tamil Nadu state of India, generosity was expressed by a wedding party that fed stricken communities with the food that it had planned to serve to guests.

The 2011 Tohoku earthquake in Japan triggered both a tsunami and a nuclear meltdown. Japanese drew from their experience of mutual aid societies after the 1995 Kobe earthquake, and rapidly rebuilt much of the tsunami-damaged coastal area. The meltdown of the Fukushima reactors rekindled Japan's anti-nuclear movement, which temporarily shut down other reactors and won a ban on new reactors.

Post-Disaster Cooperation

Similarly hopeful post-disaster responses are documented by Rebecca Solnit's 2010 study *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster*. Solnit used the San Francisco quakes of 1906 and 1989 as jumping-off points to discuss "the ability of disasters to topple old orders and open up new possibilities" (16). In many disasters, she observed, "strangers become friends and collaborators, goods are shared freely, people improvise new roles for themselves. Imagine a society where money plays little or no role, where people rescue each other and then care for each other, where food is given away... where the old divides between people seem to have fallen away" (17).

Solnit recounted the story told by a Nova Scotia resident who lived through a 2003 hurricane, and saw that "everybody woke up the next morning and everything was different. There was no electricity, all the stores were closed, no one had access to media. The consequence was that everyone poured out into the street to bear witness. Not quite a street party, but everyone out at once—it was a sense of happiness to see everybody even though we didn't know each other" (10).

Solnit asserted that the history of disaster "demonstrates that most of us are social animals, hungry for connection, as well as for purpose and meaning. It also suggests that if this is who we are, then everyday life in most places is a disaster that disruptions sometimes give us a chance to change" (305). One example of alleviating disaster in everyday life was when the Black Panthers, usually known for their militant tactics and image, organized a free breakfast program for kids, setting a precedent for government

lunch programs.

Popular culture would have us believe that such cooperative thinking goes against human nature. Watching any episode of *Survivor* leaves the impression that all human beings are so individualistic and selfish that they would eliminate others, even in their own “tribe,” by voting them “off the island.” But how would any of us actually behave if stranded on a desert isle? A more revealing series might be *Gilligan’s Island*, in which power hierarchies are reversed by the castaways. The bumbling Skipper, the dowdy Millionaire and his Wife, and the clueless movie star Ginger were stripped of their prestige and authority, and depicted as largely useless for survival. Meanwhile, the common-sense knowledge of the Professor, the Kansas farm girl Mary Ann, and especially the goofy but practical first mate Gilligan tended to save the day.



The early 1960s series perfectly captured the Keynesian era, when labor unions and values of economic equality were still strong. Creator Sherwood Schwartz set up *Gilligan’s Island* as “a social microcosm...in the sense that when necessary for survival, yes we can all get along.” But these values were later displaced in popular culture by assumptions that an inevitably dystopic future will be dominated by brutal competition as assumed in *Lord of the Flies* or *Mad Max*. *Survivor* represents the “Me-First” popular culture of the post-1980s neoliberal era, was directly inspired by the *Lord of the Flies*, and does not reflect the actual stories of cooperation when young boys are stranded on an island.

Misinterpretations of disaster resilience

Another neoliberal misinterpretation of resilience comes from the “survivalist” movement of so-called “preppers,” who seek to prepare for emergencies and general social breakdown by stockpiling food, supplies, and often weapons. Such preparations put the well-being of the individual and immediate family ahead of the larger community. “Preppers” can be ordinary people who are simply trying to prepare for natural disasters or prolonged power outages. Preppers can take the form of super rich executives constructing fortified compounds in remote areas or foreign countries. They can also take the form of white supremacists reacting harshly to social and political change, which explains why the movement grew under the Obama Administration. The movement declined in the first years of the Trump Administration, which “quieted the fears” of

these reactionary preppers. But the movement dramatically rebounded in the early weeks of the coronavirus pandemic.

Anthropologist Chris Begley acknowledged, “I understand the appeal of these post-apocalyptic fantasies. They resonate with the rugged individualism and self-sufficiency that we imagine in ourselves. In the post-apocalypse, we would be able to start over, from a blank slate: decluttering on a global scale. Our needs would be immediate, and our focus clear... Life would be simple.... As an anthropologist who studies human societies, I know this is not how it plays out. An apocalyptic disaster will be nothing like those fantasies.... Any post-apocalyptic reality will not be a time machine to a mythical past we long for. It will not be a simpler, uncluttered life. We will not be able to run away. We will have to stay and fix things, and if we succeed, we may not recognize ourselves.”

Begley concluded, “While the wilderness survival skills certainly can’t hurt, it will be empathy, generosity, and courage that we need to survive. Kindness and fairness will be more valuable than any survival skill. Then as now, social and leadership skills will be valued. We will have to work together. We will have to grow food, educate ourselves, and give people a reason to persevere. The needs will be enormous, and we cannot run away from that. Humans evolved attributes such as generosity, altruism, and cooperation because we need them to survive. Armed with those skills, we will turn towards the problem, not away from it. We will face the need, and we will have to solve it together. That is the only option. That’s what survival looks like.”

Octavia Butler’s classic 1993 novel *Parable of the Sower* reflects this more community-oriented disaster resilience through the lens of speculative fiction, as the novel’s protagonist Lauren Olamina navigates a late-2020s California ravaged by drought and wildfires induced by climate change, and social chaos and crime generated by extreme inequalities. As Lauren observes, “Get ready for what’s going to happen, get ready to survive it, get ready to make a life afterward. Get focused on arranging to survive so that we can do more than just get batted around by crazy people, desperate people, thugs, and leaders who don’t know what they’re doing!”

Another extreme response to disaster, in the face of mayhem and mob rule, is for citizens to surrender their agency to an all-powerful, protective State, in order to fend off disorder or mob rule. Indeed, blindly following authority during a catastrophe can actually be deadly. After a plane struck the World Trade Center’s North Tower on 9/11, loudspeakers urged South Tower employees to return to work, and those who obeyed the calls perished in the second attack. After the 2011 Japan tsunami (according to Evergreen student Koki Hiraguchi), unprepared teachers in Okawa believed the tsunami hazard maps, and ordered their students to evacuate to an area that was not high enough, so nearly all of them perished. In Kamaichi, the students took the lead in seeking higher ground, so all but a few “survived based on their own judgement, saving not only their own lives but also those of the adults around them.” They had drilled for disaster, did not believe the tsunami hazard maps, and “were taught to make decisions for themselves.”

During the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, researchers in the Seattle Flu Study defied federal orders not to use mandated flu research funds to test patient samples for coronavirus. They found a case of community spread, which set off alarm bells throughout the country. Famously, the captain of the aircraft carrier *USS Theodore*

Roosevelt bypassed his chain of command to set off alarms about an outbreak aboard his ship. Though he was disciplined by the Navy, he gained widespread respect among his sailors.

Elaine Scarry, describing her book *Thinking in an Emergency*, observed, “One of the things that has seduced people into giving up on their own actions is the claim of emergency—the government will often make the spurious claim that because certain things require very fast action, there is no time for ordinary processes of deliberation and thinking. . . . I find exactly the opposite to be the case. Thinking and emergency action are deeply compatible. Sometimes that thinking takes the form of very recognizable deliberative processes.” Scarry’s observations are evident in the following case studies of disaster response in a range of communities, which underscore the strength of the Resilience Doctrine.

Common Ground in New Orleans and Occupy Sandy in New York

In *A Paradise Built in Hell*, Solnit identified another risk of “1%” elites taking charge of emergency situations, as they exhibit “elite panic” when they lose a sense of total control. She cited post-Katrina martial law as one of the best examples of how leaders (from both political parties) issued racist orders to shoot looters, instead of drawing on the knowledge and cooperative traditions of New Orleans’ largely Black and working-class communities. Solnit noted that sociologists have documented that ordinary people are usually calm and rarely panic in emergencies. But elites perceive a threat from out-of-control and unruly ‘mobs,’ so create a myth of social panic that shapes their actions, and they panic as a result. Elite panic reinforces an assumption that human nature is greedy and animalistic, and an upending of their social order can only lead to chaos.

Solnit explained, “Elite panic in disaster . . . is shaped by belief, belief that because human beings at large are bestial and dangerous, the believer must himself or herself act with savagery to ensure individual safety or the safety of his or her interests. The elites that panic are, in times of crisis, the minority, and understanding that could marginalize or even disarm them . . . as well as the media that magnify their message. This would help open the way to create a world more like the brief utopias that flash up in a disaster” (308).

False media rumors in New Orleans reported that gang members were raping and murdering flood refugees in the Superdome, a claim that has persisted in popular mythology. But Solnit cited temporary Superdome resident Denise Moore, who remembered that the gang members “were the ones getting juice for the babies. They were the ones getting clothes for the people who had walked through that water. They were the ones fanning the old people, because that’s what moved the gangster guys the most, the plight of the old people” (244). Meanwhile, actual violence was being perpetrated by local police against Black refugees trying to flee to white-majority areas, and by Blackwater mercenaries flown directly from Iraq.

Solnit noted, “Hierarchies and institutions are inadequate to these circumstances; they are often what fails in such crises. Civil society is what succeeds, not only in an emotional demonstration of altruism and mutual aid but also in a practical mustering of creativity and resources to meet the challenges. . . .” (305).

Katrina followed the pattern of most disasters around the world, in which the poorest communities are also the most vulnerable. The low-lying Ninth Ward, a fount of African American culture and music, bore the brunt of the flooding, as dramatized in the HBO series *Treme*. After the storm, the community-based Common Ground Collective set up clinics, mobile medics, soup kitchens, and tool-lending stations, and distributed goods languishing in Red Cross warehouses.



Common Ground Collective in New Orleans (Shane Burley, *Waging Nonviolence*)

As in other disasters, prioritizing community resilience enabled alliances across lines of significant difference, particularly racial, ethnic, and national lines. Solnit observed that “people on both sides of the old racial divides went away with changed perceptions. The volunteers mitigated the racial violence and demonization of the first days after the storm” (293). Similarly, the grassroots “Cajun Navy” was a grassroots effort of boat owners who rescued thousands of New Orleans residents without government assistance.

During Katrina, Houma Indigenous community leader Brenda Dardar Robichaux canoed to southern Louisiana homes with food, housed refugees, and held cultural workshops for Katrina relief volunteers. Robichaux remembered that FEMA and the Red Cross “were incompetent and ineffective. I don’t know where we would be without the volunteers. Our people have language barriers and education barriers; 47 percent of the adult population has less than a high school education.”

Robichaux’s experience also showed how women’s knowledge and networks are critical to recovering from disasters in which women and children are among the primary victims. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reported in 2007 that “women make an important contribution to disaster reduction, often informally through participating in disaster management and acting as agents of social change. Their resilience and their networks are critical in household and community recovery.”

Solnit identified the bottom-up cooperation as posing a threat to top-down authority in post-disaster society: “One reason that disasters are threatening to elites is that power devolves to the people on the ground in many ways: it is the neighbors who are the first responders and who assemble the impromptu kitchens and networks to rebuild. And it demonstrates the viability of a dispersed, decentralized system of decision-making. Citizens themselves in these moments constitute the government – the acting decision-making body – as democracy has always promised and rarely delivered. Thus disasters

often unfold as though a revolution has already taken place” (305).

Hurricane Sandy’s direct hit on New York and New Jersey in 2012 was a test of the Occupy Wall Street movement that had flourished and floundered elsewhere in the country. As it became clear that the government relief response was feeble at best, neighborhood activists organized “Occupy Sandy,” with the hashtag #WeGotThis. Like in New Orleans, the neighborhoods most vulnerable to damage and flooding were the lowest and poorest, and in areas previously exposed to industrial toxins. Occupy Sandy organized food and medical relief, infrastructure repair, and cell phone charging stations. FEMA and National Guard personnel received so little support from their own agencies that some were seen at Occupy Sandy trucks getting food and coffee from the activists.

As the neighborhoods recovered all too slowly, Occupy Sandy organized a “People’s Recovery” to literally and figuratively “Restore Power to the People.” The activists secured donations from around the country, and even set up wedding registries at major stores to request critical goods such as refrigerators and generators. The community recovery and empowerment programs involve long-term skills sharing and training, such as initiating multiple day-laborer collectives. Several hurricane-damaged businesses, such as a bakery, restaurant, and taxi cooperative, were being rebuilt as worker-run enterprises.



Occupy Sandy (facebook)

Solnit reminded us that “disasters are, most basically, terrible, tragic, grievous, and no matter what positive side effects and possibilities they produce, they are not to be desired. But by the same measure, those side effects should not be ignored because they arise amid devastation. Most social change is chosen—you want to belong to a co-op, you believe in social safety nets or community supported agriculture. But disaster doesn’t sort us out by preferences; it drags us into emergencies that require we act, and act altruistically, bravely, and with initiative in order to survive or save the neighbors”(6).

This does not mean that we should wait for disasters as opportunities to change society. Community resilience in the face of disaster means prioritizing preparations before the disasters, immediate responses during a disaster, and long-term recovery after the short-term disaster has passed. It is not necessary for progressives to cynically exploit or manipulate disasters for their own political ends, but to recognize that neoliberal interests will do so, and be on alert, equipped, and strong enough to counteract such moves. In the process, even normally conservative residents may open their eyes to practical alternatives.

Part 3: Indigenous Nations Understand Disaster Resilience

From the perspectives of Indigenous nations, the crises of 2020 have not been something entirely new, or even a significant historical departure from “normal.” Having previously experienced the ravages of violent colonialism, pandemics, environmental catastrophe, and forced assimilation, the current era has long been a dystopia for Native peoples. The Dakota scholar Kim TallBear described 2020 not as an unprecedented apocalypse, or an exception to normalized “progress” in the settler colonial empire, but rather as “a sharpening of the already present.”

Ann Marie Chischilly, the Diné executive director of the Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals, pointed to previous Indigenous experience with environmental disruptions and pandemics when she said “Resilience is in our DNA.” This meeting of history and present-day realities enables Indigenous peoples to have deeper perspectives on existential crises, and to envision and create innovative paths out of these crises.



Native Realities/Artwork by Vanessa Bowen (left) and Dale Deforest (right).

Pacific Northwest Native nations face the climate crisis

In the Pacific Northwest, Indigenous nations are among the most proactive and prepared communities in emergency planning and climate change adaptation, providing models for non-Native communities to follow. The region is facing drastic changes in seasonal weather patterns. No single weather event can be linked to climate change, as any climate scientist will point out, but the process is intensifying extremes. In the winter months, strong windstorms have knocked out power for days, floods have cut the interstate and rail connections between major cities, and rare blizzards and ice storms have become more intense and commonplace.

In the spring months, heavy rains have caused landslides, such as the 2014 Oso mudslide disaster. In the summer, the drier region east of the Cascade Range has seen some of the largest wildfires in recorded history, choking the region with smoke, and fires are even ravaging parts of the coastal rainforest. The massive West Coast wildfires of 2020 could be tied directly to warmer temperatures and prolonged dry conditions. Autumn rains are sometimes not enough to compensate for summer droughts, adversely affecting the life cycle of salmon, the region's keystone species.

The Pacific Northwest coast is particularly vulnerable to rising seas. Tribal and local governments need to build and retain wave barriers, prevent shoreline erosion, and build new homes and infrastructure above the floodplains. Several Washington tribes have gained federal support to relocate their coastal housing and service centers out of coastal lowlands to higher ground. Washington coastal tribes are also conducting evacuation drills that have been more efficient than in relatively unprepared non-Native communities.

Part of the reason is the threat of a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake and tsunami that would devastate coastal communities, and another part is climate change-linked sea-level rise that makes the effects of tsunamis, storm surges, or coastal flooding much worse. Displacement and relocation of coastal Native communities impacted by climate change has already occurred in Alaska and Louisiana. Climate-related resettlement is also underway in countries such as varied as China, Vietnam, Mozambique, and Papua New Guinea.

The tiny Quileute Reservation is moving tribal structures and a school in La Push to higher ground, out of the path of tsunamis, like the ones that struck the West Coast in 1964 and 2011. Congress passed a 2012 bill to allow the transfer of land from the Olympic National Park to Quileute, enabling the tribe to begin to build new housing and a school on higher ground. The Hoh tribe has also acquired higher land from neighboring governments to move housing and government offices, through a 2010 congressional bill. The Quinault village of Taholah has seen its seawall breached during major storms, flooding its lower village, so is in the process of planning to construct an entirely new upper village. (Our Catastrophe class visited both Quinault and Quileute.) The Makah and Lower Elwha Klallam tribes are similarly planning to shift new housing to higher ground.



Students in Evergreen's Catastrophe class visiting the Taholah lower village seawall in the Quinault Indian Nation, Washington, and construction of a new senior center in the upper village (Zoltán Grossman)

Disaster resilience can cut across cultural divides, with the crisis forcing Native and non-Native neighbors to acknowledge their mutual humanity and dependency. My 2017 book *Unlikely Alliances: Native Nations and White Communities Join to Defend Rural Lands* showed how Indigenous peoples and their rural white neighbors (farmers, ranches, and fishers) battled over treaty rights to natural resources such as fish and water. But when faced with an outside threat to those same natural treasures, such as mining, energy, or military projects, the adversaries came together to protect the same resources they had fought over, and formed groups such as the Cowboy Indian Alliance.

In some areas of the country (such as the Pacific Northwest) these “unlikely alliances” have also been protected their watersheds by strengthening climate resilience, and tribes have used their sovereignty to protect their elders’ health in the pandemic. Disaster planning and response affords an additional opportunity to build bridges between tribal and local governments, because when a landslide or pandemic isolates both communities from the rest of the society, they only have each other to rely upon.

Many tribal governments are sharing emergency equipment (such as fire trucks) with non-Native governments, and opening shelters to non-Native neighbors in need after landslides, wildfires, or floods. After the Oso mudslide, which took 43 lives, the Snoqualmie Tribe opened a shelter to the public, and donated \$270,000 to relief efforts. (Tulalip Tribes scientists had warned the state of the possibility of the landslide, but their warnings were not heeded.) The Shoalwater Bay tribe has received federal funding to construct the country’s first tsunami platform tower, for tribal and nontribal residents to quickly evacuate out of harm’s way in the vulnerable coastal village. Pacific Northwest tribal government have established disaster planning and response partnerships with other governments, through the National Tribal Emergency Management Council (NTEMC).

Northwest tribes are working on climate change adaptation with local non-Native governments that usually oppose tribal sovereignty and water rights. The Swinomish Tribe was one of the first Native American nations to develop a climate change adaptation plan, which it called the Swinomish Climate Change Initiative. In developing the plan, the tribe worked closely with local non-Native governments in the Skagit Delta, and set up a community engagement group for tribal members to get involved in the adaptation planning process. Swinomish Chairman Brian Cladoosby hoped the initiative could serve as a model for other Northwest tribes to account for climate change in their joint planning with their neighbors.

As another innovative example of planning ahead, the Nisqually Tribe signed an agreement with the City of Olympia in 2008 to switch their common drinking water source from McAllister Spring to a wellfield on higher ground. The proactive move, completed in 2015, avoids possible saltwater intrusion from sea-level rise and restores water flow to Medicine Creek, ironically the site of the signing of the 1854 Treaty. The sacred spring was returned to the tribe two years later.

Pacific Northwest tribal nations are not only taking the lead in disaster planning, but in proactively mitigating the climate crisis that is the source of many of the disasters. The Tulalip Tribes defused a long-standing source of conflict between dairy farmers and tribal fishers over cattle waste in the Snohomish watershed’s salmon streams by converting the waste into biogas energy. The Tulalip Tribes are exploring plans to store glacial and

snowpack runoff to lessen spring floods and summer droughts that have been intensified by warming temperatures. Many of the tribes have also taken the lead in “unlikely alliances” with rural white communities in opposing new oil and coal port terminals, to protect their treaty fisheries, public health and safety, and global climate priorities.

The response of Northwest treaty tribes to salmon depletion and the climate crisis established a template for their response to the coronavirus pandemic, informed by tribal histories of epidemics brought by the colonizers. As the *Seattle Times* reported, “Tribal communities know death by pandemic. As history threatens to repeat . . . tribal communities are turning to their teachings and one another to protect themselves amid what they call a near total failure of federal resources to help, despite solemn promises in treaties. No one is waiting in these communities for someone else to come to the rescue. Response to the threat of the virus by tribal governments and health care providers has been swift and aggressive. Tribal governments are sovereign in their territory, with broad emergency powers — and they are using them.”

Tribal responses were swift after Washington became the first state with a reported case of coronavirus. The Lummi Nation established the state’s first field hospital. Native artists mobilized to secure masks for rural and urban Native communities. And coastal tribes such as the Quileute, Hoh, and Makah quickly isolated themselves from outsiders. As the *Seattle Times* reported about the Makah Nation in May 2020, “At the heart of the tribal council’s order was the urgency of protecting Makah elders, the community’s source of leadership and cultural continuity. . . . It seems to be working: so far not a single case of COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, has been reported on the reservation.”

The Makah approach to community resilience is similar to other Indigenous nations around the world. Other Native nations that were not as able to close their sovereign borders, such as the Diné (Navajo) Nation, were devastated by the coronavirus, and used the pandemic to fortify their resilience. As the Makah carver Greg Colfax said in the same article, “isolation has really been one of our great strengths. We carried the burden of having lost so many people. But we survived and we were able to thrive.”

Māori disaster resilience and hospitality traditions in Aotearoa New Zealand

The Māori, or the Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand, prepare for and respond to disasters through cultural structures of manākitanga, or the tradition of hospitality. The pivot is the marae community, through which tangata whenua [people of the local land] host and care for others, including neighboring Māori, Pākehā (European settlers), Tauiwi (recent immigrants), and foreign visitors.

Marae communities care for neighbors and visitors in wharenui (sacred meeting houses) and wharekai (dining halls), hosting large events such as funerals, and have proven to be a particularly useful system in times of disaster. As Ahipara lawyer Catherine Murupaenga-Ikenn told me, “Whenever there’s an emergency, our first thought is, ‘Let’s all go to the marae!’” New Zealand’s *National Disaster Resilience Strategy* draft document includes a section on manākitanga and other Māori cultural values, and commits to the Crown obligations to Māori embedded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the 1840

Treaty of Waitangi).

After the 2011 Christchurch earthquake on the South Island, which killed 185 people, the homeless community accessed abandoned downtown luxury apartments and, in their words, began “living like kings.” Māori iwi (tribes) and hapū (subtribes) took a leading role in the response and recovery. The quake most deeply affected the Eastern Suburbs, with a large Māori population.

The Ngāi Tahu iwi, led by Sir Mark Solomon, led the relief efforts, based on the theme “Aroha nui ki te tangata” (love to all people), regardless of ethnicity. In the immediate aftermath of the quake, Ngāi Tahu representatives went door-to-door for eight days, asking about power, water, and food. One of these door-knockers who offered frozen fish and vegetables to an elderly white 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 in an interview, “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 Defence 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.

Solomon 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. One legacy of the bridges built after the quake from was seen in the aftermath of the 2019 terror attack on two mosques. Māori expressed solidarity with the Muslim community with a series of haka honor dances.

After the 2016 Kaikoura earthquake, also on the South Island, Solomon’s local tribal marae was instrumental in sheltering and feeding both the Māori and Pākehā communities. Volunteers fed 1.5 tonnes of crayfish to locals and stranded tourists, who were “absolutely overwhelmed” by the generosity. 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 Solomon 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.”

Marae have also responded to major flood disasters, such as 2017 flood in Edgumbe, in the Bay of Plenty region on the North Island. I twice visited Edgumbe, and saw the low-lying mainly Māori neighborhood where 15 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. 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, in a relief operation that was mired in red tape.

Edgecumbe Collective coordinator Vicky Richards described to me that “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,” and checked on 333 homes. According to Tautini Hahipene of NAVA, “Manākitanga, it's really helping everyone out. Māori and Pākehā do have it when it comes to disasters... Māori will always be there.”

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 [Family] Day to help in the recovery effort months after the disaster, and two murals were unveiled to emphasize the humanity of the flood survivors. Kokohinau Marae near Te Toko built five homes in a papakainga (village) development for flood whānau, with 14 more homes planned. The community published a moving book to document its experiences in residents’ own voices. The Edgecumbe Collective, a network of local NGOs, developed a culturally centered plan for community recovery.



Edgecumbe flood mural by Regan Balzer (Zoltán Grossman).

Another series of floods occurred in 2015 and 2017 on the North Island, around Whanganui, which I visited in 2019. 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. Māori had led the effort to have the Whanganui River legally recognized as a person in a 2017 declaration, to protect the water and reframe the human relationships around it.

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. Army veterans and Security Consultant Chris Kumeroa developed Marae Emergency Management Plans, with iwi and hapū liaisons. Many local 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 told me, 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.”



The Te Ao Hou Marae Civil Defense Centre in Whanganui (Zoltán Grossman)

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 tribes themselves control. As Māori disaster scholar Simon Lambert noted, outside agencies “can do their thing, but they should not be in charge. As guests they should ask permission and default to the mana whenua [local power of the land].”

Stories of Indigenous resilience flip the common depiction of Indigenous communities as the first and most deeply affected victims of disasters. Drawing from traumatic histories,

Indigenous nations are also developing innovative models of preparing for and responding to emergencies. Leading Pākehā voices have acknowledged that Māori grieving rituals, such as those after the eruption of Whakaari (White Island) volcano in 2019, are “leading us through loss.” 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 white Pākehā see their own safety and security are better protected by Indigenous authority.

Mike Smith, spokesperson of the Iwi Chairs Forum’s Climate Change Leaders Group, 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.” But as Smith observed, most iwi have few resources: “We're not silver bullets to those problems... we shouldn't overestimate our people's capacity...[W]here 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.”

During the coronavirus pandemic, the Iwi Chairs Forum has played a leading role in preparing marae and urban Māori communities. Much like Pacific Northwest tribes, some iwi and hapū closed off their marae and territories to protect elders’ health. The Ministry of Health recalled the impacts of the 1918 and 2009 flu pandemics on Māori: “It is evident from previous pandemic responses that the business-as-usual model previously used preferentially benefited non-Māori and failed to protect whānau, hapū, iwi and Māori communities from the worst outcomes. It is critical that the specific needs of Māori, particularly equity and active protection, are integral to the health and disability response to COVID-19.... The principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi...provide the framework for how we will meet our obligations. These principles are applicable to the wider health and disability system, including the response to COVID-19.”

Long-term perspective

The Ojibwe Anishinaabe environmental leader Winona LaDuke recounted that her people “have a prophecy that a time will come when we have to choose between two paths: one scorched, one green. For those who choose the green path, a more peaceful era will follow — known as the Eighth Fire — in which the Anishinaabeg will return to our teaching of *Mino Bimaatisiwin*, the Good Life. *Mino Bimaatisiwin* is based on reciprocity, affirmation and reverence for the laws of Nature — quite a different value system from that of the Gross National Product.... As Dakota philosopher and poet John Trudell often says, first you have to ‘keep the beast out of the garden.’ I refer to the beast that’s destroying our collective garden as *Wiindigo* (cannibal) economics —the practice of extracting every last bit of oil just because you’ve got the technology to do it, ecosystems be damned. Killing *Wiindigo* economics is doable, but it will be a big job. We must work with the determination of people who actually intend to survive, and we must find the Achilles’ heels of the current system.”

LaDuke described how the Anishinaabe make decisions considering “the impact upon the seventh generation from now. This teaching can guide a life, a social movement and ultimately an economy. The essential elements of intergenerational equity involve renegotiating and restoring a relationship to ecological systems, to Mother Earth. It’s not just making sure that you can buy a solar cell-phone charger from Amazon. It means a restorative and regenerative economy. It also means justice — from a just transition for workers, to an interspecies, intergenerational and international justice.”

I remember hearing John Trudell state 40 years ago, at the 1980 Black Hills International Survival Gathering, “We have to learn to put up and deal with the hard times just like we enjoy the good times. We have to learn and understand that hard times are necessary for the good times to be here....We always had to struggle, so let's not fool ourselves and try to make ourselves quit what we believe just because it's going to be hard. Let's struggle for a purpose. Let's struggle for the freeing of the earth because only by freeing the earth, and those who would attack the earth, can we be free ourselves. It is the only way we can do it.”

Part 4: Mutual Aid in the Pandemic and Beyond

At The Evergreen State College, in Olympia, Washington, our winter-quarter class on “Catastrophe: Community Resilience in the Face of Disaster” began in early January 2020, so our students had early warning of coronavirus as it began to spread around the world, but before the disease or public awareness had reached the United States. COVID-19 had reached Washington state by February, as our class held a Catastroph-Fair, and workshopped disaster scenarios such as a pandemic. After the shutdown began in mid-March, our faculty decided to introduce a new “Pandemic Academy” class, with the “Resilience Doctrine” as my inaugural lecture.

As I noted at the onset of the quarantine, “We’ve learned from previous disasters that fear makes citizens more obedient to authority. Fear reinforces the superstate as our protector, and justifies oppressive or unequal responses ... ‘Elite panic’ generates repressive measures that start to bring out the police, vigilantes, and military, ironically in the name of preventing public panic.” President Trump acknowledged as such one week later when he told reporter Bob Woodward, “I always wanted to play it down. I still like playing it down, because I don't want to create a panic.”



Mural for health care workers on Denver's Colfax Avenue,
by Austin Zucchini-Fowler (Our Community Now)

Trump and similar European leaders used the so-called “foreign virus” as a xenophobic rationalization for “stronger borders” against immigrants, even though Syrians and Hondurans medically had much more to fear from contact with European and U.S. citizens than the other way around. The American mentality of “contagion” has been historically fraught with racial, cultural, and political exclusion, rooted in “Red Scares” and “Yellow Perils.” Anti-Asian sentiment and pogroms have historically been fraught with fears of disease. Latinx and Indigenous immigrant farmworkers and meatpackers bore the brunt of the pandemic, and launched numerous strikes for better health protections around the country. Homeless communities were also vulnerable to the virus, as urban leaders realized too late that unaffordable housing could exacerbate a public health crisis.

The pandemic popularized the phrase “we’re all in this together,” and it’s true that all human beings are vulnerable to the virus. But in other ways, the phrase is not at all true, as the coronavirus has starkly exposed our deep social inequalities in co-called “normal” times. Immigrant meatpackers and farmworkers, African Americans, health care workers, incarcerated people, elders in nursing homes, service and gig workers, teachers and students, homeless people, Native nations, and others, were more susceptible to the virus. Asian-Americans faced an upsurge in racism and women an upsurge in domestic violence. People who were less able to weather the economic collapse need to have their rent deferred or canceled, get government support to pay off debt, and gain better technical resources to work or go to school online. These inequalities became even more stark as the George Floyd Rebellion against racial injustice began in late May.

Beyond exposing social injustice and inequalities, the pandemic has revealed the stark dangers of western individualism and social atomization, and in particular the American brand of “rugged individualism,” or the “liberty” of individuals to do as one pleases, despite the potentially fatal effect on others. Certain areas of the country, particularly the Southeast and Great Plains states, almost made a point of defying health authorities. The college partiers and Sturgis bikers epitomized this “anti-lockdown” sentiment against masks and social distancing, even as many of them fell ill. The “COVIDiot” sentiment against mask mandates fused with a toxic brew of far-right politicians and militias reacting to gun reform laws and Black Lives Matter, as gun sales vastly increased. Rural counties that had largely voted for Donald Trump in 2016 felt early on that they would avoid the worst of the pandemic, but they later paid for their pervasive carelessness.



Immigrant Worker Safety Net Fund poster, and fruit-processing company farmworkers on strike in central Washington’s Yakima Valley (Edgar Franks, Familias Unidas por la Justicia).

Meanwhile, Asian societies with a stronger sense of community, social cohesion, and collective responsibility generally fared much better in the pandemic. South Korea introduced near-universal testing for the virus, and flattened the curve more quickly than western countries, in particular the U.S. Upon first hearing of the outbreak on the Chinese mainland, Taiwan ramped up its public health infrastructure, including masks, and initially had fewer than ten deaths. Vietnam’s public health system carried out a “vast and labor-intensive contact tracing operation,” and for several months had zero deaths.

All three of these countries had experience with the 2003 SARS pandemic, but even more importantly had the cooperation of their people, and a cultural sense of intergenerational responsibility and accountability. A few western island countries such as Iceland and New Zealand also had relative successes, but for the most part, European-originated

societies constantly had to fight the scourge of individualism and to promote a neighborly sense of community in a time of emergency.

The pandemic (like the climate crisis) has underscored the urgent need both for building resilient communities and undertaking social transformation. Naomi Klein commented as the pandemic began, “Moments of crisis can also be moments where we catapult ourselves forward...People are wondering when are things going to return to normal, we always have to remember that normal was a crisis...normal is deadly...It is transformation that we need.”

Rebecca Solnit agreed that “Hope offers us clarity that, amid the uncertainty ahead, there will be conflicts worth joining and the possibility of winning some of them. And one of the things most dangerous to this hope is the lapse into believing that everything was fine before disaster struck, and that all we need to do is return to things as they were. Ordinary life before the pandemic was already a catastrophe of desperation and exclusion for too many human beings, an environmental and climate catastrophe, an obscenity of inequality. It is too soon to know what will emerge from this emergency, but not too soon to start looking for chances to help decide it.”

Māori climate resilience leader Mike Smith’s admonition to “weave the social fabric” has been embodied around the world in mutual aid campaigns in response to the pandemic, based on “solidarity, not charity.” At the onset of the pandemic, even highly individualistic and atomized urban communities experienced a “pandemic of people helping people.” Using “pandemic solidarity” social media, “collective care” online sign-ups delivered essential supplies to quarantined people, provided medical support and supplies (such as homemade masks), distributed meals and water to neighbors who had challenges acquiring them, and gathered resources and reliable information on COVID-19.

Mutual aid collectives organized social solidarity with homeless populations, immigrant workers, health care workers, and others highly impacted by the pandemic. Activist groups resisted evictions, launched debt strikes, and blocked deportations. In addition to material and medical support, neighbors sought to lift each other’s spirits, whether Iranian health workers making dance videos, Italians belting out opera, Canadians singing Leonard Cohen tunes, or Americans howling in unison at set times. The Pee Posh/Maricopa/Quechan poet and organizer Reuben Cruz hoped that in people’s isolation in quarantine, “This is a moment of incubation, and something could hatch from this....incubating positivity not negativity.”

The Mutual Aid Disaster Relief network compared the pandemic to the climate crisis: “The global pandemic is a disaster enveloping all of the intersections where climate catastrophes typically surge, storm-batter and strand impacted regions, but when every community is a different version of ground zero, sourcing from within, in as much as possible, becomes a critical component....Fluidity and consistently vetting information as it comes out is critical during this crisis. The decentralized work of data review, resource building, working to severely limit the risks of transmission, providing support for those self-quarantining and those whose vulnerabilities put them at higher risk and

disproportionate impact from Covid-19 as well as organizing mutual aid efforts to contribute to the self-determination and survival of our communities across the world continues.... Mutual aid networks have formed and grown to keep us as safe and cared for in perilous times.”

Solnit commented on the mutual aid networks, “I believe the generosity and solidarity in action in the present moment offers a foreshadowing of what is possible – and necessary. The basic generosity and empathy of most ordinary people should be regarded as a treasure, a light and an energy source that can drive a better society, if it is recognized and encouraged. Mostly, it’s overlooked, undermined and sabotaged....Competition is the antithesis of mutual aid, which is not only a practical tool but an ideological insurrection. The fact that even in places like the U.S., where these competitive, isolating messages have bombarded us for at least 150 years, millions still reach out in generosity, and are still moved to meet the needs that become visible in moments such as this, is testament to something about human nature and human possibility”

The poet Donna Ashworth envisioned the end of the pandemic as ushering in a better society: “History will remember when the world stopped / And the flights stayed on the ground / And the cars parked in the street / And the trains didn’t run / History will remember when the schools closed / And the children stayed indoors / And the medical staff walked towards the fire / And they didn’t run. / History will remember when the people sang / On their balconies, in isolation / But so very much together In courage and song. / History will remember when the people fought / For their old and their weak / Protected the vulnerable / By doing nothing at all. / History will remember when the virus left / And the houses opened / And the people came out / And hugged and kissed /And started again / Kinder than before.”

But like in earlier disasters, some questioned how mutual aid cooperation could be maintained after the immediate recovery period. Media Studies Professor Nathan Schneider (who founded the self-governance network CommunityRule.info), looked ahead to see a need to formalize and institutionalize these relationships: “Quick-and-easy connections in social media groups, with no structure but the compassion of volunteers—these are beautiful at first, until they begin to fade and reveal the absences of accountability and responsibility underneath. If our communities’ response is to be stronger than the virus, we will need to remember older forms of community-building, which translate enthusiasm into robust organization....Institutions all around us—including many we take for granted but would hate to lose—started out of community responses in times of crisis. Many credit unions, labor unions, fraternal societies, rural cooperatives and charities have such an origin story. As their founders worked humanely, they also thought institutionally. They recognized that often the needs that arise in a crisis have been there all along, and the solutions need to outlive the crisis, too.”

A welcome sign came during the West Coast wildfires of September 2020, when pandemic mutual aid networks and Black Lives Matter protesters quickly shifted gears to provide relief to fire refugees, and rural groups formed to shelter threatened livestock and animals. The mutual aid template was easily transferable to the context of a new emergency.



Wildfire at senior center in northern California (Associated Press), and Equitable Workers Offering Kommunity Support (EWOKS) mutual aid distribution center in Portland (Garrison Davis)

The case studies previously discussed in this series—Common Ground in Louisiana, Occupy Sandy in New York, tribally led alliances for climate justice and resilience in Washington state, Māori marae communities facing disasters in New Zealand, and pandemic mutual aid networks— demonstrate the power of proactive action. Not only are the most prepared communities more likely to survive crisis than those that are unprepared, but encouraging resilience also helps to build lasting cross-cultural bridges to neighboring communities, and promotes a healthier future even in so-called “normal” times. Any strategy for building collective resilience must consider the periods before, during, and after a disaster.

Before the Disaster: Collaborative Resilience

Before the disaster, community organizers need to prepare for the inevitable crisis, not just respond to it. They should not merely wait for disasters, nor should they leave a vacuum in planning for the privatizers to exploit. They can actively propose alternate disaster planning based on the public sector, economic cooperation, and environmental sustainability. They need to learn the depoliticized jargon of government agencies to make such radical proposals into nonthreatening, common-sense proposals, but also use the language of organizing to inspire and move community members into action, particularly young people.

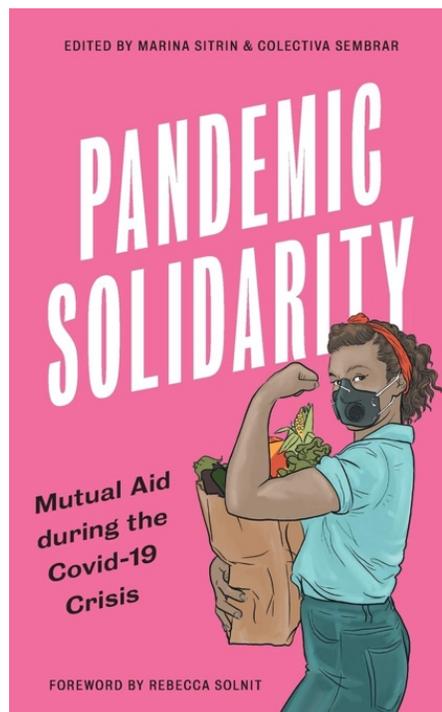
Before the disaster, concerned residents need to “work the system,” and get into positions to make a difference. Many students ask me about how to secure “Green Jobs” after their graduation, but the fields of habitat restoration, renewable energies, etc. are becoming increasingly corporatized and difficult to acquire. Another option is to seek employment in community planning and emergency response and recovery, in agencies such as the Red Cross, FEMA, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Health and Social Services, state and local departments, and so on.

Some of the most important “green jobs” may be in rural and urban planning, disaster prevention, and emergency response, to make communities more humane and sustainable than they were before the disasters. Getting forward-thinking people into those jobs are critical, partly to keep them away from the privatizers and elitist bureaucrats, but also to be able to blow the whistle on agencies that undercut their mission to serve people.

As the planner John Randolph commented on “collaborative resilience” in an era of climate change, “If we are going to create climate resistant communities, integrating...social dimensions into climate change planning must be the rule rather than the exception. Social strategies for localized resilience need to become a social movement.” Randolph cautioned that planning for “resilience to global warming requires adaptation and transformative change not only to reduce further vulnerabilities, but also to mitigate carbon emissions...Resilience focused on bouncing back to the *status quo* may actually impede necessary adaptation to climate change.”

Before the disaster, communities need to adapt to the inevitable effects of climate change, not to give up or surrender to the fossil fuel industry, but to be proactive in preventing the worst effects that will devastate unprepared communities. As Oxfam has noted, “Even extreme weather need not bring disasters; it is poverty and powerlessness that make people vulnerable. Though more emergency aid is needed, humanitarian response must do more than save lives: it has to link to climate change adaptation and bolster poor people’s livelihoods through social protection and disaster risk reduction approaches.”

The most critical planning is not at the national or state scale, but at the local and regional scale, recognizing that local communities may be on their own in the first hours and days of an emergency. Collaborative resilience is being recognized as a critical part of planning by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), representing “Local Governments for Sustainability.” The website initiative pResilience explores issues of “Local Social Adaptation.” The Transition Towns Network prepares local communities for climate change instability and decreasing reliance on fossil fuels. The Washington Emergency Management Division has organized a “Map Your Neighborhood” disaster planning exercise for residents of a single block. The Shareable network has guides for making community spaces into longer-term hubs for local resilience and mutual aid.



During the Disaster: See the Stars

During a disaster that involves a prolonged power outage, we have to forget the assumptions of a wired industrialized society. In a mass power outage, communities cannot rely on refrigerators, the internet, or even the water supply. In response, neighbors can share generators, barbecue meat from thawing freezers, collect rainwater, use solar or bicycle power to recharge phones and other devices, and much more.

Neighbors can plan ahead for communication during a crisis. Even though the internet is rarely available during disaster blackouts, using social media has also become an important part of building preparedness and resilience in advance. The Nextdoor app, for example, lets neighbors get to know each other to find missing cats or chickens, but can also be used for neighborhood emergency planning, or identifying generators and shelters. Old-fashioned mimeograph machines, cranked by hand, could copy off hundreds of leaflets containing urgent information, which teams can drop at each home and apartment building in the neighborhood. While authorities are relying on radio and TV bulletins that few people will be able to hear, neighborhoods can organize themselves to meet their own needs and make their own demands of officialdom. Face-to-face organizing is more effective than facebook in mobilizing shocked communities in times of disaster.

Communities that are proactive and plan ahead will be the communities that survive the disaster, rather than those that respond wildly and ineffectively as the crisis shatters familiar norms. Because Americans cannot rely on FEMA or other agencies to rescue them, they have to build networks of local social relationships, particularly across ethnic and racial barriers.

In these ways, catastrophes can focus residents' thinking on how to effectively prepare for emergencies, and how to respond to disasters. According to Solnit, in her book *A Paradise Built in Hell*, even the roots of these terms reveal how these experiences can destabilize a society. "Emergency" comes from the Latin for *e-* (opposite) + *mergere* (submerge in liquid), a clear reference to flooding. "Catastrophe" is from the Greek for *kata* (down) + *streiphen* (turning over). And "disaster" is from the Latin for *dis-* (without) + *astro* (star), because normal life directions and guidelines may no longer apply (10).

Using this last definition, Solnit described the 2003 Northeast blackout: "the loss of electrical power meant that the light pollution blotting out the night sky vanished. . . .the Milky Way could be seen in New York City, a heavenly realm long lost to view. . . .You can think of the current social order as something akin to this artificial light: another kind of power that fails in disaster. In its place appears a reversion to improvised, collaborative, cooperative, and local society. . . .The constellations of solidarity, altruism, and improvisation are within most of us and reappear at these times. People know what to do in a disaster."

After the Disaster: Make Collaboration Last

Immediately after disasters, many Americans seem to be more open to a cooperative message and policies. Individualized and competitive economic models, dependent on

globalized corporate supply lines, are the least efficient means to ensure survival. The public is also more open to an environmental message and sustainable planning after they have witnessed how climate change intensified a storm, how clearcutting enabled a landslide, or urban sprawl facilitated flooding.

But after a few weeks, the crisis lessens, and the larger lessons are usually forgotten as society begins to return to “normal.” The dominant perception is that the crisis and collaboration were flukes, even though social inequalities and climate change are meanwhile conspiring to provide the next crisis. Which begs the question: how can the life of collaborative resilience be extended beyond the crisis?

Cooperation can last beyond the disaster by institutionalizing it, and embedding it in new structures, so it is not overwhelmed by old, pre-crisis structures. As Elaine Scarry asserts in *Thinking in an Emergency*, effective responses to crisis are practiced ahead of time as habits or protocols, rather than developed as the emergency unfolds (108). Communities can create stronger networks of local relationships, build practical skills and mutual help systems, and prepare for the inevitable changes ahead. This means focusing on the brass-tacks logistics of meeting human needs, beyond “do-gooder” and “band-aid” work.

This process of sustaining disaster collectivism blurs the distinctions between social activism and social services, as it necessitates both face-to-face social networking and meeting immediate human needs, beyond merely sandbagging a river. Community organizers who have worked on providing social services to homeless residents or youth in crisis will be better equipped to face a disaster than activists who have merely debated political points at meetings.

This path is already being taken by some homeless communities, urban gardens, and other projects emerging from social and environmental crisis. In Olympia, Washington, in 2007, homeless adults founded Camp Quixote, which was taken in by several churches until 2013, when it was transformed into the permanent tiny-home community of Quixote Village. Grassroots activism made the project possible, but community organizing transformed it into lasting social change that strengthens collaborative resilience.

Solnit acknowledged that as the pandemic recedes, “Some of that sense of urgency and shared destiny will fade away, as it often does after a disaster, but one of the important things to remember is that some of it was here before this pandemic. I sometimes think that capitalism is a catastrophe constantly being mitigated and cleaned up by mutual aid and kinship networks, by the generosity of religious and secular organizations, by the toil of human-rights lawyers and climate groups, and by the kindness of strangers....The pandemic marks the end of an era and the beginning of another – one whose harshness must be mitigated by a spirit of generosity.”

Conclusion

The twin crises of climate instability and the pandemic, folded into the “slow violence” of economic inequality and colonial and racial injustices, indeed mark the beginning of a particularly harsh era. Much as governments and corporate interests use disasters as an opportunity to institute a “Shock Doctrine” that reworks society in their interest, social movements can not only defend communities from shocks, but institute a “Resilience

Doctrine” that builds communities back more sustainable and equal than before, and hardens them against inevitable future shocks.

The Resilience Doctrine goes beyond the period of a disaster, to address the brokenness of lives, relationships and ecosystems that preceded and outlast catastrophes. Disaster collectivism, or Solnit’s idea of “a paradise built in hell,” can rebuild communities across racial and cultural barriers, but also strengthens social and ecological cohesion and prefigures a healthier and more just future.

The Resilience Doctrine can be embodied in government policies that emphasize public ownership and services, community, cooperation, equality, and sustainable planning over private property, profits, competition, extraction, and growth planning. But it goes far deeper than political decision-making, because it requires a social and cultural shift that opens people’s eyes to solutions they would not have explored in so-called “normal” times, in collaboration with partners they may have previously shunned.

The Indian writer Arundhati Roy observed that the pandemic “offers us a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves. Nothing could be worse than a return to normality. Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.”

Resilience is not merely about surviving present or future disasters, but goes far deeper, into shifting social power relations and transforming our relationships with the Earth, and thriving in a society based on justice and regeneration. In this way, decolonization is not just about reversing the domination of oppressed or colonized peoples, but about a process of indigenization that both reverses and heals the harms of settler colonialism, racism, and overseas imperial expansion. Through studying our planning for and responses to disasters such as climate change and the pandemic, we can identify the pathways toward a more hopeful future.