‘New Zealand’s Darkest Day’[1]: The Representation of National Grief in the Media: The Case of the Christchurch Earthquake

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Abstract

On 22 February 2011 a powerful earthquake[2] struck the city of Christchurch, New Zealand. Buildings had collapsed, businesses were disrupted, and many lives were lost. As the death toll rose and the realities of the destruction set in, a nation moved from initial shock to anger and depression—not unlike the stages of grieving. This paper discusses the stages of grieving and the mourning process as they were reflected in national media. It explores how national identity and national consciousness are related to national mourning by a review of the literature and a thematic analysis of selected media content.

The authors found that emotion is not only evident in reporting but it is necessary and expected when disaster is reported, challenging traditional

[1] ‘We may be witnessing New Zealand's darkest day’, Prime Minister John Key told TVNZ, after arriving in the quake-struck city within hours of the tremor. The comment was widely reported in national and international media (see, for example, http://world.globaltimes.cn/asia-pacific/2011-02/626105.html; http://www.theage.com.au/world/nation-confronts-fear-and-despair-20110222-1b46q.html.)

[2] Civil Defence Emergency Management and other government departments refer to the Canterbury earthquake. The general public and the majority of the media refer to the Christchurch earthquake.

ISSN 1023-1757

views of 'quality' journalism that favour rationalism and objectivity over emotion in reporting.

This research contributes to scholarly debate concerning the reporting of national disasters and how it impacts on its national identity.

Keywords: media, disaster, emotion, grieving, national consciousness, national identity.

Introduction

The 6.3 magnitude earthquake that struck New Zealand's second most populated city of Christchurch in Canterbury, New Zealand, on the 22nd of February 2011 made international news. Compared to other global disasters the numbers of fatalities were relatively small, but to a nation of four million people the loss of nearly 200 people in one single disaster affected all New Zealanders. No-one remained untouched by the grief that followed the earthquake. Many had friends or relatives living in Christchurch who were directly affected; others knew those who had friends and family there. The media played a crucial part not only in reporting the events but providing an avenue for those moved to express their shock, despair and even anger about the disaster and its subsequent impact. What was seen in the media was a cumulative and shared process of grieving for what was lost: people, livelihoods, identity, and, as the ripple effects were reported upon, lost opportunities.

When discussing the media as a conduit for national mourning, it is important to remember that journalists are part of the community and of a nation[3]. While there is an expectation that journalists must remain objective, they are in fact participant observers, and sometimes, observing participants. As Pantti and Wahl-Jorgenson (2011) argue, journalists are doing more than reporting events: they have become active participants in political and social processes, and particularly when there is a social crisis such as a disaster.

[3] As journalist Karl du Fresne points out, 'one of the difficulties in being a journalist in a small and intimate society such as New Zealand is that you're likely to know many of the people you write about'. http://karldufresne.blogspot.com/2010/10/two-degrees-of-separation.html.

Thus, journalists cannot remain objective or emotionally detached, and their audience would not expect them to be. A poignant example where emotions spilled over into the reporting took place during the morning show *TVNZ Breakfast*. Covering the Canterbury earthquake in Christchurch, the reporter found himself overwhelmed by his experiences, and at the end of an interview with a volunteer group he choked as he referred to the 'fantastic well of human spirit' (De Jong 2011). It may be argued that 'the media appropriates a social role to transform tragic events into platforms for global communion' (Ibrahim 2010:123) while emotive images of collective expressions of grief and empathy are naturally newsworthy (Pantti 2010).

In her discussion about the affective impact of media coverage of the 2009 bushfire in Australia, Yell (2010:118) points out that the 'public sharing of private emotion has become orthodox and mainstream'. Pantti and Wahl-Jorgenson (2011) concur, suggesting that since the 1980s there is a shift towards personalised expression of emotion in media coverage of national disasters. The images shown of natural disasters such as the Australian bushfire have become much more intimate and emotive than they were when the media reported on the 1939 and 1983 bushfires, proving that a change in reporting has taken place (Yell 2010). In fact, Pantti (2010) suggests that contemporary journalists believe that emotional images allow the truth or real story to emerge. As a result of such emotive images, the recipient becomes more intimately engaged with the victims (Yell 2010).

The Process of Grieving

As Bhowmik, Basu and Mitra (2010) have shown, emotions are often evoked among recipients of news reporting. While the use of emotion in news reporting remains controversial, the process of grieving is well-recorded in psychology and sociology. As humans we construct our world symbolically, create meaning and invest in relationships. When these relationships or the meanings we have shaped are lost or disrupted, we experience bereavement (Love 2007), or, as Hutchinson (2010) suggests, 'trauma', signifying shock, vulnerability and confusion.

Though the terms 'grief', 'mourning' and 'bereavement' are often used interchangeably, there are distinct differences between them. Grief refers to the response to loss, while mourning is the expression of that grief

(Buglass 2010). Thus national grief in this context refers to the loss that affects a nation, and national mourning the collective expression of grief by that nation. Bereavement, on the other hand, is a state of 'having experienced a loss' and refers to the 'period after loss during which grief and mourning occur' (Buglass 2010:44). National bereavement continues after the event; affording a place to it in its collective memory—part of the sense-making process necessary to achieve acceptance.

Grief is a normal reaction to loss, and feelings of despair or loss usually decrease in intensity and frequency as time passes (Love 2007), but as Hutchinson (2010) suggests, the after-effects of traumatic events can linger and shape future social (and political) landscapes. Although the emotions associated with grief and mourning are no longer news, feelings associated are likely to be renewed annually when associated events are described. For example, in a report on a shoot-out, the headline tellingly read *Shot man an earthquake refugee* (Donnell 2011), re-igniting memories of the trauma in Christchurch.

How intense the grief is and how complex the grieving process is determined by how the death (or loss) occurs (Anderson 2010). In his exploration why we mourn for people unknown to us, Brennan (2008:3) argues that we mourn the loss of meaning that 'comes from the predictability of every day life; from taken for granted routines'. We do not expect people to die while going about their daily business, and indeed, stories reported in the media about victims going about their daily lives were particularly poignant: workers taking the bus or staying in the office to finish work during lunch time, couples having lunch in cafés, family members catching up over a cup of coffee. 'The world we thought was safe is not' (Anderson 2010:128). Stories such about ordinary people dying under extraordinary and unexpected circumstances intensifies the mourning for those affected, the loss of meaning and certainty of things we take for granted. *The Press* summed this up in their tribute to the victims of the Canterbury earthquake:

February 22, 2011. Just another ordinary day in Christchurch. Workers on their lunch break leave the office to grab a bite. Shoppers go about their daily business. Tourists at ChristChurch Cathedral—the majestic 19th-century beauty that came to symbolise a city— enjoy the view from the spire. Just another day, no different from the one before. Then, at 12.51pm, it hit.

The 6.3 magnitude earthquake that brought a city to its knees and broke a nation's heart. Our darkest day. A disaster beyond comprehension that has left hundreds missing, scores dead and ruined countless lives. Hopes have faded and dreams have crumbled, much like that once-mighty cathedral. So many lives, so much loss, the sorrow is almost too much to bear. The little boy who never made it to his six-month birthday. The brother who was due to give his sister away at her wedding. The father who left home to get groceries, never to return to his wife and their children.

> The girl in the rubble who texted her father in China to tell him she was trapped. The little sister whose loving brother just wants her to come home. These are the victims, these are their stories. And we will remember them (The Press 2011b, online).

The description is filled with emotive language and imagery, highlighting how one traumatic event changed ordinary lives. It reinforces the notion of 'nation' and its unity by focusing on similarities rather than differences. Although it can be argued that the media exploited the 'sentiment of compassion' (Ibrahim 2010:131), it can equally be argued that such emotions and imagery allowed media consumers who were 'outside' the stricken area to identify with those directly affected, and provided an opportunity for all New Zealanders (and those following from outside New Zealand) to become part of the national mourning process. Trauma, by its very nature, is solitary but as it is shared by others through the media, social meaning is given to individual pain, and it enters into the national consciousness, encouraging us to re-evaluate how we are connected to the world as a nation (Hutchinson 2010).

National Identity and National Consciousness

Benedict Anderson, well known for his work on the origins of nationalism, argues that modern nations are always to some degree *imagined communities*, because 'in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (Anderson 2006:6). Importantly here, he acknowledges the significant role of media in these imaginings as 'creating unified fields of exchange' (Anderson 2006 cited in Guibernau & Rex 2010: 62). Not only is

national consciousness reflected in the media, but the media plays a significant role in recreating it in times of crisis (Avraham & First 2006). We might speculate that in present times that this role has increased exponentially as a result of the ubiquity of social media.

Anderson suggests that 'nationalism' or 'nation-ness' are 'cultural artefacts of a particular kind' (2006:4). He posits that 'comradeship' and 'fraternity' and 'solidarity' exist as features of culture that have first a history and then a structure that emerges from that history in the form of nationalism. Regardless of actual inequalities in the modern nation state, 'it is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship' (Anderson 2006:7).

Social solidarity and community (Jobst 2005) is reflected in the widespread reporting of activities by New Zealanders such as fundraising and donations to assist Canterburians to rebuild Christchurch and their livelihoods after the earthquake. A national sense of social solidarity, reflected in the belief of 'two degrees of separation' due to New Zealand's relatively small population of four million people, was often reflected in media reporting[4]. The removal of over 200,000 tonnes of liquefaction silt by Canterbury University's 'Student Volunteer Army', Federated Farmers'

[4] Many New Zealanders subscribe to the idea of 'two degrees of separation'. This is manifested in internet blogs and television programmes. Mobile phone provider Two Degrees Mobile capitalises on the idea in a series of television commercials with the line 'Everyone knows someone who knows someone who knows them'. According to Internet commentator David Farrar this belief can be traced back to 1979 Erebus disaster when people in New Zealand 'knew someone, or knew someone who knew someone' involved in some way (Stuff 2008). There have been many voices linking the two degrees of separation specifically to the Christchurch earthquake (cf. relevant websites). In a Mayoral media release pledging Auckland support for Christchurch, Councillor Michael Goudie, chairperson of the Civil Defence and Emergency Management Committee, says 'New Zealand has always been known for two degrees of separation and this is more evident than ever before'. While this belief may be more emotionally imagined than real, research by Statistics New Zealand has found that there are approximately four degrees of separation among members of the New Zealand workforce (MacGibbon 2008: 3).

'Farmy Army' and the 'Rangiora Earthquake Express' provision of over 250 tonnes of water, medical supplies, and food, from the nearby town of Rangiora by helicopter and truck, featured prominently. Patriotism in the form of this type of activity alongside emotional restraint, and its related cousin 'resilience', have long characterised reporting on disasters (Pantti & Wahl-Jorgenson 2011) but as suggested earlier, more recently the emotion and vulnerability of those reporting traumatic events has become more commonplace (Furedi 2007).

A nation and national consciousness is not necessarily delineated by geographical boundaries, and face to face contact is not required for people to identify with large social groups (such as a nation). Indeed, only the subjective knowing (*Wissen*) and a feeling of belonging (*Zugehörigkeit*) are sufficient to create a national identity and build a nation (Jobst 2005). 'Information technology has increased our awareness of suffering anywhere in the world' (Anderson 2010:129) and enables audiences to participate in the discourse surrounding events, thus constructing private and public memory (Ibrahim 2010).

That this national consciousness was not limited to geographical boundaries was reflected in the media by messages of support and sympathy from people outside New Zealand who had either visited Christchurch or lived there for a period of time. These people identified with Christchurch and New Zealand, and therefore become part of the national consciousness of mourning alongside those who were living in New Zealand. On the *New Zealand Herald* website, an interactive world map showed how many messages of support were received from various countries. For example, 343 messages were received from the United States of America, 293 from the United Kingdom and 209 from Australia (nzherald.co.nz 2011c). As the news spread, messages of condolences continued pouring in from all over the world:

> I was there for the first one but seeing the devastation this one has caused is hard to take in, I miss Christchurch more then ever and my heart goes out to all New Zealanders, I wish I was back home to give everyone I know a hug. I wish I could get in contact with the people I know. (expat kiwi in Beijing)—phebz88 (China) 08:52AM Wednesday, 23 Feb 2011 (nzherald.co.nz, 2011b, online).

The next two messages of support clearly show how identification with a nation crosses geographic boundaries, pointing towards the connection that is built through tourism and national image:

> Dear Friends in Christchurch! As a German 'Kiwi' I feel with you and my thoughts are also with you! I hope you all are well and your families as well. I feel very sorry for all those lifes which got lost. Big hug to all of you!—Jen (Germany) 12:20AM Wednesday, 23 Feb 2011 (nzherald.co.nz, 2011b, online).

> I spent my honeymoon in New Zealand, we arrived in the morning to Christchurch, we loved the people, we moved the city, walked around the streets and gardens. I have only great memories of your country and you. This morning I heard this horrible news, I give you a big hug and many tears. From Spain, from the world.—Àngel (Spain) 12:51AM Wednesday, 23 Feb 2011. (nzherald.co.nz, 2011b, online).

By providing the facilities for expression of messages, publishing them and encouraging further messages of support, the media draws in the audiences' compassion and acts as a conduit and mediator for national mourning and the expression of grief.

Media as a Conduit for National Mourning

The news coverage following a natural disaster does not only provide information but 'represents and elicits strong emotion' (Yell 2010:110). Emotions shared collectively are typically used to reaffirm social bonds, and the reporting on these disasters result in these becoming 'integrative events, moments of national consensus and unity born out of mourning together' (Pantti & Wieten 2005:301). This is similar to Linenthal's (2001:111) description of the construction of an imagined nationwide bereaved community through 'popular, mediated mournings'.

Representing national mourning and grief is inherently emotional, and while emotions are embedded in our society (Pantti & Wahl-Jorgenson 2011), the use of emotions in journalism is a topic of debate, and journalism

has been soundly and repeatedly criticised for relying on emotion in reporting. It has been put that emotions have no place in quality journalism (cf, for example, Williams 1978; Protess *et al.* 2011; Corcoran 2006).

Perhaps more realistically, others suggest emotion in reporting is required to aid in creating understanding. Meijer (2001:189), for example, advocates incorporating 'emotions', 'everyday life' and a 'relative sense of self' into a more inclusive concept of public quality, media and citizenship. Pantti and Wahl-Jorgenson (2011) argue that emotions are integral to the reporting of disaster. Hutchinson (2010:70) points out, 'one may speak ... speak and write of trauma yet words fail to convey the perceptual intensity of feelings, either physical or emotional ones'. Emotionally, the bereaved will experience a range of feelings, including sadness, anger, guild and anxiety, and by encoding these often unarticulated experiences within social symbols and linguistic patterns of the contemporary mass media allows the unspoken aspects of trauma to gather social meaning (Hutchinson 2010). It is ultimately through this meaning that sense can be made of a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, allowing it to be absorbed into the national consciousness.

The expectation of how emotion should be and will be expressed, depends on so-called 'feeling rules' (Furedi 2007). These are defined by a cultural script that determines the norms or rules about how emotions should be expressed and what these emotions should mean. Therefore they influence (or guide) the collective sense-making of a national disaster. They also determine how and when emotion is expressed in media, because—like all members of society—journalists, too, have to adhere to these norms.

Mourning and the subsequent sense-making activity are unlikely to take place without an element of anger, conflict and frustration, and these too are subject to feeling rules. Anger is not perceived as a unifying value (Pantti & Wieten 2005), and although reported in the media, is generally not as widely recounted as more positive values, such as resilience and community spirit. Pantti and Wahl-Jorgenson (2011) suggest that the most powerful emotions linked to national disaster is anger but this anger needs a focal point for expression, and in the case of a national disaster it has to be someone who can be held responsible, such as industry or political authorities (Pantti & Wahl-Jorgenson 2011). In the case of the Christchurch earthquake, questions were raised why some newer buildings collapsed, why

not all buildings were 'earthquake-proofed', and the speed of the recovery effort. Typically, however, these issues are reported upon as coming from the victims, their families and external sources, distancing the journalists from such negative emotions, such as happened in the reporting of a group of frustrated business owners who ignored the barrier surrounding the stricken city centre of Christchurch and crossed it in protest to having been prevented access to their business premises. While their anger was evident and their actions widely reported as 'storming a cordon' (Stuff.co.nz 2011a, online), by all standards their behaviour remained in the realm of civil disobedience rather than violent expression of anger, reaffirming the nation's tolerance for peaceful protest.

It remains undisputable that no society can re-establish its identity without questioning where it has been, where it is and where it is going. Anger allows the community to raise '*structural* questions of *collective* significance' (Pantti & Wahl-Jorgenson 2011:119), and therefore anger as an emotional dimension of grief is crucial in the sense-making stage of the mourning process. But in the case of the media, this dimension is reflected rather than mediated.

A key argument in the debate surrounding the expression of emotion in media reporting relies on the distinction between a private and a public sphere. If we are to assume that there is indeed such a patent distinction, then 'private emotions are presented for public consumption' (Yell 2010:117) and 'pain and suffering become tools to conjoin private and public memory' (Ibrahim 2010:131). When shown in the media through headlines, visuals and stories, these emotions evoke affective responses among the audiences who no longer remain detached. Rather, they enter into what Yell (2010) calls a parasocial relation with the friends and families of the victims, sharing their shock and fear (Hutchinson 2010) as is expressed in the following message on the *New Zealand Herald* website:

> We feel so helpless watching the devastation of the earthquake. We send all our thoughts and prayers to you all at this time. We are with you in spirit.—JANET m (New South Wales) 12:20AM Wednesday, 23 Feb 2011.

This parasocial element can act as a conduit for community building and the creation of identity, and is not limited to national borders (Ibrahim 2010). In this sense, the media can

> ... unify a group of people whose members do not know one another and turn them into a community whose members share, at least on an imagined level, one social world. As a carrier of symbols and shared messages to groups and people of different backgrounds, the media assist in the development of social integration processes (Avraham & First 2006:73).

Thus, in the vein of this argument, reporting on disasters such as the Christchurch earthquake can build national identity and consciousness, and contribute to nation building. Sharing feelings of sympathy and shock, and mourning alongside the victims, solidarity is created and communal connections are solidified (Hutchinson 2010). The media takes on an authoritarian role by assuming the role to speak for a society as a whole—whether it be global, national or local—interpreting the events and establishing its place in the memory of a nation (Riegert & Olssen 2007), and thus satisfying the emotional dimension of grief.

The second dimension of grief is cognitive, and this includes preoccupation with the deceased (or, in this case, the disaster itself), rumination, fantasising and confusion (Love 2007). The cognitive dimension is satisfied by the media's focus on the earthquake and the events surrounding it—typical of reporting during a disaster occurrence. Fantasy, Brennan (2008:9) suggests, manifests itself in the 'symbolic domain of language and the imagination' where the inner world meets the outer world. According to him messages of support often contain such manifestations.

The third dimension of grief is physical, and includes reported aspects of lowered immune functions and somatic complaints, e.g. aches and pains (Love 2007). This dimension is seldom—if ever—reported on in the media. One might speculate that it is indeed perceived as too private to place into the public domain, and perhaps, not as newsworthy as the emotional and behavioural dimensions. Regardless, victims of a disaster are likely to experience physical aspects of grief.

The fourth dimension is behavioural, and includes actions such as crying, agitation and searching for loved ones (Love 2007). This dimension has been widely reflected in the media because of its obvious news values and potential to be shown visually in, for example, video clips and photojournalism. It is often interlinked with the emotional dimension, and because of poignancy is likely to move audiences to express their grief.

But, it is the fifth dimension of grief, namely its existential dimension that can be perceived as having the greatest impact on nation building and reaffirmation of its identity and consciousness. 'Disruptions such as death ... can precipitate searching for meaning in death and the questioning of spiritual beliefs and values, often resulting in a re-evaluation of core beliefs' (Love 2007:75). A nation's identity, and thus its consciousness, is shaped through its beliefs, values and its attitudes. The media's reporting of the Christchurch earthquake and its aftermath did not only involve audiences emotionally but allowed them to metaphysically mourn alongside those who were directly affected by the quake. It opened the way for the New Zealand nation to re-evaluate (or re-confirm) its core values and beliefs, such as preservation of heritage, community support and resilience (a 'can do' attitude).

Reports that point towards a re-evaluation or confirmation of values are wide and varied. For example, reports in the media of Earthquake Recovery Minister Gerry Brownlee's suggestion that he would tear down the heritage buildings as the 'old buildings killed people when they toppled during the earthquake' (nzherald.co.nz 2011a, online) caused outrage, and reaffirmed New Zealanders' views on the preservation of their heritage. It also impacted on the political landscape, resulting in Brownlee backtracking on his suggestion that he planned to bulldoze heritage buildings (The Press 2011a, online). A month later a Canterbury University student and victim of the earthquake made headlines by handing in her thesis, pointing towards the underlying discourse of resilience and pride in overcoming adversity. Her supervisor was quoted as saying she had '… shown remarkable stoicism and resilience and we can all be proud of her achievement' (Stuff.co.nz 2011b, online).

Finally, some form of acceptance is achieved when a new identity is created, changes to lifestyle and plans for the future are made (Love 2007). Although emotional ties will always remain and the disaster will never be

forgotten, the bereaved will start looking towards the future. 'Life will probably never be the same again, and it is important to acknowledge that' (Love 2007:82). The media can help move a nation towards acceptance by reporting on expressions of support from the nation, and key figures, such as the Prime Minister John Key. Love (2007:81) suggests that a 'bereaved person needs to interact with others who are empathetic and understanding of their suffering'. It is therefore important that the media becomes a nation's voice, not only showing the victims' suffering to the world so others can understand the impact of the disaster but also allowing a nation to express their affections and support through donations and offers of help. Such support must be given and must be palpable (Love 2007). With offers of support and donations posted on various media sites and reported through national radio and TV channels the media became a conduit for generating aid—not unlike Ibrahim's (2010) assertion that mediated trauma does not only elicit strong emotion but also a humanitarian reaction from individuals and the community. Expressions of support posted onto media websites, such as *The Breeze*, *New Zealand Herald Online* and *Trade Me* websites were akin to public condolence books, which Brennan (2008) describes as a public forum that enable the outward expression of inner speech. While many of these condolence books were in the form of messages of support online, the Hutt City Council initiated a physical condolence book to be handed to the Christchurch City Council (Hutt City Council 2011). In doing so, they not only displayed their support but recognised that the earthquake would become part of their counterpart's heritage, and provided an opportunity for those who had witnessed the disaster through the media to express their feelings and support.

Public expression of condolences have become a ritual or as Anderson (2010) describes them, 'rituals of lament':

> Rituals of lament foster hope by calling evil, injustice, violence and irrational suffering by their proper names. Such honesty in our rituals after public tragedy helps us to restore a belief that the world is still safe (Anderson 2010:129).

Rituals help restore social order (Romanoff & Terenzio 1998) and therefore a nation's identity. This includes the media's own response to a

disaster through interruption of normal broadcasting, which have become taken-for-granted. According to Romanoff and Terenzio (1998) such rituals provide a vehicle for expressing and controlling powerful emotions, such as those experienced as a result of grief. Goren (2007) suggests that societies that have experienced considerable loss of life through war or other catastrophes allow death to figure broadly in their self-image or rituals. While she does not identify New Zealand *per se*, losses through earthquake and other disasters are not a new phenomenon to this country. In the early 20th century, for example, the city of Napier was all but destroyed by an earthquake, resulting in rebuilding the city centre and re-establishing a new identity as an art deco city as a result.

But before restoration can begin, the loss and its irreversibility has to be absorbed (Love 2007). This is likely to take time because grieving is rarely a linear process. We move through all or some stages of grief, and we move back and forth until we reach acceptance. This lack of linearity is reflected in the media coverage, such as recovery of bodies and the lack of power and sanitation while showing emotional visuals of funerals and grief-stricken disaster victims. When Prime Minister John Key announced that as many as 10,000 houses might have to be demolished and whole neighbourhoods relocated, an affected resident was reported as saying:

> They need to name the areas now – please tell us ....We are just struggling with day-to-day living and we don't need somebody to come and say our suburb won't exist anymore. If that is the case, we'd like to be told quickly. Our lives are on hold. It's not a nice feeling; it's not a nice feeling at all (Migone 2011, online).

While the statement reflects a patent need to move forward (typical of a community that values resilience), the emotional impact of dealing simultaneously with the loss and the subsequent practicalities is evident. This moving between emotions and practicalities in media reporting, reflects the dual process model of coping with bereavement as discussed by Buglass (2010) where those who are in the process of grieving move between dealing with emotional issues and practical issues (Love 2007).

The dual process model, encompassing restoration-oriented and loss-oriented processes, suggests that loss-oriented processes are about

emotional issues such as grief, the intrusion of grief, denial or avoidance of changes that the restoration process brings and breaking bonds or ties with what has been lost. These aspects have been widely reported on in the media coverage of Prime Minister John Key's speech on the occasion of the national Christchurch memorial service:

> It is only natural that you want things to simply go back the way they were. That is a very human desire - to feel the familiar again. To be angry that your loved one will never return. To long to hear again the sounds of joy and excitement that once filled your homes and your hearts. Most of all I know this is a time of great uncertainty. And I know that such uncertainty makes recovery from this earthquake slow, painful and difficult. But today I also want to talk not only of loss, but also of hope, and healing …. Thank you for caring. That makes you part of the story of rebuilding Christchurch (Scoop Independent News 2011b, online).

Key told mourners and families of those who died that the quake 'had left scars that will never be erased from our land and our hearts' and it was time to remember those who had been lost, and to express grief and sorrow. 'Let us remember them – they are the faces of a Christchurch that will never be as it was again'…. So today we remember Christchurch as it was, and we treasure that memory.' It was a time of great uncertainty and the recovery would be slow, painful and difficult, but it was also a time to celebrate the power of community …' (Dominion Post 2011, A5).

Restoration-oriented processes are about practical issues, such as attending to life-style changes, distraction from grief, doing new things and establishing new roles, identities or relationships (Buglass 2010). Such processes are reflected in reportage on the current discussions around how the devastated Christchurch Central Business District (CBD) should be rebuilt, and are necessary in reaching acceptance, the final stage in the grieving process. Architect Ian Athfield was quoted as saying 'through an unfortunate set of circumstances, we have a great chance to make an even better city' (Stuff. co.nz, 2011c, online). Not only did his statement reflect the restoration-oriented processes but it reflected the resilience that is part of the New Zealand nation's identity and consciousness. By reporting on

attempts to recover as well as the devastation itself, a nation is guided towards recovery.

In many ways, such reporting might be likened to keeping a collective journal, which Love (2007) suggests is a practical step in moving towards acceptance. He puts forward that a person affected by grief can help clarify and integrate the experiences arising from that loss by keeping a journal. In the case of the Christchurch earthquake, the media effectively becomes a national journal that reports on the disaster and its aftermath, attempting to make sense of it all. By allowing audiences to identify with the events through emotive stories and explanations ranging from the scientific to the pseudo-scientific, the sense-making activity is continued (see Zembylas, 2009), and the audience's understanding and knowledge of the disaster is improved (Pantti 2010).

Conclusion

The grief that inevitably follows a national disaster forces a nation to re-evaluate and re-establish its identity and key values. The media fulfils a mediating role in this process through its reporting on such disaster. Although often criticised for exploiting these events for its emotional news value, reportage that encompass raw emotion, graphic images and harsh realities unites a nation in its grief. It allows those who were not at the scene of the disaster to bear witness and grieve with the victims of the disaster. At the same time, the media reflects the national mourning of identity, livelihoods and lives lost during disasters, and indirectly can aide in the process of mourning for those who have been affected. Had the media not reported the events as it did, its victims would have might have felt unsupported and uncared for by their community and fellow nationals.

Reporting also elicits financial and physical help from those who identify with the affected, and aides in the recovery process and acceptance of loss. Without this support and help, normal grief may lead to what Love (2007) describes as 'complicated grief'. In such a case a nation would be unable to move through a natural process of mourning and could struggle to recover from the disaster. Such a nation would suffer damage to its consciousness, which may potentially lead to social instability. Journalists' role is indispensable in managing a nation's emotions and re-establishing

social and identity during a time of grief (Pantti & Wieten 2005). But while the New Zealand nation mourned publicly through the media, acceptance is unlikely to be achieved in the time frame reported here, and reconstruction of livelihoods and re-establishing of identity will be a long-term project.

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