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## **Disasters and Indigenous peoples: a critical discourse analysis of the expert news media**

- Discourses of disasters and the place of Indigenous peoples in disasters are explored in the expert news media.
- Fives discourses are identified: natural disasters, systems of oppression, humanitarianism, technocracy, and self-determination.
- Dominant discourses depoliticize disasters and vulnerability.
- Governments and non-governmental organizations are constructed as caring for Indigenous peoples, thereby justifying outside action.
- Less dominant discourses politicise disasters and suggest that governments are sometimes performative in their actions.
- **Paternalistic, humanitarian care emerged as a form of governance in a way that is in contention with other forms of care, such as care-ethics.**

### **Abstract**

Attempts to shift the ways disasters have traditionally been managed away from authoritarian, top-down approaches toward more bottom-up and inclusive processes often involve incorporating viewpoints from marginalized and vulnerable groups. Recently as part of this process, there have been calls for greater inclusion of Indigenous peoples in disaster management. In theory, this also suggests a shift in power structures, **towards recognising Indigenous peoples as experts in disaster management.** However, in popular imagination and policy Indigenous peoples often appear to be caricatured and misrepresented, for instance through tropes of Indigenous peoples as custodians of the environment or especially vulnerable to environmental change. These framings matter because they can result in disaster management policies and practices that do not capture Indigenous peoples' complex realities. However, these framings have not been analysed in the context of disaster. In this article, we aim to better understand these framings through a critical discourse analysis of how Indigenous peoples in disasters are represented in the expert news media. We identify five discourses, including a dominant one of disasters as natural phenomena to be addressed through humanitarianism and technocratic interventions. Such discourses render Indigenous peoples helpless, depoliticize disasters and are justified by framing governments and NGOs as caring for Indigenous peoples. However, we also identify competing discourses that focus on systems of oppression and self-determination in disaster management. These discourse recognise disasters as political and include discussion of the role of colonialism in disaster creation. As care emerged as a means through which intervention was justified, we conclude by asking questions of who is cared for/about in disasters and how that care is performed.

**Keywords:** humanitarian action, disaster risk reduction, journalism, Indigenous peoples, discourse analysis, **care**

1 **1.0 Introduction**

2  
3 **The COVID-19 pandemic, like other disasters before it, has revealed the power of news media**  
4 **representations of events and people in producing diverse impacts across public perception,**  
5 **policy, and practice** (Feindt and Oels, 2005; Marks, 2015). Several significant discourses – “particular  
6 ways of representing particular aspects of social life” Fairclough (2001; 2) – have become prominent,  
7 including world leaders **being** framed as wartime presidents, fighting an invisible enemy which has  
8 allowed for draconian measures of control (De Rosa and Mannarini, 2020). Others have constructed the  
9 pandemic as nature seeking revenge on humanity (Gatti, 2020), used to justify greater focus on  
10 environment, sometimes in ways that negatively impact people. **Deep-rooted racism and anti-Asian**  
11 **rhetoric in Western democracies has been exacerbated as world leaders looked to assign blame**  
12 **for the emergence of the virus** (Wang *et al.*, 2021).

13  
14 Discourses represent a complex network of power that shape how disasters are managed. Meaning is  
15 derived from a multitude of discourses but, most fundamentally, from a dominant discourse (Joye,  
16 2010). This makes discourses the sites of power struggles (Wodak, 2002), and control over discourse a  
17 powerful mechanism for sustaining power (Fairclough, 2001). For instance, where a disaster such as a  
18 famine is articulated as an environmental issue (e.g., result of drought), responses will likely focus on  
19 improving the quality of land. However, should the **disaster** be framed as a political one (e.g., the result  
20 of conflict), solutions will likely focus on ways to address these challenges (e.g., peacebuilding). The  
21 environmental frame, then, has the potential to mask political causes of disaster and keep in place  
22 oppressive sociopolitical processes, whilst political framings suggest political solutions. Depending on  
23 how some populations are constructed, they may be viewed as less deserving of assistance than others  
24 based on race, economic status, the type of disaster experienced, and numerous other conditions  
25 (Méndez *et al.*, 2020; Barreto, 2019; **Ticktin, 2017**).

26  
27 Discourse analyses of the news media have been particularly fruitful in uncovering social relations and  
28 ideological positions of those in power (e.g., Chouliaraki, 2008). This is partly because the news media  
29 is a powerful means of representing peoples, places and events to broad audiences. However, mediated  
30 representations can serve certain agendas that are not typically obvious (Knudsen and Stage, 2015):  
31 nuanced language and labels, which both facilitate and limit knowledge about social phenomena to  
32 structure public perception and cultivate a specific response, are often used (Davis and French, 2008).  
33 Thus, political agendas within the news media operate in very subtle ways and require close analysis  
34 (Pyles *et al.*, 2017).

35  
36 In this paper we examine how the expert news media discursively construct Indigenous peoples in  
37 relation to disasters. To do so we examine articles from two UN-maintained knowledge sharing

38 platforms, PreventionWeb and ReliefWeb. Identifying how the expert news media construct disasters  
39 helps reveal the ideologies present amongst those who hold power. Indigenous peoples have historically  
40 been marginalised and misrepresented by media and other institutions, with very real negative outcomes  
41 for them and their communities (Lucchesi, 2019), but there is limited academic research on disaster  
42 discourses of Indigenous peoples that have focused on the media. This has policy implications:  
43 international policy frameworks and discussions (e.g., 2015 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk  
44 Reduction), promote the decentralisation and localisation of humanitarianism and aid, as well as the  
45 increased participation of Indigenous peoples in disaster management (Hendriks and Boersma, 2019).  
46 These policy shifts theoretically correspond with a shift in power from those traditionally considered  
47 experts (Hilhorst *et al.*, 2020). Untangling how the expert news media represent disasters and  
48 Indigenous peoples, and how discourses change and grow, in the context of policy shifts can help to  
49 understand whether these shifts occur in practice.

50

51 In what follows, **we** continue the literature review before detailing our methodology. **We then** present  
52 our results, including five discourses that emerged from news media reports. We discuss these  
53 discourses within the context of the disaster and humanitarian literature, before concluding.

54

## 55 **2.0 Literature Review**

56

### 57 **2.1 Discourses of disaster**

58

59 Disaster discourses have traditionally been categorized into two areas: the (dominant) hazard paradigm  
60 and the vulnerability paradigm (Hewitt, 1983). The hazard paradigm holds that disasters are abnormal,  
61 environmental events, that require particular measures to return to ‘normalcy’ (Bankoff and Hilhorst,  
62 2009). This implies returning to a set of social, economic, and political relations present before the event  
63 (Bankoff and Hillhorst, 2009). In viewing disasters this way, the existing social and political structures  
64 that render populations vulnerable are masked, while the role of natural processes, such as climate  
65 change, are overstated (Verchik, 2018). Conversely, the vulnerability paradigm views disasters as  
66 political and socially constructed (Hewitt, 1983). Thus, disaster management under this paradigm  
67 focuses on how vulnerability can be reduced **through political actions**, be that through poverty  
68 reduction (Nadiruzzaman and Wrathall, 2015), governance (Hilhorst *et al.*, 2020), or changes in  
69 institutional arrangements (Das and Luthfi, 2017). Thus, **hazard-centric** environmental framings of  
70 disaster are generally concerned with preserving current political systems, whilst a focus on  
71 vulnerability centres social justice **and** change (Douglass and Miller, 2018; **Raju *et al.*, 2022**).

72

73 These discourses, and others like them (see Bankoff, 2019), have implications for how **different**  
74 **stakeholders might govern and manage** disasters. **Viewing disaster through the vulnerability**

75 **paradigm promotes a shift toward disasters as ‘everyone’s responsibility’, a multi-stakeholder**  
76 **endeavour involving a distended network of actors in the management of risk through cross-**  
77 **societal interventions** (Clark-Ginsberg, 2020; Tierney, 2012). **Who is specifically involved in this set**  
78 **of interventions** is blurry and shifting (Meriläinen *et al.*, 2020), but a common theme is the  
79 decentralisation of government responsibilities to local agencies (Curato, 2018a; Wisner *et al.*, 2001) –  
80 a **stark contrast to** traditional, top-down and authoritarian disaster management practices **of the**  
81 **hazard paradigm**. While this can elevate the voices of **local communities and other actors in**  
82 **disaster management** (Curato, 2018a; Hilhorst *et al.*, 2020), **it can also create** problems **for those**  
83 **communities if implemented incorrectly**. Relinquishing state responsibilities to others is one, in that  
84 responsibility is placed on individuals for their socioeconomic conditions, rendering conditions such as  
85 poverty and vulnerability a choice (Chandler and Reid, 2018). **In doing so, those marginalised are**  
86 **responsibilised for the situations they are in: a** hallmark of neoliberalism that has been critiqued in  
87 disaster and development research (Bankoff, 2019; Cheek and Chmutina, 2021). **Another is**  
88 **accountability**: NGOs also have a growing degree of power in disaster governance, but they are not  
89 accountable to a democratic governance structure and their goals can be driven by their donors (Field,  
90 2018; Reid-Henry, 2014). This has been used to critique international western NGOs working in non-  
91 Western contexts as a form of neocolonial interference with the norms and values of non-Western  
92 societies (Sripaoraya, 2017), oftentimes masked behind sentiments of care and compassion (Fassin,  
93 2012). **A third is often a failure to relinquish control. While the vulnerability paradigm pushes**  
94 **primacy of local stakeholders as bastions of knowledge, humanitarians may maintain**  
95 **paternalistic forms of intervention under a rhetoric of ‘care’ which exacerbates inequality,**  
96 **inhibits collective change, and serves colonising agendas** (Murphy, 2015; Tronto, 1993; 2010;  
97 **2013**).

98

## 99 **2.2 Discourses around Indigenous peoples**

100

101 Discourses of Indigenous peoples vary globally. ‘Indigenous’ is a self-identified identity category  
102 broadly understood to be “the assembly of those who have witnessed, been excluded from, and have  
103 survived modernity and imperialism” **as well as other forms of colonialism** (Smith 2007, 114). At  
104 national scales, dominant **state discourses typically** focuses on improving livelihoods of citizens,  
105 although Indigenous peoples are often excluded from these visions (Howitt *et al.*, 2012), in part because  
106 of their positions as minorities in states where they were once sovereign (Smith, 2007). **Thus,** national  
107 development projects account for dominant society interests, but not Indigenous society interests,  
108 leading national projects to replicate colonial patterns that do not address structural inequality  
109 (Cameron, 2012; Young, 2020). The invisibility of Indigenous peoples in these discourses, and their  
110 marginalisation from instruments and institutions of power and policy mean that colonisation is also  
111 masked (Howitt *et al.*, 2012).

112

113 Disaster management discourses often assume the universal relevance and appropriateness of dominant  
114 cultural values, responses and understandings (Veland *et al.*, 2010). For instance, disaster management  
115 may not consider the importance of protecting equipment critical for subsistence (e.g., Kontar *et al.*,  
116 2016), the significance of certain sites or building types in recovery (Huang, 2018), and policies and  
117 planning may include high levels of bureaucracy that places a burden on Indigenous communities with  
118 small workforces (Ristroph, 2019). Thus, these discourses reinforce dominant political and cultural  
119 landscapes, which justify paternalistic and colonial actions that create vulnerability for Indigenous  
120 peoples (Howitt *et al.*, 2012). In this way, standard procedures can cause long-term damage to  
121 Indigenous peoples and their institutions, through erosion of their capacity to deliver governance,  
122 support, meaning and recovery to affected communities (Howitt *et al.*, 2012; Hsu *et al.*, 2015). When  
123 crisis hits, dominant society may use disaster management mechanisms as a means of alienating  
124 Indigenous peoples' property rights for private gain (e.g., Alvarez and Cardenas, 2019). Over the long  
125 term, Indigenous peoples and their interests are often framed as irrelevant to concerns of, for instance,  
126 national development (Lambert and Scott, 2019). Therefore, Indigenous peoples, their priorities,  
127 concerns and knowledge are excluded from disaster-related decision-making processes.

128

129 **Understanding how Indigenous peoples themselves discursively construct disasters is necessary**  
130 **to avoid replicating colonial research practices that silence their perspectives.** We note that  
131 Indigenous peoples and their beliefs are incredibly diverse (Watts, 2013), and have thus sought literature  
132 from various Indigenous scholars. While research by Indigenous scholars about disaster discourses  
133 specifically is limited, there is a significant body of literature by Indigenous researchers that highlights  
134 the separation of the natural and the social as a Western dualism, with many Indigenous groups viewing  
135 the social and the natural as intertwined (Ultramari and Rezende, 2007). Similarly, other Indigenous  
136 researchers point out that Land – alongside other-than-humans and more-than-humans – is sentient and  
137 has agency (Bawaka Country et al., 2013; Museka and Madondo, 2012; Styres, 2019; Todd, 2018;  
138 Viaene, 2021; Watts, 2013; **Yazzie and Baldy, 2018**). This fits with neither of the two disaster  
139 paradigms mentioned earlier, both of which separate the natural and social.

140

### 141 **2.3 Disasters and Indigenous peoples in the Expert News Media**

142

143 Dominant discourses of disaster often frame disasters from a hazard paradigm as spectacular, natural,  
144 isolated events (Gotham, 2017), rather than from a vulnerability paradigm that recognizes their  
145 sociopolitical origins. This feeds a discourse that rationalises Indigenous peoples' vulnerability as an  
146 ordinary component of a global economic, political and social order (Howitt *et al.*, 2012). For instance,  
147 Howitt *et al.*, (2012) critique the dominant, racialized discourses of superiority and power that dominate  
148 disaster management, which overlooks colonisation in the creation of vulnerability. In a similar vein,

149 dominant discourses of disasters have drawn on or reinforced a hierarchy of credibility, in which social  
150 issues and local voices are marginalised in favour of legal and scientific discourses, which possess  
151 strong legitimizing potential and can lead to further marginalisation of those already most marginalised  
152 (Kelman, 2010).

153

154 The news media appears to be a powerful stakeholder that can shape discourses of Indigenous peoples,  
155 **often in ways that negatively impact Indigenous peoples.** The news media frequently reduces the  
156 complexity of Indigenous histories to ‘problems’, depoliticizing deep discussions about power to  
157 bureaucratic concerns of policy and procedure (Campbell, 2016). Indigenous peoples are also subject  
158 to silencing and misrepresentation in the media through caricatures (Said, 1978; Guernsey, 2021). The  
159 news media can be a space to resist dominant discourses (Myers *et al.*, 2021), but this is rarely the case.  
160 Instead, the news media has often been to normalise dominant cultural assumptions, and to grant or  
161 deny framing power to some actors over others, rendering it a powerful means of controlling how certain  
162 groups and events are represented (Carvalho, 2010; Entman, 2007; Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 2011).

163

164 Limited research suggests that this representation extends to reporting of disasters, which shapes and  
165 attributes responsibility, fault, culpability, blame, guilt, victimage, and liability (Seeger and Ulmer,  
166 2002). For instance, through emphasising their victim status and connection to the environment,  
167 Indigenous peoples have been used to highlight the urgency of climate change in ways that do not  
168 consider their political perspectives (Willow, 2009). How suffering is reported also has ramifications  
169 for the representation of certain groups. On the one hand, mediation of vulnerability and suffering can  
170 mobilise awareness and political action around issues that would otherwise go unnoticed by global  
171 audiences (Durham, 2017). However, such reports can be voyeuristic – something that disaster  
172 journalism has been critiqued for (Ong, 2015; Sontag, 2003). In particular, ‘bodily vulnerability’  
173 (usually mediated through imagery of women of colour) is used as a soft power vehicle that circulates  
174 rapidly in global media (Butler, 2004). It is also a means of addressing contested histories, through  
175 defining what is the proper past and future of a society (e.g., who is innocent), whilst affectively  
176 charging news stories (Knudsen and Stage, 2015).

177

### 178 **3.0 Methodology**

179

180 To analyse the expert news media, we adopted critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA is a social  
181 constructivist analysis technique that recognises that language is not neutral (Joye *et al.*, 2009) and is  
182 centrally concerned with power (Fairclough, 2003). CDA has been described as the “single most  
183 authoritative line of research” in analysing news media (Carvalho, 2008, 162). Specifically, it highlights  
184 “patterns of domination whereby one group is dominated by another” (Philips, 2007; 288). It moves  
185 beyond textual analysis, to include wider systematic analysis of relations between discourse and other



186 elements of social processes (Fairclough, 1989), as well as intertextuality, whereby the blended  
187 environment in which different kind of texts (and speakers) influence each other to legitimise a certain  
188 worldview (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999). Ultimately, CDA facilitates the uncovering of political,  
189 economic and cultural hegemonies that perpetuate injustice (Pyles, 2011). Whilst there are critiques  
190 around the limits of social constructivist analyses of disasters, specifically they do not contribute to  
191 improving disaster practice (Wisner *et al.*, 2004), we instead follow numerous authors (e.g., Chipangura  
192 *et al.*, 2016; Tierney, 2007) who highlight the importance of constructivist approaches for understanding  
193 how disasters interact with social processes such as poverty and inequality. For these authors, language  
194 can shape what is possible and structure policy options that have a very real impact on disaster  
195 management.

196

197 We define the expert news media in disasters as news media that is created by and for disaster  
198 management practitioners. We recognise that the term ‘expert’ is a loaded one. In the context of this  
199 research, we adopt a normative definition of experts and expertise (Boyce, 2006), as our aim was to  
200 untangle discourses amongst those who hold power in global disaster management. As such, it was not  
201 our intention (nor our place as settler/coloniser researchers) to target our analysis at Indigenous sources.  
202 To identify relevant articles, we take a similar approach to Chmutina *et al.*, (2019) in their study of  
203 language and disasters. Like them, we used PreventionWeb and additionally ReliefWeb to source  
204 articles. These are both collaborative knowledge sharing platforms targeting disaster policymakers,  
205 practitioners, and researchers (Murray *et al.*, 2015). They cross the disaster spectrum: PreventionWeb  
206 focuses on issues of disaster risk reduction, including mitigation and prevention, and ReliefWeb mainly  
207 focuses on issues of emergency and humanitarian response. Both are managed by UN agencies,  
208 PreventionWeb the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), and ReliefWeb the UN Office  
209 for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, but the sites reflect a variety of voices as content is  
210 provided by disaster stakeholders themselves. Therefore, there can be room for counter-hegemonic  
211 stances to be represented (Djalante, 2012). These sites mostly publish in English, although some articles  
212 are in Spanish. We did not limit our search by language.

213

214 These two databases have thousands of articles. After conducting numerous test searches to ensure we  
215 were not excluding key populations or types of disaster, we decided to use the key word search terms  
216 ‘Indigenous’, ‘Tribe’, ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘First Nation’ in the news media section of PreventionWeb.  
217 These terms ensured that contexts in which the term ‘Indigenous’ is inappropriate was also included in  
218 analyses (Carlson *et al.*, 2014). We found 485 articles using these search terms. On ReliefWeb, we used  
219 the same search terms with the addition of ‘disaster’, which returned 945 articles. We added ‘disaster’  
220 to the ReliefWeb search to ensure that articles were specifically covering disasters rather than broader  
221 development initiatives. Since we aim to examine some of the growing discourses of Indigenous  
222 peoples, we focused on the time period from 2015-2020 as the start of the Sendai Framework for Risk

223 and Disaster Reduction was in 2015. This framework is one of the ways the UNDRR has supported  
224 Indigenous peoples' participation in disaster management through calls for increased decentralisation  
225 of knowledge and resources, and a recognition of the need for tailored approaches in Indigenous  
226 contexts (Lambert and Scott, 2019). To meet the inclusion criteria, each article had to provide a narrative  
227 of a disaster (e.g., conflict, earthquake, climate change) and include at minimum one paragraph focused  
228 on Indigenous peoples. We did not prescribe what type of disaster was to be included, nor who was or  
229 was not Indigenous. 31 articles were retained for CDA following this inclusion criteria, which is  
230 standard given that sample sizes for CDA vary, with some studies adopting a sample of only one or two  
231 (Sengul, 2019; Van Dijk, 1993).

232

### 233 3.1 Analysis

234

235 To conduct the CDA, a framework was created, informed by previous CDAs (e.g., Cox *et al.*, 2008;  
236 Davis and French, 2008; Heikilla *et al.*, 2014). This included typical CDA concerns: the use (and  
237 meaning behind the use) of construction of in- and out- groups (Cox *et al.*, 2008; Joye, 2010; Wodak,  
238 2001), modalities, presuppositions, passive voice, vagueness, overcompletedness, intertextuality,  
239 amongst others (Olaniyan and Adeniji, 2015). We included analysis of embedded forms of media, such  
240 as photography, given it is a powerful means of communicating bodily vulnerability (Durham, 2017).  
241 We additionally coded articles based on countries of focus, nationality of author(s), and the location of  
242 the headquarters of news agencies. We included codes for authors who self-identified as Indigenous.

243

244 Articles were read several times for familiarity (Cox *et al.*, 2008). Analysis was initially conducted in  
245 QSR NVivo, before moving to manual analysis, a technique for lessening distance between the  
246 researcher and the data (Paulus and Lester, 2016). Once initial codes and themes were established, text  
247 was reread to tie emerging findings to ongoing socio-political processes, such as neoliberalism and  
248 settler colonialism (Carvalho, 2013). This was an iterative process that combined deductive and  
249 inductive approaches to coding, both of which are important for CDAs. Deductive coding made use of  
250 typical approaches used within CDAs, while inductive coding allowed findings to emerge, which was  
251 important given the nascency of this research (Willey-Sthapit *et al.*, 2020), as well as the imperativeness  
252 to include diverse constructions of disaster. Recognising these **diverse constructions of disaster is**  
253 **useful because their inclusion or exclusion within the expert news media is an indication of the**  
254 **level of hegemony of Western disaster paradigms.**

255

### 256 4.0 Results

257

258 Fifteen countries were the focus of news articles, with Australia garnering the most focus (23%),  
259 followed by Brazil (13%). Most authors self-identified as non-Indigenous Australians (23%), followed

260 by non-Indigenous US citizens (13%). The only self-identified Indigenous authors were First Nations  
 261 people from Canada (3%), and Aboriginal people from Australia (6%), all of whom were writing about  
 262 their own contexts. The headquarters for each news agency were mostly based in the U.K. (29%),  
 263 followed by Australia (26%). The majority of articles were sourced from The Conversation (41%),  
 264 followed by Thomson Reuters Foundation (22%). All articles were written in English. The types of  
 265 disaster included were broad and ranged from slow-onset disasters such as famine and sea level rise, to  
 266 sudden-onset hazards such as floods, pandemics and forced migration.

267  
 268 We found five discourses: two dominant discourses of natural disasters and humanitarian intervention,  
 269 and less dominant discourses of systems of oppression, technocracy and self-determination. Below we  
 270 describe the core features of each discourse and illustrate these with verbatim extracts. Table 1 provides  
 271 an overview of the features and strategies used in each discourse.

272  
 273 **Table 1:** Overview of the features used in each of the five discourses we identified.

<i>Discourse</i>	<i>Features</i>
<i>Natural disasters</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Focus on environmental phenomena</li> <li>- Disasters are depoliticised</li> <li>- Vulnerability is rationalised</li> <li>- Sense of urgency around the state of the environment</li> </ul>
<i>Systems of oppression</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assigns blame to systems of oppression rather than individuals</li> <li>- Highlights the normalcy of disasters</li> <li>- Highlights colonialism as a root cause of disaster</li> <li>- Sense of urgency around political situation</li> </ul>
<i>Humanitarian intervention</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- NGOs framed as knowledgeable, <b>competent and caring</b></li> <li>- Indigenous peoples framed as suffering and/or passive</li> <li>- Government is incompetent and/or oppressive</li> <li>- Depoliticisation of humanitarianism</li> <li>- Emphasis on participation, empowerment and capacity building</li> <li>- Sense of urgency around disaster</li> </ul>
<i>Technocracy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Government deals with disaster <b>and cares for Indigenous peoples</b></li> <li>- Indigenous peoples are innocent</li> <li>- Calls for increased governance of people</li> <li>- Attempts to remain neutral</li> <li>- Highlights terror of disaster</li> <li>- Indigenous peoples face the same difficulties as everyone else</li> <li>- Separates Indigenous knowledge from Indigenous peoples</li> </ul>
<i>Self-determination</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Indigenous peoples are knowledgeable, capable and aware of their political situations</li> <li>- <b>Indigenous peoples care about their communities</b></li> <li>- Avoids voyeuristic portrayals of suffering</li> <li>- Current emergency management is inadequate</li> <li>- Government is inadequate and/or performative</li> </ul>

274  
 275 In the next section we describe each of these five discourses in more detail. We note that no article fitted  
 276 neatly under any one discourse, and instead each article engaged with a variety of discourses.

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#### 4.1 Natural disasters

The natural disasters discourse viewed disasters as primarily environmental phenomena, and was the dominant way through which disasters were discursively constructed. The naturalness of disasters was evidenced through focus on environmental processes. For instance, in the context of the Australian wildfires, Barlow and Lees (23/08/2019) write the following,

*“[T]he intensity of a fire does not necessarily predict its severity. The lack of natural adaptation to deal with wildfires make rainforest species incredibly sensitive. Even a low intensity wildfire can kill half the trees. While small trees are initially most susceptible, larger ones often die in subsequent years leading to an eventual loss of more than half of the forest’s carbon stocks. These large trees hold the most carbon, and subsequent regrowth of pioneer species is no compensation – once-burned, forests hold 25% less carbon than unburned forests even after three decades of regrowth.”*

Focus on environmental processes depoliticised disasters, **emphasised by** textual silences about disasters’ social and political origins. Smith *et al.*, (14/05/2020), writing on the COVID-19 pandemic is an example here, when they state that, “COVID-19 is the first global pandemic caused by a coronavirus.” This statement focuses on the hazard (**i.e., the biomedical aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic**), not the broader systems shaping vulnerability and access to healthcare.

Vulnerability was sometimes mentioned under this discourse, but when it was it was rationalised. For example, Godoy (27/09/2017), writing about earthquakes in Mexico claims that, “[t]hese are families who, because of *their condition*, have long occupied spaces in deplorable conditions (emphasis added).” Thus, vulnerability was mentioned, but the processes behind it were masked. Other articles also mentioned vulnerability, but reduced it to factors such as geographic location, age, and ability, treating these factors as inherently vulnerable rather than vulnerable because of how institutional structures marginalize these factors. In some instances, text was complemented with aerial imagery of small settlements surrounded by greenery or large bodies of water, as well as buildings on the edge of cliffs. Such imagery elevates the importance of the environment and reduces vulnerability to elements such as remoteness, proximity to potential hazards, and poor building structures, without recognising broader **processes**.

Authors engaging with the natural disasters discourse proposed solutions that were environmental in nature. In the context of wildfires in Australia, Alexandra and Bowman (06/01/2020) propose the following,

313 *“One model we could look to is Landcare, which has enjoyed 30 years of bipartisan support. Funded*  
314 *and supported by governments, local, semi-autonomous, self-directed groups aim to take a*  
315 *sustainable approach to land management through on-ground projects such as habitat restoration*  
316 *and improving biodiversity.”*

317  
318 Proposing environmental solutions was additionally coupled with the creation of a sense of urgency  
319 around environmental change. McDonnell (21/06/2015) highlights this in the context of Vanuatu:  
320 “While the science on increasingly intense tropical cyclones around the world is complex, as these  
321 experts have warned: the future doesn’t look good for locations that are prone to natural disasters.”

322

#### 323 **4.2 Humanitarian Intervention**

324 The humanitarian discourse was also a dominant discourse that justified humanitarian intervention.  
325 Here, (mainly external) NGOs were framed as knowledgeable and competent. Godoy’s (27/09/2017)  
326 article on earthquakes in Mexico, is an example of this dynamic, describing how “Fernández, a  
327 member of the non-governmental “Hadi” [...] Otomí Indigenous Community, told IPS that  
328 humanitarian aid received so far came from non-governmental organisations and individual citizens.”  
329 In tandem with NGOs as saviours, Indigenous peoples were framed as suffering, helpless, and lacking  
330 agency. In their article on Namibians and drought-related migration Harrisberg (09/03/2020)  
331 exemplifies this:

332

333 *“As rural Namibians move to cities to escape the worst drought in nearly a century, many find*  
334 *themselves navigating a no-man’s land between over-saturated slums and the parched farmland they*  
335 *hope to one day return to.”*

336

337 This statement shows the lack of agency Indigenous peoples have, as they are controlled by external  
338 factors and cannot live in the places they want to. Text describing the suffering of Indigenous peoples  
339 was often complemented with portrait photographs of them, especially of Indigenous mothers and  
340 children, usually with serious expressions. Many authors engaging with this discourse additionally  
341 framed the government as incompetent and/or oppressive, thus justifying NGO action. Fraser’s  
342 (02/06/2020) writing on the COVID-19 response in Peru serves as an example:

343

344 *“In Iquitos and other places where government aid has been sluggish because of red tape or*  
345 *corruption, church groups have stepped in to provide crucial medical supplies, as well as food and*  
346 *other essential items for people whose scant incomes vanished when the government imposed a strict*  
347 *quarantine and curfew.”*

348

349 In this quote the government’s curfew, red tape, and corruption a damaging process to Indigenous  
350 peoples that NGOs must overcome. Emphasis on the extent of partnerships and collaborations was  
351 coupled with vagueness about their actions. For instance, the following excerpt by Bhandari  
352 (20/04/2020) in an article on climate change in Vanuatu, demonstrates the numerous collaborators  
353 involved in disaster risk reduction but remains vague about the nature of involvement:  
354

355 *“Global women’s rights organisation, ActionAid is collaborating with Shifting the Power*  
356 *Coalition (StPC), a regional alliance of 13 women-led civil society organisations from six Pacific*  
357 *Forum member countries, WWW, Women I Tok Tok Tugeta (WITTT), a coalition of women leader*  
358 *groups, and the National Disaster Management System in supporting local women through training,*  
359 *network building and research to ensure women’s rights and needs are addressed in climate change*  
360 *and humanitarian disaster response.”*

361  
362 There were silences around the politics of humanitarianism within this discourse, which was also  
363 coupled with the creation of a sense of urgency around the disaster (as an event, rather than a process),  
364 Fraser’s (02/06/2020) writing about Peru, exemplifies this: “[t]his is a disaster, and it will be a massacre,  
365 not only because of the virus, but because of official incompetence.” These two components – silences  
366 and urgency – worked together to eliminate the need to consider political elements of disaster  
367 management by masking the negative political aspects of humanitarian intervention, while emphasising  
368 the need for immediate action.

369

### 370 **4.3 Systems of Oppression**

371 Another way disasters were discursively constructed was through a less-dominant systems of  
372 oppression discourse, which highlighted the interlocking systems of oppression that created  
373 vulnerability to disasters. For example, in an article on the COVID-19 pandemic, Seymour (22/04/2020)  
374 highlights that, *“Canada’s unequal health system may make remote Indigenous communities more*  
375 *vulnerable to the coronavirus”*. Also in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic but focused on Brazil,  
376 Angelo (21/04/2020) writes that *“[t]he Guarani Kaiowa are regularly displaced by agribusiness,*  
377 *loggers and drug traffickers, and violent clashes are common, leaving them with barely enough land to*  
378 *survive.”* Although both authors are writing about the COVID-19 pandemic, they highlight processes  
379 that contribute to Indigenous peoples’ vulnerability, such as inequality and dispossession of land. In  
380 doing so, other actors (e.g., government, private companies) were constructed as powerful. Importantly,  
381 across the concourse, this was the only way the private sector was framed.

382

383 Other authors engaging with this discourse highlighted the normalcy of disasters. Writing about  
384 COVID-19 in Australia, Smith *et al.*, (14/05/2020) state the following:

385

386 “The COVID-19 crisis adds to existing pressures on remote communities. Families already live with  
387 regular loss of life, frequent funerals and an overhanging grief that contributes to intergenerational  
388 trauma”.

389

390 This normalization highlights the already precarious situation many live in that contributes to  
391 vulnerability to the COVID-19 pandemic. The past was often referred to, highlighting the role of  
392 history, and colonisation in particular:

393

394 “Aboriginal peoples live with a sense of perpetual grief. It stems from the as-yet-unresolved matter of  
395 the invasion and subsequent colonisation of our homelands. [...] While there are many instances  
396 of colonial trauma inflicted upon Aboriginal peoples – including the removal of children and the  
397 suppression of culture, ceremony and language – dispossession of Country remains paramount. [...] Since colonisation, many Indigenous people have been removed from their land, and their cultural  
398 fire management practices have been constrained by authorities, informed by Western views of fire  
399 and land management. In this way, settler-colonialism is not historical, but a lived experience. And  
400 the growing reality of climate change adds to these anxieties.” (Williamson *et al.*, 09/01/2020).

401

402  
403 While the natural disasters discourse led to proposed solutions that were environmental in nature,  
404 solutions under this discourse were primarily political. A sense of urgency was created around the  
405 political situation of Indigenous peoples, combined with the use of modalities to highlight the  
406 consequences of a lack of political change, as Baldo (07/01/2020) writes,

407

408 “Without a radical reversal of the destructive policies that Bashir’s regime used to manipulate  
409 tribal allegiances, this type of deadly inter-communal conflict will continue to erupt throughout  
410 Sudan.”

411

#### 412 **4.4 Technocracy**

413

414 The technocracy discourse constructed the government and its agencies as experts that are competent  
415 in dealing with disasters. An example of this is Smith *et al.*, (14/05/2020), an article on the COVID-19  
416 pandemic in Australia:

417

418 “People are appreciative of the efforts made by local police to keep them safe and connected. The  
419 mail is taken 50 kilometres to the Central Arnhem Highway turn-off. It is handed over to police and  
420 taken to Maranboy police station, 10 kilometres from Barunga. A community representative comes to  
421 the police station to collect it.”

422

423 Here, detailed and positive accounts of police action justify disaster management as an activity to be  
424 carried out by government and its agencies, while framing Indigenous peoples as passive. Where  
425 conflict was involved, it was reduced to “*tribal clashes*” (Sudan Tribune, 09/01/2020). In contrast to  
426 vulnerability perspectives that identify the significance of local knowledge and expertise, the  
427 technocracy discourse frames people as lacking in capacity and/or understanding around disaster  
428 management, with external ‘experts’ and authorities as responsible and capable. Together, this justifies  
429 government action.

430

431 Authors engaging in technocracy discourses attempted to remain neutral by remaining vague about the  
432 roles of various actors, as highlighted by the Sudan Tribune (09/01/2020), who used the passive voice  
433 to avoid assigning blame or responsibility in conflict in Darfur, stating, “*the problem that occurred in*  
434 *El Geneina has two dimensions: the first is the politicization of tribes in Darfur states, and the second*  
435 *is the proliferation of weapons in the region.*”

436

437 Indigenous peoples were constructed as facing the same challenges as everyone as highlighted here by  
438 Kanngieser (21/10/2018) in her article on Nauru and climate change: “*Everyone on Nauru – Indigenous*  
439 *Nauruans and refugees alike – is experiencing the impacts of one the greatest social, economic and*  
440 *political threats faced by the world today: global environmental change.*” Despite the unification of  
441 Indigenous peoples with non-Indigenous peoples under this discourse, the importance of Indigenous  
442 knowledge was still recognised. However, it was discussed in isolation of Indigenous peoples, and used  
443 for non-Indigenous priorities. This was especially evident in Farrell’s (29/12/2019) article in the context  
444 of Australian wildfires:

445

446 “*There are two significant advantages of traditional burning that make it a good fit for property*  
447 *protection. Firstly, it can be implemented safely close to assets with minimal equipment. The second*  
448 *advantage is that it has an ecological end-state as an objective, often aiming to create an open, park-*  
449 *like vegetation structure that has much less potential for damaging crown fires.*”

450

451 In this case, rather than being directed towards the benefits of Indigenous peoples, Indigenous practices  
452 of traditional burning is operationalized as a cheaper and more ecologically friendly practice for  
453 supporting Australian property owners.

454

455 For solutions, narratives around overpopulation, migration and urbanisation with frames of civil society  
456 as incompetent led to calls for the increased governance of people. **Writing in the context of landslides**  
457 **in Bangladesh**, Amas (25/06/2019) **demonstrates this sentiment, stating:** “*Disaster risk experts and*  
458 *local groups say the dangers are exacerbated by communities themselves, through rapid and unplanned*  
459 *urbanisation.*”



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#### 4.5 Self-determination

The self-determination discourse centred Indigenous peoples' experiences. One way this was done was by opening articles with describing Indigenous peoples' experiences. Indigenous authors Williamson *et al.*, (09/01/2020) writing on, bushfires in Australia, demonstrates this:

*“How do you support people forever attached to a landscape after an inferno tears through their homelands: decimating native food sources, burning through ancient scarred trees and destroying ancestral and totemic plants and animals? The fact is, the experience of Aboriginal peoples in the fire crisis engulfing much of Australia is vastly different to non-Indigenous peoples.”*

This excerpt and others like it highlight the unique experiences of Indigenous peoples, which worked in tandem with frames of current disaster management as inappropriate to the context. Elbein's (01/07/2019) article on storms in the USA shows this:

*“[W]hen aid does become available, records can be a problem. “Our Native American producers aren't as accustomed to the detailed recordkeeping that non-Indian producers do on a regular basis,” Ducheneaux said, “because we don't have the access to capital in the same way, which would require reporting your livestock.” Because Indians are less able to get loans, Ducheneaux explained, they are also less likely to carry through on the sort of recordkeeping that becomes vital once disaster strikes”.*

In contrast to the technocracy discourse, this discourse framed government as performative, as noted by Goering (04/06/2019) in the context of drought in the USA:

*““As we looked at the future and where we were going to get water reliably, sustainably, we were really looking within,” said Harasick at [Los Angeles Department of Water and Power]'s high-rise headquarters, where pebble gardens filled with succulents border a reflective pool.”*

This is similar to the ways the humanitarian intervention discourse framed government as incompetent but is more nuanced in that authors include quotes from government officials, which they undermine **through** parody.

Authors engaging in this discourse did highlight unique circumstances that made Indigenous peoples more vulnerable to some disasters. However, in doing so they managed to avoid voyeuristic accounts of suffering. Seymour's (22/04/2020) article on the COVID-19 pandemic is an example. In it, Indigenous peoples' suffering is not described in detail, and individuals are not mentioned. Instead, Seymour (22/04/2020) highlights their knowledge and expertise as a mental health first aid First Nations co-facilitator:

495 *“As a mental health first aid First Nations co-facilitator, I have witnessed first-hand many tragedies*  
496 *within remote First Nations communities like Eabametoong (Fort Hope), Eagle Lake and Lac Seul.*  
497 *Homes can be unsafe, overcrowding is a huge concern, there is no clean running water, young girls*  
498 *are vulnerable to trafficking and there is a lack of timely access to health-care.”*  
499

500 Many authors engaging with the self-determination discourse were Indigenous, but some were not.  
501 These non-Indigenous authors typically adopted an approach of ‘learning with the reader’. An example  
502 of this is Goering (04/06/2019), writing about drought in the USA, where they extensively quoted and  
503 credited Indigenous peoples, elevating the importance of listening to Indigenous peoples’ **experiences**.  
504 This shift in expertise reflects a recognition of Indigenous peoples as knowledgeable, capable and aware  
505 of their political situations. As Stacey (23/06/2019) writes in the context of wildfires,

506  
507 *“Nearly five years after the Tsilhqot’in Nation’s landmark Supreme Court of Canada judgment, the*  
508 *Nation has laid out a detailed path for partnership with B.C. and Canada to ensure that Indigenous*  
509 *jurisdiction is recognized and supported in emergency management.”*  
510

511 Solutions under this discourse were not explicitly stated but, as disasters were framed as political, it  
512 follows that solutions were also political and therefore similar to those under the systems of oppression  
513 discourse. Authors also alluded to the complexity of finding solutions, as exemplified by Bond and  
514 Whop (02/04/2020) in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia: *“[I]n a nation that*  
515 *steadfastly refuses to meaningfully recognise Indigenous sovereignty, this clearly is a bigger problem*  
516 *than public health and one likely to linger far longer than the coronavirus crisis”*  
517

## 518 **5.0 Discussion**

519

### 520 **5.1 Discourses interlink to create two meta-discourses: the dominance of the environment and** 521 **politicizing disaster**

522

523 The five media discourses of Indigenous peoples and disaster – natural disasters, humanitarian  
524 intervention, systems of oppression, technocracy, and self-determination – appear to be entangled. The  
525 natural disasters discourse worked with the humanitarian intervention and technocratic discourses to  
526 create a depoliticized discourse on dominance of the environment. A second stream of discourses, self-  
527 determination and systems of oppression, work together to create a discourse that politicizes disaster.  
528 Further, some articles blended both the natural disasters and systems of oppression discourses as a part  
529 of their narrative structure, using environmental phenomena as a means to discuss political struggles.

530

531 Environmental discourse gave focus to the physical processes that create hazards (particularly global  
532 climate change), whilst minimising political and historical processes that create vulnerability. The  
533 mention of carbon storage is an example. Carbon storage is an example of climate change mitigation  
534 aimed at reducing the occurrence of future hazards that are driven by climate change. This emphasizes  
535 the importance of hazards, particularly climate change, over vulnerability in shaping risk. The mention  
536 of carbon stores being destroyed by wildfires also constructs disaster-affected places as crucial to all  
537 humanity, rather than merely to Indigenous peoples affected by wildfires; a discursive framing that  
538 could justify outside action that may or may not support Indigenous populations. As Erickson (2020)  
539 argues, discourses that portray environmental change as the defining problem of all humanity legitimise  
540 approaches that dispossess Indigenous peoples of their land. Here, the natural disasters and technocracy  
541 discourse complement each other, as the technocracy discourse unites Indigenous peoples and settlers  
542 in the face of environmental change. Overall, by bringing in global risks and climate mitigation, authors  
543 sideline Indigenous peoples' experience, potentially pathing a justification for greater management of  
544 Indigenous lands **in the interest of the global** community. In this way, Indigenous lands are constructed  
545 as a global commons.

546  
547 These discourses aligned with other studies on how the environment is treated as the cause for disasters.  
548 Significantly, the ways climate change discourse justified focusing on natural processes (Kelman *et al.*,  
549 2016), the naturalisation of conflict (Branch, 2018), and focusing on who is vulnerable rather than why  
550 (Cararro *et al.*, 2021; Ribot, 2014). Therefore, the 'natural disasters' discourse does not exclude  
551 vulnerability, but rather adopts a narrow definition of it, perhaps one that would be termed 'exposure',  
552 'physical vulnerability' or 'environmental vulnerability' in other contexts (e.g., Boruff and Cutter,  
553 2007; Ford *et al.*, 2006).

554  
555 However, in contrast to previous studies, we find less dominant discourses of systems of oppression  
556 and self-determination were used together to highlight the political causes of disasters. In assigning  
557 responsibility to systems, the deep-rooted and systematic nature of Indigenous peoples' oppression was  
558 evident. By doing this, reporters avoided becoming entangled within the blame rhetoric that some  
559 critique as hindering addressing structural inequalities (Young, 2006). Both discourses created strong  
560 links between present day conditions and historical processes by being specific. In this regard, Baldo's  
561 (07/01/2020) piece **about conflict in Sudan** was particularly significant as it was the only one that tied  
562 conflict to historical and political processes, thus implying that civil society was not responsible. These  
563 discourses did not deny environmental change as contributing to disaster, but rather positioned it as one  
564 of many factors that interact with ongoing settler colonialism (Guernsey, 2021). This is contrary to  
565 dominant discourses of disaster in the media, which favour portrayal of dramatic hazards, rather than  
566 slower, long-lasting processes of vulnerability (Curato, 2018b). It is also different to much mainstream  
567 media, which does not focus on colonialism in Indigenous contexts (Walker *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, a

568 minority of expert news media – most of these were authored by Indigenous peoples and focused on  
569 Australia and Canada – appear to challenge dominant discourses about both disasters and Indigenous  
570 peoples. These less dominant discourses differ to findings of others, such as Wilkes *et al.*, (2010) and  
571 Roosvall and Tegelberg (2015) who critique media for omitting the political perspectives of Indigenous  
572 peoples in environmental issues. They align, instead, with discourses in fields such as disaster  
573 anthropology and political ecology, that view disasters as socially constructed.

574

## 575 **5.2 The limited role of the private sector**

576

577 **Across all discourses there was no real acknowledgement of the complex role of the private sector**  
578 **in disasters. The systems of oppression and self-determination discourses painted a simplistic view**  
579 **of the private sector, portraying the sector as unregulated and free to do what it likes, often as**  
580 **part of extractive industries and agribusiness. There were textual silences in the other discourses**  
581 **about the role of the private sector, giving limited attention to its role. As others (e.g., Meriläinen,**  
582 **2020) note, this lack of attention to the private sector may be a problem because it fails to account**  
583 **for the potentially transformative role the private sector can have in risk management, and the**  
584 **role that the government can have in enabling risk reduction and limiting risk creation. For**  
585 **example, while Angelo (21/04/2020) highlights the role of agribusiness, loggers and drug**  
586 **traffickers in Brazil in displacing Indigenous peoples, the reporter details how they are enabled**  
587 **to do so by what is in essence a complicit government (Ioris, 2020). Our findings of the limited**  
588 **and unidimensional view of private sector aligns with broader research on the private sector in**  
589 **disaster management, which shows that it is only superficially engaged in it (Blackburn and**  
590 **Pelling, 2018). We therefore call for deeper examination to reveal how governments work with**  
591 **the private sector, whether this acts to prioritise economic growth or, as Parthasarathy (2018),**  
592 **suggests delve into how current neoliberal global political economy prioritises economic growth**  
593 **by working with private for-profit companies and leaves non-profit NGOs and civil society to fill**  
594 **in the gaps.**

595

## 596 **5.3 Conflicting roles of the government**

597 These media framings have important implications for the role of the state. The humanitarian and  
598 technocracy discourse aligned with the ‘natural disasters’ discourse and portrayed Indigenous peoples  
599 as vulnerable and helpless. The difference between these discourses hinged on how the government was  
600 portrayed. In the humanitarian discourse, the government was constructed as oppressive and/or  
601 incompetent, necessitating humanitarian intervention knowledgeable and competent from NGOs.  
602 Overall, the humanitarian discourse constructed humanitarian intervention as both necessary and  
603 benevolent, depoliticising it.

604

605 These implications are consistent with those of others focused on the shift from government to  
606 governance in disaster, **including** the hollowing out of the national level in disaster management  
607 (Hendriks and Boersma, 2019), **and shifts** in focus from the state to the individual in humanitarianism  
608 (Reid-Henry, 2014). The shrinking role of the state is a hallmark of neoliberalism, and thus its principles  
609 likely underlie much of the humanitarian discourse. We see this through the use of phrases such as  
610 ‘participation’, ‘empowerment’ and ‘capacity building’, which suggests that disaster management is  
611 being decentralised and localised from the state to the individual (Pyles, 2011; Tierney, 2015). Some  
612 further argue that the language of participation and collaboration disguises the ways that state and/or  
613 international power is extended into the peoples and communities that are to be ‘empowered’ (Fache,  
614 2014; Nadasdy, 2005), which could be the case here given the vagueness around the nature of  
615 collaboration with local NGOs. Likewise, the necessariness and benevolence of humanitarian  
616 discourses is consistent with various scholars who have long critiqued the depoliticising nature of  
617 humanitarianism (e.g., Ong, 2019), as well as those who argue that neoliberal forces are extended  
618 through populist media discourse during disaster (e.g., Pyles *et al.*, 2017).

619  
620 Conversely, the technocracy discourse constructed the government as responsible and competent,  
621 eliminating the need for humanitarian intervention. In line with the ‘natural disasters’ discourse,  
622 disasters were portrayed as natural, while the role of the state in disaster creation was masked; a problem  
623 when the state is actively involved in sustaining vulnerability (Huang, 2018; Lucchesi, 2019; Walch,  
624 2018). This was especially evident where conflict was framed as premised on ethnicity, which is an  
625 oversimplification that masks processes such as militarisation, border politics, systemic marginality,  
626 amongst others (Abusharef, 2010). Thus, the technocracy discourse lacked any interrogation of how  
627 vulnerability was produced, rendering it a technical problem to be addressed by disaster ‘experts’  
628 targeting interventions in passive, local communities (Carraro *et al.*, 2021; Mikulewicz, 2019).

629  
630 Some articles within the technocracy discourse also portrayed Indigenous peoples as facing the same  
631 challenges as other groups (e.g., Kanngieser, 21/10/2018). As previously mentioned, this reinforces the  
632 importance of the environment. However, it does more than that too: by uniting people against a threat,  
633 people are portrayed as the same, erasing their unique histories and differential vulnerability  
634 (Chaturvedi and Doyle, 2016; Davis and Todd, 2017). This potentially paves the way for responses to  
635 disaster risk that are not cognizant of differential circumstances of Indigenous peoples, separating and  
636 operationalizing Indigenous disaster management knowledge from Indigenous peoples.

637  
638 The self-determination discourse was the only discourse that acknowledged the agency and expertise  
639 of Indigenous peoples and did not render them a spectacle for the settler gaze (Daigle, 2017). Here  
640 neither governments nor external NGOs were constructed as necessary. The self-determination  
641 discourse portrayed government as neglectful of Indigenous peoples. However, authors took this further

642 to suggest performative governance (Ding, 2020) is being enacted. This is where the state theatrically  
643 deploys symbols (e.g., statements, signs) to foster an impression of good governance to its citizens  
644 (Ding, 2020). Performative governance explains the inclusion of cultural approaches to emergency  
645 management within the technocracy discourse. While the technocracy discourse constructs the  
646 government as caring and responsive to Indigenous peoples' needs, for instance through its support for  
647 Indigenous knowledge, the self-determination discourse counteracts this by recognising government  
648 action, but constructing it as performative, rather than substantive. Our finding aligns with others, e.g.,  
649 Sylvander (2021), who argue that states often create policies that appear to respond to Indigenous  
650 demands but rather serve a neoliberal state agenda, thus running in opposition to meaningful autonomy  
651 for Indigenous peoples. However, many Indigenous groups do advocate for meaningful government  
652 action nationally and internationally (e.g., Whyte, 2020; Young, 2020). What appears missing from this  
653 discourse, then, is the meaningful and substantive action that governments can take with respect to  
654 Indigenous peoples' self-determination.

655

#### 656 **5.4 Care as a means of governance**

657 Cutting across dominant discourses was the use of care as a form of governance. **Care is a slippery**  
658 **concept (Bellacasa 2017), but what emerged in our findings is humanitarian care, specifically the**  
659 **processes through which intervention in Indigenous settings is justified through care for Indigenous**  
660 **peoples, usually in terms of attention to Indigenous peoples' survival over political concerns. Time and**  
661 **time** again, both governments and NGOs were constructed as caring for Indigenous peoples, supported  
662 though imagery of women and children, which strengthened the innocence and victim status of  
663 Indigenous peoples (Mostafanezhad, 2014). The reduction of children's bodies as apolitical subjects  
664 without agency is a common means of gendering vulnerability. As Hesford and Lewis (2016) argue,  
665 doing so acts to create a rescue narrative under the guise of humanitarianism. Sentiments of care also  
666 work to condition processes of control and structure of colonial violence, when enacted by states  
667 (Chhotray, 2014; Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskane, 2017) and NGOs (Fassin, 2012; Kurusawa, 2013).

668

669 Here we see these processes at play: as imagery of bodily vulnerability is a powerful means of  
670 addressing contested histories and the proper future and past (Knudsen and Stage, 2015), such imagery  
671 reinforces a global order in which Indigenous peoples are suffering and need help, be it from NGOs or  
672 the state. The technocracy discourse was most frequent in articles about Australia and Canada, where  
673 international humanitarian action is less common. As such, it may be useful here to draw upon the  
674 concept of settler-humanitarianism, in which the settler state takes on a humanitarian role that is justified  
675 through care (Maxwell, 2017). This aligns with emerging literature, which highlights how the liberal  
676 state uses care as an instrument to manage disasters (Pallister-Wilkins, 2020).

677

678 Although this may seem contradictory to the ways that technocratic approaches to disaster management  
679 have sought to manage and control people traditionally, this is not the case. Instead, in constructing  
680 Indigenous peoples as suffering to the point that they cannot survive without state intervention, the state  
681 is legitimised and constructed as benevolent rather than genocidal (Lucchesi, 2019; Razack, 2015).  
682 Indeed, from this lens, humanitarian and technocracy both draw on care as a means of governance.

683

684 **Such a conceptualisation of care is in stark contrast to other forms of care – such as care-ethics**  
685 **and radical care. These forms of care provide a way to think ethically about relationships between**  
686 **the self and others by focusing on interdependency, reciprocity and relationality whilst remaining**  
687 **attentive to inequitable dynamics and addressing these in solidarity with others (Brannelly and**  
688 **Boulton, 2017; Hobart and Kneese, 2020; Raghuram, 2016; Woodly et al., 2021). Applying care-**  
689 **ethics to disasters and humanitarian crises would frame those affected by disasters not as distant**  
690 **others, but rather as people connected to each other through processes such as colonisation.**  
691 **Addressing disasters whilst remaining attentive to these differences in power moves away from**  
692 **caring for the individual, and towards caring with/within the community, which challenge root**  
693 **causes of problems (Gilligan, 1993; Surman et al., 2021). Importantly, this caring with and within**  
694 **communities is implied in some articles engaging with the self-determination discourse, for**  
695 **example where Seymour (22/04/2020) writes from her experience of health facilitator working**  
696 **with her communities and others. Although these forms of care did not show up frequently, they**  
697 **do offer an alternative way of viewing care potentially productive for affecting systemic change.**

698

### 699 **5.5 Different temporalities**

700 Time was a significant and differentiated theme across these five discourses. All discourses created a  
701 sense of urgency. For instance, our findings show that Indigenous peoples were used to elevate the  
702 urgency of a changing climate and environmental change more broadly in line with previous work  
703 (Belfer et al., 2017; Roosvall and Tegelberg, 2015). However, we also found that Indigenous peoples  
704 were used to highlight two other forms of urgency, political urgency – a need to move away from  
705 ‘politics as usual’ to avoid disaster – and post-disaster urgency – a need to recover and rebuild quickly.  
706 Yet while all discourses were engaged in urgency, different ones focused on different temporalities.  
707 The ‘natural disasters’ discourse focused on the future, portraying it as uncertain and dangerous, much  
708 as how Erickson (2020) highlights how the future is often used to justify unjust action in the present.  
709 The systems of oppression and self-determination discourses focused on the past, revealing the  
710 importance of history in shaping ongoing vulnerability and the Indigenous experience of disaster. In  
711 doing so, vulnerability was recognised as a process (Hsu et al., 2015). The humanitarian discourse  
712 focused on the present by discussing immediate needs. Combined with the sense of urgency created,  
713 this acted to eliminate the need for political concerns in disaster risk reduction and further depoliticising  
714 the humanitarian discourse.

## 715 **6.0 Conclusion**

716

717 We conducted a critical discourse analysis of the expert news media reporting on disasters and  
718 Indigenous peoples, finding five discourses: natural disasters and systems of oppression (which  
719 differentially framed disasters), and humanitarian intervention, technocracy, and self-  
720 determination (which differentially framed actors). We have discussed these in relation to disaster  
721 governance, principally around the contested role of the state, the varying framings of NGOs and  
722 Indigenous peoples involved in disaster management, and what this means for how disasters  
723 should be managed. Through our discussion, humanitarian care emerged as a form of governance  
724 in a way that did not align with the diverse ways care is conceptualised elsewhere (e.g., care-ethics,  
725 radical care) (Bellacasa, 2017; Hobart and Kneese, 2020). We conclude here by working through  
726 what the dominant and less dominant discourses posit about governance, alongside questions of  
727 who is cared for/about in disasters and how that care is performed in the expert news media.

728

729 Dominant discourses of natural disasters and humanitarian intervention, combined with a  
730 weaker discourse of technocracy, worked to justify outside action. These discourses were  
731 underpinned by the use of care and compassion, which carved out a role for both international  
732 NGOs and the State, driving agendas of international and settler humanitarianism. The expert  
733 news media mostly implied that governments and NGOs should care about the environment,  
734 rather than sociopolitical processes that underlie disasters. This care should be performed by  
735 experts (e.g., humanitarian agencies and/or government officials), who rapidly intervene in  
736 environmental problems to resolve them. In doing so, this surpasses important questions around  
737 politics, and especially self-determination, resulting in a colonial form of care, like that described  
738 by Ong (2019). Whilst caring about more-than-humans and other-than-humans is important for  
739 many Indigenous peoples (e.g., Bawaka Country *et al.*, 2013; Yazzie and Baldy, 2018), the  
740 separation of people from these is not. Therefore, such a framing does not only neglect care about  
741 people (who are impacted by both environmental change but also historical and present social  
742 and political processes that lead to disasters), but it also conflicts with many Indigenous  
743 worldviews. That the majority of the expert news media continued to adhere to this dominant  
744 ideology reflects a trend visible in international politics in which Indigenous peoples are  
745 increasingly governed and controlled under the guise of care and compassion, sometimes through  
746 appearing to align with Indigenous priorities around self-determination.

747

748 Less-dominant discourses of systems of oppression and self-determination politicised disasters  
749 and suggested political change to address disasters. However, these discourses often masked the  
750 roles and/or capability of some actors, such as the private sector and government, as necessary



751 for political change. Again, which is interesting given that academic literature does highlight the  
752 importance of government in political change (e.g., Carrigan, 2014; Whyte, 2014; Young, 2020).

753

754 In terms of care, these discourses did allude to some ways in which colonial, paternalistic forms  
755 of care can be contested. The first and most frequently invoked way of doing so was through  
756 reframing and retemporalising disasters as slow, ongoing sociopolitical processes, often rooted in  
757 colonialism and neoliberalism. Here, the disaster process is not a spectacle, but a normal condition  
758 stemming from colonialism, and resulting in intergenerational trauma, marginalisation, and  
759 dispossession of land. In doing so, these discourses encouraged governments and NGOs to care  
760 about Indigenous peoples who are negatively impacted by these processes. In caring *about* people,  
761 rather than *for* people, focus is directed towards addressing processes such as colonialism and  
762 working in solidarity with Indigenous peoples, rather than imposing paternalistic, colonial and  
763 humanitarian forms of care.

764

765 The second means of contesting colonial care was through reframing governments as uncaring,  
766 genocidal, and manipulative in settler colonial contexts, for instance through referring to past  
767 invasion and ongoing conflict. This pushes back against frames of a caring and benevolent  
768 government, bringing into question the legitimacy and authority of the state, which then lays the  
769 foundations for arguments for Indigenous peoples' self-determination and sovereignty.

770

771 Finally, when mentioned the private sector, including the extractive industries and agribusiness,  
772 was responsabilised to care about Indigenous peoples, through the sociopolitical processes they  
773 were implicated in that create disasters such as climate change and public health emergencies.  
774 This sits firmly in contrast to dominant discourses presented here and elsewhere (e.g., Bankoff,  
775 2018), where civil society and especially marginalised groups are responsabilised for the situations  
776 they are in.

777

778 As care gains traction in disaster studies and related fields, we suggest that future disaster  
779 research focuses on engaging with the politics of care, care-ethics, radical care, and other forms  
780 of care more thoroughly, particularly as care is vital yet underappreciated in navigating  
781 precarious worlds (Hobart and Kneese, 2020; Woodly et al., 2021).

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