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My mother is Māori. My father is Iranian. I can tell you what New Zealand is



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Christchurch, March 2019 (Photo by Carl Court/Getty Images)

I implore New Zealanders to centre the victims, to examine our past, to understand that for many of us, this attack was more of a ‘when’ than an ‘if’, writes Shamim Aslani

An act of unspeakable horror seared itself into our collective consciousness as New Zealanders on March 15. We lost 50 lives in an act of callous and calculated terrorism.

From politicians, commentators and social media, the sentiment that echoed was “This is not the New Zealand we know.”

For many New Zealanders, the idea of a lingering threat against one’s existence is unfathomable. Such things exist in pockets far removed from the lives of the majority of New Zealanders. But for

some of us, the threat to our existence has always existed. We have throughout our lives, watched and heard media personalities and politicians, with vast platforms, sow the seeds of a white colonialist, pro-nationalist narrative.

We have witnessed the slow and consistent dehumanisation of Māori, of immigrants of colour, and most recently of Muslims, to mass, white-majority audiences.

It is a privilege to believe that these people, our people, were not capable of being victimised with such hatred.

While we collectively hold the victims in grief and mourning, it is paramount to remember that this was a targeted attack. This attack was carried out by a white supremacist. All the victims were Muslim.

Though the impact of the perpetrator's abhorrent extremism reverberates across the nation, the attack was not designed to hurt "us" as a collective at all. Rather, it was carried out as an act of protest. A repugnant "solution" to what the perpetrator believed was a white genocide and an invasion of the white west. When the perpetrator talked of "our lands", he did not seek to include all of us in his exclusionary and simultaneously entitled narrative.

In order to move forward from such horror, we must not shy away from collective culpability. We are so quick to stand with the victims in hurt, and grieve alongside them. So then, we can and we must also interrogate how such hatred could find a home in New Zealand, irrespective of where the terrorist was born or raised.

That is no easy task. It requires uncomfortable introspection and opens us up to potential findings that hold many of us complicit. We must face this complicity irrespective of our discomfort. Because we have the privilege of living another day to feel the devastating pain of realisation. This is a privilege that has been denied to 50 lives that were violently taken from this world.

We must go back to the beginning. We cannot divorce this act of white supremacy from the entrenched colonialist racism that spawned it. It is not conducive to change. It is not conducive to healing. And to ignore the foundations of how white supremacy came to fester within New Zealand is to offer a disservice to those whose lives were so violently taken. We must face our own violent story that continues to this day.

The legacy of white supremacy in New Zealand stems from a past which sought to expand the British Empire based on the belief of cultural and indeed white superiority. Though we like to think of ourselves as more advanced than our Australian counterparts, our history, too, includes a pattern of systematic subjugation of indigenous people. Māori peoples are and Māori cultures are subject to the continuing degradation of assimilationist policies and practice.

The entrenched and structural nature of British colonialism allows white supremacy to play out over time insidiously. It is not always blatant or overt. It seeps into the education system, flows through mainstream media and ultimately plays out in our everyday existence.

In the leadup to this year's Waitangi Day, the day on which representatives of the British Crown and Māori chiefs (rangatira) signed The Treaty of Waitangi, history teachers called for compulsory teaching of New Zealand's Māori and colonial history in schools.

Government representatives rejected the idea.

The chairperson of the New Zealand History Teachers' Association, Graeme Ball, noted that few New Zealanders understood the conditions that brought the Crown and Māori together in the 1840 Treaty. Imagine then how little New Zealanders know of how the unequal relationship between the Crown and Māori played out over the following decades.

The author of a resource for teaching New Zealand history, [Tamsin Hanly said](#), “Most people in this country, of all ethnicities, have been raised on what’s called a standard story, colonial narrative, and it’s inaccurate history.”

Colonialist legacy has and continues to actively diminish Māori histories Māori cultures and ultimately Māori peoples. It has also sought to actively portray Māori who do not subscribe to colonialist ideals as threats to the state.

In 2007 The New Zealand Armed Offenders Squad [conducted a series of arrests](#), in response to the discovery of an alleged paramilitary training camp.

Māori were photographed without consent, children were confined for several hours, some without food. It was widely publicised across mainstream media that Māori, our people, wanted to hurt New Zealand politicians and bomb parliament.

None of the 17 people arrested ended up facing charges under the Terrorism Suppression Act. The solicitor-general said the evidence against the accused was insufficient.

Many believed the terrorist smear was a tactical distraction to stagnate the 2013 Tūhoe settlement with the Crown – which subsequently resulted in a Crown apology for wrongful killings, illegal land grabs, and scorched earth warfare – recognised as some of the most severe cruelties conducted in New Zealand’s history.

How as a country, do we move forward as one, when the very notion of what kind of “one” we are is on the coloniser’s terms?

While blatant acts of white supremacy illustrate state sanctioned racism, everyday acts of white supremacy are made to seem benevolent and the effects therefore are more dangerous. We accept them as the norm.

All you need to do is research police bias or life expectancy rates for Māori. Inequality is rampant and far reaching.

Read the comments section of any article around Māori or wider Polynesian issues, around immigration, and around Muslims.

Then look at the pages of those who espouse blatantly racist, anti-immigration, or Islamophobic views. Look at the groups they are members of. Look at their ‘likes’. Look at the memes they share. Look at who they are.

I have read comments from friends and family who fear a changing New Zealand. While they would never describe themselves as white supremacists, the views they espouse align neatly with white supremacist ideals.

Born to a Māori mother and an Iranian father, experiencing racism in New Zealand is not new to me. And following the events of 9/11 my Middle Eastern name made me a target for a new wave of harassment.

I cannot count the amount of times I have been told as tangata whenua to “go back to where you came from”.

I have learnt to disengage from online debate because my name is a target for detraction. “You’re not even from here, worry about your own country”, a friend’s father once said to me on a Facebook post about refugee intakes in New Zealand.

These views are not seen as extreme. They are interwoven into the fabric of colonialist nations.

When I moved to Melbourne to gain international experience as a digital writer, the anti-halal movement's traction was proliferating across Facebook and Twitter, and many of us whose jobs required us to interact with consumers online all day, scrambled to manage the mobilised fight against food brands. Halal certification, which food brands carried, symbolised what our food brand detractors saw as a threat to pro-nationalist values.

I compiled a user profile of the type of consumer that would complain, make threats to boycott, and makes threats of violence against brands who were halal-certified.

I looked at profile pages and analysed data that included which pages were "Liked", what kind of interests were shared, the tone of memes that these profiles allowed on their timeline for public viewing.

The overarching themes that united proponents of the anti-halal movement, was the mockery and dehumanisation of indigenous peoples. The intense dislike of immigration and the view of it being a threat to western society. The fear of Islam and the belief in the threat of Sharia Law to western democracy, and of course the proliferation of the state flag across many of the profile pictures. The profiles I analysed were across New Zealand and Australia.

The overarching rhetoric was all too familiar.

The leader of the populist New Zealand First party and now deputy prime minister of New Zealand has said, "[We've spent the last 150 plus years as a country trying to develop New Zealand values.](#)"

The New Zealand First party is a notable driver in alleviating the fear around the threat to a colonialist White New Zealand. Peters has consistently promised to halt the immigration "invasion". He reflects white New Zealanders' fears about the changing face of New Zealand society.

The proliferation of racist propaganda under the guise of New Zealand patriotism is a necessary condition of colonialism and Muslims are simply being framed as the most recent threat to our white nationalism. The most recent threat to a white colonialist ideal of who we have never really been.

Securing structural inequality and making scapegoats out of Māori, of immigrants of colour, and ultimately of Muslims, rather than examining the entrenched and systematic causes of poverty, crime and housing unaffordability, must be scrutinised for what it is. White supremacy.

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Politicians who support and uphold racist rhetoric must be held directly accountable for the ramifications of their spineless propaganda.

Media pundits whose careers are founded on White supremacy under the guise of "free speech", and whose profiles flourish by upholding oppression must be exposed for their intentionally divisive click bait.

I implore New Zealanders to centre the victims, to examine our past, to understand that for many of us, this attack was more of a "when" than an "if". To collectively move into a future where we understand why it was Muslims who lost their lives, and how we can actively resist racism in the cause of Muslims who are still living.