

Editorial

After 15 March: Responses to the White-Supremacist Terrorist Attacks

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For many of us who do not encounter forms of racial and religious hatred in daily life, the white-supremacist terrorist attacks of 15 March, which killed 51 people and injured 49 others at the Al-Noor mosque and Linwood Islamic Centre in Christchurch, were experienced as a traumatic blow seemingly from nowhere. Explaining and politically responding to the tragedy felt imperative, but collective grief, indignation, and empathy were quite rightly the most immediate feelings and responses in the weeks that followed. Here, writing from a Pākehā, non-Muslim perspective, we want to consider some of the wider explanatory and strategic questions that the Left must face in the wake of these attacks.

A call to prioritise Muslim voices in the country's media followed the shootings. We begin this editorial by briefly surveying some of the key themes that appeared across Muslim responses to the attacks and their aftermath. This discussion draws on a selection of the responses produced in the immediate wake of the attacks or in the weeks that followed.¹ This survey is only a partial coverage of the responses, and we do not claim to be representing

1 These references were drawn from those compiled by the *Grappling with Ethnography* blog, <https://grapplingwithethnography.net/>

the full range of positions held within the Muslim community.

Many of the responses welcomed the sympathy and support the Muslim community received after the attacks. As Saziah Bashir writes: ‘In the wake of the Christchurch shootings, the only thing that has stopped my sadness turning into anger has been the enormous outpouring of love and support’.² While welcome, this show of support did not sit easily with all members of the Muslim community. For Hela Rahman: ‘It’s an uneasy feeling being happy that Islam is finally portrayed in a positive light in the media. . . . Why did we have to lose so many lives for that to happen?’³

The memes ‘This is not us’ and ‘They are us’, widely shared across both social and mainstream media following the attacks, also provoked unease for some. The terms ‘they’ and ‘us’ suggest a continuing divide: ‘we are still a “they”, we are still different’ as Rahman writes.⁴ Or, to be included in the ‘us’ negates the lived experiences of people who have long been treated as ‘other’ by mainstream New Zealand.⁵ The experiences of Muslims and other minority groups in the country suggests that ‘this is New Zealand, and this shit happens’;⁶ ‘we must reject the notion that “this is not us”, because it is’.⁷

Given that ‘this *is* us’, the attacks, while shocking, were not a surprise

2 Saziah Bashir, ‘Saziah Bashir: Four things you should do following the Christchurch terror attacks,’ *Radio New Zealand*, 19 March 2019, <https://www.radionz.co.nz/news/on-the-inside/385064/saziah-bashir-four-things-you-should-do-following-the-christchurch-terror-attacks>

3 Hela Rahman ‘Three weeks after the Christchurch mosque attack: Forgiveness, faith and fear,’ *Metro*, 5 April 2019, <https://www.metromag.co.nz/society/society-politics/christchurch-mosque-attack-three-weeks-on-muslims-grateful-but-scared-to-rock-the-boat>

4 Rahman, ‘Three weeks after the Christchurch mosque attack’; see also, Hina Tabassum Cheema, ‘Christchurch shooting: “Just accept us as we are, ordinary”’, *Stuff*, 22 March 2019, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/christchurch-shooting/111453219/christchurch-shooting-just-accept-us-as-we-are-ordinary>

5 Hala Nasr, ‘Islamophobia: A Personal Reflection,’ *Pantograph Punch*, 24 March 2019, <https://www.pantograph-punch.com/post/islamaphobia-a-personal-reflection>

6 *Facebook*, 18 March 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/chloeNZgreens/photos/a.326710637664582/872328433102797/?type=3&theater>

7 Bashir, ‘Saziah Bashir: Four things you should do.’

for many Muslim New Zealanders: as Pakeeza Rasheed writes, ‘we knew this was coming’.⁸ Muslims have experienced rising levels of discrimination in recent years along with an increase in online vitriol from the far-right.⁹ The Islamic Women’s Council of New Zealand had warned the government of the risks their community faced for five years preceding the attacks. They were met with inaction and the downplaying of their concerns,¹⁰ an experience shared by others.¹¹ Security agencies disregarded far-right groups,¹² while Muslim communities were under close scrutiny.¹³ Muslim voices were ignored in New Zealand.¹⁴ Those who did speak up ‘were told to be quiet, to be invisible, to know our place and apologise for our very existence’.¹⁵ Others were ‘very careful to not rock the boat’ as ‘apart from the fear of hate and violence there is also the worry amongst Muslims that they

8 Pakeeza Rasheed, ‘I Am a Muslim New Zealand Woman And I Am As Angry As I Am Sad,’ *Vice*, 18 March 2019, https://www.vice.com/en_nz/article/8xy34p/i-am-a-muslim-new-zealand-woman-and-i-am-as-angry-as-i-am-sad; see also, Guled Mire, ‘Christchurch terror attacks: Kiwis need to “stop living in denial” and acknowledge racism exists in Aotearoa,’ *1 News Now*, 18 March 2019, https://www.tvnz.co.nz/one-news/new-zealand/christchurch-terror-attacks-kiwis-need-stop-living-in-denial-and-acknowledge-racism-exists-aotearoa?variant=tb_v_2; Haezreena Begum binti Abdul Hamid, ‘A reflection on the Christchurch shooting massacre,’ *Victoria University of Wellington*, accessed 8 May 2019, <https://www.victoria.ac.nz/sacs/about/a-reflection-on-the-christchurch-shooting-massacre>

9 Anjum Rahman, ‘We warned you. We begged. We pleaded. And now we demand accountability,’ *The Spinoff*, 17 March 2019, <https://thespinoff.co.nz/society/17-03-2019/we-warned-you-we-begged-we-pleaded-and-now-we-demand-accountability/>

10 Rahman, ‘We warned you.’

11 Rasheed, ‘I Am a Muslim New Zealand Woman’; Faisal Al-Asaad, ‘Today, we mourn. Tomorrow, we organise,’ *Overland*, 17 March 2019, <https://overland.org.au/2019/03/today-we-mourn-tomorrow-we-organise/>

12 Rahman, ‘We warned you.’

13 Al-Asaad, ‘Today, we mourn.’

14 “‘Were our voices not enough?’ asks refugee who experienced racism in NZ prior to mosque attacks,’ *1 News Now*, 20 March 2019, https://www.tvnz.co.nz/one-news/new-zealand/were-our-voices-not-enough-asks-refugee-experienced-racism-in-nz-prior-mosque-attacks?variant=tb_v_1

15 Rasheed, ‘I Am a Muslim New Zealand Woman.’

might come across as ungrateful to be in New Zealand if they speak up'.¹⁶

The unease foreshadowing the attacks in Christchurch was long present. The terrorist attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001 (9/11) by the militant Salafi organisation al-Qaeda are widely regarded as a turning point. While there had been some acceptance of Muslims who were seen to be assimilating into Aotearoa New Zealand prior to these attacks, things changed dramatically after 9/11.¹⁷ Muslims recount experiences of being negatively stereotyped,¹⁸ dehumanised,¹⁹ of becoming the 'demonised other'.²⁰ As Rasheed recounts: 'Our mosques quickly became targets, assumed to be hotbeds of illegal and extremist thought and behaviour. We saw a global rise of white supremacy and open hostility towards Muslims'.²¹ She continues:

Attacks on women wearing the hijab grew, Muslim women received death threats and hate mail, protest against 'Sharia law' abounded, and there was growing sentiment that Muslims weren't Kiwis, that we weren't welcome and were threatening to take over New Zealand. We were supposedly going to be the reason New Zealand would no longer be a utopia.²²

Another woman shares her experiences of having her hijab ripped off, of being spat at, and having eggs thrown at her; a young man tells of being chased by skinheads as a schoolboy.²³ Beyond these individualised experiences are the organised attacks on mosques by far-right extremists—

16 Nasr, 'Islamophobia: A Personal Reflection.'

17 Faisal Halabi, 'What it means to be a Muslim New Zealander in 2019,' *The Spinoff*, 17 March 2019, <https://thespinoff.co.nz/society/17-03-2019/what-does-it-mean-to-be-muslim-in-new-zealand/>

18 Halabi, 'What it means to be a Muslim New Zealander in 2019'; Nasr, 'Islamophobia: A Personal Reflection.'

19 Bashir, 'Saziah Bashir: Four things you should do.'

20 Rasheed, 'I Am a Muslim New Zealand Woman.'

21 Rasheed, 'I Am a Muslim New Zealand Woman.'

22 Rasheed, 'I Am a Muslim New Zealand Woman.'

23 "'Were our voices not enough?'"

as when neo-Nazi's delivered boxes of pig heads to Al-Noor Mosque in Christchurch in 2016, chanting 'bring on the cull'.²⁴ However, racism is not restricted to this country's far-right; 'it is systemic, cultural, entrenched in our institutions, language, economy, and social structures'.²⁵ Public media has 'vilified Muslims',²⁶ and focused on the 'radicalisation supposedly harboured by Muslim communities'.²⁷ Wider political discourse has been 'radicalising white supremacists'.²⁸

Debates around 'free speech' contribute to this climate. When the alt-right speakers Lauren Southern and Stefan Molyneux toured Aotearoa New Zealand in 2018, figures from across the political spectrum came out in defence of their visit, including the far-right's Don Brash and the so-called left-leaning political commentator Chris Trotter. As Lamia Imam writes, summarising these positions: 'We do not take threats by white supremacists seriously, because we believe they have a legitimate point of view that should be protected under free speech principles'.

The picture that emerges when listening to Muslim's experiences is of a country 'resistant to everything that does not subscribe to "white, middle-class normality"'.²⁹ This resistance is deeply and systemically entrenched. A straight line can be drawn from Aotearoa New Zealand's colonial roots to the violence of the white-supremacist terrorist attacks in Christchurch:³⁰ 'The responsibility for our "darkest day" in recent memory lies with the same

24 Matt Nippert, 'Christchurch mosque shootings: Pig heads delivered to mosque in 2016', *NZ Herald*, 19 March 2019, https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=12214191

25 Mire, 'Christchurch terror attacks.'

26 Rahman, 'Three weeks after the Christchurch mosque attack.'

27 Al-Asaad, 'Today, we mourn.'

28 Lamia Imam, 'Vigils are useless without real change,' *News Room*, 20 March 2019, <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/2019/03/20/495705/vigils-are-useless-without-real-change>

29 Imam, 'Vigils are useless without real change.'

30 Bashir, 'Saziah Bashir: Four things you should do'; Lamia Imam, 'Lamia Imam: "I cannot forgive the rhetoric that got us here";' *Radio New Zealand*, 19 March 2019, <https://www.radionz.co.nz/news/on-the-inside/385061/lamia-imam-i-cannot-forgive-the-rhetoric-that-got-us-here>; Nasr, 'Islamophobia: A Personal Reflection.'

racist, colonial structures of power that have produced dark day after dark day in this country's history'.³¹ Exacerbating the experiences of Muslims and other minority groups is the inability of most Pākehā to admit the existence of racism. As Guled Mire asserts: 'I'm done talking about racism with white people. I'm done, because it's honestly like banging your head against a brick wall'.³²

Along with sharing experiences of racism in this country, the surveyed writers offer suggestions as to what New Zealanders can do. An important starting point is to centre Muslim voices in discussions of the attacks,³³ and to continue to listen to Muslims and other minorities so that we might learn from and be challenged by them. As Rasheed writes:

It's time for new voices at the table. It is time for women to be leading conversations. It is time to listen to the voices that make you uncomfortable. Voices that express anger. Voices that call for the country to engage in difficult dialogue. Voices that will no longer accept the status quo.³⁴

The prevention of future acts of violence against the Muslim community, suggests Faisal Halabi, 'begins with acknowledging any more distance that might slowly creep back in, pushing us back into corners, until we're too far gone to reverse it again'.³⁵ Hina Tabassum Cheema reinforces this point, 'all you need to do is just accept us as we are, ordinary'.³⁶

Along with listening and accepting, we are challenged to 'speak out': 'Challenge destructive narratives in the media, from your community leaders and politicians, and the people in your life'.³⁷ As Hala Nasr argues, effective action in the present involves acknowledging this country's past:

31 Al-Asaad, 'Today, we mourn.'

32 Mire, 'Christchurch terror attacks.'

33 Bashir, 'Saziah Bashir: Four things you should do.'

34 Rasheed, 'I Am a Muslim New Zealand Woman.'

35 Halabi, 'What it means to be a Muslim New Zealander in 2019.'

36 Cheema, 'Christchurch shooting.'

37 Bashir, 'Saziah Bashir: Four things you should do.'

‘Honour the Treaty. . . . Join and organise with your local anti-racist, anti-colonial organisations. Learn to recognise and dismantle your white privilege and entitlement’.³⁸

In the wake of the white-supremacist terrorist attacks one might have expected an abatement of Islamophobia. Although this prejudice has been dialled back in Aotearoa New Zealand’s mainstream media and political rhetoric for the time being, events elsewhere indicate Islamophobia is still widespread. The website *This is Our New Zealand: Report Islamophobia* was established in the days after the attacks as a place for people to record incidents of abuse in this country.³⁹ Abuse has continued, with some perpetrators emboldened. Recorded incidents include a house being vandalised, Muslims shouted at while driving or waiting at bus stops, and intimidation when walking to mosques. One woman reported the following when using public transport in Auckland:

A lady got into the bus and harassed me abusing terribly (verbally) discriminating because I was a Muslim wearing a hijab covering my face. She said I’m evil and rude and I should not be in NZ. She asked me to go back to from whatever I came. She was so loud and everyone was just staring at me not knowing what to do. She also mentioned just because people die in Christchurch why should everyone support all Muslims.⁴⁰

Another person reports an incident after a sports match in Hastings: ‘After a game of tennis our boys went to congratulate the teams on their win and a Caucasian boy directly said you look like a Muslim and I want to shoot you’.⁴¹

Such aggressions highlight the ingrained and persistent nature of Islamophobia in New Zealand and warn us against any complacency in light of the public outpouring of support for Muslims reported in mainstream

38 Nasr, ‘Islamophobia: A Personal Reflection.’

39 <https://reportislamophobia.nz/>

40 ‘Category: Post-Christchurch Attack,’ *This is Our New Zealand: Report Islamophobia*, accessed 8 May 2019, <https://reportislamophobia.nz/category/post-christchurch-attack/>

41 ‘Category: Post-Christchurch Attack.’

media. White supremacy, as Muslim New Zealanders have made clear, is structurally imbedded in this country.

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As many in the Muslim community have pointed out, then, the white-supremacist terrorist attacks in Christchurch did not come out of the blue. They were acts consistent with the racism and xenophobia that Muslims around the Western world have been subjected to for decades, particularly after 9/11. Further, they are acts that should be understood as a continuation in the long history of white supremacy and colonial violence in Aotearoa New Zealand and that we should not expect to abate of its own accord.

In this respect, the attacks need to be understood in the context of place. Not just place as in ‘ah, Christchurch, if it was going to happen anywhere, it would be there’. Of course, there are particular dynamics and characteristics in Christchurch that are important. But this lazy isolation of Christchurch absolves the rest of New Zealand of our colonial history and persistent white supremacy.

It has been a magic trick of Pākehā identity to develop a nationalism based on connection to land, while actively ignoring the violence through which Pākehā came to be here. From the first arrival of Europeans, Pākehā murdered Māori. In the wake of the Christchurch shootings many commentators drew parallels with Rangiaowhia. There, a group of Māori, including children, were burnt alive in or shot trying to leave a whare karakia by Crown troops in 1864.⁴² There are many other examples that highlight the continuity of white supremacy: Parihaka, the persecution of Rua Kenana and his community, the 2007 raids on Māori sovereignty activists, to name a few. As Tina Ngata points out, white supremacy is woven through Aotearoa New Zealand’s racist police force and spy agencies,

42 Leigh-Marama McLachlan, ‘Christchurch mosque attacks: Māori leaders say acts of terror nothing new in New Zealand,’ *Radio New Zealand*, 21 March 2019, <https://www.radionz.co.nz/news/national/385226/christchurch-mosque-attacks-maori-leaders-say-acts-of-terror-nothing-new-in-new-zealand>

the social welfare and justice systems, and immigration policies.⁴³ Because Pākehā consistently deny our history, ‘Pākehā nationalism consequently depends more centrally on assertions of attachment to place than on narrations of history or of cultural distinction, while the history of how that attachment was secured is “forgotten”’.⁴⁴

The Pākehā forgetting of how we got here is haunted by a persistent, loose sense that something is not quite right, and that sense often takes shape as white fragility. This fragility saw many people dismiss any critical questioning of Pākehā complicity in the Christchurch attacks. For instance, discussion about changing the name of the Crusaders rugby team was immediately dismissed by some as ‘PC gone mad’, or ‘going too far’. Another version of this fragility—sometimes endearing, but more often cringeworthy—sees Pākehā seek out reassurance that we are ‘good’. We saw this in the careful attention paid to what the world thought of Aotearoa New Zealand’s reaction to the massacre, and the soothing way the media framed the Muslim community, noting that they still want to be here and still love this place.

This fragility, while worthy of close scrutiny, was nevertheless accompanied by genuine caring and a desire to learn about the Muslim community, to make people feel safe and at home, to say sorry and own how we have been complicit in the creation of a wider culture of Islamophobia. There has been a reckoning for many Pākehā. But digging out the rhizomes of white supremacy so that care can flourish will require huge social change. Nine days after the massacre, Moana Jackson laid down the wero:

the challenge ahead is how the many genuine expressions of love and solidarity of the last few days can be translated into the meaningful changes that will make this country a place where all people can feel truly safe and at home. It will require a certain compassionate empathy, but

43 Tina Ngata, ‘What does a just, safe Aotearoa look like?’ *The Non-Plastic Maori*, 19 March 2019, <https://thenonplasticmaori.wordpress.com/2019/03/19/what-does-a-just-safe-aotearoa-look-like/>

44 Avril Bell, ‘Bifurcation or Entanglement? Settler Identity and Biculturalism in Aotearoa New Zealand,’ *Continuum* 20, no. 2 (2006): 256.

also a willingness to question not just the present circumstance but how it came to be.⁴⁵

White supremacy, both its history in this land and its contemporary articulation, needs to be challenged on personal, interpersonal, and systemic levels.

What else can the Left do? In addition to heeding calls from the Muslim community to speak out against racism and Islamophobia, and to dismantle, in the case of Pākehā, one's own white privilege and entitlement, the Left can also seek solidarity with Muslim communities. This, of course, begs the question as to what meaningful and enduring solidarity with Muslim communities would look like?

A week after the attacks, speaking at the national vigil in Hagley Park, the imam of the Al-Noor mosque, Gamal Fouda, said that those killed were not just martyrs for Islam, but for Aotearoa New Zealand. Speaking of the victims of the attacks, he continued:

Our loss of you is a gain to New Zealand's unity and strength. Your departure is an awakening not just for our nation but for all humanity. Your martyrdom is a new life for New Zealand and a chance of prosperity for many.⁴⁶

This was not a general call to recognise abundance in the face of misery. Rather, it was a specific reflection on the solidarity shown across seven days of mourning by many New Zealanders.

This rejection of hate and white supremacy was widespread and real, but it must be remembered that it was Muslims, not the Left, that were the subject of the attacks. In contrast, for instance, with the mass murder

45 Moana Jackson, 'The connection between white supremacy and colonisation,' *E-Tangata*, 24 March 2019, <https://e-tangata.co.nz/comment-and-analysis/the-connection-between-white-supremacy/>

46 'Broken-hearted but not broken: Al Noor imam's Christchurch speech in full,' *The Guardian*, 22 March 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/22/broken-hearted-but-not-broken-al-noor-imams-christchurch-speech-in-full>

of Norwegian Labour youth by the white-supremacist terrorist Anders Breivik, the shootings on 15 March exclusively targeted Aotearoa New Zealand's Muslim community and were intended to sow fear into Muslims around the world. While the attacks were conducted by an enemy of the Left, then, the attacks were not against the Left. Acknowledgement of this is important as it indicates the need to think carefully about the spirit in which the Left responds to the attacks as well as what necessary points of solidarity could be.

Specifically, we need to be wary of being carried away with a triumphalist spirit. The far-right is finally under the spotlight with arrests, surveillance, and alienation from the centre. This is a good thing. But this chance to expose and condemn the Right came from a horrific tragedy aimed specifically at Muslims, not at the Left. Newly energised anti-fascist spaces must recognise this and never forget the intolerable brutality that underwrote the attacks.

In continuing with a firm grounding of this as an attack on Muslim New Zealanders, points of solidarity need to deepen between the Left and Muslims, refugees, and migrants. Solidarity is not just an abstract term here, nor can the Left rely on political parties and international NGOs to hold the line on anti-racist initiatives. Specifically, there are three key areas of concern that we think could be addressed now and in the near future: centre-right flirtations with the far-right, the soft-ban on refugees from the Middle East and Africa, and an expansion of support for Muslim, refugee, and migrant civil society. These are concrete sites for building solidarity between the Left and Muslim communities and dismantling white supremacy in Aotearoa New Zealand.

First, after nearly a decade in power the centre-right is in a moment of disarray. In December 2018 that disarray led the National Party, under the uncertain leadership of Simon Bridges, to oppose the Global Compact for Migration (GCM). Opposition to the GCM in Europe was largely rooted in far-right neo-Nazi activism and led to the fall of the government in Belgium. Despite this, eyeing a potential split between New Zealand First and the Labour Party, Bridges took up the cause of far-right fringe

groups and conspiracists claiming, ‘There is no automatic right to migrate to another country without that country’s full agreement, a view which the United Nation’s Global Compact on Migration, set to be signed next week, seeks to counter’.⁴⁷ Media commentators at the time of the Christchurch attacks noted that the attacker also disagreed with the GCM, but few went as far as to note that ‘Here’s Your Migration Compact’ was written on the stock of one of his guns. The next flirtation of the centre-right with the far-right will not take the same form, but we can be sure that it will take place. The Left needs to publicly condemn these flirtations between the racist, ethno-nationalist far-right and the National Party now and in the future.

Second, when in government, the National Party instituted policies that restricted refugees from certain regions coming to New Zealand. Though less overt than Donald Trump’s Muslim ban, these policies—justified in terms of cost reduction, helping with refugee movements in our own, Asia-Pacific region, and ‘broad security concerns’—drastically reduced the number of African and Middle Eastern refugees to New Zealand.⁴⁸ While not all refugees from these regions are Muslim, and some from the Asia-Pacific region are, there is a broad crossover between these categories. Along with refugee rights campaigners and community groups, the Left should oppose these restrictions and challenge those who use the vague language of security concerns to implement racist policies.⁴⁹

Third, the Left also needs to oppose the co-option of refugee voices and communities in government resettlement programmes. The abuse of refugee communities in Australia has led to a stark division between refugee representatives and government. The former takes no money from the latter and this allows them to advocate directly and honestly about

47 Simon Bridges, ‘National would pull New Zealand out of UN migration pact, 4 December 2018, https://www.national.org.nz/national_would_pull_nz_out_of_un_migration_pact

48 Murdoch Stephens, ‘Unfair and Discriminatory: Which Regions Does New Zealand Take Refugees from and Why?’ *Policy Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (2018): 74–79.

49 Murdoch Stephens, ‘Is our refugee quota really all that bad? Yup, it’s Trump-level bad,’ *The Spinoff*, 12 May 2017, <https://thespinoff.co.nz/society/12-05-2017/is-our-refugee-quota-really-all-that-bad-yup-its-trump-level-bad/>

community needs. In Aotearoa New Zealand this division has not taken place. Instead, the Strengthening Refugee Voices programme is supposed to enable resettled refugee communities to represent resettled peoples' needs to government. In practice, as with so many similar policies, the \$250,000 fund (spread across all resettlement locations) restricts these refugee communities from speaking out against the government. Meanwhile, the fund allows Immigration New Zealand to claim that refugee voices are listened to in policy discussions, drawing mana from the appropriation of refugee voices.

Real solidarity with Muslim, refugee, and migrant communities means not expecting these groups to meet us on our terms. In addition to standing up against the nationalist drift in the National Party's politics, this means helping to grow the capacity of the already existing Muslim, refugee, and migrant civil society groups so that they are in the position to lead these critiques of the state.

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There is intellectual work ahead for the Left also. Specifically, the Left needs to deepen its understanding of the wider atmosphere out of which the Christchurch attacks emerged. The shooter, while drawing on long-established ideologies of white supremacy, was also a member of a global and increasingly active far-right movement. In this respect, the Christchurch attacks should also be understood in the context of the recrudescence of a fascist atmosphere across the Western world. Described previously in *Counterfutures* as 'post-fascism', this ideological atmosphere consists of a globally-available constellation of ideas, themes, images, and practices that, while deeply rooted in the history of the West, has rapidly taken shape and gained purchase in the aftermath of the 2007–2009 Global Financial Crisis (GFC).⁵⁰

The GFC punctured the powerful 'end of history' narrative that predominated in the Western world from the early 1990s. Since 2007, many Western countries have been experiencing a prolonged economic

50 Chamsy el-Ojeili, 'Keywords: Post-Fascism,' *Counterfutures* 6 (2018): 100–118.

stagnation and the crumbling of their political centre. Out of this, a post-hegemonic neoliberalism increasingly beset by reality problems and bereft of pretensions to moral and intellectual leadership has emerged.⁵¹ This is reflective of the wider interregnum that characterises the present historical moment: a situation in which the old, neoliberal order is dying, but a new one cannot yet be born.⁵² In addition, the current period has been marked by the emergence of a number of ‘culture wars’ over issues such as immigration, feminism, LGBTQ+ rights, and racism.

The emergence of a post-fascist atmosphere has been a major efflux of this period of crisis, a ‘morbid symptom’ of the present interregnum. It is reactive to a litany of perceived societal ills, but also articulates a vision of an alternative order. Five core features give it consistency.⁵³ First, an attempted ‘return’ to a strong politics of a purified, integral nation, a return set against a narrative of present cataclysmic decline—‘the great replacement’ or ‘white genocide’. Second, the forces or ideologies considered responsible for this contemporary decadence—Islamism, globalism, or cultural Marxism, for example—are understood in conspiratorial terms, providing maps of the world and its power-structures and lending credence to arguments about the necessity of cleansing the nation. Third, charismatic modes of authority are typically viewed as the political answer to current problems. This is typically articulated in the peculiar combination of appealing to the democracy of the nation’s ‘true peoples’ and simultaneously gesturing to the role of strong, decisive, action-oriented leadership by a ‘great’ person. Fourth, a backlash politics against the Left is constitutive. This backlash is animated by attempts to borrow the Left’s counter-cultural aura and to misappropriate the Left’s arguments about the right to difference, but also by the feverish opposition to egalitarianism and notions of social justice. Finally, a militaristic masculinity unites this far-right constellation, visible in the emphasis on action, will, strength, virility, combat, pornography, and

51 William Davies, ‘The New Neoliberalism,’ *New Left Review* 101 (2016): 121–134.

52 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 276.

53 For a more comprehensive account see el-Ojeili, ‘Keywords: Post-Fascism,’ 107–111.

violence of this largely online discourse.

In understanding and contesting this emergent post-fascist constellation, we must not only focus on the impoverished, irrational, and fear-filled features of this ideological atmosphere, but also attempt to visualise the utopian dimensions in play. This constellation is loaded with anti-systemic elements and with desires for a better way of being. Understanding these, and the political, cultural, and economic dimensions from which this new far-right has emerged, will be crucial in the fight against it.

That fascist ideologies are ascendant once again clearly indicates the need for sweeping political and economic reform. The present interregnum will continue to provide fertile ground for the dissemination of far-right ideas so long as it is bereft of compelling and widely shared alternatives. Articulating visions and programs for a better future and building widespread support for Left alternatives to colonial capitalism will be an important means of suffocating this emergent post-fascist constellation of further oxygen.

The search for understanding and for sweeping political and economic reform, however, should also be balanced by a more immediate and militant anti-fascism. The fascisms that flourished in the inter-war years, and which provide the cultural and ideological dreamscape of today's (re)articulation, were able to gain ascendancy through the use of violence and intimidation as well as the tacit endorsement or instrumental use of fascist militants by more moderate right-wing forces. Resisting intimidation and seeking to 'make fascists afraid again' will be crucial in the years ahead.

Much of the terrain covered here is ultimately suggestive. As to *Counterfutures'* own contribution to these challenges, we will aim to provide a space in which solidarity between the Left and Muslim, refugee, and migrant communities can be built and in which the Left can clarify and debate the contours of the contemporary far-right and the strategies and tactics that can be employed against it.