

THEY ARE US. WE ARE IT. IT IS US

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JACINDA ARDERN IS New Zealand's third female Prime Minister in twenty years¹. She initially came to international attention in 2018 as one of the youngest world leaders and for being only the second female Prime Minister to have a baby in office. Earlier this year (2019) she featured in the international press for her empathetic support for victims of a terror shooting and then her decisive management of reform to New Zealand's gun laws. Within three weeks New Zealand had banned private ownership of military style semi-automatics and assault rifles, following a near unanimous vote of agreement for the action in the country's parliament, of 119 to one.

A reminder of what precipitated this: On 15 March 2019 a gunman opened fire on the Al Noor and Linwood Mosques in Christchurch New Zealand, killing 51 people and injuring 38 more. Less than ten minutes before the attacks, the gunman emailed a 74 page 'manifesto', titled *The Great Replacement*², filled with white-supremacist, violent and Islamophobic thoughts, to the Prime Minister's Office along with about 70 other recipients including politicians, domestic and international news media. He also posted it on Twitter, Facebook and 8chan, an online platform described as a magnet for some of the most vile, obnoxious, and sociopathic people on the internet.³

Although the manifesto did not alert email recipients to exactly what he was about to do, or where, the gunman did post to his followers on 8chan that it was time to 'stop shitposting'⁴, to make a 'real life effort post' and carry out an attack against the 'invaders'. The gunman then proceeded to film his shooting spree using a helmet mounted camera and, over the next seventeen minutes, live stream it to Facebook. It would be hours before the major social media platforms did something to stop it spreading. During that time the manifesto and video were re-uploaded repeatedly. Once alerted, it took Facebook over 24 hours to remove 1.5 million videos of the attack. The manifesto

remains online, and has since been cited as inspiring the later Poway Synagogue and El Paso WalMart domestic American terrorists.

Facebook and YouTube were the target of many people's anger about the Christchurch attack, and debate swirled around the world about the role of social media platforms in providing spaces for extremists to support, recruit, validate and radicalise others and enabling internet-savvy extremist mass murderers go both undetected and viral with their heinous words and deeds. Many New Zealanders and advertisers removed themselves from Facebook in disgust. Facebook's chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg wrote a letter to New Zealanders outlining the actions that the company would take in the immediate wake of the attacks.⁵

Two months later Ardern joined with French President Emanuel Macron in hosting the 'Christchurch call' in Paris on May 15 2019, a voluntary meeting of international leaders and social media giants seeking to prevent and prohibit the production and dissemination of terrorist and violent content online. The meeting produced a three-page, non-binding pledge⁶ which was signed by 17 governments, as well as the European Commission and eight technology companies: Amazon, Facebook, Dailymotion, Google, Microsoft, Qwant, Twitter, and YouTube.

Despite being the site where people with the most extremist beliefs congregated, 8chan was not present at the Christchurch call. Nor did it sign the pledge, meaning that it was business as usual on that platform, at least until immediately after the El Paso shooting, when the Cloudflare network provider hosting 8chan sent notice it was terminating 8chan as a customer on the grounds that 'they have proven themselves to be lawless and that lawlessness has caused multiple tragic deaths.'⁷ Exactly where the platform's users will re-congregate en masse is yet to be seen.

The United States did not sign the pledge on the grounds that it felt the document could present constitutional concerns, potentially conflicting with the First Amendment.

HILLARY CLINTON PRAISED Ardern's reaction to the Christchurch shootings: 'Her reaching out to the Muslim community in New Zealand sent a message about how leaders should behave in the face of horrific violence conducted for ideological reasons...I think that was as strong a signal as we could get that, given the chance, many women will govern and lead differently.'⁸ 'I've never seen such leadership,' echoed Oprah Winfrey, 'the Prime Minister is a woman who has the courage of her convictions, and she's set a global standard in leadership with her response...[She] projected peace and goodness, and the Arab world projected it right back for all of us to take in. And suddenly we saw that the other didn't seem that much different from us.'⁹ 'America Deserves a Leader as Good as Jacinda Ardern, wrote the editorial board of the *New York Times*¹⁰. *Time* magazine called her one of

the most influential leaders of 2019¹¹; and she was ranked 2nd by *Forbes* in its list of most influential leaders, the only elected representative to appear in the top ten¹².

Away from the hyperbole, however, Ardern's successful response to the shootings belies a more complex, and in many ways discomfiting, back story. Jacinda (as she is known in New Zealand, a country that commonly refers to its Prime Ministers by their first names), became leader of New Zealand's socially progressive Labour party seven weeks out from the 2017 general election, when the party's opinion poll support was in freefall after nine years in opposition.

She had a strong leadership effect. Within seven weeks, the Labour party's support rose from 24% to 36.9% on election day. The party still did not win the highest proportion of the party vote which went to the incumbent centre-right National party on 44.4%. But New Zealand has a Mixed Member proportional (MMP) electoral system, where voters choose parliaments, not governments. A minor party, the New Zealand First Party, held the balance of power with 7.2% of the vote, and spent a couple of weeks negotiating with both major parties. The leader of New Zealand First made the announcement that Labour was the party's choice of coalition partner direct to the people at a news media conference without prior warning to the major party leaders.

The leader of the New Zealand First party, Winston Peters, is now New Zealand's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. For 22 years Peters has tapped into and fed New Zealand's (relatively small by international standards) populist rump by campaigning on anti-immigrant, anti-foreigner rhetoric and policies. He is highly skilled at finding the areas of greatest popular discontent with the major parties, particularly in regional (heartland) New Zealand where he visits regularly. Progressives don't like Peters because of his populist rhetoric and nativist policies. Conservatives don't like him because he highlights the plight of New Zealanders who have not benefitted from globalisation. Peters understands that both major parties, in their rapacious desire to globalise, modernise, and liberalise have left many New Zealanders behind.

Therein lies the uncomfortable paradox. Jacinda would not be such a leadership icon today if it was not for the support of a political party that has fuelled, legitimised and normalised many of the anti-immigrant values shared by the Christchurch assassin, and those that spread the live video feed of him on his killing rampage.

'They are us', Jacinda said at her first news conference after the shooting, referring to the largely immigrant Muslim victims who had called New Zealand home; the gunman may have thought he was attacking a minority group but in doing so he was attacking all New Zealanders. This was in direct contrast to the 'they are not us' statements that her party's coalition partner had frequently made over the previous 20 years. What was left unsaid is, they (the populists) enabled us. They are also us. We are them.

THE THEME OF THIS CONFERENCE is media and democracy in troubled times. In the call for papers the question was asked: how are citizens, journalists, media outlets, digital platforms, and public officials adapting to these troubled times. The wording of this question implies that these groups are needing to adapt to troubled times caused by *others*—in this case, digital populists more concerned with spreading misinformation through online channels than promoting liberal democratic ideals. The conference call asks whether liberal democracy can coexist with digital populism.

In this paper I argue that liberal democracy and digital populism already co-exist. Like the New Zealand example so clearly shows, they are bed-mates. This paper goes beneath the covers to expose some uncomfortable features of the relationship between digital populism and the systemic and structural racism that underpins liberal democracy. It also considers the role of universities in (re)producing and maintaining white supremacist power and interests, and offers ways in which political communication educators can re-orient their teaching and research in order to promote the norms, values and worldviews necessary to achieve pluralistic, tolerant, multi-racial liberal democracies.

While there was widespread acceptance that immediate blame for the Christchurch mosque massacres belonged almost exclusively to the terrorist himself, and some irrational national relief that he was an Australian, not a New Zealand citizen, the murder of fifty one Muslim New Zealanders triggered soul-searching and debate within New Zealand about the complicity of politicians and political parties in furthering xenophobia and islamophobia for their own political gain. As one journalist wrote, ‘hate does not breed in a vacuum, and the time is long overdue to hold our leaders to account for playing fast and loose with rhetoric — particularly when it comes to Islam.’¹³

Much of the news and social media attention naturally zeroed in on Peters and the political party he founded and leads. People have a tendency to displace, project and blame their anxieties onto others and the New Zealand First party is an easy target. Indeed, Peters probably would not have survived as long as a political force had the news media not given him coverage for his often inflammatory claims. A master of intermittent reinforcement, Peters regularly goads and baits the news media with his populist rhetoric; then rewards them with a smile and a joke and, after hours, a glass of whiskey.

However, in blaming ‘them’, which included anyone from populist politicians to online supremacists, commentators were effectively playing the same game, by positioning them as ‘the other’. They are not us, the liberal commentariat felt secure in thinking, and from a particularly righteous position for ‘we’ would never go so far as to threaten or kill anyone for their views (nor, for the record, would Winston Peters — at heart he is a law abiding, peace-loving man who has never

incited physical violence), for we adhere to liberal democratic values which are much more respectful of different cultures and beliefs and the protection of human dignity and freedom.

IF I ASK WHAT CONFERENCE DELEGATES are seeking to defend in these troubled times, most would consider a range of the enlightenment or liberal values that underpin the western world today. These are listed on the left column of Table 1 (below). But in looking at that list, it's easy to forget that despite the word enlightenment meaning *illuminate*, it also had a dark side; the discursive system that categorised and coded those who did not conform with the norms, values, beliefs, behaviours and ideals of the enlightened, as 'them' and 'the other' — the qualities on the right column of Table 1. Othering is a form of classification that is still in wide use today. It enables populists and supremacists to distinguish themselves as the voice of the common people, from *them* and *they* that do not belong. It also enables liberal elites to think they can distinguish themselves from populists and extremists.

Table 1: Enlightenment/Western liberal values

Democracy	Tyranny
Civilisation	Primitive
Modernity	Tradition
Rationalism	Emotion
Equality	Inferiority
Mastery	Uneducated
Scientific method	Superstition
Nation state	Tribalism
Self-actualisation	Helpless
Positivism	Animism
Justice	Instinct
Humanism	Savage
Knowledge	Unknown
Rule of Law	Disorder
Universalism	Random
Discovery	Discovered
Free speech	Nothing of value to say
Human rights	No rights
Opportunity	Threat
Private ownership rights	More land than they need
Philosophy	Storytelling
Us	Them
Normal	The Other

Although it is a false binary system, othering has endured for hundreds of years up to the present day because it was inherent in imperialism, the mode through which the enlightened states of Europe justified spreading their sense of civilization, culture and knowledge¹⁴, their rightness, their whiteness, to the lands that became known as the United States of America and New Zealand.

From the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries the rulers and governments of Western Europe believed they had the absolute and unquestionable right to expand their economies, discover, colonise, exploit, appropriate, control and subjugate 'new' worlds, new wealth, new possessions and people; use arms and violent means to take over ownership of their lands, flora and fauna, dismiss the political and constitutional structures which were already there, and replace them with their own¹⁵. The principle of othering enabled colonists to consider indigenous people as not fully human, or not human at all, and therefore extinguishable. Māori and indigenous studies scholar Linda Smith writes:

One of the supposed characteristics of primitive peoples was that we could not use our minds or intellects. We could not invent things, we could not create institutions or history, we could not imagine, we could not produce anything of value, we did not know how to use land and other resources from the natural world, we did not practice the 'arts' of civilization. By lacking such virtues we disqualified ourselves, not just from civilization but from humanity itself. In other words we were not 'fully human'; some of us were not even considered partially human.¹⁶

The notion of other cultures being uncivilised is so prevalent in the founding myths of our countries that most western people do not think twice about them today. In New Zealand, 2019 is still recognised by many Pākehā (European) New Zealanders as the 250th anniversary of James Cook 'discovering' New Zealand, despite the fact that Māori had discovered this land over 600 years before Cook. In America you herald your Founding Fathers, and conveniently ignore the fact that there had been founding American Indian fathers here for thousands of years before a small group of white men led the war for independence from Great Britain.

For colonised people, however — Native Americans, First Nation's people, Māori, Pacific, Asians, Aboriginals, Africans — the enlightenment was anything but enlightening. These groups had their own knowledge bases that predated colonisation: ways of organising themselves, their own values, their own forms of governance and power, their own communities, their own agriculture, architecture and art, their own relationships with nature and the non-human, their own rituals, their own science; their own ideas of spirituality, sexuality, gender, healing, space and time. Moreover, as Linda Smith reminds us, 'We had absolute authority over our lives; we were born into and lived in a

universe which was entirely of our making. We did not ask, need or want to be 'discovered' by Europe'.¹⁷

After the Christchurch terrorist attack, it was indigenous New Zealand scholars and commentators such as constitutional lawyer Moana Jackson, who drew attention to the need to understand historic cause and consequence when trying to unpack what had happened. Jackson writes:

There is no great distance in act and consequence between someone who today might kill Jews in an American synagogue, or Muslims in a New Zealand mosque, and the earlier colonisers who killed and oppressed indigenous peoples who threatened their assumed right to rule....The Christchurch terrorist was therefore not some "lone wolf" psychopath. He may have acted alone, but he drew upon the shared ideas and history that still lurk in the shadows of every country that has been colonised.¹⁸

A FEW DAYS AFTER the El Paso domestic terrorist attack in August 2019, Fox News primetime host Tucker Carlson said 'I've lived here [in the U.S.] 50 years and I've never met anybody, not one person who ascribes to white supremacy...I don't know a single person who thinks it's a good idea.'¹⁹ This was a comment that could only be made by someone so centered in a normalized, white supremacist worldview that it was completely invisible to him. Carlson is frequently criticised by the progressive left for being a racist conservative. However, his comments are entirely in line with liberalism's white-centered episteme which has since been baked into all contemporary western institutions, systems and structures including the nation state system, legal system, the criminal justice system, the trading and banking system, the education system, the electoral system and the media system. All of these are simply regarded by the dominant culture as an inalienable, unchangeable reality.

Carlson, like all American TV hosts, operates inside a broader media system which is predominantly owned and operated by, prioritizes, defends and promotes the values of, and provides financial benefit to, those who subscribe to white liberal democratic knowledge systems and rights — the default for human experience and knowledge regardless of whether they are viewed from the 'left' or 'right' side of the political spectrum. Populists and extremists may verbalize and actualize their supremacism openly, rudely and, where they have access to semi-automatic weapons, violently with devastating consequences, but liberal democrats practice supremacism unconsciously, invisibly and silently. Liberal democracy and digital populism co-exist. They are bed-mates. They are us. We are it. It is us.

THAT'S NOT ME you'll be saying to yourself: I teach my students about racism and bias, and my classes are full of people of colour and foreigners and gays and trans, and our university has really good diversity and inclusion policies. I earned my position on merit; I'm tolerant and certainly don't wish others harm for their religion, culture or their skin colour.

What you probably haven't reflected on are the more insidious ways that the supremacy of western knowledge is created and reproduced in classrooms all over the western world. In 2017 an exceptional New Zealand secondary school educator named Ann Milne, published the book *Colouring in the White Spaces* (2017). Ann writes:

If we look at an untouched colouring book...we think of the pages as blank. But they're not actually blank, each page is uniformly white, with lines established to dictate where colour is allowed to go. Children by this are taught about the place of colour and the importance of staying within pre-determined boundaries and expectations, reinforcing a system where the white background is considered the norm.²⁰

In universities this white background is embedded within curriculum content and research methods, in statistical markers of higher educational achievement, success and excellence, in the rigid system of discipline classifications and fields of knowledge, as well as higher education's management structures and behavioural expectations of staff and students. It is played out in the pedagogy that ignores and negates the world views, practices, customs, languages, images, histories, spaces, needs and aspirations of indigenous and non-western cultures and communities.

It is also played out in conferences like this. To be here today means you belong to the American Political Science Association (APSA), which claims to be 'the leading professional organization for the study of political science.'²¹ To boldly lay a claim to 'leadership' when the organisation is so clearly unrepresentative of the general population (see Table 2) is an example of how easily even the most benign organisations default to the idea that western white male dominance equates leadership.

Table 2: Membership of the Political Communication section of APSA at February 2019.

APSA Political Communication Division membership at February 2019	US population in last census (2010)
76.29% Non-hispanic White or Euro American	60.4% of the general population
4.7% Hispanic or Latino American	18.3% of the general population
4.25% Black, Afro-Caribbean or African American	13.4% of the general population
8.28 East Asian or Asian American	5.9% of the general population
1.79 middle eastern or Arab American	0.6% of the general population
Native American, American Indian, Native Hawaiian and Pacific membership too small to	Pacific peoples = 0.2% and Alaska Native/American Indian 1.3%

have its own category, and lumped in with 'Others': 4.03%	
61.28% male	49.2% male
38.52% female.	50.8% female.

Data from the APSA diversity and inclusion online dashboard²².

I'm sure it has also occurred to more than one of you that digital populists and online extremists are a lot more successful than political communication scholars in communicating their views to a wide audience. Because of the metaphorical straitjacket imposed by the need to preserve and protect western knowledge systems, we end up talking to ourselves in white spaces like the one we're in today, pretending to hold digital populists to account by publishing papers in highly ranked journals that the perpetrators of hate crimes are unlikely to read, on the pretext that these are markers of objectivity and scientific excellence²³. The paradox is that every minute we spend in this space we are silently reinforcing the populist and supremacist worldviews we are wanting the world to be rid of.

If you are still doubtful about your roles as educators in perpetuating the same underlying worldviews and conditions that enable your president to think that it is acceptable to hate and engage in online abuse of people different to him, then consider these questions, which I have adapted from Ann Milne²⁴, which she herself has adapted from Shannon Morreira and Kathy Lockett from the University of Cape Town²⁵.

When you are hard at work planning for your classes or preparing a research project, do you ask yourself any or all of these questions?

- Whose principles, norms, values, knowledge and worldviews are implicit in this learning or this research? Are other world views left out? Are you even aware there are other world views that have a different perspective on your subject? That's a legacy of hundreds of years of thinking that non-western world views are immaterial. It's supremacy.
- Does your teaching practice or research critique and analyse societal conditions, attitudes and experiences through an indigenous lens? Do you even know where to go for this understanding? If the answer is no, that's supremacy.
- Does your topic reflect its location in the tribal locations of first nations or indigenous peoples in your location and your country? Do you even know whose land you are occupying? How is your teaching or research directly involving those people to create beneficial outcomes? If the answer is no, or it isn't, that's supremacy.

- Do you use the word minority to describe colored students or research subjects? That's supremacy. Minority may be a numerical concept to represent the smaller number or part, but it does not represent a lack of value or worthiness on the part of cultures that are smaller in number. Nor does having dominance in number give white educators the absolute right to use western concepts when referring to non-western peoples and cultures.
- Do you accept the proportion of students of colour who fail your courses as being a factor of normal statistical distribution? If there is a gap in achievement levels between white students and BIPOC (Black and Indigenous People of Color) students, that's not probability theory in operation, that's supremacy.

One of my colleagues asked a group of Māori students what they considered success was to them and the students said it was all of the class passing; not themselves as individuals, but the whole class collectively. I'm sure you have already jumped to thinking that getting a whole class to pass would be to either lower your standards or give the struggling students more attention which would take more time, and that isn't fair to others. That's because your frame of reference is likely to be an enlightenment one which believes that efficient/measurable systems rank above all other systems of assessment. Unfortunately, it is also a pedagogical practice that problematises students who possess different cultural values and experiences.

If you are feeling uncomfortable with this provocation and wish you hadn't chosen to come to this panel, that's also supremacy. My expectation is that most of the people in this room have seldom experienced discomfort for their worldviews. But to avoid it is a luxury only the dominant culture have. I particularly like this quote by an American educator named Jon Greenberg: 'In sports, we don't keep our athletes comfortable. Even White athletes are expected to work up a sweat at practice. So why then, when it comes to discomfort, do they get a pass in the classroom [conference]?'²⁶

In my experience in my College where we are actively trying to address these issues in our teaching, research, management structures, recruitment of students and staff and workplace values and behaviours, those who feel most discomforted are older white male academics, who are worried about the rug being pulled from under them. Contrary to all the scaremongering you might hear or read elsewhere, however, decentering knowledge and knowledge production is not about eliminating white men from the curriculum or from research or from making a contribution. It does

not mean a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. It does not mean the lowering of expectations or abandonment of words, and ideas and forms of traditional scholarship.

What it does mean, however, is consciously and actively re-orienting higher education so that it promotes the norms, values and worldviews necessary to achieve pluralistic, tolerant, multi-racial liberal democracies. As scholars who focus on the communication and representation of power, the political communication discipline has a particularly important role to play. Not by doing yet more research on bias, framing, agenda setting, or civic participation — despite decades of this research, BIPOC in this country and in mine remain amongst the most marginalised and powerless. But by learning with and from your students who have lived experience of growing up in a system of unequal power in order to make real change with and for these groups.

The following is a starter list of things you can be doing to change the impact of your teaching practice (in no particular order):

- Avoid using the term minority in your vocabulary and broaden your intellectual vision to include and critically engage with a wider range of world views when designing your course content. If you don't know how and where to start, learn from the rapidly growing number of indigenous scholars around the world.
- Engage in student responsive teaching practices by devising learning activities and assessment methods that draw on and deliver to students' different cultural strengths, needs and contexts. Aim to create a system that values a wider range of methods, focuses, practices, learning styles, languages, spaces, modes of delivery and assessment.
- Acknowledge that teaching BIPOC and non-western students comes with added responsibility. Build learning communities in your classroom where students learn actively from each other and draw on their own knowledge sources and research methodologies. Through this you can create more hospitable environments and relationships that assist learning.
- Give your BIPOC/non-western students stories, films, articles, podcasts, books that are by and include people like them. There's plenty of evidence to affirm that when an educator is able to harness what the student relates to through their own cultural identity and connect it to what is being taught the learner feels valued and the learning is more meaningful to them.

- Learn about the histories, cultural practices and languages that will enable you to build stronger relationships with your students built on shared understandings, so you can respond to them and their communities in a culturally appropriate way.
- Do not assume that indigenous communities want your fabulously researched western solutions to their needs! Stop studying 'them' and instead actively provide these communities with the opportunities to design their own solutions to their problems or needs; ask if they would like your support to do research that has mutual benefits, and do not take offense if they turn down your offer.

This is too big to be left up to diversity and inclusion officers or to wait for direction from BIPOC staff who are frequently asked to do this as unpaid work. It will also take time, and will not stop the next domestic terrorist attack taking place on American soil. But because the supremacy of western knowledge is created and reproduced in classrooms every day, it is in all those classrooms that we have to start to make the change that will one day mean that everyone can see a future for themselves *as* themselves, no-one is considered or considers themselves to be the other or supreme or extreme, and both our countries are places where all people can feel truly safe and at home²⁷.

¹ Jenny Shipley was the first female Prime Minister from 1997-1999, and Helen Clark was Prime Minister from 1999 to 2008

² For those unfamiliar with the concept of 'the great replacement', see <https://www.smh.com.au/world/europe/the-great-replacement-the-racist-idea-now-at-the-heart-of-europe-s-politics-20190319-p515cc.html>

³ <https://www.urbandictionary.com/author.php?author=Ubernoob2>. 8chan is the site on which not only the Christchurch gunman, but the subsequent Poway synagogue and El Paso mall shooters in this country posted their racist rantings and announced their intentions ahead of their acts of domestic terrorism.

⁴ Shitposting: in which people write posts that are semi-absurd, laced with references to popular content or figures in the attempt to troll people online and get an emotional response, <https://www.newstatesman.com/science-tech/internet/2019/03/christchurch-new-zealand-shooter-pewdiepie-youtube-facebook-video-shows-we-need-take-online-radicalisation>

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