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New Zealand Religious Groups' Responses to the Christchurch Terror Attacks: Inclusion, Exclusion and the State Response to the Mosque Victims

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Abstract

This article explores how New Zealand religious leaders and their communities responded to the 15 March 2019 Christchurch mosque shootings. This article analyses qualitative data, drawn from leaders across New Zealand's diverse religious communities, specifically including minority religions and the non-religious. It utilizes a two-time-period qualitative data collection methodology combining material drawn directly after the attacks with interviews subsequently conducted one year later with a diverse sample of religious leaders (n=14). We offer three findings: 1) Immediate religious community responses to the Christchurch mosque shootings, 2) Religious community reactions and reflections on the state response, and 3) Inclusive and exclusive religious framing of the mosque victims' Muslim identity. Our findings demonstrate that New Zealand religious communities were universally appalled by the Christchurch mosque attacks, in terms of its human impacts on the Muslim community, but in some cases the recognition and legitimation of the victims' religious identity were contested.

Keywords

Christchurch terror attacks; Islamophobia; intolerance; New Zealand; religion.

Introduction

On 15 March 2019, two mosques in the New Zealand city of Christchurch were subject to a white supremacist terror attack: the Al Noor Mosque and the Linwood Islamic Centre. While worshippers were engaged in their Friday prayers, the attacker shot and killed 51 people and injured another 49. The shooter, a white supremacist and self-identified member of the 'alt-right', livestreamed the shooting on the internet (Macklin 2019: 2) and had uploaded his manifesto on the website '8chan' (BBC 2019b: 1; Sparrow 2019: 15). The attacker's manifesto (Tait 2019) indicated a belief in a series of far-right conspiracy theories, in particular 'the Great Replacement', a belief that white people in Western countries are being 'replaced' by immigrant minority groups, including people from Muslim countries (Cosentino 2020: 76; Sparrow 2019: 1–5). The manifesto, imagery and video from the attacks were distributed worldwide across social media and by news media, all presenting images of white supremacist violence directed against a religious community.

In the New Zealand state response, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern initiated a tradition of refusing to use the attacker's name and requested that the public do the same (BBC 2019a). We uphold this request in this article. The government censured his manifesto, instituted gun control reform, and attempted a global call to ban terrorist and extremist violent

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content on social media (Hoverd et al. 2021). In addition, the New Zealand Government responded to the attacks with the explicit usage of inclusive Muslim imagery and ritual that was broadcast domestically and globally.

The Prime Minister Jacinda Arden publicly wore a hijab, hugged Muslim community members, and observed Muslim tradition in her post-attack messaging and remembrance services (Malik 2019: 1). She also refuted the intent behind the attacks, using the catchphrase 'This is not us' (Hall 2019: 1). On 19 March 2019, an Islamic leader opened the House of Representatives with the Adhan (Islamic call to Prayer) (New Zealand Parliament 2019). On 22 March, a national remembrance ceremony for the victims and their families was led by a Muslim leader and broadcast across the national networks RadioNZ and Television New Zealand, with two minutes' silence being observed followed directly by the Adhan (Radio New Zealand 2019).

Despite the fact that it was a *religious* community that was attacked, much of the existing literature devoted to the Christchurch attack aftermath has focused on extremism and the terrorist dimensions of the attacks (Battersby and Ball 2019: 194; Vanderberg and Hoverd 2020), gun control (Every-Palmer et al. 2020: 275), and the New Zealand Government's international Christchurch Call initiative to prevent terrorism and extremism online (Christchurch Call 2019; Thompson 2019: 83). Douglas Pratt's work (2019; 2020) is the only substantive source directly discussing the attacks from a religious studies perspective. Taylor and Taylor (2020) have talked to Christian leaders about the attacks from a theological standpoint. However, to date, a religiously diverse qualitative data set has not been drawn upon which includes minority religions and the non-religious. This article explores how New Zealand religious groups responded to and understood the attacks with a specific focus on perceptions of the Muslim community—both immediately after the attacks and at the one-year anniversary. It investigates the responses of 'other' faith groups to the Christchurch mosques' tragedy and situates their treatment of Muslims and Islam.

Literature Review

Islamophobia (Besley and Peters 2020; Drury 2019) has been a common discussion point after the attacks, but often that has been framed quantitatively in terms and measures of racism (Herrera and Sabaratnam 2019) rather than in terms of religion. For example, Greaves et al. (2020) in a study of 1,335 New Zealanders found 'a greater perceived

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threat and negativity towards Muslims compared with other groups. In particular, older people, New Zealand Europeans, men, and those with more right-wing attitudes report greater threat and negativity towards Muslims' (Greaves et al. 2020: 260). Elsewhere, Mirnajafi and Barlow (2019) have argued that much of the solidarity after Christchurch was perhaps tokenistic and that instead a focus on lasting social change needed to occur. In recent qualitative research, Ash et al. (2020) suggested that since the attacks, we need to understand racism against Muslims in New Zealand in a more complex manner. Their research found a covert racism, where non-Muslim participants argued that New Zealand was perceived as a safe haven that was tolerant and accepting of other religions and cultures. However, simultaneously participants would hold views such as women's representation in Islam was problematic and that not *all* Muslims were terrorists. Ash et al. (2020) also suggested that there is an assimilationist logic and covert racism to many of these views. Rahman (2020) suggested that there are conflicting views about Muslims in New Zealand, that positive media images and language directly after the attacks sit alongside media language that is negative, demonstrating structural inequalities and a fascination with overseas Muslim violence.

New Zealand is unfamiliar with mass shootings, having not experienced one since 1990 when 13 people were killed in the Aramoana massacre (Ministry for Culture and Heritage 2020). For most New Zealanders, religious violence has been something that happened elsewhere, overseas, not 'here'. New Zealanders have seen themselves as having a harmonious religious diversity within a highly secularized state (Pratt 2016). Outside of anti-Semitism, it is rare in New Zealand for specific religious groups to be targeted with violence (Kishi et al. 2019). There have been clear government concerns about Islamic terrorism, particularly in relation to ISIS (Key 2014) and state surveillance of Muslim communities (Royal Commission of Inquiry 2020). The 1975 case of the Ananda Marga sect is a rare example of a religious group that planned to use violence for political means in New Zealand (Battersby 2017; Battersby and Ball 2019).

Globally, there is significant literature that suggests certain Christian groups, particularly amongst non-denominational evangelicals, are intolerant towards the religion of Islam (Belt 2016; Colic-Peisker, Flitney and Dekker 2020; Lentini 2019; Vidra 2019). Pratt (2019) has made the argument that there is Christian prejudice against Muslims in New Zealand. However, a small amount of quantitative literature suggests that this prejudice against Muslims is not coming from Christian

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communities. Shaver et al. (2016) tested whether inter-religious conflict was responsible for prejudice against Muslims in New Zealand. Their results testing religious individuals suggested that prejudice against Muslims was due to other factors rather than religious intolerance *per se*. Highland et al. (2019) suggested that religious identification and church attendance in New Zealand indicated a 'powerful source of acceptance for Muslims'.

Tite has argued that violence among or against religious groups can speak to internal or group angst (2015: 185). Tite continues by suggesting that social actors are sometimes able to respond to violence constructively to 'offer healing and reintegration of shattered lives, or to render "obvious" and "natural" those worldviews that are socially constructed or contested' (Tite 2015: 185–87). Clearly, the government response was an immediate repudiation of the acts and the exclusion of the attacker's ideology. In a sense, Jacinda Ardern's actions and language offered reintegration and healing for the national community. She responded by refuting the violence of the attacks, by refusing to use his name (Wahlquist 2019), and by using the catchphrase 'they are us' (Hall 2019), and by her wearing the hijab which is a source of prejudice against Muslim women in New Zealand (Ash, Tuffin and Kahu 2019). By doing so, Ardern attempted to reconstruct the national community as an inclusive and unified 'us', where 'us' becomes a society that is not violent, exclusionary or intolerant towards Muslims. However, both indigenous Māori (Waitoki 2019) and New Zealand Muslims (Ghumkhor 2019) have said, quite frankly, 'it is us', with 'it' here directly referring to an embedded culture of intolerance towards Islam and Māori based upon a longer history of colonial Christian settler racism (Elers and Jayan 2020).

We note that the Prime Minister focused on unifying the national community to include the Muslim community after the attacks, but that the local academic literature is contested about the acceptance and tolerance of Muslims. As such, we wanted to generate qualitative data to explore how a diverse variety of religious groups understood and responded to this terrible event. Our research set out to find how New Zealand religious and humanist groups responded to and interpreted the state response to the Christchurch mosque shootings, both immediately after the event and one year later. We wanted to understand how these groups framed their relationships with the Muslim community and the Muslim victims through their own particular worldviews. We wanted to understand how they felt about the state response, particularly the usage of Islamic imagery and tradition. Lastly, we wanted to explore

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whether the attacks were indicative of broader anti-Muslim sentiment across New Zealand or whether it really was a one-off white supremacist act of terror and 'not us'.

Methodology

Our mixed-methods data was collected at two time points.

- Time Point 1: March 2019—Immediate Christian responses to the Christchurch attacks[4]
- Time Point 2: March 2020—Interviews with a diverse set of New Zealand religious and humanist leaders (n=14)[5]

The purpose of having two Time Point comparisons was to understand both immediate reactions to the attacks, and those tempered by time. Time Point 1 shows how Christian communities initially responded to the attacks through ethnographic fieldwork data from 16–17 March 2019. We supplemented the ethnographic data with a review of five publicly available sermons from non-denominational evangelical churches produced over that weekend and social media posts from a selection of New Zealand pastors. Our Time Point 1 data allowed for an immediate and unfiltered reaction to the attacks but was restricted to Christian denominations (primarily Anglican) as this was the religious group whom the lead author was doing her research fieldwork with when the attacks took place. At Time Point 2, we recorded interviews with a more diverse set of religious and humanist groups than was available at Time Point 1. We intentionally aimed to conduct the Time Point 2 interviews around the first anniversary of the attacks to ensure that they were still relatively fresh in the minds of our interview participants, who by this time had some time to reflect on the events that had taken place.

Time Point 1: March 2019—Immediate Christian Responses to the Christchurch Attacks

The Christchurch mosque attacks occurred on 15 March 2019. The ethnographic fieldwork captured data from two days after the attacks on 16–17 March utilizing participant observation and 'deep hanging out', a term developed by Clifford Geertz (1998) to describe how

4. Rivera's Time Point 1 data collection was assessed as low risk by Massey University Research Ethics Notification Number: 4000018915.

5. The Time Point 2 data was collected by the Massey University's Religion, State and Cohesion Project Team.

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anthropologists immerse themselves in a cultural or social group. This convenience sample allowed for in-depth engagement with a particular group of people at a specific point in time, in a defined geographic location. Its value is in the 'thick' description it produces (Geertz 1973) because the researcher usually participates in these settings, giving insight into how their group experiences their world, not just what they say about it. The ethnographic research consisted of embedding with an Anglican Christian group in 2019, but for this article we focus purely on the weekend directly after the shootings (16–17 March 2019). Our lead author was conducting her ethnographic research at a festival/ conference and then a dedicated ecumenical church service in response to the attacks. She participated in the festival and service and took fieldwork notes on the discourse, practices and reactions present. As per the ethics permissions from Massey University, and the research agreement with this community, names and locations have been kept anonymous. Secondly, the Time Point 1 research drew on five sermons from non-denominational evangelical churches, delivered on 17 March 2019 that were accessible and transcribed from these churches' websites. These sermons are referred to as Online Services 1–4.[6] Time Point 1 contains only 'Christian data' due to the Anglican Diocese ethnographic fieldwork and the analysis of the church sermons and social media. While this data set might be non-representative of the wide range of New Zealand Christian responses, we do argue that it offers a unique and deep understanding of Christian perspectives, and their value is they were collected in the immediate aftermath of the attacks. We supplement this 'Christian' perspective with the more religiously diverse Time Point 2 interview data.

Time Point 2: March 2020—Interviews with a Diverse Set of New Zealand Religious and Humanist Leaders

The Time Point 2 data sought to broaden our analysis by interviewing a more diverse set of New Zealand religious and humanist leaders. Time Point 2 set out to understand how, one year afterwards, these communities reflected on the impact of the attacks, understood their own relationship with the Muslim community, and how they felt the government responded to the attacks. The March 2020 New Zealand religious and humanist leader interview participants were initially

6. These church sermons were sourced from Arise Church, Church Unlimited, Curate Church, Equippers Church and Life Church.

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selected by employing census data to identify the largest religious groupings (Hoverd 2008; Hoverd and Kuhle 2018). We began with a systematic search of digital media, from which we contacted 47 religious communities with requests to participate in our interviews. These communities included Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, Non-denominational Evangelical, Latter-Day Saints, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Sikh, Humanists and Atheists. There were University ethical restrictions regarding conducting interviews with Muslim communities because of the March 2019 attacks; consequently we did not approach Muslim communities with requests for participation.

Initially, we approached communities by email, on 10 March 2020, with an interview request. We sent additional emails, and then called the groups that did not respond. However, by 17 March 2020, COVID-19 community transmission concerns and subsequent state pressure on religious organizations to cease communal worship made sourcing participants difficult. Our community leaders were no longer working in their offices and had to quickly innovate how they delivered pastoral care to their communities (Oxholm et al. 2021). As such, 27 communities did not respond, 6 declined to participate, and ultimately 14 religious leaders participated in our interviews.

Table 1: New Zealand religious leaders interview chronology

Interview number	Date	Covid alert-level	Religious affiliation	Interview method
Interviewee 1	14-03-2020	No system yet	Sikh	Face-to-face
Interviewee 2	17-03-2020	No system yet	Catholic	Face-to-face
Interviewee 3	17-03-2020	No system yet	Catholic	Face-to-face
Interviewee 4	18-03-2020	No system yet	Nondenominational Evangelical	Face-to-face
Interviewee 5	31-03-2020	Level 4: Lockdown	Anglican	Zoom
Interviewee 6	31-03-2020	Level 4: Lockdown	Buddhist	Zoom
Interviewee 7	01-04-2020	Level 4: Lockdown	Nondenominational Evangelical	Zoom
Interviewee 8	14-04-2020	Level 4: Lockdown	Humanist	Zoom
Interviewee 9	16-04-2020	Level 4: Lockdown	Jewish	Zoom
Interviewee 10	16-04-2020	Level 4: Lockdown	Latter-Day Saints	Zoom
Interviewee 11	17-04-2020	Level 4: Lockdown	Anglican	Zoom
Interviewee 12	20-04-2020	Level 4: Lockdown	Atheist	Zoom
Interviewee 13	06-07-2020	Level 1	Presbyterian	Zoom
Interviewee 14	07-07-2020	Level 1	Methodist	Zoom

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The interview utilized 18 semi-structured questions looking at religion, the state, and social cohesion in New Zealand. These questions were in five parts, divided by theme. These were: 'Background' (3 items), 'Change of the Parliamentary Prayer' (4 items), 'Social Media/ Online Extremism' (3 items), 'Christchurch Attack' (5 items), 'Questions about the New Zealand State and Government' (3 items), and then asking if the interviewee wanted a transcript. Primarily our data is drawn from the five items concerning the Christchurch attacks, because it was the one-year anniversary, the attacks were still central in our participants' minds across the whole interview. Some data was sourced from the other items as well. In the face-to-face interviews, written consent was obtained. Subsequently, consent was requested, given and recorded verbally via Zoom. The interviews were doubly transcribed, meaning one person did the initial transcription and another went through the transcripts afterwards for accuracy.

Limitations

The value of the samples is in their timing in relation to the attacks and their complementarity rather than their size or representativeness. Time Point 1 was a convenience sample that was drawn upon by the primary author in her fieldwork. Time Point 2 strove for a wider representation but was constrained by who was willing to talk during an unprecedented lockdown. Nevertheless, both samples were taken at critical times: Time Point 1 immediately after the attacks and Time Point 2 one year after the attacks.

Our 14 informants remain anonymous; for the smaller religious groups some risk of identification remains because we interviewed religious leaders in a relatively small nation of five million people. There were times in the interviews when the religious leader gave their own view of the question and differentiated the view from that of their religious group; there were other times where the views appeared synonymous. Consequently, the results may contain some ambiguity where it is not clear whether that individual represents their community or their individual views. Demographically, we note that age, education level and gender could have influenced the findings as well as the religious categories used. Additionally, certain religious groups have distinct ethnic representation (i.e., Latter-Day Saints has a high percentage of Māori and Pasifika)—this study was not able to control for ethnicity.

The Time Point 2 data set drew upon census categories of religious affiliation to identify the largest religious groups. These census categories

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are, in a sense, monolithic in that they homogenize a variety of beliefs and practices into catchall categories (Hoverd and Kuhle 2018). The largest census categories remain Christian. Comprehensive New Zealand research unpacking the variety of charismatic groups, migration trends and geography underpinning the heterogeneity of the smaller religious groups is yet to occur. We differentiated between non-denominational evangelical churches and mainline churches ('mainline' consisting of Catholic, Presbyterian, Anglican and Methodist). Evangelicalism (which includes the subcategories of Pentecostal, Charismatic and Apostolic) is a type of Christianity found across all Christian denominations (Hastings et al. 2000), including mainline ones. It is characterized by an experiential, individualized 'relationship' with God (Choi-Fitzpatrick 2014), and a literalist view of the Bible as the main source of spiritual authority (Bebbington 1989; Gallagher 2003) rather than a person (e.g., the Pope). Evangelicalism is strongly linked with non-denominational churches (Suh and Russell 2015). These churches do not belong to any official denomination and shy away from the use of formal hierarchies, clergy and rituals. Non-denominational evangelical churches usually use contemporary, upbeat music (Thumma 2015), their congregations are larger and younger than the mainline churches (Gordon and Hancock 2005; Thumma 2015), and often have an orientation to neoliberal capitalism (Coleman 2000).

Findings

Finding 1: Immediate Religious Community Responses to the Christchurch Mosque Shootings

Understandably, all the religious groups in our Time Point 1 data set reacted to the attacks with shock and sadness and, at that time, almost all made some attempt to help or convey their sorrow to the wider Muslim community. Primarily, the analysis for this result comes from our Time Point 1 data set, but most interviewees at Time Point 2 also reflected on their immediate reaction to the attacks, and some Christchurch-based leaders talked about how their community responded to being locked down by police on 15 March. More generally, our responses can be divided into immediate reactions (Time Point 1 and 2 data), and subsequent responses in the days and weeks following (Time Point 2).

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Ethnographic Observations conducted 16–17 March 2019

In the two days directly after the shootings our lead author attended a lower North Island peace festival that had been arranged many months before by her Anglican research participants.[7] The festival was already underway when the news began to emerge about the terror event unfolding in Christchurch. It was decided that the festival should continue, but instead of the intended Friday night barn party, a vigil took place in the chapel with candles, tears, and prayers. On Saturday morning, sitting in a tent on hay bales, the mood was sombre as the speakers tried to grasp what had happened in Christchurch and why. People continually checked their phones for any updates. Some clergy who attended the festival had to leave early as it became apparent that the next day's Sunday service would not be 'business as normal' and they needed to prepare.

Then on Sunday 17 March, our lead researcher attended a commemoration service at a lower North Island Anglican church where representatives of the local Muslim community were invited to join with Christians from other denominations to remember and mourn. The church was overflowing, with people having to stand outside in the foyer. These Anglican participants reported later that they observed more people attending their services in the weeks following the shootings, with more people coming into their buildings during the weekdays to sit and reflect or sign commemoration books. Across these two events, the researcher noted that the Anglican people around her were filled with emotions of shock, compassion, sadness, and a desire to connect with Muslim 'brothers and sisters' in shared mourning and grief.

Interviewee Reflections about 15 March 2019

Reflecting directly on the day of 15 March 2019, our religious and humanist leader interviewees and their communities uniformly noted that they had to respond quickly to a fluid and unfolding situation. Several Christchurch interviewees were directly affected by the potential risk of further attacks before the situation was fully understood to be the work of just one terrorist. One Christchurch-based interviewee described having to calm parents whose children were locked down in the local parish school (Interviewee 5), while another Christchurch participant joined in with the church school's teachers to keep the children distracted:

7. Unrelatedly, the theme for the weekend was 'loving thy refugee neighbor'.

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> we sat together in the hall, we had food, the kids were actually quite happy, I think they actually enjoyed it. It was bizarre, because they could look out the windows, they are quite high, the windows of our school, and there were just armed [Police] defenders everywhere [outside], it was incredible. (Interviewee 11)

In the capital city of Wellington, the Dean of the Cathedral of the Anglican Diocese went to the Kilbirnie Mosque a few hours after the shootings and a normal Friday evening prayer service at St Peters on Willis Anglican Church was hastily turned into an open public event (personal correspondence with Rivera, 19 March 2019). The service ended up being full, with people coming in off the street to grieve. Our Sikh interviewee noted that in addition to adding their voices of support to the Muslim community, his own community were immediately concerned that their Gurdwara and adherents might be mistaken for mosques or Muslims. This misconception was validated when over the weekend of 16–17 March, people started leaving flowers at the gate of the Gurdwara. The community responded by having a sign made up and placed on the Gurdwara's gate to make it clear they were a Sikh rather than Muslim community. 'Our community was worried. Going with the historical experience they thought that maybe there could be a mistaken identity thing… In Wisconsin, the gunman got into the Gurdwara, mistaking it as a mosque, and killed six people there' (Interviewee 1).

In the days, weeks and months following the shootings across our data sets we found that most of the religious communities responded empathetically in some way to the shootings. At the minimum, participants contacted people from their religious community to make sure everyone was okay (Interviewee 7), and some got in touch with Muslim friends and colleagues to check on them (Interviewee 4). Many held special services, as mentioned in the ethnographic description above, and a few invited Muslim leaders to their places of worship for combined services. Some visited their local mosque and/or stood outside to form a human chain of protection during Friday prayers. Those involved with interfaith and ecumenical groups, such as the Sikh, Buddhist, Jewish, Catholic, Anglican and Latter-Day Saint communities, held meetings and coordinated help and support (Interviewees 1, 3, 6, 9, 10). Humanist participants noted that most of their responses, such as visiting the mosque, were as individuals and not as a community (Interviewee 8). Many of these groups issued official statements. For some, such as humanists and atheists, this was their main response to the event, where they issued statements of condolence through their social media channels.

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Some participants put on community events, for example our Buddhist participant's community held an art exhibition with a theme of peace (Interviewee 6), and the Sikh community set up an outdoor kitchen and provided food to their neighbourhood (Interviewee 1). Actions of commemoration and solidarity were also common, such as non-Muslim women wearing a hijab on the day of the official state commemoration service (Interviewee 3), ringing church bells (Interviewee 11), and making crafts to hang in public places (personal correspondence with Rivera, 2019).

Practical help was a feature for many religious communities. Some gave money (Interviewees 9, 10; Online Services 1, 4), and others provided food and care packages to wounded victims and their families (Online Service 1). One example of this practical help can be seen in the response of the Latter-Day Saints in our sample. They provided volunteers to the local council to help coordinate the response for what victims needed, food for a marae (Māori meeting house) that was hosting emergency responders, and taxi vouchers for people who needed to get to the hospital to visit loved ones or who were scared to use public transport (Interviewee 10).

Two of the Christian communities interviewed did not offer any extra actions after their initial response, which was to pray and text a Muslim acquaintance straight after the shootings. One Christchurch pastor said they did not know any Muslims personally and were unsure what to do.

> We looked for different ways, I sent some emails to different people, tried to talk to [some] people. But… the Islamic group would still be quite a separate group from the bulk of this city, to be honest… I think for most of us it seemed like we could do very little… I think, had we had more connection, we would have reached out with love and grace. (Interviewee 7)

In the immediate responses to the shootings, all groups sampled expressed sympathy for a community affected by violence. Practically and symbolically all groups that we sampled across both Time Points expressed their shock and sorrow at the horror of the attacks and evidenced demonstrable support for the victims through actions of help, inclusiveness, donations and/or with words of solidarity and compassion.

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Finding 2: Religious Community Reactions and Reflections on the State Response

Finding 2 explores the range of reactions and reflections on the subsequent state response to the shooting. New Zealand's minority religions and the historical mainline Christian groups were generally supportive of the state response whereas non-denominational evangelical Christians were less so. Humanist and atheist groups had mixed views. In addition, a clear sub-finding emerged where those who were unsure about aspects of the state's response, or thought it was unacceptable, did so out of direct concern over the state use of Islamic practices and traditions in public and government settings. Some of this concern was non-religious from a human-rights and/or feminist viewpoint, and for a small group of Christians the objections were theological.

At Time Point 2, interview participants were asked what they thought of the New Zealand state's response to the shootings, specifically Prime Minister Jacinda Arden wearing the traditional Muslim headscarf (hijab). Other state use of Islamic practices in remembrance events that were mentioned in the data set were the use of the Adhan (Islamic call to prayer) in the New Zealand Parliament (19 March 2019) and at the official commemoration service in Christchurch (22 March 2019).

Most respondents felt the government did a good, very good, or excellent job of responding to the New Zealand community in the wake of the shootings. 'I would say, the overall government response was good' (Interviewee 1). 'We were one hundred and twenty percent supportive of the government response, and thought it was excellent and kind of unprecedented in the amount of human empathy' (Interviewee 6). There were some variations in response to specific elements of the government response. The Prime Minister's wearing of the hijab, and its adoption by a percentage of non-Muslim New Zealand women as a sign of solidarity in the remembrance ceremonies, evoked mixed responses (Rahman 2020).

The Catholic, Anglican and Buddhist interviewees were the most positive about the wearing of the hijab by non-Muslim women, seeing it as an appropriate response in a multi-cultural society such as New Zealand (Interviewees 3, 6, 11). Others understood the sentiment Prime Minister Ardern was trying to convey, but felt its representation was conflicting. The humanists and atheists thought the use of a contested religious symbol by the head of a secular state was problematic (Interviewees 8, 12). Additionally, it was felt that she sent the wrong message regarding the

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fight for women's rights by some Muslim feminists, and that the hijab is a symbol of patriarchy.

> Jacinda Ardern wearing a headscarf, I thought that was a little odd. I mean, I know why she did it, and of course it made for some incredible photos, which will do her well. But there are a significant number of, particularly Iranian, refugees [we know] and one thing we agree on is that it is inappropriate of Ardern to wear that symbol of incredibly heightened, patriarchal views of women as possessions… so, we were totally in agreement how it could send the wrong message. (Interviewee 9)

Across all the Time Point 2 groups there was an acknowledgement that the Prime Minister wearing the hijab was an empathetic and political act specifically aimed at symbolizing reconciliation and solidarity with Muslim communities domestically and likely internationally (Interviewees 1, 3, 6, 11), but the act itself and its emulation by non-Muslim women made others uncomfortable (Interviewees 4, 7, 8, 9, 12).

Regarding the public use of Islamic ritual at the commemoration service and its broadcast on national media channels, many religious communities were either neutral about this or thought it appropriate to the tragedy. Some felt uncomfortable, but spoke on behalf of their own individual beliefs, rather than their communities on this topic. One said for those who had lived as minorities in the Middle East the use of the Adhan in a state ceremony in New Zealand brought up conflicted feelings.

> The broadcasting of the central, important prayer in Islam, which is, if you look around the theocracies of the Middle East… an integral part of maintaining that theocracy, so a lot of people would have viewed that [as] giving the Muslims this state public platform to proselytize… I know [name of Iman], and I know that he is not trying to take over New Zealand with Islam, but there was an unsettling feeling to it. (Interviewee 9)

A group of leaders from different religious communities was invited to Parliament on 19 March 2019 to open the first session after the attacks with prayer, firstly the Adhan and then the normal Parliamentary Prayer (Oxholm et al. 2022). Most Time Point 2 participants who discussed this item were neutral or positive in their reactions, except for non-denominational evangelical Christians.

These Christians were the religious group most disturbed by the state use of Islamic practices in the wake of the shootings. Most concerns were theologically, and to some extent politically, based. One pastor who was

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interviewed saw the use of Islamic practices by the state as submitting New Zealand to the spiritual authority of Islam.

> Jacinda Ardern putting on the head scarf is really a symbol of coming under Islam. That is what it symbolizes… [and] having their people go into our Parliament and declare that Allah is the only true god, within our own Parliament, no way. So, I am against that, totally and absolutely. Our government shouldn't be doing that, I have no idea what they are doing. Because there is a spiritual dynamic here, that they are tapping into and don't seem to understand. (Interviewee 4)

Another interviewee mentioned that it was understandable the state used Islamic elements considering the specific circumstances, but in their view, it solidified the symbolic decline of state Christian tradition in New Zealand. 'I mean, if you feel that you have things being eroded and then you see another thing… that fire is already burning so [it] throws some petrol on it' (Interviewee 7). Similarly, in our Time Point 1 digital data we observed that the public national broadcast of the Adhan was contentious for these Christians. One pastor stated that New Zealand is a Christian nation 'founded on Christian values and principles. I'm not bowing to Allah' (Wall 2019). Pastor Paul De Jong of Life Church Auckland stated on Instagram:

> To be asked to pray is one thing, but to pray a prayer that states there is no other God, but Allah stands against our Christian faith. I encourage all Christians to pray for those affected by the shooting and loss of loved ones, but to be praying in and exalting the name of Jesus. (De Jong 2019)

Bishop Brian Tamaki of Destiny Church wrote on Twitter:

> Hold on a mo… On Friday… at least for a moment NZ will become a Muslim Nation… 2 min of silence is ok but the Islamic Prayer will sound? it contains this line 'there is no God but Allah'. Well I disagree… Jesus Christ is the only True God… This is Not US! (Tamaki 2019)

Across these examples from Time Point 1, we see emerging clear sympathy at the human level for the victims, but a theological opposition to the victims' religion. The quoting of New Zealand's national anthem, 'God of Nations', was also a common feature in sermons and social media accounts of non-denominational evangelical pastors.

> 'God defend our free land, guard Pacific's triple star from the shafts of strife and war'… It says there to guard us from strife and war… these are serious times, this is a state of emergency. My fear is that if the church does not arise, I don't want to say what could happen… Our national

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> anthem is a message to the church. 'Lord of battles in thy might, put our enemies to flight'. 'God defend our free land'. God watch over our nation and protect it, turn it to Jesus. (Online Service 2)

From the immediate aftermath of the mosque attacks, we saw that the state response, particularly its use of Islamic tradition and imagery, was understood to have a symbolic inclusive intent. It was intended to symbolically integrate both the affected and broader national Muslim community into state and community discourse and identity. Across both Time Points 1 and 2, most mainline Christian groups and smaller minority religions evinced a level of comfort with this approach and all groups understood the restitution role and community-building symbolism of this usage. However, the usage did make some participants uncomfortable for either human-rights reasons or for theological reasons. Human-rights questions arose around the wearing of the hijab (Interviewees 8, 9, 12). Theological concerns were associated with the notion that certain respondents felt that New Zealand is a Christian nation and others had strong concerns about the spiritual ramifications of having Islamic traditions employed by the state.

Finding 3: Inclusive and Exclusive Religious Framing of the Mosque Victims' Muslim Identity

Finding 1 showed a general empathy and horror expressed by New Zealand's religious groups for the victims as fellow human beings affected by violence. Finding 2 demonstrated mixed feelings about the state response to the mosque attacks, particularly in relation to the incorporation of Islamic tradition in state discourse and action. Nevertheless, certain participants particularly at Time Point 2 were divided when it came to discussing Islam and the Muslim identity of the victims. Finding 3 was analysed by examining language use and showed that specific words to describe Muslim identity were used by some religious communities and not by others. Consequently, in Finding 3, we find that the religious groups sampled across the two time points utilized three types of inclusive and exclusive discourses to describe the Muslim identity of the victims:

(a) inclusive language of 'Muslim brothers and sisters', or 'Muslim neighbors' etc.
(b) the omission of any language identifying the victims as Muslim—not offering any religious legitimacy and instead framing the victims simply as 'humans', 'fellow citizens' or 'parents'.

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(c) an explicit opposition to any legitimacy given to Islam in combination with horror at the violence of the attacks and empathy for the victims as 'humans'.

The mainline Christian groups, the Latter-Day Saints, humanists, and minority religious groups, such as the Jewish community, used familial relational terms such as 'our Muslim brothers and sisters', and similar words including 'friends' and 'neighbors' in discussion of the Muslim community at large. The Anglican Church used the phrase 'our Muslim brothers and sisters' five times across four official statements. 'It [Prime Minister Arden's wearing of the hijab] was a powerful symbol of solidarity with our Muslim brothers and sisters and a gesture of love, kindness, support and all those things' (Interviewee 8). 'It was an automatic response; how can we support our Muslim brothers and sisters?' (Interviewee 10). 'We choose to stand with our Muslim brothers and sisters and support their continued and inalienable right to live and worship here in peace' (Richardson and Tamihere 2019).

Across our data sets, the second way of talking about the victims and Muslim community emphasized the human tragedy in terms of those shot being 'fellow humans' and 'people'. Eight participants noted that their communities reacted, 'as humans'. 'We might have different theological views, but we are humans, this is about an attack on humanity' (Interviewee 14). 'We are all one human family and let us stand strong with that' (Interviewee 6). Non-denominational evangelical churches tended to discuss the victims as being 'parents/dads/mums/children' to emphasize that everyone lost in the violence was part of a family unit and that they could identify with the victims in that way. 'They have mums and dads and families that have been decimated. The bread earner has gone. Kids have lost their dads and mums. It is horrendous' (Interviewee 4). 'There are children who have lost their fathers, parents that have lost their children, people who have lost their cousins' (Online Service 4).

Across our data sets the non-denominational evangelical churches and one mainline Church omitted to use the phrase 'Muslim brothers and sisters' or refer to the Muslim community or Islamic identity at all. Indeed, with these groups the word 'Muslim' itself was not used, with victims being referred to in terms indicating fellow humanity such as 'the/those people', 'those who were shot'. 'Many [here] today will know people who are lost, people who are missing… We will take an offering for those who have been impacted and lost family members' (Online Service 1). 'We can see that when we look at the people who were victims

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this week, we have more in common than we would think on the surface' (Online Service 4).

While it is difficult to make inference about an omission, it is possible there was a deliberate choice of language which prioritized the humanity of the victims/community and the horror they experienced, over naming, legitimating or potentially having to conflict with the Muslim identity and beliefs of the victims. Importantly, many of these groups did fundraise for and donate to the victims, indicating strong human empathy despite not mentioning their religious identity.

Within the non-denominational churches there was a small group that did speak of the Muslim identity of the victims. They specifically differentiated their response between the shooting victims as humans whom they wanted to support, and their religion of Islam having a political and spiritual dimension that they felt negatively about.

> So, on a human level, our response was to pray for these people… it is horrendous [what happened]… on a human level we will do what we can to help. [But] having their people go into our Parliament and declare that Allah is the only true god, no way… there has been certainly an embracing of the Islamic community and they have used that of course to promote themselves, as anybody would. (Interviewee 4)

This comment differentiates between a shared humanity with the victims, but an oppositional stance to the New Zealand state's use of Islamic practices in official commemoration events that were examined in Finding 2. Finding 3 shows that the religious communities used differing language to frame their responses to victims of the Christchurch shootings. The first and most common use of language was inclusive and acknowledged the victim's Muslim identity. While all were empathetic to the tragedy that had befallen their fellow human beings, not all groups acknowledged the victim's Muslim identity, some groups simply used human and familial language to describe the victims, with a small minority clearly differentiating between a human response to the victims and theological opposition to Islam.

Conclusion

Our two-time-period data allowed us to explore how certain New Zealand religious leaders and their communities responded to the 15 March 2019 Christchurch mosque attacks, both directly after the attacks in Time Point 1 and then one year later with Time Point 2. Rahman (2020) noted that there was a complexity of media imagery around the attacks with

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empathy around the attack in contrast to a variety of negative images of Islam. Similarly, our data demonstrates that New Zealand religious communities were appalled by the violence of the mosque attacks particularly in terms of its human impact on the Muslim community. Where our results are more specific is that they demonstrate that religious resistance to Islam is explicitly found in one form of Christianity where the recognition and legitimation of the religious identity of the victims were omitted or contested. Recently, research addressing the post-attack New Zealand Parliamentary performance of the Adhan has also found some strong Christian resistance to its usage (Oxholm et al. 2022). Elsewhere, Geoffrey Troughton has noted that:

> There are some groups who have been very concerned about what they perceive as public acknowledgement given to Islam… [They believe the Adhan] has spiritually potent actions… that activate spiritual powers that are malign or not working in the nation's interests. (Troughton cited in Wall 2019)

Our data indicates resistance to Islam exists amongst some of New Zealand's non-denominational evangelical Christians. Our findings suggest that the state's Christchurch terror attacks response and its use of Islamic tradition has exacerbated this resistance. One of our challenges with this data set is that, by noting the omission of the religious identity of the victims by some Christians, we are left to interpret what is unsaid. Methodologically, our research design does not allow for this interpretation. To suggest that the omission we find in our data is deliberate, exclusionary or that we find Islamophobia through omission, are all interpretive bridges too far. However, we did find explicit intolerance of Islam from some non-denominational evangelical groups. As such, we would encourage an exploration of what is *unsaid* by religious communities about Muslims to be a focus of future research.

Additionally, we would also like to see further exploration of Islamophobia in New Zealand that addresses racism and religious intolerance together rather than as separate measures. The evangelical objection to Muslim identity is similar, but distinctively different to racism because their objections are based on religion, theology and doctrine, rather than ethnicity, nationality or culture. Recent work by Haynes (2020) focused on right-wing populist politicians' 'vilification of Islam as a faith and Muslims as a people'. This allowed Haynes (2020) to consider how illiberal arguments made about Muslims that are overtly framed in terms of human rights actually function implicitly (and explicitly) alongside Christian ideological intolerance.

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Methodologically, we encountered challenges with using New Zealand census and historical categorizations to discuss religious diversity. It is debatable how useful a term like 'Mainline Christianity' is, given that the term could be argued as prioritizing those groups when they have collectively shrunk to represent a relatively small percentage of the total population. Today, you could argue that all religions in New Zealand are minority groups. Additionally, we must acknowledge that census categorizations are monolithic as they mask all sorts of ethnic, geographical, cultural and theological differences within these groups. For example, the census category 'Muslim' does not differentiate between Shi'a and Sunni and it encompasses ethnic and cultural diversity from across Europe, Africa, the Middle East and South East Asia. The usefulness of the Muslim census category is helpful only in comparison to other census categories. The limitations of census categories suggest that the qualitative richness of the heterogeneity in these categorizations require further analytical and methodological exploration.

When it comes to thinking about how religious communities understand Islam, our results suggest that Highland et al.'s (2019) findings that New Zealand's churches offer a 'powerful source of acceptance for Muslims' needs careful qualification with the word 'Mainline'. The Mainline Christians, humanist and atheist, and the minority religious groups we interviewed were generally inclusive and accepting towards Muslims specifically in the light of the Christchurch attacks, whereas non-denominational evangelical Christians clearly differentiated between the unjust horror of the violence perpetrated against the victims, and their Muslim identity. Importantly, this research adds the finding that *religious intolerance* needs to be factored into the growing evidence that prejudice and racism are widespread in relation to the New Zealand Muslim community.

New Zealand data on religious responses to the Christchurch attacks should be of interest globally and nationally. This nation's response to an unprecedented white supremacist terror attack on a Muslim population was unique at the time. The state response was intentionally inclusive and incorporated restitution in its intent. It drew particular attention to the negative social experiences of New Zealand Muslims and started what has been a series of difficult conversations between the government and Muslim community. Today, that response is primarily incorporated in the Department for Prime Minister and Cabinet's *Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Attack on Christchurch Mosques on 15 March 2019* which utilizes a Muslim reference group to inform a cross government policy response to foster an 'inclusive New Zealand, welcoming of people of

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all ethnicities and backgrounds' (Royal Commission of Inquiry 2020). As part of that response, it has noted the lack of research in this area and, in Recommendation 32, argued that 'Public sector agencies need to prioritize the collection of data on ethnic and religious demographics to support analysis and advice on the implications of New Zealand's rapidly changing society, inform better policy making and enhance policy evaluation'. Our data, its limitations, and our suggested avenues for future research point to some of the factors around New Zealand religious demographics that could be further explored to enhance this recommendation.

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