

ONLINE WARFARE: DEFINITION, DRIVERS AND SOLUTIONS

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ABOUT CARE

The Centre for Culture-Centred Approach to Research and Evaluation (CARE) at Massey University, Aotearoa New Zealand, is a global hub for communication research that uses participatory and culture-centred methodologies to develop community-driven communication solutions to health and wellbeing. Through experiments in methods of radical democracy anchored in community ownership and community voice, the Centre collaborates with communities, community organisers, community researchers, advocates and activists to imagine and develop sustainable practices for prevention, health care organising, food and agriculture, worker organising, migrant and refugee rights, indigenous rights, rights of the poor and economic transformation.

Prof Mohan J Dutta is the Director of CARE and author of books such as *Neoliberal Health Organizing*, *Communicating Health*, and *Voices of Resistance*.

This white paper may include images and texts around topics such as sexual violence, physical violence, identity-based discrimination and harassment, and genocide. I encourage you to care for your safety and wellbeing while reading this paper.

WHITE SUPREMACIST NETWORKS AND ANTI-MĀORI HATE: TRACKING THE FAR-RIGHT DISCURSIVE ECOSYSTEM AROUND THE 2024 HIKOI

This white paper maps the discursive ecosystem of the far-right organised around the targeting of the 2024 hikoi resisting the Treaty Principles Bill. The hikoi emerged as a broad organising space for challenging the Bill, perceived by many as attack on the Treaty of Waitangi, drawing in tangata whenua and tauiwi into a collective movement. Organised over nine days across Aotearoa, with some groups beginning the journey from Far North and Bluff and pulling in approximately 50,000 participants from across the nation, the hikoi has been described as the largest protest march in national history. The Treaty Principles Bill is organised around a narrative of equality, promising equality to all New Zealand citizens. This framing of equality to target Indigenous rights resonates with the global uses of the language of equality in the far-right ecosystem to target diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). In response to the introduction of the Bill in New Zealand parliament, several Members of Parliament (MPs) expressed their opposition to the bill, with the Member of Parliament (MP) of Te Pati Māori Hana-Rāwhiti Maipi-Clarke tearing a copy of the bill and then leading a haka in New Zealand parliament.

The hikoi, that was being planned in anticipation of the expected date of release of the bill, marched to the parliament although the bill was launched earlier than its announced date. The global far-right digital network responded to the hikoi and the protest in parliament by Te Pati Māori with white supremacist messages disseminating anti-Māori hate and calling for violence. This white paper analyses the far-right discursive ecosystem that emerged around the hikoi, the global interconnections among the digital infrastructures of the far-right across spaces, and the brick-and-mortar linkages of digital disinformation and anti-Māori hate. The analysis wraps up with recommendations addressing anti-Māori disinformation and hate. The analysis presented in this report is limited to X, and further research is needed into the other digital platforms through which disinformation and hate around the hikoi are produced, magnified, and sustained.

METHODS

This white paper is based on 37 hours of observations of digital interactions on X, and theme analysis of the posts, comments and retweets emergent from the far-right infrastructure. The initial categorisation of far-right is based on preliminary research, informed by the literature. The far-right is defined by the nature of the posts made and the interlinkages with known far-right accounts. The initial accounts that are identified then lead to other accounts. The analysis began with open coding, reading critically the initial collection of tweets, drawing upon the key tenets of the culture-centered approach that explore the interplays of culture, structure and agency in the construction of marginalising messages. The open codes are then arranged into broader categories, which are placed into a conceptual framework.

FINDINGS

The findings demonstrate the interlinkages between the white supremacist far-right global ecosystem and the digital ecosystem of the far-right in Aotearoa. Moreover, the themes point to the intersections between the far-right digital infrastructure and right-wing astroturfing organisations, political leaders and political parties in Aotearoa New Zealand.

FAR RIGHT APPEAL TO EQUALITY

The far-right discursive infrastructure centers a narrative of equality to mobilise anti-Māori racism. Consider here the framing of the Treaty Principles Bill as a policy framework to give equal rights to citizens of all races, a narrative that is convergent with the appeal to equality deployed by the far-right in is targeted attacks on DEI. Here's a post from a far-right X account titled @EndWokeness that has historically engaged with and reproduced the narratives of the Trumpian ecosystem:



Figure 1: A nodal far-right handle creating and disseminating the trope of equal rights

The tweet generated 18 million views, generating responses such as “Why are they protesting equal rights?” The handle responds to the question by stating, “Equal rights = no special privileges.” Note here the decontextualized reading of Te Tiriti, with the implication that Te Tiriti offers special privileges to Māori. The far-right platform of EndWokeness regularly interfaces with far-right X handles such as Tommy Robinson:



Figure 2: The EndWokeness account interfacing with the far-right Islamophobic Tommy Robinson account

Simultaneously, the racist structure of the settler colonial state, the institutional and structural racism toward Māori, and the large-scale inequalities in outcomes experienced by Māori are erased. These erasures reflect the erasures of structural violence perpetuated by settler colonialism in the Treaty Principles Bill. Another response to the tweet states,



Figure 3: A nodal far-right handle creating and disseminating the trope of equal rights

Note once again the framing of Te Tiriti as offering special rights based on race, at the same time, erasing the historic account of settler colonialism that has shaped the structural barriers experienced by Māori in health, education, employment etc.

Here's another post that further makes visible the communicative inversion of the historical evidence, emergent from the far-right account @Visegrád 24 that is funded by the Polish government, manufactures disinformation and Islamophobic hate, and supports the populist far-right in Europe, Brazil, and the US. Note here the communication content produced by @Visegrád 24 around the "Make Europe Great Again" campaign.



Figure 4: A far-right X handle, with partial funding from the Polish government, spreading disinformation based on communicative inversion

The post is disseminated across the X ecosystem of the far-right.



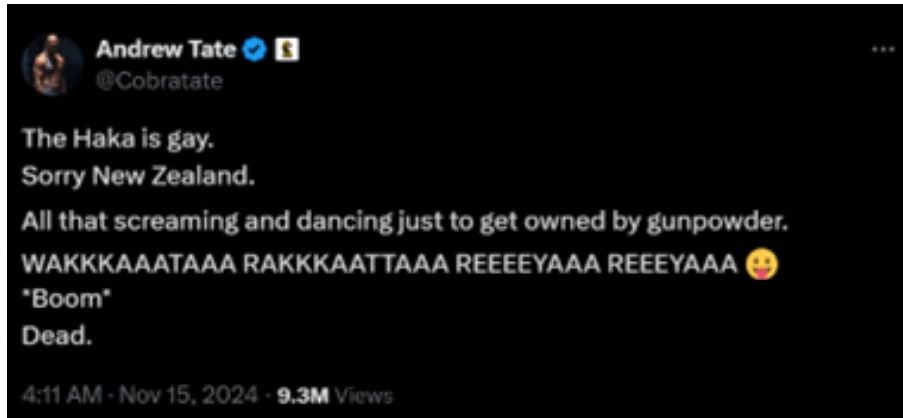
Figure 5: The communicative inversion around the inequities experienced by Māori disseminated in the far-right ecosystem

The tweet above communicatively inverts the historic and ongoing structurally-anchored inequalities experienced by Māori in Aotearoa, unseeing the robust empirical evidence around the structural determinants of health, education, housing etc. The tweet is also shared by the far-right account @visregaard. Critical here is the analogy put forth by the far-right digital ecosystem between the Treaty Principles Bill and the dismantling of DEI. The hikoi is seen through this lens as a DEI movement that is seeking to undermine equality.



RACIST CONSTRUCTION OF THE PRIMITIVE OTHER

Key far-right handles on digital platforms produce anti-Māori hate, portraying Māori as weak and primitive, and therefore, deserving of the colonial violence. Consider here the post from the X handle of the far-right white supremacist Andrew Tate.



The racist misogyny in the post legitimizes colonial-imperial violence, rendering visible the white supremacy that underlies the violence. The portrayal of Māori as primitive forms the architecture of colonialism, constructing Māori as inferior and therefore, deserving of colonial genocide. It is critical to point out here that the racist depiction of the haka generated 9 million plus views and 1 million+ likes. The post generates dehumanising comments from accounts based in Aotearoa New Zealand. Let's look at the following post:



This is a critical element of the global discursive infrastructure of the far-right, mobilising attacks on marginalised communities through a constructed conspiracy around “Cultural Marxism” and “DEI.” Note the caricature of Hana-Rāwhiti Maipi-Clarke portrayed in the image, with white supremacist depiction of the Haka as “stone age tropes.” An account named TruebloodNZ responds, “Totally agree bro. God Defend New Zealand.” Moreover, the depictions of Māori as primitive mobilise contrasting narratives of what makes up modernity. The posts on X build around racist narratives constructing dehumanising frames, drawing upon tropes around Indigenous culture. These dehumanising frames are critical to the communicative infrastructure of anti-Māori hate.



Note here the racist language, placed alongside the racist reading of the imagery. The racist framing of the clothing is juxtaposed in the backdrop of the framing of the Nike store as a symbol of modernity. The post then draws up racist responses, replete with objectifying language, and turning then to attack DEI and Cultural Marxism.

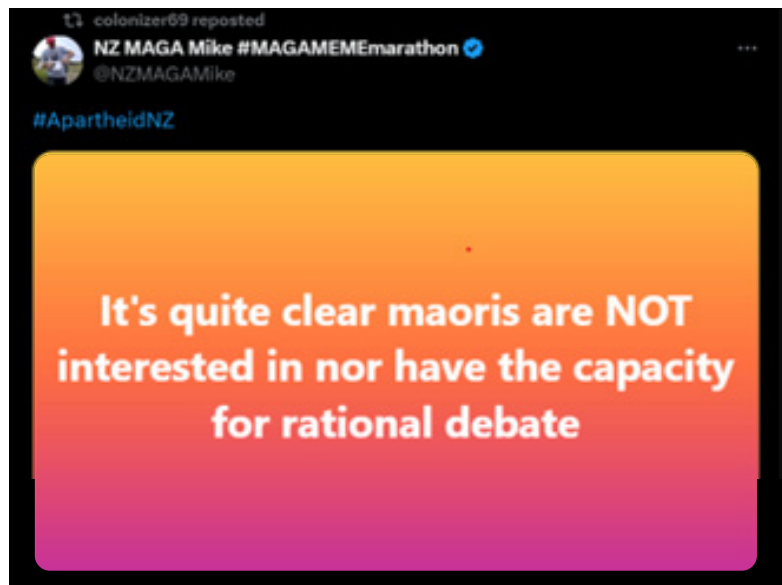


Consider similarly the primitivising gaze in the following imagery emergent from an X handle based in Aotearoa New Zealand, and retweeted by other handles engaging with the global far-right ecosystem:



The violent imagery presented in the tweet generates a violent response, “Yup we aren’t voting out of this just slowly equip yourself buy ammo every week,” by a handle named colonizer69 @bigot666.

The framing of More and the haka as primitive is reproduced across posts, going on then to frame the hikoi as against civilisation and democracy. Far-right handles portray Māori as incapable of rational debate.



Note also here the hashtag #ApartheidNZ that communicatively inverts the materiality of Apartheid, framing the mobilisation around Māori rights as apartheid. The frame of Māori receiving handouts forms a critical infrastructure of the far-right ecosystem, reproducing racialized imageries of protestors.



In another tweet, a New Zealand-based handle @the_salty_one erases the history of settler colonial violence, instead framing the colonial enterprise as protecting Māori. Māori are depicted as begging for help for protection against the French. White European civilisation is portrayed as offering protection and enlightenment and bringing about an end to cannibalism and slavery.



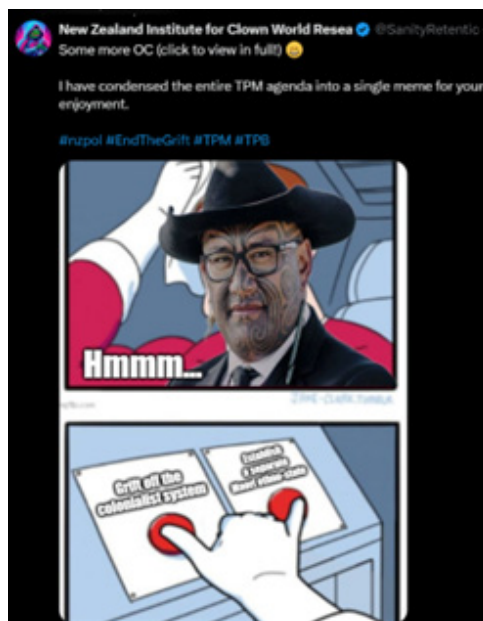
LINKAGES WITH THE FAR-RIGHT ECOSYSTEM IN AOTEAROA

The responses to the hikoi render visible the interlinkages between the discursive infrastructures of the far-right across spaces. In response to the post on the hikoi by @EndWokeness, an X account based in Aotearoa posts the following:



Note the framing of the hikoi as a separatist movement, and the construction of New Zealand police as “terrorist scum.” The response then generates racist responses such as, “Couldn’t fight their way out of a wet paper bag. They were defeated by a single boat from England with a scrawny crew. At least they’re not cannibals anymore, apparently.” The @KiwiLivesMatter handle comments, “Cannibalism is still practiced in New Zealand by the gangs. Police even caught one of them discussing plans to cook and eat a witness to one of their crimes in a ‘hangi’ (dirt oven).”

Consider further the construction of the TPM agenda:



The protest around seeking to assert Te Tiriti-based rights is framed as a separatist movement for a separate Māori ethno-state. It is critical to underline here the erasure of the historic knowledge of Te Tiriti, instead imposing a narrative of ethnically-based separatism. The rhetorical trope of separatism is a communicative inversion, racializing Te Tiriti and reducing the established scholarly and legal work around Te Tiriti to a race-based frame. This race-based frame is reproduced across tweets, framing the hikoi as identity politics, a frame that situates the hikoi within the broader discursive architecture of the far-right attack on DEI. Consider here the following tweet:



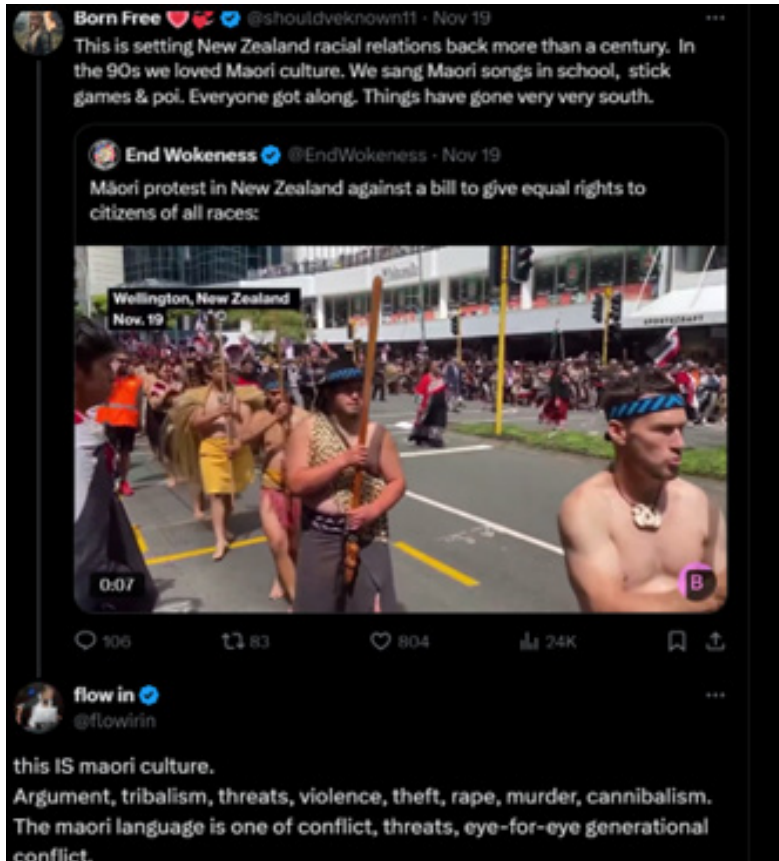
The hikoi is framed as march against equal rights, as identity politics. This language depicts the ways in which the language of equality is deployed to attack DEI within the broader discursive architecture of the far-right. Moreover, note the framing of the hikoi as anti-European and ungrateful to the Europeans who “developed the country.”



The discursive infrastructure is rife with white supremacist claims that imply and explicitly claim the superiority of the white race over Māori. Consider the following tweet:



The tweet from the @EndWokeness handle is shared by a handle in Aotearoa New Zealand Born Free, @shouldveknown11,



Note here the racist tropes assembled together in painting Māori as primitive, pulling together into a singular communicative framework that racist stereotypes of “argument, tribalism, threats, violence, theft, rape, murder, cannibalism.” The white supremacy of the narrative describes Te Reo as a language of “conflict, threats, eye-for-eye generational conflict.” Another post responding to the hikoi, based in Aotearoa New Zealand responds to the @EndWokeness handle:



Evident is the analogy drawn with the Black Lives Matter movement. Moreover, it is critical to underline the violence that is depicted in the imagery. The tweet by the far-right account @ generates comments, likes, and engagement from the right-wing ecosystem in Aotearoa New Zealand. Here's an example:



Underlying the narrative are the racist tropes around “Māori elite,” “Māori on benefits draining public fundings.” The handle goes on to further state on the thread, “Why on earth do Muslims, who hate the west, want to come to NZ? To take over as they have in other countries.”

CALLS TO VIOLENCE

The discursive infrastructure of the far-right responding to the hikoi is saturated with references to violence. The violence becomes explicit across a range of far-right X handles, as noted earlier. The colonizer69 @ bigoat666 handle mentioned earlier shares Nazi memes and imagery, drawing upon a global far-right infrastructure. Consider the following post:



Attend here to the explicit imagery of Hitler, and the discursive ecosystem that engages with the imagery. Here's another re-post by the handle:

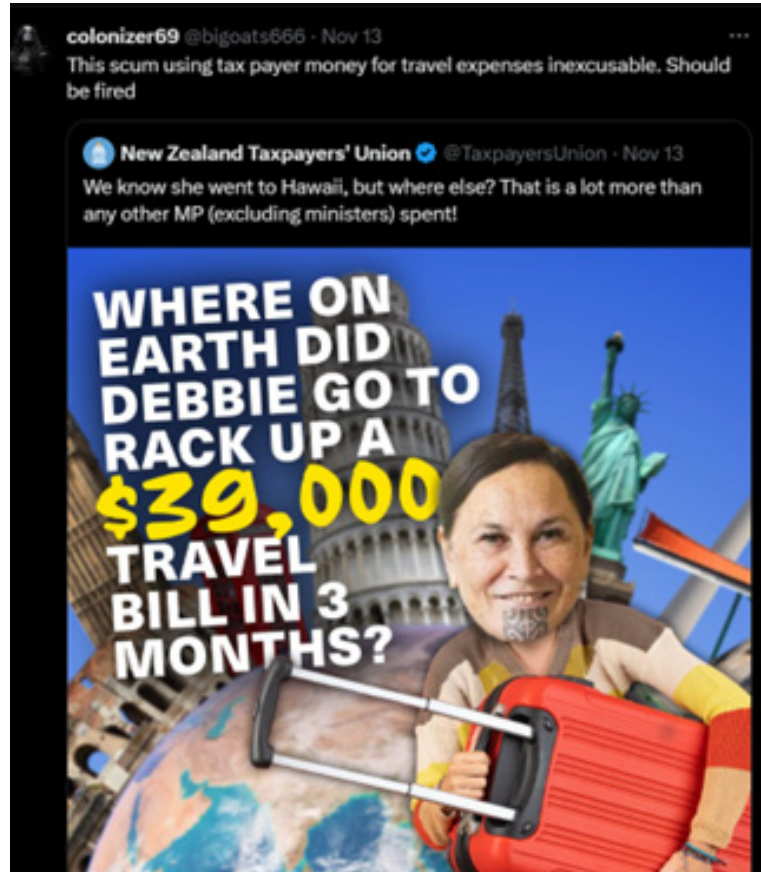


The handle continually recirculates white supremacist frames, framing white civilisation, culture, family and children under threat.

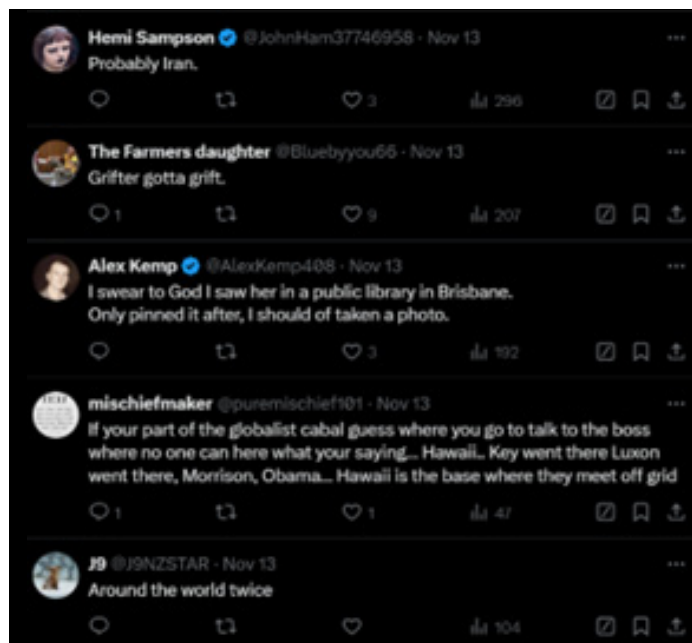


FAR-RIGHT INTERSECTION WITH MAINSTREAM

The digital infrastructure of the far-right continually engages with, promotes, reproduces and draws upon the communication infrastructure of the mainstream right. For example, the colonizer69 account retweets the posts from the mainstream right wing astroturf organisation Taxpayers Union. Here’s an example:



Refer here to the racist imagery targeting a Māori Wāhine, drawing on racist stereotypes. The post by Taxpayer Union offers the context for the violent language and the call to fire an elected member of parliament. I document here some other racist responses that are generated in response to the TPU post:



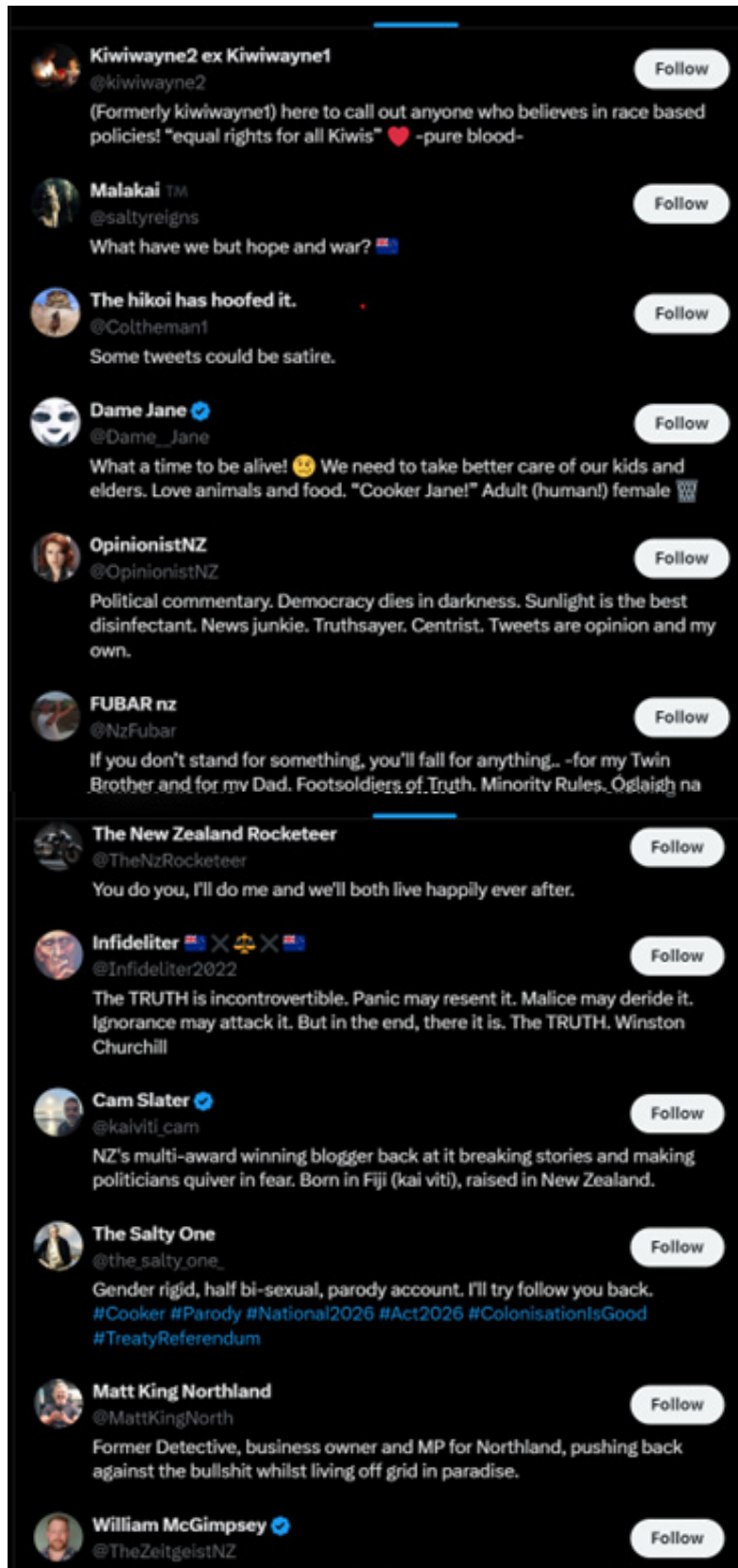
The responses are replete with far-right conspiracies around a globalist agenda and Iranian influence. The OnceWereKiwis handle posts the following Tweet, reposting with comment on a video by the ACT MP David Seymour championing the Treaty Principles Bill:



The handle OnceWereKiwis often posts violent misogynist imagery, including images targeted at the former Prime Minister Dame Jacinda Adern.



Here are some of the followers of the OnceWereKiwis handle:



The follow list includes right-wing New Zealand blogger Cam Slater, William McGimpsey (attached earlier to the Free Speech Union and disseminator of the Great Replacement Conspiracy), and the former politician Matt King, noted for spreading disinformation around COVID-19 and climate change. Here's another posted by a far-right account shared in the right-wing ecosystem:



CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the far-right digital infrastructure mobilizes around the white supremacist trope of equality to attack Māori and Te Tiriti. At the heart of the communicative infrastructure is the continual reproduction of communicative inversion, the turning of materiality on its head to construct white communities and civilisation in threat. The far-right communicatively inverts DEI to frame policies seeking to address structural racism as racist. This rhetorical device is critical to the far-right, generating claims to Indigenous rights as discriminatory and against equality. The production of white victimhood works alongside the assertion of white supremacy, working together to craft fear and anxiety. Moreover, the analysis notes the intersection of the far-right infrastructure in Aotearoa New Zealand with the global far-right infrastructure, amplifying each other to underline the message around equality under threat from DEI.

Critical to the disinformation campaign is the undermining of academic and legal research, framing scholarship as activism, and seeding doubt around rigorous scholarly analyses. The analysis also points to the role of the brick-and-mortar right wing structure in feeding the far-right communicative processes, rendering the disinformation-based claims viral. The discursive space on X attacking the hikoi is rife with anti-Māori hate and is constituted within a broader ecosystem that calls for violence. This report has some key limitations. The analysis is based on a small window of observation around the hikoi. Further research is needed to longitudinally map the anti-Māori disinformation and hate. The current analysis only focused on X, and it is worthwhile to examine the disinformation and hate on other related platforms such as Facebook, Telegram, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram etc. Finally, the analysis focuses on the discursive linkages of disinformation, racism, and hate around the hikoi. It is worthwhile to explore further the financial and political linkages of the disinformation and hate.

Based on the analysis, the white paper offers the following recommendations:

- Map closely the discursive linkages between the far-right digital ecosystem in Aotearoa and the global far-right ecosystem on platforms.
- Map closely the threats to social cohesion, peace, and democracy in Aotearoa that emerge from the far-right ecosystem.
- Situate the Treaty Principles Bill within the far-right discursive network, and critically explore the impacts of the Bill on social cohesion and democracy.
- Consider critically the impact of the anti-Māori hate emergent from the far-right responses to the Treaty Principles Bill on Māori health and wellbeing.

¹ Hameleers, M. (2022). Populist Disinformation: Are Citizens With Populist Attitudes Affected Most by Radical Right-Wing Disinformation?. *Media and Communication*, 10(4), 129-140.

² Miller-Idriss, C. (2022). *Hate in the homeland: The new global far right*. Princeton University Press; Urbanik, M. M., Maier, K., Tetrault, J. E., & Greene, C. (2024). Hate crime and class vulnerability: A case study of white nationalist violence against unhoused Indigenous people. *The British journal of criminology*, 64(4), 863-880; Simi, P., & Futrell, R. (2024). *American swastika: Inside the white power movement's hidden spaces of hate*. Rowman & Littlefield.