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Author: Simons, Jeremy

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RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, SOCIAL COHESION, AND PREVENTING AND COUNTERING TERRORISM AND VIOLENT EXREMISIM: TIME FOR A NEW ZEALAND PRAXIS?

Jeremy Simons¹

This article assesses the “restorativeness” of New Zealand’s counter-terrorism approach as it is currently articulated after the 2019 Christchurch Mosque attacks. It applies a restorative lens to current policies, activities, and discussions in the New Zealand government’s efforts to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the attacks. Utilising a restorative peacebuilding lens highlights the need for further development of bi-cultural, binding, bonding, bridging, and linking processes to restore social cohesion and rebuild social capital in the aftermath of acts of terrorism and violent extremism. This expands the conceptualisation of restorative justice articulated in the Royal Commission of Inquiry, advocating for *restorative peacebuilding* as a key strategy within the broader movement for *Te Tiriti*-based social justice and cohesion, with Māori resistance and peace-making highlighted as critical processes. Restorative peacebuilding draws on learnings from global peacebuilding to inform Aotearoa New Zealand’s bi-cultural framework for social cohesion in response to terrorism and violent extremism. The article recommends additional conversations, initiatives, and resources enabling restorative responses to extremism and digital harm circulating in and through online-offline ecosystems.

Keywords: Restorative Justice, Peacebuilding, Social Cohesion, Terrorism and Violent Extremism, Binding, Bonding, Bridging, Linking, Bi-cultural, Māori

¹ Dr Jeremy Simons is an educator, organiser, and researcher with experience in peacebuilding, restorative justice, community development, and social health. His scholarship and practice draw on in-depth experience in conflict transformation, appreciative inquiry, and indigenous accompaniment around the world. Corresponding author: Jeremy.Simons@otago.ac.nz.

Introduction

This article draws on insights from the academic literature on restorative justice and peacebuilding in contexts of entrenched violence around the world to cast new light on the complex nature of terrorism and violent extremism in New Zealand. Terrorism and violent extremism are collective forms of violence involving communities, social groups, and political systems, where violent actors: “spread fear by dramatic violent acts;” target “unarmed civilians and civilian property;” for the purpose of a particular ideological goal.¹ Three aspects of particular importance are the performative, communicative, and transformative dynamics of terrorism and violent extremism. Terrorism and violent extremism are performative in the way “dramatic” violence is “staged” in order to maximise its public, destabilising impact. The communicative element highlights how terrorism and violent extremism is a means of communicating real and perceived grievances in order to dramatically alter larger social and political entities by exacerbating social fault lines of exclusion, harm, and injustice.

In analysing and crafting responses to terrorism and violent extremism, there needs to be sensitivity to its performative features, the grievances which that violence communicates, and its potentially transformative impact on the broader social system and political context. After the 2019 mosque attacks, the New Zealand government revisited its approach to countering terrorism and violent extremism, clarifying that its strategy focused “on extremist narratives, activities and movements only where they cross, or intend to cross, into violence” and that “Non-violent forms of extremism...lie outside this mandate.”² Recognising that terrorism and violent extremism are social phenomena embedded in and impacting not only particular sub-groups, but society as a whole, the government reviewed and revived a collective response promoting social inclusion and cohesion which had lapsed in the years preceding the attacks.³

This article argues that restorative justice frameworks, values, processes, and skills - by both expanding and critiquing the repertoire of tools and strategies within Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) efforts - provide more effective and appropriate responses that align with the treaty-based, social cohesion framework advanced by the Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the terrorist attack on Christchurch masjidain on 15 March 2019 (hereafter referred to as the RCOI). Utilising a restorative peacebuilding lens highlights the urgent need for further development of bi-cultural, binding, bonding, bridging, and linking processes to restore social cohesion and rebuild social capital in the aftermath of acts of terrorism and violent extremism in New Zealand.

Preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism: policy and practice after the Christchurch attacks

Why restorative justice?

This article takes as a starting point Recommendation 27 of the RCOI report: namely, that the government discuss with survivors “what, if any, restorative justice processes might be desired and how such processes might be designed and resourced.” Additionally, Recommendation 26 for the establishment of a Collective Impact Board concretises a restorative mechanism supporting survivors, affected families, and witnesses. Furthermore, the survivors’ frustrated experiences of the criminal justice process and public sector agencies’ responses after the attacks echoed critiques articulated by restorative justice practitioners (e.g. RCOI, Chapter 3, par. 24-27).⁴ Thus, even as law enforcement and criminal justice strategies remain central to New Zealand’s PCVE efforts, the inclusion of restorative justice by the RCOI reflected a potentially novel approach to critique, assess, and inform Aotearoa New Zealand’s PCVE initiatives.

Restorative justice envisions the direct repair of harm by the person who caused harm through relational processes that empower victims to directly articulate their needs in criminal justice and other accountability processes (see Table 1). It is a collective form of justice that engages the wider community in supporting both victims and offenders in processes of healing, reparation, and rehabilitation. This conception, as articulated by Howard Zehr, counterposes “restorative” justice against “punitive” justice, and highlights divergent underlying questions driving each paradigm:⁵

Criminal justice	Restorative justice
What laws have been broken?	Who has been harmed?
Who did it?	What are their needs?
What do they deserve?	Whose obligations are these?

Table 1: *A Comparison of Criminal Justice Versus Restorative Justice (source: Author)*

In synthesising its core elements, restorative justice is underpinned by “corner post” values of:

1. Inclusion: All affected parties are invited to directly shape and engage in restorative processes in response to crime.
2. Encounter: Affected parties are given the opportunity to meet the other parties in a safe environment to discuss the offence, harms, and the appropriate responses.

3. Amends: Those responsible for the harm resulting from the offence also take responsibility for repairing it to the extent possible.
4. Reintegration: The parties are given the means and opportunity to re-join their communities as whole, contributing members rather than continuing to bear the stigma of the harm and offence.⁶

A substantial body of scholarship has emerged over decades, developing, assessing, nuancing, and critiquing the theory and practice of restorative justice,⁷ but with minimal exploration in terms of its application to terrorism and violent extremism. The restorative justice framework has traditionally been positioned in contrast to criminal justice enacted through adversarial processes and carceral measures within formal legal systems. Developed by practitioners seeking alternatives to minor criminal offenses, restorative justice suggests a radical paradigm shift in the concept of justice and has been applied in a wide range of contexts and situations.⁸ For many it represents an emerging world view encompassing a constellation of practices, principles, and values enabling social justice at all levels of society.⁹ Finally, there is substantial conversation and critique among restorative and Indigenous scholars on the histories, convergences, and tensions between restorative justice and Indigenous forms of justice, a point that will become relevant later in the discussion.¹⁰

Social cohesion: underpinning New Zealand's approach to countering terrorism and violent extremism

The recommendations on improving social cohesion in the RCOI Report provide a substantial non-securitised framing of New Zealand's response to violent extremism. It states:

Social cohesion has many direct benefits to individuals and communities. In contrast, societies that are polarised... will more likely see radicalising ideologies develop and flourish. Efforts to build social cohesion, inclusion and diversity can contribute to preventing or countering extremism.¹¹

The RCOI adopted a definition of social cohesion that includes belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition, and legitimacy, undergirded by a bi-cultural framework where a "collective sense of identity and belonging (as Māori)... is respected by broader society as a whole."¹² A willingness to engage a more expansive approach, appreciating the larger communal, historical, and social context, especially tangata whenua¹³ perspectives; consulting and prioritising impacted communities; ensuring efforts were responsive to Treaty of Waitangi values; and making concerted efforts to listen to survivors, families and witnesses of the attacks were all important aspects of the RCOI's work.

However, the commission found substantial gaps in the government's pre-attack community engagement efforts, including "limited political leadership and public discussion of social cohesion, inclusion and embracing diversity."¹⁴ As a result, the proposed

social cohesion framework went beyond traditional security-centric approaches.¹⁵ Still, apart from building overall social inclusion, there was limited practical articulation of how to respond if social cohesion was to be breached and the fabric of community torn by further violent extremist acts. This was critical because intelligence assessments maintained a high likelihood of additional terror attacks, revealing that police had prevented several mass shootings around the time of the mosque attacks.¹⁶ Nonetheless, by casting a wide net for feedback and pushing the limits of its mandate, the articulation of a social cohesion framework opened up the potential to empower a broader set of constituencies, models, and activities addressing terrorism and violent extremism. The next section explores circumstances and events in the government-led process rolling out the social cohesion approach, as well as insights emerging after a second terrorist attack in September 2021. These reveal both challenges and opportunities in the implementation of policies to increase social cohesion and respond directly to those who engage in violent extremist acts.

Government initiatives and community response: Māori mediation and carceral lapse

To expand this broader, more inclusive PCVE response, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) gathered a large number of civil society representatives for the He Whenua Taurikura conference in June 2021.¹⁷ This hui (gathering), New Zealand's inaugural gathering on countering terrorism and violent extremism, was "to bring together relevant central and local government agencies, communities, civil society, the private sector and researchers to create opportunities to build relationships and share understanding of countering violent extremism and terrorism."¹⁸ There were workshops with key stakeholders within and outside of government to jointly plan for the creation of a National Centre of Excellence for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism that will "research preventing and countering violent extremism, with a focus on understanding diversity and promoting social cohesion."¹⁹ A mandatory workshop was conducted for government employees in attendance, allowing them to hear first-hand experiences of discrimination from the Muslim community. This was intended to concretise the lived reality of racism and move the discussion out of the realm of abstraction. Additionally, one of the first panels was composed of Māori leaders discussing a bicultural approach to violent extremism.

In this panel on *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* (Treaty of Waitangi) and *Te Ao Māori* (Māori world view) approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism, Lindsey Te Ata o Tu MacDonald asserted that "the restructuring of society and the shaping of political equality which will undermine terrorism is the work of relationships, of *manāki*." Esteemed Māori academic Tracey McIntosh raised prospective practices of "*hohourongo*" (holistic peacemaking) by asking: "what will expressions of *manākitanga* look like? How will we work productively with conflict?... How will we express our distinctiveness and our relationality?"²⁰ Culled from the panellists' presentations, a dynamic constellation of underlying values emerges: *manāki* (care), *whanaungatanga*

(relationships/kinship), humanity, hospitality, recognition of the *mana* (dignity and authority) of all, and mutual responsibility – all informed by deep, contextual listening and honourable governance. These values and frameworks will also find resonance in the ensuing discussion on restorative peacebuilding.

While laudable in its intention towards biculturalism and inclusivity, the eruption of conflict during the conference was indicative of the challenge (for government at least) of properly including and assessing community experiences of marginalisation and racial extremism.²¹ Furthermore, as one participant commented, “the conference felt like something designed by those in Wellington, and imposed on Christchurch without much local input.”²² As a conference attendee, this author observed that when distressed Muslim participants walked out in protest of statements made by a Jewish panel member, they appealed to *tangata whenua*, the local Māori hosts, to intervene and facilitate conversation with DPMC organisers. Through these efforts, aggrieved participants publicly expressed their sentiments during the next plenary session and returned to the gathering. What this illustrated was that even ostensibly inclusive efforts to strengthen and build social cohesion in New Zealand’s PCVE efforts were themselves fraught with conflict and divergence. At the same time, the intervention by Māori hosts in mediating frictions provided an unanticipated, yet critical, affirmation of the need for deeper bicultural leadership in the process.

The government’s response was further challenged just months later with the September 2021 Lynn Mall attack and revelations that the attacker had been incarcerated for three years by the New Zealand Department of Corrections and was only released not long before the attack. This raised questions about the role of incarceration in his later turn to violence.²³ The Lynn Mall attacker, like the Christchurch mosque terrorist, was described as a loner cut off from social networks and positive community relationships. Both a local Imam who attempted to support the man who attacked shoppers at Lynn Mall, and the psychologist who provided his mental health assessment, believed that the attack could have been prevented if a community-based, trauma-informed approach been used to address his psycho-social health.²⁴ The Department of Corrections’ apparent inability to effectively assess and respond to the Lynn Mall attacker’s needs seems symptomatic of pre-2019 approaches underpinned by securitised and carceral responses of police, corrections, and intelligence services.

In reflecting on these events, it is important to highlight two inter-related insights: first was the unheralded role of Māori leaders who intervened in government-civil society interactions during the DPMC contested engagements with community; second was the ongoing failure by government judicial and security agencies to effectively undertake a holistic approach, in spite of both community input (represented by the Imam) and professional advice (represented by the clinical psychologist). In other words, failing to fully appreciate the social, political, and institutional ecosystem meant that the potential ways forward suggested by framing PCVE through restorative justice

and social cohesion were not achieved. These observations reflect common challenges experienced in the fields of peacebuilding and restorative justice, which will be explored in the next section.

Social cohesion, restorative peacebuilding, and terrorism and violent extremism

Linking restorative justice and social cohesion

Though restorative justice and social cohesion were both included within the RCOI findings and recommendations, there has been no effort to explicitly integrate them, in spite of their similarities. Linking the key values of restorative justice and social cohesion highlights their complementarity, addressing concerns identified above and providing a more robust conceptual framework of inclusive social justice. Furthermore, engaging the broader field of peacebuilding elucidates strategies (binding, bonding, bridging, and linking) that have been tested in other contexts which may usefully inform efforts recommended by the RCOI. In particular, integrating restorative justice with the social cohesion framework suggests that: (a) social cohesion represents an overarching goal that characterises a healthy society and a political community resistant to violent extremism; and (b) restorative justice frames non-violent justice strategies and tools for rebuilding and repairing social cohesion when it is damaged through violence, as illustrated in Figure 1.

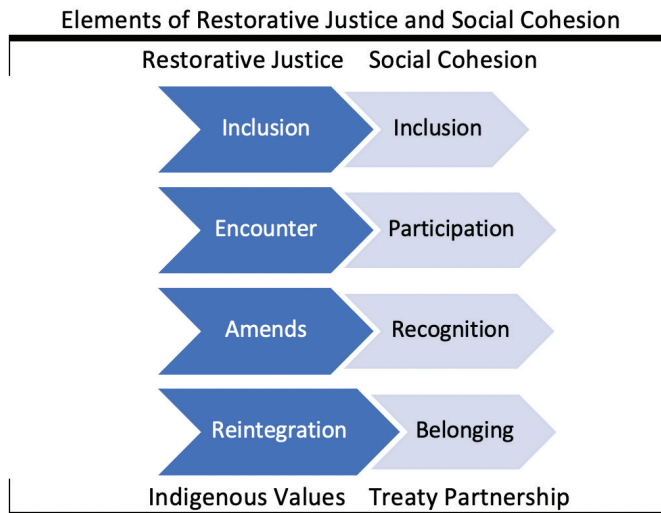


Figure 1: *Elements of Restorative Justice and Social Cohesion* (source: author). Indigenous Values: Hohourongo, Manāki, Whanaungatanga, Mana, Humanity, Hospitality, Mutual Responsibility

Linking the values of restorative justice and social cohesion, as seen in Figure 1, affirms inclusivity as a fundamental principle in both restorative process and social cohesion initiatives. Restorative justice processes of encounter enable broader societal participation as a response to violence and harm. The process of identifying stakeholder's needs which is central to restorative practice, and then making amends to meet those needs, provides concrete opportunities to express the recognition that is necessary for social cohesion. Explicitly prioritising community reintegration, which is fundamental to restorative processes, increases the likelihood that marginalised and stigmatised groups and individuals will experience a sense of belonging when working through the impacts of exclusion and violence. Synergising these actions will reinforce a sense of legitimacy, and grounding them all in a bicultural, treaty partnership reflects the importance of indigenous values and peacemaking practices that resonate with restorative approaches, as was asserted by Māori panel presenters during the hui.

Restorative peacebuilding, and terrorism and violent extremism

In making the case for a restorative approach to terrorism and violent extremism, understanding the overall logic of mainstream counter-terrorism is necessary. Counter-terrorism has generally been associated with short-term security and war-fighting interventions and theories of change. These have been oriented towards identifying a “conveyor belt” process of individual radicalisation to extremist ideologies, leaving more holistic and contextualised alternatives, such as restorative justice, under-resourced and ignored by policy makers. Moving beyond simplistic and linear logics of violent enforcement and security means addressing not only individual actors or ideologies, but the context of terrorism and violent extremism, including the broader cultural milieu of actors and social institutions.²⁵ Critical scholars such as Bosly (2020) therefore avoid the term “deradicalisation”, as this has primarily focused on individual and ideological stigmatisation.²⁶ Efforts that emphasise changing ideologies or beliefs are problematic for a number of reasons. First, in terms of psychosocial ineffectiveness, research indicates that there is no causal link between “radical” beliefs and violent behaviour; rather, beliefs are only one factor influencing a person's turn to violence. Second, deradicalisation ignores trauma interventions; in fact, addressing traumatic stress and increasing belonging, agency, and significance demonstrate greater effectiveness. Third, such approaches can erode human rights, as ‘deradicalisation’ risks “abridging freedom of expression and of religion by criminalising an arbitrarily selected set of beliefs”.²⁷ Fourth, it risks political manipulation; governments have used counter-terror discourses to suppress dissent in society, with radicalisation and terror serving as a “deceptively simplistic... bogeyman”.²⁸ Fifth, it can lead to counterproductive consequences. Targeting ideologies has been shown to increase people's attachment to their beliefs, while “neuroscience studies find that threats to group identity and status activate the same neurobiological reactions as threats to physical safety, which dehumanise those perceived as threatening and remove cognitive inhibitions to violence”.²⁹ Sixth,

a deradicalisation approach can distort legitimate social issues. This is because people attracted to extremism are frequently concerned about legitimate grievances like “state predation; discrimination; exclusion from political structures;...historical or collective trauma;...and oppression”.³⁰ Lastly, such approaches can inhibit positive social action. In fact, harnessing concerns over pressing social issues and providing avenues of constructive response can “inspire social progress and selfless humanitarianism”.³¹

Rather than an ideologically framed, deradicalisation framework, peacebuilding approaches to terrorism and violent extremism address violent behaviours through interventions and social processes that seek to interrupt and transform the mobilisation to extremist violence at the individual, interpersonal, cultural, and structural levels. Peacebuilding refers to a theory of “justpeace” grounded in conflict transformation, active non-violence, reconciliation, and grassroots development and empowerment.³² In this context, reconciliation means:

A process by which communities and people disengaging from violent extremism rehumanize each other and foster healing to reduce stigma, open spaces for prosocial engagement, address needs for justice and accountability, restore relationships, and move from exclusion and fear to inclusion and productive participation in the community and society.³³

Reconciliation is a “long-term multi-track transformative contribution to social change, helping to create a just and sustainable peace.”³⁴ Peacebuilding, therefore, provides an inclusive framework operationalising the social cohesion envisioned by the RCOI. Llewellyn and Philpott suggest that restorative justice and reconciliation are “relational” concepts of justice which “integrate the various and often competing goals involved in peacebuilding into a holistic framework.”³⁵ Schirch further argues that restorative justice, trauma healing, and conflict transformation processes actually form the heart of peacebuilding.³⁶ This article therefore recommends *restorative peacebuilding* as an overarching paradigm of reconciliation for the restoration of relationships, not simply in interpersonal terms, but in and through the cultural, institutional, and structural engagements necessary for Aotearoa New Zealand’s PCVE efforts to be successful.

“De-exceptionalising” violent extremism

Bosly emphasises a necessary shift in thinking, a “de-exceptionalisation” of violent extremism which, “like other forms of violence... is a *behavioral* challenge, and “only one of a host of adverse outcomes from similar sets of risk factors and social ecologies.”³⁷ De-exceptionalisation addresses many of the same problems undercutting criminal justice processes and structures, which restorative justice also addresses by re-humanising people in the justice process. Key principles include: centering behavioral change; facilitating prosocial engagement; considering the entire social ecology;

applying trauma-informed care; ensuring access to care; care in the use of language; labelling the transformation; facilitating justice and accountability; and linking with prevention efforts.³⁸

Formulating and applying a *restorative peacebuilding* framework to terrorism and violent extremism is therefore a critical step in the de-exceptionalisation process, requiring a deeper elaboration of restorative justice than is currently applied in New Zealand's response to the Christchurch attacks, as well as in the restorative justice literature in general. Furthermore, this needs to address securitisation as a form of stigmatisation³⁹ affecting New Zealand's Muslim communities, and the consequent need for a "de-Islamisation" of PCVE.⁴⁰ As the RCOI noted,

For Muslim communities in New Zealand, this has led to a perception that they are persistently placed in a one-dimensional frame by both wider society and the Public sector agencies.... That frame has been referred to as "securitisation"... [which] means that, as a group, Muslim individuals and communities are primarily seen as a potential threat to New Zealand's national security.⁴¹

The language of restorative justice within peacebuilding is central in this articulation of disengagement from violent extremism and is critically important in that it provides not only an alternative theoretical framework, but an evidence-based⁴² pathway by which terrorism and violent extremism can be addressed. However, this also requires a re-articulation of restorative justice in order to address the challenges of engaging violent extremism in current social realities. While it is essential to de-exceptionalise violent extremism in order to bring effective interventions to bear, it is also necessary to recognise that this violence has particular characteristics, in terms of its collective, destabilising nature, that necessitate a broader, be-spoke theorisation of restorative justice, which the next section elaborates.

Towards a restorative praxis (theory and practice) of peacebuilding

This article suggests four domains of restorative social action as critical arenas of practice for restorative peacebuilding. These are necessary for the advancement of restorative justice generally, and in particular, provide a conceptual grounding for restorative processes that rebuild social cohesion in response to terrorism and violent extremism. These domains are restorative social services, social movements, social performance, and social history – which all contribute to the development of social capital as a relational resource for social cohesion.⁴³ Drawing on recent restorative justice scholarship, this section elaborates an applied sociology of restorative justice necessary for its application in meso- and macro-level social systems.

While both locally driven and institutional restorative processes should ideally complement each other, there has been tension between expressions of restorative justice in different social contexts. For some, restorative justice is a set of social practices with the potential to reform the criminal justice system, primarily from the inside out. In this view, restorative justice acts as a kind of social service where restorative practices infuse change within and through judicial structures and processes. This seems to have been the primary framing of restorative justice in the context of the RCOI. However, as alluded to earlier, restorative justice also encompasses a “shift in systemic thinking about the nature of justice” that enervates a much broader social movement enabling transformative change across the entire spectrum of institutions in society.⁴⁴ Stauffer argues that restorative justice enables this through a ripple effect of practices that circulate beyond the immediately impacted stakeholders of the restorative process. This builds community through the restoration of social capital, strengthening resiliency within and across groups, empowering not only individuals, but entire communities to become agents of social justice. This elaboration of restorative justice reinforces elements of social cohesion, as was iterated earlier.

Others have highlighted restorative justice as a cultural practice, a form of social performance and ritual involving reflexive actions, whereby participants stage social identities, create social meaning, and reveal or obscure a variety of social faces in efforts to reduce stigmatisation, negotiate group relations, and enhance individual and collective agency. These have the potential to enable transformative change at interpersonal, social, and structural levels.⁴⁵ On the other hand, critical scholars take restorative justice to task for failing to unmask the nature of oppressive institutional power in restorative processes, particularly as it is gendered, racialised, and distorted through liberal governance. These patterns of invisible or latent violence are reinforced through the legitimisation of dominant social histories and narratives that reproduce structural injustice across generations. This highlights how, in spite of decades of restorative innovations in criminal justice, the large-scale structural and cultural conditions that keep marginalised groups subjugated have been recirculated within and through restorative practices.⁴⁶

The way in which restorative justice is articulated in the RCOI report reflects a relatively limited process which may or may not be chosen by survivors of the Christchurch attack. Explicitly linking restorative justice with the social cohesion approach however, demands practical tools for achieving the vision of social cohesion as expressed in the RCOI. Additionally, there are unique features of terrorism and violent extremism that require modification of restorative justice beyond what is essentially a government-run social service in order to strengthen the wider public domains of social capital through social movements, social performance, and social history as collective narrative. The framework of binding, bonding, bridging, and linking provides actionable and focused restorative processes for re-building social cohesion while addressing the acute challenges of terrorism and violent extremism in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Restorative peacebuilding: binding, bonding, bridging, and linking social capital

Without an intergenerational community-based response and trans-communal orientation, micro-level restorative social services and practices alone are insufficient to respond to shocks of terrorism and violent extremism that reverberate across multiple social domains. Collective, community-based restorative justice provides a deeper, more organic contribution through the development of social capital, strengthening social cohesion through the repair of harm across communities and identity groups. A process of restorative peacebuilding grounded in these domains can be framed as binding (individual healing), bonding (strengthening internal group relationships), bridging (building relationships across group boundaries), and linking (connecting multiple groups together in networks of action).⁴⁷ These expansive modalities of restorative justice support wider community development efforts through participation within and across communal boundaries in partnership with responsive public institutions – building both vertical and horizontal social capital and societal resilience.

Restorative social services and practices

Restorative peacebuilding therefore facilitates the conceptualisation and delivery of expansive restorative social services and restorative practices for resisting and responding to terrorism and violent extremism. With government and civil society providing multi-stakeholder platforms for local and non-professional groups, the inclusion and encounter pillars of restorative justice are strengthened, and new communities of care can be mobilised, connected, and staged.⁴⁸ This means creatively deepening concepts of reparation (the amends pillar of restorative justice) contextualised to the particular needs and aspirations of perpetrators, victims, and survivors in contexts of terrorism and violent extremism.⁴⁹ Braithwaite suggests building on the evidence-based effectiveness of Motivational Interviewing as a way to link micro-processes of accountability with macro-level restorative governance.⁵⁰

Binding refers to the locus of change around which trauma awareness, growth, and healing occurs. This involves restorative processes addressing the two most debilitating psychological impacts of violence – disconnection and disempowerment – at both individual and collective levels. Healing the ruptures in these two “fundamental elements of human well-being” can enable the restoration of relationships (reconnection) within a community of concerned stakeholders.⁵¹ Furthermore, empowerment emerges in restorative processes as the reclamation of voice and agency through participatory storytelling and consensus decision-making. Restorative social services can therefore promote trauma healing and help in “establishing the truth, providing victims a public platform, holding perpetrators accountable, strengthening the rule of law, providing

victims with compensation, effectuating effective institutional reform, promoting reconciliation, and promoting public deliberation,” which mirror the recommendations of the RCOI.⁵²

Restorative social histories, narrative and transitional justice – macro-level restorative justice

Much can be learned from peacebuilding applications of restorative justice in transitional justice contexts. This orients restorative peacebuilding to the domains of social identity and collective history where structural violence is expressed in and through oppressive forms and/or failures of governance. Transitional justice refers to justice-seeking following war, civil conflict, and historical oppression or during transitions from authoritarian political systems to democracy.⁵³ Murphy argues that transitional contexts are characterised by four unique conditions: pervasive structural inequality; normalised collective violence and political wrongdoing; existential uncertainty in the transition process itself; and fundamental instability of organised political/state authority.⁵⁴

This article suggests that terrorism and violent extremism, as a form of violence targeting entire communities, seeks to reverse engineer these four conditions which are necessary for healthy governance. By constructing polarised narratives of pervasive social and structural inequality (condition 1) effecting their identity group, terrorist and violent extremist groups undermine organised political authority (condition 4), justifying and normalising collective violence (condition 2), thereby creating a destabilised pathway for social change (condition 3). This is geared towards facilitating the creation of a new political order reclaiming the legacy of an exclusionary mythological past as a new social history and narrative.

Transitional justice scholars tell us that when political communities are targeted or systematically degraded over time, local cultural conceptualisations and practices of justice and healing may erupt as formal and societal institutions are fractured and/or in flux. Stauffer observed an unexpected outcome in transitional justice where:

The Transitional Justice field has unwittingly provided the scaffolding of language and the platform of dialogue for indigenous justice forms to surface in order to meet the desperate need for justice to be felt as transformative by local communities on-the-ground who otherwise are often left out of the national and international transitional justice discourse.⁵⁵

Thus, in the days following the Christchurch mosque attacks, deeply resonant and spontaneous Māori *haka* were performed, going viral online as expressions of spiritual resistance to the attacker’s hatred, and solidarity and support for the victims, with special lyrics composed to commemorate the tragedy.⁵⁶ This draws attention to the ways

in which Indigenous practices, as social performance, emerged as an organic response to terrorism and violent extremism.⁵⁷ Māori mediation during the hui was not only an act of self-determination, but critical social action restoring social capital and strengthening *mana*.

Meta-level restorative justice: Linking restorative social movements for social cohesion

Finally, restorative justice as a social movement is about linking together disparate practices of interpersonal relationship building, political advocacy, non-violent resistance, strategic community organising, trauma healing, and cultural performance. Restorative social movements should therefore be guided by the following intentions gleaned from the historical development of restorative justice. First, they should focus on “integrating populations most effected by violence and injustice” - all stakeholders in restorative processes – and aim at “amplifying their voices and participatory liberation in the process”. Second, they should resist “widespread ‘quick-fix’ and/or politically compromised legislation” to avoid co-optation. Third, they should commit to “centering and engaging racial and ethnic justice and the healing of historic harms” such as colonisation, violent oppression and human rights violations. Fourth, there needs to be a determination to “transforming personal, social and structural violence and all intersecting relationships that make up the web of human justice”. Fifth, they should be committed to “de-institutionalization... decentralized organisational structures and to ‘bottom-up’ justice expressions and processes.” Finally, they should exhibit “shared and emancipatory leadership models and functions.”⁵⁸

Terrorism and violent extremism degrade the conditions necessary for inclusive socio-political orders, cascading grievances that reinforce legacies of exclusion and injustice over time. The antidote of restorative peacebuilding requires survivors, stakeholders, and public agencies surfacing, composing, and repairing both individual and collective narratives as part of a larger process reconciling social histories and identities.⁵⁹ This resonates with the bicultural paradigm proposed by Māori experts during the He Whenua Taurikura panel, when Professor McIntosh suggested an expansive approach to social cohesion where “redress and response to harm... capture the entirety of the context.” Thus “the eradication of extreme violence,” requires a “reshaped collective narrative” addressing the “drivers of collective violence” and should be enacted “in a way that strengthens, not diminishes, our humanity.”⁶⁰ In concert with, and undergirded by, Te Tiriti values and bi-cultural strategies, restorative peacebuilding provides a flexible and dynamic framework for rebuilding social cohesion through binding, bonding, bridging, and linking, with the overall goal of restoring relationships and inclusive social capital.

Ways forward

With limited research on the use of restorative peacebuilding in the Global North in relation to terrorism and violent extremism, the European Union conducted a consultation in late 2019 to discuss the application of restorative justice in situations of terrorism and armed political conflict. The consultation included “victims of terrorism, former members of extremist groups, mediators, social workers, exit workers, and psychologists.”⁶¹ Promising initiatives from Italy, the Basque Country, Poland, Northern Ireland, Hungary, Lebanon, and Israel-Palestine were discussed, not as models to be replicated, but as evidence of the variety of approaches and the necessity for creative and context-specific initiatives. Recognising that populism, polarisation, and far-right movements create unique challenges for restorative peacebuilding, the following summary Table of (1) contextual and (2) process-specific reflections is offered.

Contextual reflections	Restorative Justice-specific recommendation
Public institutions must play a nuanced role, sometimes not directly involved, due to questions of neutrality.	Preparation must be consensus-based and un-forced, taking an inclusive approach (within and outside justice systems) and a long term, historical view of generational restorative processes.
While NGOs and academic institutions can support and facilitate restorative processes, there must also be space for direct, informal, and personal efforts.	Facilitator capacity-building must be experiential in terms of both practical skills, the ability to handle contested “neutrality,” and broader in-context credibility and political awareness.
Timing is the “biggest challenge,” so temporal flexibility is required, recognising that the needs of institutions, groups, and individuals are dynamic.	Attention, support, and sensitivity must be paid to the telling of personal stories enabling post-traumatic growth and the transformation of meta-narratives and histories of violence.
Social-preparation, awareness-raising, and evidence-building is required to build the capacity of host communities and societies to support restorative processes.	Participation and support must be available to anyone at any point willing to engage in restorative process. Resources and peace infrastructures need to be developed, creating safe spaces that prevent re-victimisation and retaliation against former combatants.

Table 2: *Reflections and Recommendations (source: author)*

Taking into account these contextual and restorative justice-specific reflections, there is a need to facilitate bicultural, multi-peoples conversations among stakeholders, government, and communities to elucidate how binding, bonding, bridging, and linking can be developed in the New Zealand context. This would make a significant contribution towards reconciling social cohesion and governance in New Zealand’s response to terrorism and violent extremism. One of the practical learnings from global peacebuilding praxis is the necessity of “trusted in-context” leaders to guide these

processes. In rebuilding social capital through binding, bonding, bridging, and linking, it is crucial that facilitation teams are Māori-led and include leaders from across the conflict identity group spectrum.⁶² In the southern Philippines, activists have mobilised “tri-peoples” peacebuilding efforts, putting feet on a relational concept deeply grounded in the local cultural context, with civil society intervention teams composed of Muslim, Christian/settler, and Indigenous leaders, as have groups engaging community-based transformative justice in Sierra Leone.⁶³ In New Zealand, this might include a series of intra- and inter-group consultations with cohorts at various levels of national/regional/local community involvement to form bi-cultural/multi-people teams enabled and empowered to advance localised programmes of action and crisis response. Preceding or in concert with this, a more substantial bi-cultural engagement with, and critique of, the government’s efforts to counter terrorism and violent extremism is called for, and is necessary not only in the offline world but in the on-line/off-line context, which suggests a final challenge.

This challenge was alluded to earlier – and was recognised by the government in its launching of the Christchurch Call – that is, the way in which violent extremism circulates through the off-line/on-line ecosystem. While this article lacks the space to address this, it is suggested that restorative peacebuilding provides a grounding praxis for action in domains which are crucial not only for its application in terms of violent extremism, but in fact are necessary for the continued survival of restorative justice as a potent and meaningful movement for social justice. However, this author notes that even the limited engagement of restorative justice in countering violent extremism is more advanced than restorative justice’s application to social media conflict and digital harm. In the online-offline ecosystem, there seems to be no extant scholarship, and only a few, nascent restorative initiatives engaging the huge challenges of online-offline violence. This article therefore suggests a fifth domain of restorative praxis: restorative action in the digital and social media ecosystem. This requires a new community of praxis, led by in-context leaders, grounded in bi-cultural partnerships to creatively engage, understand, and activate restorative practices and social movements in the digital domain.

Conclusion

In response to the 2019 Christchurch Mosque Attacks, the government created a Royal Commission of Inquiry to assess the country’s preparedness (or lack thereof) prior to the attack and suggest ways forward to address future threats of terrorism and violent extremism. In addition to significant recommendations for the New Zealand security services, the commission took on-board substantial community input that led it to suggest a broader re-framing of the overall response to terrorism and violent extremism around the idea of social cohesion. This broader bi-cultural framework oriented towards social cohesion has the potential to substantially alter New Zealand’s approach to countering terrorism and violent extremism and includes some language (perhaps lip service) allowing for restorative justice processes.

However, social cohesion confronts implicit tensions with existing socio-cultural biases and harmful histories underpinning the ongoing securitisation and exclusion of Muslim communities. These reflect racist social dynamics and punitive forms of governance that have impacted Māori communities for many generations due to colonisation. Additionally, the failure of restorative justice reforms to substantially change the carceral culture of New Zealand criminal justice requires the elaboration of a new framework of restorative peacebuilding in terms of countering terrorism and violent extremism. This was tragically illustrated by the September 2021 Lynn Mall attack and the failure to de-securitise and de-exceptionalise the judicial and law enforcement measures taken towards the attacker, despite recommendations by both community and psycho-social specialists. Additionally, even with significant Māori leadership in the commission itself, a fully bi-cultural engagement with government's countering violent extremism efforts is inhibited by broader legacies of distrust and violence between the Crown and *tangata whenua*.

Nonetheless, Māori cultural dialogue processes and non-violent resistance emerged spontaneously in direct response to the attacks, as well as during ensuing government community engagement efforts. This included *haka* as a performative counter-measure expressing community solidarity, grief, anger, support, and *aroha* (love) immediately after the attacks.⁶⁴ Informal mediation by Māori leaders during government-initiated consultations that eased tensions between government, Muslim survivors, and other groups could be seen as an expression of *hohourongo* that Dr. MacIntosh called for during her panel presentation. This exposes the need to further appreciate, understand, and assert a bicultural, Māori engagement and indigenisation of social cohesion that influences and enhances, but is independent from, New Zealand's countering violent extremism programme.

This study affirms that restorative justice praxis has evolved globally to reflect a broader and wider social movement for social justice writ large. New domains and modalities have been articulated and conceptualised under a rubric of restorative peacebuilding that reflects Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural social cohesion framework. Multi-modal and systemic reconciliation in response to terrorism and violent extremism should enable specific processes of binding, bonding, bridging, and linking. This will facilitate the reconstruction of social capital through restorative social services, social movements, social performance, and social histories – and therefore contribute to overall social cohesion. An Aotearoa New Zealand praxis of restorative peacebuilding would therefore engender a more culturally appropriate, robust, effective, and integrated response to violent extremism than is currently under development by the Crown, and provide the basis for an emergent, yet-to-be-defined, restorative praxis in globalised digital spaces.

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3 "Terrorism - Under New Zealand law, a terrorist act is defined as an ideologically, politically, or religiously motivated act – including, but not limited to, those causing death or serious bodily injury – intended to intimidate a population, or to compel the government to do or not do certain things."

"Violent extremism - The justification of violence with the aim of radically changing the nature of government, religion or society. This violence is often targeted against groups seen as threatening violent extremists' success or survival, or undermining their world view."

"Extremism - Religious, social or political belief systems that exist substantially outside of more broadly accepted belief systems" and which "may seek radical changes in the nature of government, religion or society." Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, p. 6.

4 "We heard of disillusionment and a loss of hope and trust, largely due to the lack of acknowledgement of victims in the criminal justice process" and "that the issues and concerns that victims have had in this specific case were seen to be a demonstration of the issues that victims face more broadly in New Zealand's criminal justice system..." (New Zealand Government (2020) Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Mosques on 15 March 2019 (2020), Part 3, chap. 3, par. 25. Retrieved from <https://christchurchattack.royalcommission.nz/the-report/>).

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