

Racism is endemic in many online spaces, promoted by the structures of social networking sites (SNS), and few initiatives have attempted to counter everyday racism online. This article describes how tauwiwi groups collaboratively developed anti-racist graphics, which unpredictably became memes that stimulated online and offline conversations about anti-racism and decolonisation. I outline the difficulties in developing such graphics, suggest where to post them, and argue that the strategies used to develop anti-racist graphics could be useful in combatting other social inequities. The article draws on a larger PhD study in which I interviewed online news editors, analysed racism on SNS, developed and posted anti-racist graphics on two Facebook genres, and analysed the results. It envisions a future where online users commonly see witty images that challenge structural inequities.

Online Graphics Can Change Conversations About Racism in Aotearoa

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In this article I draw on Margaret Wetherell's persuasive argument that it is necessary to analyse the role of emotions in discourse, which is defined as language, imagery, and other meaning-creating practices which construct our social world.¹ Her work builds on existing developments in social-practice theory, which view emotions about racism as sets of social *practices*—that is, as actions repeated by the same types of people in similar situations—rather than lay understandings of spontaneous and irrational reactions that are separate from ideas. These latter conceptions leave emotions unavailable to analysis, as do definitions that separate affect—as intensity that occurs before meaning-making—from emotion.² Viewing affect and emotion as practices enables us to analyse how they can be recruited to serve racist purposes, how they might be changed, and how alternative emotional practices might be supported. I define emotional and discursive practices as racist when they justify and support Pākehā control of Aotearoa New Zealand.³

1 Margaret Wetherell, *Affect and Emotion – A New Social Science Understanding* (London: Sage, 2012).

2 Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movements, Affect, Sensation* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

3 Margaret Wetherell and Jonathan Potter, *Mapping the Language of Racism: Discourse and the Legitimation of Exploitation* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 70.

Social networking sites (SNS) play a major role in disseminating racism, but there has been far less research about anti-racism online than there has about anti-racism offline.⁴ And despite the predominance of graphics among widely circulated memes, there is very little research about the potential of anti-racist internet graphics. Drawing on my wider PhD research, in this article I seek to address this gap. I first outline the context of online racism, including SNS structures, and discuss common racist themes. I then summarise existing anti-racism strategies and describe the way in which these strategies were used to collaboratively develop graphics with te Tiriti education groups. Finally, I outline the results of posting these interventions on news and personal Facebook pages and consider the wider implications of the research. I hope to provide anti-racism and other social-justice groups with practical strategies with which to develop graphics that contest online racism and other injustices.

Online racism

Effective anti-racism starts with understanding the ideologies and structures of social network (SN) corporations, which shape online racism and anti-racism, and their intersection with existing anti-Māori discourses in Aotearoa New Zealand. An oligopoly of US-owned corporations controls the infrastructure of the biggest online discussion sites. Their proprietary and impenetrable algorithms change frequently, and actively promote impulsive, outrageous, and often racist content that has increased ethnic inequalities and enabled hate speech to spread easily.⁵ The corporate colonisation of the internet and its promotion of racism threatens representative democracy

4 Ariadna Matamoros-Fernández and Johan Farkas, 'Racism, Hate Speech, and Social Media: A Systematic Review and Critique', *Television & New Media* 22, no. 2 (2021): 205.

5 Andrew Jakubowicz et al., *Cyber Racism and Community Resilience: Strategies for Combating Online Race Hate* (Cham: Springer, 2017).

and the equitable future that all social-justice groups strive for.⁶

The cyber-libertarian ideology of SN corporations claims the internet as a neutral space where all users enjoy freedom of speech. Critical researchers argue instead that cyber-libertarianism amplifies default white-male norms.⁷ They also highlight how SN corporations like Facebook make their profits from selling user data; thus, in a proliferating SN economy, these corporations constantly try to engage viewer attention for longer and to increase online traffic.⁸ This online structure intersects with entrenched racism in Aotearoa New Zealand, which the colonisers brought from Europe, positioning themselves as superior to other ethnicities and justifying the colonisation and exploitation of, and violence towards, Māori.⁹ The assumption that Pākehā aspirations embody the national interest—rather than those of a colonising population aiming to maintain its control—remains built into governing systems, reproducing unfair and avoidable advantages for Pākehā. Cultural racism, which describes aspects of non-white cultures as the main barriers to those populations achieving to white standards, or as opposed to white liberal traditions, became more common in the 1950s.¹⁰ Cultural racism denies the existence of structural racism, recognising only individual and extreme examples; it also frames accusations of racism as more dangerous than acts of racism, and as attempts

6 Carole Cadwalladr, 'Facebook's Role in Brexit – and the Threat to Democracy', *TED*, 16 April 2019.

7 For example, Kate Miltner, "'One Part Politics, One Part Technology, One Part History': The Construction of the Emoji Set in Unicode 7.0', *New Media & Society* 23, no. 3 (2020): 515-534.

8 Mike Allen, 'Sean Parker unloads on Facebook: "God only knows what it's doing to our children's brains"', *Axios*, 9 November 2017.

9 Angela Ballara, *Proud to be White: A Survey of Pakeha Prejudice in New Zealand* (Auckland: Heinemann, 1986).

10 Martha Augoustinos and Danielle Every, 'The Language of "Race" and Prejudice: A Discourse of Denial, Reason, and Liberal-Practical Politics', *Journal of Language & Social Psychology* 26, no. 2 (2007): 123-141.

to prevent debate.¹¹ Further, it uses egalitarian principles to exclude non-white people from the national identity, often without overt denigration. This combination of cyber-libertarianism, SN structures, and cultural racism provides a major challenge for online anti-racist interventions.

Māori issues and te Tiriti o Waitangi are common targets of cultural racism. One long-term analysis of mass news media items on these issues found the repeated use of 13 anti-Māori discursive repertoires—these being recurrent groups of metaphors and phrases used to justify and express racism. These repertoires support everyday Pākehā commonsense and racism at personal and institutional levels.¹² In contrast, Māori-television and iwi-radio news habitually represent Māori diversity, and use alternative discourses, while defining the disequilibrium of news according to Māori definitions, such as resulting from colonial systems.¹³ Familiarity with anti-Māori repertoires are important in disrupting everyday racism, so here I briefly summarise the most common anti-Māori repertoires identified by Barnes and colleagues.

Three repertoires are clusters of liberal ideas that support stigmatising talk about any non-white people in Aotearoa New Zealand. Pākehā ethnicity is rarely identified in uses of the *Pākehā as the Norm*¹⁴ repertoire, which is indicated by terms such as ‘we’, ‘the public’, or ‘taxpayers’. In this repertoire, Māori and other racialised groups are often labelled, implicitly or overtly, especially in items about deviance from Pākehā practices.¹⁵ The *One People* repertoire states that all New Zealanders should be treated the

11 Martha Augoustinos and Danielle Every, ‘Accusations and Denials of Racism: Managing Moral Accountability in Public Discourse’, *Discourse & Society* 21, no. 3 (2010): 251–256.

12 Angela Moewaka Barnes et al., ‘Anti-Maori Themes in New Zealand Journalism—Toward Alternative Practice’, *Pacific Journalism Review* 18, no. 1 (2012): 195–216.

13 Brendan Hokowhitu and Vijay Devadas, eds., *The Fourth Eye: Māori Media in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

14 For clarity, all repertoires are italicised and capitalised.

15 Jean Allen and Toni Bruce, ‘Constructing the Other: News Media Representations of a Predominantly “Brown” Community in New Zealand’, *Pacific Journalism Review* 23, no. 1 (2017): 225–244.

same and is commonly used to re-assert Pākehā dominance. The third liberal repertoire, *Rights*, portrays Māori rights as threatening non-Māori, and portrays Pākehā rights as neutral.

The other repertoires focus on Māori and are mutually reinforcing. The *Privilege* repertoire depicts Māori as unfairly favoured in ways that disadvantage non-Māori. The *Māori Resources* repertoire represents Māori control of land and other resources as a threat to tauīwi. The flexible *Good/Bad Māori* repertoire splits Māori into ‘bad’ (most commonly) or ‘good’, depending on the aims of the speaker, who can assign the same person to both categories at different times. In the *Violence* repertoire, Māori are depicted as more likely than Pākehā to be aggressive, criminal, or violent. The *Māori Culture* repertoire describes aspects of Māori culture or practices as inadequate or primitive.¹⁶ And the *Treaty of Waitangi* repertoire portrays te Tiriti as a divisive and irrelevant old document that supports bogus claims, provides undeserved riches to Māori from excessive settlements, and blocks economic development.

These repertoires can be expressed subtly, whereas online racism is often expressed in more abusive and hateful forms. A Netsafe survey of 1,161 people in Aotearoa New Zealand found that those reporting experience of any hate speech (statements that discriminate, denigrate, abuse, or disparage people because of their ethnicity or other group characteristics) increased from 30 percent in 2018 to 35 percent in 2019, and three-quarters of Māori respondents believed that hateful online content is increasing.¹⁷ Other studies found that 71 percent of Māori experienced abuse or harassment on Facebook,¹⁸ where readers of comments about Māori-news stories were twice as likely to see racist comments as they were to see supportive or anti-racist comments.¹⁹ On news organisation websites

16 James Maffie, “In the End, We Have the Gatling Gun, and They Have Not”: Future Prospects of Indigenous Knowledges’, *Futures* 41, no. 1 (2009): 53–65.

17 Edgar Pacheco and Neil Melhuish, *Measuring Trends in Online Hate Speech Victimisation and Exposure, and Attitudes in New Zealand* (Auckland: Netsafe, 2019).

18 The Workshop, *Online Racial Abuse* (Wellington: The Workshop, 2018).

19 Laura O’Connell Rapira and Leroy Beckett, *The People’s Report on Online Hate, Harassment and Abuse* (Wellington: ActionStation, 2019).

and Facebook pages, such racism is masked by editing, which can remove one in five comments.²⁰ These include defamatory or illegal comments, as well as personal attacks, threats, and blatantly racist posts such as calling Māori ‘toxic rubbish’.²¹ Online editors of three news organisations who I interviewed in 2016 said that Facebook pages hosted the most debate of the SNS that they moderated. The editors all left everyday racist comments on their pages to encourage debate, although sometimes such posts had to be retracted later.

In contrast to moderated news Facebook pages, unmoderated sites like YouTube allow more extreme and vicious statements.²² Researchers have found that, compared with Facebook, a far greater proportion of comments about two New Zealand news videos on YouTube used racist abuse or obscenities (the videos showed presenter Paul Henry saying racist things about people of Indian descent).²³ Other examples of online racism include racist documentaries about colonial New Zealand and supposed pre-Māori populations appearing as top results in YouTube history searches;²⁴ and based on previous New Zealand entries, Google’s autocomplete function delivers the words ‘stupid’, ‘lazy’, ‘scum’, and ‘violent’ to complete ‘Māori are’.²⁵ These studies build a picture of online environments that are often hostile and abusive for Māori and other racialised people in Aotearoa New Zealand.

20 Andy Fyers, ‘A Week in the Life of Stuff Comments’, *Stuff*, 7 December 2016.

21 For example, ‘Terms and Conditions: User Submitted Content and Comments’, *Stuff*, 6 May 2019.

22 Liesbet van Zoonen, Farida Vis, and Sabina Mihelj, ‘YouTube Interactions between Agonism, Antagonism and Dialogue: Video Responses to the Anti-Islam Film *Fitna*’, *New Media & Society* 13, no. 8 (2011): 1283-1300.

23 Caren August and James Liu, ‘The Medium Shapes the Message: McLuhan and Grice Revisited in Race Talk Online’, *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 25, no. 3 (2015): 232-248.

24 Rapira and Beckett, *The Peoples Report*.

25 Steve Deane, ‘Horror over Google’s racial stereotyping pop-ups’, *NZ Herald*, 7 March 2014.

Anti-racism strategies online

In this section, I briefly review research about online anti-racism interventions here and overseas, including general and visual strategies and potential target audiences. Despite the ubiquity of everyday racism online, there is little international research into discursive or visual anti-racist interventions for online use.²⁶ The first systematic meme creation I found was by the US alt-right, to promote Trump's election in 2016.²⁷ Since then, the alt-right has used memes, including those co-opting social-justice idioms, to attack Muslims, Jews, immigrants, and other minority ethnic groups in the US.²⁸ However, I have found no research on systematic meme creation by anti-racist organisations. Most overseas anti-racism initiatives have aimed to raise awareness of racism among youth, to 'positively' represent ethnic minorities, or to monitor and try to restrict hate sites.²⁹ Critical researchers attribute SNS corporations' poor and inconsistent responses to hate speech to their reluctance to restrict traffic and profit.³⁰ However, even if SNS blocking of hate sites was effective, ubiquitous everyday racism would remain untouched.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, three anti-racism campaigns by the Human Rights Commission (HRC) have focused on individual rather than institutional racism and these campaigns have been evaluated largely in terms of undefined social media 'reach', rather than impacts on behaviour or on racist discourses. The 2016 campaign *That's Us* aimed to redefine Aotearoa New Zealand as a welcoming country that stands up to racism; it

26 Jakubowicz, *Cyber Racism*.

27 Heather Suzanne Woods and Leslie Hahner, *Make America Meme Again: The Rhetoric of the Alt-Right* (New York: Peter Lang, 2019).

28 Maxime Dafaure, 'The "Great Meme War": the Alt-Right and its Multifarious Enemies', *Angles* 10 (2020): 1-28.

29 Gaven Titley, Ellie Keen, and László Földi, *Starting Points for Combating Hate Speech Online: Three Studies About Online Hate Speech and Ways to Address it* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Youth Department, 2014).

30 Ariadna Matamoros-Fernández, 'Platformed Racism: The Mediation and Circulation of an Australian Race-Based Controversy on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube', *Information, Communication & Society* 20, no. 6 (2017): 930-946.

was described as reaching 1.9 million people and engaging with more than 600,000.³¹ The 2017 *Give Nothing to Racism* campaign encouraged people to respond to racism by using the campaign's blank-faced emoji online; it was described as 'reaching more than 4.2 million people and engaging with 1.3 (or 2.1) million'.³² However, the HRC provides no information about online discussion or other impacts resulting from such engagement.

The 2020 *Voice of Racism* campaign gave prominence to racist statements spoken by a full-screen face, with links to why they were racist; however, such attempts to counter negative stereotypes by repeating them have been found instead to reinforce racism.³³ The campaign was aimed at 'unintentional contributors to racism', but the evaluation was carried out not with this audience but through an online survey of 1,253 general respondents aged 18–50. Thirteen percent had visited the website and 12 percent had 'taken action such as talking to others, thought about their own views, [and] had talked to or called someone out for a racist comment or behaviour'.³⁴ An independent analysis concluded that the *Voice of Racism* campaign employed mainstream white-saviour logic—encouraging white people to save racialised people from racism—while ignoring the systemic racism of Aotearoa New Zealand's settler institutions.³⁵

The only detailed local evaluation I have found is of ActionStation's online anti-racism intervention programme Tauīwi Tautoko (TT), which trained volunteers to use listening and social-justice advocacy strategies to interrupt racism on news Facebook pages. The evaluation recorded 88 incidents out of 1,156 online encounters where TT posts led to a change

31 HRCNZ, *Stand Up To Racism – That's Us* (Wellington: Human Rights Commission, 2016).

32 Leo Horgan, 'NZ anti-racism message reaches millions', *Māori Television*, 14 July 2017.

33 Rob Donovan and Rodney Vlasi, *A Review of Communication Components of Anti-Racism and Pro-Diversity Social Marketing/Public Education Campaigns* (Melbourne: VicHealth, 2006), 62–64, 76, 100.

34 Alex van Wel, letter to author, 19 January 2021.

35 Manjeet Birk, 'Racism and Anti-Racism in Aotearoa: Considering the Voice of Racism project', unpublished paper, 2021.

in the positions or claims of those who had made racist statements.³⁶ These interventions about interpersonal racism took significant volunteer time and energy and did not impact on institutional racism.

New Zealand researchers suggest three potential groups for collaborating on, or targeting with, anti-racist interventions: those who have attended te Tiriti education workshops,³⁷ European New Zealanders who identify as Pākehā,³⁸ and tauiwi who are learning te reo Māori.³⁹ An Australian study has also recommended that interventions should be aimed at mildly prejudiced bystanders, which it estimated at 63 percent of the Australian online audience.⁴⁰ Previous studies have recommended posting high rates of anti-racist comments, as this has been found to have more impact and provide more potential for viral posts than small numbers of irregular posts.⁴¹ To be effective, researchers agree that anti-racism campaigns need to be long-term and well-funded, to combine mutually reinforcing online and offline elements, and to operate at institutional as well as interpersonal levels.⁴² A major campaign such as this has yet to be implemented in Aotearoa New Zealand. A possible long-term measure of success, taken from a review of interventions against violent extremism, could be gradual increases in proportions of views and engagement with anti-racist posts, and gradual decreases in those for racist content.⁴³

36 Claire Fitzpatrick, *Tauīwi Tautoko: Data Analysis of August Engagements, 2020* (Wellington: ActionStation, 2020).

37 Ingrid Huygens, 'Processes of Pākehā Change in Response to the Treaty of Waitangi' (PhD thesis, University of Waikato, 2013).

38 Robyn Andrews et al., *National Identity and Cultural Diversity* (Palmerston North: Massey University, 2012).

39 Awanui Te Huia, 'Pākehā Learners of Māori Language Responding to Racism Directed toward Māori', *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 47, no. 5 (2016): 734-750.

40 Jakubowicz, *Cyber Racism*, 344.

41 John Postill, 'Democracy in an Age of Viral Reality: A Media Epidemiography of Spain's Indignados Movement', *Ethnography* 15, no. 1 (2014): 51-69.

42 'Anti-racism initiatives', *Challenging Racism Project*, 2018, https://www.western-sydney.edu.au/challengingracism/challenging_racism_project/anti-racism_initiatives

43 J. M. Berger, *Making CVE Work* (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2016).

Existing studies of memes and offline discursive strategies provide useful pointers for creating visual interventions. Although many internet users refer to any still image with text as a meme, researchers define them as widely circulated cultural artefacts, including animations, videos, and websites, which users imitate and transform, thus creating a shared social experience.⁴⁴ Researchers have identified five elements common to memes: most important is humour, followed by timeliness, an appeal to feelings, remixes of popular cultural material, and juxtapositions of incongruous features.⁴⁵ Kathleen Brennan argues that parodic, ironic, and otherwise funny memes about social injustice that evoke feelings of outrage and empathy can engage ambivalent or unaware internet users and increase support for such issues.⁴⁶ Funny memes can also support anti-racist norms more effectively than earnest arguments and can also defuse antagonism.⁴⁷ However, humour is not inherently progressive—for example, sarcasm can foster antagonism, and satire, irony, and sarcasm can be misread.⁴⁸

Overall, my review of the existing research suggests six strategies for disrupting racist discourses about Māori, which I list below. Other anti-racism reviews have also emphasised speaking respectfully to people making racist statements and avoiding self-righteousness,⁴⁹ and have recommended that all anti-racism interventions should be tested with their audiences before use, to avoid having no impact or unintentionally sustaining racism.⁵⁰

44 Limor Shifman, 'Memes in a Digital World: Reconciling with a Conceptual Troublemaker', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 18 (2013): 362-377.

45 Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear, 'Online Memes, Affinities and Cultural Production', in *A New Literacies Sampler*, eds. Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 199-228.

46 Kathleen Brennan, 'MemeLife', in *Making Things International 1: Circuits and Motion*, ed. Mark Salter (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 243-254.

47 Cris Mayo, 'Being in on the Joke: Pedagogy, Race, Humor', *Philosophy of Education Archive* (2008): 244-252.

48 Paul Iganski and Abe Sweiry, *Stopping Hate: How to Counter Hate Speech on Twitter?* (London: Media Diversity Institute, 2016).

49 Agata de Latour et al., *We Can! Taking Action against Hate Speech through Counter and Alternative Narratives* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2017).

50 Donovan and Vlasis, *A Review*, 57, 74, 84, 98.

Method

To create anti-racist memes, my study involved six stages, 75 participants, and analysis of 33 online news stories and 4,480 comments.⁵¹ Anti-Māori discourses and emotional discursive practices were analysed in a baseline and an implementation sample. Over eight months in 2016, I developed 88 anti-racist graphics, which were iteratively and collaboratively refined with 25 Pākehā and Māori te Tiriti educators. Long-term educators have experience dealing with Pākehā racism about Māori, and how this can change in learning about colonisation and te Tiriti. This collaboration included meetings with three te Tiriti education groups: Tāmaki Treaty Workers (TTW) in Tāmaki Makaurau and Network Waitangi in Whangarei and Ōtautahi. Many images were being developed at any one time, with sometimes conflicting feedback from different te Tiriti groups and individuals.

Māori and other researchers emphasise the need for Pākehā research about racialised issues to be accountable to research participants, and to have Māori oversight.⁵² Consequently, my supervisor Te Kawehau Hoskins (Ngāpuhi) advised and pre-tested graphics, a Māori colleague in Kupu Taewa discussed ethical issues as they arose, and I checked graphics in two meetings with a Māori te Tiriti worker. I discussed research issues at TTW meetings, as well as in a writing group of Pākehā PhD students studying te Tiriti issues. Treaty education groups received a link to the final graphic interventions to use and distribute in 2017, and the graphics Facebook page was promoted to Māori rōpū in 2020.

Available graphics were tested with a group of post-graduate public-health students, and through participating in te Tiriti education groups I recruited 24 participants who had completed basic Treaty workshops to post the final images on their personal Facebook pages. The Facebook

51 More methodological details are available in Jenny Rankine, 'Affective Combat Against Online Racism about Māori' (PhD thesis, University of Auckland, 2020).

52 Maui Hudson et al., *Tē Ara Tika: Guidelines for Māori Research Ethics: A Framework for Researchers and Ethics Committee Members* (Auckland: Health Research Council of New Zealand, 2010).

participants and I posted 52 graphics on news and personal pages in the summer of 2016–2017. I analysed the results, surveyed collaborators and participants about the process and the graphics and reassessed the images in the light of this information. The 59 graphics that survived this process can be found on the Social Justice NZ Facebook page, with others added since.⁵³

The strengths of this methodology include the size of the two analysed samples and the detailed and collaborative graphic development process. Limits include the small number of graphics posted, the small number of threads on which they were posted, the lack of any controls, and the speed of algorithmic change in Facebook pages, all of which mean the results should be treated as only suggestive. While a larger study could compare image-only with text-only posts, and early with late posts in different threads, the nature of news and personal Facebook pages—with diverse commenters, unknown numbers of lurkers, different news stories, topics, and discourses—makes precise controls between different campaigns impossible.

Graphic development process

After reviewing anti-racism research, I rejected most of the 200 anti-racist graphics I had collected before the study as counter-productive, because they either simply insulted others, denounced others as racist, presented racism as inherent in individuals, conveyed self-righteousness or superiority (for example, Figure 1), or presented the speaker as non-racist. I adapted some of the remaining 50 graphics ideas, developed new ones from scratch, and refined them all in discussion with te Tiriti educators. My collaborators and I aimed to produce images that countered comments fuelled by particular anti-Māori repertoires prominent in the baseline comments sample. The *Treaty of Waitangi* and *Good/Bad Māori* were the most common of the 12 repertoires I identified in that sample; 11 were repeated in the study's 2017 implementation sample, with the *One People* repertoire also commonly used.

53 See: <https://www.facebook.com/SocialJusticeNZ/>



Figure 1.

Four issues dominated our discussions, three of which are also relevant to other social inequities. The first was the chasm between anti-Māori and te Tiriti-based discourses about settlements of te Tiriti breaches.⁵⁴ We wanted images to critique unilateral government control of the settlement process as a Treaty breach, while acknowledging that settlement of claims arising from colonial atrocities and thefts is a necessary part of resolving our violent history. We also wanted to represent unceded Māori sovereignty and te Tiriti as essential to decolonising constitutional and resource processes for the future. As still images can express only a single idea in few words, we decided that individual graphics would focus on each of these issues.

Another issue was the need to present decolonising alternatives clearly while not discouraging curious bystanders. We did not want them ignoring the graphics because they felt offended by their label.⁵⁵ Pākehā, European, white, non-Māori, tauīwi, and Kiwi were all problematic for some members of the audience we wanted to reach and we decided 'European' was the descriptor least likely to offend. I used 'European' in 12 images, white and Pākehā each in three graphics, and European-Kiwis,

54 Margaret Mutu, 'Te Tiriti o Waitangi in a Future Constitution: Removing the Shackles of Colonisation', Robson Lecture, Napier, 22 April 2013.

55 Andrews et al., *National Identity*, 6.

non-Māori Kiwis, settlers, and Kiwis once each. Related to that issue was whether to use macrons on te reo words in graphics, a practice that te Tiriti educators said that many Pākehā find off-putting, although I found no research evidence of this. Although all of the tauwiwi developers support this endangered language and routinely use macrons in writing, we decided—without Māori input—not to use them on these graphics. I discuss this further below.

The struggle to condense counter-hegemonic ideas into a few words that Pākehā might respond to was a constant difficulty in creating and improving graphics, illustrating the apparent inevitability and naturalness of Pākehā dominance and its constraining effect even for people who support tino rangatiratanga and have long experience in countering settler racism. While refining such graphics we were also constantly alert to any reinforcement of anti-Māori discourses.

The six strategies from the research review that I used for graphic interventions were as follows: evoking emotions that support social justice; using alternative discourses; highlighting contradictions in racist statements; undermining Pākehā control/affirming Māori authority; shifting dominant identities towards inclusion; and providing omitted information. However, many graphics reflected more than one strategy. Feelings that support social justice include anger at ongoing colonial injustices, empathy with Māori, and hope for a just future based on te Tiriti. For example, Figure 2 adapted an existing graphic likening the injustices of the government's Treaty settlements process to a car theft (a trope originated by Māori activists), aiming to evoke empathy with Māori.⁵⁶ After discussion with te Tiriti groups, I used the same wording but illustrated it with maps showing the theft of land, which te Tiriti educators said were tools that changed attitudes in their workshops.

56 Wira Gardiner, *Return to Sender: What Really Happened at the Fiscal Envelope Hui* (Auckland: Reed, 1996).



Figure 2.

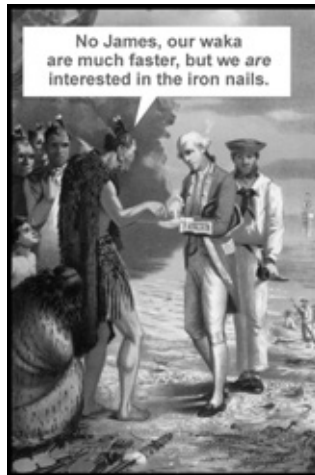


Figure 3.

Using alternative discourses was the most important strategy recommended by anti-racism research in discourse analysis, and we drew on those consistently provided by Māori. For example, Figure 3 used an 1890 painting to contrast Māori assessments of Captain James Cook's unwieldy vessel with their enthusiasm for metal; its representation of strategic Māori approaches to European technologies attempted to disrupt the *Māori*

Culture repertoire.⁵⁷ To highlight contradictions in racist discourses, I used a cartoon that targeted inconsistencies in the repertoires about *Violence* and the *Pākehā Norm* (Figure 4), which are sustained through the use of ethnic labels by police and mass news media.



Figure 4.

Using the fourth strategy—undermining Pākehā control and affirming Māori authority—I produced five cartoon graphics satirising elite Pākehā arrogance and complacency, which aimed to disrupt the *Privilege* and *Pākehā Norm* repertoires. Another series of graphics presented te Tiriti settlements as benefiting all New Zealanders, to undermine the *Treaty of Waitangi* repertoire and encourage hope for respectful and reciprocal relationships between Māori and tauwiwi. Most of this series pictured resources with the slogan ‘Treaty settlements work for all of us’, aiming to affirm Māori authority over these resources (Figure 5). One example of the fifth strategy—transforming dominant identities to be more inclusive—redefined settler identity as related to, rather than dismissing, te Tiriti. Figure 6 labelled tauwiwi as Treaty people on a background image of te Tiriti text, which also aimed to encourage hope for authentic partnerships between Māori and non-Māori.

57 Irihapeti Ramsden, Treaty of Waitangi workshop where author was present, August 2000.



Figure 5.



Figure 6.

Providing information that racist discourses persistently omit was a strategy recommended in a review paper, but only when accompanied by other anti-racism strategies.⁵⁸ It was easier to develop graphics for this strategy than for any other. Te Tiriti educators suggested focusing on three issues in the *Treaty of Waitangi* repertoire: the tiny proportion of resources returned in Treaty settlements (the subject of four graphics); the tiny monetary total of settlements compared with other government spending (seven graphics); and current te Tiriti breaches (six graphics), to counter the common Pākehā misconception that all breaches of te Tiriti are in the past.

58 'Anti-racism Initiatives – Providing Accurate Information to Dispel "False Beliefs"', *Challenging Racism Project*, 19 May 2018.

Despite the importance of humour in memes, I found it very hard to be regularly funny, ironic, or whimsical about anti-racism. Two participants and I assessed that 52 percent of the 88 graphics were funny in some way. Most were ironic, with ten remixing the Tui-billboard meme to focus on colonisation and privilege. I found few images from meme-generating sites that provided useful models for anti-racist graphics, as their popular culture origins and associations were largely inapplicable.

Most of the final graphics set focused on three anti-Māori repertoires: the *Treaty of Waitangi* (37), the *Pākehā Norm* (16), and *Privilege* (14). Ten graphics each aimed at the *One People* repertoire and general racist denials, and ten focused on colonisation (some images targeted more than one). Thinking against dominant discourses was more difficult for the *Good/Bad Māori* and *Māori Culture* repertoires. For the *Violence* repertoire, an inability to obtain permission for historic images meant that I was unable to represent the persistence of colonial violence against Māori.

Results

Markers of success for graphic interventions on Facebook are scant and problematic, as only a tiny minority of readers engage with posts, while the rest (lurkers) simply read. On news pages, markers include Likes⁵⁹ and the number, tone (for example, insulting or courteous), and discourses of responding comments, and on personal pages they also include the number of times the graphics were shared. Likes and comments can be ambiguous proxies for actual interest and impact;⁶⁰ few Likes or comments on a post could indicate that lurkers were silenced by other abusive comments, that they felt ignorant, had no opinion, were thinking about a post, or that they did not support it. Most of the 52 graphics posted between November 2016 and February 2017 seemed to attract low levels of such engagement on news and personal Facebook pages.

59 Capitalisation distinguishes use of the Facebook Like button from other liking.

60 Veikko Eranti and Markku Lonkila, 'The Social Significance of the Facebook Like Button', *First Monday* 20, no. 6 (2015).

My 63 posts on news Facebook pages, 54 with graphics (38 different images), attracted a total of 36 comments, a low rate for news pages about Māori issues. I was unable to track whether other posters shared graphics. The most responses on one thread was 14, stimulated by my 21 posts, more than I wrote on any other thread. Most responders to all my posts disagreed; only five responses supported my anti-racist posts. Some commenters who responded by using another anti-Māori repertoire were insulting. However, despite the often-hostile tone of news threads, most respondents debated the issue reasonably, possibly because of the friendly tone of most of my posts ('Sorry, can't agree [first name]. Despite all its apologies, the government breaches the Treaty all the time. Until they start treating Māori as equals, we won't be "one people"').

My posts had a mean of 2.6 Likes each; 40 percent attracted none and the most Liked of my posts received 42 (when the most-Liked post in that thread received 276). The strongly moderated RadioNZ page was the most courteous Facebook page in the intervention sample, and the only thread where responding comments outnumbered my posts. In contrast to the Taiui Tautoko intervention, no posters of racist statements in my baseline or intervention samples changed their positions or claims in 9,165 analysed posts, despite many anti-racist posts by other commenters.

Research participants posted 59 graphics (35 different images) on their personal Facebook pages, largely without accompanying text, stimulating little engagement. For all but two graphics, Likes averaged two per post; and 25 graphics were shared, eliciting only 12 responses. While a later reassessment, reported below, judged some graphics to be ineffective or doubtful, this apparent lack of engagement across two Facebook genres also highlights the intense competition for online users' attention.⁶¹ In the remainder of this section, I focus on the two graphics on personal pages that *were* widely shared and discussed.

The Pākehā/Kiwi graphic (Figure 7) paraphrased a comment from a 1990s Treaty education participant, which elicited laughter at the time and

61 Lisa Ellen Silvestri, 'Memeingful Memories and the Art of Resistance', *New Media & Society* 20, no. 11 (2018): 3997-4016.



Figure 7.

after it was shared online by 303 people.⁶² A Māori woman posted the graphic in November 2016 and told the private Facebook research group: ‘I never had anything like that on my FB page!!! And great kōrero too with whanau that I would have never had . . . in person’. In 2012 Facebook was estimated to show posts to 24 percent of a poster’s friends, resulting in an estimated actual audience of 48,500.⁶³ This is a tiny proportion of the 4.2 million people ‘reached’ by the Human Rights Commission’s far more extensive 2017 campaign *Give Nothing to Racism*. Nevertheless, the graphic attracted an average of 7.4 posts per visible sharer page. If this average applied to all sharers, it could have attracted more than 2,200 comments by 1,200 commenters.

The second widely shared graphic (Figure 8) was developed for offline use, since it was text-heavy and earnest, but a Pākehā participant asked to post it on Waitangi Day 2017. It was the sole graphic of the 88 that suggested individual decolonisation actions for tauiwi, and by 27 February it had been shared by 261 people. Only 28 percent of sharer pages were visible, and only 37 of those allowed their friends to be shown. The above calculation led to an estimated actual audience of 50,112 for this graphic.

62 Rosanne Black, ‘Treaty People Recognising and Marking Pākehā Culture in Aotearoa New Zealand’ (PhD thesis, University of Waikato, 2010), 155.

63 Michael Bernstein et al., ‘Quantifying the Invisible Audience in Social Networks’, in *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, eds. Susanne Bødker et al (New York: Association for Computing Machinery, 2013), 21-30.



Figure 8.

This decolonisation graphic attracted fewer comments, an average of 1.1 per visible page; if these averages applied to the rest of the sharers' pages, it would have attracted 287 comments by 183 commenters. Only one visible sharer of the Pākehā/Kiwi graphic also shared the decolonisation graphic. I estimated the actual audience for both graphics to be between approximately 50,000 (assuming a complete overlap of invisible sharers) and 98,000 (no overlap) during the intervention phase, stimulating discussion between an estimated 1,400 posters.

However, the decolonisation graphic continued to be shared on Facebook after the end of the posting period. In 2019, it was shared by 877 people in Aotearoa New Zealand and by 956 after it was remixed for non-indigenous residents of Hawai'i. It was also shown to the 2017 Public Health Association conference, used in Ministry of Education staff workshops, distributed to Massey University and te reo students, used in email signatures, and hung on office walls. This recurrent sharing and remixing made the graphic a meme and enabled it to reach and stimulate discussion among an estimated audience of more than one million people.

These two widely shared graphics stimulated online discourses which

I had not previously seen in news Facebook comments. A hopeful search for decolonisation among tauwiwi was the most common discourse in visible comments about the decolonisation graphic. This emotional discourse acknowledged that New Zealand was a colonising state, expressed comfort and confidence in Māori authority, and focused on how tauwiwi could decolonise, act honourably as te Tiriti partners, and relate ethically with Māori. For example, one poster said there was ‘much to do’ to change Pākehā norms about te Tiriti and another supported challenges to the supposed neutrality of the white norm; another said that the way forward ‘of course’ was following the leadership of Māori and tauwiwi of colour.⁶⁴ One organisation described the graphics as a useful starting point, also pointing to its timeliness, an important factor in political images becoming memes.⁶⁵

Two other discourses that I had not seen in either news Facebook sample—Pākehā pride and Pākehā fragility—were less clearly associated with anti-racism. Several commenters on the Pākehā/Kiwi graphic expressed pride in the Pākehā label, rejection of a European home, and admiration for Māori culture. Three posters, commenting on both graphics, expressed fragility and vulnerability as Pākehā, a feeling of marginalisation by Māori, anxiety about belonging, and self-pity. For example, one poster said that the label ‘non-Māori Kiwi’ in the decolonisation graphic made them feel like an outsider in their homeland, while another reported the same feeling from being labelled Pākehā. While this discourse can be associated with Pākehā accusations of Māori discrimination, here it was expressed by a poster who expressed strong support for He Whakaputanga, the 1835 Māori Declaration of Independence.

The friendly, casual conversation on the personal Facebook pages of participants and sharers was strikingly different to the often antagonistic, hostile, or abusive debate about Māori issues on news pages. Posters on the

64 To protect the privacy of these commenters, I have paraphrased posts and quoted only common, untraceable phrases.

65 Stephanie Vie, ‘In Defence of “Slacktivism”’: The Human Rights Campaign Facebook Logo as Digital Activism’, *First Monday* 19, no. 4 (2014).

visible sharers' pages often expressed uncertainty and occasionally said they could be wrong. For example, an amicable dialogue between one poster who suggested that others may have lived in Aotearoa before Māori (a feature of the stigmatising *Māori Inheritance* repertoire) and those who politely questioned that claim, contrasted strongly to the same topic on news pages, where this claim was made and sometimes argued dogmatically or abusively. These and other anti-Māori comments on the pages of those who shared both graphics indicated that the graphics reached audiences unaligned with anti-racism.

After the implementation period, I reflected on the reactions of news Facebook commenters and surveyed te Tiriti groups and Facebook participants to reassess the interventions. The reassessment highlighted difficulties identified in development. For example, some Facebook participants and te Tiriti educators were concerned about graphics that they viewed as aggressive; two had receive no response and I deleted them from the final set. Some te Tiriti workers were also concerned about ironic and satirical graphics, which one argued 'need a clear critical prompt', so I deleted one image where the satire was less obvious. Other participants also questioned the conservative, retro-sexist standpoint of the Tui 'Yeah right' meme, only three of which had been posted. The meme's irony also seemed to mute emotional responses; as a result, I deleted them all from the collection released publicly in 2020.

Macrons and one late-developed graphic highlighted the importance for Pākehā of consulting Māori in decisions about anti-racism. The graphic featured four gravestones reading 'Here lies' and related wording, below which I had inserted phrases such as 'The One People myth'; it had been posted only once. A Māori te Tiriti educator, consulted after the posting period, advised against such culturally sensitive images of urupa (burial grounds), so I also deleted this image from the public set. The lack of macrons was questioned by a Māori Facebook participant who did not post any graphics without them. They argued, 'I don't believe we should "soften" our use of [te reo] in any form to allow non-Māori to feel more comfortable. Doing so diminishes the very mana of Te Reo'. As a result, I added macrons as relevant in the final graphics set. One Pākehā Facebook participant decided not to post any graphics using the label European; to give users of the published

collection a choice, I made versions using each label for graphics mentioning the dominant culture.

Te Tiriti groups and three individual educators said the graphics would be very useful in Treaty workshops, and as handouts or posters as well as on Facebook; as one educator said, ‘they get people to think differently’. The individual decolonisation graphic, and a new one for organisations that I created in consultation with te Tiriti workers, were printed as posters in 2020 and available for a koha from Network Waitangi Ōtautahi; more than 1,500 copies of the individual decolonisation poster have been distributed.⁶⁶ Finally, survey participants also suggested a raft of other potential topics for graphics, including about institutional racism, the environment, the Pākehā suggestion that Māori show gratitude for being colonised, Pākehā ideas of indigeneity as fractions of ancestry or blood quantum, current issues, and recurring events such as Waitangi Day, Parihaka Day, Guy Fawkes, and Anzac Day.

Conclusions

The two widely shared graphics involved possibly hundreds of thousands of people with different viewpoints in discussions about decolonisation, te Tiriti, respectful Māori–Pākehā relationships, te reo Māori, and Pākehā identity, online and offline, and evoked emotional-discursive practices that I had never or very rarely seen on news Facebook pages. The discourses evoked by these two graphics indicate that anti-racist graphics, particularly those that are timely and witty, can become memes and change conversations about racism in Aotearoa New Zealand. The development of a set of graphics using six discursive strategies extended discursive, social practice, and anti-racism research, and the results support the use of these strategies in the systematic creation of a larger body of anti-racism and pro-Treaty interventions. The reassessment also supported research arguing for robust accountability structures for Pākehā working on anti-racism.

The development process, reassessment, and wide distribution of

⁶⁶ See: <https://nwo.org.nz/resources/decolonisation-posters/>

the two graphics supports research about the importance of timeliness and humour in creating political memes, as well as the difficulties of using sarcasm and satire. It also supports the conclusions of other researchers that only a tiny proportion of political graphics are likely to become memes, and that this process is unpredictable.⁶⁷ It also shows the usefulness of such graphics in offline social-justice education and promotion. Further, the study suggests that vague proxy measures of SNS ‘engagement’ are inadequate to assess the impacts of anti-racism campaigns online, and that such campaigns should compare shifts in online emotional-discursive practices about racism and anti-racism as a result of their interventions.

Finally, my study indicates that the most fruitful sites for online anti-racism interventions are supporters’ personal Facebook and possibly other personal SN pages, where sharing immediately reaches unaligned audiences. While mass news Facebook pages are generally hostile environments for such graphics, posting them on the more socially progressive and heavily moderated RadioNZ news page may be useful, as would posting on Māori news Facebook pages, for Māori wanting to promote discussion among Māori audiences about decolonisation.

Based on the existing literature, the meme-development process, participant feedback, and five workshops that I ran on creating feminist and anti-poverty graphics between 2017 and 2020, the six discursive strategies outlined in this article appear to be able to be generalised to create graphics against other social inequities. There is scope here for activist groups to systematically produce social-justice images that disrupt dominant discourses, while deflecting elite attacks and co-optation. The systematic production of memes could help to develop SNS where users regularly see witty and imaginative images that support marginalised populations, challenge structural inequities, and advance just futures. However, such a vision faces major obstacles, including the corporate control of SNS and the algorithmic promotion of racism. Despite these hurdles, it is past time for political memes to be created systematically by social-justice groups. We cannot leave this in the hands of the alt-right.

67 Postill, ‘Democracy in an Age of Viral Reality’, 57.