

White Cultural Imperialism and the New Zealand Criminal Justice System: Importance of Insider Voices

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Abstract

In New Zealand, Māori women and men make up a disproportionate amount of the prison population, reflecting what Indigenous scholars have termed the era of the hyper-incarceration of Indigenous people. Using Tracey McIntosh's conceptualisation of the violence continuum and Donna Awatere's framework of White cultural imperialism, this article examines the colonial past and current state of the New Zealand criminal justice system with a particular focus on how crime is framed in New Zealand public discourse. This article offers insight into how Whiteness is operationalised in re-enforcing Māori as the criminal Other. Voices of incarcerated or formerly incarcerated Indigenous and non-Indigenous people offer counter-narratives to dominant frames of criminality advanced by the state and offer opportunities for moving forward.

Keywords: Donna Awatere, Whiteness, Māori incarceration, incarcerated voices, racialised policing

Introduction

In New Zealand, Māori make up 64% of the female prison population and over 50% of the male prison population (Department of Corrections, 2022; George et al., 2014). Furthermore, the number of people incarcerated in New Zealand increased sharply between 1986 and 2009, and of particular note is the 297% increase in the female prison population, which is almost twice the growth rate of male prisoners (Workman & McIntosh, 2013). In 2022, Māori and Pasifika populations made up 65% of the total prison population even though they only accounted for 24.5% of the New Zealand population, while European or Pākehā New Zealanders made up 70% of the total population but only 30% of the prison population (Department of Corrections, 2022; Stats NZ, 2019). The disproportionate rate of incarceration of Māori should be seen as a disturbing signal that there is a systemic issue leading to adverse outcomes for Indigenous people within the criminal justice system (Andrae et al., 2017; Norris, 2017).

Historically, prevailing narratives explaining racial disparity relied heavily on viewing crime through the lens of individualism and class analysis only. Māori scholars have pointed out that such narrow foci exclude the racialisation of crime control and structural constraints dating back to the mid-to-late nineteenth century when the state enacted laws to hold Māori activists without trial for resisting the colonial project (Cunneen & Tauri, 2016; Webb, 2017). Critical examinations of history bring to light a continuity of racialised targeting from the beginning of the colonial project to the modern day (Agozino & Pfohl, 2003; Alexander, 2012; Awatere, 1984; Proulx, 2014). Contemporary examples of widespread racialised targeting and profiling, such as the case of the extralegal photographing of Māori and Pasifika youth by law enforcement in 2021, illustrate that technologies of surveillance are not neutral but highly racialised (Norris & Tauri, 2021). The racialised nature of criminalising narratives deserves urgent attention, especially with regard to ideologies of Whiteness in upholding the power structures where Māori are locked in a continuous cycle of resisting colonial forces (McIntosh & Curcic, 2020). In responding to the call advanced by

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McIntosh and Curcic, this paper draws on the voices of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people to gain insight into the structural forces that fashioned a web that has ensnared generations of Māori in the criminal justice system. This article introduces Donna Awatere's 1984 concept of White cultural imperialism to discuss the processes that render this web invisible to wider society (Alexander, 2012; Awatere, 1984; de Saxe, 2021; Norris & Lipsey, 2019). Awatere's 1984 book *Maori Sovereignty* presents one of the first critical accounts of Whiteness in New Zealand (Norris et al., 2023). By weaving together McIntosh's conceptualisation of the violence continuum and Awatere's framework of White cultural imperialism, the role in which colonial violence and racialised narratives have become embedded within White New Zealand consciousness and social institutions will be discussed. This successful deep colonisation of the social collective consciousness allows contemporary racialised structures and discourses to appear race-neutral. In other words, New Zealand's collective consciousness of race has been shaped over time in a way that inevitably associates terms like 'gang member', 'offender' and 'welfare recipient' with Māori and Pasifika peoples, thus perpetuating the cycle of colonial violence (Bonilla-Silva, 2000; Norris et al., 2023).

This article proceeds with a brief history of the institution of Whiteness in New Zealand and the policies created to uphold this power inequity. McIntosh and Curcic's (2020) discussion of the violence continuum is considered alongside Awatere's (1984) concept of White cultural imperialism, which offers a lens to examine crime control and related criminalising narratives. Particular focus is devoted to the role of Whiteness within New Zealand, especially in relation to modern strategies used to suppress the reality of racism and Māori voices. The article concludes with a discussion of the importance of centring voices of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated Indigenous people.

History of Whiteness in New Zealand

To understand incarceration rates and structural violence in New Zealand, studies must address the power structure through the context of colonial racialised violence and its role in the creation of 'Whiteness' (Cunneen & Tauri, 2016). Cunneen and Tauri highlight the commonalities of the experiences of Indigenous populations within British settler-colonial societies, which stems from the historical legacy of colonisation that led to significant disruption to pre-existing social orders. Awatere (1984) discussed how White culture in New Zealand was formed through a common greed that superseded historical rifts between Scots, Irish, Australian, British and other Europeans. Whiteness became an operational force in New Zealand when foreigners united their power and purpose towards the common goal of dispossessing Māori of their lands. This strategy was replicated from success in colonising Canada, the United States and Australia; the seizing of Indigenous lands lies at the heart of colonisation, uniting forces among White settlers (Awatere, 1984; Smith, 2020; Webb, 2017). It is important to note that at the inception of the dominant culture of Whiteness, people continued to define themselves by their ancestry rather than their 'new' culture of White identity, which simultaneously gave rise to White superiority and Indigenous inferiority. In turn, Whiteness became institutionalised in that it was considered the norm and the governing force that ruled (Norris et al., 2023).

Awatere situated White culture in New Zealand as an extension of British imperialist culture, with the only distinction being White New Zealanders' deeply held opposition to Māori. This defining factor has been instrumental in shaping New Zealand policies and structures from the outset, which were built to serve White people at the cost of Māori. Joseph Ward, the Prime Minister of New Zealand in 1910, stated:

"I do not think we require to have a discussion of the policy of New Zealand regarding its preservation of white races only. That policy has been settled long ago and I am just as determinedly in favour of that policy today as I have always been in the past." (cited in Awatere, 1984, p. 57)

This widely held belief is seen through policies such as the Suppression of Rebellion Act 1863, the Land Settlement Act 1863 and the Maori Prisoners Trials Act 1879. These laws were all put in place to suppress Māori justice, political independence and resistance, establishing systems of racial social control (Webb, 2017). This trend followed through into the 1900s with policies such as the Public Health Act 1900, which designed health services for White settlers and completely ignored the needs of Māori, while simultaneously criminalising and suppressing traditional healing practices (Awatere, 1984; Simmonds, 2014).

Awatere's concept of White cultural imperialism offers a framework to examine the processes of domination that consists of three key factors—fraud, military power and systemic exclusion. Fraud begins with the Treaty of Waitangi, which consisted of two separate documents, one written in Māori and the other in English. When read in te reo Māori, the Treaty gives Māori sovereignty of their people and land (Awatere, 1984). Mutu (2011) discusses Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Māori document which was signed by Māori chiefs at Waitangi, which guaranteed Māori sovereignty and undisturbed possession of their lands, forests, fisheries and other property (Wynyard, 2019). The English document, which holds no legal authority, is a treaty of cession of sovereignty and was crafted by White settlers and used as a weapon for the justification of the violence of colonisation (Jackson, 2019; Mutu, 2011). Military force was used to dominate and destroy the strength of Māori through the decimation of their people, land and agriculture. We are now in an era of extreme social exclusion. Each system built on the foundation of colonisation in New Zealand was created with the intent to exclude Māori from participation. Awatere (1984) identified housing, education and criminal justice as the superstructures that uphold and maintain White cultural imperialism. These superstructures play an integral part in the domination and dispersion of White ideologies and act as a powerful force for executing social exclusion. In addition to the dispersion of White ideology, these structures became a tool for forced assimilation. To progress in the new New Zealand, Māori either had to join and leave Māoridom behind or become locked out of the system completely.

Awatere advanced the concept of White cultural imperialism to also point out how New Zealand began as and continues to be a separatist state under the guise of biculturalism and later multiculturalism. The myth of a bicultural society is most notable in the reality of racism and structural violence, which is well documented and highly visible through the consistent adverse outcomes for Māori in criminal justice, education, healthcare, foster care and housing (Elers & Jayan, 2020; George et al., 2014; Norris, 2017; Tauri, 2014). However, New Zealand has tended to see itself as a model nation for a multicultural identity (Bonilla-Silva, 2000; Elers & Jayan, 2020; Tecun et al., 2022). This projected image is deeply embedded in the hearts and minds of many New Zealanders. It obscures the reality of racism through an ideology of deep denial and mythologised equality, most notable in the myth of egalitarianism ever existing (Bonilla-Silva, 2000; Skilling, 2013). Unfortunately, race has largely been overlooked by White New Zealand writers, many of whom believe New Zealand to be a post-colonial and post-racial society (Gray et al., 2013). Māori scholars have not been so blind and have been documenting the role of New Zealand's settler-colonial, or 'White', systems in influencing and predetermining the lives of Māori for many decades (for example, Awatere, 1984; Gray et al., 2013; Jackson, 1987, 2019; Quince, 2010; Tauri, 2014). As Awatere pointed out, Whiteness is the force that drives myths of biculturalism, making racism harder to prove even when White systems of justice have sustained a system of Māori imprisonment and containment.

The violence continuum

To critically discuss the criminal justice system in relation to the social control of Māori as proffered by Awatere (1984), it is imperative to have a firm definition and understanding of violence. *Violence* can be an individual act, such as physical violence, psychological manipulation and social violence, or a collective or institutional act, such as political violence (Farmer, 1996). *Political violence* can be embedded and perpetuated throughout institutions and systems in the form of direct, structural or symbolic violence. *Structural violence*

constrains the agency of groups of people by having their life choices structured by racism, sexism, political violence or grinding poverty (Farmer et al., 2006). *Symbolic violence* occurs when oppression is made invisible because of systemic normalisation to the point where all parties perceive it as natural or ‘just the way things are’ (Bourdieu, 1977, as cited in Martin et al., 2021; McIntosh & Curcic, 2020). An essential component of these issues is that they are designed to be invisible through the systems of education and socialisation of the public. Therefore, societal perception is built to view this form of violence as a personal failing of the individual rather than an intentional form of political violence. As a result, these forms of violence are not criminalised in the way individual acts of violence are. Instead, they are rife within social institutions, including the criminal justice system (McIntosh & Curcic, 2020).

The violence continuum provides a framework to discuss violence in its many forms and pays particular attention to the fact that violence creates a condition that generates more violence, particularly against historically targeted and excluded bodies (McIntosh & Curcic, 2020). McIntosh and Curcic, when tracing the trajectory of the mass imprisonment of Māori women, employ the framework to illustrate how structural violence begets other forms of violence by creating the conditions for poverty, loss of identity, lack of employment, and lack of housing. Awatere’s (1984) conceptualisation of White cultural imperialism links colonisation to the violence continuum. In doing so, she identified White hostility as the engine powering the violence continuum that is rarely recognised and has gone unexamined. Craig Proulx’s 2018 article “White backlash against Indigenous peoples in Canada” documents a similar phenomenon of White activists’ long-standing practice of promoting White innocence discourse most observed through equality-as-sameness rhetoric which demonises Indigenous people. Such strategies ignore, rationalise and deny responsibility for continuing colonial land and resources theft (Augoustinos & Callaghan, 2019; Proulx, 2018). Without considering and unpacking White cultural imperialism, one could believe that the violence enacted against Māori was a single act committed by those who lived generations ago. However, in a settler-colonial society, violence against the Indigenous people only *begins* with colonisation. As Wolfe (2006) notes, settler colonialism is a structure, not an event. Therefore, these practices are not simply part of shared history but are deeply embedded in modern-day society.

Donna Awatere (1984) mapped the intentional bias embedded within superstructures that upholds Whiteness and a White supremacist order from before the Treaty to the urbanisation of Māori. For example, in the 1840s, due to an investigation by Governor Grey, the Supreme Court ruled that the Crown had legal title to all land in New Zealand. This meant that customary use was no longer enough to establish ownership, and Māori would need a Crown title. This ruling also meant that all land not cultivated by Māori would belong to the Crown. Moreover, in 1865, the Native Lands Act enabled the conversion of traditional Māori housing systems, which were based on communal land use and governorship, into individual and absolute land ownership titles (Gilling, 1994), and in so doing, the Act paved the way for land to be sold off to White settlers, further alienating Māori from their ancestral land and home. After the Second World War, there was a significant migration of Māori from rural to urban areas. Many rural Māori were subsequently forced, either by coercion, lack of opportunities or direct land seizures, to move into paid employment in the larger cities predominantly occupied by White settlers (Awatere, 1984; Gilling, 1994; Kake, 2016). This part of the colonial project aided assimilation by alienating Māori from their land and forcing them into a position reliant on White settlers for employment, accommodation and education.

By 1990, around 80% of Māori had moved to cities (Hill, 2016). Lack of connections, education and permanent housing along with isolation from their home and culture led to multiple forms of social exclusion. The State-Owned Enterprises Act 1986 left many urban Māori without permanent housing due to forestry and railway housing being sold to developers. Simultaneously, the state withdrew support for papakāinga housing, which resulted in significant barriers for urban Māori to return to their home communities. Furthermore, due to the over-policing of homeless communities, Māori were subjected to multiple forms of surveillance, experiencing the weight of the White colonial gaze and being viewed as

dangerous or criminal (Kake, 2016; Lee et al., 2022) This example illustrates the legacy of historical policies, which alienated Māori from their land and fisheries, and the ongoing inter-generational ramifications of these policies, such as increased homelessness and lower homeownership rates (Lawson-Te Aho et al., 2019). Houkamau and Sibley (2015) found that merely looking more stereotypically ‘Māori’ significantly decreases the likelihood of having a mortgage application approved by a bank or financial institution. These examples illustrate how criminalising narratives, such as the trope of ‘savages’, that were used to justify colonisation, are still used to justify the subordination and criminalisation of Māori (Norris & Tauri, 2021).

The education system is described by Donna Awatere as a bastion of White power, used to serve the interests of White students and as a tool for the assimilation of Māori students (Awatere, 1984). In 2018, UNICEF’s annual *Innocenti Report Card* ranked New Zealand as one of the worst ‘rich countries’ in education equality (Walters, 2018a). The Children’s Commissioner at the time, Andrew Becroft, notes that bias plays a significant role in the disparity between learning outcomes in the mainstream education system and that the enduring legacy of colonisation has resulted in the long-term disadvantage of Māori students (Walters, 2018b). Modern systemic bias and anti-Māori racism are two leading factors causing Māori to be represented at a disproportionate rate in the group who underachieve. To understand how these factors became embedded in the system, we need to look at colonisation policy regarding education. The Native Schools Act 1858 established subsidies for Māori education in missionary schools, but to qualify for funding, these schools were required to teach in English. As the urbanisation of Māori increased, many attended schools in the city where their history, language and culture were not only suppressed but violently silenced. To become a part of mainstream society, Māori students were forced to leave Māoridom behind. In the mid-1980s, following more than 150 years of colonisation, the public education system came under scrutiny and pressure to review and restructure. Māori activists used this opportunity strategically to advocate for kura kaupapa, Māori schools that offered a full immersion experience—but it still took until the year 2000 for the government to fund kura kaupapa (Archibald, 2006; Tocker, 2015). The education system, Awatere (1984) pointed out, is a tool of White cultural imperialism, forcing Māori to live by rules and systems imported by colonisers. Under White culture imperialism, the intention is to assimilate Māori into the White ways and exclude those who do not comply with the dominant rule. Education, along with the church and media, has been the major vehicle for establishing and maintaining White cultural imperialism.

Insider voices: Structural violence and the Criminal Justice System

As stated earlier, Indigenous scholars and imprisoned Indigenous intellectuals have long shed light on colonialism as an ongoing project that is most visible in the mass imprisonment of Indigenous people (see, Cunneen & Tauri, 2016; George et al., 2014; Ogden, 2020; Ross, 1996). Stormy Ogden (2020), a formerly incarcerated Native American woman and author, links the structural violence she faced throughout her life, from the macro to micro levels, to policies made during colonisation. She draws on policies that allowed legitimate dehumanisation, such as the Indian Indenture Act of 1850, which made it legal to own First Nations people as slaves. This policy and similar others led to Native Americans being exposed to violence and dispossession, slavery, kidnapping, rape and mass murder (Madley, 2017, as cited in Ogden, 2020). The foundation of the United States is rooted in violence that permitted and sanctioned systems of monitoring, surveilling and confining Native Americans—systems that are still seen today. These systems institutionalised and deputised the White body as agents over Native Americans’ everyday lives and being. Stormy’s story parallels that of Stan Coster (Ngāti Kahungunu), who speaks of structural features of the state that rendered his entire life characterised by different forms of state confinement, including becoming a ward of the state at nine and spending more than 25 years in prison (McIntosh & Coster, 2017). McIntosh and Coster draw on Coster’s knowledge acquired under conditions of state constraint to address the gap in New Zealand crime control scholarship that has silenced Indigenous experiences in general and, more

specifically, those who have experienced forms of state control and confinement (Deckert, 2016; Goyes & South, 2021).

Insider insight: Suppression and relevance of Indigenous voices

Mills (1959) stated that “neither the life of the individual nor the history of society can be understood without understanding both” (as cited in McIntosh & Curcic, 2020, p. 226). Incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people, or insider voices, hold the key to understanding how these historical harms are weaved into the day-to-day lives of individuals and communities. Luana Ross (1996) and Donna Awatere (1984), alongside many other Indigenous scholars, have long recognised this gap in how these voices are pushed out of both academia and public policy.

In a society in which the power of ‘free speech’ has been dominated by White people while Māori expressions of dissent are criminalised, we have witnessed a narrative of crime being crafted that shows a distorted image of reality (Elers & Jayan, 2020). Since colonisation began, White hegemonic power has used different tropes and labels to position Māori as less than White people and deserving of their fate through individual moral failings. This notion of White supremacy rests on the shaky grounds of *stadial theory*, which was formulated by Enlightenment philosophers who imagined that societies advance in a linear fashion through predetermined stages of social development from barbarism to ‘civilisation’, with the latter being a euphemism for ‘White culture’ (Awatere, 1984). This ideology of labelling Māori as ‘savages’ has permeated society. In contemporary times, the term savage is largely absent, but society has been socially cued to associate words like ‘criminal’, ‘gang member’ and ‘violent Other’ with Māori (Barnes & McCreanor, 2023; Lewis et al., 2020; McCreanor et al., 2014; Te Punga, 1971). Additionally, the view of crime as an individual problem situates criminality as a character defect, and thus constructs the person as untrustworthy (Alexander, 2012; Norris & Lipsey, 2019). These forces act to discredit and suppress the voices of individuals who are or have been in the prison system. As a result, such voices are not deemed credible experts and so they are, therefore, excluded from crime control discourses. In an effort to advance our understanding of social issues, including incarceration, facing Indigenous people, they need to be acknowledged as experts on their own conditions (McIntosh & Coster, 2017; McIntosh & Curcic, 2020). By recognising their individual and collective experience of structural violence, we are forced to acknowledge how deeply rooted, systemic and predetermined the outcomes are. The contribution of insider voices allows us to examine the systems of power that uphold structural violence and White cultural imperialism.

Stan Coster’s life, for example, has been defined by deprivation, dislocation and personal loss. He tells his story as a Māori man whose childhood was filled with violence, both physical and structural. He shares experiences of the Epunui Boys’ Home where he grew up, which acted as a “holding pen for an overloaded youth justice system” (Cohen, 2011 as cited in Andrae et al., 2017, p. 127). Coster’s path to prison was predetermined by the state (Andrae et al., 2017). He is an insider of the foster care system, gangs and prisons. As an insider, he identifies structural violence—from the protection he did not receive in foster care to the criminalisation and surveillance that has plagued his adult life (Andrae et al., 2017).

Voices like that of Stormy Ogden and Stan Coster tell stories that are rife with structural violence in many forms. Such voices link day-to-day microaggressions to a colonial history of erasure, dispossession and confinement (Andrae et al., 2017; Ogden, 2020; Re: News, 2019). More importantly, such voices shed light on the racialised aspect of policing and surveillance, which has received little attention within the New Zealand context as compared with North America (Norris & Tauri, 2021; Ogden, 2020). Insider voices will also sharpen our analysis of viewing policing and surveillance of Indigenous people beyond agents of crime control to identifying such practices as embedded societal features normalised through White cultural imperialism. Norris and Tauri, in their analysis of racialised surveillance of Māori youth, argue that

Indigenous and Black youth are policed by schools, parents and community members, which becomes part of an interconnected web of surveillance that influences and reshapes daily life. Insider voices bring attention to the reality of the multiple facets of policing driven by narratives, education, mass media and religious views linked to settler colonialism, which birthed and cultivated a dehumanising story about Indigenous people for centuries (Awatere, 1984; Mogul et al., 2011).

Invisibility, criminalisation and racialised surveillance

When looking at Indigenous and Black communities, there is a rigid dichotomy: on the one hand, they are hyper-visible in crime control, policing and media when they are perceived as the perpetrators, while on the other hand, the same groups are invisible or discredited when they are perceived as victims. McGuire and Murdoch (2021) posit that the invisibility of Indigenous victimisation is inextricably linked to their criminalisation and hyper-incarceration. When Indigenous women need protection from law enforcement, they are dismissed and their claims are not recognised as valid; however, that same system criminalises and imprisons these women in acts of self-defence (Monture-Angus, 1999b, as cited in McGuire & Murdoch, 2021).

The inclusion of Indigenous voices, especially incarcerated or formerly incarcerated ones, sheds light on the racialised and gendered nature of surveillance and structural violence (Tauri, 2014). Through their insight and expertise, we are offered the opportunity to redesign a system to reduce harm rather than simply recreating it. Awatea Mita believes that if we are to move forward, we must completely redesign the criminal justice system to foster reconciliation and community-driven solutions to harm (Re: News, 2019). In New Zealand, traditional Māori knowledge provides clues to meaningful solutions for reducing the incarceration of Māori (George et al., 2014). By listening to and validating the voices of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people, we create new narratives that explain their lives within the context of modern-day New Zealand. As a result, we move away from labelling the individual as a ‘criminal’ and see the system itself as violent. This process involves directing a critical lens toward Whiteness, unpacking it as a framework and force that obscures the depth of anti-Māori beliefs and maintains and operationalises narratives of Māori criminality.

Ideologies of Whiteness: Realities of racism obscured

This far, the discussion has introduced the influence of White cultural imperialism in shaping the modern-day system of social control of Indigenous people, including mass imprisonment. Moreover, Indigenous people have had to actively combat the widely promoted myth of New Zealand being a model multicultural society. Awatere (1984) cautioned New Zealanders that this projected image, which is deeply embedded in the dominant culture, obscures the reality of racism through an ideology of deep denial of Whiteness that mythologises equality. For example, Charles Mills directs our attention to the system by asking, “Who was the criminal justice system built by, and who was it built to serve?” (Mills, 2012). Awatere (1984) outlined that the White New Zealand system was built for Whites, and thus, White people benefit from living in a society dominated by Whiteness. Conversely, within Western liberalism, there is a trend to separate the individual from the system. Instead, the ideology proposes that society is comprised of autonomous individuals entirely responsible for their own decisions. This view undermines societal and structural violence and inhibits our ability to understand the collective reality of experiences (de Saxe, 2021; Gray et al., 2013). However, White people have a vested interest in overlooking the role Whiteness has played and continues to play in their lives (Awatere, 1984; de Saxe, 2021; DiAngelo, 2018, Hattery & Smith, 2018). Awatere (1984) advanced the notion of White amnesia as a vital condition for White people as it allows them to deny responsibility for the deeds of their racialised position. This separation allows White people to place themselves as victims in their own stories or as ‘self-made’ people instead of recognising that their

current status rests on the forceful alienation of Māori from their land. Whiteness acts as ‘the unmarked marker’ and is left unexamined within society, often leading White people to believe that they ‘do not see race’ (Hattery & Smith, 2018; Heitzeg, 2015). However, that very Whiteness is the standard against which all other groups are assessed, equated and made visible (Elers & Jayan, 2020; Jackson, 1987).

Within the context of the criminal legal system and the role of criminalising narratives, it is crucial to discuss the oppressive structure of Whiteness. Structural violence has become embedded into the foundation of institutions, but White society is socialised into being blind to this violence. The norms that keep White privilege and power intact are upheld through the freedom of [White] speech across media, public, government and policy. Elers and Jayan (2020) discuss how this hegemonic right leads to the erasure of the voices of Indigenous people from these spaces. Thus, by rendering Indigenous voices invisible and untrustworthy, their narrative and story become manufactured and portrayed negatively by the “White colonial master” (Dutta, as cited in Elers and Jayan, 2020, p. 239). Awatere (1984) brought attention to the intersection of negative narratives imposed on Māori as deviant and White dominance and violence, which is omitted from the conversation. The power of implicit referencing of race through terms like ‘those on the dole’ or ‘gang members’ is arguably more challenging to contend with as the public has been conditioned to believe that this is not racial discrimination (Norris & Billings, 2017). However, through both blatant and implicit referencing, Māori are placed as hyper-visible in their role as scapegoats for social ills of mainstream society.

Social constructions of groups rooted in negative cultural characterisations or stereotypes of a group are often depicted and controlled through White cultural hegemony (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Over time, the language around negatively racialised populations will change and evolve. While racial hostility against Māori is still deeply embedded in our society, we have constructed coded terms to refer to this group without actually labelling them Māori. Terms such as poor, homeless, gangs, criminals and welfare beneficiaries have been used to disproportionately frame Māori as a burden on society. Despite using race-neutral terms, the consciousness of race is already framed through history. Thus, colonial strategies, influenced by Whiteness, function to continuously link Māori to social ills. From the construction of Māori as gang members and ‘troublesome youths’, the hegemonic status of White norms and values has ensured that these constructions are understood to be ‘reality’. At the same time, White people have never been equated with such tropes, which has triggered a White belief that they are, in fact, the group that needs to be protected (Norris & Billings, 2017).

Conclusion

The systemic denial of racism and inability to address Whiteness prevents us from developing a race consciousness and hinders our capacity to address institutional racism. Charles Mills says that the only way to move ‘past race’ is to recognise that the system was built for White people and remedy it (Mills, 2012). Insiders’ voices help elucidate the process of structural violence and surveillance. Therefore, it is problematic when their voices are suppressed and dismissed as it hides the connections they make between historical context and modern day-to-day realities. Furthermore, it is imperative to acknowledge the influence of Whiteness as a product of White cultural imperialism in inventing the narrative of the ‘Māori problem’, thus redirecting attention towards individuals.

It is also imperative to recognise that White hegemony continues as the principal engineer of a systemically racist modern society (Elias & Feagin, 2020). Racism exists because it was built into the foundation of our society and is an integral part of the White separatist state, which continues to ensure that power remains in the hands of White people (Awatere, 1984). Tactics such as the suppression of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated non-White voices do not address the dilemma of hyper-incarceration of Māori in New Zealand. Instead, such tactics actively work to refocus crime on the individual and hide

the system perpetuating this cycle. Insider voices broaden our understanding of the collective experience of incarcerated people and examine the criminal justice system and prisons, in particular, as a colonial site actively advancing the colonial project.

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