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# Societal resilience following terrorism: community and coordination in Christchurch

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## ABSTRACT

The March 2019 assault on two mosques during Friday prayers in Christchurch, New Zealand, shocked a nation unaccustomed to the terrorist violence suffered elsewhere in recent years. The immediate reaction from political leaders and wider society was to stand in close solidarity with the targeted Muslim community, and a broad recovery process soon emerged which provided substantial ongoing support to anyone impacted by the incident. The authors spent two weeks in New Zealand in mid-2019 with the aim of understanding the apparent societal resilience displayed following the attack, and the ways in which the response was coordinated across different levels of government and civil society. It became clear that effective working relationships among national/municipal authorities and community members/associations established well before the tragedy facilitated communications, cooperation, and the appropriate targeting of support. High levels of institutional trust and authentic leadership enabled an organic, personable recovery process, and represents a pertinent example of societal resilience following an act of terrorism.

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## Introduction

On 15 March 2019, New Zealand suffered its most fatal peacetime assault on civilians in the nation's history. The assailant, a 28-year-old Australian, killed 51 Muslim worshippers during Friday prayers at the Al-Noor and Linwood Mosques in the southern city of Christchurch. Dozens more sustained life changing injuries. In a so-called 'manifesto' posted online minutes before his rampage, the killer claimed his act would 'ripple for years to come, driving political and social discourse, creating the atmosphere of fear and change that is required' to realise his extremist vision (Watson, 2019). While this message was likely targeting an international audience, the attack's impact within New Zealand was in stark contrast to its intention. A vast majority of people immediately stood in close solidarity with their Muslim neighbours, and the government's reaction was inclusive, supportive and defiant.

Unprecedented measures unfolded in the hours and days following the attack. The national terrorism threat level was raised to 'High' for the first time ever, heavily armed

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police were stationed outside places of worship and state institutions, and the government announced a royal commission of inquiry to ascertain how the assailant managed to plan and conduct his attack undetected (NZSIS, 2019). But when Prime Minister Jacinda Arden addressed the nation in the evening after the incident, it became clear the government's ongoing priority was to focus on assisting the victims and bereaved. The mosque shootings were not the first time Christchurch has experienced tragedy and large-scale disruption in recent years. The region's ordeal with earthquakes in 2010 and 2011 provided some direction as to how various levels of society respond to crises. With this in mind, the authors travelled to New Zealand for two weeks in mid-2019 with the aim of understanding how societal resilience coalesced following the attack, and the extent to which response and recovery efforts were coordinated effectively.

In this article, we argue that continued investments in a society's resilience – even during peace time – builds trust and the capacity needed to overcome trials or crises. We first review the literature on societal resilience and highlight themes that will guide our analysis. Next, we review our methodology and data. We consider the ways resilience is understood and developed in Aotearoa – first using available literature on efforts taken after Christchurch's earthquake tragedies, and then by detailing our findings on efforts taken following the March 15 attacks. We observed that amiable working relationships between authorities and communities developed over the past several years benefitted communication channels, enabled input from appropriate community stakeholders, and facilitated the provision of support services. High levels of institutional trust and authentic leadership enabled an organic, personable recovery process, which appears to represent a pertinent example of societal resilience following an act of terrorism. These efforts built upon efforts and strategies from New Zealand's experience in the earthquake tragedies. Finally, the discussion section aligns our findings with the themes found in the literature to show that: (i) Social resilience is highly discernible in Christchurch; (ii) Social resilience can be considered a largely proactive concept; and (iii) The role of civil society and community cannot be discounted. It also includes several points of contention between interviewees, in terms of the immediate responses following the shootings, as well as sentiments surrounding these efforts. While March 15 has been described as one of New Zealand's darkest days, the weeks and months which followed demonstrated quite robust levels of resilience, with fervent contributions from all levels of society.

## The what, who and why in resilience literature

'Social resilience' as defined by Adger (2000) is the 'ability of groups or communities to cope with external stresses and disturbances as a result of social, political and environmental change' (p. 347). This suggests the 'ability to cope' is already present, and that social resilience should be nurtured in anticipation of future shocks or crises. 'Resilience' therefore essentially pertains to a society's capacity to first respond to the immediate effects of a disturbance; the adaptation (or adaptive capacity) to the change and the capacity to learn; and thereafter the eventual transformation of the system to ensure the sustainability of its resilience (Davoudi, 2012). It 'provides the capacity to absorb shocks while maintaining function' in the long-term (Folke et al., 2002). Social – or societal – resilience is not something citizens should expect their governments to provide or regulate (Aspen Institute, 1996; as cited in Black & Hughes, 2001, p. 3). Authorities can be

facilitators, but resilience should be cultured and organic, emerging from within society itself. For our purposes, we will use the term ‘societal resilience’ to refer generally to resilience that originates from society, and within the societal setting. It is separate from technical resilience (Vasu, 2007, p. 5), which involves the structural preparations or contingency plans that do not involve the grassroots – often regarded as ‘resistance strategies’ – as we would expect from emergency planning or disaster-related resilience literature.

Three themes are pertinent in studying resilience within societies, and will be used to structure the findings and discussion in this paper. First, resilience is increasingly considered together with resistance when developing frameworks. Second, scholars disagree as to whether resilience is a ‘reactive’ or ‘proactive’ concept. Third, identifying the specific actors or party most suited to managing the challenges affecting resilience remains contested.

Firstly, while resilience and resistance are separate concepts, they are increasingly considered together to provide a comprehensive understanding in the building of resilient communities. In a study by Longstaff et al. (2010), resistance is defined as ‘the anticipation of risks and the mitigation of vulnerability’ in the short term, while resilience ensures the survivability of a society or community’s vital operations in the long run (p. 3). Resilience strategies thereby presume resistance may fail, and resilience is what allows the society to recover. Cutter and Corendrea (2013) also suggest that societies enhance their resistance strategies in order to nurture resilience in complex systems. As with much resilience literature, Walker and Salt (2006) refer to societies as systems – structures with the capacity to respond and/or adapt to change. Systems have a threshold which depicts a specific level of resistance – a limit if crossed, would mean a degree of adaptation to the system thereafter (resilience) (p. 11).

Edwards’ (2009) ‘Social Resilience Cycle’ describes four stages (mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery) which essentially repeat what Longstaff et al., Walker and Salt, and Cutter and Corendrea have put forward in their conceptions of resilience and resistance. The mitigation, preparedness and response stages in Edwards’ cycle can be viewed as resistance strategies, while recovery may be considered a resilience strategy, because of the need to adjust to ensure the long-term survivability of the system’s functions (p. 19). Therefore, *resilience subsumes resistance* (Longstaff et al., 2010, p. 3). Resilience is that which ensures the continuation of function when resistance fails.

Second is the question of whether resilience is a ‘reactive’ or ‘proactive’ concept. A reactive understanding of resilience suggests the ability to ‘bounce-back’ after a crisis. Black and Hughes (2001), Bodin and Wiman (2004) and Zautra et al. (2009) argue that resilience is a system’s recovery to its prior equilibrium following a shock. Resilience literature from most disaster-related recovery and emergency planning strands largely seek strategies to ‘avoid deeper problems rather than increase capacities’ (Zautra et al., 2009, p. 133). In this regard, employing the reactive understanding suggests its corollaries to resistance.

In contrast, others view resilience as proactive, whereby capacity-building takes place gradually (Brown & Kulig, 1996; as cited in Norris et al., 2008, p. 130). A resilience strategy ensures the survivability of a system’s essential functions (Longstaff et al., 2010, p. 3). It is a process, rather than the outcome of a disturbance (Norris et al., 2008, p. 130). This proactive understanding of resilience is also supported by Waller (2001) and Handmer and Dovers (1996), who emphasise an openness to adaptability, rather than simply ‘stability’ or the return to prior equilibrium. In this regard, this study contributes to the

understanding of resilience as a proactive pursuit. As will be observed in the Discussion section, data show how there was measured and continuous investment in fostering societal trust and understanding between the national and local authorities as well as the Christchurch and local Muslim communities. This aligns well with building the capacity for overall societal resilience, to sustain society's functions and daily life.

Third is determining the most suitable members of society to respond to challenges affecting resilience. Edwards, Norris et al., as well as Davoudi recommended a bottom-up approach from individuals and the community (p. 304). This means building and sustaining resilience over time within society to ensure a strong populace. On the other hand, Sapirstein, as well as Folke et al. (2002) and Hancock (2000) suggest a socially resilient society requires the participation of all segments by interacting across different layers of society, leading to a polycentric (multi-level) form of governance and accountability (see also Lebel et al., 2006). For Olsson et al. (2006), both the government and civil society should take responsibility in building resilient and self-organising capacity through established feedback mechanisms. From this perspective, the role of government leadership and institutions, members of society and their social capital are therefore all significant in building the resilience of a society (Olsson et al., 2006, p. 18).

However, Cote and Nightingale (2012) argue the existing resilience literature lacks thorough analysis of the structure and agency dynamics, especially regarding systemic decision-making. Studying how structure affects agency has always been the emphasis (Cote & Nightingale, 2012, p. 481), as though this relationship is unilineal. Agency and power can influence the system's environment at both conceptual and empirical levels, and should be given more attention, as societies have many layers of interaction at the government, grassroots, and individual levels.

These points from the literature will be considered vis-à-vis the responses after the March 15 shootings – while also acknowledging the strategies developed from Christchurch's experiences with the earthquake tragedies. In assessing the responses, it is noteworthy to identify the overall strategies of different actors, evaluate whether these strategies were reactive or proactive, and assess the extent to which various actors continue to respond to the needs of the community months after the shootings. Looking at the responses to this particular act of terror through the societal resilience lens will contribute to overall resilience literature, which has been seemingly dominated by socio-ecological crises. Therefore, understanding the processes and motivations behind the responses and strategies observed in Christchurch will help inform future post-tragedy processes and develop robust societal resilience in different contexts.

## Methodology and data

We employed an inductive approach to the research, using two forms of data collection over a span of two weeks in late May and early June 2019, which bridged the Muslim holy months of *Ramadhan* and *Syawal*. The project obtained social, behavioural and educational research (SBER) ethics permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore.

Firstly, qualitative narrative interviews were held with relevant stakeholders in the nation's response and recovery effort. We interviewed representatives from the national and local governments, the Wellington-based embassies and high commissions of

Muslim majority states, national police headquarters, Muslim civil society organisations, Christchurch schools, interfaith associations, and members of the Christchurch Muslim community. This method prompted interviewees to describe their involvement in the response from their personal perspective, and follow-up questions sought clarification where needed. A total of 37 interviews were conducted, each lasting between 45 min and 1.5 h. Participants were informed about the design and intentions of the project, and were then asked for consent. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed with permission, unless interviewees preferred us to take notes instead. A small number of respondents wished to remain anonymous; none were directly referenced in the present article.

Secondly, ethnographic observation was conducted at several community events, gatherings and *iftars* in Christchurch involving the local Muslim community – including at Al Noor Mosque. Through this, we were able to observe their activities at the height of *Ramadhan* (and about three months following the March 15 attacks). These observations provided insight into how they strived to recover from the attacks by going about their daily activities, and additional programmes or strategies put in place to safeguard the safety of the mosques and its congregants.

We acknowledge the sensitivity of the topic and approached all interactions with prudence and consideration, while maintaining interviewer objectivity. One issue was potential interview fatigue, as the Christchurch shootings had been in the media spotlight for some time after March 15, and some of our interviewees were key personnel or leaders in the national or local government, or within the Muslim community.

From the outset, we were transparent regarding the purpose of the project and made clear our institutional affiliations with the Centre of Excellence for National Security, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University. We provided participant information sheets and answered any questions about the project before and during the interviews. We knew two of the participants through links to our research centre, while others were contacted through publicly available email addresses and phone numbers, or through the recommendation of other participants during our interviews. In this way, we connected with key personnel involved in the response efforts, who were willing to engage with us following a request from their colleague/associate. When conducting ethnographic observations, we also made sure to maintain objectivity by focusing on what was observed during gatherings and events, and at the mosques. Notes were kept after each visit, and interview.

Our individual identities might have also assisted us in attaining contacts, as well as understanding cultural contexts. On top of being familiar with topics surrounding social resilience and terrorism, one of the authors is a New Zealander, while the other is (visibly) Muslim. This worked to some advantage when introducing ourselves to relevant representatives from ministries, and also when approaching the Muslim community. We were able to use these identities as strengths, and to identify the cultural nuances that presented themselves during the course of the study. This helped us discern the practical situations we were in while conducting interviews and ethnographic observations as we navigated more sensitive topics. However, we found interviewees openly willing to share their experiences and opinions, and helpful in linking us with other contacts for interviews.

Data was analysed categorically, i.e. assessing for themes, while identifying reference points showing how data from the interviews may have converged or diverged. This is common practice when research is focused on an experience or phenomenon shared by several individuals (Earthy & Cronin, 2008). We analysed data along the three themes featured in the literature review, which will be outlined in the subsequent sections of this paper. Through interviews and observations, we sought to gain an understanding of the context within which the local Muslim community and wider Christchurch community live, while acknowledging prior experiences with the earthquakes; identify points of similarity and contention between interviewees, in terms of the immediate responses following the shootings, as well as sentiments surrounding these efforts; and lastly assess how the context and responses to the shootings might build upon, or threaten, societal resilience within Christchurch.

## Aotearoa resilience

### *Resilience from Christchurch's earthquake tragedies*

The New Zealand government has no rigid definition of 'resilience' but adopts themes prevalent in understandings of the concept held elsewhere. A July 2018 report from the New Zealand Treasury drew upon a World Economic Forum (WEF) interpretation, which highlights 'bouncing back' after sudden shocks and adapting to shifting contexts. The authors note the concept of 'risk' evokes 'negative consequences from uncertainty', whereas resilience 'encourages us to grasp opportunities and innovate' (Frieling & Warren, 2018). Multi-stakeholder coordination was considered essential for strengthening the nation's overall resilience among government agencies, but also in close partnership with the private sector and civil society associations (Frieling & Warren, 2018). New Zealand's resilience is largely based on its responses and strategies to natural disasters, but this does not preclude its strategies and plans from adapting to address other risks or crises.

For example, the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management (CDEM) published its third National Disaster Resilience Strategy in April 2019, based on 16 years of experience since the CDEM Act of 2002, and consultation with a range of stakeholders (CDEM, New Zealand Government, 2019). The three priorities outlined in the strategy were managing risk; effective emergency response and recovery; and enabling, empowering, and supporting community resilience. Through this people-focused strand, the government aimed to 'cultivate an environment for social connectedness which promotes a culture of mutual help', and stressed the importance of encouraging 'the participation of different cultures in resilience' (CDEM, New Zealand Government, 2019).

### *Earthquake recovery*

Christchurch and the greater region of Canterbury have been all too familiar with the term 'resilience' since two massive earthquakes struck in 2010 and 2011, followed by over 10,000 traumatising aftershocks. The February 2011 quake killed 185 people, injured thousands and caused severe damage to the city's infrastructure and surrounding geography (Potter et al., 2015). The New Zealand Treasury estimated the repair costs to be in excess of NZ\$40 billion, or roughly 20% of the nation's GDP (New Zealand Government, 2019). A comprehensive review of studies into the psychological consequences of the earthquakes



found ‘widespread’ adverse effects on the mental health of Canterbury residents (Beaglehole et al., 2019, p. 279). One project involving a survey of 525 high school students in Christchurch six months after the 2011 quake noted ‘clinically significant’ post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms among 24% of respondents (Heetkamp & de Terte, 2015).

A programme called *Community in Mind* put forward by the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA) in 2015 sought to address the ‘significant proportion’ of local people who were still ‘struggling to cope’ with practical and emotional issues following the quakes. The initiative involved a broad range of coordinated ‘psychosocial recovery activities’ delivered by various local and national organisations to address the heightened demand on mental health services. The problem was still evident in 2018, particularly among people who did not quite meet the threshold of requiring specialist care (Blundell, 2018). However, in the May 2019 national budget, the central government announced a substantial boost for mental health funding, including NZ\$455.1 million to expand access to services, and the establishment of a Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission (Bennett, 2019). The announcement came just two months after the Christchurch terror attacks, quite possibly adding additional impetus to the decision.

### *Lessons learned and resilience building*

Research into the Canterbury population’s demonstration of resilience in the aftermath of the earthquakes found strong links between the maintenance of well-being and close community relations (Thornley et al., 2013). A study based on focus group discussions with over 90 grass-roots leaders and Canterbury residents 15–17 months after the 2011 earthquake found four primary sources of influence on resilience: (i) pre-existing community connectedness; (ii) community participation in response and recovery efforts; (iii) community engagement in official decision-making processes; and (iv) support from authorities outside the community (Thornley et al., 2013, p. 2).

In the study, volunteering was thought to provide particular benefits to both individual prosperity and collective progress, while many participants thought ‘just being together, talking, and sharing cups of tea’ were vital for personal recovery and building neighbourhood bonds (Thornley et al., 2013, pp. 3, 18). An earlier study from the Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences Limited (GNS) also noted the importance of community cohesion and shared responsibility to developing resilience (Paton et al., 2013). A sense of connectedness to external sources of assistance, exchanging stories and experiences, and access to relevant information were considered conducive to helping people cope and bounce back (Paton et al., 2013, p. 9).

The Christchurch City Council has drawn on similar findings from its own experience and research in developing plans of action, including the city’s current Resilience Strategy. Through a series of workshops with key stakeholders involved in earthquake recovery efforts, the council recognised the need to build better relationships of trust between communities and decision makers; nurture existing networks and support systems; and consider the ‘impact and opportunity’ that migrants helping with the rebuild bring to the city (Christchurch City Council, 2014). The Safer Christchurch Strategy draws on related themes, stressing collaboration and dialogue between police, central and local government and community organisations, while ‘fostering a sense of connectedness, where all members of the community are equally valued and respected ...’ (Christchurch City Council, 2016).



The Canterbury earthquakes also highlighted levels of engagement between local authorities and Christchurch's many and varied ethnic communities. In 2012, the Council published best practice guidelines for engaging with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities in times of disaster. Interviews with over 30 relevant participants revealed both positive feedback, such as meetings with CALD communities directly following the 2011 earthquake, and the benefit of having bilingual liaison officers in certain agencies.

However, a number of shortcomings were noted, such as inadequate coordination between government agencies regarding communication channels, leading to mixed messages; a dearth of information translated into languages other than English to cater to the different linguistic needs of Christchurch's residents; and insufficient CALD liaison people across government departments (Christchurch City Council, 2012). The report's conclusion emphasised one key message: 'If you want to communicate well with CALD communities following a disaster, don't wait until something really bad happens. Get to know them now – build a relationship ... based on mutual trust, respect and understanding' (Christchurch City Council, 2012, p. 37).

This aspiration helped to inform the city's current 2017–2021 Multicultural Strategy, through which the council aims to respond to the diverse needs of the city's ethnic communities; to improve equitable access to public services; and ensure all residents have the chance to participate in Council decision-making processes (Christchurch City Council, 2017). Experiences in the recent past and the development of cohesive strategies also assisted the city in dealing with the human-made tragedy that erupted on a Friday afternoon in the late summer of 2019.

### *An unprecedented attack: resilience and responding to terrorism*

On 15 March, New Zealand Police received an emergency call at 1:41 pm reporting an active shooter at the Al Noor Mosque on Deans Avenue in Christchurch. In the 18 min from the first shots fired to the assailant's eventual roadside arrest, 50 people were killed – 42 at the Al Noor Mosque, seven at the Linwood Islamic Centre, and one who passed away soon after arriving at the hospital (NZ Police, 2019a, 2019b).

Christchurch Hospital's emergency department first learned of the incident ten minutes after the shooting began, when two men ran through its doors having escaped the attack with just a few cuts. Cars soon began arriving with the injured, driving against traffic to forge the most direct route (Smyth, 2019). Over the next hour, 48 people with critical gunshot injuries poured through the emergency department's entrance. An additional 81 people sought medical assistance in the following days at Christchurch Hospital for concerns related to the attacks such as 'anxiety, chest pain, and mental health issues' (Canterbury District Health Board, 2019).

Once the gravity of the situation became clear, much of Christchurch was placed in lockdown, including all government buildings, non-emergency sections of the hospital and educational institutions throughout the region. News started to filter into classrooms through mobile phones and teachers reported dealing with a range of emotions and challenges over the 3–4-hour lockdown (KPMG, 2019). Some students had watched footage of the attack as it was livestreamed on social media by the assailant, or soon after as it spread across platforms (Interviews with Assistant Principal David Bone, Christchurch Boys' High

School; and Deputy Principal Peter Sawyer, Christchurch Girls' High School, Christchurch, 5 June 2019).

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern had been in the small North Island city of New Plymouth when the attack took place. Once back in the capital, Ardern addressed the nation, in which she labelled the incident a terrorist attack. She outlined the updated national security protocols, and offered words of defiant unity, highlighting New Zealand's diversity, cultural inclusiveness and common values. She also issued the 'strongest possible condemnation of the ideology' behind the attack and committed the government to supporting the communities of those directly affected (Ardern, 2019). The majority of our interviewees in this study (representatives from embassies and high commissions based in Wellington, individuals and leaders met at community events, as well as representatives from local and central government) stressed their admiration and commendation for the PM's leadership in the first few days of the response. Ardern's apparent authenticity was well received by those caught up in the tragedy, and she clearly articulated a 'victim-centred approach' which formed the basis of the collective government and civil society response over the coming days, weeks and months (Interview with Catriona Robinson, National Security Systems, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Wellington, New Zealand, 27 May 2019; also featured in interview with Peter Alms, Immigration New Zealand (INZ), over telephone, 6 August 2019).

This section puts together data we attained from our interviews and ethnographic observations, supplemented also by secondary data covering the attacks. It is largely organised in chronological order, along four areas of response contributing to the overall resilience of the Christchurch and the larger New Zealand society, namely: (i) Central and local authorities; (ii) Coordination and support services; (iii) Civil society input and assistance; and (iv) Memorials and tributes.

### *Central and local authorities*

In Wellington, the first reports received by the central government were that one or two people had been killed outside the Deans Avenue mosque in Christchurch (Interview with Catriona Robinson, National Security Systems Directorate, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Wellington, New Zealand, 27 May 2019). Given the location and rarity of multiple shooting incidents in New Zealand, senior officials activated the nation's National Security System (NSS) – mobilised when a situation is deemed sufficiently complex or significant to warrant the focused attention of the broader government system. The first task was to bring together chief executives from different branches of government for a group known as the Officials Committee for Domestic and External Security Coordination (ODESC).

Robinson explained that NSS was more involved in the direct response in the immediate aftermath of the attacks. The central government immediately divided work into several streams to tackle different aspects of the response. One stream focused on security, and by Monday police had deployed over 250 officers and support staff to the investigation, with assistance from the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Australian Federal Police (NZ Police, 2019c). Another stream concerned people –

the victims, the injured, the bereaved, the impacted communities; that is, the Muslim communities around NZ, other faith groups; the Jewish communities in particular, and the

Christchurch community as a whole, which had already been through a major traumatic event with the earthquakes. (Interview with Robinson, NSS)

There was an emphasis on the mental health and well-being not just 'from the Muslim community but also from the wider Christchurch community, with all the trauma being re-woken [from the previous earthquake tragedies]' (Interview with Robinson, NSS).

State agencies and ministries such as the Inland Revenue Department and the Ministry of Social Development coordinated to provide support services to affected families and individuals. An international engagement stream focused on safeguarding the safety of New Zealand's international brands, high commissions and embassies abroad, and a communications stream was concerned with providing ministers, government agencies and civil society stakeholders with timely and accurate information. Robinson said that New Zealand's 'national security programmes work [had] been reprioritised' following the attacks:

[Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern] then set the scene and was very clear. She said this is a terrorist attack. We in NZ comprehensively reject the motivations for this attack. You are us, as it were, and this was really a social tragedy for New Zealand. The response is about people and the victims, which set the tone for how people talked about it.

New Zealand Police established a prominent role from the beginning. Inspector Rakesh Naidoo, who is both principal advisor to the deputy commissioner and chairperson of the Wellington Interfaith Council, explained that 'NZ police's operating strategy is prevention focused' and 'one of the key things is to have processes and structures in place prior to major events'. NZ Police has a dedicated Office for Maori, Pacific and Ethnic Services – directly overseen by a deputy commissioner, which 'makes an important difference to how you engage with minority and indigenous communities' (Interview with Insp Naidoo, NZ Police, Wellington, 28 May 2019). Over the years, the Office has invested in 'a strong relationship with the Muslim community, which has [faced] a lot of pressure since the rise of ISIS ... [NZ Police] work alongside them to ensure that [their] concerns are being addressed'. There is a need to have a 'depth of knowledge ... [and] continuous and regular engagement across these issues with communities [which require] a lot of investment in time'. Naidoo added how engagement with the community has been one of 'partnerships and pro-activeness, built on strong relationships and mutual respect', and drawing on established relationships was crucial in the days and weeks following the tragedy (Interview with Insp Naidoo, NZ Police).

The apparently close relationship between NZ Police and communities on the ground enabled swift activation and coordination with relevant parties and leaders in the aftermath of the March 15 attacks. Naidoo noted one of the first actions taken was communicating with leaders of key mosques and Muslim organisations, such as the Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand (FIANZ) and the New Zealand Muslim Association (NZMA), to ensure strong and immediate Muslim leadership was available in Christchurch and other major cities such as Auckland (New Zealand's most populous and ethnically diverse city). NZ Police convened a team of 18 Islamic representatives to lead the agency's interactions in Christchurch, as they realised

there would be considerable pressures that would come on to the Muslim community – fronting the media, dealing with the aftermath in terms of burials, and community frustration, and

religious protocols ... we needed key people alongside us to manage all of this. (interview with Insp Naidoo, NZ Police)

Simultaneously, NZ Police also arranged for 23 liaison officers from the Office for Maori, Pacific and Ethnic Services to fly down on the Friday evening from Wellington to Christchurch, where they stationed themselves at the hospital.

These key personnel also worked in streams alongside the NZ Police. Inspector Naidoo said one group focused on the operational and facilitation aspects of autopsies and burials, which included 'securing the right funeral director [and] burial site and working with the [Christchurch City] Council to work out the right cloth and material'.<sup>1</sup> Another group

worked with [NZ Police] specifically to set up the Ulama Council ... to manage any religious queries that were going to come through – from the issuing of medicine to undertaking autopsies, dealing with [the] deceased themselves, dealing with [the] crime scene[s], cleansing of the building[s], and cultural competence for the nurses and doctors.

Some of the personnel stood in as Islamic leadership given 'there was a vacuum [in Christchurch] as leaders were among the deceased'. They worked closely with NZ Police, and included the national president of FIANZ and representatives who 'knew how to manage media and community conversations' (Interview with Insp Naidoo, NZ Police). Naidoo also described how victim liaison teams communicated with affected families regarding the investigations and practical matters such as autopsies and burials. He added they were valuable in managing the emotions and grief of victims' families by providing timely information and updates; the coronial identification process took some time to ensure all victims were correctly identified, and some families were worried that a family member was missing or unidentified.

The delay in naming the deceased required the families' cooperation and understanding of the coronial and police processes. In this regard, Naidoo explained how 'having key people that can sit alongside you to have those conversations and discuss the religious and cultural aspects' of the response and recovery is important. He also stressed that religion was an important identity for new migrant and refugee communities. While NZ Police had mirrored some processes from the recovery efforts following the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes, certain significant aspects required more nuanced cultural and religious perspectives in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks.

With Police leading the direct response regarding the crime scenes, the bereaved, and the burial processes, the Christchurch City Council (CCC) focused on liaising with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community associations, and individual volunteers for the welfare needs and organisational capacity of the whole community. Among the first endeavours was to establish a space for people to obtain the latest information or simply gather with others to grieve, which became known as the 'Community Hub'. The Council's community partnerships advisor Claire Phillips described the process as 'an organic, coming-together of community'. The Hub grew to occupy the Hagley Oval cricket ground, which is walking distance from both the Al Noor Mosque and Christchurch Hospital. The venue hosted public meetings, police updates, talks by international delegates, and allowed key government agencies such as Inland Revenue and Immigration New Zealand to speak with community members face-to-face. Members of the Christchurch Muslim community we spoke with largely commended the way the Hub facilitated

direct interaction with government officials (Interviews and conversations with members of the Christchurch Muslim community, Christchurch, New Zealand, 30 May–5 June 2019). According to Phillips, the key was for local government to work ‘in partnership’ with the community to facilitate the growth and coordination of responses from the ground (Interview with Claire Phillips, CCC, Christchurch, New Zealand, 3 June 2019).

Phillips repeatedly suggested that the ‘deep and robust relationships with the [diverse] communities’ in Christchurch and organisations working with them over the years had benefited their work on the ground. It was therefore not difficult for Council ‘in an emergency, to pull together the right people’ (Interview with Phillips, CCC). For example, she explained that Council was ‘the first in the country that had a refugee and migrant forum ... [which has been used] to get the interagency response going’, where they were able to bring the forum together ‘immediately after the attacks ... [and include] the mosques, and the representatives of the Muslim communities’. Having a comprehensive interagency response was learned from prior experiences during the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes, as it was essential to have ‘a clear one point of contact, one message to the community about what’s going on’ (Interview with Phillips, CCC). Phillips added that the Council sought to ‘include the community in decisions that we make ... it is very important that affected communities guide and lead the response, in many ways’.

The close relationships between local government, communities and relevant organisations also promoted efficiency, as hierarchies between various organisations broke down in constructive ways. An environment of ‘permission-less leadership’ emerged organically – tied by ‘a common purpose’ to overcome both the earthquakes and the impact of the terrorist shootings (Interview with Phillips, CCC). This stemmed from an understanding that ‘there is a place for emergent [efforts]’ within the Christchurch community where ideas can grow and be supported, and the society’s resilience nurtured (Interview with Phillips, CCC). Similar to NZ Police’s experiences, this working environment would not have been possible without the strong relationships present amongst different Christchurch communities, built over the years. The Canterbury earthquakes therefore had both prioritised personal engagement between the council and its communities and highlighted the need for more effective communication with CALD communities, in particular.

The Council had the support of ‘16 case managers from the Ministry of Social Development (MSD)’ – each handling between one to 12 families, depending on the complexity of the cases. There is ‘a core group of 121 [families], but there’s a critical mass of everybody else who [was] affected, their families and other families as well’ (Interview with Claire Phillips, CCC). Following some concise training in specific policy requirements and cultural competency, these case managers assisted the families with welfare needs. One area of focus to ensure sustainable resilience in the Christchurch community is mental health and the provision of applicable resources, as ‘some people who are struggling and have been really traumatised (who may not necessarily be Muslim) might have been taken back to the experience with the earthquake’ (Interview with Phillips, CCC).

However, Phillips explained that the Council focused on Christchurch ‘transitioning from medium to long term planning’ in terms of moving forward, while ensuring those who are most affected by the shootings get support from the most appropriate avenue. For Phillips, resilience is the ‘ability to “bounce forward”’ and ‘in the work that we do as a city, in the

consultation that we have, [which allow] everybody to be in the planning process, moving forward ... that's the bouncing forward, as a city'. She added,

If you've got an earthquake, then [communities are] what you've got to really invest in. And relationships. Not giving money. And on the local level, civic relationship that champion ... the principles of inclusion and equity. That really becomes the principles of the region, of the city. And then people start to get on board with that. That's why I really like that saying, "It's not time to build a relationship at 2am when the river's rising".<sup>2</sup>

### *Coordination and support services*

The Ministry of Social Development (MSD) flew some of its Auckland-based Muslim staff to Christchurch to assist the affected families. The MSD team held regular meetings with stakeholders in recovery efforts to coordinate activities and ensure resources were directed appropriately.<sup>3</sup> In the months following the assault, MSD established a case management system called *Kaiwhakaoranga* to address needs and provide financial assistance, which was extended to victims without permanent residency status. *Kaiwhakaoranga* case managers received training in Islamic finance, cultural awareness and trauma sensitivity. They worked closely with Immigration New Zealand (INZ), which had established an emergency visa category allowing victims' family members to enter the country and provide immediate support to those affected in the initial few weeks after the shootings.

INZ's Peter Alms said that while the agency had facilitated incoming travel following the earthquakes, the March 15 recovery presented a unique situation.

The challenge [following the mosque attacks] was that applications were coming in from a whole range of different countries, some of which were countries which would traditionally take a bit longer to process applications from ... [and INZ needed] to facilitate the decision making quickly while managing the associated risks in a situation like that.

They worked to

set up a streamlined process ... [enabling] security agencies to effectively provide a response within a timeframe that enabled us to provide visas – by and large between 24 and 48 h, once we are satisfied with the identity and character of the individual. (Interview with Peter Alms, Immigration New Zealand, by telephone, 6 August 2019)

Individuals applying for the visa were required to show they were directly related to someone impacted by the mosque attacks.

The government also created a Christchurch Response Special Residence Visa, granting permanent residence to all victims and their immediate family members who were in New Zealand at the time of the attack (Interview with Alms, INZ). A pool of immigration lawyers and advisors were available on hand in Christchurch to provide independent advice and support to the Muslim community – an effort intended to offer victims and the bereaved a degree of certainty about their place and future in New Zealand (Interview with Alms, INZ). According to Alms, INZ and MSD

adopted a far more proactive case management approach ... to resolve the immigration issues of some of the family members who have been impacted – as well as doing a number of forums and community meetings, where we could interact with individuals and make sure they had the right level of advice and support.

He added that Prime Minister Ardern's early words of a victim-centred approach 'enabled agencies to basically understand the direction of travel, what the expectation of the government was, [so we] could then tailor a response that really met the government's intent'.

Active inter-agency efforts continued supporting individuals affected by the March 15 shootings in the months following the attack. The regular *Te Kohao Pounamu* newsletter highlighted translation support, counselling sessions, community gatherings and announcements to inform victims and families of further assistance. Available services from the Christchurch City Council, Canterbury District Health Board, Housing New Zealand and the New Zealand Police regularly feature in the newsletter. These agencies also support the Canterbury Resilience Hub which was created after the attacks to focus on the Christchurch community's mental and emotional well-being, and consolidates resources on loss, grief, financial support and counselling in a range of languages.

### *Civil society input and assistance*

The Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand (FIANZ) played a key role in linking central government agencies to appropriate people in Muslim communities throughout the country, but also sought to mediate potential difficulties. Co-ordinator for Women's Affairs at FIANZ, Rehanna Ali, said their principal priority was to 'immediately respond and heal any social rift that could have occurred' while ensuring the unity and cohesion within the larger Christchurch community (Interview with FIANZ representatives, Wellington, New Zealand, 28 May 2019). This involved managing the wave of interactions between Muslim and non-Muslim New Zealanders with sensitivity on all sides, but also to prevent divisions with the New Zealand Muslim community, which comprises dozens of ethnicities and different denominations.<sup>4</sup>

FIANZ also made pertinent recommendations to the government, including the case worker (i.e. case management) approach to victim support and designating a government minister to oversee the response, similar to the role created following the Canterbury earthquakes.<sup>5</sup> They worked closely with NZ Police as part of 'the wider community responding in Christchurch', as a 'repository of advice' in addressing issues and concerns of the Muslim communities in New Zealand (Interview with FIANZ representatives). According to FIANZ, there is trust in the police which 'made a huge difference at the grass-roots level'; for example, they were conscious about the need to involve the Muslim community in 'a genuine consultation approach' as part of the dialogue in responding to the March 15 attacks, and '[had] developed an ethnic liaison brand pivotal in informing [relationships in Christchurch]' (Interview with FIANZ representatives).

FIANZ helped establish a Christchurch-based coordination group to assist the response efforts in Christchurch. The group then mobilised additional volunteers from the many chapters under the FIANZ umbrella according to established work units. These volunteers were organised into groups such as those managing burials and services for the *janaza*, collection of funds, grief counselling, and media management (Interview with FIANZ representatives; and Ikhlāq Kashkari, New Zealand Muslim Association, Auckland, New Zealand, 7 June 2019). Additionally, social workers and counsellors working with the New Zealand Muslim Association (NZMA) cognisant of relevant cultural and Islamic perspectives were sent to Christchurch to assist those already there (Interview with Kashkari, NZMA).



FIANZ representatives also suggested that the March 15 attacks may ultimately prove pivotal in creating greater awareness of diversity in New Zealand:

After March 15, they (non-Muslim New Zealanders) realised we were actually living amongst them. For the first time as people, not as caricatures on TV ... A real person, and there was such a connection, such an embracing of the community. (Interview with Rehanna Ali, FIANZ)

Moving forward, FIANZ's Abdur Razzaq asserted the need to understand and learn about different religions for stronger social cohesion:

Because faith in a diverse demography, is a highly important part of their lives. But because we've secularised the public space, we've really ignored that element of social identity. But to understand each other, and all of our complexity and beauty, we need to know each other and learn about going forward in a really important way, in which we can future-proof risks.

Embassies and high commissions representing some Muslim-majority states in Wellington stated their immediate focus was to give consular assistance to the victims' families.<sup>6</sup> An immediate priority was to determine how many of their citizens were affected, if the bodies were to be buried in New Zealand or repatriated, and provide consular support to immediate or extended family members. Embassy staff also needed to manage the media and enquiries from the public. While embassies cited families' unhappiness over the delays in identifying the victims – and therefore not being able to bury the bodies within 24 hours, as per Muslim rites – they commended the New Zealand government's priority to ensure accuracy in the coronial processes, as well as the swift and clear messaging from the executive level in the early days after the shootings (Interviews with representatives from the High Commission of Pakistan, High Commission of Malaysia and Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt).

They added that the New Zealand government had accommodated many of the consular arrangements and costs incurred, and that Victim Support and the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) were efficient in attending to the counselling and financial needs of those affected. Additionally, representatives of the High Commission of Pakistan mentioned how it was 'generous and less bureaucratic in Christchurch'; while the point of contact for embassies was Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), embassy representatives were allowed to communicate directly to the various ministries if it helped shorten lines of communication (Interview with the representatives from the High Commission of Pakistan, 28 May 2019). Similar to the experiences of the Christchurch City Council, official protocol was put aside for sensitivity, efficiency and practicality.

The embassies and high commissions also coordinated voluntary work from the grassroots organisations they work with. Pakistani Associations in Auckland and Canterbury, the Canterbury Malaysian Association and the Indonesian community in Christchurch offered initial assistance such as food, lodging and transport to the victims' families, and volunteering their time and effort. They also mentioned how FIANZ and the Muslim Association of Canterbury (MAC) have been helpful in addressing the needs of victims and families affected by the shootings. The Imams of both mosques – who are Egyptian Kiwis – have also been prominent in the response, as they were *de facto* points of contact between the New Zealand agencies and the mosque community. They advised on Muslim rites and rituals and provided religious support and leadership. One of the Imams – Imam Gamal Fouda – led the prayers during the Hagley Park memorial on the Friday following the shootings. University student volunteers

also assisted with washing the bodies of the deceased, digging graves, and transporting the *janaza* and family members to the burial grounds.

### *Memorials and tributes*

In memorialising the loss of the Muslim community, and the tragedy that hit New Zealand society, several events took place at the national and local level. In the days immediately following the shooting, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern grieved with Muslim families and wore a hijab as a mark of respect for the religion and its rites. Parliament opened with an Islamic prayer on the Tuesday following the shootings, while a national memorial for the victims together with the Islamic call to prayer (*azan*) was broadcasted on television the following Friday. Christchurch's daily newspaper, The Press, ran a front page with 'Salam, peace' in English and Arabic, together with the names of the victims. A National Remembrance Service at Christchurch's Hagley Park was held two weeks after the attacks.

Religious groups released statements in support of the Muslim community. Jewish synagogues in Christchurch remained closed the Saturday after the shootings – their Sabbath – while churches welcomed Muslims following the closure of their mosques for security reasons. Interfaith groups featured prominently in various services held across the country and emphasised tolerance toward different beliefs and customs. Māori leaders conducted cleansing ceremonies outside the two Christchurch mosques to rid them of evil spirits, while different groups performed poignant *hakas* to pay their respects to the deceased and stand in solidarity with the Muslim community.

Once re-opened, mosques around the country held events and invited everyone in the community to visit. Schools held assemblies on the Monday following the shootings to acknowledge the tragedy and promote tolerance. For example, Christchurch Boys High arranged for a young Muslim student to share with the school 'a Muslim perspective' on what had unfolded (Interview with David Bone, Christchurch Boys' High, 5 June 2019). Teachers explained that a number of students were still emotionally affected by the earthquakes, and the terrorist attacks had likely compounded the issue. Students in Christchurch had been among the deceased, and others had lost family members and loved ones. Therefore, schools ensured students had access to counsellors, and identified students who were or could have been affected. School management throughout the city also encouraged pupils to express their emotions any way they saw fit. Arts and crafts became a way to channel feelings, and thousands of tributes were placed in pertinent places throughout the country (Interviews with Peter Sawyer, Principal, Christchurch Girls' High, 5 June 2019, Christchurch, New Zealand; Interview with David Bone, Vice Principal, Christchurch Boys' High, 5 June 2019, Christchurch, New Zealand; and Rod Thompson, Principal, Middleton Grange School, 5 June 2019).

### *Discussing Aotearoa resilience*

One significant observation from the response and recovery efforts was the organic, ground-up formulation of activities and ideas. While the national and local governments had recovery strategies and protocols in place, civil society organisations and individuals volunteered their time and energy to the process. This largely built upon Christchurch's experience in disaster relief from the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes, as well as programmes promoting the integration and interaction of residents in its multicultural community

(Interview with Rakesh Naidoo, NZ Police; Interview with Claire Philips, CCC). Interviews and ethnographic observations conducted for this study showed that Christchurch communities had well-established networks of support and cooperation across ethnic and religious groups, and generally constructive relations with the local government and national agencies. The responses following the March 15 terrorism attack displayed relatively high levels of societal resilience, with deep community engagement and well-coordinated support mechanisms. This section assesses the response along the three nodes delineated in the literature. They will be ordered as follows: (i) Social resilience is highly discernible in Christchurch; (ii) Social resilience can be considered a largely proactive concept; and (iii) The role of civil society and community cannot be discounted.

### *Societal resilience was highly discernible in Christchurch*

A noteworthy starting point in reviewing societal resilience in Christchurch and New Zealand at large, is that many existing strategies and plans had already integrated a community-building component. While most emergency planning and disaster-related resilience literature often describe national or local strategies which exclude society or view society separately – Longstaff et al. refer to these as ‘resistance’, while Vasu calls this ‘technical resilience’ – strategies such as the third National Disaster Resilience Strategy, the Wellington Resilience Strategy, ‘Resilient Auckland’ and Canterbury’s ‘Community in Mind’ iterate a people-focused approach to participation in response and recovery, as well as decision-making processes (see as examples Auckland Civil Defence and Emergency Management Group Plan 2016-2021, 2016, and Wellington Resilience Strategy, 2017). This complemented ‘technical resilience’ strategies for the overall national security responses from NSS, DPMC and NZ Police. In this regard, there is an emphasis in New Zealand to incorporate the society (i.e. ‘societal resilience’) into operational strategies (i.e. ‘resistance’ or ‘technical resilience’). Bringing the community into the response and recovery efforts was evident in the immediate aftermath of the shootings, and this mirrors Thornley et al.’s (2013) findings of the four primary sources of influence and support after the Christchurch earthquakes – all involving the community at different levels of response (p. 2).

What we found was that procedures and protocols the Christchurch City Council had in place, as well as community engagement efforts from the police, were largely successful because of the good partnerships and relationships they had already established with certain sections of society. There was a conscious effort in New Zealand to invest in good relations – and establishing channels of communication – to ensure civic cooperation, trust and buy-in during times of need. This included strengthening established community networks, and ensuring community engagement with the central and local governments, police and civil society organisations. Close cooperation based on respect, mutual trust and understanding was already present before the March 15 attacks, to a significant extent, and helped to ease cooperation between different actors in addressing the needs of the local Christchurch and Muslim communities. In this regard, building capacity within society may therefore create an environment which nurtures and normalises societal resilience to withstand external stresses resulting from social, political and environmental changes (Adger, 2000, p. 347). Although governments may not be expected to regulate societal resilience in structural preparations (Aspen Institute,

1996; as cited in Black & Hughes, 2001, p. 3), culturing such behaviours over time through national and local government strategies can promote 'mutual help' across groups of different cultures and backgrounds as 'communities and whānau (family)' (Resilient Greater Christchurch, 2016; CDEM, New Zealand Government, 2019). Therefore, it would be difficult to view resilience and resistance as separate in the New Zealand context. Societal resilience has already been considered with resistance strategies when developing overall resilience frameworks since the 2011 earthquakes, to ensure the survivability of society's functions.

Another noteworthy aspect of New Zealand and Christchurch's people-centric strategy is the importance placed on integrating new migrants and refugees into the fold. Local authorities try to engage recent arrivals and consider how they may contribute to broader society (Christchurch City Council, 2014). Again, these were emphasised after the experience with the 2010–2011 earthquakes, and can be observed in their 'Resilience Strategy' as well as 'Safer Christchurch Strategy'. This was also reflected in our interviews with the Christchurch City Council, NZ Police and FIANZ – all emphasising the need to engage with refugees and migrants in a consultative approach with messages of 'inclusion and equity' (Interview with Claire Phillips, Christchurch City Council). Importantly, faith and religion are important to this section of the community as they find themselves navigating a new life in New Zealand (Interviews with FIANZ, and Insp Naidoo, NZ Police). Therefore, engaging new migrants into the community may contribute to society's overall resilience (as can be observed in the aims of Christchurch's 'Multicultural Strategy').

This people-centric approach can also be seen in the government's efforts from the immediate aftermath of the shootings, on a 'victim-centred' emphasis to response and recovery (Interviews with Catriona Robinson, National Security Systems; and Peter Alms, Immigration New Zealand). Efforts were to be 'community-led and ... in true consultation with what the Muslim community want', by the Christchurch community with the national government's support (Interview with Claire Phillips, Christchurch City Council). The hard, technical strategies and protocols were balanced with the softer aspects of response in the form of sensitivity and warmth to the victims, families and individuals in society who were affected. Therefore, societal resilience in the form of empathetic support at different levels of society was also discernible in Christchurch and across New Zealand; evident, for example, from the Prime Minister's leadership, visibility and empathy in responding to the shootings, to the support services and volunteers at Hagley Oval. It was seen in the tributes across Christchurch and New Zealand for the victims and their families, and in the grassroots and local government level cooperation to address local needs.<sup>7</sup> This social aspect of resilience is necessary and complemented 'resistance' strategies, and must be considered a valuable resource during a crisis.

### *Societal resilience as a largely proactive concept in Christchurch*

Societies do not (and should not) simply return to how they were before a crisis. In Christchurch, recovering from prior incidents such as the earthquakes involved adaptability and proactive development. Society does not just 'bounce-back', but should build upon the ordeal to 'bounce forward'. Here, it was important to the local Christchurch government to build capacity gradually (Brown & Kulig, 1996; as cited in Norris et al., 2008, p. 130) – with an openness to adaptability (Waller, 2001). Societal resilience as a proactive

concept incorporates the need to work consistently at building capacity through the lessons learned – a continuous process of ensuring high levels of institutional and inter-community trust within a society (Brown & Kulig, 1996; Handmer & Dovers, 1996; as cited in Norris et al., 2008, p. 130; Waller, 2001).

As observed in our findings, many of our interviewees saw the need to ‘build even better social structures’ in society after the March 15 attacks (Interview with FIANZ). Authorities and civic groups at both the national and local levels have made conscious efforts to engage regularly with civil society groups and individuals on the ground. Police recognised the value of close communal relations and have been engaging with Muslim communities for at least two decades through its Office for Maori, Pacific and Ethnic Services, partly to counter the discrimination and stigmatisation experienced by many Muslim New Zealanders during the post 9/11 ‘war on terror’. This engagement had been one of proactive partnerships, and built on good relationships and mutual respect (Interview with FIANZ). FIANZ’s robust relations with NZ Police and DPMC also proved valuable in coordinating response and recovery communications and activities between Wellington and Christchurch (Interviews with FIANZ; and Inspector Rakesh Naidoo, NZ Police).

At the local level, the Christchurch City Council was a crucial actor in nurturing societal resilience, as the city had learnt from the response and recovery efforts following the earthquakes. It was committed to encouraging strong rapport within the local Christchurch community, and promoted consistent engagement with various ethnic and religious groups, as well as relevant government ministries and social service providers. Such regular interactions clearly benefit the Christchurch community as they facilitate the mobilisation of established connections swiftly when there is need. At the same time, during ethnographic observations conducted during mosque activities and at the local youth group Nawawi Centre’s *iftar*, we saw local social service and police officers actively participating and interacting casually with congregants and community leaders.<sup>8</sup> This type of authentic engagement with the community reduces hierarchy and social power distances, and is critical for building long-lasting trust.

There were two observable areas which may be considered proactive and adaptable, specific to the responses and recovery in the aftermath of the shootings. Firstly, there were improvements made in terms of communicating with the diverse groups present in Christchurch – learnt from the lessons coming from their experience with the earthquakes – affected by the crisis.<sup>9</sup> There were appropriate channels of communication through which better coordination of response efforts could be carried out, and materials as well as information for assistance and counselling were available in many languages (Interview with Claire Phillips, CCC). Additionally, while there were insufficient CALD liaisons to assist affected families in the response efforts after the earthquakes, there was a more coordinated strategy for liaisons in the aftermath of the shootings. Liaisons had been given cultural competency training to understand the linguistic and religious needs of the various communities they were attached to, and by relevant government departments in terms of policy requirements (Interview with Insp Naidoo, NZ Police; Claire Phillips, CCC; and Peter Alms, INZ). According to Phillips, there was also an increased interest ‘to learn more about the communities living in Christchurch ... 170 ethnicities living in Christchurch’ after the March 15 tragedy. The importance placed on cultural competencies and understanding as part of the resilience of the larger Christchurch

community is therefore seen to be a vital part of the current Multicultural Strategy the city is focusing on.

Secondly, there was also an emphasis on the need for access to mental health services and resources. This was mentioned repeatedly amongst our interviewees (notably by Claire Phillips of Christchurch City Council, representatives from embassies and high commissions, FIANZ, Nawawi Centre, and the three schools interviewed), and can be observed in the inter-agency efforts and the Canterbury Resilience Hub's work to address mental health as publicised through the *Te Kohao Pounamu* newsletter. This mirrored the concerns following the earthquakes, which had led to the 'Community in Mind' programme attending to the mental health needs of individuals. Individuals who have not recovered from the trauma from the earthquakes may also be further affected in coping with the stresses from the shootings.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the announcements by the national government following the March 15 tragedy are the national mental health funding in May 2019 and the establishment of a Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission are good steps in addressing outstanding issues to sustain social resilience in the long run (LabourVoices, 2019).

What these two examples show are adaptable efforts which the national and local governments are taking to safeguard and strengthen their resilience into the future. They have taken actionable steps, and have also learnt from their experiences with the earthquakes. These examples clearly showed the proactive nature of their efforts – aligned to ideas of resilience as propagated by Brown and Kulig (1996), Handmer and Dovers (1996), Waller (2001) and Norris et al. (2008). Again, this is in line with the importance placed on investing in relationships within the community, to build and ensure the sustainability of the overall trust and resilience of society as a whole over time (Davoudi, 2012).

### *The role of Christchurch civil society and community cannot be discounted*

The immediate responses following March 15 showed civil society played a significant role, by providing voluntary services and emotional support; and acting as agents for consistent trust and capacity building before, during and after the tragedy. Significantly, Cote and Nightingale's argument that resilience literature should also comprise thorough analysis of structure and agency dynamics may be applied to Christchurch. While the roles of government leadership and institutions as well as individuals within the larger society are all vital in building societal resilience (Olsson et al., 2006), the March 15 event in Christchurch offered a case study in which civil society was given the space to lead and be part of response efforts. In the immediate aftermath of the tragedy, several community-based organisations and individuals stepped up alongside national and local level authorities to contribute to response and recovery efforts, which represents a polycentric form of governance and accountability (Folke et al., 2002; Hancock, 2000; Lebel et al., 2006; Sapirstein, 2006). This can be observed with the activities at Hagley Oval in the immediate aftermath of the shootings.

From these three points, we found the responses multi-faceted and involving individuals from various levels of society. Societal resilience, in Christchurch's case study following March 15, was principally the product of regular engagements on the ground between various national and local level actors – alongside established standard procedures and strategies in the event of crisis or natural disaster.

However, despite largely positive observations of coordination and cooperation in the response efforts after the shootings, there were several points of contention. These stemmed largely from: (a) tensions between national and local leadership over specific issues; (b) tensions within the local Muslim community, due to differences between cultural and religious denominations; (c) concerns regarding the role of Muslim organisations representing the best interests of victims' families; and (d) the role of the media.

Firstly, local government found it difficult to coordinate with the national level government in the immediate aftermath of the March 15 shootings. Christchurch City Council had initially experienced difficulties with NZ Police and other national-level government bodies from Wellington, in working out the best response for the local Christchurch community. According to Claire Philips of Christchurch City Council, national level government agencies may not have had the social capital or specific knowledge of the local community. For example, NZ Police may not have had the same levels of trust among local community leaders, which needs to be built beforehand. Therefore, it would have been wiser for national-level authorities to allow local-government to lead the direct contact with local Muslim communities, and provide corollary coordination on the ground. As an example, Council was most suited in managing the hordes of volunteers who had descended unto Christchurch and organising their participation in volunteer activities with partners within Christchurch. In the longer-term, the Council would be leading various Christchurch communities on a recovery plan in partnership with the local branch of Office of Ethnic Communities (Interview with Claire Philips, CCC).

Secondly, aside from complaints among the Muslim community over delays in identifying and burying the victims, tensions also emerged due to differences between diverse cultural and religious denominations. FIANZ representatives described long-standing disagreements within the mosques under their purview as to the manner in which prayers should be conducted because of the different religious denominations present, and how the cultural make-up of the congregants have posed difficulties in maintaining cohesion within the Muslim community (interview with representatives from FIANZ). These problems were reflected during the victims' burials, where there were disagreements regarding how *janaza* prayers and burial procedures were to be conducted – primarily because victims and/or their families may have belonged to different denominations under the Islamic faith (Interviews with representatives from the high commissions and embassies, FIANZ, and Claire Phillips, CCC).

Thirdly, there were concerns over whether specific Muslim organisations (e.g. FIANZ) were best suited to be representing the victims' families' interests. While FIANZ experienced the brunt of the Muslim community grievance in the early days as they were the largest and most prominent Muslim organisation in New Zealand, some interviewees thought FIANZ could have done better in relaying updates to affected families and explaining the delays. More specifically, there were issues surrounding the disbursement of donations and financial assistance to the affected families, and FIANZ's communication with affected families could be more transparent. They suggested how FIANZ could have appointed focal people to provide assistance in relevant languages. MSD eventually provided these services through the *Kaiwhakaoranga* case managers.

Lastly, several interviewees also raised concerns over the way Muslims had been portrayed in the media. FIANZ representatives, for example, conveyed their concerns



regarding the largely negative portrayal of Muslims in the mass media – which they thought may encourage undesirable stereotypes in New Zealand associated with Muslims and negative attitudes. This may then impede integration, if Muslims are constantly associated with terrorism in the local or international media. Additionally, some representatives from embassies and high commissions were also concerned with false reporting on the ‘deaths’ of individuals hurt in the shootings, which were spread on social media, causing unnecessary hurt and alarm to victims’ families.

Nevertheless, many interviewees stressed what they saw as a strong show of support for Muslim communities after the attacks. Various issues surrounding better social relations in New Zealand’s diverse society have been discussed publicly. Interviewees also thought the possibility for a long-term change in attitudes towards Muslims was possible, and this could contribute to the overall strengthening of social resilience. For example, MAC representative Anthony ‘Jamaal’ Green thought that while Christchurch society has traditionally been conservative, he believed more work will go into building positive perspectives of Muslims after the shootings (Interview with Anthony Green, Muslim Association of Canterbury, Christchurch, 31 May 2019). INZ’s Peter Alms suggested that ‘the Muslim community has had really broad public exposure [following the shootings], which has really allowed people to educate themselves on diversity and understanding some of the biases and prejudices out there in the wider world’ (Interview with Alms, INZ). And as FIANZ’s Rehanna Ali put it, ‘There was an opening of the hearts after the incident. Christchurch tends to be a conservative society ... but you’ve got people stopping their cars to give you a hug’ after the shootings (Interview with FIANZ).

## Conclusion

The March 15 shootings were the most fatal peacetime attack on civilians in New Zealand’s history, and in times of crisis, even the best laid plans may require updates or evolve quickly with the situation at hand. Despite the points of contention, fairly swift actions were taken at the national and local levels, and the overall coordination from the NZ government was highly commended by almost everyone interviewed for this project – especially the embassies and high commission representatives, and mosque congregants. While a quantitative assessment of societal resilience was beyond our scope, it is noteworthy that individuals and society at large mobilised themselves in a time of need – giving rise to organic resilience, emerging from within society itself.

It will be important to look deeper into the impact of the support provided following the attacks. Several interviewees wondered if the Christchurch community – and perhaps New Zealand society as a whole – may have been going through a ‘honeymoon period’ during the outpouring of support for those affected. It is certainly unclear whether fundamental changes to perceptions and levels of tolerance have taken place, which would more clearly suggest the strengthening of societal resilience – beyond a sharp rise in awareness of Islam and Muslim New Zealanders.

Furthermore, it may still be too early to assess the psychological impact on New Zealand’s Muslim communities and wider society in Christchurch. FIANZ has called for thorough analysis of the current and future needs of victims and their families. For example, the loss of future income among victims suggests that relevant agencies may establish schemes

which can assist them well into the future. FIANZ underlined the need for civic rehabilitation if there were to be any individual who might harbour revenge from the attacks, as well as encouraging open dialogues on Islamophobia, religion and social cohesion.

The most constructive lessons from the Christchurch attacks and subsequent response may be the importance of building trust between authorities and communities, the power of authentically inclusive language from political leaders following such a tragedy, and a victim-centred approach to the recovery process. Terrorist attacks based on hateful ideologies are intended to divide people into adversarial spaces. When the wider population comes together in strong solidarity with those targeted, as was the case in New Zealand, it nullifies the terrorist's objective. Time should tell whether the compassionate reactions and support for New Zealand's Muslim community from wider society translate into increased tolerance and understanding in the longer-term. Research involving sentiment analysis of inter-ethnic and cross-cultural community relations in the years following the attacks would be a useful barometer of progress.

## Notes

1. In Muslim burials, white cloth is used to shroud the body (*janaza*) before burial.
2. Taken from Augustine's (1995) 'Managing the Crisis To Prevent', who quoted Elizabeth Dole, president of the American Red Cross: 'When you have taken the time to build rapport, then you can make a call at 2 am when the river's rising and expect to launch a well-planned, smoothly conducted response'.
3. This included attendant issues arising from the loss of life during the shootings, such as helping families navigating government agency assistance, the disbursement of funds from Victims Support, and other support services. Case management officers streamlined communication for affected families, by working across agencies and coordinating access to relevant services.
4. This included for example, how *janaza* prayers were to be conducted, as different Muslim denominations required different rites.
5. Minister Megan Woods, Minister for Greater Christchurch Regeneration, was appointed to oversee responses to the attacks.
6. Embassy and high commission representatives have requested anonymity, and some did not want to be audio recorded. Data referenced here reflects the notes taken during interviews with them.
7. The March 15 shootings had affected not only the local Muslim community, but also the Kiwi society as a whole; a 'New Zealand tragedy' (Interview with Rehanna Ali, FIANZ). Therefore, emotional and social support services were also made available to the general public who were affected by the tragedy.
8. Interviewees informed us how the police officers often made regular appearances at their events, and often checked in on the welfare of the youths as well as the Christchurch Muslim community.
9. Refer to the problems faced by local government as detailed in Safe Christchurch Strategy (Christchurch City Council, 2014).
10. Some initiatives from within the Christchurch Muslim community have focused their efforts on addressing issues of mental well-being. For instance, the Nawawi Centre strengthened their youth programmes by ensuring regular social activities for the children of victims and other young people in the community. Recognising that frustrations and grief are expressed in diverse ways, Nawawi volunteers offered access to trained psychologists who regularly engage with the children, and alerted authorities of potential red flags (Conversation with Nawawi Centre representatives, Christchurch, New Zealand, 4 June 2019).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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