

29/07/2020

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Leadership Week Live Notetaking

Transparency International NZ

Kim: Kim provides a brief welcome and draws attention to the housekeeping.

Kia ora hui hui mai tatou
Nau mai haere mai

Welcome everyone to tonight's webinar discussing groupthink and whether it is ruining our democracy, and the role of the online world in all this.

My name is Kim Connolly-Stone Stone, I'm the Policy Director at InternetNZ, and I'll be your MC this evening.

Tonight's event is brought to you by Transparency International NZ and is part of Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington's Leadership Week. An awesome week of free, online sessions that are open to the public and aim to inspire action on the issues that matter.

Before I introduce tonight's speakers, a couple of notes on how we'll run the session.

- Our two presenters will each talk for about 10 minutes, followed by a Q&A session which we will be managing through the Q&A function on Zoom.
- If you have a question you would like to ask, please post it in the Q&A. We ask that these be respectful and relevant.
- You will have the opportunity to upvote questions that they would like to have answered. I'll be doing my best to get through the questions. Apologies in advance if we don't get to yours if we run out of time.
- If you have any technical issues during the session, please type these into the chat and our fabulous team behind the scenes will respond to you directly.
- You can also use the chat to say where you are from and share thoughts on tonight's topic that aren't necessarily questions.
- Our speakers have kindly agreed to the recording of tonight's session. Because we are recording, and we want to protect your privacy, we have set the Zoom settings so that attendees can't share their video or unmute themselves. As I've mentioned just now, we will instead be taking the questions through the Q and A function.
- We also have an electronic live transcriber for tonight's event. You can access our transcribers notes via the Google Docs link in the chat.

Next up a few words from our sponsors - Transparency International New Zealand and Victoria University of Wellington. Take it away Suzanne and KariWKim

I think you need to unmute yourselves.

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A warm welcome from the Brian Picot Chair in Ethical Leadership. To our students and other members joining us this evening. Brian Picot Chair in Ethical Leadership Regularly hosts seminars and webinars on ethics.

Welcome, and I'd like to pass over to Suzanne.

Suzanne: TINZ is delighted to be working with the chair of ethical leadership on this leadership week program. For those unfamiliar with Transparency international, and there a lot of international attendees tonight - in New Zealand we're 1 of 100 chapters, and we promote transparency as antidotes to corruption. It's through discussions like this that we widen the challenges you have with the nuances of what that means in practice.

Kim: THanks Suzanne and Karen. Without further ado, I'd like to introduce the first of our two fabulous speakers. First up, Sanjana, a recognized thought leader concerning technology, media, and extremism online. Amongst many other things, he's special adviser to the ICT for peace foundation, a senior researcher for the centre of policy alternatives in Colombo. SANjana has a great presentation for us. He'll talk about the promises technology has made and how the reality is different, and authoritarian amplification, continuous partial attention, and conformity as peer currency. Sanjana will share some recommendations for us as individuals, and thoughts on what States and corporates should be doing. Sanjana, the virtual floor is yours.

Sanjana: Let me share my screen here. Hopefully everybody can see that. Wonderful to be here with you this evening. I'd like to spend 10 minutes outlining the landscape as I see it outlining the topic we have in front of us. I am a guest in your country and I know nothing of the politics that govern it. It's a bit like commenting on the Pope. I've tried to go to my comfort area of Sri Lankan politics and how it impacts group think. We won't have consensus or clear answers, which is why it's important to have this conversation. There are new challenges that confront us as citizens that haven't been around in decades prior to our current one. On the left of this slide you see the discussions on Twitter in Sri Lanka and on the right you see the discussions on Twitter in New Zealand. This might look like something out of the Hubble telescope looking at the far reaches of the Milky Way. This is not unlike that. What you see in front of you is, in a sense, rather traumatic moments for both countries. On the right hand side is 3 weeks after the Christchurch massacre. I look at the manner in which conversations at the national level occur in response to, react to, contrast, these kinds of traumatic events as well as political developments and moments of interests in Sri Lanka and, when I was here doing my research, Christchurch. Twitter and the University of Otago have undertaken a research project to look at how New Zealand Twitter reacted to the Christchurch earthquakes. This is what I do. I look at the manner in which conversations on social media evolve and why they do that.

I don't know if anybody is from the Middle East, but... About a decade ago there was this spirit of optimism. Naive, perhaps. That the promise of the democratization of technology, social media, blossoming amongst citizenry, that authoritarianism would be overthrown and democratic institutions and frameworks would be placed in countries which have never enjoyed democracy and all that comes with it for decades. There was an expectation around

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the dividends of social media and the hope that the production, promotion, the pitch of this content would strengthen democratic traditions in countries which have only known authoritarianism. This was an "Arab Spring" moment.

We are now older and wiser. This background is from Sri Lanka. In 2016, in that month, the country saw some of the worst violence against the Muslims in a city called Kandy. This made the New York Times top of the world headlines; that was partly because of social media enflaming the reach of the violence, creating a tsunami of public opinion that weaponized community distrust over decades and normalized heinous violence against a community. Around the world you find this hesitation to grasp the early potential of social media democratization because of the demonization of it by the worst elements of society.

This man genuinely frightens me. The record is public. This is the kind of individual that we have across both sides of the Atlantic where the individual founded on populism and authoritarian trends and frameworks supported by social media rises into absolute power. Academics call this bully bull-bits now. It's a complete reversal of a decade ago where you now have authoritarians as the greatest engineers of populism and the entrenchment of their power through social media. A lot of people think this is the only way you can think and do things.

I looked at these two photos; I took a while to pick them. In the lifetime of some of the people on this Zoom call, you had public transport where you looked at the other person and talked to them. Nobody was engrossed in what you have in the other photo, in their mobile phones and worlds. We call this continuous partial attention. We are, all the time, and some of you may be, checking our phones, iPads, notifications, posting on Facebook that the Sri Lankan speaker is an idiot and doesn't know what he's talking about. It's a real challenge. There's a psychosocial part to this. We are gripped by information that doesn't inform us, and we mistake all the time popularity for veracity, truth. This is a real challenge. It's a challenge in New Zealand, and more so in Sri Lanka. That's where we come to groupthink.

There's a real cost of speaking out today. It's comfortable fitting in and being silent, and going with the flow. Many young people I speak to tell me it's more challenging to speak out than it is to go with the flow and let things happen, evolve. That's why I called it peer currency. Conformity is peer currency. It's the sameness; there is no dare to be different attitude.

In Sri Lanka there are real costs for speaking out, but we see the conformity in New Zealand too.

As an individualist, citizens - and this is a real concern in Sri Lanka - broadly speaking, citizens as individuals in a country, it would behoove us to be intentional in what we consume, critical in questioning what we consume. Consume widely, but conservative in your engagement. Not in the political sense, but in being reflective, thoughtful, about what one consumes. It's eating a lot but as time goes by, selecting only what you like to eat and consume. In terms of consumption, have set times. Don't fall prey to the notification hostage situation. It taxes your mind.

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At the state level, or government level - New Zealand has a handle on this, Sri Lanka does not. Importance of education in the mainstream, and civic and media literacy in particular. This can't be stressed enough, this confusion around information and popularity being conflated with truth and veracity. New Zealand is rather good - this current campaign about hearing racism by the Human Rights Commission is about grappling with an inconvenient truth instead of shunning it. Sri Lanka does not do that. We don't have a common narrative, something that binds us together as a society. Social media splinters groups into the present, past and future, and there is no common truth binding us back together.

Facebook, Twitter, Google - I won't get too technical, please ask me questions if you feel moved to - social media can make their products better from a do-no-harm perspective and from a technical level. Technical issues are echo chambers; we need to get out of what we believe in and hold true, and confront us with questions around our reality and what we believe and hold to be true. Companies can do this in a progressive way, in a democracy, to introduce us to do those things. I look forward to the discussion after Josie's presentation.

X

Kim: next up, we have Josie, the director of the council for international development. She has a stellar background in communications and public affairs. Has supported the prime minister. Tonight, she will talk about why politics have become so polarised and how this is playing out in social media and the non virtual world. We'll hear about tribal voting patterns, how to protect democracy and how this will play out in the upcoming elections.

Josie: Thanks Kim. I am going to share my screen. Bear with me a minute here. Looking alright? Yup. I am wearing two hats today; Sanjana that was a great presentation. I will talk about the real world of politics and how it impacts all of our communication platforms. I work in Aid Agencies, run an organisation, and I do political commentary. I have friends and colleagues from both worlds. The thing that unites aid and development is politics. We are seeing the same trends play out in both. Starting with a story about Matt Rashbrook. He was trying to convince me about good ideas - we were agreeing that it's important for democracy to push back on groupthink - too many groups in society feel excluded and vulnerable, therefore they become silenced. We were agreeing, and then I said hold on, you are talking about identity and I am talking about working class NZers - completely different groups. If you look at our representation in parliament and social media, we are doing pretty well in diversity in NZ. That's a good thing. The voice that is missing is an authentic working class voice. That voice is excluded from mainstream politics and media. My mantra is that exclusivity is always dangerous in democracy. Making politics a religion where heretics are punished, and you shield yourself from opposing views, doesn't make the opposing views go away. I know looking globally that the oldest and vastest exclusion we've seen is the exclusion of people of colour. If you look at recent events in the US - that exclusion is shocking. Partly because parties of the right haven't played that type of politics - they haven't turned the treaty process into something that's polarised the nation. We are in what I would call an unacknowledged culture war. It plays out in social media and the real world. We know what real polarisation looks like. To take some of the examples that Sanjana was using - this is Iran a few months ago. This is from a couple of weeks ago in Eastern Russia. If you look

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at what polarisation used to look at - go back to the rise of facism in eastern europe for example. Disintegration of communities, where cultural and scientific cleansings were being carried out, and everything un-German had to disappear. This kind of censorship would be happening in social media, like in China. Intellectual segregation on the left has been bad too. There is a danger that as progressives we become quite insular and protect ourselves from heretics. In the US, no one expected Trump to win, but he did. We didn't see it happening. That is the danger if you are sitting in your own group and not really realising what's happening under the surface. Trump won, not because of social media facebook and russian funding - if we think that, we are missing the real appeal of the populists. This is back in 2017, where there was a movement to ban Mike Hosking off the air. Many of us may disagree with him, but the idea that you ban ideas you disagree with isn't going to get rid of the bad ideas. It doesn't make them go away, it makes them go underground. Whole groups feel silenced. If you go back to the birth of the Labour party in the UK, it did emerge because politics was dominated by just some groups. There was no voice for working class people. In those days, you joined Labour to make your life better off. Nowadays, you join to make someone else's life better off. That isn't a bad thing, but it has transformed politics of the left. My colleague in the UK runs a think tank called Britain Thinks. She sums up this change well. 20 years ago, if you thought about the labour party, you'd think of a pint and pie in the pub. Today, it's a bowl of quinoa in a wine bar. There has been a transformation of progressive politics on the left. Thomas Picerty charted the change here. In the 1950s, most people who voted on the left would have had very little education. Cut through back to today, and it's predominantly people who are highly educated, even with PhDs. That's not a bad thing, but the problem is you end up with a reversal of who is in leadership roles in the left. You can have a disjointed disconnection between people you're meant to be representing vs people who are leading. This can lead to smearing of people you don't agree with - the cars they drive, the tv shows they watch etc. Brahmin left - sense of a high priesthood - instructing people how to live their lives.

This is a quote from Paul Colliers book. He talks about 6 core values that drive voters; loyalty, fairness, liberty, hierarchy, care and sanctity. Parties on the right do well with liberty. The winning combination, think back to 2017 Jacinda, or John Key 2007, is a broad church appeal to lots of different groups in society. Going back to Deb Matterson - she believed if you want to have successful politics, you need to appeal to 1) settlers, 2) prospectors and 3) pioneers; progressives. The winning combination appeals to all of those. She argues the pioneers are running parties on the left and they are less tolerant to the views of the settlers and prospectors. Rather than disagreeing with views, you begin to disapprove of them. What is it that is the appeal of the populous? Partly, it's optimism. It's also about belonging, feeling like you have a voice, feeling confident. We need to be aware of the appeal of the populous. In NZ, a quick summary of what those categories look like, we have a working class job, aspirational lower middle working class family, and Jacinda personifying the progressing left. I think the answer to this is how do we avoid getting into that polarisation that you see in the US and across Europe - you need to listen to all of the different groups. This poll came out recently about the issues driving NZers right now. At the top is economy, jobs, healthcare. Interestingly, look down, climate change is quite far down. SO is immigration. We need to be prepared to listen to the things that are driving people in their everyday life. We know in the Pacific, every pacific country, top three issues for people living in the pacific are jobs, health

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and education. Those are the things people are focused on. This is the Addleman Trust Barometer from February. You can see income and equality is the greatest influence in the decline in trust of government and institution. It's something we know from our polling here, people want governments to address.

Colleagues of mine in the thinktank More in Common - it started in England after an MP was murdered there due to Brexit tensions. Her legacy emerged after her friends and family set up this thinktank called More in Common. They looked at tribal values - how are people fitting themselves into tribes these days, rather than political allegiances. If you look at the US for example, pretty much 50:50. 50% think immigration is good, 50% not so good. Same with feminism, race, etc. If you dig down into the tribes - progressive activists, 100% think immigration is a positive. Devoted conservatives - 100% think it's a bad thing. See how the tribes - all of these values and tastes are driving our politics now. If you are a progressive activists, you will think immigration is good and so on. In the middle, are most people. Most people are sick of the hate speak. They are sick of political correctness. In the middle, you have a lot of people who feel good about political liberalism. On the fringes, you get disintegration. Our challenge is to look at how we talk to that exhausted middle. Giving people a sense of hope, owning the future in a way that the populous have been doing well, reaching out to different communities that aren't like you and listening, not smearing. That authentic leadership where it seems like people are talking from a real place. The good news is this - this is some new polling done last year. On the whole, most people, whether working class or way up there in the LGBTQI group, whether you are an ethnic minority, etc, just about everybody, wants to see something done about inequality and support redistribution of work. If you deal with inequality wherever you see it, if you celebrate the values and the culture of different groups including working class NZers, then we will have the best possible approach to dealing with any emergence of polarisation in NZ.

Thank you

Kim: Thank you so much Josie on those thoughts on how we can avoid that polarisation. Now we are at Q and A time. We have a few questions and comments there. As the MC, I get first dibs on asking a couple of questions to the panel. Bear with me as I do that. Sanjana, you may be aware as part of the NZ government's response to the Christchurch terror attacks, there would be some domestic law changes, in particular those that regulate social media. My question is, if you do decide what the terms of reference for that government review was, what do you think should be included?

Sanjana: I think that our policy experts are here in the audience and know more than I do - I have two broad answers. One, it matters what NZ does to more than NZ. That might be confusing for those here. A lot of other countries look at NZ, Australia, Singapore, US, Europe, and try to bring about domestic legislation that echoes what they see has been done in those countries. That's sometimes a problem. Australia, after Christchurch, etc, they suggest that for domestic reasons, when these governments are seen to be the beacons of democracy, they bring about frameworks that impinge on freedom of expression, that becomes an excuse for other countries to do the same. It matters that NZ gets this right. It's something that, if I may stress, not something that local policy makers often think about. But it does matter to the rest of the world. It follows the wide global recognition. Again, David

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Kale that just retired, 2 years ago he came out with a document that was tabled at the sessions that built on the principle of content regulation. Towards the end of the document had two recommendations, one for social media companies and one for local government. In NZ, the regulations could be based on legal framework, not on the whims and fancies of political parties. There needs to be transparency and accountability. Governed by rules and the principles of the freedom of expression. Needs to be clearly circumscribed - overreach can also lead to a chilling effect. It should be standards based. States should have some type of a report card. There needs to be a public conversation annually if possible, with citizens. There should be review and discussion around the regulation as well, so it's not set in stone. Authoritarians don't like this - they have a paternalistic bent. These are broad principles, I know the evening is already late and this is technical, but for those interested, this is a public document. Social media companies have come a long way in the last few days and can be supportive of political frameworks. I will end by urging - if you think of a progressive way forward that helps countries like mine also construct frameworks along these lines. It's important that NZ gets it right, countries neighbouring NZ haven't got this right and we shouldn't go down that path.

Kim: Thank you Sanjana. Josie, a question for you. I am keen to tap into your journalistic background. Coming into the election, misinformation is a big issue. Where do you think NZers should be going for their information and are there special roles for mainstream media?

Josie: Yes, absolutely roles for mainstream media. A lot of people access info this way. I admire the policy the Greens have on having their policies costed, detailed analyses of who will pay. I think what we are seeing in the election is a slightly dangerous strand of - perhaps a criticism of the labour government - that we won't put any policy out there, other people can. But actually, you do have to - put our very detailed, granular policy. Analysing how it will be costed. Coming up with edgy stuff you can disagree with - e.g. the universal benefit. I think there are 2 things about that Kim - Trump got away with calling mainstream media fake news because whole groups of people and communities felt they weren't represented in that media. Therefore, it's a chicken and egg thing. Yes we need to ensure there is info that can be relied on and is not manipulated, but we also need to be aware that people can only get away with accusing someone of fake news if we are not putting out stuff we want to listen to. So yes educate, but also listen. Last thing I'll say - we always complain no one votes in local elections because we don't know who the candidates are. But you try closing a hospital - now you will know who the local candidates are.

Kim: Thanks for that. Just a reminder, pop questions into the Q and A, not in the Chat. The most upvoted questions for. From Howard - he is interested in the possibilities of using protected whistleblowing as a driver for accountability in business. If we could change the perception of having more principled whistle blowing, would that make a difference?

Sanjana: I will pass to Josie

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Josie: I agree Howard. Whistle blowing in any democracy, when it works well, is one of the best accountability mechanisms we have. We have whistleblowing legislation, but it could be - protected whistleblowing is something we can look at

Sanjana: I agree, but my hesitation in whistle blowing in 2020 is the implications of the information age we live in. Anonymity is not always guaranteed. If you are a whistleblower - depending on what you are revealing to the public, the manner in which you engage may give you away. Hundreds of data trails make whistle blowing very difficult. I have nothing against it, but it comes with risks and challenges that weren't there a few years ago. That must be taken onboard.

Josie: I agree, the principle of whistleblowing doesn't mean the contents need to be made public, but the mechanisms need to be addressed to protect people who may be damaged when that information goes public.

Kim: Next question is a mashup of the questions we have on the screen. It's about diversity. How can diverse individuals and groups be heard in NZ, included rather than excluded. Building on that, comments and questions from Brian and Kay - where is the Māori perspective on this?

Josie: When i hear myself say working class NZers, I can hear people say 'oh we aren't like that' / What i mean by that, is it's predominantly Māori and pacific island, as well as Pakeha, driven a lot by the church, by religion, importance of religion in communities, sports, and a sense of a culture that i think is a working class culture - not necessarily being expressed in mainstream media. Of all the social media platforms, what is the most authentically working class in NZ? Probably TikTok. You are getting a really authentic voice that isn't necessarily debating the things we are talking about tonight. There are ways in which we can incorporate a more diverse series of voices. Not just looking t those who feel they have a mandate to express what it is to be Māori of Pacific Island experience, but looking t communities who don't feel they have as strong a voice in mainstream media.

Karin: We would like to acknowledge the speakers and attendees, this topic has left us hungry for more. Thank you very much. I think our time is up, so we hope to see you at one of our other evenings where we can talk about democracy and the state of NZ. Thank you very much.

Kim: The time has really got away on us, thank you so much to our speakers and all of our attendees. It's been lovely chatting to you tonight.

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