

## Enough is enough: when words matter

By Laura Campbell

Fifty innocent Muslims were killed in Christchurch last week by a white nationalist who idolized Donald Trump. Have you read the individual stories of the victims? It's truly excruciating to read them. Many of them had already lived a life of incredible hardship before they found new lives in New Zealand. It's hard to comprehend the level of delusion and hatred that would drive someone to do such a thing.

It's hard to comprehend, yet, in some ways it's equally hard to ignore the pattern of right-wing violence being committed in the West at this moment in history. Indeed, a few months ago, New Zealand actually witnessed a series of white nationalist rallies, similar to what has been going on in the U.S. And given that objectively true context, it's time we start naming names when we ask WHO is emboldening these guys. Or more importantly, who is normalizing the language of hatred? Why have we tolerated folks who have publicly said abhorrent things about our muslim friends and fellow human-beings? Because, make no mistake, these aren't lone wolves.

And so here goes a very long-overdue criticism of Jordan Peterson. And I'll keep this very simple and brief, because if you haven't heard of the man, I will spare you having to delve into the many thousands of pages of material that have been published about the psychology professor's very controversial career.

This is personal to me because I'm a PhD student in the humanities at U of T, in history. Professor Peterson's department shares a building with the history department. Indeed, I've shared elevators with the man and have had to cross a rubicon of angry students who have both protested and supported his strange pop-up stump speeches.

One of his proposals to undermine my fellow academics has included a massive online database that 'warns' young students of classes to avoid if they don't want to be 'indoctrinated' by left-wing ideas. (Since when has teaching young people about the Holocaust amounted to left-wing indoctrination?). My work isn't particularly avant-garde or even political. I study and write about the history of foreign economic policy. I'm not sure how it could be considered 'left-wing' since it simply explains what President Jimmy Carter decided to do to fix the inflation problem in the 1970s. Does that sound like I have a radical left-wing agenda? No. No, it simply does not. But to Peterson, the humanities have been infected by progressive politics. Perhaps my subjects would pass his strange test. Who knows?

Peterson's contrarian purpose is to use a very broad and sweeping academic framework to make arguments that he can sell to us (for lots of money). He then hangs his intellectual hat on the 'free-speech-is-paramount' peg of course, never once distinguishing between what is free speech and what is hate speech.

What is truly ironic is that for a man who is such a self-professed history buff, he seems to forget that college campuses have ALWAYS been a place where radical new language and ideas have developed. Even his own hero, Sigmund Freud, was at one time considered a radical. But yet Peterson himself doesn't like the 'radically' accepting language of 2018 (for example, gender neutral language). He especially doesn't like the word islamophobia not because he abhors discrimination against Muslims. No, he hates the word because he thinks it's a meaningless term invented by social justice warriors who have a political agenda.

He was recently on a speaking tour in New Zealand where he posed for a photo with a man wearing a t-shirt that read 'Proud Islamaophobe' (not my spelling). The photo is still circulating on Twitter. He knows who comes to see him speak these days. He welcomes them. Indeed, he gave an interview to the right-wing news network, Rebel Media, where he actually tried to argue that islamophobia didn't exist. And minimizing racism, as a privileged person in this world IS racism. (Gosh he would hate me for this!)

If you know someone who is trying to defend Jordan Peterson, the man who is talking to racists in his crowds and defending their right to spread hate (even though he says he himself isn't racist) you have a responsibility to gently remind them that his ideas are

flawed. This intellectual labour is the work we must do. Anyone who isn't naming the mosque attacks for what they truly are, (ahem, Andrew Scheer), is trying to minimize racism and ignore islamophobia. Yes, the attacks were an attack on freedom (as Scheer tweeted). But they were also a targeted attack against Muslim citizens. That latter part is more important right now because racist ideology has emboldened people to kill innocent children, women, and men who are specifically muslim.

How will we put at end to white supremacy, once and for all? How will we defend our fellow citizens from this scourge? I don't have all of the answers. But I do know where I can contribute effort beyond supporting victims? I will not stand idly by while I watch an academic play semantics where it concerns people's LIFE.