





## INTRODUCTION

# REPRESENTATION AND VOICE

## in a complex communication environment

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Themes of *representation* and *voice* have long animated media, communication and cultural inquiry and for the authors collected here these concepts provide useful entry points into a range of important contemporary communication issues. The contributing authors feel strongly that *representation* and *voice* give rise to a research agenda and to communicative issues that require ongoing, reflexive engagement. In recent years our research collective has set itself the challenge of responding to these research imperatives in richly diverse ways.

This edited volume introduces highlights of the academic interests and research activities of a number of staff at Unitec's Department of Communication Studies, demonstrating the breadth and scope of the engagement of this academic collective with contemporary communication issues. It is clear from the work presented here that communication in Aotearoa New Zealand remains complex and continually under negotiation, as this country continues to be formed and re-formed by processes of cultural encounter, by political and institutional change and by *voices* seeking to assert, to contest and to claim their presence - to represent and to be represented within contemporary New Zealand.

*Representation* is, of course, a central analytical concept with media, communication and cultural inquiry. The centrality of representation – of expression, mediation, institutional form and cultural negotiation - to issues of public debate and engagement, the quality of our media and to the measure of human agency and of our institutions is a notion that grounds our research and inquiry at Unitec. *Representation* is a central foundation of our research strategy and a central theme of this collection.

A parallel interest and sensitivity to the place of *voice* within contemporary communicative practices provides a second foundational concept for our research activities. With an interest in *voice* we are focusing our attention on individuals, agencies and institutions and processes of 'self' and 'collective' representation that voicing implies, particularly in response to experiences or

conditions of marginality (Couldry, 2010). Here, *voice* is understood as capacity and agency, in as much as it implies the communicative or representational act itself. Likewise, *representation* is an important way in which our voice can be heard. We feel strongly that how *voices* are intervening from the margins within contemporary New Zealand is a centrally important dynamic to be analysed and understood. We feel our Department is strongly placed to make significant contributions in this area and this collection stakes this claim.

Issues of cultural encounter and exchange form a strong theme in this publication with several essays exploring the complexities of culture, race, media, policy and education. They reflect the current debate about New Zealand's complex reality that involves a multicultural society that is at the same time institutionally a monoculture and symbolically a bi-culture (Sibley, Hoeverd & Liu, 2011). In an essay concentrating on issues of policy and the implications for social cohesion, Cruickshank discusses the poorly effected changes to immigration policy that occurred in the 1990s in Aotearoa. Cruickshank's argument holds that had greater efforts been made to communicate both with the general public of New Zealand and with new migrant communities, we may have avoided the emergence of ugly, primarily anti-Asian discontent and politics, the effects of which remain with us today.

Multiculturalism, ethnic diversity groups and migrant, ethnic, diasporic media are increasingly common features in many societies – arising from both diversity within a country and growing global migration. The essay by Noronha and Papoutsaki, *The migrant and the media - maintaining cultural identity through ethnic media*, explores the use of these media by migrant groups in New Zealand. New Zealand's pro-immigration policies have attracted a number of ethnic groups from across the world contributing to a diverse society with Auckland boasting more cultural diversity than London, and with a vibrant ethnic media scene. Evidence shows that mainstream media in New Zealand does not fully address the communication needs of these ethnic groups nor does it represent them in a balanced way. This is where diaspora media play a supporting role by providing an alternative to an increasingly homogenised mainstream media. For ethnic communities, access to such media gives them an avenue to understand more clearly issues affecting their community, a stronger sense of identity and social cohesion and a connection to a perceived transnational community.

The issue of everyday racism and racial microaggressions is explored by Revell, Papoutsaki and Kolesova in their essay, *Race, racism and everyday communication in New Zealand*. Informed by theories of 'new racism', the authors explain how race and racism continue to play an integral role in our lives, but in subtle and often hidden ways. This discussion focuses on some of the issues that emerged from a critical collaborative autoethnographic project that explored how race is manifested in everyday communication interactions in New Zealand. The discussion highlights what the authors call 'conversational tact' and its sub-themes of 'everyday racialised ethnic terms', 'the everyday racialised use of ethnic stereotypes', and 'everyday censorship and silence around race

in conversation'. These themes focus our attention on the way in which people communicate race through their everyday patterns of speech and vocabulary in New Zealand and help us unmask 'racial micro aggressions'.

Kolesova's discussion of the multi-cultural classroom experience demonstrates culture and cultural difference can also be harnessed as a powerful pedagogical tool, as she discusses her experiences and those of her students in teaching and learning through engagement with East Asian popular culture. As Kolesova makes clear, popular culture provides fertile pedagogical ground in which to cultivate an appreciation for the cultural products and experiences of 'the other'. This self-reflexive engagement also encourages further exploration of how one's own cultural identity can be shaped through cultural exchange and consumption, resulting in the thrilling discovery of new ways of understanding one's own experiences, memories and self.

Building upon the theme of culture, the following two essays address aspects of biculturalism, exploring contemporary environmental management and communication, and representation within the communication industry. The *Cross Cultural Collaboration and Environmental Communication* project, examining communication issues facing community driven conservation campaigns, seeks to understand how communication theory and method can illuminate and animate novel approaches to conservation and resource management in contemporary Aotearoa. In the essay emerging from this project, *Moving forward keeping the past in front of us*, Dodson makes the argument that although the Treaty of Waitangi settlements process has made progress towards re-dressing injustice, the process of re-establishing a Treaty partnership in respect of conservation and resource management – of nation-building, in short - is incomplete. And, there is much to be learned from the new institutions of resource management that the settlements process has produced and the communicative practices that characterise their function.

Trenwith's essay, *Public relations in New Zealand ... the missing pieces*, identifies yet another gap in the bicultural history and multicultural reality of this country. She argues that what is missing from the New Zealand public relations [PR] history discourse is representation that addresses and integrates Māori and Pacific Island PR ontological and epistemological assumptions. Doing PR is an inherently cultural activity as PR practitioners rely on culturally influenced representations of the societies in which they work; they can be seen as creators of meaning through their roles of cultural gate keeping and mediation as they adapt their communication to culturally diverse target audiences. One of the major considerations for PR professionals is how to manage the choice of words and images to better represent and honour the Māori and Pacific Island cultural priorities, and how to recognise the cultural nuances and context of communication.

Williams' contribution *Where to from here* focuses our attention on the continuing issue-nexus of technology, accessibility and government policy, which appears to have lost momentum and focus on ensuring all New Zealanders have high quality access to the digital technologies that are so obviously and swiftly reshaping and reordering our world. While governments everywhere are quick to extol their technology policies, as recent experience with the development of the Ultra-Fast Broadband projects in Australia and New Zealand demonstrates, such projects can be fraught – as the Australians recently discovered. As Williams points out, at times lost within the machinations of technology and communications policy is a need to address persistent issues of digital exclusion.

Donaghey's *Portraits of our lives* project, which explores intergenerational lesbian identity and experience, has given rise to an engaging discussion of innovative oral history interview methodology, presented here as *Repositioning the oral history interview*.

Focusing on contemporary media representations and sporting nationalism, in *All the suffering on our backs*, Cass turns a wry eye to the use by media organisations of sporting heroes to narrate and animate stories of national consequence. Cass uses the twin catastrophes of the recent Christchurch and Great Eastern Japan earthquakes to make an ultimately serious argument concerning the use by the media of sports and sports people to act as a vehicle for public catharsis in the aftermath of disaster. Sport is, Cass reminds us, just a game after all, and it is politicians, public authorities and insurance companies and communities themselves who are ultimately responsible for post-disaster recovery.

The emerging themes under discussion in these essays indicate that issues of voice and representation in New Zealand are strongly linked to multiculturalism, biculturalism, racism, migration, media, digital division, gender and national and cultural identity. Each of these essays is research informed and in several cases research based - and all are making sense of contemporary communication issues in Aotearoa New Zealand.

## REFERENCES

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