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CULTURE, IDENTITY & MEDIA 2019 : LITERATURE REVIEW

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NZ On Air: culture and identity

New Zealand has undergone major transformations in its population and economy over the past 30 years. Notable changes include rapid ethnic diversification, the shift from a tightly controlled to an open market economy, booming tourism, new trading relationships, rising inequality, Māori cultural and political renaissance and ongoing efforts to address historical grievances[1]. These changes have taken place alongside a rapidly changing media environment. The way we see ourselves in our communities and on-screen is quite different from the way we saw ourselves at the time NZ On Air was established.

Demographic changes

The effects of longer lifespans, declining birth rates and migration constitute the most dramatic story of our age [2], and these global trends have profoundly altered New Zealand society. New Zealand has long been described as 'ethnically diverse' with a rich mix of cultures and languages and a vibrant indigenous culture, but we are now described as 'superdiverse'[3].

As well as describing the ethnic makeup of a country, the term 'superdiverse' describes new levels and complexity of diversity. Superdiversity can be seen in the various threads that make up our identities such as ethnicity, language, religion, age and places of residence. Superdiversity also describes the rich links between different communities within New Zealand and the ties they have with communities elsewhere[4]. New Zealand is the fifth most ethnically diverse country in the OECD[1] [5].

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is a significant identity thread for many New Zealanders, and census data reveal how dramatically New Zealand's ethnic diversity has changed since the 1990 research. Migrants arriving from the Pacific and Asia, especially, have increased New Zealand's ethnic diversity, although people with European heritage still make up the largest group of migrants[5]. The five largest ethnic groups are now New Zealand European, Māori, Chinese, Samoan and Indian, but this mix is changing.

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[1] The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, a group of 36 member countries with developed market economies.

The biggest increases in populations since 2006 have come from groups within the broader Asian category, which has grown overall by 33%[3]. New Zealand's Asian population is expected to become the second-largest group from the mid-2020s. By 2038, more than a fifth of New Zealand's children are expected to identify with at least one Asian ethnicity[6]. Migration from the Pacific to New Zealand is still significant, but the numbers of Pacific peoples born in New Zealand has exceeded the number of migrants since 1990. More than 62% of Pacific people are born here, and in some cases, New Zealand Pacific communities are larger than those in their societies of origin. The Pacific population is diverse with people from Samoa, Cook Islands and Tonga being the largest groups.The proportion of the population with European heritage still make up almost 75% of the population overall, but this is a smaller percentage than at the time of the 1990 research when they represented more than 82%.

Not all parts of New Zealand experience the effects of migration and increasing ethnic diversity to the same extent. In the 2013 census, for example, 90% of South Islanders identified as being of European origin compared with 61% of Aucklanders who did so[7]. Nearly three-quarters of all New Zealanders live in the North Island, but Māori, Asian and Pacific communities are even more likely to do so. New Zealand is a highly urbanised country, and migrants gravitate towards New Zealand's largest city, Auckland. Of the 472,000 Asian people living in New Zealand at the 2013 census, for example, 65% lived in Auckland [7]. Pacific peoples are also most likely to live in Auckland – 66% of Pacific people do so [3, 7, 8].

Migration means that an increasing number of New Zealanders were born overseas, with many maintaining ties to their countries of origin and communities in the diaspora. The total number of New Zealanders born overseas had risen from 19.5% of the total population in 2001 to 25% by 2013[9]. This effect is concentrated in Auckland, where 40% of residents were born overseas, making it one of the world's most diverse cities[10]. By contrast, Gisborne, Southland and the West Coast have 9.7%, 10.1% and 11% of residents who were born overseas, respectively [4]. Canterbury is the second most popular destination for new migrants, but they tend to be less ethnically diverse than Auckland's – 28% of Canterbury's migrants come from the United Kingdom and Ireland, for example, compared with only 12% of Auckland's.

The other side of the migration equation is emigration, or New Zealanders leaving to live abroad while retaining links at home. Estimates vary, but around 20% of New Zealand's citizens live abroad, the second largest proportion of any country in the OECD[11]. Around half of these live in Australia, including an estimated one in seven Māori[12]. The identities of New Zealanders living in other countries add another dimension to our national identity.

Religion

Demographic changes and migration mean that New Zealand's religious identity is becoming increasingly diverse. The number of people claiming that they have no religion has continued to increase steadily, reaching almost 42% in the 2013 census, with Māori and Pākehā most likely to make this claim (46.3% and 46.9% respectively). Among those who do claim a religious identity, Christianity remains the single largest religion. There have been significant changes within the Christian faith, however, as Catholicism has overtaken Anglicanism to become the largest Christian denomination, largely as a result of immigration from the Philippines, Samoa and Tonga [4, 6]. Adherents to non-Christian faiths such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism have also increased, and in some cases doubled.

Age

Births, deaths and life expectancy shape New Zealand's population and identity as much as migration. As life expectancy increases and the population grows, the number of New Zealanders over-65 is expected to almost double from 635,000, or 13%, in 2013 to 1.1 million, or 21% in 2030 with the oldest group, those over 85, expected to almost double from 74,000 to 144,000 over the same period[13]. The fastest-growing age group in New Zealand is people aged over 65[3], and this pattern is repeated around the world.

Overall population age figures mask significant differences between ethnic groups. The median age for European New Zealanders in 2013 was 41, compared with 31 for Asian New Zealanders and 22 for Pacific New Zealanders. The average age of Māori is 24 years.

As with ethnic diversity, there are significant regional differences in peoples' ages. Provincial regions in the North and South Island are already older than the national average. As provincial populations shrink overall, the proportion of older people is increasing. The regions are therefore ageing more quickly than Auckland, which is more ethnically diverse and younger than the rest of New Zealand[14]. This reflects immigration and ethnicity as well as the changes brought about by internal migration as young people move from smaller communities, towns and cities to Auckland or abroad, and older people move to smaller communities with warmer climates and lower housing costs[7].

Māori

Migration and demographic change are clearly changing New Zealand's identity, but some of the most significant cultural changes since the 1990 research have developed domestically. One notable change has been the political and cultural resurgence of Māori, which is evident in the revival of *te reo Māori*. Increased use of *te reo* in Parliament, schools and in broadcast media is an example of how normalised use of the language has become[16]. Māori understandings of identity, belonging, and citizenship influences our collective national identity[17].

Māori culture sets New Zealand apart from other nations; it makes us distinct. However, while attitudes and public recognition of *kaupapa Māori* have changed since the 1990 research, the diversity of Māori identities can be obscured by media portrayal of Māori as an homogenous, disadvantaged group[18]. This stands in contrast to the national pride expressed in Māori symbols such as the haka and the koru[19], which have significant symbolic value for New Zealand[20].

Pākehā

The emergence of a self-conscious Pākehā identity is another significant change since the 1990 research was done. It has been observed that members of New Zealand's dominant ethnic group can find it difficult to see themselves as having a distinct ethnicity or culture[4, 21]. Adoption of Pākehā identity is an example of the way that New Zealand's cultural politics have evolved in response to globalisation and diversification on the one hand, and the developing Māori identity and a more culturally diverse society on the other[22]. The idea that there is a Pākehā ethnic identity is not without its critics[23], but many adopt it as a sign of confidence in a locally-grounded identity, distinct from any ties to a 'mother country', and a sign of willingness to explore new options for partnership with Māori[10].

Overall, people interviewed 30 years ago valued the mix of nationalities and ethnicities in New Zealand. Respondents saw New Zealand as offering equal opportunities to all, regardless of their ethnicity or country of origin. They saw an advantage in having many cultures adding variety to New Zealand's existing culture, as long as they adopted New Zealand values[21]. People from ethnic minority groups, especially, valued the political freedom they experienced in New Zealand.

Socio-political changes

As well as social changes such as increasing diversity and urbanisation, New Zealand has undergone major political and economic change over the lifetime of NZ On Air. These include changes to the electoral system, changes in our trading relationships, and the emergence of new industries such as satellites and gaming. New Zealand is also facing global tensions such as climate change and the rise of income inequality, which challenge some of our most cherished national beliefs.

New Zealand's political identity

New Zealand's increasingly diverse population is reflected in the diversity of its parliament, thanks in part to the introduction of Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) representation for the 1996 election. This gives parties an incentive to broaden their appeal to voters from a range of ethnic groups[16]. MMP has led to greatly increased representation of Māori, both as a result of increasing numbers of Māori electorate seats and through list votes. Representation of women still lags behind, although it has increased to 38% of MPs[16].

Global engagement

New Zealand's increasing engagement with the global economy has had a significant effect on our social, economic and political landscape, shifting the perception expressed in the 1990 research that we are cut off from the mainstream of global affairs. Globalisation has meant increasing engagement with issues of foreign ownership of land and businesses, and questions about the erosion of sovereignty as expressed through debate about the merits and risks of trade agreements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership[24, 25].

At the time of the earlier research, New Zealand was just five years into a comprehensive project of economic restructuring and reform that has profoundly altered both the economy and New Zealand's social fabric[26, 27]. Support for productive industries such as agriculture had been withdrawn; tariffs and trade barriers were being removed; markets were being deregulated; parts of the state sector were being corporatized or privatised; and monetary policy had shifted to favour control of inflation[27, 28].

These reforms had far-reaching consequences. New links to global markets brought more variety of goods and services while deregulation of trading and licensing hours improved access to retail and entertainment. The young people who complained in the earlier research that New Zealand was unexciting, slow and closed on evenings and weekends will have entered their adult years cultivating cosmopolitan lifestyles with patterns of consumption that mirror those in developed economies around the globe[29]. The booming tourism market that brings almost three million visitors to New Zealand each year[30] also takes New Zealanders to all parts of the world, exposing them to new ways of living.

Egalitarianism

As well as playing a role in global fora such as the United Nations, New Zealand is also experiencing the effects of global trends such as rising inequality, tight housing markets and climate change. These are threatening some of our most deeply held ideas about ourselves, such as our egalitarianism and pristine natural environment.

People interviewed for the 1990 research described New Zealand as a land of opportunity where everyone has an equal chance. They acknowledged the existence of inequality and poverty, but their belief in egalitarianism was a belief that people could take advantage of opportunities for social mobility and economic advancement to improve their lot[31]. New Zealand is an equal society in many ways. New Zealand has equal voting rights, a Bill of Rights, and a Human Rights Act that outlaws discrimination on a variety of grounds[32]. In other ways, New Zealand has become increasingly unequal. Like most developed countries, the income gap between rich and poor is much larger than it was 30 years ago[33]. Respondents in 1990 identified poverty and homelessness as emerging concerns. Since then, levels of poverty and hardship have increased further[34, 35]. Rising economic inequality and falling rates of homeownership suggest that not everyone has equal access to opportunity.

Housing

Homeownership has been described as a cultural expectation in New Zealand, but our identity as a nation of home-owners is strained[36, 37]. An intergenerational gap has opened up between first home buyers today and those entering the housing market at the time of the 1990 research. Those purchasing homes 30 years ago could expect to have saved a deposit and paid off a home loan by now. Buyers today will take 50 years to save a deposit and pay off their home loans, which leaves little time to pay off any student loans and accumulate retirement savings[36]. Student loans, another significant policy change since the earlier research, were introduced in 1992.

There are regional, ethnic and age differences in patterns of homeownership. House price increases have been concentrated in a few regions, especially those with major cities such as Wellington[36]. Homeownership is less common among those on low incomes and the young, which means that Māori, Pacific people, and new migrants have the lowest homeownership rates nationally [38 37]. Despite a popular narrative that the baby boomer generation, those born between 1946 and 1964, benefitted from access to affordable housing and rising property prices[4], recent research suggests that a sizeable minority of older people do not own their own home and are struggling to access affordable housing as much as younger people[39].

Tolerance

People interviewed for the 1990 research described New Zealand as tolerant and accepting. Racism was seen as a minor problem, despite growing concern about racial tension between Māori and Pākehā in the context of a developing Treaty settlements process. The idea of New Zealand as devoid of the persistent and structural racism found in other Western countries has nevertheless been challenged over recent years. One in three complaints to the Human Rights Commission is about racial discrimination, but the Commission acknowledges that most people never complain[41]. Reports of discrimination puncture our idealised self-image of New Zealand as having a non-racist, tolerant national character[42] and reflect our obliviousness to parts of our history which include discriminatory legislation, directed especially towards Asian migrants, that persisted until well into the 20th century[42].

Environment

New Zealand's natural beauty and environmental purity have been among our most powerful narratives and are a key part of how New Zealand presents itself to the world[44]. People interviewed for the 1990 research described the landscape and notions of space, freedom, clean air and water, and easily accessible natural beauty as central to their image of New Zealand. The conception of New Zealand as a place of wild natural beauty contains elements of nostalgia given that New Zealand has one of the highest rates of urbanisation in the world – only 13.8% of New Zealanders live in rural areas[44] – but also positions New Zealand as environmentally aware and progressive. New Zealand's feisty nuclear-free stance was framed as an environmental issue[45], and New Zealand has been a prominent advocate for environmental regulation on the global stage[46].

There is a lot riding on New Zealand's image as clean and green. The Ministry for the Environment has estimated that its value to the agriculture and tourism sectors runs into hundreds of millions of dollars[48]. At the same time, the environmental impact of those same industries has highlighted the fragility of New Zealand's clean green image. Local issues such as water contamination and global concerns about climate change have led to questions about the resilience of New Zealand's environmental health[49].

Not all New Zealanders experience or understand environmental issues in the same way, and conflicting views on responding to environmental concerns are straining relationships between New Zealand's predominantly urban population and its rural communities. Innovative developments such as the recognition of Te Urewera land and the Whanganui River as legal entities with the same rights as people have brought increased recognition and understanding of Māori environmental ethics, the customary relationships that Māori established with whenua[18, 51].

We're so far away

Perceptions of New Zealand's geographical isolation have changed over time. Thirty years ago, survey respondents saw our isolation as supporting resourcefulness and independence, but also as a barrier to trade. Young people, especially, felt that we were culturally backward, slow and unexciting. Now, our remoteness has new meaning. Our isolation makes us distinctive and different, an exclusive destination where it is possible to get away from everyday routines and enjoy an ‘untouched world’. Geographical distance, insularity and remoteness have been reconfigured as integral, valued parts of our national profile[42].

As we’ve discovered, geographical isolation has not insulated us from global trends in matters of politics, economics or ecology. These connections are highlighted by changes in the way we connect through media and other communications.

New Zealanders and Media

People interviewed 30 years ago were beginning to experience profound changes in their media following deregulation in 1989, which led to changing patterns of ownership, the fragmentation of markets and increasing competition[52] in both broadcast and print media. Television New Zealand had become a state-owned enterprise in 1988, a privately-owned free-to-air channel, TV3, had begun broadcasting in 1989, and in 1990 Sky Television offered New Zealanders a subscription television service for the first time.[52, 53]

Since then, New Zealand’s media landscape has altered almost beyond recognition, driven by technological change. The internet, especially, has sparked a communications revolution of stunning magnitude[54]. Many of the routine daily tools that we use to present our personal and group identities, such as mobile phones and social media, were simply not available to people 30 years ago. Although the internet was being used in workplaces and institutions for activities like email and file sharing when the 1990 research was done, the basic technologies that underpin the World Wide Web – HTML, HTTP and URL[2] – were only just being developed [55]; the iPhone and its app store was not launched until 2007. Over the course of just a few years, the internet and the devices we use to connect to it have become seamless parts of our everyday existence, transforming how we communicate with each other and how we receive information about the world[56]. More than 94% of us use the internet, and we spend, on average, around 20% of our day on internet-connected devices[56-58].

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[2] HTML: Hypertext Mark-up Language. The mark-up (formatting) language for the web; URL: Uniform Resource Locator. A kind of “address” that is unique and used to identify to each resource on the web; HTTP: Hypertext Transfer Protocol. Allows for the retrieval of linked resources from across the web.

Identity in the digital age

Digital media has emerged so rapidly that it is difficult to understand the political, social, and cultural nuances of emerging online spaces and the way that we operate in them[59]. There is conflicting research on the impact of social media use on mental health outcomes for example[60].

Digital inequality

Digital places and technologies are important sites for understanding identity, belonging and citizenship in Aotearoa New Zealand, but they have limitations that intersect with ethnicity, age and geography. New Zealanders do not enjoy equal access to digital spaces and technologies. There is a correlation between those who lack connectivity and economic disadvantage, ethnicity, age and geographical isolation. The most digitally-excluded groups have been adults with disabilities, children with special needs, Māori, Pacific people, senior citizens, people with low household incomes and those living in the regions[61].

It is often assumed that digital divides will disappear over time as more people grow up in the digital age and digital infrastructure improves, including the rollout of ultra-fast broadband and rural broadband[62, 63]. Research suggests that the divide persists because people lack the motivation and skills, as well as the financial resources, to participate in online life. The cost of installing and maintaining an internet connection may be too high for low-income households, or they may not have resources such as a credit card or credit history necessary to set up an account with an internet service provider, even if a connection is available[58, 63]. As public and commercial services, education and media are increasingly provided online, poor access to the internet risks entrenching such inequality.

The not-so-central role of television

Before the advent of digital media, television had a much more central role in New Zealanders’ lives, and it made a distinct contribution to local and national cultural development. Respondents in the 1990 research valued broadcast media as a source of local news and information. They valued impartial reporting that appealed to their intellect and were sceptical of the development of magazine-style current affairs programmes that editorialised the news. They also appreciated entertainment and documentary content made in and about New Zealand, as long as it was made to a high standard. Young people were especially interested in local programming, feeling that overseas programmes did not reflect New Zealand life.

People interviewed in 1990 were subject to programming decisions made by broadcast networks and television channels, who selected content that targeted a broad cross-section of the population. Viewers grumbled about the over-scheduling of American sit-coms; a lack of news coverage; too much or too little sport; repeats, and advertising. However, they had few alternative media sources to turn to for news and entertainment. As broadcasting has shifted to a more individualised and interactive model, broadcasters are facing intense competition and being forced to innovate – some posit it is possible linear television may disappear altogether[64, 65]. Consumers now have many alternatives and spread their time across a range of devices, viewing content or listening to music from a variety of sources and gaming online.

Researchers speculate that the viewing habits of young people aged 14 – 24 foreshadow the wider social norms of the future. If this is the case, viewers of the future will spend more time online than all other forms of traditional media combined .When they do watch video content, two-thirds of it will be watched online[57, 65, 66]. Young people's behaviour now suggests that television news broadcasts, especially, will disappear over the coming years, with major implications for the way political and public interest information is communicated[67]. New media platforms offer opportunities for local news and content providers to distribute their content to new audiences, but the power imbalance between local producers and large global digital platforms can threaten the sustainability of local media businesses. Global digital platforms can be an important source of viewers, but they can also keep much of the revenue that those viewers generate, using their data advantages to target audiences for advertising[68]. Digital platforms such as YouTube may develop local inflections, especially where languages and culture are unique to a region, but their global dominance also gives them great influence in shaping private and public communications at a global scale[69]. Researchers have drawn attention to the erosion of public interest programming and the dangers of ‘platform imperialism’ in which the technical and commercial dominance of global media platforms overwhelm local culture [69, 70].

Interaction, dialogue and debate

The capacity of digital technologies to provide spaces for interaction, dialogue and debate mean that they have the potential to transform political engagement. There are no barriers to entry on sites like Facebook or Twitter; power is diffused because, in theory, everyone is able to participate. The potential of the internet to spark political progress and civic renewal seemed to be realised when social media platforms were credited with powering uprisings such as the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement[71]. This optimism has abated with rising concern about “fake news”, data privacy breaches, and online bullying [56]. The fantasy of global citizenship that digital media technology offers is balanced by the way that people incorporate broadcast, on-demand and social media into their lives and use it to build their individual and group identities. Overall, new forms of media seem to cement rather than disrupt already existing social networks and provide new opportunities for those who are connected to become active and informed citizens. However, the increasing role of artificial intelligence or algorithms in determining what kind of content is produced, where it appears and how it reaches some audiences and not others – work that was once done by human editors and programmers – has given rise to concern about “filter bubbles” or echo chambers. The personalisation of news, it is argued, may limit what people see and experience, particularly from opposing viewpoints, ultimately narrowing their knowledge and choices[72] and potentially amplifying biases[73, 74].

Producing content

The changing patterns of media consumption across channels, formats and devices have been matched by changes to the way that content is produced. Consumers are generating a large volume of the content being consumed as the social, cultural and technical production knowledge has become more widely available[64]. Most of us now actively produce mediated content that we make available publicly, or semi-publicly, on platforms such as Instagram or Facebook and these are an important part of how we create a sense of identity[64]. Indeed, user-generated clips are the most popular type of video to watch online[66]. Consumers increasingly provide video content for news media, and these are the next most popular type of video to watch online[66].

Needless to say, the quality of media content is not equal across all formats, and higher quality productions continue to dominate consumer choice[80]. The overall cost of producing quality content remains prohibitively high as the falling cost of technology has been offset by a rise in production values. Globally dominant streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon are producing more original content; each of these companies is investing billions of dollars in original shows and sports programming which will be shown in all markets[54, 81]. This raises questions about the way local and culturally relevant content is financed, produced and distributed.

Minority ethnicity and media

Technological change and convergence have shifted the ways audiences discover and engage with media content[66]. This complicates the delivery of public service outcomes[75]. New Zealand's Broadcasting Act aims to ensure the availability of broadcasts that provide for the interests of ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, children, women, and youth. Publicly supported services to non-mainstream audiences demonstrate the state's obligation to its citizens and symbolise the state's recognition of New Zealand's social and cultural diversity.

Minority group media is diverse but faces several challenges[82]. Minority media groups are small, and their income is slight, which means that their capacity to collect, edit and present news or respond to digital transformation is often limited. For some groups, such as Pacific communities, media operates in isolation in New Zealand without a parent company in the 'homeland' of its consumers on which to call for financial support or content. This contrasts with media groups serving people from larger language and ethnic groups such as English speakers or Asian consumers who can buy programming from a range of sources. The Pacific region is particularly poorly resourced in this regard, which means that what Pacific media in New Zealand do for their communities matters a great deal[83]. Māori Television has played an important role in the revitalisation of *te reo* and *tikanga Māori*, encouraging people to value these as key aspects of New Zealand's identity. Māori Television highlights the central role that audio-visual culture plays in community relationships and cultural survival[20, 84].

Minority media producers see their media as an important forum for minority groups to see and hear themselves, especially as they are largely invisible elsewhere[82]. For minority groups, the ability to control the representation of their communities through accessible digital technology is a chance to break out of the vision of diversity that fixates on food and festivals[20, 85]. Producers' personal identities bring a sense of responsibility to their communities that are not evident amongst dominant culture or mainstream journalists, and they note that they "live what their listeners live", which may be a defining characteristic of marginalised identity media. In a globalised media environment, this is increasingly true of New Zealand as a whole, with local content dwarfed by content produced elsewhere for global audiences[86].

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