

‘A heart to heart on race relations’: TVNZ’s *State of the Nation* as public sphere discourse

ABSTRACT

This article considers TVNZ’s audience discussion programme, *State of the Nation*, as a moment of public sphere discourse. The programme’s pre-broadcast branding and deliberate construction of a bicultural television space is examined, while particular attention is given to the hosts’ framing of the discussion and the programme’s treatment of identity. The article concludes that the programme was a questionable public sphere contribution, partly because the structuring of the discussion reinforced the established polarities of the Aotearoa/New Zealand ‘race relations’ debate, over-privileged producer control at the expense of audience participation and was, more generally, indicative of the limits of TVNZ’s post-Charter commitment to public service broadcasting.

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ONE AREA of media analysis that has fruitfully applied ‘public sphere’ theoretical perspectives is the loosely defined genre of the television ‘audience’ or ‘current affairs’ discussion show (Livingstone, 1996). Örnebring (2003) suggests ‘current affairs debate programmes ... very consciously and clearly present themselves as important, timely and necessary’ (p. 503) and can therefore be regarded as broadcaster attempts to concretise their commitment to a public sphere ethos. Broadcast on TV One on Thursday, 10 June 2004, Television New Zealand’s (TVNZ’s) *State of the Nation*

was clearly imagined as such a programme and marketed as a deliberate intervention, by the state broadcaster, in the (so-called) Aotearoa/New Zealand 'race relations' debate. The critical evaluation of that programme, as a moment of public sphere discourse, is the focus of this article.

Produced by Screentime Productions, *State of the Nation* was broadcast in an extended prime-time slot from 8.35 to 10.35 pm. The programme was co-presented by Anita McNaught, Kerre Woodham and Robbie Rakete (all of whom have established profiles as broadcasters in New Zealand) and, through a mix of participatory audience discussion and pre-recorded video clips, purposefully set out to discuss various New Zealand race relations issues. The context which the programme promised to address was immediately backgrounded by a series of inter-related issues – including controversies over the government's legislative plans to formalise 'Crown' (i.e. state) ownership of the foreshore and seabed, the embryonic moves towards the formation of a new Maori party (Stokes, 2004) and National Party leader Don Brash's 2004 Orewa speech, which was celebrated by some as a cathartic expression of Pakeha grievances with Maori cultural privilege.¹ *The State of the Nation* 'text' is positioned here as one illustration of this wider socio-political discussion of race relations in 2004 Aotearoa/New Zealand.

The audience discussion programme as discursive space

One of the key theoretical questions facing audience discussion programmes, as public sphere events, has been formulated by Livingstone (1996):

[Can] audience discussion programmes ...contribute to a contemporary public sphere in which the viewer-as-citizen participates in processes of symbolic construction, public opinion formation, and political discourse... or [are they] merely a travesty of 'real' [and substantive] political debate? (p. 262)

Although she describes the television studio as 'in many ways a highly unsatisfactory space for public discussion', Livingstone suggests audience discussion shows can make a valuable contribution to the construction of the public sphere by offering a space for 'emotional' – as distinct to dry, rational – engagement on important socio-political issues (*ibid.*, p. 277); indeed, Livingstone and Lunt (1994) draw equivalences between the discussion show format and formal therapy, as both processes seek to construct a discursive

space where ‘marginalised voices, repressed experiences and taboo thoughts are given a legitimate place’ (p. 65). This esteeming of the genre as a cathartic ‘celebration of ordinary experience’ has been questioned by Carpentier (2001), however, who shows how audience ‘participation’ is ultimately subject to the controlling and disciplining hand of the production team. Nevertheless, Carpentier does credit the audience discussion show format for placing (so called) ‘ordinary people’ in a ‘relative egalitarian position towards members of different elites’ (p. 228), though he tempers this by criticising media institutional actors for their failure ‘to question the power relations which encircle the media system itself’ (*ibid.*, p. 230).

This analysis will consider a tension in Habermas’s own formulation between the desirability of widening the level of democratic representation in the public sphere and its qualitative impact on deliberative dialogue (Calhoun, 1992) – a pertinent issue in light of *State of the Nation’s* decision to invite over 100 people into the studio. Örnebring (2003) has, for instance, observed that while the global ascent of a deregulated, profit-driven model of broadcasting since the 1980s increased the quantity of participation in audience discussion shows, the effect sometimes merely serves to create the illusion of a functioning public sphere, as participants are given less time to explicate their views in highly structured formats. Political communication is, in effect, reduced to the ‘politics of consumerism’ (Garnham, 1995, p. 247). Fairclough (2000) positions the question of participant access as central to any normative conceptualisation of public sphere discourse, though he concedes (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999) that this laudable principle still needs to negotiate a way around the issue of successfully ‘mediating’ (Garnham, 1995) such an open-ended and potentially chaotic dialogue, as well as address the problematic issue of what a ‘representative’ and ‘democratic’ television debate might look like (Livingstone, 1996, p. 263).

Methodological framework

A concern with discourse (i.e. the intersubjective production of meaning through language and semiosis) and the structuring of the public sphere as a discursive space is central to this article. We draw on critical discourse analysis methodologies, which understand discourse analysis as both a methodological and theoretical framework for examining the relationship between the textual and the social (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999), and the textual

analysis presented in this article follows Fairclough's interest in how 'any text... will be simultaneously *representing* [italics added], setting up identities, and setting up *relations*' (Fairclough, 1995, p. 5). As a text, *State of the Nation* is formally understood here as a composite of different textual genres, as the various marketing materials used by TVNZ to promote the programme, such as press releases, newspaper and television adverts, can be understood as attempts to pre-frame the audience show discussion, as well as signify the national broadcaster's commitment to a public service ethos. In this respect, we regard Fairclough's idea of 'genre chains', which he describes as different genres 'regularly linked together' (2003, p. 216), as a useful way of anchoring our analysis of how the *State of the Nation* text constructs the race relations debate from the pre-broadcast branding to the actual discussion.

This article has a particular interest in the question of identity, and how aspects of identity are 'articulated' and 'worked' together (Fairclough, 2003, p. 218) with particular discourses (representations) and genres (relations). We suggest that a sustained focus on the central race relations question of identity is a particularly useful way of grounding our interest in the public sphere and bi-cultural dynamics of the *State of the Nation* text. It is also helpful way of exploring some of the dialectical tensions between the producer-host wish to orchestrate and frame the discussion around their own symbolic construction of the race relations discussion and more empowered, organic forms of audience participation. This interest in the construction of identity is supplemented by a more detailed discourse analysis of pronouns, which Van Dijk (1998) identifies as 'the best known grammatical category of the expression and manipulation of social relations, status and power, and hence of underlying ideologies' (p. 203). Pronouns, particularly the use of the pronominal pair 'us' and 'them', are key linguistic markers of identity, and this analysis offers some micro-level illustrations of the identities constructed by, and in, *State of the Nation* – including examples which either implicitly affirm or problematise the structuring of the discussion as, to put it crudely, a Pakeha versus Maori discussion.

It is, however, not possible to discuss all the ideologically significant discursive features of the programme. Instead, we see this analysis as an overview, supported by specific illustrations, of how the programme was constructed as a discursive and public sphere event. The article concludes by situating our analysis in a wider theoretical consideration of the public sphere,

while we also modestly suggest ways of perhaps improving this type of audience discussion show format in the future.

Pre-broadcast branding

From an institutional perspective, *State of the Nation* can be positioned as a concretisation of TVNZ's adoption of a Public Service Charter in 2003. This controversial move, driven by the Labour-led government, took three years to implement and was promoted as a commitment to re-articulating a public service ethos at the national broadcaster level after the neo-liberal transformation of the broadcasting environment in the 1980s. The Charter seeks to differentiate TVNZ from its private competitors and address public concern over advertising levels, falling standards, and excessive spending. Nevertheless, the requirement that TVNZ continues to return a profit and deliver public service style programming means the broadcaster walks a fine line between meeting charter objectives and retaining market share (Comrie & Fountaine, 2004). Although not produced by TVNZ's news and current affairs division, *State of the Nation* was the network's most significant primetime discussion about contemporary race relations in 2004. TVNZ's attempt to engage with an often polarised debate in a two-hour prime time special was commendable and consistent with a Charter-based commitment to the principles of public service (to inform, entertain and educate), the building of community and citizenship capacity, as well as ensuring 'the presence of a significant Māori voice'. However, the broadcast still had to be structured to accommodate eight separate commercial breaks.

Pre-broadcast marketing of the programme was cast in a Charter-conscious paternalistic register and, as Livingstone's (1996, p.262) description of the genre would suggest, promises an 'unashamedly middle of the road' forum where 'ordinary people' can 'talk rationally', 'offer different perspectives' and contribute to 'better understanding'. (TVNZ, 2004) The perspective of ordinary people is pre-positioned in an antithetical relation with an implied elite, for as the advertising copy starkly puts it: 'No politicians. No extremists. It's a chance for ordinary Kiwis to have their say'. The press release also implores 'New Zealanders' to 'put aside political correctness and discuss the things that bug them about race relations in this country': a formulation that signals a conscious therapeutic and cathartic intent on the part of the programme's producers. Hence, the branding of the programme con-

structs a thematic and stylistic representation of ordinary identity that is frustrated by the self-censoring 'politically correct' race relations debate and tired of hearing the same old 'political', 'radical' and 'extremist' voices.²

These populist appeals, redoubled in newspaper adverts, are also interesting from the perspective of the production team's own stance towards a bicultural politics, and suggest a wish to move beyond ethnic markers of identity. Yet the paradoxes of this attempt to transcend 'race', while positioning it as master signifier, is already suggested by the multiple press release references to 'the two races' as well as the clear marketing of co-hosts Kerre Woodham and Robert Rakete as designated ethnic 'cheerleaders'.

Given the fraught nature of the issues, some were surprised that the programme was hosted by the BBC's Anita McNaught, a former TV1 newsreader, but dubbed in the press as a cultural 'outsider' or 'import' (Drinnan, 2004).³ New Zealand First leader Winston Peters (2004) suggested TVNZ had 'forgotten that New Zealand is no longer a British colony and that we do have a number of television front people who could do an excellent job'. Not surprisingly, Peters' demand that TVNZ reveal the details of its contract with McNaught (Cook, 2004) was ignored by the broadcaster, though the controversy about her involvement may have contributed to the deferential and largely non-interrogative posture she assumed during much of the broadcast. This deference can be more broadly understood in terms of the wider socio-cultural sensitivity of publicly discussing race relations in a country which, according to a historically dominant Pakeha narrative, has 'the best race relations in the world' (King, 2003, p. 471).

Constructing a bi-cultural television space

The voice-over welcoming viewers to the programme identifies the studio's location as Puke Ariki⁴ on the New Plymouth waterfront, and the historical significance of the site to the 'shared history' of Pakeha and Maori is emphasised in McNaught's introduction. The voice-over preamble describes the programme as a coming together of Pakeha and Maori for a 'heart to heart on race relations', a formulation which underscores the billing of the programme as a therapeutic offloading of suppressed race relations sentiment. The national race relations story is structured around four background segments incorporated into the programme's general structure, whose tightly scripted narrative forms offer a stark contrast to the structurally disjointed contribu-

tions of ordinary participants.

The continuity between contemporary and historical events is suggested by the combined use of illustrations, images of documents, old photographs and contemporary location shots of Woodham and Rakete, who articulate what are positioned as the distinct historical perspectives of Pakeha and Maori. The dialogical structuring of these pieces, punctuated by light-hearted banter and teasing between the presenters, work to a colloquially reformulated abstract historical narrative (such as Woodham's idiomatic reference to the 'hospital pass' job of translating the Treaty). Their tone is also occasionally evaluative as, for instance, when Rakete refers to the Crown troops' attack on the peaceful Maori residents of Parihaka as 'one of the worst civil rights violations in the history of this country'. But this assertion is immediately countered by Woodham's claim that 'it was not, however, a holocaust': a clear allusion to a much cited comment previously attributed to Tariana Turia, Maori Party founder and ex-Labour government minister, and implicitly positioned here as a Pakeha rebuttal of what the pre-broadcast publicity represents as 'extremist' Maori rhetoric.

The evocation of a sense of bicultural difference and division is starkly conveyed by the arrangement of the studio audience, who are organised into two distinct Pakeha and Maori sections, with 50 members in each group. A panel of 13 'experts' is separately positioned in the middle of the studio. The discussion follows a pre-fabricated format and structure, where various aspects of the 'race relations' debate are addressed in segments that complement the programme's eight commercial breaks. The basic thematic and chronological outline is as follows: (1) Introduction/Taranaki as a particular illustration of the national debate; (2) Treaty of Waitangi;⁵ (3) 'two classes of citizenship' under the Treaty; (4) historical grievances; (5) Taranaki as a particular illustration of historical grievances; (6) foreshore and seabed; (7) Government's intervention in the foreshore and seabed; (8) the future; (9) television audience poll.

The programme's four background segments take up a total of just over 14 minutes of broadcasting time, while the eight commercial breaks take up approximately 25 minutes. These in-built time constraints on the discussion are indicative of the general tension between commercial imperatives and the chance for open, deliberative dialogue. Visual flash cards, offering various bits of un-referenced statistical information, also appear on screen both be-

fore and after each of the eight commercial breaks. Many of these flash cards serve to either explicitly or implicitly juxtapose the comparative position of Pakeha and Māori, as, for instance:

Scholarships available to all tertiary students – 1451

Scholarships available only to Maori students – 154

Interestingly, of the 100 designated ‘ordinary’ people present in the studio, 43 make an on-screen contribution to the discussion during the broadcast, and the programme was largely successful in ensuring a reasonable parity of contributions from both designated identities, with 23 Pakeha and 20 Maori contributors. However, the fact that over half of the ordinary people make no vocal contribution to the discussion clearly illustrates the logistical problems of attempting to achieve a genuine participatory dialogue on television; indeed, two of the designated 13 experts also make no contribution to the discussion, something that McNaught apologises for near the end of the programme.

Discourse structuring and framing

The show’s *raison d’être* is outlined in McNaught’s introduction: ‘Tonight we are talking about the relationship BETWEEN⁶ Maori and Pakeha’. Assuming a caring and empathetic discourse ‘style’ (Fairclough, 2003, p.26), consonant with the genre’s therapeutic posture, she describes the programme as ‘a discussion that is LONG overdue’. Invoking an unspecified ‘we’, perhaps best understood as the assumed register of a paternalistic and self-consciously educational national broadcaster, McNaught asserts ‘*we* understand that it’s not always an easy discussion to have either, but *we’d* like to see discussions like this happening nationwide’.

Although the Pakeha/Maori/expert structuring of the studio space is described by McNaught and visually illustrated, she immediately seeks to de-emphasise the binary regulation of the studio audience space by stating that she, like the discerning viewer, understands that the structuring of the discussion around binary markers of identity is much too ‘simplistic’:

We understand that many here would be comfortable sitting on either side [adding, with a wry smile to camera] but television is at times a necessarily simplistic medium and seating, I’m afraid, reflects that.

The agency of two distinct audiences is affirmed by McNaught: ‘YOU the [in-studio] audience are driving this discussion and YOU the audience at home also have a crucial role’. Reinforcing this discourse of the empowered audience(s), she also positions the ‘expert panel’ as ‘not here to tell you what to think’. However, at the same time, McNaught suggests a condescending distinction between well reasoned ‘expert’ contributions (positioned as the arbiters of fact: a categorisation reinforced by their visual positioning in the studio space) and emotionally charged ‘ordinary’ contributions. The experts – the word choice alone is a powerful demarcation of identity – are instead ‘here to bring clarity and to *correct points of fact*’. Not surprisingly, the positioning of the expert panel in an unsullied fact-clarifying role proves controversial – most obviously when law lecturer David Round’s description of the Treaty as ‘practically meaningless’ is reproached as ‘assertion rather than fact’ by McNaught. The arbitrary nature of the studio distinction between expert and ordinary person is also suggested by Rakete’s identification of one Maori audience member as ‘the chief negotiator’ for Ngati Mutunga⁷, while another ‘ordinary’ contributor self-references his work as a ‘public policy analyst’ on the seabed and foreshore.

McNaught introduces her co-hosts, Kerre Woodham and Robbie Rakete, who are invited to offer perfunctory ‘Pakeha’ and ‘Maori’ perspectives on the race relations debate. These are in turn supplemented by two consciously designated ‘Pakeha’ and ‘Maori’ audience contributions, which establish the programme’s general – and ironically quite politically correct – pattern of consciously balancing and reciprocating contributions from *both* sides. The two supplementary Pakeha contributions, the second of which assumes a distinctly liberal posture interrogative of the ‘Pakeha side of the story’, serve to illustrate what Woodham calls ‘a real divergence of opinion’ among Pakeha, though her initial reformulation of a generic Pakeha perspective, which appropriates fragments of discourses hostile to the Treaty and the settlement process, is exasperated, fearful and metaphorically lurid:

Well, ever since Don Brash’s Orewa speech, they’ve had an awful lot to say and it’s almost like a scab has been ripped off, and it appears our race relations isn’t quite as idyllic as we once thought. There seems to be a real concern that the Treaty claims are going ON and ON and there is no such thing as a full and final settlement and the Treaty of Waitangi could lead us down a separatist path and that seems to be what’s concerning Pakeha.

Many of McNaught's questions and interjections throughout the broadcast, particularly her cues at the start of each themed section, reinforce, despite the asserted disclaimers, the programme's polarised representation of the race relations question: 'The Treaty of Waitangi, the founding document of our nation? *Or* a modern-day irrelevance that's fuelling damaging divisions between Pakeha and Maori?'; 'The grievance process *or* the grievance industry'; 'Is this current race wrangle constructive *or* destructive?'

These framing strategies sit uneasily with the programme's declared commitment to be 'un-ashamedly middle of the road', as the binary structuring of much of the discussion reproduces a kind of extremism that the pre-broadcast marketing disavows. At the same time, the polarised, and sometimes deliberately pejorative, representation of race issues can also be read as the production team's conscious attempt to cultivate the non 'politically correct' space promised in the advance billing. This is suggested, for instance, by McNaught's categorical ('we know') reformulation of one aggrieved Pakeha contribution – using the same evaluative, anthropomorphised metaphors as a question to the expert panel: '...the Treaty has, of course, *crept* into legislation; we know that. It's become *entrenched* in aspects of New Zealand life'; and, more generally, by McNaught's appropriation of hackneyed morally evaluative categorisations like the 'grievance industry'.

Nevertheless, the assertion of one Pakeha male that 'I don't know of any white people in the world who have eaten each other' (a characterisation that situates Maori within an archaic colonialist discourse, representing indigenous peoples as uncivilised primitives and inferior) is forcefully censored by McNaught, who, indicating the limits of the programme's disavowal of political correctness, reproaches it as 'out of line' and 'very hostile': 'that's not the kind of debate we want tonight'.

Partly because of the general time constraints, and the pre-fabricated format, the space for supplementary questions is severely curtailed and dialogical exchanges, perfunctory, tend to be restricted to host-expert interactions. Much of the time McNaught is reduced to giving bland assertions of her gratitude for the simple fact of an audience contribution ('thank you so much' is her frequent response). The limited opportunity for reflexive discourse about the role of media in the construction of the race relations debate is illustrated, too, when the only explicit observation on the media's tendency 'to polarise the issues' meets with a 'thank you so much' response by McNaught, who,

pressed for time, proceeds to remind the television audience of the home viewer poll. Her signalling of the need to manage two distinct audiences, the studio audience and the audience ‘at home’, underscores another tension in the programme’s framing and structure. The home audience are urged to contribute to the discussion by multiple verbalised and on-screen appeals to telephone or email the show. Yet, this technology-dependent attempt to give ‘voice’ to the television audience is ultimately a technical fiasco, for when the much heralded results of the Treaty-related viewer poll appear on screen near the end of the programme, the statistical data, as McNaught is forced to concede, appears self-contradictory and incoherent. Thus a reductionist, simplistic attempt to give agency to the audience at home fails in its own limited terms.

The binary structuring of the programme as a Māori/Pakeha discussion is consciously subverted by the production team near the end of the show. Calling attention to the hybridity of the Aotearoa/New Zealand identity, co-hosts Woodham and Rakete swap sides of the auditorium to mediate the contribution of the ‘other’ side. Rakete observes ‘I’m a Maori... but I’m also a Pakeha’ and in a more distinctly ‘Kiwi’ register asserts: ‘I feel equally as comfortable standing here with my mates in the corner’. Woodham, in an analagous shift to a Maori register, suggests that ‘there are many many many Pakeha who feel that Maori are their tangata whenua’,⁸ and then casually reformulates the debate as ‘not an ethnic debate’ but ‘an ideological one’. Responding to a direct prompt from McNaught, expert panelist, sociologist Paul Spoonley, also raises the slipperiness of ‘New Zealand’ identity, criticising and criticises the bi-cultural tendency to ‘forget that there are other people’. For Spoonley, the issue confusion is not whether everyone involved is a New Zealander but ‘what you might be in addition to that’. Instead of a race-or ethnicity-based model of identity, he suggests a model that allows people to identify ‘how they feel’ about identity and, hence, have it self-constructed rather than prescribed (Singelis, 1994). This contribution meets with a ‘hear, hear’ affirmation from at least one member of the audience.

However, these attempts to problematise the bicultural framing of the discussion are often formal rather than substantive. Overall, the discussion remains locked in binary assumptions – partly because, it must be said, of the audience contributions themselves. This can be illustrated more clearly by considering how pronouns were used by both presenters and participants.

Pronoun use: Identity and allegiances

The ideologically resonant, pronominal pair *us* and *them*, either explicitly or implicitly, constructs social relationships by signalling both (positive) in-group membership and (negative) out-group membership. Such a pairing can generate an overly simplistic view of the complex and multiple cultural identities that may be present within social groups.

Analysis of the *State of the Nation* studio audience shows that pronouns signifying allegiance to a particular group (the pronouns *we*, *they* and their related pronominal forms *us*, *our*, *ourselves*, *them* and *their*) are predominant. This is predictable, for many of the hosts' questions and interjections are constructed to elicit personal opinions and reactions by inviting audience members to respond as (reductive) representatives of their designated social group as, for example, when McNaught turns to ask the Maori side of the studio, 'What do Maori want to do with the foreshore and seabed if *they* got it?' What would *they* do? Charge for access to the beach?' This question effectively demonstrates the programme's polarising approach, presenting complex and potentially volatile issues in a reductive, more palatable and overly simplified fashion. It further illustrates, too, McNaught's conscious efforts to give voice to some of the more extreme claims made by a similarly reductive Pakeha Other, as exemplified here by her reformulation of a particular customary right claim⁹ into a discourse asserting that 'they' want to own the beaches. Woodham's articulation of a reductive Pakeha perspective, in the pre-recorded background piece on the seabed and foreshore issue, is even more extremist in its reformulation of Pakeha concerns about Maori intentions: 'there's a real perception amongst Pakeha that Maori want to claim everything, the radio waves, the seabed and foreshore; they'll be after the air that we breathe next'.

Yet the ways in which participants refer to themselves and others undermine the simplistic binary structures suggested by the physical layout of the studio and the hosts' representation of many issues. Participants' pronoun use reveals continually shifting points of view and indicates the multiplicity of identities invoked during the discussion. The use of the pronoun *we*, for instance, best demonstrates the slippery ground that the participants are negotiating. Throughout the programme, *we* is variously used to denote, inter alia, Maori, Pakeha, the nation, the nation as economic entity, the broadcasters and the entire studio. Some speakers use the pronoun to suggest contemporaneous affiliation to multiple social groups, as demonstrated in the follow-

ing contribution by one Maori audience member:

I think as New Zealanders we need to celebrate the diversity of who we are as a people. Maori, we acknowledge every race that is here in Aotearoa, we celebrate them, their language and their culture. ... But we need to realise we are separate in terms of our culture, colour and language. Can't we celebrate that as a people and recognise that? When we go overseas we all say we are Kiwis, everyone knows that. We are proud to be Kiwis.

Here, the pronoun *we*, initially collocated with a celebratory multi-cultural discourse, first implies all New Zealanders, shifts in meaning to denote a distinct Maori perspective and ends by perhaps suggesting a unified New Zealander (i.e. 'Kiwi') perspective. The changing meaning of the pronoun results in an ambiguous referent for the pronoun at the end of this statement, leading one to question whether it does indeed refer to all New Zealanders. While the use of *we* seems all-embracing here, it can also convey, as Fairclough (2000) suggests, 'a vagueness which obfuscates difference. Inclusive 'we' as a device for avoiding division leads in some cases to incoherence' (p. 176).

Occasionally, however, the pronoun 'we' is used by participants to emphasise difference by actively distinguishing the experience of their own group from a clearly identifiable Other, demonstrating Van Dijk's (1998) contention that 'there are few words in the language that may be as socially and ideologically "loaded" as a simple *we*' (p. 203). These uses serve to enact the racial divisions the programme seeks to both reveal and mollify. For example, in response to McNaught's provocative questions, 'What constitutes a Maori? How Maori do you have to be to be Maori?', one Maori participant retorts, 'What does it constitute to be Pakeha? Don't ask us what it constitutes to be Maori, we know what that means. What does it constitute to be Pakeha?' These quite politically incorrect questions, asked 'because a lot of people wanted to know' asserts McNaught, construct a Pakeha subject interrogative and suspicious of the authenticity of the Maori Other. But the defensive response also attests to the asymmetrical nature of the question from a wider cultural perspective, for, unlike white New Zealanders, Maori were historically defined by law according to their biological makeup (the *Births and Deaths Registration Act 1951*, repealed only in 1995, defined the Maori population as those with half or more Maori blood.)

THE INDIGENOUS PUBLIC SPHERE

The effort to define a collective, bicultural *we* sometimes results in a marginalising of those cultures not included in the historical Treaty partnership, who are, in effect, not identified as part of New Zealand's bicultural framework. For instance, one audience member self-identified 'as a Pacific Islander' and seated on the Pakeha side of the studio, describes, during an explicit discussion of the Treaty, her frustration at feeling excluded and alienated from this national debate:

The Treaty is a partnership between the Crown and Maori . The Crown is the Queen of England and myself I am a Pacific Islander/ New Zealander. I am not a Maori nor am I the Crown or the Queen, so therefore, the Treaty actually has no part for me as a New Zealander.

This woman's sense of out-group exclusion is strongly affirmed in the immediate follow up to her contribution, when, in response to Rakete's implicit reformulation of her concerns as a question about the place of other 'ethnic minorities' in New Zealand', one Maori audience member responds:

In my mind, I believe that their relationship to the Treaty – they come under the British subjects. They are immigrants to New Zealand. And you have the Māori and Pakeha, and any immigrant that comes into the country falls under the category of the British subject. They do not sit on the side of Maori.

The stark demarcation of identity articulated here alienates not only a multicultural perspective, but also a Pakeha perspective by offering a robust reminder of their colonial identity as British subjects. It also attests to the floating contemporary usage of the Maori word 'Pakeha' (a term not found in either translation of the Treaty) which is implicitly used here to categorise any non- Maori, including Europeans, Asians and Samoans. However, for many audience members, the word Pakeha seems to refer more coherently to native-born or long-term residents of British ancestry, sometimes including continental European immigrants, thus implicitly excluding New Zealanders of Chinese, Indian and Pacific Island descent (Bayard 1995). For instance, one Pakeha audience member characterises Pakeha as 'white people', while the Maori treaty claims lawyer Te Kani Williams equates Pakeha with foreign Western concepts of land ownership: 'Ownership is a Pakeha system which has been brought in.'

They (and its related pronominal forms *them* and *their*) is used to signify different groups throughout the programme and refers, *inter alia*, to the studio audience, Pakeha or Maori, New Zealanders, the nation, the Crown and the Department of Conservation. The use of the word *they* not only reveals a distinctive Other, it can also stridently demarcate the limits of one's own group identity as constructed through a clear *us* and *them* dichotomy. This perspective, the one from which the binary framing of much of the discussion takes its cue, is clearly seen when one Pakeha audience member expresses resentment about what she regards as a privileging of a Maori rights discourse. Positioning her 'New Zealand' identity in opposition to the Maori Other, and seeking to solidify that identity with an appeal to her own sense of history, she asserts:

They are talking about their rights and they are talking about their whakapapa¹⁰. What about us New Zealanders who were born and bred here for generations after generations after generations? ... There are plenty of people that are disadvantaged in this country equally as much as Maori.

On the other hand, a number of Pakeha, while maintaining their distinctive cultural position, express sympathy for the Maori political situation. For instance, one expresses his admiration for the 'gracious' way Maori have conducted themselves in the face of difficult and frustrating legal disputes and another participant, Andrew, appropriates a discourse of Kiwi fair-mindedness to suggest the foreshore and seabed should be returned to Maori. Modestly presenting his viewpoint as 'representative perhaps of some part of New Zealand', yet consciously seeking alliance with an unspecified, earlier contribution from the Maori side of the studio, Andrew explains his position:

I'm a Kiwi, we're fair people. Give it back. As the man said, what do you fear with Maori ownership? I don't. I would fear American ownership more. At least I have a connection with the Maori people.

Even though Andrew distinguishes himself from Maori, his contribution indicates that he believes that the threat represented by cultural difference is a matter of degree. He frames the local New Zealand power struggles within a wider power relations discourse, seeking to unite Maori with the rest of New

Zealand in the face of the external threat of American economic hegemony. This discursive move projects an alternative *us* and *them* construction, which has parallels in how the Crown is imagined as the ideologically distinctive Other.

It is in relation to the Crown that the inadequacy of the Pakeha and Maori dichotomy seems clearest, especially in the two groups' shared attitude towards the role of the government in handling Treaty claims and assets. Without fail, references to Crown and government agencies, such as the Waitangi Tribunal¹¹ and Department of Conservation, are negative, evoking unfairness, unequal application of law or the mismanagement of lands and assets.

Appropriating a discourse of national ownership and a critical disposition towards the neo-liberalisation of the New Zealand economy, one Pakeha audience member observes: 'They [the government] have got a very good history of selling our treasures.... My concern is how good a caretaker will they be?' The 'rightness' [sic] of this contribution is then affirmed by a Maori audience member, who, seeking to subvert a stereotypical discourse which casts Maori as a dysfunctional social group (i.e. spongers – see Walker, 2002), also frames the seabed and foreshore issue in terms of globalised power relations and a similarly critical political economy:

This is about power and money, and the government—you're right, they've always taken from Maori – has also sponged off Maori and then flogged it to foreigners.

This exchange therefore demonstrates the possibility of alliances and shared interests between Maori and Pakeha – further illustrating the inadequacy of a reductive dichotomy which structures much of the discussion, and also perhaps the limits of the programme's antipathy to the formal world of politics, for the Other (s) in this instance (i.e. Crown representatives) are not present in studio to respond.

Conclusion

This analysis has given a general overview, complemented by some illustrative examples, of how the *State of the Nation* discussion was structured and regulated. It is not a detailed analysis of all the discursively significant moments in the programme. Even so, it allows us to make some general observations about the programme as a public sphere event. We can, for instance,

suggest that the programme itself embodies unresolved, post-Charter tensions about the role of public service broadcasting in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The fact that approximately 25 minutes of the promised two-hour discussion is taken up with commercial advertising makes this plain.

From a public sphere theoretical perspective, we can observe that the frequency of the advertising breaks and the general over-reliance on formatting seriously undermines the possibility of participatory deliberative dialogue, ultimately over-privileging the production imperative to control the trajectory of the discussion, according to the programme's preconceived sense of the race relations issues. Livingstone's (1996) question, as to whether the audience discussion show genre contributes to or undermines the construction of the public sphere, is more complex. The fact that the programme was held at all can be interpreted as a positive contribution, particularly if one defers to Livingstone's favourable reading of the genre as a prompt for further public discussion rather than, necessarily, a satisfactory debate form in its own right.

Yet the structuring of so much of the programme as a binary Pakeha/Maori discussion is, as we have sought to demonstrate, particularly problematic. The effect, one acknowledged by the hosts' conscious efforts to subvert the binary late in the discussion is to reinforce, rather than transcend, the established polarities of the New Zealand race relations debate. As a specifically discursive event, it is hard to disagree with one expert panelist's retrospective evaluation of the programme as a 'ding dong discussion' (Hill Cone, 2004). The binary structuring and reductive demarcation of identities could be benignly interpreted as an attempt to publicise what are perceived as emotional and polarising 'lifeworld' discourses, as well as an acknowledgment of the Treaty underpinning the construction of Aotearoa/New Zealand national identity. The fact that the validity of these perceptions – many of which serve to orchestrate the discussion around some of the most trite and hackneyed dichotomies – is often belied by audience contributions serves to underscore the lack of media reflexivity about its own role in the construction of race relations discourse. Indeed, one could interrogate McNaught's disclaimer by suggesting that there is nothing '*necessarily* simplistic' about the television medium; the simplistic structuring of the discussion in this instance is the clear outcome of conscious production team choices.

The simplicity of the format can perhaps be more sympathetically regarded as a concession to the need to give some structure to a discussion with

well over 100 participants. This is another problematic aspect of the *State of the Nation* discussion, though we offer no easy answer for negotiating this trade off between participation and representativeness. However, we would suggest that the demarcation of an expert elite from the rest of the audience (s) contradicts the programme's quasi-egalitarian commitment to celebrating ordinary perspectives. The prospect of explicated dialogue would have been better served if there were fewer people present in the studio and if they had instead been organised into a single audience group and not two reductive identities, whose contributions, as happened on multiple occasions, needed to be doubly mediated by McNaught and a designated cheerleader. In addition, while the selection of studio participants was clearly informed by some notion of social representativeness, as illustrated by the mixture of ethnic, gender and age-based identities present in the studio, there are obvious limits to the programme's claim to be representative politically, given its antipathy to the formal professional field of politics and what it labels as 'extremist' positions.¹²

Finally, our analysis would suggest that the programme's attempt to so self-consciously simulate mediated citizen engagement is largely a travesty of public sphere discourse. In several cases, McNaught is forced to interrupt the flow of the studio discussion to address the 'audience at home' as she endeavours to empower their agency through a prescribed, multiple-choice format: a crude instrumentalisation of public opinion diametrically opposed to the deliberative intent of a public sphere philosophy. This, as we have noted, brought with it particular technical problems in the case of *State of the Nation*. The general trend towards technology-led audience interactivity can also be critically evaluated for its 'bottom line' economic motive (texts to the programme cost 50 cents including GST and phone calls to the programme cost 99 cents). The main host's request for questions from the television audience is, perhaps, more constructive, though this is also made problematic by the reformulation of anonymously sourced questions about what 'they' at home (neatly imagined as a coherent whole) have been saying. The valorisation of viewer questions also sits uneasily with the regulation of the studio discussion, where the power to ask questions, or have questions put, is largely the privilege of the programme hosts.

Notes

¹ Pakeha is the Te Reo Maori word used to denote ‘non-Maori, European, Caucasian’ (Ryan, 1997, p. 189). Orewa is the name of the town where Brash made the speech.

² Interestingly, if you leave aside the hostile disposition towards the formal world of institutional ‘politics’, this appeal to ordinary Kiwi identity has much in common with the suppressed lifeworld identity appealed to by Brash’s Orewa speech (as is suggested, for instance, by Woodham’s use – see main text - of the ‘ripping off of a ‘scab’ metaphor).

Well, ever since Don Brash’s Orewa speech, they’ve had an awful lot to say and it’s almost like a scab has been ripped off, and it appears our race relations isn’t quite as idyllic as we once thought.

³ McNaught seems to strongly identify with her 12 years of New Zealand work experience, so the categorisation of her as an ‘outsider’ is at least contestable. She is currently based in the UK, however, where she was also ‘born and educated’ (BBC, 2005).

⁴ McNaught translates Puke Ariki as the ‘hill of chiefs’.

⁵ The treaty co-signed by representatives of Māori iwi (i.e. tribes) and the British Crown in 1840.

⁶ The use of block capitals indicates speaker emphasis. Italics are used to give emphasis to those aspects of the text emphasised in our analysis.

⁷ Ngati Mutunga is one of several Taranaki based iwi. Ngati is the generic term used to denote the ‘people of’ different areas.

⁸ Tangata whenua translates as ‘local people, aborigine, native’ (Ryan, 1997, p. 274).

⁹ The immediate origins of the foreshore and seabed political controversy stem from a Court of Appeal ruling in June 2003 which, in response to particular customary rights claims made by a group of Marlborough based iwi, ruled that the ‘Maori Land Court has the power to decide foreshore and seabed claims’ (Thompson, 2003).

¹⁰ Whakapapa translates as ‘genealogy, cultural identity’ (Ryan, 1997, p. 355).

¹¹ The Waitangi Tribunal was established in 1975 ‘to deliberate and rule on alleged breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi’ (King, 2003, p. 487).

¹² We are drawing here on Street’s (2001, p. 258) distinction between ‘social representativeness’ and ‘political representativeness’ as criterion for evaluating the democratic functioning of public sphere discourse. Although neither gender or age are the focus of this analysis, the programme managed to have a balance of 24 male and 19 female contributors, while several members of the audience were invited to give a ‘young person’s’ perspective on the discussion.

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