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Non-Māori Viewing of Māori Television:  
An Empirical Analysis of the New Zealand Broadcast System

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Richard James Turner

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## ABSTRACT

Since its launch in March 2004, Māori Television has been redefining broadcasting standards and operational ethics in the New Zealand mediasphere. The channel's overall viewership has increased on a yearly basis, growing to over two million unique viewers by 2010, 83% of which is made up of non-Māori viewers. It is to the issues raised by this unusual situation that this thesis directs itself. Why do non-Māori watch Māori Television? What shows are they watching? What messages do they derive from their viewing habits? And how is the channel, as an indigenous broadcaster, affecting notions of narrative, identity, and nationhood in New Zealand society? These questions are addressed through a qualitative analysis of data collected from focus groups, questionnaires, and one-on-one interviews with non-Māori viewers of the Māori Television channel.

The thesis begins by exploring the broadcasting system in which Māori Television is positioned, outlining the legislative processes and media systems non-Māori are shifting from. It then describes the Māori social and communications paradigms which ultimately resulted in the channel's emergence on the nation's airwaves. This is followed by a description and justification of the research methodology.

The ensuing analysis of the viewpoints and assertions made by the research participants indicates that there are significant patterns in non-Māori perceptions of Māori Television and its evolving role in New Zealand culture. These perceptions include: a) an acknowledgement of Māori Television's contribution in filling a perceived void in New Zealand public service broadcasting; b) an appreciation of the quality of its broadcasts, often described as providing a compelling, inclusive, ethical, and professional service to their audience; c) a belief that the channel is facilitating a reconceptualisation of bicultural politics in New Zealand and nurturing the development of a better understanding of post-colonial cultural identity. The thesis argues that the Māori Television channel provides non-Māori a 'third space' for a re-negotiation of non-Māori identity in New Zealand, offering them a reconciliation with Aotearoa. In this sense, the channel is argued to challenge bifurcated cultural practices by presenting counter-narratives of nationhood and of the national imaginary which move beyond traditional notions of 'settler identity'.

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