The Language of Immigration: a discussion distorted by stereotypes, misconceptions, and myths

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Who am I?

Born at North Shore Hospital
Grew up and schooled in Auckland

By day: a PhD candidate in Computer Systems Engineering working in embedded computer vision, developing smart video analytics

By night: interested in politics and evidence-informed policy, makes data visualisations, writes policy analyses, contributed a chapter to this book →

Also: teaching assistant/lecturer and course development since 2012
Also: entrepreneurship and innovation through ReturnOnScience at UoA
Also: Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor's Science Policy Exchange
Also: supporting civics education through UN Youth, currently chair of their Trust
Language

• “He was born in New Zealand? Oh he’s a real Kiwi then.”

• Small subtle interactions lead to big identity crises
• Varying opinions = inconsistent messaging
• Assumptions create a baseline belief
• When is someone “Kiwi enough”?

• “No defensible moral framework regards foreigners as less deserving of rights than people born in the right place at the right time”
  – Alex Tabarrok
Watch: 'You don't have the right to be here, you Muslim' - woman's disgusting racist attack on women wearing hijabs in Huntly

An Auckland woman who was the victim of a shocking and disgusting racist attack in the Waikato town of Huntly said the attacker threw cans of alcohol at her and even attempted to hit her.

Dashcam footage shows 'hypocrite' Kiwi abusing Asian driver

6 Dec, 2017 1:40pm

Caught on camera: Man on mobility scooter hurls racist abuse

Kirsty Wynn, National, Saturday, 16 December 2017, 7:33PM
Language

- A lot of negative, hateful speech about migrants
- Speech can influence thoughts and opinions
- Where does this speech come from?

- Children learn from the people around them:
  - Parents
  - Teachers
  - Media
    - YouTube celebrities
    - Instagram influencers
    - Opinion column writers
    - Politicians
Tactics

- Dehumanising humans
  - Economic units of supply and demand
  - Treat people as (big) numbers
  - Using (often water-based) metaphors
- Oversimplifying information
- Using stereotypes and racism
- Perpetuating myths
  - Migration = Unemployment
  - Migration = Crime
  - Migration = Loss of rights
- Just be abusive
- Set up an “us vs. them” narrative
Yesterday: Record immigration. Today: Unemployment up. It's an uncomfortable fact (but still a fact) that the two are related.

#nzpol

@lainLG I made you a graph. Tell me what the relationship between the two variables is.
Spread and Impact

• Politicians get recorded a lot
  • As role models, their language gets amplified
  • Media and columnists further spread the message
• Also in our communities, but harder to prove

• What does the data say about society?
• Good news: lots of people recognise racism and call it out
• Bad news: lots of people think it’s okay and spread
• Three broad groups of people:
  • Migration is entirely negative: 20%
  • Migration is entirely positive: 30%
  • “The anxious middle”: 50%
Spread and Impact

- Recent migrants
- One-and-a-half and second generation
- Those that just look or sound sufficiently different

Being stuck between two cultures makes it difficult for us to “belong”. To be told that because of my last name or ethnicity, something I did not choose, that I am a problem for “honest hardworking Kiwis”, is crushing. All I have ever wanted is to make my community, my country, my world a better place.

I have roots in Taiwan, but I was born in New Zealand; just because my face looks Chinese and my last name sounds Chinese should not disqualify me from being able to live my life here.
He aha te mea nui o te ao?

he tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata.
Moving Forward

- Fact check
  - Stop stereotypes, misconceptions, and myths from spreading
  - Do we call out racism? A thorny problem
    - Sometimes, an appeal to fairness may be better
- People are people
  - Treat others as you would like to be treated
  - Encourage empathy
  - Encourage interactions between cultures
  - Encourage global awareness
  - Reduce barriers between people

“It is not only up to our leaders, politicians, and media to uphold our values of fairness – it is up to all of us to take responsibility for our words, to fight against racism and intolerance where we see it, and to support our fellow humans in their quest for a slice of heaven.”
Questions and Discussion