A ‘Politics of Presence’

Signifying ‘home’ in the built landscape of Auckland’s Chinese shopping precincts

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Photographs by Richard Shepherd
Overview

Focus: a reframing of ideas of ‘belonging’ in Chinese ethnic precincts in Auckland

The idea of a “politics of presence” is evident in the “linguistic landscapes” of precincts. The linguistic landscapes comprise an “affective edifice” that both migrants (and hosts) interact with as ‘the idea of ‘home’ is established.

We argue that precincts are more than places of commerce in which group identities are evident: they include significant affective dimensions that need research and policy recognition.
1. Meadowlands

2. Northcote
Politics of presence

Politics of presence refers to a set of processes through which:

- distinctive **group identity** based on shared **common interests** is recognized as a social category,
- the **inequalities of power** between the minority and hegemonic groups are acknowledged;
- policies to increase the **autonomy** of the minority group are made. (Phillips 1995, 1998)
Investigating Linguistic Landscapes

Our approach: Investigate how such changes produce coherent linguistic landscapes that recognise group identity, shared interests, inequalities of power and autonomy

- Distinct informational & politically symbolic functions
- create a gestalt
- produce a ‘decorum’ within public space
- Gestalt & decorum reflect the politics of presence
- Ability of migrant groups to exercise control over/within public spaces they routinely inhabit
Affective edifices

Ghassan Hage (1997: 100)

“Home”

• an ‘affective edifice’ constituted out of feelings
  • Security
  • Familiarity
  • Community
  • Sense of possibility.
Interrelated concepts
Security
subject to the same aggravations / policing
Familiarity
this all make sense to me
Familiarity
the "Chengdu marmite sandwich moment"
Community

being host
Sense of possibility
play & irony
Sense of possibility ...
the ‘here’ of ‘there’
Conclusion

Ethnic precincts are social and political spaces as well as economic spaces

– We have focused on how ethnic precincts can be conceptualised as linguistic landscapes that generate important feelings of belonging
  • Elements of security, familiarity, community and a sense of possibility confirm this affective dimension

– This affective dimension is crucial to the experience of successful migration but is currently excluded from policy frameworks
• Reframe understanding of ethnic precincts:
  – Not mere markers of difference
  – Not tied to a failure to integrate
  – Not tied solely to economic / private practices
• Reframe the discourse of difference signified by linguistic landscapes around the liminality of ‘other’ in a bicultural polity
• Rethink the role of affective in public policy