The Post-Politics of the 2014 New Zealand General Election

A SYMPTOMATIC DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

JOERG D. BENDT

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Abstract

In this thesis, I submit the 2014 election campaign in Aotearoa to a logics-based discourse analysis in a post-positivist manner tracing the post-political elements of contemporary politics in Aotearoa New Zealand. For this analysis, I draw on the theoretical vernaculars of discourse theory, and capitalist realism, in addition to the usual concerns given to neoliberalisation in the study of New Zealand politics. Consequently, I argue for post-politics as a useful theoretical approach to the contemporary parliamentary politics in Aotearoa. Finally, I widen the scope of the discussion by utilising relatively recent work on bio-financialisation and on hauntology which suggest a possible opening for novel forms of politics.

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Introduction

Since the 1990s there has been increasing interest in the depoliticisation of the liberal market democracies of the West, what some scholars have called the turn to 'post-politics' (for instance cf. Mouffe, 2005; Rancière, 2004; Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2014; Žižek, 1999). While the accounts of post-politics vary, especially in the conceptualisation of the mechanism(s) of depoliticisation at the heart of post-politics as well as in their conception of the political, they nevertheless share a common thread – the concern with the evacuation of the properly political from politics. Based on the Heideggerian distinction between the ontic and the ontological,[1] these scholars of 'post-politics' direct attention to the tension between politics, that is the institutional practices which organise society and sociality, and the ontological category of the political (Mouffe, 2005; Rancière, 2004; Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2014; Žižek, 1999). Furthermore, a relation between post-politics and neoliberalisation is commonly posited in such a way that post-politics is a consequence of both neoliberalisation and post-modern identity politics (Mouffe, 2005; Žižek, 1999).

In this thesis, I seek to relate post-politics to the shape of contemporary politics in Aotearoa. Drawing specifically, but not exclusively, on the 2014 election campaign and commentaries on this election from various sources (the media, the academy, and politicians' self-interpretations), I argue that the concept of post-politics helps explain the campaign events as well as the interpretations of such events in the commentaries surveyed. I look at the 2014 election campaign because it makes political activities more salient. Furthermore, the 2014 election was the most recent general election in New Zealand at the time I started working

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[1] Roughly, "[…] the former is concerned with facts about entities and the latter is concerned […] with how entities are intelligible as entities" (Wheeler, 2014, sect. 2.2)

on this thesis. Finally, there has only been little consideration of post-politics in the context of contemporary New Zealand politics. Overall, I proceed as follows.

I outline the various theoretical vernaculars employed in this work in the first chapter. I outline what Fisher calls capitalist realism, the cultural and ideological consequence of neoliberalization, and contextualise post-politics within it (Fisher, 2009). I generally accepted that Aotearoa went through a period of wide-ranging neoliberalisation in the 1980s and 1990s (Dean, 2015; Duncan, 2011; Jesson, 1992; Kelsey, 1995, 2015; Larner, 1997, 2000; Neilson, 2011; Nicholls, 2011; O'Brien, 2013; Roper, 2005, 2015; Shore, 2010). Hence, a turn to Fisher's elaborations on the outcomes of this process of neoliberalisation offers promise of a productive engagement. Then, after providing a short primer on discourse theory as the social ontology underlying my investigation, I address some methodological considerations pertaining to discourse analysis. I specifically delineate the post-positivist research strategy developed by Glynos and Howarth which informs the overall approach taken in this thesis. An emphasis is placed on their conception of the retroductive circle as an appropriate conception of social scientific research as well as on their conception of discursive logics as relevant middle-range concepts to be brought to bear in discourse analysis (Glynos & Howarth, 2007). This puts me in a position to outline Phelan's five logics of neoliberalisation (Phelan, 2014). I illustrate and enrich these ideal type logics through insights pertaining to neoliberalisation from various related disciplines and case studies. Finally, to conclude chapter one I briefly treat the recent growth in scholarship more narrowly apprehending the expansion of finance into each and every aspect of the *bios*, that is *bio-financialisation*.

In the second chapter I provide a general account of the events of the 2014 New Zealand election campaign. For this purpose, I proceed from the relevant institutional features of

parliamentary politics in Aotearoa, then introduce the relevant political parties and their policies. Following this overview, I set out the relevant long-term trends affecting the 2014 election campaign before directing attention to the turn of events over the course of the election year. Before concluding the chapter, I discuss Aotearoa's mediascape as well as the media performance during the election campaign as problematized by academic commentary and journalists' self-interpretations. This, I do in order to later capture the way in which the media perpetuate hegemonic discourse.

In chapter three, I apply Phelan's five logics of neoliberalisation to the 2014 election campaign in Aotearoa. In line with the methodological consideration of the first chapter, this involves the articulation of the events outlined in my second chapter to the five ideal-type logics.

In chapter four, I relate the findings of the previous chapter to the post-political as presented in chapter one. I argue that contemporary Aotearoa politics can be accounted for productively with reference to post-politics as well as Fisher's *capitalist realism*. Furthermore, I subsequently widen the scope of the discussion to briefly describe a potential way to escape the post-political stranglehold hitherto inspected.

This thesis seeks to apply the theoretical insights discussed in chapter one to contemporary politics in Aotearoa. I omit a detailed critique of the theoretical vernaculars drawn on in chapter one because this would require a much more in-depth engagement and inspection than can be offered in an application of an eclectic mix of theoretical vernaculars. Instead, I briefly acknowledge these critiques where relevant and outline some further consideration in my conclusion. However, it should be clear, that my argument in chapter four implies a modification or surpassing of the status quo described by Fisher as capitalist realism, the valence of which from a generally left political perspective remains to be seen.

Chapter 1: Theoretical vernaculars

In this chapter I introduce the various theoretical vernaculars brought to bear in this thesis. I start with Fisher's capitalist realism and post-politics, the latter of which I contextualise within the former. Then I turn to discourse theory as the social ontology guiding my research. Thereafter, the methodological considerations and middle-range concepts (discursive logics) of Glynos and Howarth are outlined because both guide the overall approach in this work. Furthermore, their work also inspires Phelan's work on neoliberalisation to which I turn subsequently. I outline his logics of neoliberalisation, a specific elaboration of Glynos and Howarth's middle range concepts, which promise a productive applicability to the 2014 election. Finally, I briefly touch on recent work directing attention to bio-financialisation.

Capitalist Realism

The term *capitalist realism* was introduced into cultural analysis by Fisher in his work of the same title (Fisher, 2009). Originating from German Pop Art of the 1960s as the satirical counterpart to socialist realism, Fisher recuperates the term to capture "[…] the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it" (Fisher, 2009, p. 2, his italics). Capitalist realism haunts contemporary Western societies as the consequence of neoliberal hegemony. Fisher draws on various theorists as well as a collection of post-modern cultural artefacts to outline "[…] a pervasive *atmosphere*, conditioning not only the production of culture but also the regulation of work and education, and acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thoughts and action" (Fisher, 2009, p. 16, his italics; also cf. Jameson, 1991).

In his work, then, he is concerned with the consequences of neoliberal reform, its hegemonic project as well as the creation of an affective regime (Fisher & Gilbert, 2013). Fisher's

development of *capitalist realism* takes its departure from Jameson's and Žižek's claim that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism (Fisher, 2009). The specific conception of *capitalism* from which Fisher takes his cue is the one presented most succinctly by Deleuze and Guattari who conceive of it as simultaneous decoding/deterritorialisation and recoding/reterritorialization (Deleuze & Guattari, 2003; Fisher, 2013b). Furthermore, he makes the point "[…] that capitalist culture has developed since the 1970s, with amoral neoliberal deregulation pursuing a project to desacralize and commodify without limits, supplemented by an explicitly moralizing neoconservatism which seeks to revive and shore up older traditions and institutions" (Fisher, 2013b). For Fisher this "[…] massive desacralization of culture" follows from the collapse of the ritual and symbolic expansions of beliefs once these are submitted to the regime of exchange value, just like everything else (Fisher, 2009, p. 6). This, in turn, leaves behind only "[…] consumer-spectator[s], trudging through the ruins and the relics" (Fisher, 2009, p. 4)

In *capitalist realism*, the Deleuzian conception of capitalism is brought together with a conception of *realism* that is best understood as "[…] analogous to the deflationary perspective of a depressive who believes that any positive state, any hope, is a dangerous illusion" (Fisher, 2009, p. 5). However, this deflationary attitude is, according to Fisher, drawing on Badiou in this context, presented as a virtue in the discourse of capitalist realism (Fisher, 2009). After all, it is beliefs, especially in their ideological expression, which accounted for threats and disasters in the past. The appeal to capitalist *realism* instead turns on the idea that the current state of affairs, while not perfect, is at least not terrible. Precisely, "[…] capitalist realism presents itself as a shield protecting us from the perils posed by belief […]", instead suspending us in post-political and post-ideological stasis (Fisher, 2009, p. 5). In capitalist realism, the much-trumpeted postmodern ironic distance is reconceived as the

antidote to the fanaticism of belief (on postmodern ironic distance also cf. Žižek, 1989). Simultaneously, however, "[…] a deeper, far more pervasive, sense of exhaustion, of cultural and political sterility" than even Jameson envisioned comes with this abandonment of belief (Fisher, 2009, p. 9; also cf. Jameson, 1991).

Fisher's central contention is that as a result of capitalist realism, the status quo – at the *end of history* – has become incapable of producing genuine novelty in cultural terms (Fisher, 2009, 2013b, 2014; Fisher & Gilbert, 2013; als cf. Fukuyama, 1989).[2] Instead we are currently stuck in the Jamesonian 'nostalgia mode' understood "[…] in terms of a *formal* attachment to the techniques and formulas of the past, a consequence of a retreat from the modernist challenge of innovating cultural forms adequate to contemporary experience" (Fisher, 2014, pp. 11-12, his italics). Here what is, in fact, yearned for is not so much a specific historical period but an aesthetic form. This brings to the fore Jameson's emphasis of retrospection and pastiche as crucial tendencies in postmodernism which condition the infinite return and repetition of the already established/already familiar (Fisher, 2014; Jameson, 1991). Furthermore, Fisher intertwines Jameson's insights with Berardi's more recent work on 'the slow cancellation of the future' to problematize the current juncture (Fisher, 2014). Precisely the fact that "[…] the nostalgia mode subordinated technology to the task of refurbishing the old", thereby naturalising the aforementioned Jamesonian tendencies, camouflages the receding of the future and the "[…] current crisis of cultural temporality […]" (Fisher, 2014, pp. 13, 14). Finally, this raises concerns about the status of contemporary culture. "A culture

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[2] In some sense there is a resemblance between Stuart Hall's emphasis of the repetition of functions across multiple generations of technological devices and Fisher's claim of absence of genuine novelty, as both point towards the persistent emphasis of newness in different discourses while only referring to a repetition and maybe optimisation, for Hall of technological functions, and for Fisher of cultural forms (Fisher, 2009, 2014; Hall, 2011). Ultimately, however, the concerns of the two differ in that Hall sees technological desire as the more prominent feature of neoliberalism, whereas Fisher emphasises the ceaseless repetition due to the prevalence of the capitalist realism as the consequences of neoliberalisation.

that is merely preserved is no culture at all" for even tradition requires the contestation and modification it is subjected to in the face of the new (Fisher, 2009, p. 3).

Post-politics and the political

Fisher suggests that as the neoliberal reform process was championed by the claim 'there is no alternative' (to neoliberal capitalism that is), *capitalist realism* "[...] could perhaps [...] be seen as a set of behaviours and affects that arise from this 'belief'" (Fisher & Gilbert, 2013, p. 90). In his highly instructive dialogue with Jeremy Gilbert, Fisher explicates the connection between capitalist realism and neoliberalism in more detail. Specifically, Fisher argues that because capitalist realism is the consequence of neoliberal hegemony, it "[...] consolidates the idea that we are in the era of the post-political – that the big ideological conflicts are over, and the issues that remain largely concern who is to administer the new consensus" (Fisher & Gilbert, 2013, p. 90).[3] But Fisher directs attention not just to the ideological but also to the material elements of post-politics in capitalist realism, as party membership is dwindling and increasingly major political parties from disparate ends of the world come to resemble each other in organisation and political positions (Fisher & Gilbert, 2013).

Moreover, Fisher is explicit in pointing out, that "[...] capitalist realism is a pathology of the left", for it is the political left which has come to acquiesce in the idea that there is no alternative as most vividly illustrated by proponents of the Third Way (Fisher & Gilbert, 2013, p. 90). More specifically, the post-political moment of capitalist realism, then, lies not so much in its endorsement of neoliberalisation – which it does not – but much rather in the more pragmatic, but simultaneously fatalistic approach – the depressive realism outlined above.

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[3] This consolidated idea is, of course, but a restatement of Fukuyama's *end of history* thesis, which various other theorists of the post-political also regularly engage with (Fukuyama, 1989; Mouffe, 2005; Žižek, 1999)

Capitalist realism simply leaves no room for a politicisation of the social order, instead reducing politics to elections. The deflated 'that's just how things are now' combines favourably with other ideological tenets of neoliberalism, such as individualisation which pre-empts political mobilisation and instead generalises anxieties, for instance about work security under conditions of continuous (self-)surveillance and bureaucratic assessment (Fisher & Gilbert, 2013, p. 92). Bureaucracy becomes part of "[…] the fabric of work in general, not something performed by a special kind of worker". While this on the one hand necessitates the development of "[…] new ways in which people can become involved with politics", it also highlights the Althusserian dimension of capitalist realism on the other hand (Fisher & Gilbert, 2013, p. 91; also cf. Althusser, 1971). Althusser conceives of ideology as basically ritualistic best exemplified in Pascal's claim 'kneel down and you will believe' (Althusser, 1971; Choi, 2013; Pepper, 1995). Neoliberalisation has effectively naturalised and normalised business practices and language in all areas of the social (Fisher, 2009, 2011, 2013b; Fisher & Gilbert, 2013).

Furthermore, the "[…] combination of market imperatives with bureaucratically-defined 'targets' is typical of the 'market Stalinist' initiatives which now regulate public service" (Fisher, 2009, p. 23). This conception of market Stalinism is analytically useful, according to Fisher, because (*a.*) it underlines the "[…] authoritarian bureaucratic control system" which neoliberalism relies on, and (*b.*) it demonstrates that neoliberalism is not, in fact, about "[…] reducing governmental control in order to free up the market", but much rather about the "[…] pseudo-marketization, the *simulation* of market dynamics" (Fisher & Gilbert, 2013). The market dynamics, which can be observed especially in the public service sector, are, in this sense, constructed by a variety of colluding factors.

While Fisher draws out these Althusserian and Deleuzian aspects of post-politics in his elaborations regarding capitalist realism, others approach post-politics from a more Lacanian perspective. While there are some differences in their accounts, especially pertaining to the specific conceptual mechanism(s) at the core of post-politics, they share a common concern with the retreat of what they consider the political from politics (Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2014). The post-political depoliticisation which these authors document form an important part of capitalist realism as elaborated by Fisher (Fisher, 2009).

Žižek develops his insights about post-politics by drawing on Rancière's conception of the political. For the latter, politics proper, that is the political as contrasted with the police, involves the struggle for one's voice to be perceived as signal rather than noise, whereas the police are but the administration of an established social order. Thus, politics proper, always entails a struggle for recognition as a partner in the conversation concerning *res publica* by the 'part of no-part', the excluded from a given social order (Rancière, 2004). As Žižek puts it:

> This is politics proper: the moment in which a particular demand is not simply part of the negotiation of interests but aims at something more and starts to function as the metaphoric condensation of the global restructuring of the entire social space (Žižek, 1999, p. 208)

There is a resonance between Žižek and Laclau for whom the political involves the elevation of a particular demand to the status of the empty signifier to which all other popular demands are equivalent, thereby constructing 'the people' as political agent (Laclau, 2006a, 2006b, 2007).

Similarly, Mouffe's point of departure for her reflections on the '*post-political Zeitgeist*' is her distinction between 'politics' and 'the political', which is roughly congruent with Rancière's differentiation between the political and the police. As she outlines:

> […] by 'the political' I mean the dimension of antagonism which I take to be constitutive of human societies, while by 'politics' I mean the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organising human coexistence in the context of conflictuality provided by the political (Mouffe, 2005, p. 9).

Underlying Mouffe's conception of 'the political' is her and Laclau's work pertaining to discourse theory. Thus, we might not be too far off the mark in claiming the theoretical antecedents of reflections regarding *post-politics* to be located roughly in discourse theory and the concomitant application of psychoanalysis into political theory (Mouffe, 2005). Both, Žižek's and Mouffe's conception of post-politics emphasise the banishing of the properly political due to the suppression of moments of displacement. In Mouffe's conception, the specific moment of displacement suppressed is the ineradicably antagonistic dimension of human sociality, whereas Žižek refers to the emergence of the 'part-of-no-part', the emergence of the excluded other claiming the status of universality in order to have their voices accepted as equal in consideration with regards to public affairs (Mouffe, 2005; Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2014; Žižek, 1999; also cf. Rancière, 2004).

> In post-politics, the conflict of global ideological visions embodied in different parties which compete for power is replaced by the collaboration of enlightened technocrats (economists, public opinion specialists . . .) and liberal multiculturalists, via the process of negotiation of interests, a compromise is reached in the guise of a more or less universal consensus. Post politics thus emphasizes the need to leave old ideological divisions behind and confront new issues, armed with the necessary expert knowledge and free deliberation that takes people's concrete needs and demands into account (Žižek, 1999, p. 198).

So, the properly political can be said to involve antagonism(s) and the overcoming of various exclusionary moments conditioned by these.[4] In contrast, the post-political involves the establishment of fixed subject positions; each in their place, to be individually addressed according to individual needs and demands, in the administration of a supposedly complete

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[4] This is, however, where the precise conceptions differ as for Žižek the fundamental antagonism is some form of historically specific class struggle, whereas Mouffe objects to such a reduction of social antagonism(s) to class struggle

social order. Whereas politics proper involves the active putting forth of demands, which might crystallise into empty signifiers, by the people, post-politics only involves the compromise solutions reached through the process of negotiation and the taking into account factors such as expert opinions (Laclau, 2006a, 2006b, 2007; Mouffe, 2005; Žižek, 1999, 2006a, 2006b).

Discourse theory

I am now in the position to outline the social ontology underlying this thesis as well as to elaborate upon the research strategy employed throughout the rest of this work. A number of crucial insight regarding post-politics originate from various elaborations of what Laclau has called post-Marxist discourse theory and related theoretical disciplines (Laclau, 2006a, 2006b, 2007; also cf. Žižek, 1999). Originally developed in Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy (HSS)*, discourse theory is, at its core, an anti-foundationalist social ontology as well as a post-Saussurean theory of social signification (Devenney et al., 2016; Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2010; Hansen & Sonnichsen, 2014; Laclau, 2006a; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). This means, that rather than identifying a theoretical grounding – or foundation – discourse theory emphasises the fundamental and irreducible contingency of the social. As Torfing points out, the conception of discourse put forth in *HSS*, and subsequently modified and defended by Laclau and others, should be considered as the foundation of the third generation of discourse theory and analysis. *HSS* moves beyond the linguistic focus of the first generation (e.g. *socio-linguistics*, *content analysis* and *discourse-psychology*), as well as the semiotic focus of the second generation which distinguishes between discursive and non-discursive practices (e.g. Fairclaugh's *Critical Discourse Analysis* and Foucault's *archaeological writings*) (Torfing, 2005). Laclau and Mouffe deny the distinction between discursive and non-

discursive practices and instead claim that all signification, linguistic as well as non-linguistic, is already discourse (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).[5]

The foundation of discourse theory – or rather its lack thereof – is provided by the irreducible presence of antagonism. Antagonism is considered to be "[…] primarily constitutive of the social fabric […]" (Laclau, 2006a, p. 104). However, antagonism is not merely considered a relation because from within each pole of the antagonism, the other appears purely negative. As formulated in *HSS*: "[…] in the case of antagonism […]: the presence of the 'Other' prevents me from being totally myself" (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 125). Thus, argues Laclau, antagonism is "[…] a kind of relation in which the limits in the constitutions of any objectivity are shown" as there is always some heterogeneous excess that escapes totalisation (Laclau, 2006a, p. 104). It follows that there can be no privileged single space of representation. There are always interruptions, displacements, and irregularities due to the irreducible presence of antagonism. This, in turn, rules out both dialectical contradiction in the Hegelian sense as well as Kantian *Realrepugnanz* as adequate accounts of the constitutive character of antagonism, precisely because either option presupposes a single space of representation (Laclau, 2006a, 2006b).[6]

Instead, each structured representative space or totality inscribed onto the ontological terrain traversed by antagonism is conceived as a *discourse* – basically one of many actual and/or possible systems of signification posing as universal (Laclau, 2006a; Laclau & Mouffe,

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[5] In this sense, Laclau and Mouffe remain true to their teacher Althusser, as it was he who argued that the individual is always already the subject of ideology (Althusser, 1971)

[6] Here, discourse theory joins the familiar post-structuralist cannon of the likes of Derrida ("structural undecidability") and Lacan ("lack in the Other") by introducing an axiom of 'radical contingency' as Glynos and Howarth call it, "[…] the *constitutive* failure of any objectivity to attain a full identity" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 110). Aside from a shared commitment to radical contingency, Derrida's deconstruction as well as Lacanian psychoanalysis also provided some important tools for discourse theory's development (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2010; Laclau, 2006a, 2006b; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985)

1985). Due to the presence of antagonism, there is always a tension between the differential distribution within a discourse, the working of the logic of difference, and the equality of all representable difference within a discourse in the face of the radically heterogeneous other looming beyond its limit, the working of the logic of equivalence. Consequently, the closure of a system of signification, that is its completeness, is necessary to enable signification as such, yet impossible due to antagonism, a particular becomes the stand-in for the absent universal – the impossible totality (Laclau, 2006a). This is the production of an empty signifier, of a *name* which retroactively unifies a discourse negatively in its opposition to what is beyond its limits of representation. Thus, an empty signifier is but a catachresis, a figural term without a literal referent (Laclau, 2006a, 2006b, 2014).

Last but not least, there is an affective dimension to discourse, according to Laclau, because signification presupposes affect in the sense that "[…] the paradigmatic pole of language – which Saussure, revealingly, called 'associative' – requires substitutions only possible in terms of an individual experience […]" (Laclau, 2006a, p. 110). Furthermore, affect is not external to discourse either, as it is only constituted "[…] through the differential cathexis of a signifying chain" (Laclau, 2006a, p. 110). Hence, empty signifiers, for Laclau, work in the same way as the Freudian Thing in psychoanalysis. A *radical investment* into a partial object accounts for "[…] the only way in which a certain kind of fullness is achievable", *unevenness* accounts for a similar effect in the context of signification (Laclau, 2006b, p. 651). In fact, *unevenness* within a system of signification is the precondition for any signification at all due to the tension between the logics of equivalence and the logics of differences. This tension, in turn, arises from the system's constitutive exclusion, which effected "[…] the split of any signifying element between an equivalential and a differential side" mirroring the split subjectivity posited in psychoanalysis (Laclau, 2006b, p. 652).

Finally, the central purchase for political analysis arising from discourse theory is its unequivocal identification of politics with the struggle for hegemony, an idea first developed by Gramsci which Laclau and Mouffe stripped of its class reductionist roots (Gramsci, 1972; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Mouffe, 1979). As Žižek remarks, "[f]or Laclau […] the fact that some particular struggle is elevated into the "universal equivalent" of all struggles is not a predetermined fact but itself the result of the contingent political struggle for hegemony" in contrast to class struggle which privileges a specific social group as the political/hegemonic agent (Žižek, 2006a, p. 554).[7] So the logic of hegemony is essentially the logic of the empty signifier, for

> [a]ll groups are particularities within the social, structured around specific interests. But they only become hegemonic when they take up the representation of the universality of the community conceived as a whole (Laclau, 2000, p. 140).

However, as has been outlined above, the representation of universality always falls short, due to the irreducible presence of antagonism at its limit. For the political, this implies that the possibility of hegemony lies in its ultimate unachievability (Laclau, 2000, 2006a, 2006b). "This incompletion of the hegemonic game is what we call politics" (Laclau, 2000, p. 142). Thus, politics proper, is basically the production of empty signifier and their – the signifiers' – struggle for hegemony. Thus, to say that a discourse, theory, or policy regime, such as neoliberalism, is hegemonic, in consequence, means that its central tenets have come to represent the absent universality in their particularity. A further corollary from this is the absolute primacy of the political in the institution of the social, as any institution of the social always presupposes hegemonic struggle by means of which a particular becomes universal,

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[7] Evidently, Žižek prefers a version of class struggle to Laclau's conception of social antagonism and hegemony, but that's altogether an issue too far afield to be treated in detail here (cf. Laclau, 2006b, 2007; Žižek, 2006a, 2006b).

the image of the social whole, the structured totality (Laclau, 2000, 2006a, 2006b; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).

There have been three main lines of critique against Laclau and Mouffe, as well as some of the proponents of the conception of post-politics. The first one of these levels the charge of relativism against discourse theory as well as Žižek's Lacanianism (Boucher, 2008). In a related way, the second line of critique questions the abandonment of class-analysis in post-Marxist discourse analysis *à la* Laclau and Mouffe (Geras, 1987; McLennan, 1996). Both of these critiques overwhelmingly criticise the lack of political applicability from a left perspective, thus, only peripherally impacting on the applicability of discourse theory as an analytic device. The third line of critique originates from Deleuze and Guattari and critically examines the underlying Lacanian conception of split-subjectivity. Specifically, Deleuze and Guattari reject this conception of subjectivity, arguing that it is produced by capitalism rather than being ontologically given (Deleuze & Guattari, 2003; also cf. Fisher & Gilbert, 2013). However, as with the previous two lines of critique, this third one does not fundamentally impact on the application of discourse theory in the study of the 2014 election in New Zealand, because the social organisation of Aotearoa is undeniably capitalist. Furthermore, my overall argument does ultimately only rely on discourse theory in the analysis of the status quo but not in the projection of future trajectories.

Discourse analysis

In their work, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory*, Glynos and Howarth offer a further elaboration of Laclau's discourse theory with a view of providing a number of middle-range concepts to enable critical discourse analysis (Glynos & Howarth, 2007). The most important of these middle-range concepts for this thesis are the logics of critical

explanation. While Glynos and Howarth detail a tripartite typology of discursive logics as well as a number of other middle-range conceptions to enhance the applicability of discourse theory to social scientific research, I only outline their general understanding of discursive logics and the consequences of their conception in terms of social scientific research.

A discursive logic, argue Glynos and Howarth is basically a unit of explanation (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Phelan, 2014; also cf. Wittgenstein, 1997 for a similar use of the term). More specifically, discursive logics are means to capture and name relational networks within a discourse (Glynos & Howarth, 2007). This might be best illustrated by their example of the logic of the market, which

> […] comprises a particular set of subject positions (buyers and sellers), objects (commodities and means of exchange) and a system of relations and meanings connecting subjects and objects, as well as certain sorts of institutional parameters (such as a well functioning legal system). However, our concept of logic also aims to capture conditions that make possible the continued operation of a particular market practice, as well as its potential vulnerabilities (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 136)

As can be seen from this example, discursive logics fulfil three related functions for Glynos and Howarth: (1) they account for the basic entities as well as their relationships within a discourse; (2) they gauge a discourse's rules or grammar; and finally, (3) they can also document the conditions of possibility and of vulnerability of a discourse (Glynos & Howarth, 2007).

In their development of a post-positivist research strategy, Glynos and Howarth argue that a discourse theoretic ontology supplemented by their middle-range concepts is required for social scientific research as it is the most promising way in which to approach the openness of the social in such research. In line with Laclau and Mouffe, they prioritise the political, shaped in the way outlined above, as constitutive of the social and, finally, suggest to conceive of social scientific practice as an articulatory practice (Glynos & Howarth, 2007). As Laclau and

Mouffe defined articulatory practice as "[…] any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result […]", this means that social scientists effectively construct both the problems as well as the explanations of these problems (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 105). Consequently, Glynos and Howarth propose a *retroductive circle* comprised of three interrelated moments as an adequate model of social scientific inquiry. The first moment is that of *problematisation* in which "[…] a range of disparate empirical phenomena have to be constituted *as* a problem, and the problem has to be located at the appropriate level of abstraction and complexity" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 167). That is followed by the moment of *retroductive explanation and theory construction* in which the previously constructed problematisation is accounted for by identifying and articulating those discursive logics which characterise, bring about and sustain the conditions bracketed in the problematisation (Glynos & Howarth, 2007). Finally, the moment of *persuasion and intervention*, which pertains primarily to the justification of a hypothesis, completes the tripartite of moments in Glynos and Howarth's retroductive circle. Here, the authors suggest a set of alternative criteria to the positivist fetish of predictive capability and success, to evaluate hypotheses. Some such alternatives may include the acceptability of the hypothesis to relevant communities of scholars and subjects under study, as well as various criteria concerning evidence, coherence, or public articulation (Glynos & Howarth, 2007). Importantly, this third moment effectively closes the retroductive circle because "[…] the *persuasive* aspect of justification extends the task of convincing the relevant audience about the way the problem was characterized (or re-characterized) […]" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 38, my italics).

This conception of a post-positivist social scientific research strategy also informs the remainder of this thesis. In this chapter, I outline the conceptual resources brought to bear

throughout this thesis. This includes the outline of the discursive logics, Phelan's logics of neoliberalisation, in the next section, which are brought to bear on my problematisation of the 2014 election campaign. Specifically, Phelan's logics of neoliberalisation are a more substantive elaboration of Glynos and Howarth's discursive logics. Thus, by drawing on Phelan I can bridge the gap between abstract theorising in the style of Laclau as well as Glynos and Howarth, and concrete instances of abstract entities theorised. Finally, as Žižek and Mouffe both argue that there is a connection between post-politics and neoliberalisation, I subsequently bring out the post-political aspects of the instances of Phelan's logics in the 2014 election campaign in Aotearoa.

Phelan's five logics of neoliberalization

Neoliberalism is unequivocally considered the hegemonic project of our time in Aotearoa as well as globally (Chomsky, 1999; Dean, 2015; Fisher & Gilbert, 2013; Foucault, 1991; Hall, 1988; Hall & Jacques, 1983; Harvey, 2005; Hayes, 2013; Jessop, 2007; Kelsey, 1995, 2015; Larner, 1997, 2000; Lemke, 2001, 2002; Phelan, 2014; Roper, 2005, 2011, 2015; Rose, 2000; Rose, O'Malley, & Valverde, 2006; Springer, 2012; Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2014). Even Laclau and Mouffe in their seminal text developing post-Marxist discourse theory make a mentioned of the neoliberal hegemonic project and caution the left that this necessitates a new response, e.g. hegemonic politics (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). There are numerous conceptions of neoliberalism — or neoliberalisation, a term sometimes preferred in order to avoid the connotation of a monolithic and internally coherent project. As Phelan points out "[...] instead of over-relying on appeals to a reified "neoliberalism", it is more analytically productive to conceptualize neoliberalism as a series of discursive "logics" that are always hegemonically articulated with other discursive logics" (Phelan, 2014, p. 57). It is this, his conception of

neoliberalisation, I now turn to because it provides a link with the above discussion of discourse theory and analysis. Phelan's conception is synthesised from various theoretical disciplines concerned with neoliberalism in a way consistent with Glynos and Howarth's conception of social scientific research in which "[…] we can deploy theoretical concepts and empirical generalisation derived from other traditions as long as their use is accompanied by suitable acts of reactivation, deconstruction, commensuration, and articulation" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 188). Furthermore, Phelan adopts from Glynos and Howarth their abstract conception of discursive logics. Secondly, Phelan's logics are explicitly conceived in order to engage with a variety of ontic phenomena, for instance concrete political phenomena, rather than being restricted to more abstract, ontological considerations (Phelan, 2014). Finally, the articulation of Phelan's five logic of neoliberalisation to the 2014 election campaign will allow me to draw out the post-political moments of this campaign.

Phelan identifies five ideal type neoliberal logics: (*1*) the logic of market determination, (*2*) the logic of individualisation, (*3*) the logic of competitive ritual, (*4*) the logic of self-interest, and (*5*) the logic of commodification (Phelan, 2014). Together these logics can capture the heart of the neoliberal project.

Regarding (*1*) the logic of market determination, Phelan points to internalisation that practices, especially institutional practices, are to be justified in market terms on the part of social agents (Phelan, 2014). This clearly resonates the valorisation of the market as the supreme distributional mechanism which various academic disciplines attribute to neoliberalisation (Fisher, 2009; Fisher & Gilbert, 2013; Foucault, 1991; Gordon, 1991; Hall, 2011; Harvey, 2005; Larner, 2000; Mann, 2013; Springer, 2012). Furthermore, the logic of market determination captures the sense in which 'the market' has become normalised and

naturalised in social practices. This reverberates some of the crucial insights gained from the critique of neoliberalisation from the perspective of cultural studies (Dean, 2015; Hall, 2011). The logic of market determination, in more general terms, might be taken to refer to the fact that market models are taken to be the most adequate models to account for human interaction in line with Foucault's claims regarding the broadening of the scope of economics (Foucault, 1991). In addition, another connotation of the logic of market determination points to the constructed nature of the 'market' which Fisher and governmentality scholars emphasise (Fisher, 2009; Fisher & Gilbert, 2013; Larner, 2000; Lemke, 2002). Finally, the logic of market determination can for the present intentions be articulated to Glynos and Howarth's aforementioned logic of the market (cf. above). However, whereas Phelan's logic of market determination directs attention to the internalisation and valorisation of market practices, Glynos and Howarth's logic of the market aims at the formal set of rules, of the internalised market practices. There is also a fantasmatic dimension to the logic of market determination. An obvious candidate for the position of a sustaining fantasy might perhaps be the oft-espoused distributional efficiency as beatific object, or as Fisher's argues, institutional sclerosis and Stalinist bureaucracy as its horrific object (Fisher, 2009).

Turning now to (*2*) the logic of individualisation, Phelan argues that this logic involves a "[…] privileging of individual, rather than collective, identities, and the normalisation of self-expressive modes of public discourse" (Phelan, 2014, pp. 61-62). Furthermore, according to Phelan, in the media this logic is exemplified in the presidentialisation of election campaigns and the exploitation of personal life narratives for political profit in politics as well as the discourse of personal responsibility, which has permeated the social (Phelan, 2014). Of course, this logic can also be employed to articulate aspects of various conceptions of neoliberalisation. A very concrete instance of the discourse of personal responsibility which

Phelan mentions is presented by Dean's as well as Smith's observations regarding the shifts in popular and political discourse which increasingly blame the poor for their poverty in Aotearoa (Dean, 2015; L. T. Smith, 2013). Fisher's reflections on the dominant psychiatric and psychological regimes in mental health discourse point in a similar direction (Fisher, 2009, 2011; also cf. Smail, 2004). A further instance of this line of reasoning is found in discourse of individual responsibility which historically as well as contemporarily justifies the roll-back of social welfare and increasingly punitive reform of those welfare provisions still existing (Dean, 2015; Douglas, 1993; Kelsey, 1995; Loughrey-Webb, 2015; O'Brien, 2013; Roper, 2005). In addition to these specific discursive instances of the logic of individualisation, there's a general resonance between it and the insights from political economy regarding the overriding status of individual liberty in neoliberal thought (Harvey, 2005). Drawing on Glynos and Howarth's general definition of logic(s), we might elaborate the logic of individualisation to refer to the construction of subjects as isolated individuals relating to one-another through interactions of all kinds. These interactions are shaped specifically by the attribution of agency and ownership over their respective bodies to isolated individuals in such a way as to make possible the consequent attribution of properties such as responsibility. Therefore, the logic of individualisation bears close resemblance to Macpherson's possessive individualism (Macpherson, 1962). In addition to that, the logic of individualisation has an affinity with Glynos and Howarth's logic of atomisation, developed in the context of a preliminary analysis of UK higher education reform to illustrate their logics of critical explanation (Glynos & Howarth, 2007). Their logic is conceptualised specifically to "[…] describe patterns of discursive articulation that individuate institutions and persons as independent entities, thus isolating them from each other, while abstracting from them their virtues, skills, and other attributes" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 172). Glynos and Howarth understand the logic of

atomisation to operate in such a way as to "[…] downplay the social or structural aspects of success and failure in the self-understanding of persons and institutions […]" similar to the way in which I have construed a conceptually widened logic of individualisation (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 172). Hence, I take the insights summarised by Glynos and Howarth under the former label to be contained in the latter.

Related to the logic of individualisation is (*3*) the logic of competitive ritual, "[…] which captures the increasing normalisation of competitive idioms and rationalities […]" (Phelan, 2014, p. 62). We can further enrich this logic by drawing on a different analysis of tertiary education reform. In his analysis pertaining specifically to university reform in Aotearoa, and drawing specifically on his first-hand experience of these reforms at the University of Auckland, Shore observes the rise of quantified measures assessing various performance indicators of the university as well as individual staff members (Shore, 2010). What is more, based on these quantified assessments different universities compete for public as well as private funding (Shore, 2010). Here, Shore's analysis also coincides with Fisher's emphasis on the bureaucratic production of quantificatory data (Fisher, 2009; Fisher & Gilbert, 2013). Glynos and Howarth also include a logic of competition in their treatment of higher education reform, which "[…] captures the ways that actors interact with each other as rivals" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 172). In their context, this refers specifically to "[…] the way *schools, departments, and individual academic staff* compete to maximize their share of university resources" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 172, their italics). Thus, the logic of competitive rituals traces the conception of individuals as rivals in a competition for resources which, in turn, leads to patterns of competitive idioms and of competitive rationalities permeating the social. Furthermore, Shore's observations regarding quantified measurement and their comparison and ranking can be found in a variety of other fields not only in the university context. In fact,

we are so well acquainted with quantified rankings that we might barely notice them. The OECD offers quantified rankings of its member countries according to all sorts of indicators, such as economic growth or income inequality. Similarly, the Heritage Foundation offers an annual ranking of all countries globally according to economic freedom. These rankings often find their way into political discourse when governments announce policies aimed to improve a country's ranking according to this, that, or another indicator (for instance, *Growing an innovative New Zealand*, 2002; also cf. Hayes, 2013). As a consequence, specifically of the way in which individuals and other entities such as institutions and states are constructed as rivals involved in perpetual competition, the logic of competitive ritual is closely related to Phelan's logic of self-interest.

The next logic to be outlined is (*4*) the logic of self-interest. It refers to "[…] the tendency to explain publicly visible behaviours and action in narrow self-interested terms" (Phelan, 2014, p. 62). What is at stake, here, specifically is the construction of rationality along the lines outlined in rational choice theory (Phelan, 2014). This also resonates with the Foucauldian insights that the redefinition of subjects as entrepreneurs with the concurrent emphasis of methodological individualism and a focus on the maximisation of preferences are at the heart of rational choice theory (Becker, 1993; Foucault, 1991; Gordon, 1991). Finally, the shift towards explanations of individual behaviours and acts in terms of self-interest is also related to the previously mentioned extension of the scope of economics. Specifically, self-interest serves as the essentialist core of the conception of human nature able to account for the validity of market models. Thus, the colonisation of all areas of life by economics, might be dependent on the construction of human rationality as the maximisation of self-interest. This construction of the individual as motivated only by self-interest also leaves its traces in social practices.

Finally, the logic of commodification picks out "[…] the increasing commodification of media and social identities" (Phelan, 2014). For the purposes of this thesis, I extend the scope of this logic to cover not just the commodification of identities but the commodification of every other aspect of life. In this way, the logic of commodification might refer to a number of phenomena, sharing a Wittgensteinian family resemblance and revolving around the concept of the commodity. In this way, the logic of commodification can pick out Phelan's and Hall's observations regarding the commodification of identities (Hall, 2011; Phelan, 2014). More specifically, it directs attention to the naturalisation of identification by means of consumption, to the "[…] hyperbolic marketing of […] identities" as well as performative acts of "[…] self-commodification and self-branding […]" (Phelan, 2014, p. 61).

In a related way, we might take the logic of commodification to also refer to the way in which commodity fetish is the generalised fantasy filling the lack at the heart of the consumer-subject (Böhm & Batta, 2010). Here, the generalisation of commodity fetishism presents a unique patterning of the social which results in identification by means of consumption of commodities as the only means of identification. In this sense, the logic of commodification directs attention to the omnipresence of the commodity but also to the way which the social is dominated by "[…] an imperative 'Enjoy!', which is a mute, socially sanctioned enjoyment […]" by means of consumption (Böhm & Batta, 2010, p. 356). Finally, in the cultural realm, Fisher's observations regarding the desacralisation of culture through commodification and the consequent shift from beliefs to aesthetics also resonate with the logic of commodification (Fisher, 2009). Fisher's remarks regarding the way in which commodification desacralizes culture by dissolving the ritual and symbolic elaboration of beliefs and so submit them to the regime of exchange value, effectively bridges the gap between what Phelan calls the logic of commodification, and Glynos and Howarth's logic of instrumentalisation. In the

context of higher education, Glynos and Howarth view this logic as operating "[…] in such a way as to downplay the potentially intrinsic and processual qualities of teaching and research in favour of their instrumental or exchange value, whether from the point of view of academics or students" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 172).

This, then, completes the account of Phelan's five logics of neoliberalization. But before I proceed to the next chapter introducing and detailing the case study to which these logics are subsequently articulated in order to trace the post-political consequence of neoliberalisation, an important aspect of capitalist realism, I briefly turn to the more recent theoretical development of bio-financialisation. I do so to direct attention to the transformation in the conception of value which scholars of bio-financialisation point out. Of specific interest in this context is the conception of assetisation as a typically financial form of value creation.

Bio-financialisation and embodied value production

Since the 2008 financial crisis, there has been an increasing interest, not only in neoliberalism in general, but also in financialisation, and more specifically bio-financialisation. Financialisation is often conceived as a moment within neoliberalisation, akin to Mann's characterisation of it as "[t]he increased role of finance in overall economic activity and the increased proportion of profits that are realized via financial channels […]" (Mann, 2013, p. 155). The focus of those scholars interested specifically in *bio*-financialisation, however, is on the way in which financialisation not only modifies the behaviour of actors in the political economy, such as firms, but also more generally introduces new forms of rationality and a new indeterminate conception of value (cf. Bryan, Martin, Montgomerie, & Williams, 2012; French & Kneale, 2012; Jones, 2014, 2016; Lightfoot & Lilley, 2017; Lilley & Papadopoulos, 2014; Martin, 2013; Martin, Rafferty, & Bryan, 2008). Effectively bio-financialisation refers to

the penetration of the *bios*, that is every aspect of life, by finance which has profound implications not only for the economy but also for culture and subjectivity (French & Kneale, 2012; Lilley & Papadopoulos, 2014).

Of specific importance below is a series of transformations which some scholars of bio-finance and bio-capitalism direct attention to. The financialisation of the economy, not only transforms political economic entities, such as firms, into financial artefacts and introduces new means of value creation and management (Birch, 2017), it also expands the horizon of value production, thereby undermining – or outdating – an account of value as solely embodied in commodities (Lilley & Papadopoulos, 2014; Martin, 2013). As Birch argues, this generates new forms of value extraction, such as assetisation, which is the transformation of a property into a recurring stream of revenue (Birch, 2017). More generally, the conception of value produced is increasingly immanent and indeterminate (Lilley & Papadopoulos, 2014). In fact, some suggest that this financialised value is constituted only by valuation practices and that it follows a different set of demand logics than economic, embodied value (Birch, 2017). Similarly, the regime of value production is also transmuted, it becomes embodied whereas it used to be externalised – contained solely at the work place (Lilley & Papadopoulos, 2014).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the theoretical framework of this thesis. I started with capitalist realism to contextualise post-politics as one specific consequence of neoliberal reform (another more general consequence being the installation of the deflated mind-set or general attitude Fisher calls capitalist realism of course). Then I summarised the basic principles of discourse theory and offered an introduction to Glynos and Howarth's logics-

approach to discourse analysis. These highly abstract theoretical insights serve as guiding lights for the overall approach in this thesis. In order to the analyse the post-political discourse of contemporary politics in Aotearoa, I delineated Phelan's development of a set of discursive logics of neoliberalisation, which I apply in my discourse analysis of the 2014 election campaign below. I also introduced the study of bio-financialisation to expand on Phelan's logic of commodification specifically. In the next chapter I outline the 2014 election campaign, my case study, to which I apply Phelan's logics of neoliberalisation in the third chapter. Finally, in the fourth chapter I draw out the way in which the instantiations of Phelan's logics condition post-politics in Aotearoa.

Chapter 2: The 2014 general election campaign in Aotearoa

I now turn to my case study, the 2014 general election campaign in Aotearoa. As indicated above, I begin by summarising the election campaign. The dual purpose of this chapter is the introduction (1) of the general turn of events constituting the 2014 election campaign in Aotearoa and (2) of some interpretations of these events. More generally, this chapter provides a detailed, yet not exhaustive account of the context of the explanation(s) put forth in the following to chapters. I proceed as follows. First, I introduce the relevant parties and policies, then I outline the campaign events and their interpretation. Finally, I turn to the role of the media in the election campaign because the media plays an important role in perpetuating hegemonic discourse(s).

New Zealand has a proportional representation electoral system, called the mixed-member proportional (MMP) electoral system. Under MMP every voter has two votes, an electorate vote which is given to a candidate standing in the respective electorate and a party vote, which is given to one of the parties standing in the elections. While the electorate vote determines the representative of the respective electorate according to simple-majority, the party vote proportionally allocates the total number of representatives each party supplies to parliament (Arseneau & Roberts, 2015; Miller, 2015). At the 2014 general election, there

were 71 electorate seats[8] (64 general seats and seven Māori seats[9]) and 49 list seats[10] to be

filled (Levine & Roberts, 2015; Miller, 2015). There are two specific, electoral thresholds build

into MMP to prevent excessive proliferation of small, potentially extremist parties and to

balance diverse representation with the possibility of stable multi-party governing

arrangements, such as multi-party coalition government or single-party minority government

enabled by confidence and supply agreements with various other parties (Arseneau &

Roberts, 2015; Miller, 2015). In order to qualify for their share of seats in parliament, parties

must either gain more than 5% of the party vote or win one electorate contest (Arseneau &

Roberts, 2015; Miller, 2015).

There were 15 parties fielding party list candidates in the 2014 general election of which 7

were successful in having candidates elected to parliament (Arseneau & Roberts, 2015,

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[8] The number of electorates is based on consensus data and determined by the Representation Commission. "It begins its calculations by dividing the South Island population into sixteen electorates of approximately equal size (in 2013 there were 59,679 per electorate) (Representation Commission, 2013). The number of seats in the North Island (48) is based on the South Island quotient, a process that tends to result in the addition of one or two seats following each redistribution, especially in those parts of the country where population growth is greatest, such as in the upper North Island. To ensure that the size of parliament remains the same, any growth in the number of electorate seats results in a corresponding reduction in the total number of list seats." (Miller, 2015, p. 90)

[9] The seven Māori seats are a special feature of the electoral system in Aotearoa which was first introduced in 1867 and was held at four. Only since the 1990s has their number increased to reflect the size of the tangata whenua population who choose to enrolled on the separate Māori roll. The seven Māori electorates are (1.)Te Tai Tokerau covering Northland and parts of Auckland; (2.)Tāmaki Makaurau covering the majority of Auckland; (3.) Hauraki-Waikato covering the north-western North Island from Papakura to Hamilton including the Coromandel peninsula; (4.) Waiariki covering the Bay of Plenty, including Tauranga, Rotorua, and Whakatane as well as Taupo; (5.) Ikaroa-Rāwhiti covering the entire east cost of the North Island from Te Araroa north of Gisborne to the Wairarapa in the south, including Gisborne, Napier, Hastings and Masterton; (6.) Te Tai Hauāuru covering large parts of the western North Island such as King Country, Taranaki and the Manawatu-Wanganui as well as Paraparaumu of the Wellington region, including New Plymouth, Whanganui and Palmerston North; finally (7.) Te Tai Tonga covers the entire South Island as well as large parts of Wellington (Bargh, 2015; *Hauraki-Waikato Electorate Profile*, 2012; *Ikaroa-Rāwhiti Electorate Profile*, 2012; Miller, 2015; *Tāmaki Makaurau Electorate Profile*, 2012; *Te Tai Hauāuru Electorate Profile*, 2012; *Te Tai Tokerau Electorate Profile*, 2012; *Te Tai Tonga Electorate Profile*, 2012).

[10] This excludes additional list seats due to 'overhang' necessitated by some election outcomes. "An overhang is created when a party receives more electorate MPs than its entitlement based on its share of the party vote." (Miller, 2015, p. 74, footnote). "Electorate seats cannot be taken away from parties in 'overhang' situation like this. Instead, the size of parliament is temporarily increased." (Arseneau & Roberts, 2015, p. 278). In the 2014 election, United Future won an electorate seat but only 0.2% of the party vote, which under the Sainte-Laguë electoral formulate used in Aotearoa entitles them to no seats at all (Arseneau & Roberts, 2015; Levine & Roberts, 2015; Miller, 2015).

specifically table 5.1.1). I concentrate on those parties which either managed to gain at least

1 % of the party vote or at least one seat in parliament.[11] This leaves nine parties: the two

major parties, National and Labour; the minor parties, the Greens, New Zealand First,[12] and

the Māori Party; and the micro parties, ACT, United Future, the Conservatives, and

Internet/MANA (Aimer, 2015a, 2015b; Edwards, 2015; Ford, 2015; Godfery, 2015; James,

2015b; Joiner, 2015; Miller, 2015). Ideologically, National and Labour, the two oldest, former

mass-membership parties in Aotearoa, are usually considered to be competing for the centre

of the political spectrum – 'middle New Zealand' – making National a centre-right and Labour

a centre-left party (Aimer, 2015a; James, 2015b). In centrist orientation, they are joined by

NZFirst, the Māori Party, and United Future (in the commentary the only reason for this seems

to be each parties willingness to work with either one of the major parties), while the Greens

and Internet/MANA occupy a position to the left of Labour, and both the Conservatives and

ACT inhabit political space to the right of National (Edwards, 2015; Ford, 2015; Godfery, 2015;

Joiner, 2015; Miller, 2015).

Campaign policies

The ideological orientation, and especially the race to the centre, was also reflected in the

campaigns of the respective parties. National's campaign was focused on their achievements

in government during the previous two legislative periods – "[…] strong and stable leadership

[…]" and "[…] responsible economic management […]", and welfare reforms (National, 2014a,

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[11] Excluded are the Aotearoa Legalise Cannabis Party, Ban1080, the Civilian Party, Focus New Zealand, the New Zealand Democratic Party for Social Credit, and New Zealand Independent Coalition, together securing only 0.86 per cent of the vote. Furthermore, I chose the criteria for inclusion because neither ACT nor United Future managed to gain 1% of the party vote, nevertheless securing representation by winning an electorate contest each. In both cases this was due to "[…] the prime minister […] issuing explicit instructions well before the election to supports in the Ōhāriu and Epsom electorates to cast votes for United Future's Peter Dunne and ACT's David Seymour in preference to National Party candidates" (Higgs, 2015b, p. 324).
[12] Henceforth abbreviated NZFirst as the party itself commonly does (cf. NZFirst, 2014a, 2014b).

2014b). While there was an emphasis on protecting "[…] hard-won gains […]", National's programme equally set out further initiatives such as a 'business growth agenda' to increase both, productivity and competitiveness (National, 2014a). A number of (working-)family-oriented policies and targets, and some law and order aims were put forth too (National, 2014a, 2014b, 2014e, 2014f). Regarding fiscal responsibility and economic management the party's material cited a Treasury economy forecast predicting job growth, increased average wages and lower unemployment by 2018 to highlight their success in stabilising and strengthening the economy (National, 2014a).[13] The majority of National's policies were elaborated in little detail and framed as incremental adjustments rather than big reforms or transformations (Higgs, 2015b). Their family-oriented proposals emphasised the need to balance fiscal responsibility with the provision of services on which families depend, such as healthcare and education. In addition to their tinkering approach, National introduced its HomeStart package in August 2014 under pressure to address the decline in first home buyers due to spiralling housing prices (N. Smith, 2014).[14] Finally, as evidenced by their TV ad, there was a good deal of scaremongering about the potential coalition of forces involved in an alternative government on part of the governing party (Higgs, 2015b). In line with this scaremongering, National's slogans were 'keep the team that working' and 'working for New Zealand' (National, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2014d, 2014e, 2014f).

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[13] There are some curiosities in National's campaign material regarding job growth: while National claims that 83 000 jobs were created in 2013, they only campaign on the promise of at least 150 000 more job by 2018, which implies a drop in new jobs to an average of 30 000 new jobs per year, barely more than a third of the jobs created in 2013, in the five intervening years (cf. National 2014e). Furthermore, National's target of at least 150 000 new jobs by 2018, also sits well below the number forecasted by the Treasury's economic forecast quoted elsewhere in their campaign material (cf. National 2014a).

[14] In 2014 there were concerns about both, supply and affordability, of housing in Auckland with the median housing price in Auckland being NZ$625 000, in February that year, up 10% from a year earlier (Niall, 2014). On a side note, it seems the 'Auckland housing crisis' has, at the time of writing this in 2017, become much more generalised, having seen an increase of 10% in the median national house price over the last year, and a median housing price in Auckland sitting at around NZ$ 900 000 (Nichols, 2017)

The Labour Party campaigned under the slogan of 'vote positive', seeking to promote the vision of an Aotearoa "[…] where there are enough secure, well-paid jobs, where every family can afford a warm, dry home, and where every Kiwi kid gets the best start in life" (Labour 2014). Their campaign style contrasted with National's in that they offered policies in much greater detail and, moreover, "largely packaged [these] as significant and transformational" (Higgs, 2015b, p. 327). Even the format of Labour's campaign material points to this, Labour offering a whole booklet of a mini-manifesto compared to National's folded A3 sheet of bullet points (National, 2014a; Labour, 2014). A significant similarity, however, could be found in the family focus of their respective campaigns, as Labour also strongly emphasised the benefits to families deriving from their policy proposals, three of which – the extension of free GP visits to under 13 year-olds, and the increase of parental tax credits and parental leave – had effectively been undercut by National in the government's budget in May 2014 (Higgs, 2015b; Labour, 2014; National 2014a). Another central policy piece were economic reforms aimed at sustainable economic growth (Labour, 2014). These include the shift from a narrowly focused economy essentially based on property speculation and a few commodity exports to a 'high-value' as well as low-carbon economy based on a "diverse range of sophisticated, job rich exports" as the means to achieve sustained economic growth as well as their targeted unemployment rate of four per cent (Labour, 2014). Finally, Labour promoted the introduction of a capital gains tax in order to dampen the increases in housing prices due to property speculation and to finance the aforementioned economic reforms (Labour, 2014).

The Green Party's campaign concentrated in three main topics: (*1.*) a cleaner environment; (*2.*) a fairer society; and (*3.*) a smarter economy (Greens, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c; Levine, 2015). In terms of specific policy proposals, the party advanced the introduction of National Standards for water quality, state investment into free early childcare as well as afterschool

and holiday programmes in decile 1-4 schools, an increase of the minimum wage to $18 per hour over three years, $1billion investment into research and development activities to promote a sustainable economy, reinstatement of post-graduate student allowance and additional funding for tertiary institutions in the fields of engineering, mathematics, computer science, and the physical sciences (Greens, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2014d, 2014e). Their overall approach to policy was to present various proposals which were explicitly in line with the values put forth in the Green Party Charter (Ford, 2015). A further emphasis in the Green's campaign material was on their fiscal responsibility, advertising the fact that their policies had been reviewed by respected and independent economists who had certified both, a bigger surpluses and lower debt than projected under National's current policy mix (Greens, 2014a.). The Greens also campaigned on the three following fiscal policies: (*1.*) tax cuts for 97% of the population by establishing a threshold on income tax, which would exclude the first $2000 earned; (*2.*) investments of $3.8billion over three years to reverse National's cuts in health, education, and environmental protection; and (*3.*) a cut to the company tax rate, reducing it from 28% to 27% (Greens, 2014a).

As already suggested by the party's name, NZFirst campaigned on an economic-nationalist platform combined with some populist elements (Joiner, 2015; NZFirst, 2014a, 2014b). Their campaign materials emphasised the well-being and needs of New Zealanders, promoting various policies in line with the party's 15 'common sense' principles (NZFirst, 2014a, 2014b). A focal point was on a tightening of immigration legislation in favour of building skills and capacities locally to 'future-proof' Aotearoa (NZFirst, 2014a, 2014b). Furthermore, the party campaigned for the restriction of foreign ownership of, and access to, New Zealand assets, as well as against the privatisation of assets of national interest, such as power companies (Levine, 2015; NZFirst, 2014a). These proposals were combined with the promotion of

stronger law and order legislation; of smaller, more accountable government; of more direct democracy; and of the removal of GST from essential food items. Finally, NZFirst campaigned on the retention of the superannuation entitlement age. It is worth remarking that NZFirst was one of three parties explicitly appealing to common-sense in their campaign.

The Māori Party campaign in 2014, first and foremost, focused on its achievements as a partner of the National government, much in line with its general emphasis of partnership – 'being at the table' (Godfery, 2015; Māori Party, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2014d). As one candidate pamphlet read, the aim of the party was "[…] to represent […] not just in parliament – but in Government […]" (Māori Party, 2014a). Specific emphasis was placed on those provisions in the 2014 budget benefitting tangata whenua throughout the Māori Party campaign material, with a large magazine-like pamphlet focusing solely on these (Māori Party 2014b). In this context the establishment of *He Kai Kei Aku Ringa*, *Whānau Ora*, as well as various other fiscal commitments are named in various campaign materials (Māori Party, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2014d). Furthermore, the party promoted various policy initiatives such as the removal of GST from essential food items, the development of a *te reo Māori* revitalisation strategy, and modifications to the fishing quota system (Māori Party, 2014a, 2014c, 2014d).

In line with their neoliberal origins, ACT's campaign focused on avowedly neoliberal economic reforms as well as law and order, and socially liberal policies (ACT, 2014a, 2014b; Edwards, 2015). Furthermore, their campaign material drew attention to the party's status as John Key's preferred partner to work with in a new governing arrangement, stressing that "National plus ACT is a safe way to re-elect John Key as PM" (ACT, 2014a).[15] In terms of policy,

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[15] One reason for this stress of the great working relationship between ACT and National might be their 'cup of tea' deal detailed below (cf. n22 below).

ACT campaigned on the introduction of a flat income tax and a radical reduction of the company tax rate (ACT, 2014b). More generally, ACT promoted small government, getting rid of corporate welfare – arguably also all other sorts of welfare in favour of individual responsibility – and stronger law and order legislation extending the three strikes law to include burglaries (ACT, 2014b; also cf. Edwards, 2015).

The final party gaining representation in parliament, United Future, campaigned under the banner of common sense much like NZ First. However, in comparison to the latter, United Future did not heavily draw on the term 'common sense' in sloganeering, rather branding itself as "[…] a modern centre party […]" (United Future. 2014a.). Their campaign material boasted a number of (vague) initiatives to enhance both personal choice and responsibility. Specifically, United Future promoted the ability for parents to combine their income for tax purposes to leave them with more money for the family, and for more freedom of choice in regard to health, education and welfare services (United Future, 2014a). As well, "[…] a sustainable environment, and access to the great outdoors […]" didn't go unmentioned in their campaign material (United Future, 2014a). Finally, United Future campaigned the on the 'super-flexi' policy which would see superannuation, Aotearoa's universal, non-means tested pension scheme, become more flexible, giving people the opportunity to take a reduced rate of superannuation earlier than the then-current entitlement age or an increased rate if they choose to take it later than the then-current entitlement age ("Dunne should make super a bottom line," 2014; TV3, 2014b; TVNZ, 2014c).

The Conservative Party attempted to occupy much of the same political ground as NZFirst while pitching themselves as more honest and genuinely conservative than specifically

Winston Peters, the party leader of NZFirst.[16] However, with the anti-neoliberal nostalgia central to numerous NZFirst proposals absent from the Conservatives' policies and rhetoric,[17] the party is better understood as "[…] a right-wing vehicle for a disparate set of ideologies" (Edwards, 2015, p. 167). The Conservatives campaigned on six programme points: (1) "Say No to Drugs"; (2) the repeal of the anti-smacking bill[18]; (3) law and order legislation, including hard labour, and a one-law-for-all approach justified by the supposedly original vision of Te Tiriti o Waitangi; (4) the introduction of a flat tax with a threshold to keep the first $2000 earned tax free; (5) opposition to foreign ownership of assets – "Stop the Sell Out"; and (6) more direct democracy and smaller government (Conservatives, 2014a, 2014b; Levine, 2015)

Finally, Internet/MANA, the two parties campaigning together as an alliance with a sunset-clause,[19] aimed to "[…] strengthen the voice for change […]" (Internet/MANA, 2014a). Their campaign revolved around three themes: Manaakitanaga (sharing our wealth), Ngā Moemoeā (a future of hope), and Rangatiratanga (a free and independent nation) (Internet/MANA, 2014a; 2014b). Organised under these three headings were various policy proposal such as a programme to ensure food for children, free tertiary education, the introduction of taxes on financial transactions and wealth, the extension of the living wage to all paid work in the long run, increased investment into research and development activities, cheaper and faster internet connections as well as the use of 100 per cent renewable energy by 2025 (Internet/MANA, 2014a, 2014b).

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[16] In their portrayal of Peters position, the Conservative Party breeched advertising ethics regarding the way in which they presented Peters' view on alcohol reform ("Advert ruling against Conservatives," 2014).

[17] Most notably, the Conservatives appear to differ from NZFirst in that the former only opposes foreign ownership of assets, while the latter also opposes the privatisation of publicly owned assets.

[18] 'Anti-smacking bill' is the colloquial name of the Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act 2007, which removed 'reasonable force' as a legal defense in case in which parents or guardians are prosecuted for assaulting their child (Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act 2007)

[19] Their alliance was to be readdressed on the day after the election.

Chapter 2: The 2014 general election campaign in Aotearoa

Long term trends

The commentary on the 2014 election in Aotearoa identifies two relevant long-term trends impacting upon the election outcome. The first of these trends pertains to the two major parties. As Levine puts it, "John Key led his National Party into the 2014 election year in a comfortable position […]", not the least due to a stable lead in opinion polls over Labour (Levine, 2015, p. 30). Furthermore, numerous sources attribute some of this lead to the popularity, even celebrity status, of John Key (Higgs, 2015b; James, 2015a; Johansson, 2015; Levine, 2015). This contrasted sharply with the position the Labour Party found itself in, as it was hampered by persistent infighting and a 'vacuum in leadership' to use Johansson's expression (Higgs, 2015b; James, 2015a; Johansson, 2015; Levine, 2015; Levine & Roberts, 2015). David Cunliffe, selected as Labour leader in 2013, was the fourth Labour leader over the course of three legislative periods, having been preceded by Phil Goff and David Shearer since Helen Clark's Labour government had been voted out of office in 2008 (Aimer, 2015a; Johansson, 2015; Levine & Roberts, 2015). The newly adopted leadership selection process by which Cunliffe was selected, gave significant say to Labour Party members as well as affiliated unions in addition to the parliamentary caucus of the party. However, according to Johansson, Labour's "[…] leadership selection rules grossly violate the idea of 'one person, one vote', as affiliated unions have disproportionate influence when compared to either caucus or ordinary party members", resulting in the selection of David Cunliffe as party leader without the support of his parliamentary colleagues (Johansson, 2015, p. 91; also cf. Levine, 2015). While at the time of the leadership selection in 2013 the Labour Party had polled at about 37 per cent, closing the gap to Nation to only about 5 per cent, their polling had declined ever since increasing the gap to National's polling results into the double-digits by the time of the election date announcement in March 2014 (Higgs, 2015b)

The second long-term trend of concern were the positive economic conditions which prevailed until early 2014, as well as economic forecasts signalling sustained economic growth especially due to favourable export conditions for the first time since the summer droughts 2007-2008 and the 2008 global financial crisis (Higgs, 2015b; James, 2015a). While some of these positive economic conditions did not last until the September elections, the flow-on effects of their decline were yet to impact upon the wider economy at the election date (Higgs, 2015b). These conditions also lend support to National's claim of successful economic management and pre-empted the globally growing concerns with marketisation as economic policy framework to spill over into the 2014 election campaign (Higgs, 2015b; James, 2015a). Finally, the Christchurch rebuild in consequence of the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes also contributed significantly to economic growth (Higgs, 2015b; James, 2015a).

The election campaign

There has been a shift towards continuous campaigning in which the time immediately after an election is conceived as the time before the next election with political campaigning always going on, akin to a background noise accompanying day-to-day politics. The announcement of the election date on the 10th of March allowed for campaigning to move up a notch before going into full throttle after Writ Day for roughly four weeks before election day (Higgs, 2015b; Levine, 2015; Levine & Roberts, 2015).[20] In the remainder of this chapter I briefly survey the commentary on what the literature terms the 'long campaign', the period between the announcement of the election and Writ Day, and the 'short campaign', from Writ Day until election day, before turning to the media's role in the election campaign.

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[20] On March, the 10th, Prime Minister John Key announced the date for the election as September, the 20th (Higgs, 2015b; Levine, 2015).

Chapter 2: The 2014 general election campaign in Aotearoa

The long campaign

According to Johansson, "[…] the absence of competition, the bizarre campaign events, and the low turnout make 2014 a forgettable election" (Johansson, 2015, p. 103). Others also remark on the fact that the 2014 election was effectively a settled affair as early as April 2014 (Clifton, 2015; Higgs, 2015b; James, 2015a; Levine, 2015; Levine & Roberts, 2015). As subsequently revealed, it was in April 2014 that the Labour Party, and specifically Labour leader David Cunliffe, turned down an offer of the Green Party to campaign together as a future coalition government (Higgs, 2015b; James, 2015a; Johansson, 2015; Levine & Roberts, 2015). While the two parties campaigning together as the future coalition government would have given voters looking for an alternative government a clear option to place their votes, the rejection and subsequent ambiguities about what a Labour-led government would look like post-election instead created a void (James, 2015a) Consequently, the rejection of a joined campaign fermented the public image of the opposition as an unorganised and quarrelling bunch which the aforementioned National TV ad would conjure up once more (Higgs, 2015b; James, 2015a; Johansson, 2015; Levine, 2015). Furthermore, in light of the opinion polls at the time it was abundantly clear that any Labour-led government post-election would be reliant on Green Party support (Higgs, 2015b; James, 2015a). Thus, "[…] some six month before polling day, the election was over as an effective contest" (Johansson, 2015, p. 89). Instead, Labour entered a vicious circle of declining ratings in opinion polls and being abandoned by voters due to declining polling, the latter in turn re-enforcing the former trend (James, 2015a).

Although the election outcome might have been decided early, the campaign nevertheless was lacklustre. There were several media missteps by Labour leader David Cunliffe through

the whole year, leading online news outlet *stuff.co.nz* to ask its readers as early as mid-June to pick their favourite of as many as seven different gaffes (Higgs, 2015b; Levine, 2015). On May 1st National's Minister of Immigration Maurice Williamson resigned amid revelations that he had made a phone call to the police in the context of a domestic violence investigation against National Party donor, Donghua Liu (Higgs, 2015b). Furthermore, it was revealed that the National Party's 'Cabinet Club' might have granted access to MPs and Ministers in exchange for donations to the party (Levine, 2015). These events overshadowed National's 'safe' and even 'boring' budget released in May which prioritised the delivery of a surplus, no matter how insignificantly small, to be used for debt repayment "[…] – hardly a commitment calculated to cause hearts to beat faster, even if it could be considered a responsible one" (Levine, 2015, p. 34).

Johansson commends Green party co-leader Russell Norman's "[…] solid performance as unofficial 'leader' of the opposition, when Labour's spiralled into leadership instability and caucus disunity hampered its ability to competently perform that role […]" (Johansson, 2015, p. 93). Other than that, there is not much else said about the Green Party's performance before Writ Day. NZFirst leader Winston Peters appeared to have, first and foremost, been banking on becoming 'kingmaker', and willing to work with whomever would make the best offer, while remaining ambiguous in regard to his preferred governing arrangements (Higgs, 2015b; Levine, 2015). This, however, led to Peters' statements throughout the election year "[…] attracting something of the same puzzled scrutiny given in Cold war days to mystifying Kremlin pronouncements […]" (Levine, 2015, p. 42). Furthermore, there were the internal quarrels within the NZ First caucus due to two sitting MPs finding themselves lowly ranked on the party lists, thus having little chance of re-entering parliament post-election (Levine, 2015).

As Labour, ACT also had a new leader, Jamie Whyte, to replace former leader John Banks,[21] as well as a new electorate candidate, David Seymour, in the Epsom electorate which was previously held by Banks (Levine, 2015). As their 'cup of tea' deal with the National Party had been renewed, ACT was almost certain to return to parliament (Higgs, 2015b; Levine, 2015; Levine & Roberts, 2015).[22] However, their more ambitious aim of securing additional list MPs was undermined by no one else than the new leader of the party himself. Having been preferred over former ACT MP John Boscawen as post-fresh start ACT leader, Jamie Whyte went on to publicly discuss the philosophical arguments against the illegality of incest in a February interview which "[…] immediately depleted an already limited reservoir of credibility" (Levine & Roberts, 2015, p. 338). Thus, there might well be some credibility to the *Dominion Post* editorial's claim that ACT was but 'a joke party' which repeatedly made it into parliament solely due to the Epsom deal with National (Dominion Post, 2014 in Levine, 2015, p. 47).

Matters were similar for United Future. United Future had also been partner to 'cup of tea' deals with National in the past and continued this tradition (Higgs, 2015b; Levine & Roberts, 2015). However, the major issues the party faced were otherwise. Precisely their general invisibility on a national scale and their perceived low credibility and consequent poor polling were United Future's main campaign obstacles. Apart from United Future leader Peter

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[21] John Banks, a former National MP and major of Auckland, had been recruited out of retirement in 2011 to lead ACT. However, he became embroiled in a scandal, was made to resign from a ministerial post in 2013 and from parliament in June 2014. Subsequently he was found guilty of an electoral offence relating to campaign donations and in August 2014 sentenced to both, two months of home detention and 100 hours of community service. In a retrial in May 2015 he was exonerated, but by that time it was too late to save his political career (Levine, 2015; Levine & Roberts, 2015)

[22] In 2008 and 2011 John Key had met with the respective ACT leaders (John Banks in 2011 and Rodney Hide in 2008) at the time for a 'cup of tea' to implicitly signal his preference of ACT as a coalition partner and to motivate the Epsom electorate National supporters to cast their electorate vote for the respective ACT candidate rather than the National one to secure ACT's presence in parliament (Higgs, 2015b; James, 2015a; Levine, 2015; Levine & Roberts, 2015). In 2014 this deal was continued. However, due to the potential unpopularity of such deal, it was this time made explicit in a letter to supports (Higgs, 2015b; Levine, 2015)

Dunne's "[…] difficulties during the 2011-14 term, when he briefly lost his ministerial position due to an unwillingness to cooperate fully with an inquiry into a leak of materials […]" little attention was given to United Future (Levine, 2015, p. 47). As a party United Future had also failed to maintain 500 paid-up party members which led to it being briefly deregistered as a political party by the Electoral Commission during the legislative term ending in 2014 (Levine, 2015). Their abysmal polling on Election Day was foreshadowed throughout the election year.

The Māori Party also went through the process of change with both, the party's founder and co-leader, Turiana Turia, and co-leader Pita Sharples, retiring from parliament in 2014. In their stead, Te Ururoa Flavell took over the Māori Party leadership. This change in leadership proved to more of the same in terms of stance, with the new leader emphasising the estrangement between the Māori Party and the Labour Party , and estrangement present since the founding of the party after Turia defected from Labour over the Foreshore and Seabed legislation in 2004 (James, 2015a; Levine, 2015). While this estrangement combined with the focus on 'being at the table' went a long way to justify the confidence and supply agreements with National in the past, the literature directs attention to a second estrangement, that between the Māori Party and the Māori electorate – "[…] only 55 per cent of Māori opted for the Māori electorate rolls after the 2013 census compared with 58 per cent in 2006 […] [which] may reflect disenchantment with the Māori Party […]" (James, 2015a, p. 82). This might especially be the case, because the low National party votes in the Māori electorates create the appearance that the Māori Party is effectively delivering Labour or left-leaning electorates to the National Party (James, 2015a).

Then there were the two parties on either end of the political spectrum, Internet/MANA and the Conservatives. The Internet Party was founded in 2014 by German file-sharing billionaire

Kim Dotcom and some speculated the party was a political means or vehicle for Dotcom to avoid an impending extradition trial. The MANA Movement had been around since 2011 and its leader and founder, Hone Harawira, held the electorate seat of Te Tai Tokerau (Edwards, 2015; Higgs, 2015b; Levine, 2015) The campaign alliance agreement between these two parties which established a joint list, was forged first and foremost to use Harawira's Te Tai Tokerau seat to 'coat tail'[23] list MPs into parliament (Higgs, 2015b). The Internet/MANA coalition was announced in May 2014 (Higgs, 2015b; Levine & Roberts, 2015).

On the other side of the political spectrum, the Conservatives were busy trying to improve on their 2.7 per cent showing at the 2011 election (Levine & Roberts, 2015). As outlined above, a major feature of the Conservatives campaign was their attempt to discredit Winston Peters and portray themselves as the truly conservative party up for election (cf. above). However, while Peters was a veteran of Aotearoa politics having been in and out of parliament since 1978, the Conservatives' leader Colin Craig was a relative newcomer to politics, and one who publicly doubted the moon landing – a fact which did not gain him much credibility (Higgs, 2015b; Levine, 2015; Levine & Roberts, 2015).

Dirty Politics

In addition to these lacklustre events throughout the year, the publication of *Dirty Politics: How attack politics is poisoning New Zealand's political environment* a mere month before polling day added spice to the election campaign (Hager, 2014). In the book, investigative journalist Nicky Hager documents various smear campaigns by *Whale Oil* blogger Cameron Slater and other bloggers of the 'right-wing' political persuasion (Hager, 2014). On the basis

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[23] 'Coat-tailing' is the colloquial name of one method of circumventing the 5 per cent threshold by securing an electorate seat in order to be eligible to convert a party vote of under 5 per cent into list seats in parliament (Higgs, 2015b).

of hacked emails and Facebook conversations provided to Hager by hacker Rawshark, the coordination of some of these smear campaigns by the National Party as well as by business interests is illustrated (Hager, 2014). Specifically, the hacked materials, some which were subsequently released to the public through the Twitter account *@WhaleDump*, implicated Jason Ede, a staffer at the Prime Minister's Office and former National Party employee, and Justice Minister Judith Collins (Hager, 2014; Higgs, 2015a, 2015b; McMillan, 2015). While the former had, according to Hager, colluded with Slater in the exploitation of a security gap on the Labour Party website, and in the embarrassing of Phil Goff over a secret intelligence briefing both during the 2011 election campaign, Collins had allegedly cooperated with Slater in a smear campaign against the former head of the Serious Fraud Office, Adam Feely (Hager, 2014).

As Higgs puts it, "[u]pon publication the political ramifications of *Dirty Politics* for the upcoming election were immediately evident" (Higgs, 2015b, p. 328). The publication of Hager's book, but also the subsequent leaking of the emails and Facebook conversation via *@WhaleDump*, was a source of irritation for the National Party immediately prior to their campaign launch (Higgs, 2015a, 2015b; Levine & Roberts, 2015). Prime Minister John Key's initial response rejected the claims contained in *Dirty Politics* as "[…] left-wing smear campaign […]", nothing but "[…] selective information […]" assembled by a "[…] screaming left-wing conspiracy theorist […]" (Key in 3News, 2014a; also cf. Higgs, 2015b; Johansson, 2015).

However, while the allegations of *Dirty Politics* might have been expected to significantly disadvantage Key and the National Party in the upcoming election, this did not turn out to be the case. "Voters told focus group pollsters they didn't understand the implications of the

Hager assertions and their relevance to the election and few deserted National on that score",

as James points out with explanatory recourse to glorifying theorising about John Key being

a 'macro-personality' (James, 2015a, p. 77). There were some repercussions of the book's

release, nevertheless, as Judith Collins tendered her resignation as Minister of Justice after

the Prime Minister's Office obtained an incriminating email (Higgs, 2015b).[24] After Collins'

resignation on the 30th of August, the initial decline in National's polling as a result of *Dirty*

Politics stopped and John Key was no longer willing to address media questions on the topic,

instead 'stonewalling' them (Higgs, 2015b; Johansson, 2015)

The Short Campaign

As a further consequence of *Dirty Politics*, "National sought to dispel the atmosphere of sleaze

and scandal" (Levine & Roberts, 2015, p. 335). Their main means to achieve this was

emphasising their two campaign themes of "[…] strong and stable leadership […]" and '[…]

responsible economic management […]" (National. 2014b). As Johansson puts it, "[…] if only

for the briefest of moments, Key became a champion for policy-focused elections"

(Johansson, 2015, p. 95). In addition to this emphasis, Prime Minister and party leader John

Key was another focal point of National's campaign which involved meticulously planned

public appearances to keep the risk of getting the party's prime asset caught out at a

minimum (Miller, 2015). To further cash in on his image Key self-consciously adopted a 'selfie'

strategy on the campaign trail: he would commonly let voters take selfies with himself in

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[24] This was not the first time Collins' actions had reflected negatively on the government as it had come to light in March 2014 that while on a taxpayer funded trip to China, she also had had dinner with Chinese border officials and bosses of Oravida, a milk exporting company on the broad of which her husband was sitting (Higgs, 2015b; Levine, 2015) As opinion polls had suggested that she should have resigned over the earlier incident, Levine reckons her repeated negative publicity made her resignation after her second failing 'inevitable' (Levine, 2015, p. 35, n5). Seemingly, all this controversy has not harmed Collins' political career, however, as she was reelected by majority in both 2014 and 2017 in her electorate, and secured a cabinet position after 2014.

order for these photos to then spread on social media and subsequently be picked up by traditional media (Higgs, 2015a; Johansson, 2015).

The policy focus of the National Party was, however, undermined by a number of musical disruptions, such as the publication of two songs ('Kill the PM' and 'Planet Key') both of which made fun of John Key and his politics, portraying him as an obscenely wealthy and greedy individual and his politics as benefiting only those who are wealthy like him (@Peace, 2014; Levine, 2015; Watson, 2014). Moreover, just 4 days before polling day, proceedings were filed at the High Court for breach of copyright as the National TV ads seemed to be using Eminem's 2002 Grammy Award winning song 'Lose Yourself' (Levine, 2015).[25]

Labour, on the other hand, was struggling to overcome its poor performance during the first half of the year. The chosen campaign slogan, 'vote positive', and the public perceptions of the Labour Party were almost diametrically opposite each other and the party's general conduct during the campaign did not help overcome that either (Higgs, 2015b; Levine, 2015; Levine & Roberts, 2015). The various gaffes of David Cunliffe as well as other Labour candidates meant that Labour continued to be vulnerable to negative publicity. Specifically, Labour's Selwyn and Rangitata candidates raised questions concerning the ability of the party to recruit suitable candidates as "attracting media attention for all the wrong reasons – erratic personal behaviour, awkward comments, retrograde views – strengthened impressions that the Labour team lacked discipline, character and competence" (Levine, 2015, p. 39).

A major campaign feature were the televised leaders' debates (cf. Table 1; Higgs, 2015b; Johansson, 2015; Levine, 2015). Leading up to the 2014 election there were four such debates

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[25] National was found guilty of breaching copyright by the Wellington High Court in October 2017 and ordered to pay damages of NZ$ 600,000 plus interest to copyright holders (Cook, 2017).

between the prime minister and the leader of the opposition (aspiring prime minister), three of which were beamed onto the audiences' screens by TVNZ and TV3, and a further one which was live-streamed by Fairfax owned online news outlet *stuff.co.nz* (Higgs, 2015b; Stuff.co.nz, 2014; TV3, 2014a; TVNZ, 2014a, 2014b). In addition, there were two debates between the minor party leaders, one produced by TVNZ and a second one at the outset of the official campaign as part of TV3's *The Nation* programme (Higgs, 2015b; Kean, 2015; TV3, 2014b; TVNZ, 2014c). However, even before the latter, the earliest of all the debates, there was controversy already: TV3 had excluded Colin Craig, the leader of the Conservative Party, from their non-primetime debate, although he was polling higher than a number of parties whose leaders had been invited (Higgs, 2015b; Kean, 2015). In consequence of a High Court decision, he, nevertheless, got to take part in the debate alongside the other minor party leaders (Kean, 2015).

Date	Channel/Outlet	Time	Length	Participants	Reference
10/08/2014	TV3	9:30am	60mins[26]	Colin Craig, Jamie Whyte, Hone Harawira, Metiria Turei, Winston Peters, Te Ururoa Flavell and Peter Dunne	(TV3, 2014b)
28/08/2014	TVNZ	7pm	60mins	John Key and David Cunliffe	(TVNZ, 2014b)
02/09/2014	Stuff.co.nz	7pm	120mins[27]	John Key and David Cunliffe	(Stuff.co.nz, 2014)
05/09/2014	TVNZ	7pm	90mins	Colin Craig, Jamie Whyte, Hone Harawira, Russell Norman, Winston Peters, Te Ururoa Flavell, Peter Dunne and Brendon Horan[28]	(TVNZ, 2014c)
10/09/2014	TV3	8:40pm	65mins	John Key and David Cunliffe	(TV3, 2014a)

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[26] This included an analysis of the debate in the later part of the show.
[27] including a 15-minute break
[28] Horan came into parliament as a NZ First MP and then resigned from the party during the 2011-14 legislative term, while still retaining his seat the Beehive. Before the 2014 election he founded the New Zealand Independent Coalitions. (Edwards, 2015; Levine, 2015, p. 43, n12)

| 17/09/2014 | TVNZ | 7pm | 30mins | John Key and David Cunliffe | (TVNZ, 2014a) |

Table 1: 2014 televised leaders debates in chronological order

In light of the general campaign dynamics, it may not come as a surprise that Labour failed to improve in the polls even after David Cunliffe was widely judged to have outperformed John Key in the leaders' debates, "[…] unequivocally so in the first debate, and by smaller margins in the subsequent ones […]" (Johansson, 2015, p. 91; also cf. Levine, 2015).[29] Instead, after Cunliffe 'won' the first debate, Labour's polls reached a new low the week after that debate (Higgs, 2015b). Furthermore, the Labour leader "[…] appeared focused on winning the debate[s] in a technical sense, rather than utilising the events as opportunities to sell himself and his message to viewers" (Higgs, 2015b). While generally both debaters frequently talk/yelled over the other, Cunliffe's public image appears to have taken more damage from this. The Labour leader's schoolmaster-esque tone, coming more to the fore in the last two debates might have significantly undermined his appeal to voters (Stuff.co.nz, 2014; TV3, 2014a; TVNZ, 2014a, 2014b).

In comparison with the major party leaders' debates, the two debates involving the minor parties were somewhat more civilized with less interruptions and talking over one another (TV3, 2014b; TVNZ, 2014c). In these, the Green Party co-leaders attempted to demonstrate the Green's expertise in areas outside their traditional focus on environmental conservation and to establish an aura of professionalism (TV3, 2014b; TVNZ, 2014c). The same aim might have also been on the Green Party's mind when they called for an independent audit of Labour's campaign promises, which in the end only further undermined the perception of the

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[29] There are some discrepancies concerning this judgement, vividly demonstrated by the fact, that some academic literature suggests Cunliffe did better in the debates, whereas the text messaging poll from the first debate found that the audience was more impressed by John Key on the night (Higgs, 2015b; Johansson, 2015; TVNZ, 2014b)

Green Party and Labour being able to form an alternative government if the election outcome would allow them to do so (James, 2015a).

NZFirst also made headline during the short campaign, when Peters' comment 'two Wongs don't make a white' at the party's campaign launch was widely taken to be out of step with the multiculturalism of contemporary Aotearoa (Levine, 2015). The Race Relations Commissioner Dame Susan Devoy judged the comment to be "[…] outdated rhetoric […]", its surfacing on the campaign trail "[…] disappointing and shameful […]" (Devoy, 2014 in Levine, 2015, p. 43). Furthermore, Peters got physical in a dispute with a heckler in Hamilton, using his forearm to prevent the man from reaching the microphone (Levine, 2015).

As for NZFirst main competitor for the 'populist vote', the Conservatives were on the back-foot due to not having secured a 'cup of tea' type deal with National. Instead, party leader Colin Craig appeared set to litigate his way into parliament. First there was the High Court injunction ensuring his presence on the minor party leaders' debate of *The Nation* (cf. above), then the Conservatives secured an increase in allocated broadcast time in consequence of judicial review proceedings against the Electoral Commission (Higgs, 2015b; Levine, 2015; Levine & Roberts, 2015). Finally, however, it all came undone when two days before polling day Craig's press-secretary Rachel MacGregor resigned, remarking that the Conservatives' leader was 'a manipulative man' (MacGregor inLevine, 2015, p. 44).[30]

While the Māori Party and United Future managed to avoid any sort of scandal, with the former persisting in its divergence from its Labour Party origins, and the latter simply in a mostly unnoticed political existence, ACT and Internet/MANA contributed their share of

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[30] It was subsequently revealed that MacGregor resigned due to sexual harassment from Craig. The whole incident resulted in numerous court-cases, especially defamation lawsuits left, right, and center (Dennett, 2016; Leask, 2016)

ruckus events to the campaign. While ACT's campaign launch in September had no noticeable effects, Jamie Whyte's speech a month earlier, which compared Māori to the pre-revolutionary French aristocracy in terms of holding unjustified legal privileges prompted at least one significant response. For it was in reaction to this speech that ACT's Dunedin North electorate candidate Guy McCallum resigned from both his candidacy and from the party's board (Levine, 2015). Also in August, Whyte suggested that the amount of people cycling in Aotearoa could be doubled if only the law which requires cyclists to wear a helmet would be abolished (Levine, 2015). And finally, in September ACT announced their proposal to withdraw Aotearoa's bid for a seat on the UN Security Council "[…] because the UN was an organisation that allowed 'terrorist states' to tell New Zealand what to do, and Security Council membership would bring New Zealand enemies due to the votes and decisions […]" involved (Levine, 2015, p. 47).

Finally, turning to the Internet/MANA campaign, this was undermined by "[a] succession of extraordinarily inept events during the campaign […]" (Levine, 2015, p. 48). First of all, the coalition had to fight the general public perception that it was but a political vehicle of Kim Dotcom to avoid his extradition to the United States. The abuse hurled at the media at Internet/MANA's campaign launch by the party's press secretary and former Alliance MP (1996-99) Pam Corkery did not contribute to Internet/MANA achieving the sort of respectability that would displace this perception (Levine, 2015, p. 48, n19). And neither did the video which showed Dotcom at a party event with the party's supporters F-bombing John Key,[31] as Edwards put it on *The Nation* (Levine, 2015; TV3, 2014b). However, while commentators frequently document as well as subscribe to the view that Internet/MANA's

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[31] cf. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3NpLjjPlXk

campaign was haphazard, inappropriate and harmful (a view also widely shared in the media according to these commentators), there might be more to this (James, 2015a; Levine, 2015; Levine & Roberts, 2015). According to Edwards, especially younger voters appeared to be unfazed by expletive-laden language, or by Metiria Turei's gestures shutting down Colin Craig while debating (Edwards in TV3, 2014b). In addition to these issues of public relations, the leaking of expletive-laden internal communications regarding vastly different views on marijuana legislation between the Internet Party leader, Laila Harré, and the MANA leader, Hone Harawira, evidenced the fragility of their 'strategic alliance' (Levine, 2015).

The major event of the Internet/MANA campaign was the 'Moment of Truth', a "[…] suspense-filled media extravaganza […]" in the Auckland Town Hall on September 15th to top off the(ir) lacklustre campaign (Levine, 2015, p. 49). [32] The event was "[…] foreshadowed many month prior to the election" and promoted as the occasion on which Kim Dotcom with the support from Pulitzer Prize winning American journalist Glenn Greenwald, Dotcom's lawyer Bob Armstrong, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, and NSA whistle-blower Edward Snowden was going to present definite evidence that John Key was unfit for office (Higgs, 2015b, p. 329; also cf. James, 2015a; Levine, 2015). The event was preceded by the publication of an email to Aotearoa's media which was supposed to show the collusion between John Key and foreign, specifically American, interests over the extradition of Dotcom to the US (Higgs, 2015b). However, "[p]rior to the 'moment of truth', the email was dismissed as fake and the prime minister rebutted the evidence provided by Greenwald by describing him as 'Dotcom's henchman'" (Higgs, 2015b, p. 329). The evidence provided by the other panellists, who were

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[32] A video of the whole event can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pbps1EwAW-0
There's also a transcript of the event available online:
https://ia802304.us.archive.org/13/items/TranscriptMomentOfTruthAucklandNZ20140915GreenwaldSnowde
nAssangeAmsterdam/Transcript_MomentOfTruth-AucklandNZ_2014-09-15_Greenwald-Snowden-Assange-
Amsterdam.pdf

taking part in the event via videoconferencing was similarly dismissed and the event ended up harming Labour due to the potential of having to work with Internet/MANA post-election the most, whereas National emerged strengthened in the polls after the event (Higgs, 2015b; James, 2015a; Levine, 2015).

The media in the election campaign

Modern politics is a highly mediatised affair as various forms of news outlets, such as newspapers and television news, mediate between political elites and the public at large (Rudd, 2013). The 2014 general election was no exception to this. Hence, in this section I specifically draw into focus the media coverage of the campaign. To start, I make observations pertaining to the state of the media of Aotearoa, in 2014, before proceeding to the media's handling of the 2014 election.

Aotearoa's mediascape

As Richardson, Murchison and Rudd point out, Aotearoa's media-scape consists of a number of more or less perfect duopolies in different domains (Richardson, Murchison, & Rudd, 2015). In the print media, two Australian media companies, *Fairfax* and *APN News and Media/NZME*[33], pretty much dominate the market, with the former owning the second and third biggest newspapers, Wellington's *Dominion Post* and Christchurch's *The Press*, as well as the online news outlet *stuff.co.nz* , and the latter owning Aotearoa's biggest newspaper and its online news outlet, Auckland's *The New Zealand Herald* (Myllylahti, 2014). Both of these media firms are foreign owned. *APN*'s substantial shareholders in 2014 were Irish media corporation INM and Irish telecom billionaire Denis O'Brien, whereas Fairfax's largest

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[33] *APN* and *NZME* which is short for *New Zealand Media and Entertainment* have since 2014 demerged with *NZME* stocks being listed separately in both the New Zealand stock market and the Australian stock market (Myllylahti, 2016)

shareholder was mining billionaire Gina Rinehart (Myllylahti, 2014). In addition to these two companies there's also *Allied Press*, which owns Dunedin's *The Otago Daily Times* (*ODT*), the largest New Zealand owned newspaper in the country. However, in terms of market share, the *ODT* remains marginal (Myllylahti, 2014).

A similar trend towards ownership concentration and duopoly was visible in the commercial radio market, especially so after *APN* acquired *The Radio Network* (*TRN*) from its American joint venture partner *Clear Channel* in 2014 (Myllylahti, 2014). The other major player in the commercial radio market is *MediaWorks*, a media company owned by five financial firms with its largest shareholder in 2014 being private equity fund, *Oaktree Capital*, holding a total of 43 per cent, in consequence of *MediaWorks*' 2013 receivership (Myllylahti, 2014).[34] In terms of market share, the commercial radio market was divided almost equally, with *MediaWorks* controlling 51 per cent, while *TRN* and subsequently *APN* secured the remaining 49 per cent (Myllylahti, 2014). In addition to these two players controlling commercial radio, Aotearoa's radio waves also feature the countries only true public service broadcaster, *Radio New Zealand* (*RNZ*) (Myllylahti, 2014). The most obvious contrast between *APN* and *MediaWorks* on the one hand, and *RNZ* on the others is that the latter is publicly funded in accordance with the Radio New Zealand Act 1995, although its funding had been frozen in 2008.[35]

Finally, in the television sector a similar picture emerges. In 2014 *TVNZ* and *MediaWorks* were both broadcasting via *Freeview*, Aotearoa's free-to-air television (Myllylahti, 2014). However,

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[34] In 2013, *MediaWorks* was put into receivership due to being unable to serve its debts. Prior to receivership, consequent of accumulating debts of NZ$797 million against assets of NZ$329 million, *MediaWorks* was owned by Australian private equity firm *Ironbridge Capital*. *MediaWorks* assets were then sold to the newly established *MediaWorks* holding company, wiping out NZ$600 million worth of debt in the process of receivership, with the new holding company owned 100 per cent by banks and financial institutions (Myllylahti, 2014)

[35] The government's Budget of 2017 subsequently ended the *RNZ* funding freeze (Pullar-Strecker, 2017)

in addition to these two, there was (and still is) a third major player in the television market of Aotearoa, *SkyTV*, which only offers pay-tv subscriptions (Myllylahti, 2014). *TVNZ* is state-owned, however, 95 per cent of its funding originate from advertising (Myllylahti, 2014). Furthermore, in contrast with the previously discussed Crown Entity, *RNZ*, *TVNZ* has not had a public broadcasting function since its charter was abolished in 2011 (Myllylahti, 2014; Richardson et al., 2015). Since then, *TVNZ*'s sole function is the generation of dividend for the Crown (Myllylahti, 2014). As for *SkyTV*, it used to be owned by Rupert Murdoch's *News Limited*, which had sold its shares in *SkyTV* in 2013. "In 2014, *SkyTV*'s 20 largest shareholders were financial institutions", holding a combined share of 84 per cent (Myllylahti, 2014, p. 13, *my italics*). In addition to these three companies, *Māori Television* also operates in the television market, the free-to-air segment specifically. The broadcaster is funded by the government as well as by Te Mangai Paho, the Crown-owned Māori Broadcasting Funding Agency, and provided with the specific mandate to revitalise *te reo Māori* (Myllylahti, 2014). There are a number of other media companies operating in Aotearoa as well, but they are not covered in this survey precisely because they are not news outlets *per se*. Some of these companies offer special interest TV channels, such as Choice TV, while others publish monthly or weekly magazines, such as *Bauer NZ*, the New Zealand arm of family-owned German media corporation *Bauer* (Myllylahti, 2014).

By 2014 significant changes to the media-scape of Aotearoa were becoming visible. "Digitalisation and the internet have affected news media audiences, as is exemplified by the increasing demand for online video" (Myllylahti, 2014, p. 28). All major media companies operating in Aotearoa also offered online presences, for instance news-websites and on-

demand streaming options (Myllylahti, 2014).[36] However, these traditional media companies found themselves in a growing but also fiercely competitive market segment. Especially "[t]elecommunication companies and internet service providers emerged as challengers to traditional broadcasting corporations", with *Spark* (former *Telecom NZ*) and *Vodafone NZ* becoming more involved in online broadcasting (Myllylahti, 2014). Finally, pertaining to news journalism more narrowly, there had been an increasing prominence of blog-based citizen journalism throughout the early 2010s, a fact also illustrated by Hager's *Dirty Politics* (Hager, 2014; Myllylahti, 2013, 2014).

The state of the media in Aotearoa in 2014 was evaluated critically in regard to diversity (Myllylahti, 2014). Because the vast majority of news outlets were (and remain) commercial in their organisation, with an increasing number also financialised – owned by financial institutions or actors – there were concerns about the media "[…] becoming more profit focused as their financial shareholders exerted influence" which might undermine values associated with public service journalism (Myllylahti, 2014, p. 43). Specifically at stake is the mediator role described in the opening of this section, as the majority of the population get their political information from traditional news media (Boyd & Bahador, 2015; Rudd, 2013). In 2014, the leading news medium was television, followed by newspapers (half the audience size of TV), the internet and finally radio (Boyd & Bahador, 2015).

The media coverage of the 2014 election campaign

The most relevant trends in the media coverage of the 2014 election campaign are summarised by Boyd and Bahador as follows:

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[36] *TVNZ* and *MediaWorks* had added online on-demand services, *TVNZ ONDEMAND* and *3NOW* respectively, to their broadcasting activities by 2014, while *RNZ* announced a major shift towards a more extensive, multi-media online presence in 2014 (Myllylahti, 2014).

> Media coverage of New Zealand election campaigns appears to be going through the same transformation that has been observed in the mature democracies of North America and Europe, with heightened coverage of gaffes and scandals, increased negativity, and a decrease in the coverage of policy (Boyd & Bahador, 2015, p. 160).

To start with, small parties received more attention than their polling on election day would suggest, while bigger parties got less attention than their election results would indicate (Boyd & Bahador, 2015). The exception to this trend was the Green Party, which received just under 6 per cent of the coverage but almost 11 per cent of the vote (Boyd & Bahador, 2015). Furthermore, except for John Key, Winston Peters and Colin Craig, party leaders got less coverage than their respective parties, with leadership teams (co-leaders) getting the least coverage (Boyd & Bahador, 2015).

The tone of the election campaign coverage was substantially negative in all major news outlets in Aotearoa, with the coverage of the two major parties much more polarised than the coverage of all 7 other parties, which might suggests that these two parties attracted more scrutiny due to being 'large targets' as either one of them was expected lead the newly elected government (Boyd & Bahador, 2015).[37] The coverage of party leaders was overall more negative or less positive than the coverage of the respective party and the negativity in coverage also differed according to story genre (Boyd & Bahador, 2015). Analyses, such as opinion pieces, editorials, or piece-to-cam on TV, were more negative than news stories, which are supposed to adhere to journalistic standards more closely than analyses. These analytical stories were also biased against the party political left, while not biased towards the right (Boyd & Bahador, 2015).

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[37] Here Luke 12:48 (or as it is more commonly know these days, Uncle Ben's 'With great power comes great responsibility' from the first Spider Man movie) strikes again.

The overwhelming majority, roughly two-thirds of all coverage, was focused on non-policy issues, with the 'general nature of the campaign', accounting for over 17 per cent of all coverage (Boyd & Bahador, 2015). The top 4 issues covered in mainstream media reporting on the election campaign were all non-policy issues and the most covered policy issue, taxation, accounted for a mere 7 per cent of all coverage (Boyd & Bahador, 2015). Even when the coverage inspected was divided into the four weeks of the official campaign period from Writ Day (20th of August) to election eve (19th of September), there was no week in which the policy coverage came close to 50 per cent of total coverage (Boyd & Bahador, 2015).[38]

In regards to different media formats, television news programs contained less policy coverage than the election coverage of the main New Zealand newspapers (Boyd & Bahador, 2015). Here, *The New Zealand Herald* stood out as the news outlet with the most election coverage in general, accounting for more than one-third of all Units of Analysis in Boyd and Bahador's study, as well as the highest percentage of policy coverage, amounting to just over 42 per cent of all its coverage (Boyd & Bahador, 2015). In general, the findings pertaining to the media coverage of the 2014 election campaign fit in well with other research into media coverage of previous elections in Aotearoa, as well as with overseas trends (Boyd & Bahador, 2015). Importantly, both negativity and non-policy coverage increased in 2014 when compared to the 2008 election in Aotearoa (Boyd & Bahador, 2015).

The media and Dirty Politics

In addition to the issues surrounding the National Party's 'dirty' campaign tricks, Hager's *Dirty Politics* also problematized the ethical standards (or lack thereof) in citizen journalism and the

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[38] This dominance of non-policy issues in election campaign coverage in 2014 remained, even if the coverage of the fallout resulting from *Dirty Politics* was excluded (Boyd & Bahador, 2015)

relationship between this novel form of journalism and traditional news media (Hager, 2014; Higgs, 2015a; McMillan, 2015). This leads McMillan to argue "[t]he 2014 election campaign told us perhaps as much about the media in New Zealand as the media told us about the campaign" (McMillan, 2015, p. 235).

Besides the documentation of the 'new kind of attack politics' employed by the National party, Hager also draws attention to its implications for the mainstream media, and journalists at the forefront of it (Hager, 2014; McMillan, 2015). After all, the mainstream media picked up and perpetuated stories originating from Slater's and others' blogs, thus exposing them to much greater publicity than they would have otherwise enjoyed (Hager, 2014; McMillan, 2015) Moreover, by passing through the mainstream media, the supposed 'gate-keeper' of public discourse, the kind of smear stories originated by Slater and others became legitimised (McMillan, 2015). In Hager's account of it, there's a relation between the complicity of journalists in National's public relations scheme and the increased commercialisation of media organisations (Hager, 2014). The understaffing and under-resourcing of newsrooms, and the persistent restructuring of media organisation makes news organisations vulnerable to the kind of attack politics Hager describes (Hager, 2014; McMillan, 2015; Richardson et al., 2015; also cf. Clifton, 2015; Myllylahti, 2014). In addition, many political communications advisers – spin doctors – are well acquainted with newsroom needs, and often have journalistic experience themselves. They are, hence, able to exploit the news organisations' vulnerabilities by provide journalists pre-packaged information conforming to the journalistic needs and news values (Edwards, 2013; Richardson et al., 2015). As Hager discloses, Cameron Slater regularly passed information on to reporters from *The New Zealand Herald* and *The New Zealand Business Review* (Hager, 2014). According to the hacked online communications of Slater, both reports readily accepted information from Slater, in consequence adopting

Slater and Co.'s framing of issues wholesale, and supplied the blogger with information inappropriate for their media outlets (McMillan, 2015).

The journalistic responses to these claims "[…] ranged from outright denial to rueful reflectiveness, with some cynical 'tell us something we don't know' in between" (McMillan, 2015, p. 225). Some journalists simply dismissed Slater's claims of influence over themselves as nothing but an overestimation on part of the blogger – he had mistakenly assumed that the exchange of information and the bargaining involved in being a source of a journalist, constituted influence (McMillan, 2015). Others admitted to having used Slater's prefabricated material with reference to the increased pressures in the commercialised and/or financialised newsroom environment (McMillan, 2015). Some argued the 'game' of politics routinely involved 'black ops' á la Ede, Slater and Co., expressing doubts not about the substance of Hager's claims but about the supposed one-sidedness of outsourced attack politics (McMillan, 2015). This latter group of journalistic responses pointed to Hager's use of illegitimately acquired materials and his timing of publication as evidence of a left-wing dirty politics – reverberating the official prime ministerial stance (McMillan, 2015). Yet other voices were more critical of the media's role in the *Dirty Politics* saga, questioning their own and others' abilities to neatly distinguish between valuable information and political agenda in Slater's tip for stories, and pointing the latter's dual strategy of fear and favour which made for the difference between "[a]lmost exclusively, […] stories […] good for National and bad for anyone in its way" and "[…] threats of violence and […] an atmosphere in which I was personally and professionally denigrated" as McMillan quotes from a journalistic account (McMillan, 2015, pp. 226-227). Finally, some remained positive about the media's role, citing the events leading up to the resignation of Judith Collins as evidence. These events featured Cathy Odgers, another right-wing blogger (under the name *Cactus Kate*) and one of Slater's

associates, pre-emptively releasing the ultimately indicting email in the belief the media had already acquired it, thereby sealing Collins' destiny (McMillan, 2015; also cf. Higgs, 2015b; Levine, 2015).

In the blog-sphere – the realm of citizen journalism dragged into focus by *Dirty Politics* – critique of the traditional media in the context of the book's publication was emanating from left-leaning blogs, alleging not only the commercialisation-induced under-resourcing but also media bias "[…] in favour of their corporate owners, and […] also towards the right side of politics" (McMillan, 2015). Another view, although one more present in the academic literature than in the blog-sphere, relates *Dirty Politics* and the media handling of it to increasing concerns about political disengagement, especially of young people (James, 2015a; McMillan, 2015; Miller, 2015). While some doubt the public's proper understanding of the relation between the claims in the book (and the allegation at the 'Moment of Truth' for that matter) and the election, others question not so much the understanding but the care for it (James, 2015a; McMillan, 2015; Miller, 2015). As Miller tries to elucidate the lack of impact left on the election outcome by those extraordinary campaign events:

> A further explanation, and one that is potentially the most disturbing, is the possibility that the public have become so disengaged from campaigns that they are no longer attentive to day-to-day developments, even those that might test their confidence in the current state of New Zealand democracy (Miller, 2015, p. 224).

This line of argument was also resonated by Keith Ng on his blog, *Public Address*. There he argued, that the media narrative emphasising the strategic aspects of politics perpetuated "[…] a culture where 'political engagement' means to cynically understand 'the game'" (Ng in McMillan, 2015, p. 229).

In consequence of the publication of *Dirty Politics*, the news media as well as the blogsphere were heavily scrutinized for political impact and hidden machinations. However, it might have

well been the old-fashioned medium of the book, which had the biggest impact on the election. The media furore surrounding *Dirty Politics*, as well as the impeccable timing and widespread popularity of another book, John Roughan's *John Key: Portrait of a Prime Minister*, seem to indicate this (Higgs, 2015a).

Conclusion

This completes my survey of the 2014 election campaign and the commentary on it. I have basically tried to draw into focus the various rather extraordinary events on the campaign trail as well as in the year leading up to the campaign. Most obviously, and various commentators agree, the campaign lacked an oppositional block able to capture and mobilise a sufficient chunk of the electorate to challenge the government, as well as a focus on policy. In its stead, the electorate was left with gaffes, mishaps and scandals aplenty. These often times drowned out the campaigning of the smaller parties. These trends were, furthermore, mirror by the media coverage of the 2014 election campaign, which was dominated by non-policy issues across various formats. While both, the publication of *Dirty Politics* and the Moment of Truth event, set out to challenge the comfortable position of the governing National Party prior to the election, little to this effect was accomplished by either. Both events seemingly boosted rather than undermined Prime Minister John Key and his party. In the next chapter I turn to the application of Phelan's logics of neoliberalisation to some of the trends identified in this one. This will take me a step closer to the conclusion that contemporary New Zealand politics is a thoroughly post-political affair.

Chapter 3: Articulating the logic of neoliberalisation to the 2014 general election

In this chapter I re-assemble the identified trends and tendencies under the logics of neoliberalisation that were elaborated above from Phelan. Ultimately this helps to trace what I later argue to be the mancipatory post-politics of capitalist realism in Aotearoa. I weave together the logics, aspects of the election campaign, its events, and the commentary on the election, with various theoretical insights as well as available self-interpretations of the various actors involved. A particular interest of this chapter, in addition to the articulation of the various logics, lies in their inter-connections. This interconnectedness of, but also the ruptures and crevasses between, the neoliberalising logics can contribute to the understanding of the "[…] messy, yet nonetheless coherent totality […]" that is neoliberalisation and the consequent capitalism realism (Phelan, 2014, p. 63).

Market determination

Phelan's first logic of neoliberalisation to be applied is the logic of market determination. As has been mentioned, one of the identified long-term trends with significant impact on the 2014 election result, was a general economic trend benefitting Aotearoa's dairy exports due to a relative high price in dairy exports (Higgs, 2015b; James, 2015a). The volatility of the dairy market effected the election less than might have been expected. The carry-on effects of the decline in global economic conditions had not yet impacted on the wider national economy, specifically in terms of consumers and business confidence ("Business confidence bodes well for everyone," 2014; Higgs, 2015b). Furthermore, John Key quite explicitly reasoned that his early announcement of the election date, "[…] assisted business confidence […]" which in turn would assist his electoral victory if the aforementioned commentators are to be believed

(Key, 2015, p. 119). Key's mention of 'business confidence' is, of course, of interest here, because it further directs attention to the element of perception which is also crucial in the way in which economic conditions impact on electoral politics. As Gardener suggests, it is both the actual economic conditions, most notably unemployment and real income, as well as the *perception* of economic conditions which impact on voters' decisions (Gardener, 2017; also cf. Lees-Marshment et al., 2015). Key's remark is especially pertinent because the results of Gardener's statistical analysis of the impact of the subjective perception by New Zealanders of economic conditions on voter decisions are much more conclusive than those which would signal a direct statistical relation between the objective economic conditions and voter decisions (Gardener, 2017).

Here, we have found market determination in its very ordinary domain, the economic. While, the concepts of the market and of market determination are certainly not uncontested even in the field of economics, this is not at issue here. However, what we should take note of, is that markets, and in the case of the 2014 Aotearoa general election specifically the price of dairy on global commodity exchanges and business confidence resulting from these beneficial terms of trade, impact on elections in a very real sense. The general economic conditions and the popular perception of them, affect politics, just as politics might affect economic conditions. While the *New Zealand Herald*, in a fit of economic reductionism suggesting that governmental change only happens when the economic outlook is bad, might have been exaggerating, it nevertheless points to an undeniable relationship between economic conditions and election results ("Economy rules - so change of Govt unlikely," 2014).

In a different way but still within the context of economics, there was the focus on the housing market in the election campaign. The Auckland housing market was ostensibly in crisis (cf.

n15 above) or 'defect' as the *New Zealand Herald* editorial of the 26th of August put it, and various parties offered policies addressing the issue of housing affordability in detail ("Demand for investment property the problem," 2014). On the one hand, Labour, in its manifesto, declared "when the market doesn't deliver, we do", promoting their government home-building program, *KiwiBuild*. National's policy, on the other hand, followed a softer supply-side economics approach combined with some demand-side intervention (Labour, 2014; National, 2014a; N. Smith, 2014). National's *HomeStart* package, which introduced government grants for first home buyers, was, of course, the demand side mechanism, as it was essentially a subsidy to first-time home buyers. Its introduction was formally justified by the declining rate of homeownership, especially among 20-35 year olds. The policy was not aimed at housing prices themselves, but at lifting the declining rate of homeownership (N. Smith, 2014). Labour's policy raises questions in relation to its battle cry just quoted. The specific suggestion in the Labour election manifesto was that the party, if elected would build 100,000 new affordable homes. Since the slogan emphasises that Labour, if in government, would have *delivered*, we might legitimately ask: where they were going to deliver to? And unsurprisingly, in absence of any wider reform to housing provision in Aotearoa, Labour would have delivered these houses to the housing market in order to reduce housing prices by increasing supply. Thus, Labour's building program was another supply-side approach, akin to National's proposed and enacted solution aimed at stabilizing housing prices. Labour's proposal was no less market oriented than National's Auckland Housing Accord established before the election which enabled the establishment of Special Housing Zones in Auckland with fast-track resource approval for new residential dwellings, and National's promised suspension of tariffs and duties on building material, and improvements to the Resource Management Act (Labour, 2014; National, 2014a; N. Smith, 2014). All of these proposals do

not, in the last analysis, move away from a market-based solution in any significant sense –
contrary to Labour's battle cry. Instead, they stay well within what the 2014 Greens co-leader,
Russel Norman called getting "[…] the prices right, […] the incentives right", in the context of
arguing that "[…] markets are a really good solution to the big problems we are facing […]"
(Norman in Dean, 2015, p. 28).

The proposals of both major parties to address the issue of housing affordability, located the
problem primarily on the supply-side, in a housing shortage. However, Shaamubeel Eaqup,
the chief economist at the New Zealand Institute for Economic Research argued as early as
March 2014 that the Auckland housing crisis was not fuelled primarily by such a housing
shortage (Smellie, 2014). Eaqup pointed to the disparity between increases in housing prices
and increases in rents which should rise in parallel in case of a housing shortage, and argued
that the price rise was essentially investor-fuelled (Smellie, 2014). This analysis, then, locates
the cause of the rise in housing prices on the other side of the market, the demand-side. While
Labour mentions the banning of foreign investors from the residential property market in its
manifesto as well as the introduction of a comprehensive capital gains tax to curb residential
property speculation, National does not outline any further measures, apart from the already
existing taxation on the 'flipping'[39] of properties (Labour, 2014; National 2014a; Stuff.co.nz,
2014; TV3, 2014a; TVNZ, 2014a, 2014b). Yet this existing taxation regime, it has been argued
more recently, might well contribute to housing unaffordability, as it has distortionary effects
giving undue privilege to owner-occupied housing in comparison to other assets, such as
government sanctioned retirement funds, by taxing these differently (Coleman, 2017).

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[39] 'Flipping' is the colloquial term for the purchase and sale of properties within two years. The capital gains
realised in this way, are liable to taxation unless they meet exemption criteria as Key points out in several
leader's debates (Stuff.co.nz, 2014; TV3, 2014a; TVNZ, 2014a, 2014b).

Thus far the proposals of both major parties, arguably ideological opposites, are remarkably

similar in so far as they primarily address the problem from the supply-side with some

demand-side measures put forth as well. In Labour's case, this demand-side measure is the

banning foreign residential property investors. In National's case, it is the stimulation of

demand by providing *HomeStart* grants to first home buyers. However, in addition to their

proposals Labour also put forth the introduction of a capital gains tax payable on realised

capital gain – in the case of housing the sale of a residential property – to curb residential

property speculation (Labour, 2014). This proposal was framed as a promotion of equitable

taxation and was to exclude owner-occupied housing – the main residence – from capital

gains tax (Labour, 2014; Maples & Karlinsky, 2014). Modelling suggests that a capital gains tax

with the proposed exemption of owner-occupied residential property might have a lower

welfare effect, than an accrual based capital gains tax without such exemption, and it would

raise less tax revenue (Coleman, 2010). The lower welfare effect is precisely due to the

increase in rent a capital gains tax is likely to cause. This, in turn, would hit lower-income

household the most (Coleman, 2010). Furthermore, the exemption itself might cause trouble,

because "[…] the more exemptions that are allowed, the more complicated and abusive the

system will be perceived and become" (Maples & Karlinsky, 2014, p. 174). The exemption of

the main residence from capital gains tax may also lead to a 'mansion effect' – wealthy

taxpayers investing in huge main residences, which is already the case in Aotearoa due to the

aforementioned differences in the taxations of different assets, or to a lock-in effect, which

incentivises the persistence in suboptimal conditions – in the case of housing living in poor or

unsuitable properties – in order to avoid capital gains tax (Coleman, 2010, 2017; Maples &

Karlinsky, 2014). Further exemptions in the Labour proposal, such as luxury items,

collectables, and life insurance policy surrendered or sold, could also lead to more

complications in the implementation and administration of such a capital gains tax, potentially creating unnecessary loopholes (Maples & Karlinsky, 2014). Nevertheless, modelling supports Labour's general claim that a capital gains tax would likely increase both homeownership rate and foreign asset position, less so with Labour's proposed design and more so with an accrual based capital gains tax without exemptions (Coleman, 2010). The latter, however, is much harder to implement (Coleman, 2010). Finally, the implementation of a capital gains tax does nevertheless not alter the underlying method of resource distributions, e.g. housing, by means of a market.

To make matters more complicated, while Labour rhetorically disavowed the market in their manifesto,[40] in his post-election reflections the new Labour leader, Andrew Little, made the telling remark that the party's campaign team's findings "[…] from market research was that New Zealanders were increasingly tired of 'politics as usual'" (Little, 2015, p. 135). This 'politics as usual' might have included the persistent reliance on market mechanisms, and, thus, motivated Labour's rhetorical rejection of such mechanisms. It is, nevertheless, clear that Labour failed, as specifically illustrated by their policies pertaining to housing, to actually offer an alternative to market solutions.

What is, furthermore, of interest is Little's choice of the term 'market research' rather than, for instance, 'opinion polling' in the just quoted passage. What are the implications of Little's remarks? First of all, the Labour campaign team's 'market research' refers to a range of polling and canvassing techniques routinely employed by political parties to track public opinion (Barnett & Talbot, 2015; Little, 2015; Salmond, 2015). But simultaneously, the choice of words indicates a specific conception of electoral politics more generally, by appealing to the

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[40] They did so in several sections, each time with reference to the lack of optimum outcomes from market solutions (Labour, 2014).

research of the 'market', which in Little's phrase appears to be equated to 'New Zealanders', i.e. potential voters or the electorate. The tendency to posit market models in politics is not new, with some scholars referring to the use of marketing techniques in election campaigns as early as the 1920s. The view that elections are a form of market transactions is worth exploring, and is a clear instance of the logic of market determination as it seems to imply that elections are really just another 'market' (Lock & Harris, 1996).

The 'market' idiomatic in politics is most prominent in the study of political marketing where some scholars suggest that a transactional model of politics can encompass all of what is conventionally political science (Kolovos & Harris, 2005; Lock & Harris, 1996). Others, however, remark specifically on the difference between ordinary product advertising (marketing) and political advertising as seen during election campaigns (political marketing) and consequently deny the global applicability of such a transactional conception of politics (Kolovos & Harris, 2005; Lock & Harris, 1996). At its most basic, the transactional conception of politics takes the election to involve a transaction between voters and political parties or candidates, in which votes are exchanged for better government or a set of policies. In this context then, the use of various polling mechanisms to track public opinion take the important role of measuring the demand for various policies, while political communication becomes a part of an overall political marketing strategy (Kolovos & Harris, 2005). As Kolovos and Harris argue, political marketing, "[…] from being a subset of a party's electoral communication, […] has now grown so much that it has "annexed" political communication as one of its components" (Kolovos & Harris, 2005, p. 10). Furthermore, they also direct attention to the view of some scholars that political marketing is becoming 'Americanised' by means of the import of specifically US American political marketing strategies, which get adapted to local contexts, as well as by means of US political consultants working increasingly

all around the globe (Kolovos & Harris, 2005). Once again, we find some of these issues quite openly on display specifically in Labour's import of sophisticated micro-targeting techniques from the US (Barnett & Talbot, 2015; Salmond, 2015).

Thus, what at face value looks like a blatant contradiction between the Labour manifesto and those supposedly representing that manifesto, might indeed be much more symptomatic of Fisher's capitalist realism. This case is so illustrative because it seems so contradictory at face value.[41] Labour's battle cry is aimed at securing market outcomes more in line with the modernized version of the ideal of the 'quarter acre'[42] in the context of housing for instance. However, what is troubling about their approach is the major congruence of both major parties' proposals![43] Labour's proposal stays well within the patchwork of economic theories which are generally invoked in responses to what some might be inclined to consider 'market failures'[44]. This contrasts with the rhetoric employed by Labour which suggests a divergence from orthodox market economics. Furthermore, it seems Little's remark concerning the 'market research' done before the election, gives away Labour's inability to think beyond market determination when it comes to resource allocation.

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[41] I think this resonates well with what I believe to a remark of Žižek, who somewhere in truly colossal writing directs attention to the fact that anti-globalisation protesters are not actually against globalization *per se*, but much rather against the specific shape globalization takes under neoliberal capitalism. A similar thought is developed here with reference to Labour's disavowal of the market.

[42] As most significant social developments in Aotearoa, there is a long history of top-down implementation of the quarter acre ideal. As early as the early 20th century, Aotearoa saw the development of suburbs and suburban social housing which was widely taken to be a pre-emptive measure against the spread of socialism as well as a way to avoid the replication of the wretched condition in industrialised European cities at the time (Derby, 2010; Jesson, 1992). More specifically, the common format of suburban housing, for a long time was a quarter acre of land with a single three bedroom dwelling (Derby, 2010).

[43] This is nothing new in itself for Craig, Hayward and Rudd note, concluding their investigation of media coverage of the 2008 general election in Aotearoa: "Little was offered to voters in the way of alternative policy programmes or alternative visions of a future New Zealand society" (Craig, Hayward, & Rudd, 2009a, p. 146).

[44] A market failure, here, is an instance in which the "[…] market does not deliver […]" (cf. above). As Mann puts it "[r]ather than delineating the limits of markets' utility, and therefore the realms in which they are socially inappropriate, what capitalist markets cannot do is defined as a "failure" – relative to an impossible dream" (Mann, 2013, pp. 93-94).

And Andrew Little, was not the only party leader to interpret electoral politics in market terms. John Key repeatedly characterized electoral politics as a 'contest of ideas' in the 2014 leaders' debates (Stuff.co.nz, 2014; TV3, 2014a; TVNZ, 2014a, 2014b). There are of course various ways in which to interpret Key's remark. It might be that, by emphasizing the 'contest of ideas' his aim was to humble his opponent in the debates by complimenting his ideas, or to celebrate Aotearoa's liberal democratic inheritance in comparison to other countries, in a way similar to the *Weekend Herald*'s praising of the 2014 election in Aotearoa compared to the Fijian general election taking place at the same time ("Good losers show us how lucky we are," 2014). The latter line of thought Key picks up in the opening of his address at the post-election academic conference in Wellington (Key, 2015). However, his comments might also indicate a conception of electoral politics related to political marketing, which requires him to set himself apart from his opponent. He might do so by way of appealing to different ideas, conjuring up a stark opposition between the two major parties. Furthermore, Key might be taken to implicitly appeal to some conception of a 'free marketplace of ideas', most familiar from US American constitutional jurisprudence in relation to the First Amendment, the Freedom of Speech, in his conception of electoral politics as ideas in contest/competition (Brazeal, 2011).[45] This provides occasion enough to inspect the market conception of electoral politics as it seems to be implied at various occasions by both major party leaders and the marketplace of ideas which Key might be taken to appeal to.

The market conception of electoral politics is one in which, policies, different ideas or even ideologies underlying them, compete freely in the marketplace of ideas, from which voters,

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[45] Apart from being the dominant conception of the Freedom of Speech, the 'free marketplace of ideas' analogy since its inception in a dissenting Supreme Court opinion in 1919 has also come to justify the First Amendment in terms of its truth-maximizing function in a way akin to the justification of freedom of speech familiar from Milton or Mill, both of whom omitted the market reference, however (Brazeal; Mill).

in placing their vote, choose their preference. In this sense, then, Key and Little share common ground in their endorsement of a conception of electoral politics which involves a transaction at its centre. But while Little's conception remains vague about the kind of market involved in electoral politics, Key refers precisely to the realm of ideas. Due to the nature of the goods exchanged in the realm of ideas, as well as the nature of such exchanges, this makes things a little more complicated (Brazeal, 2011).

A cynic might be inclined to consider Key's references to the 'contest of ideas' and the potential implication of this contest taking place in 'the free marketplace of ideas' against his professional background in currency trading. He might well have understood economics enough to appreciate that 'the free market of ideas' on which ideas contest does not entail the truth-maximizing utility-function ascribed to it in American jurisprudence (Brazeal, 2011). This is due to the divergence between economic and epistemic rationality,[46] as there might well be false ideas which it is economically rational for an agent to believe, in the sense that their believing of the idea is instrumental to the agent's end (Brazeal, 2011).[47] The utility function of the 'marketplace of ideas' is simply far from clear, but "[t]here is no more reason to assume that an ideally efficient idea-market is one in which all consumers arrive at the same conclusions than there is to assume that an ideally efficient appliance-market is one in which all consumers possess toasters of the same size and color" (Brazeal, 2011, p. 29).

As we have seen then, the logic of the market pervades the 2014 election on several levels and for several reasons. Globalized economic markets impact on political processes by

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[46] At its most basic, epistemic rationality concerns the truth, whereas economic rationality concerns the maximal satisfaction of one's preference (Brazeal, 2011).

[47] There are a number of other issues with the conception of a 'marketplace of ideas', according to Brazeal who nevertheless develops a way in which to employ it as a tracing tool, rather than a justification for the First Amendment (Brazeal, 2011). For my intents and purposes, I can stay agnostic about the (epistemic) status of the 'marketplace of ideas' in a conceptual sense, instead simply treating its invocation as a symptom.

shaping the conditions of the *polis.* In addition to that, the perceptions of the economic conditions on part of the populous also impacts upon elections. Furthermore, the Auckland housing market, a potential market failure, provoked only market based solutions from both major parties, which makes them look rather similar on this issue. Finally, both major party leaders referred to electoral politics as involving some kind of market, an issue which I shall return to.

Individualisation

Talking about the two major party leaders, two individuals in the spotlight of New Zealand politics, leads to the discussion of Phlean's second logic, that of individualization. In the first chapter I outlined the logic of individualization with specific reference to 'presidentialisation' which is commonly defined as a shift from electoral politics founded on conceptions largely characterised by collective bodies, such as political parties, to a conception which emphasises the roles of those individuals wielding power, such as party leaders (Barisone, 2009; Craig, Hayward, & Rudd, 2009b). The 'presidentialisation' of media coverage refers to a focus on party leaders at the expense of party organisations and/or policies, and this in no way implies an actual adoption of a presidential political system.

National's 2014 campaign strategy emphasised stable leadership and was built around its popular leader, Prime Minister John Key. From the selfie-strategy to carefully managed public appearances, the individual at the helm was at the centre of National's campaign. This also was the case for other parties of course. Both New Zealand First leader Winston Peters and the Conservatives leader Colin Craig were taken to be synonymous with their respective parties by the media (Boyd & Bahador, 2015). Clifton even admits in hindsight that journalists, including herself, were too preoccupied with what Winston Peters was going to do in case of

becoming 'kingmaker' (Clifton, 2015). This feat is also well illustrated by the *Weekend Herald's* editorial from the 13th of September which solely focuses on Peters and his post-election role in the formation of a new government, while simultaneously deriding the persistent influence of his person and the associated 'grey power' movement ("Peters: Great pretender for long enough," 2014). Winston Peters (NZFirst), Colin Craig (Conservatives), and to a lesser extent John Key (National)[48] all were more prominent in the media coverage than the parties they led, whereas for all other parties the opposite was the case (Boyd & Bahador, 2015). Kim Dotcom, the primary funder of Internet/MANA, also got significant media coverage, which is not captured in Boyd and Bahador's content analysis, because he was not the party leader (Boyd & Bahador, 2015; also cf. n49 below). Furthermore, the media coverage seemed biased against co-leadership in a qualified way.[49] "Where parties have co-leaders […] the media make more references to the party than the leaders", compared with some trends in the opposite way in the case of single-leadership (Boyd & Bahador, 2015, p. 151).

Similarly, Boyd and Bahador also show that only about one-third of all election coverage was concerned with policy, whereas the remaining roughly two-thirds was not, more so in television news than in newspapers (Boyd & Bahador, 2015). Almost five per cent of the media coverage was concerned with 'personality or personal life' of candidates (Boyd & Bahador, 2015). This kind of narrative is well illustrated by political journalist John Campbell's visits to political candidates in their homes during the 2014 campaign, an event Māori Party

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[48] According to the analysist, Boyd and Bahador, Key's portion of coverage devoted to him would have been greater had it not been for media focus on Judith Collins' misconduct in the first half of the campaign (Boyd & Bahador, 2015)

[49] Specifically, Boyd and Bahador, point out that their coding for Internet/MANA included Kim Dotcom, the principle funder of Internet/Mana. Internet/MANA also had a co-leadership team, but the categorisation of Dotcom in the party coding might have distorted the results. As a permanent resident, Dotcom was allowed to vote, but not to stand for office, as only New Zealand citizens are legally permitted to do so (Green, 2005). Nevertheless he tirelessly campaigning for the party.

leader Te Ururoa Flavell particularly enjoyed (Flavell, 2015; Mediaworks, 2014). A further thirteen per cent of media coverage was concerned with 'polls/public opinion/horserace' (Boyd & Bahador, 2015). Of specific interest regarding the 'horserace' coverage is that such framing of the election campaign largely focuses on the 'race' between the two main jockeys – the leaders of National and Labour (Boyd & Bahador, 2015; Rudd & Hayward, 2009). A focus on the two major party leaders is also demonstrated well by the number of leaders debates between the two major party leaders (four during the short campaign) compared with the number of multi-leader debates (one just before the short campaign, and one during).[50] Generally, presidentialisation, thus, individualises at the political elite level, e.g. party leaders. Simultaneously, 'horserace' coverage individualises at the level of citizens or voters by focusing on individuals and their choices, for instance in opinion polling, at the expense of social groups.

This individualisation at the voter level is further exacerbated by a further instance of the logic of individualisation. This can be found in the introduction of new micro-targeting techniques in campaign advertising. These specifically address the shortcomings of statistical methods of voter-targeting (Salmond, 2015). Instead of relying on statistical averages, micro-targeting is a means of identifying those individuals most likely to respond positively to a party's message by making use of as many data sets as possible all the while cross-referencing these with the personal information available from the electoral roll (Salmond, 2015).[51] Cynically we might notice some similarity between this method of voter-recruitment and Scientology's 4-step

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[50] Related to this, on the weekly current affairs show *The Nation*, Government Ministers and Labour portfolio spokespersons regularly debated policy, further evidencing a focus on the two main horses in the race (Kean, 2015)

[51] Three years on from the 2014 election, there are now data analytics companies specialising in creating and evaluating the data sets involved. One such company, Cambridge Analytica claims to have "[…] psychological profiles based on 5,000 separate pieces of data on 220 million American voters […]" (Cadwalladr, 2017)

recruitment process (Wright, 2015). Whatever the case may be, it is important to note that what we find here may be a less expected individualization taking place. Whereas we might have reasonably expected to find individualization in media coverage, in line with the generally observed trend in Western democracies, micro-targeting represents a relatively novel mode of individualisation in political campaigning. It might, however, be entirely in line with the market conception of electoral politics. After all, a transactional conception of voting might consider election day the temporal coincidence of each elector's transaction with the party voted for (Lock & Harris, 1996). Hence, a focus on those individuals most likely to respond positively to party advertising might well be both plausible and reasonable. Furthermore, micro-targeting will resurface when I discuss the logic of self-interest below.

In addition to the media's and the parties' attention on individuals outlined so far, there is also a trend of individualisation detectable in academic commentary. The media's focus on political leaders is well matched by increasing interest in political leadership on the part of scholars. Johansson's focus on political leadership in his treatment of the 2014 election is symptomatic of a wider trend here (Johansson, 2015; Miller & Mintrom, 2006). There are various subfields of the study of politics which concern themselves with assessing 'leader effects' on popular voting (Barisone, 2009), or the normative constraints on democratic leadership (Weber, 2010). The crux of all of these elaborations is the inevitable focus on the individuals in positions of leadership and their agency against the backdrop of an implicitly or explicitly assumed democratic model (Körösényi, 2009a; Miller & Mintrom, 2006; Weber, 2010). While some try to extract an ideal of democratic leadership from Plato's 'proto-fascist' political theory in the *Republic*, others advance deflationary accounts of representative democracy to justify strong conceptions of individual political leadership (Körösényi, 2009a; Popper, 1966; Weber, 2010). In this context, the latter specifically reduce the function of

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voting to choosing leaders, whereas the former is but the most lucid illustration of the intuitive tension between democracy and leadership. To avoid this tension, defenders of democratic leadership commonly rely on the aforementioned deflationary account of representative democracy which creates the space for leadership to arise on some accounts (Beerbohm, 2015; Körösényi, 2009a, 2009b). Precisely, some version of Schumpeterian democratic elitism as based on "[…] more realistic and sceptical" behavioural assumptions serves to justify stronger conceptions of democratic leadership, which ascribe wide-ranging agency to leaders (Körösényi, 2009b, p. 81). Others, however, actively attempt to develop a more wide-ranging, processual account of political leadership, that can also be accommodated in more optimistic models of representative democracy, such as the delegate model of representation (Miller & Mintrom, 2006). In the context the various interactions between leaders, followers, and contexts of leadership are emphasized (Miller & Mintrom, 2006).

The way in which the allegations put forth in *Dirty Politics* were dealt with presents the final instantiation of the logic of individualisation. While there was some media attention to the lack of journalistic ethics governing blogging practices as well as the assumption that these communicational 'black-ops' were commonly engaged in by all players in the political 'game', there was a focus on the role of certain individuals, such as Justice Minister Judith Collins[52], Jason Ede at the Prime Minister Office, and Cameron Slater himself in the *Dirty Politics* saga (McMillan, 2015). Even such a scandal, posing questions about the structural integrity of Aotearoa's democracy, was very much individualised.

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[52] One *Weekend Herald* editorial went as far as largely psychologizing Judith Collins' failures ("'Crusher' must be put in her place," 2014).

Competitive ritual

The reference to the 'political 'game'' in the final paragraph of the last section represents one of the most evident instances of the logic of competitive ritual. However, before turning to the conception of politics as 'game', there are some more general consideration to be taken into account. While it may seem evident, it should be acknowledged that elections are in fact some sort of competition in the setting of a representative democracy. After all, in each electorate multiple candidates put themselves forward to represent the electorate in parliament, and there are multiple parties seeking to enter parliament. The oft-cited 'contest of ideas', which John Key as well as Clifton refer to, indicates this aspect of the election, assigning it as a competition of ideas (Clifton, 2015; TVNZ, 2014b).

For political communications scholars 'game' is an instance of 'framing'. While there are various different theories of framing, these tend to have an emphasis on the importance or *salience* of various items within a common text (Aalberg, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2011; Entman, 1993; Kahneman, 2003). As Entman puts it:

> To frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described (Entman, 1993, p. 52, his italics).

More to the point, 'game framing' refers to a specific way of election campaign coverage which makes more noticeable the strategic aspects of political campaigning, stressing the competitive nature of elections and election campaigns (Aalberg et al., 2011). This media coverage, consequently, makes more salient "[…] the 'game' components of elections […]" (Boyd & Bahador, 2015, p. 145). Coverage framed in this way commonly features a focus on the highly professionalized strategy of candidates and parties, potentially in an attempt to avoid being complicit in them (Aalberg et al., 2011). In addition, opinion polls provide a view

of the state of the 'game' (Aalberg et al., 2011). More latently, polls also require little (journalistic) resources , while simultaneously conferring the status of scientific objectivity (Aalberg et al., 2011). Finally, as the political 'game' offers drama, conflict, negativity, the opportunity to 'personalize' and involve elite individuals or groups, strategic game coverage conforms well to a number of core news values.

In the 2014 elections campaign, the media coverage in general was tilted towards non-policy coverage rather than policy coverage at a ratio of roughly 2:1 (Boyd & Bahador, 2015). Furthermore, the single most prominent issues in the coverage was what Boyd and Bahador code as 'the campaign (nature)', followed by '*Dirty Politics* book', 'polls/public opinion/horserace' and 'coalition/MMP' (Boyd & Bahador, 2015, p. 157, table 10). All four of these issues, making up 54.6 per cent of all coverage, are coded as non-policy issues and suggest that game frames may have played an important role in how the media made sense of the election. Furthermore, opinion polls also exemplify the use of quantitative measurements which various scholars emphasize in their treatment of competition in various areas of the social.

In addition to news media coverage, there were the televised leaders debates which also emphasise the competitive 'game' aspects of the campaign (Richardson et al., 2015). Game-show-like 'quick fire questions' for the two major party leaders vying for the Prime Minister's Office were alternated with rehearsed anecdotes, repeated across multiple debates in identical or almost identical formulation, to justify policies (Stuff.co.nz, 2014; TV3, 2014a; TVNZ, 2014a, 2014b). Personality and policy freely intermixed as Jamie Whyte outlined the philosophical reason why work at McDonalds would a great job for other people, but not for his children; Winston Peters recounts his three favourite movies, or Hone Harawira describes

his perfect Sunday (TV3, 2014b; TVNZ, 2014c). And after each advertising break, viewers get updated on the latest text-message polls or twitter trends (Stuff.co.nz, 2014; TV3, 2014a, 2014b; TVNZ, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c). In summary, it might be fair to suggest that the televised leaders debates were but a 21st century version of Postman's Huxleian nightmare, intensified first and foremost by means of digital communications technology (Postman, 1987).

So, the media focused plenty on 'the game' in both framing and in the production of events which brought out the 'game' aspects of the campaign. Furthermore, the single most important antecedent to game framing of election coverage is the degree of commercialisation of the mediascape (Aalberg et al., 2011). As outlined above, the New Zealand mediascape was highly commercialised in 2014, with the overwhelming majority of media companies' active in Aotearoa owned privately. Moreover, even publicly owned *TVNZ* operates commercially, its sole purpose being the payment of dividend to the government (Myllylahti, 2014, 2016).

Commercialisation brings with it the merger of news and entertainment as well as a greater prominence of the profit motive (Richardson et al., 2015). The commercial media realise profits by maximizing their audience, which in turn enables the securing of advertising revenue (Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Richardson et al., 2015). This means that media organizations, including their news divisions, compete to capture audiences in order to command high prices for advertising slots, thereby maximizing their revenue (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). While there is also a filtering effect from the media's dependence on advertising dollars, more closely related to issues at hand is the introduction of competitive pressures to journalistic practice due to commercialisation as well as technological development (Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Richardson et al., 2015). It follows that not only can

electoral politics be portrayed by the media as competitive, but media practices themselves can also be expected to display competitive traits or elements. As I have outlined above, the New Zealand media, and especially its news media with the exception of *RNZ* and *Māori TV*, fit this profile, as they all operate commercially.[53] Furthermore, the majority of privately held media companies can be considered 'financialised', with this term specifically indicating a shift towards ownership of media organisations by financial institutions and consequent prioritising of financial objectives (Silva, 2015). The financialisation of media companies is also linked to internal restructuring, cost-saving measures and ultimately lay-offs (Myllylahti, 2013; Silva, 2015).

It is, thus, unsurprising that Clifton directs attention to "[…] the pressure media companies are under for sheer viability […]" with reference to the media coverage of the 2014 New Zealand election (Clifton, 2015, p. 187). She also directs attention to the flow-on effects on journalists, whose work-load has increased significantly as a consequence of various restructuring and cost-saving measures (Clifton, 2015). Others make a similar connection between corporatisation and financialisation of the media on the one hand and a decline in quality journalism on the other, because of a shift in resource utilisation towards meeting the costs of capital rather than the maintenance of product quality (Fenton, 2011; Silva, 2015). Increasingly reporters have to copy-edit their own work, supply pictures and videos, live-blog and moderate the comment-sections of the online versions of their articles (Clifton, 2015; Richardson et al., 2015). Clifton specifically recounts her surprise at meeting a *RNZ* photographer and points out the extension of the services offered by all news outlets today, each of them being "[…] a written, spoken, video and pictorial service" (Clifton, 2015, p. 187).

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[53] Although the ownership of various media corporations has changed since 2014, the commercialised orientation of the respective companies has not (Myllylahti, 2014, 2016).

To complicate the matter of news coverage even further, "[…] politics is a turnoff to readers, listeners and viewers – at least in as much as media businesses are able to gain audiences and sell advertising" (Clifton, 2015, p. 187). And this brings us full-circle back to game-framing, which results from the various pressures described here, for it is a resource conserving way of covering politics, and especially elections (Aalberg et al., 2011). The "[…] focus on celebrity candidates, their backgrounds, or their successes or failures appears to draw larger audiences" (Aalberg et al., 2011, p. 164).

When I introduced the logic of competitive ritual above, I also directed specific attention to the quantitative data figuring prominently in the logic of competitive ritual, because such quantitative data enables the straightforward reading-off of the hierarchical position of each player in a 'game'. We find a similar focus on quantitative data in the election campaign as well, with most parties offering some quantified targets in different policy areas (cf. party campaign materials). Here, National's campaign material offers the widest variety of quantified data, whereas some parties' materials, most notably New Zealand First and United Future, offer very little in terms of numbers (National, 2014a; New Zealand First 2014a, 2014b; United Future 2014a, 2014b). Nevertheless, quantified measures, which appear in both relative and absolute terms when they do appear, are applied to housing, childcare, education, health and crime as well as to the economic and fiscal policy areas. Furthermore, New Zealand's standing in various rankings is regularly compared to that of other countries. This is especially the case in the National Party's campaign materials which employs both quantified data and comparisons with other countries' data to boast achievements of the National-led government (National, 2014a). Specifically, the comparison of Aotearoa's economic growth over the 2011 to 2014 legislative period with other OECD countries sticks out in this context (National, 2014a). The pamphlet entitled *National's Programme* might

appear more like a corporate portfolio with its excessive use of bullet-points, its various, quantified performance measures as well as targets (National, 2014a). This contrasts with the Labour Party's *Vote positive: Labour's plan for a better New Zealand* which is decidedly more akin to a manifesto (Labour, 2014). However, Labour leader David Cunliffe's performance at the leaders debates, in which he "[…] appeared focused on winning the debate[s] in a technical sense […]" illustrates Labour's vulnerability to the logic of competitive ritual (Higgs, 2015b, p. 329). In addition to that, the Green Party's campaign material contained quantified data to illustrate how its fiscal policy would reduce sovereign debt quicker than National's existing fiscal policies (Greens, 2014a, 2014b).

Self-interest

I now turn to the logic of self-interest, some instantiations of which are also contained within the media's focus on the 'game'. So far, I have focused on those elements of media coverage which stress the competitive nature of election campaigns and elections, such as game-framing but also the production of 'game' events. However, there is a second aspect to game-framing as "[…] the strategic news frames [also] make politicians' self-interest more salient […]" (Aalberg et al., 2011, p. 165). Game framing brings to the forefront of election coverage the self-interested motivations of politicians. In consequence of reducing electoral politics to only its competitive elements, politicians' motivations are also reduced. This can be seen in the media's focus on Winston Peters as the potential 'kingmaker' and his *bottom lines* (policy but also government portfolio for himself) for potential coalition negotiations during the campaign (Clifton, 2015).

While not strictly fitting the profile of game-framing, the already mentioned *Weekend Herald* editorial even reduces Peters' motivation to these negotiations, in turn labelled as "[…] phony

post-election posturing" ("Peters: Great pretender for long enough," 2014). The editorial accounts for the possibly drawn out nature of hypothetical negotiations in advance *not* with policy differences or the need to produce a coherent agreement ensuring stable governance. Instead, Peters is said to draw out "[…] a negotiation for no purpose beyond the pleasure he finds in it" ("Peters: Great pretender for long enough," 2014). Thus, the instrumentality of an electoral victory, for instance to achieve desired policies, is backgrounded in favour of a focus on immediate individual benefits, which are then said to provide for the individual's (e.g. Winston Peters) motivation. Ultimately, so the editorial claims, Peters is only seeking hedonistic self-gratification from the limelight associated with the 'kingmaker' position, a power which he should be denied, not the least in the interest of the economic viability of social policy, specifically as "[t]he gold card carries excessive benefits and superannuitants know it" ("Peters: Great pretender for long enough," 2014). Grey Power, portrayed as the 'movement' behind New Zealand First, thus, also gets a bashing for their self-interested support of a universal pension as well as gold-card[54] benefits. This second appeal to self-interest seems to undermine the first as Peters seems to have implemented policies instead of "[…] doing little else than argue points of order" in Parliament ("Peters: Great pretender for long enough," 2014). The editorial eventually suggests that even these policies were only aimed at satisfying his supports to eventually ensure another round of negotiations in the limelight ("Peters: Great pretender for long enough," 2014).

This case, then, also involves criticism of self-interested actions as constituting a disadvantage to the public at large. A similar judgement is found in the *New Zealand Herald* editorial criticising Judith Collins' misconduct ("'Crusher' must be put in her place," 2014). More

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[54] "The SuperGold Card is a discounts and concessions card for seniors and veterans, in recognition of their contribution to New Zealand society." (SuperGold, 2017).

generally, Clifton directs attention to media companies' demand for "[…] more stories on MPs' weight loss secrets, perks abuses and love lives, and as few as is get-away-with-about on carbon emissions, constitutional debates and benefit abatement rates" (Clifton, 2015, p. 187). In addition to the focus on the individuals, there might, thus, also be a structural bias towards stories about politician's self-regarding actions, such as their life-style choices, due to aforementioned commercialisation and financialisation. These stories, in turn, allow for conclusions to be drawn about political actors and their self-regarding desires – their self-interest, narrowly conceived (Shaver, 2015) – and a quick and easy judgement of whether these are pursued according to the rules.

Another implicit appeal to self-interest might be found the National Party's promise of potential tax-cuts in 2017 on the condition of favourable economic circumstances during the 2014 election campaign (Higgs, 2015b; Levine, 2015). Here, the underlying thought might have been one of polarisation, as also evident from the debates in which John Key frequently tried to distinguish National's policies from Labour's by reference to taxation – National as the party of less taxes, Labour as the party of more taxes (Stuff.co.nz, 2014; TV3, 2014a; TVNZ, 2014a, 2014b). But, it might also be that the National Party advanced its promise in order to meet the electorate's *assumed* financial self-interest by promising a marginal reduction of the tax burden in the future. If this was the case, the party, however, miscalculated as the *New Zealand Herald* points out that the majority of the electorate did not in fact desire any tax-cuts ("PM's promise of tax cuts shows lack of judgement," 2014). Furthermore, this editorial also observes the potential threat to economic stability that might arise from a prioritising of future tax-cuts ("PM's promise of tax cuts shows lack of judgement," 2014).

There are two points to be made here. On the one hand, these appeals to self-interest share a simplification in their accounts of behaviour. Rather than providing a detailed account of ideals, preferences and aspirations, references to hedonic pleasure and individual benefits are substituted instead. An incessant celebrity-culture, like the one Hall directs attention to, might, of course, do part of the work here. Especially so in the wake of Aotearoa's first celebrity Prime Ministers, as well as a more general blurring between celebrity and politician – Donald Trump or 'Kanye 2020'[55] – all of which might suggest that politicians are becoming but a form of celebrity.

On the other hand, the appeals to self-interest might also be productively approached from a psychoanalytic perspective, not the least because the self-interested actions of individuals or groups but also campaign promises appealing to self-interest are scrutinised. Here, the undue maximisation of self-interest, as in the case of Peters, Collins, or the 'grey power' movement, might perhaps be best understood as 'their' – the others – privileged access to enjoyment, or jouissance as it is called in psychoanalysis. In the case of Peters, he might get privileged access to the limelight of being the 'kingmaker'; Collins might be said to ensure privileged access to the Chinese dairy market for the company her husband sits on the board of for instance, and consequently in the last instance this is but a privileged access to wealth for her immediate family; finally, Grey Power might be understood as securing privileged access to community resources through the GoldCard. Furthermore, criticism of appeals to self-interest, as in the case of National's promised tax cuts, might be understood as threats to 'our' jouissance (cf. Žižek, 1999). The object threatened in the case of the tax cuts would, consequently, be the economic stability which might be sacrificed to an attain an object 'we'

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[55] (see for instance Oppenheim, 2016)

– the majority in the opinion poll – did not desire. Finally, psychoanalysis also directs attention to the ultimate unachievability of jouissance because actual fullness, the Freudian Thing, "[...] is devoid of any content [...]"(Laclau, 2006b, p. 651). Instead the subject has to engage in sublimation which elevates "[...] an object to the dignity of the Thing [...]" (Laclau, 2006b, p. 653). Thus, the positing of a privileged access to jouissance – the appeals to self-interest – in itself constitutes a fantasy which camouflages the fundamental lack of the object of jouissance or irreducible contingency (Laclau, 2006a).

So, self-interest was evident during the 2014 election campaign and was reflected in the media coverage of the campaign. Self-interest is narrowly conceived in these instances as self-regarding desire/preference and only problematized in those cases in which there is conflict between privileged access to jouissance arising from the pursuit of self-interest, and the equitable availability of jouissance. Basically, self-interest is only highlighted in those cases in which its pursuit violates those rules commonly circumscribing this pursuit.

In addition to these instantiations of the logic of self-interest in the media coverage, it also surfaced in the micro-targeting practice already brought up in the context of the logic of individualisation. Specifically, these new micro-targeting technologies might be said to capture the self-interest of individuals better than more statistics-based methods of voter targeting. However, Salmond also makes the point, that micro-targeting effectively overcomes some of the short-comings of rational-choice theory (Salmond, 2015). This is of interest because the basic unit of rational choice theory is self-interest. Specifically, it seems that micro-targeting aims to identify individual preferences, but not necessarily self-interest in the narrowly defined sense delineated above because the identified individual preferences are not limited to self-referring ones.

Commodification, assetisation, and the culture of valuation

I now turn to Phelan's final logic, the logic of commodification. I have so far articulated the different logics of neoliberalisation to their relevant symptoms as they presented themselves in the 2014 election campaign. In this section, I trace two different conception of value in order to direct attention to the transformation in the conception of value and value-creation, which in turn bridges the gap between the logic of neoliberalisation and the study of bio-financialisation. Crucially, the underlying conception of value in finance contrasts with an economic conception of value. While the latter revolves around the commodity as the embodiment of value, in finance

> […] value becomes an intrinsically indeterminate magnitude that has to be calculated by creating appropriate measuring tools and then defended and negotiated between experts in designated public spaces or in the secluded spaces of the markets (Lilley & Papadopoulos, 2014, p. 975).

To map these conceptions of value, I draw on examples from the 2014 election campaign. As a point of departure, I first turn to the discursive valorisation of paid work in various campaign material. For instance, both National and Labour, in their campaign material variously refer to the importance of jobs (cf. Labour, 2014; National, 2014a). Labour, in this context, emphasized the importance of "[…] enough secure, well-paid jobs […]" whereas National's campaign material explicitly draws attention to the fact, that "[…] 1500 people are moving off a benefit and into work each week […]" (Labour, 2014; National, 2014a). This emphasis put on paid work was also one of the moving forces behind the welfare reforms of the fifth National government, which the governing party both boasted as an achievement and sought to extend if given the mandate for another term in office (Loughrey-Webb, 2015; National 2014a).

The overall focus of the fifth National government's welfare reforms prior to the 2014 election was that of long-term welfare dependency, as evident from, for instance, the narrow prescriptions set for its Welfare Working Group (WWG) (Loughrey-Webb, 2015; O'Brien, 2013). Specifically, the National government cultivated two lines of arguments, a financial and a moral one, to construct the problem of long-term welfare dependents (Chapple, 2013; Loughrey-Webb, 2015; O'Brien, 2016). The former explicitly considers long-term beneficiaries as a financial liability to the state (Chapple, 2013; for instances of such argument cf. Destremau & Wilson, 2016; Pandit, 2016), whereas the latter turns on the valorisation of paid work, contains an emphasis on individual responsibility, and easily lends itself to victim blaming, not the least due to an implicit distinction between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor (Loughrey-Webb, 2015; O'Brien, 2016).

The basic line of the moral argument was conveniently offered by the Minister of Social Development, Paula Bennett, in various speeches. Fundamentally, work is presented as the only means to attain "[…] independence and well-being […]", to transform one's life from "[…] a simple existence on welfare to a meaningful rewarding life as a working member of society", "[…] the path to a better, more prosperous, and fulfilling life is through work, not welfare […]" (Bennett in Loughrey-Webb, 2015, p. 99 & 100). As Loughrey-Webb outlines with reference to the fifth National government's welfare reforms, the moral argument for welfare reform, which specifically valorises paid work, contributes to a portrayal of work as a moral obligation to contribute to a just society. Concomitantly, those, who choose not to engage in paid work, are judged to be dysfunctional, which, in turn, justifies greater intrusions into their lives by means of obligations, sanctions, financial incentives, and individual case-management (Loughrey-Webb, 2015). This argument is also reflected in the policy proposals various parties put forth in the election campaign as outlined later.

The fifth National governments welfare reforms, were boasted as one of the major achievements of that government prior to its re-election. The Aotearoa welfare system was effectively turned into an engine of increased commodification as a result of the fifth National government's welfare reform. Universal welfare systems are said to be de-commodifying as they ensure that subjects can meet their costs of social reproduction without recourse to selling of their labour power. Narrowly targeted, punitive welfare systems such as the one brought about by the fifth National government's welfare reforms can be considered to do the opposite, that is to increase commodification (Loughrey-Webb, 2015). Narrowly targeted, punitive welfare systems relegate the costs of social reproductions solely to individual subjects (Loughrey-Webb, 2015). Here, the cost of social reproduction effectively gets privatised and those who cannot meet these costs get stigmatised and are subjected to an increasing array of surveillance and management measures to enforce a set of behaviours deemed acceptable by the state. The acceptability of these behaviours is once again anchored in their supposed contribution to 'employability' (Loughrey-Webb, 2015). Basically, this (increased) commodification comes to turn Paula Bennett's view quoted above into reality, as subjects have to increasingly rely on paid work to secure their welfare – their social reproduction. Here, the discourse valorising paid work comes to make the world in its image, as the National welfare reforms under Minister of Social Development, Paula Bennett, indeed ensured that "[…] the path to a better, more prosperous, and fulfilling life is through work, not welfare […]" (Bennett as quoted in Loughrey-Webb, 2015, p. 107).

Remarkably, the discursive valorisation of paid employment can be found in the campaign material of virtually all political parties that contested the 2014 election. For example, New Zealand First's policy proposals stressed the need for New Zealanders to be able to secure work justifying a tightening immigration legislation among other things, and Internet/MANA

proposed a right to work which also identifies paid work as the (only) means for individuals to better their conditions (Internet/MANA, 2014a & 2014b; NZ First, 2014a & 2014b). Similarly, many parties put forth programs to enhance the employability of the general populations or identified subsections of it.

It might be, that political parties' focus on paid work (and the promotion of it) simply reflected their acknowledgement of economic realities (for the majority of the electorate at any rate), but it is nevertheless important to note that the discursive valorisation was evident in the various campaign materials as well as in the implementation of policy. This valorisation is an instance of the logic of commodification, not in a novel or extraordinary sense, but in its very mundane and implicit re-enforcement of the commodification of human labour which is at the heart of capitalist relations of production according to Marx (Marx, 2011 [1872]).

Another potential instance of the logic of commodification might be the revelation of National's 'Cabinet Club' (Higgs, 2015b; Levine, 2015). The 'Cabinet Club' made headlines in May 2014 as it transpired that the National Party offered informal breakfasts or lunches with MPs and/or Ministers in exchange for "[…] a fee or donation to the party […]" (3News, 2014b). Of course, while such a trade in order to maximize donations, and thus fill up the party's 'war chest' for the election campaign is not forbidden, it nevertheless raised questions about undue influence of wealthy donors (3News, 2014b). Furthermore, there were at least two more revelations which hinted at such a state of affairs: the resignation of Maurice Williamson, and Judith Collins' dinner with Oravida bosses while on a taxpayer sponsored trip to China. Effectively, the National Party may be said to have commodified access to their MPs and Ministers as a fundraising strategy. And a successful strategy it appears to have been, as National reported more than four times the amount of donations of the Labour Party in their

2014 annual returns form to the Electoral Commission[56] – NZ$ 3,977,536.97, compared to Labour's NZ$ 939,411.00, and especially outdoing any other party in the number of donations ranging from NZ$ 1,500 to NZ$ 15,000.[57] Of course, the fact, that Labour, assuming for a moment that it would have wanted to run the same strategy, was at a decisive disadvantage here, because the access to their MPs would have been considered less desirable for two reasons, should be noted. First of all, being in opposition, the scope of influence of the Labour Party was considerably limited, whereas access to National MPs, was a more promising prospect for those with the money to afford Cabinet Club membership. Second, the Labour Party is historically the 'workers' party'. Although its 2014 incarnation is a lite-version of this at best, its support base is firmly located in the less-affluent sections of society. Thus, even if there had been a Labour version of such a club, its prospects of attracting donations would have been significantly smaller.

What remains concerning is the tension between egalitarian democratic politics and the elitist 'Cabinet Club' in the context of highly professionalized campaigning. Whereas access to politicians is increasingly difficult, with each public appearance, especially on the campaign trail, tightly managed by various professional party staff (Edwards, 2013; Miller, 2015), wealthy donors appear to get access to National Party MPs and Ministers in exchange for a donation of sufficient size, leaving those without the required funds unable to access politicians. This raises a number of questions about democratic procedure and the way in which elected representatives are accessible to those who they (claim to) represent (Higgs,

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[56] These forms are available to the public from: http://www.elections.org.nz/parties-candidates/registered-political-parties/party-donations-and-loans/party-donations-year

[57] It should not be omitted that it wasn't a particularly rosy year for Labour, as it only managed to secure the roughly same amount of donations as in the previous election year of 2011. Meanwhile, parties such as the Greens, NZ First and National achieved significant increases in donations, with National's increase being almost twice the amount of Labour's 2014 total donations reported.

2015b; Levine, 2015). However, while it seems initially plausible to consider the National Party

Cabinet Club as an instance of commodification, at a closer look there are perhaps some

tensions between the embodied value of the commodity and the fact that the Cabinet Club

effectively derives value from the availability of public officials.

Thus, in order to more productively engage sort of value production or creation, I suggest

conceiving of the Cabinet Club as a form of assetisation. This modification of Phelan's logic of

commodification moves significantly towards a financial conception of value production and

away from a commodity-based economic account of it (Birch, 2017). Effectively, the National

Party has, for fundraising purposes, turned access to their MPs and Ministers, not so much

into a commodity, but transformed such access into an asset, which then generates a

recurring revenue for the party. Furthermore, the value of the access to MPs would, then,

depend not solely on demand, but also relate to the National Party's management of access.

First, the National Party's decision to monetize access to their MPs, creates the value of the

'access-asset'. Then, various factors, such as the demand for such access and National's

administration of, promotion of, and secrecy about the Cabinet Club all contribute to its value,

revealing further affinity with the conception of assets and their valuation as outlined by Birch

(Birch, 2017). The secrecy surrounding the Club is hinted at in the *TV3 News* coverage of it

(3News, 2014b). This might perhaps be a part of National's value management, though, as

the absence of public knowledge about the club might have well increased its value.

So far, I have used media coverage of the campaign in the service of highlighting various

instantiations of Phelan's logics of neoliberalisation, while also gesturing at some conditions

of the production of media content. As outlined above, the majority of Aotearoa's media

companies are financialised, meaning they are effectively financial artefacts to generate

recurring revenue in the form of dividend collected by financial actors or institutions owning them (Myllylahti, 2014). These financialised media companies control the most popular information outlets with television and newspapers being the leading information sources for the majority of the population at the 2014 election (Boyd & Bahador, 2015). As Rudd, poignantly remarks, "[n]ews, now more than ever, is a 'commercialised' product" (Rudd, 2013, p. 45). While, I think there is some truth to this, I want to suggest that 'news' is, in fact, a commercialised product as well as a financialised product, due to the regime of value production it is engulfed in.

The first indicator of this financialisation is contained in the ownership structure of the media in Aotearoa. Media companies have become financialised, that is, reconfigured as financial artefacts owned predominantly by listed and unlisted financial institutions (Hope & Myllylahti, 2013; Myllylahti, 2014, 2016). These reshaped media companies, in turn, control the different media outlets, such as TV stations or newspapers, which Myllylahti explicitly considers as the media companies' assets (Myllylahti, 2014, p. 6, table 1). The primary function of these assets is the capitalisation of flows of information, thereby creating a recurring revenue stream for the media companies (Hope & Myllylahti, 2013; Myllylahti, 2014). In turn, television programs, such as the six o'clock news, or individual newspapers should be conceived as the media organization's means of value capture as viewer attention is transformed into advertising dollars.

Importantly, such a financial account of the media structure has some advantages when compared with an economic account revolving around commodification.[58] First of all, while

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[58] "This notion of economy launched in the nineteenth century as a mechanism by which energy could be profitably conserved in the form of utility becomes during the twentieth century modeled mathematically as information processing that yields equilibrium" (Martin, 2013, p. 87)

TV news or newspapers are certainly products as Rudd reckons, it is less obvious that they are, as a matter of fact, commercialised in the sense of being involve in commodity exchange. They are only in some cases exchanged like commodities. In the case of television, the most popular source of information in Aotearoa, for instance, there is no obvious exchange between the media producer and the media consumer, as the majority of news and current affairs programs are broadcast on free-to-air television, funded solely from advertising revenue. While the case is slightly different for the newspaper as a physical medium, which indeed demands a price in return for the information provided, even print publications rely first and foremost on advertising for funding (Rudd, 2013). Furthermore, while there has been persistent discussion about the introduction of paywalls for online content, little has been implemented in this regard (Myllylahti, 2014, 2016).

Secondly, the commodity/economy account of news production would have to located value as inherent in the news-commodity. However, as we have seen, it would be advertisers who approximate the buyers of such a news-commodity to the greatest extent. Furthermore, Clifton bemoans, from a journalist's point of view, "[…] the tabloid/jolly lifestyle/*Ten Celebrities Who Hate Broccoli!* Trend" in news coverage which can only be overcome if the media "[…] get some signal that people value serious news reporting enough to start paying for it again" (Clifton, 2015, p. 190). This indicates that news coverage is no longer (if it ever was) a commodity exchanged between journalists and their audience, in the journalist's opinion because the audience has stopped valuing it. This is also suggested by the fact that "[…] politics is a turnoff to readers, listeners and viewers – at least in as much as media businesses are able to gain audiences and sell advertising", as Clifton points out in her reflections on the 2014 election campaign (Clifton, 2015, p. 187). Thus, the economic account of media production can be further problematized, because from the advertisers' point of

view, media are not inherently valuable due to their informational content for instance.

Instead, the media content's value is *derived* from audiences and especially audiences'

characteristics most relevant to advertisers, such as age bracket for example (cf. Rudd, 2013).

These characteristic of the audience only attain their value by being measured in what we

might call a valuation practice (Birch, 2017). Furthermore, we should take note of the

derivative character of the value of media content. Of relevance, here is the work of Martin

and others on financial derivatives as an approach to value (Lightfoot & Lilley, 2017; Lilley &

Papadopoulos, 2014; Martin, 2013). As Martin puts it:

> The derivative solves some of the challenges to liquidity or revenue streams posed by
> what had been conceived of as a public good. Knowledge that was once viewed as
> nonexcludable and nonrival and therefore difficult to treat as a discrete commodified
> object that can be priced is now converted into a contingency that can be traded on
> its own terms (Martin, 2013, p. 93).

Finally, as Lilley and Papadopoulos point out, this change in the conception of value towards

a financialised, immanent form of indeterminate value also changes the process of value

production. They direct attention to the embodied value production which increasingly

permeates all aspects of life: "[p]roduction no longer operates through an externality

between the subject and her work, but through accumulation of the embodied totality of

one's own bio-financialised existence" (Lilley & Papadopoulos, 2014, p. 978). In the case of

the media, this means that the audience's consumption of media, for instance their watching

of the news, is itself a form of value production.

In this section I have departed from Phelan's logic of commodification by outlining the

emergence of a financialised conception of value as well as hinting at the associated regime

of value production. While the production of economic, commodity-based value is still

relevant, increasingly the creation of value takes place in a financialised way as illustrated by

the assetisation of access to politicians by the National Party, but also by the financialised

media system. Companies, finally, extracts value from the audiences' consumption of their media without a direct charge to the audience. Instead, funding through advertising implies a pricing model all too familiar from finance, as the price of an advertising slot is based on the most probable, future audience size and characteristic, which can be reviewed at any moment in the light of new information. Basically, then, advertising pricing is but a specific futures market. As futures are but a specific financial derivative, the business model of financialised media companies, such as those found in Aotearoa, is also a financial one. Here, the value of the asset (audience size), on which the derivative (advertising price) is based, is itself constituted by measurement and (probabilistic) calculation, and alterable by managerial (and in the case of the media, editorial) decisions, thus displaying great likeness with the financial conception of value outlined by a number of scholars more abstractly (cf. Birch, 2017; Lightfoot & Lilley, 2017; Lilley & Papadopoulos, 2014; Martin, 2013; Martin et al., 2008)

Conclusion

In this chapter I have traced the neoliberal discourse of the 2014 election campaign by applying Phelan's logics of neoliberalisation to some of the trends that were identified in the second chapter. Furthermore, his logic of commodification was extended to also cast a glance at various, seemingly more financialised processes of value production. In the next chapter I discuss the post-political residue the logics of neoliberalism leave in political practice.

Chapter 4: Post-political remainder

Having identified and articulated the neoliberalising logics to some of their instances during the 2014 general election campaign, I now turn to their impact on contemporary election campaigns more generally. Specifically, I aim to critique the neoliberalised election campaign by drawing on Žižek's and Mouffe's conception(s) of *post-politics* (Mouffe, 2005; Žižek, 1999). I argue that the logics of neoliberalisation share a commonality in their depoliticising effects. This has turned the 2014 election in Aotearoa into a post-political affair. I close this chapter by commenting on the *weirdness* of the election and the spectre of bio-financialisation this weirdness might signal.

In contrast to the importance of demands and disagreements which theorists of post-politics ascribe to the properly political, we find politicians and commentators emphasise *ideas* (Clifton, 2015; TVNZ, 2014b). The contrast consists primarily in the fact that in many cases the *ideas* in question are already the product of complicated negotiations of interest, aggregated expert opinions, and opinion polls, all of which are designed to capture the preferences of 'middle New Zealand' as the two major parties compete in a race to the centre (Aimer, 2015a; Edwards, 2013; James, 2015b; Little, 2015). Furthermore, in parallel to this, it might be that the emphasis of *ideas*, in fact, serves to camouflage the lack of different proposals – not the least due to the compromise nature of the *ideas* on offer.

Then, by means of micro-targeting voters are increasingly presented with those ideas they are likely to agree with in the first place (Salmond, 2015). This, however, means that each individual demand is addressed in isolation thereby preventing the elevation of a particular demand to the status of the empty signifier by establishing relations of equivalence. Instead, particular demands are being catered to in a compromised and 'rational' solution. There are

some cases, for instance the housing crisis and the different policies to address it, in which there is an observable similarity in the framework from which various parties propose solutions with differences or disagreements located only in the fine print.

Here, we might note that while politics proper would involve the addressing of demands to political elites, the 'contest of ideas' metaphor lends itself to the inverse relation, that is the offering of ideas to the public by different parties – similar ideas indeed, judging from the housing policies on offer by the two major parties. Importantly, these ideas offered by political elites differ from demands of the electorate in that the ideas which make it into the offering of political parties, often times have been spun the right way, and are the product of complex prior negotiation of interest. Finally, the similarity in some ideas might seem surprising, because John Key might have appealed to 'the contest of ideas' at least partially in a branding exercise to draw a distinction between himself and the Labour leader.

The focus on ideas, furthermore, reminds us of Žižek's remarks concerning New Labour's mantra of drawing on 'good ideas' disregarding their 'ideological' origins, where 'good ideas' are those ideas which work without putting into question the existing framework of their application (Žižek, 1999). In the 2014 election campaign the proposed solutions to the housing crisis or the discursive valorisation of paid work across the party landscape affect a similar outcome: politics is reduced to the administration of the status quo – the art of the possible rather than the art of the impossible, the latter of which is the domain of the properly political (Žižek, 1999). A similar reduction might also be found in a bio-financial approach to politics, as the strategies of truth-management of John Key, the bio-financial entrepreneur as Jones argues, reveal in the suppression of the surprising elements of the truth (Jones, 2016). This commonly involves the reduction of the truth of a statement to the speakers' position of

relative authority and an appeal to a naïve empiricism (Jones, 2016). This effectively banishes the properly political as the art of the impossible because everybody knows that impossible ideas are, just that, impossible. The emphasis of *ideas*, especially those that work irrespective of their ideological origin, also resonates with the lack of belief in capitalist realism from the dangers of which we have been delivered by post-modern cynical distance (Fisher, 2009)

The market conception of politics explicated in political marketing moves very much along the same line of reduction. In this instance, parliamentary politics and especially electoral politics, are diminished to quasi-commercial transactions. The fundamental differences between commercial transactions and voting are side-lined in favour of advertising techniques to be adopted from the commercial context. Effectively, in political marketing, then, "[…] the fundamental metaphor for political discourse is the television commercial", very much in the devastating way Postman cautioned about more than 20 years ago (Postman, 1987, p. 129). While I return to Postman's more substantial claim regarding politics becoming a form of entertainment in the age of television, the importance of the introduction of commercial advertising techniques and the concomitant market conception of politics is not overstated. That is because even a watered-down conception of elections and parliamentary politics as the contest of ideas and the transactional conception of politics implicit in the introduction of commercial advertising techniques remain in tension. The reasons for this tension are principally twofold turning on both (1) the mechanisms of advertising and (2) the characteristics of the good (*ideas*).

First, as Postman details at length, the fundamental mechanisms of television advertising significantly divert from the idealised conception of capitalist exchanges on the market by shifting the focus from the claims about the products offered to images upon which the

audience can project their fears, fancies and dreams, ultimately suggesting "[…] that all problems are solvable , that they are solvable fast, and that they are solvable fast through the interventions of technology, techniques and chemistry" – just buy the advertised product (Postman, 1987, p. 134).[59] If political discourse is reduced to the television commercial in an analogous fashion, it is implicitly suggested that there are quick and easy solutions in politics and this fosters a distrust of complex language and complex problems (Postman, 1987). A good illustration of this mechanism can be found in the first leaders' debate where John Key was able to reject Cunliffe's citation of a meta-study dismissing a straight forward causal relation between minimum wage rate and unemployment rate by referring to naïve common-sense propositions in line with his usual techniques of managing truth (TVNZ, 2014b).[60] More generally, the debates saw the debating of complex problems replaced by both 'quick-fire questions' and rude shouting matches – maybe in order to guarantee the audience's entertainment (Postman, 1987; Stuff.co.nz, 2014; TV3, 2014a; TVNZ, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c). Furthermore, as the image and the audience's projections gains dominance in the context of electoral politics, the public image management and the portrayal of politics overtake actual policy in terms of importance. This is well illustrated by Boyd and Bahador's finding regarding the dominance of non-policy issues in the media coverage of the 2014 election campaign (Boyd & Bahador, 2015).

Secondly, as set out in the previous chapter, there is a difference between ideas, and commercial goods and services traded on the market. As Brazeal remarks, the spread of ideas, that is their purchase if you will, is likely better modelled with reference to the spread of

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[59] This resonates well with the magical voluntarism Fisher diagnoses in contemporary psychological practice – if you're not well, you're not working hard enough on yourself (Fisher, 2009, 2011, 2013b; also, cf. Smail, 2004).
[60] As Jones points out, this naïve empiricism is one of Key's go-to means of truth management, another being the explaining away of inconvenient truths by reference to the relative authority of the speaker (Jones, 2016).

disease than with reference to the market (Brazeal, 2011; also cf. Chignell, 2017). Thus, while there may be a demand for a different style of politics as Little remarks in his post-election reflections, it might in the end be more productive to interpret this demand, not in market-economic terms (supply and demand), but instead in terms of a request addressed at the political elite, which might well turn into a claim if the latter remain unresponsive (cf. Laclau, 2007). Effectively, the market-conception of electoral politics together with an incessant focus on the contest of ideas (that work), illustrates the contemporary inability on part of both the commentaries and the political elite to think past the established framework – the 'that's just how things are now' of capitalist realism.

The gap between the emphasis of the contest of ideas on part of journalists and politicians, and the overwhelming focus on non-policy issues in much of the coverage of the election campaign is worth dwelling on once more (Boyd & Bahador, 2015; Clifton, 2015; TVNZ, 2014b). As I outline above, there was a focus on individuals and non-policy issues in the media coverage (Boyd & Bahador, 2015). This might at least be partially due to the financialised organisation and ownership structure of the media itself. As the media is increasingly organised according to the meta-logic of capital, which Žižek argues is the structuring matrix of social reality, it moves away from those expectations scholars of political communication place on it for the function of a democratic society (Žižek, 2006a, 2006b). More specifically, media companies are beholden primarily to their financial owners and secondarily to their audience, in the sense that they depend on the audience watching to capitalise on advertising sales. However, in so far as advertising sales are concerned, the news does not do particularly well (cf. Clifton, 2015, especially as quoted above). It is, thus, no surprise to observe low-quality reporting, focusing on non-policy issues, as this kind of coverage requires less resources. Nevertheless, this leads to a depoliticisation of the election campaign coverage, as

individual personality, polls, and the possible outcomes of the election, instead of demands or even ideas, are pushed into the limelight by an adoption of game-framing in political coverage. This instantiates both the logic of individualisation and the logic of competitive ritual. However, it is not clear whether the media actively depoliticise or only follow the audiences' preferences for depoliticised coverage, after all news do not do particularly well when it comes to advertising sales, and thus, audience size.

As we have seen, the outcomes of the 2014 election have been explained by various academics with reference to the individual characteristics and likeability of individual leaders, rather than policy. While democracy may necessarily involve an element of representation as Laclau argues, the explanatory short-cuts which over-emphasise the individual leaders are only the tip of the iceberg – a proto-fascist iceberg if there is credibility to Žižek's argument regarding the primacy of the leader in fascism (Laclau, 2000).[61] In addition to this, the stress placed on leadership brings out two relevant trends: (1) it relegates the diminished role of simply choosing a leader (in many elaborations from a pre-selected member of the political elite) to the electorate, and (2) it elevates the status of party leaders, analogously to the way in which the media coverage gives overwhelming attention to these individuals. The first trend has already been touched upon. As for the second trend, we witness a resurfacing of Postman's apprehensions about the transformations in political discourse brought about by the introduction of television as the chief information medium. I have already outlined how the increasing influence of political marketing and the related rise of political image management might be regarded as a result of this transformation in political discourse. But

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[61] The 'if' is a big one for Laclau explicitly denies this argument of Žižek's, placing us at a potentially uncomfortable junction, which I am unable to resolve as the scope of this thesis does not allow for a detailed examination of their respective interpretations of Lacan which support the position of each (Laclau, 2006b; Žižek, 2006a, 2006b)

Postman directs attention to a further consequence of this transformation, namely that politicians "[...] have become assimilated into the general television culture as celebrities" (Postman, 1987, p. 135). Of course, these concerns take on specific importance as John Key has been variously dubbed a 'macro-personality' or 'New Zealand's first celebrity prime minister' (James, 2015a; Johansson, 2015). Importantly, Postman draws the further distinction between being 'well known' and being a 'celebrity'. Whereas, the former simply denotes a general familiarity with a person on part of the wider populous, celebrity status is intimately connected to entertainment and amusement. In this sense, it increasingly appears that an election with a celebrity prime minister involved, might just be another casting show.

This suspicion is further advanced by those characteristics of the re-elected prime minister, which are commonly emphasised – his likeability, relatability and his shock-jocky quips at the opposition as well as journalists. These are also beautifully illustrated by his responses to the allegations put forth in *Dirty Politics*. It remains, however, unclear if the entertainment of the audience is the main purpose or a distraction. Furthermore, the question of what politicians are famous for, what justifies their celebrity status, now arises, as every casting show I am aware of has at least a spurious excuse for the temporary fame bestowed on its contestants.

At this point, we return to the logic of market determination. The most decisive factor in the election according to the electorate, the commentariat, and the winning politicians themselves, was the domestic economy, and its position in the global market. The economy, is constructed as something external to be managed by politicians, akin to the way in which the Clark government constructed globalisation as an external force (cf. Skilling, 2011). It is in the context of this prioritising of the economy that we should understand Key's remarks on the importance of creating a positive business climate, e.g. investment conditions, in the

leaders' debates. It is also in this context that one should evaluate the various appeals of all parties to fiscal responsibility in their prioritising of budget surpluses and debt-reduction. There appears to be a consensus between all parties, potentially due to leaving intact the general necessity of austerity measures in the Public Finance Management Amendment Act 2004 (Roper, 2005). As Wilson and Swyngedouw point out, these measures have consistently proven ineffective on a macro-economic level, they do not address problems of low economic growth for instance. However, they are a formidable means to exacerbate class-divisions, as the first austerity measures are commonly cuts in social spending with the consequent entrenchment of economic inequality (Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2014).[62] Thus, we might be inclined to conclude that the election in many ways looks more like the casting of New Zealand's Next Manager of the Economy – the next great administrator of a status quo without alternative – than anything remotely political.

The above analysis, furthermore, suggests that one of the core responsibilities of New Zealand's Next Manager of the Economy is the balancing of interests. This is especially clear in the instantiation of the logic of self-interest which was markedly twofold. On the one hand, the revelations contained in *Dirty Politics* foment the view that politicians are self-interested maximisers. This view is suggested by the media coverage of Winston Peters, who was persistently portrayed as harming the harmonious social totality by appealing to sectarian interests. And his followers were afforded the same treatment. At the ontic level, the implication of this treatment is first and foremost a mistrust of politicians – the same mistrust that was found to be well reflected in the negative tone of the media coverage of the election

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[62] The relationship between cuts to social spending, especially welfare spending, and inequality is well illustrated by the New Zealand experience of the 1990s (Roper, 2005). Rashbrooks edited work provides a more recent overview on inequality in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Rashbrooke, 2013)

campaign. However, at the ontological level, we immediately recognise the dangerous assumption of a harmonious, completely accounted for society, a closure, a picture which, as Žižek and Laclau agree, marks the passing from a democracy to a totalitarian nightmare. This is because for both of them, democracy, hegemonic practice, and finally, the political, presuppose a constitutive openness of the social (Laclau, 2000; Žižek, 1999).

On the other hand, there were those appeals to self-interest which simply critiqued what might be best considered as a misrecognition of the general interest as exemplified in the scrutiny of National's promise of tax-cuts on the campaign trail. As the critique is supplemented with the appropriate survey-findings, the most productive approach, is to consider it as a critique of interest management, and thus, in the final analysis a failure to establish an adequate compromise. This is to deny the political (i.e. an inherently antagonistic) dimension of such a promised tax cut. Importantly, there is no reference to special interests which would unmistakeably benefit from tax cuts in the editorial which gives voice to the critique of the proposal ("PM's promise of tax cuts shows lack of judgement," 2014). Once again, a similar picture as in the first instance of the logic of self-interest emerges: effectively, there is a harmonious social whole, the homogenous interest of which can be identified by means of expert opinion and negotiation. Thus, what we find here, might perhaps be best considered the inversion of Adam Smith's invisible hand: rather than focusing on the individual following their self-interest and thereby unwittingly contributing to the general interest, the focal point here is the general interest, which is simply considered as the agglomerated self-interest of individuals (cf. A. Smith, 1976). Moreover, this excludes the possibility of any incommensurability of various interests, instead assuming the availability of an appropriate compromise, if only interests are ordered the right way. That various ways of negotiating and ordering interests deliver different results, never conserving the individual

prioritisation of interests of all individuals, and always containing a moment of exclusion in virtue of representing universality, shows the fantasmatic dimension underlying such construction of self-interest, at the bottom of which is always already a political decision (Hausman, 2013; Laclau, 2006a; List, 2013).

Finally, I have brought out a decipherable move away from an economic and towards a financial regime of value-production. This is of interest due to the outlined emphasis of the importance of the economy by the media, academic commentary and in the rhetoric of politicians themselves which contrasts sharply with the increasingly financialised practices in areas such as media organisation and party fundraising. In fact, even global market prices are first established by derivatives which follow the indeterminate logic of financial valuation rather than the logic of commodification (Martin, 2013). Furthermore, Jones has argued that the strategies of John Key – the bio-financial entrepreneur – can be made sense of more productively with reference to specifically financial forms of rationality (Jones, 2016).

Conclusion

Regarding this shift in the conception of value, it might be helpful to draw on what is called *hauntology*, that is the study of spectrality, in addition to ontology as the study of being (Fisher, 2012, 2013a; Žižek, 1999). In chapter 2 I quoted Johansson in relation to the election campaign: "[…] the absence of competition, the bizarre campaign events, and the low turnout make 2014 a forgettable election" (Johansson, 2015, p. 103). The absence of competition as well as the low turnout might well be related to the fact that the 2014 election and the preceding campaign can be characterised as a thoroughly post-political affair. Thus far, I have argued that there was little competition due to a fetish of compromise and a fundamental agreement on globalised neoliberal capitalism as 'the way things are' – capitalist realism.

However, what particularly sticks out in the quote from Johansson is the disjunction between bizarre campaign events and the forgettable character of the election. In fact, this disjunction almost perfectly corresponds to Fisher's account of *the weird* in his last work before his premature death. There, Fisher basically elaborates on the weird as "[…] that *which does not belong*" (Fisher, 2016, p. 10, his italics). Or, more specifically, for Fisher, "[t]he weird […] is a signal that the concepts and frameworks which we have previously employed are now obsolete" (Fisher, 2016, p. 13). Thus, *the weird* is effectively a displacement of the familiar producing effects of inextricable pleasure and pain related to Lacanian *jouissance* (Fisher, 2016).

With reference to the 2014 campaign, the weirdness of the campaign events might then create some sort of fascination, rather than make them forgettable. We might understand this fascination, a crucial element of Lacanian jouissance – enjoyment beyond the pleasure principle – as arising from the absence of the political from a supposedly political campaign. The supposedly familiar of politics has become unfamiliar or strange due to the absence of the properly political. There were no fundamental policy disagreements. There was no alternative mode of social organisation on offer, not even in vague spectral form. Instead, the election was only about finding those ideas that work in the context of the established order. This is post-politics and as I have tried to show throughout this work, the campaign events appear decidedly less bizarre if approached from this perspective. In consequence of three decades of neoliberal reform, it seems post-politics is alive and well in Aotearoa. Politicians are now celebrities, famous for the way in which their management of the expert negotiation of interests entertains the masses. More than 23 per cent of these entertained masses do not even bother voting – that is taking an active part in the entertainment – whereas the

remaining 76 per cent are left with a choice between various highly professionalised political parties with increasingly similar programs – the same suits in front of various different logos.

However, there is a sense of weirdness in Johansson's quote itself as well. How come the scholar of politics connects bizarre campaign events to forgetfulness when there is a such sense of *non-belonging* in this connection at first sight? It might simply be that bizarre campaign events have become the new normal. Certainly, the leadership focus of the fifth National government seeking a third term re-election in 2014 matches that of Helen Clarks' fifth Labour government's campaign in 2008 in the same situation (Edwards, 2009). Similarly, the general absence of policy from the campaign and the fact that the election campaign appeared to have little impact on opinion polls were also noted then, as they were noted after the 2014 election (Craig et al., 2009b). As for gaffes and scandals on part of the opposition leader and challenger for Prime Minister, these were a feature of, for instance, the 2005 National Party campaign under the leadership of Don Brash, who was involved with the Exclusive Brethren in an attempt to smear the fifth Labour government (Craig et al., 2009b). In this sense, bizarre campaign events appear to be 'the way things are now'. Furthermore, as indicated specifically by the relative absence of policy in the 2008 as well as the 2014 election campaign and media coverage thereof, post-politics might also not be a novelty in New Zealand parliamentary politics. This brings us back to the start of this thesis because the face-value *weirdness* of Johansson's quote can be accounted for by appeal to capitalist realism.

Especially the conjunction of bizarre campaign events and a forgettable election only really makes sense, if bizarre campaign events are the norm rather the exception. Further, as I have outlined, the bizarre campaign events might well be due to the vacation of the political of the

election campaign. This is the contemporary post-politics of capitalist realism in Aotearoa. There is seemingly no alternative to bizarre but ultimately politically vacuous political campaigning which seeks to only manage the status quo. This, in turn, makes any and every election which sticks to this mould forgettable as it only offers more of the same. I have argued above that politics is effectively reduced to entertainment. This line of thought might be extended here to elaborate on the parallel between trends in popular entertainment, specifically Jameson's nostalgia mode, which conditions the repetition of the already familiar form, thereby undermining genuine novelty, politics as entertainment appears to proceed along very similar lines (Jameson, 1991). This is well illustrated by the similarity of slogans and campaign themes of various elections. Above, I have already directed attention to some similarities between the 2014 campaign and the campaigns of 2008 and 2005. To this it might be added that the more recent 2017 general election campaign also resembled the 2014 one in some respects. Although Prime Minister John Key resigned between 2014 and 2017, the National Party's campaign slogan remained basically the same. Recall that in 2014 National campaigned under the slogan "Working for New Zealand" among others. In 2017 their campaign slogan was "Delivering for New Zealanders" (Patterson, 2017). We might note that National appears to have stuck to the familiar aesthetic form. More generally then, the aesthetic of the post-political election campaign might be best described as a sequence of bizarre events with little relation to the properly political.

Finally, *the weird* transpired in the spectre of bio-financialisation creeping into some elements of the 2014 election campaign. It could be found especially in relation to contemporary forms of value production. In this context various scholars direct attention not only to the increasing financialisation of value and the associated culture of valuation, but also to more social instantiation of the logic of the derivative as elaborated by Martin among others (Martin,

2013). In many ways, this financialisation of each and every aspect of life – the *bios* – conditions a politics in the opposite direction of neoliberal individualisation and atomisation. As the derivative simultaneously dissembles and reassembles it necessitates a politics of interconnection (Lilley & Papadopoulos, 2014). In this way, the haunting presence of bio-financialisation and the concomitant end or at least retreat of the economy may indeed provide a new horizon – an opportunity of *terra forming* as Lilley and Papadopoulos argue – which could break the post-political deadlock in Aotearoa and globally (Lilley & Papadopoulos, 2014; Martin, 2013).

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