

# The Discourse of Protest, Resistance and Social Commentary in Reggae Music

A Bakhtinian Analysis of Pacific Reggae

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# 1 Constructing an encounter between Mikhail Bakhtin and the New Zealand band Herbs

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*One night in September 2012, I was invited to an event in the Great Hall of the neo-baroque Town Hall in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand.<sup>1</sup> This space has been the setting in the past for most of the city's important civic functions including a reception for survivors of the battle at Gallipoli in 1915; events to honour Britain's Prince of Wales in 1920 and Queen Elizabeth as Head of State in 1953; and for a dinner for US President Bill Clinton and other Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum leaders in 1999. Radical feminist Germaine Greer gave a speech here in 1972, and the hall has been a venue for concerts by orchestras, musicians, classical singers and rock bands, including The Beatles in 1964. But on this night I had been invited to witness and celebrate the induction of the band Herbs into the Aotearoa New Zealand Music Hall of Fame. Sitting in a red velvet seat in the front row of the balcony of the Great Hall, with its white pilasters and ornate ceiling, I watched musicians, songwriters, families and friends eating and talking at large, dark-clothed dining tables, and young people dressed in black carrying trays of drinks and food through the room below. The centre of the balcony above them was taken up by film crews, cameras and computer monitors, and on the far side, among more cameras, lights and white reflective screens, people came and went for interviews with Māori Television. While film and sound technicians tinkered with wiring and cables, the seats beside me were gradually filled by other guests and supporters.*

*We had gathered for the Australasian Performing Right Association (APRA) Silver Scroll Awards ceremony, to be part of the music industry's recognition of Herbs as the founders of Pacific reggae in New Zealand, for their "enormous contribution to the cultural fabric of life ... while forging a unique and original sound".<sup>2</sup> I was there at the invitation of the band's founding member and songwriter Toni Fonoti because I was working on a study that explored the discourse and cultural significance of Herbs' music and their first Pacific reggae mini-album, What's Be Happen? (Herbs, 1981).*

*The lights went down, I leaned forward, and proceedings began on the stage with a series of bands covering songs chosen as finalists for best song of the preceding year. Then it was time to celebrate Herbs. At the words "Give it up for Herbs!", past and present members of the band began to emerge from between the tables nearest the stage among spotlights that found them in the darkness of the auditorium. The musicians gathered on stage to the noise of applause and the sound of their song "Dragons*

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*and Demons*”, followed by a roll call of 17 names that included two deceased band members, Fred Faleauto and Charles Tumabai. Long-time Māori band member and leading elder of the band, Dilworth Karaka greeted the audience in languages of the Pacific and spoke on the musicians’ behalf. As he finished speaking, the musicians began a spontaneous a cappella singing of the traditional Māori waiata (song) “E Papa”. I stood; everyone stood; and, like everyone else, I sang, with great pride to be part of this.

*In a celebration that included film of performances, as well as clips of archive footage and shots of album covers accompanied by a soundtrack of Herbs’ songs, there were commentaries and tributes from musicians, journalists, critics, and former managers that emphasised the courage of the band members, who hadn’t been afraid in the late 1970s and early 1980s to highlight injustices that they and others had to face. Herbs drew on Bob Marley’s influence in juxtaposing pointed lyrics and music that stirs people to move and dance, then developed it and made it “Pacific” (APRAAMCOS, 2012). In fusing Pacific and reggae sounds, the band “gave a voice to an emerging, politically-aware audience ... they gave a generation of young Māori and Pasifika musicians and songwriters a new path to follow ... original New Zealand music could be as culturally diverse as [its] people”.<sup>3</sup> Herbs spoke out in their music against the loss of indigenous Māori people’s land, atomic tests in the Pacific, racist treatment of migrants and so-called over-stayers in New Zealand, the apartheid regime in South Africa and that country’s racially selected team’s rugby tour of New Zealand. At a time when Aotearoa New Zealand had no history of political bands, Herbs’ songs of social commentary forged a new path and were a voice for oppressed people.*

## **Introduction**

The construction of an encounter between Herbs’ Pacific reggae in Aotearoa New Zealand and the ideas of language and cultural theorist Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895–1975) may seem an unlikely project to some. However, the aim of this book is to demonstrate that the philosophy and discourse theories of Bakhtin are particularly fitting for a detailed analysis of the discourse of such popular songs of social commentary, protest and resistance to injustice. With what has been characterised as a righteous anger, Herbs’ extended play album (EP) *What’s Be Happen?*<sup>4</sup> connects, marks and speaks of historically significant international and domestic political events, issues and injustices in the late 1970s and early 1980s. And it does so in a particular, popular, discursive space that falls outside the dominant discourses at that time.

Although grounded in a specific context at a particular moment in time, the themes of Herbs’ album have relevance for those beyond the islands of Aotearoa New Zealand who suffer racism and are socially and economically marginalised, and those who experience the cultural dislocation of migration. In its novel and productive extension of Bakhtin’s theories and analytical tools to Herbs’ music, the book will be of interest to people studying Bakhtin’s work, to anyone investigating historically and culturally significant artefacts of popular culture, and to

those with an interest in reggae music. Others with an interest in the cultural politics of Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific region or in the literary analysis of music and lyrics will also find it useful, as will those involved with exploring popular constructions of resistance to social injustice.

Although previous studies of popular cultural artefacts have drawn on aspects of Bakhtin's work, there has been no comprehensive application of his theories and concepts to the discourse of recorded popular music. While this form of popular cultural artefact was beyond the scope of Bakhtin's literary work, I hope to show that his ideas are not only compatible with the analysis of present-day, popular and creative constructions of resistance and protest related to ethical values (see also Turner, 2015), but are also strikingly fruitful. To achieve this aim, I also draw on relevant literature from other discipline areas, including the study of popular music, literary theorist and critic Terry Eagleton's approach to the analysis of poetry, and theories of identity in cultural psychology, as well as interviews with Herbs' songwriters Toni Fonoti and Phil Toms.<sup>5</sup>

I argue that Bakhtin's philosophy and theories have relevance for an analysis and interpretation of the meanings constructed in Herbs' highly political album for a number of related reasons. These are, in brief, Bakhtin's focus on popular culture and literary texts; his politicisation of theories of language and discourse; his focus on the construction of meaning and understanding (Renfrew, 2015); his overarching notion of dialogism (see Bakhtin, 1981), which conceives meaning as a dynamic and relational phenomenon (see Bostad et al., 2004) derived "from relations *between* the intersecting meaningful acts" of subjects (Brandist, 2004, p. 38); and his conceptualisation of utterances as ethical acts.

Herbs' first reggae album is seen as a defining moment in the history of New Zealand popular music, in which the multi-ethnic mix of five musicians introduced an innovative and distinctive style of Pacific reggae. In 1981 the Auckland band consisted of vocalist and songwriter Toni Fonoti, of Samoan heritage; Tongan drummer Fred Faleauto, now deceased; Tongan guitarist Spenser Fusimalohi; Māori rhythm guitar player Dilworth Karaka; and European (Pākehā) bassist and songwriter Phil Toms. Through the musicians' localisation of Jamaican roots reggae,<sup>6</sup> the album embodied the influence of Bob Marley on Māori and Pacific Islands musicians, activists and audiences in particular, for whom Marley's music "became part of the fabric of the post-colonial ... experience of history and their search for identity" (Fala, 2008, p. 85).

In drawing on Bakhtin's ideas, the analysis of Herbs' album is grounded in a theoretical approach that explicitly regards popular culture as "the privileged bearer of democratic and progressive values" (Hirschkop, 1986, p. 92). Bakhtin's theory ascribes value to popular cultural products, and privileges discourse that has the power to subvert the authority of monologism (see Bakhtin, 1981c). He uses the term monologism to signify discourse that expects no answer. For Bakhtin, monologic discourse represents authoritative claims to a single truth that make no allowances for other perspectives: "the shutting down of dialogue" (White, 2009, p. 1). While monologism denotes an authoritarian attitude towards other discourses and a single evaluative point of view, Bakhtin (1986f) posits a

culture and language in which all have the right to speak and none has absolute authority or the final word.

### **Outline of the political, social and historical context**

The period leading up to the release of Herbs' album in 1981 was a time of critical change in Aotearoa New Zealand's recent history, and in *What's Be Happen?* the band creatively constructs and comments on social and political realities and events in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Historians and social commentators agree that the issues that were so fiercely contested at that time had a significant influence in shaping subsequent opinion and the sense of identity of many New Zealanders. The campaigns and conflicts that took place were struggles over human rights and the ethical values associated with those rights, over differing senses of national identity, and, as historian Jock Phillips has explained, over the kind of society Aotearoa New Zealand should be. There were protests over Māori people's losses of their ancestral lands. Demonstrations took place against French nuclear testing in the Pacific and degradation of the environment, as well as against the racism of South African apartheid. There were socially divisive protests against the New Zealand tour by South Africa's racially selected international rugby team before it began and during the tour. Other protests arose over local racism in government and police treatment of Polynesian "over-stayers" as well as the day-to-day treatment of newly urban Māori and Pacific Islands people. And as in other parts of the world, in the 1970s there was the rise of the feminist movement and struggles for women's rights and gay rights in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The experiences and responses of New Zealanders to some of these conflicts form the social and political context for Herbs' songs and are constituted in the lyrics. Significant themes in *What's Be Happen?* have been recognised as including "the realities of street life for young Polynesians", the Springbok tour and the struggle to end the apartheid regime in South Africa, race relations in New Zealand, as well as the spiritual, cultural and political dislocation suffered by Pacific Islands people who were born in Aotearoa New Zealand. Chapters 5 and 6 elaborate on these themes in identifying references in individual songs to racist police treatment experienced by Māori and Pacific Islands youth in urban Aotearoa New Zealand ("Whistling In The Dark"); the loss of Māori ancestral land ("One Brotherhood"); the struggle against the racism of apartheid (referenced in "Azania (Soon Come)" and "One Brotherhood"); the struggle of Pacific Islands people to achieve material betterment in Aotearoa New Zealand and their dislocation from Pacific Island roots ("What's Be Happen?"); spirituality and the battle between conflicting internal voices ("Dragons and Demons"); as well as the death of Bob Marley and identification with reggae ("Reggae's Doing Fine").<sup>7</sup>

The book extends earlier understandings by drawing on Bakhtin's tools of analysis to provide a detailed investigation of the network of significant related themes that produce the discourses of the album. These can be seen as constituting five key themes constructed in the music, the lyrics, and the album

sleeve: oppression, power and the struggle for liberation, spirituality, identity, and the dominant theme of resistance.

### Herbs' cultural contribution

The historical significance of the events and issues in the late 1970s and early 1980s referenced in *What's Be Happen?* is attested by the continuing circulation of related discourses in contemporary society and in recurring references to Herbs' album and its context. Evidence of the enduring cultural significance of songs from the album includes the fact that Herbs musicians performed "One Brotherhood" at a reception in Auckland in November 1995 for President Mandela, at which he thanked New Zealand's anti-apartheid protestors on behalf of the people of South Africa. In addition, "Dragons and Demons" was used in the film *Boy* (Waititi, 2010) to evoke the sounds and spirit of the early 1980s in Aotearoa New Zealand; and "Azania (Soon Come)" is referred to as part of the sound track for the anti-apartheid protests in 1981.

Since that induction of the band into the Music Hall of Fame in 2012, Herbs' contribution to cultural life in Aotearoa New Zealand has received further acknowledgement. On 15 April 2015, Dilworth Karaka (on behalf of the band's musicians), the founder of Warrior Records Hugh Lynn, and label and artist manager Will 'Ilolahia were awarded the Independent Music New Zealand (IMNZ) Classic Record award for *What's Be Happen?* at the Taite Music Prize event in Auckland. The award recognises New Zealand's "rich history of making fine albums that continue to inspire us and that also define who we are". In June 2015, Herbs were again recognised for the inspiration that the same album – described at the ceremony as a ground-breaking album of social commentary – continues to provide, and for their second album *Light of the Pacific* (1983), in a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Vodafone Pacific Music Awards in Auckland. More recently, in August 2019, the premier of the documentary film *Herbs: Songs of Freedom*, which celebrates the band's place in New Zealand's cultural history, took place in Auckland at the New Zealand International Film Festival.<sup>8</sup>

### Drawing on Bakhtin in a focus on recorded songs

Given this recognition, it is perhaps surprising that there has been no study to date that analyses the "combination[s] of music and words" (Brackett, 1995, p. 29) that constitute the songs on this seminal album in terms of their relationship to the social and political environment in the early 1980s. It is perhaps also surprising that there has been no analysis of popular songs that draws on Bakhtin's ideas and discourse theory in a comprehensive way. This is particularly the case given that Bakhtin's work has been mobilised not only in the analysis of novels and non-literary texts, but also in the examination of concepts relating to the construction of identity in other contemporary cultural products that were beyond his sphere of interest and analytic focus. These include a television series, films, and London's Notting Hill Carnival (see Peeren, 2008). As in Esther

Peeren's analysis of other contemporary cultural forms, the study presented here produces encounters that are fruitful in "pushing" Bakhtin's concepts into new circumstances, in this case in order to examine the issues referenced in Herbs' album, predominantly from the perspective of song lyrics.

It is often argued in the field of musicology that because audiences hear lyrics and music at the same time, privileging one over the other should be avoided in the study of popular songs. However, while acknowledging the importance of the relationship between music and words, I seek in the analysis presented here to investigate meaning constructed in Herbs' songs largely from a perspective of applied linguistics,<sup>9</sup> rather than as a musicological study. I therefore privilege words in focusing predominantly on the narrative of the lyrics in relationship to the political and social context at the time of the album's release, and their co-construction of aspects of that context. Musicologist Richard Middleton's (1990) three-pole model of words/music relationships in popular songs provides implicit support for a privileging of lyrics in the analysis of the songs on the album in that the model includes a "story" category, in which oral text is predominant and words as narrative are the controlling element.

Because this book focuses on a vinyl record and is not a musicological study, it is inevitable that the songs are treated in abstraction from the context of a particular musical event and experience, with its accompanying gestures and other visually performative aspects that carry meaning. Features of performance are therefore necessarily limited here to significant sonic and verbal aspects of the recordings. It is perhaps important, however, to note the significance of recordings for musicians such as the Herbs band members in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Although resources such as tablature and on-line tuition videos on YouTube and other platforms are now available for amateur and professional rock musicians who want to learn to play a particular style of music, for earlier rock musicians, recordings have constituted primary texts. As music philosopher Theodore Gracyk (2001) pointed out, it has been predominantly through familiarisation with and imitation of recorded songs that rock musicians learned to play in particular styles, rather than through exposure to live musical events or reading musical scores.

In his richly detailed study of James Brown's recorded song "Superbad" (1970), David Brackett (1995) draws on Bakhtin's theory of dialogism and certain tools of analysis to examine the song's musical and linguistic features as well as aspects of recorded performance (see Bakhtin, 1981). Like Brackett, I apply Bakhtin's theory of dialogism and the analytical category of double-voiced discourse in two of its forms: heteroglossia (see Bakhtin, 1981, 1984), defined by Ken Hirschkop (1986) as the stratified, dialogically interrelated set of speech practices of different social groups within a language at any given time; and polyphony (multiple voices/multivoicedness). I also extend other concepts from Bakhtin's analysis of novels to the examination of Herbs' album, including the notion of appropriated language populated with new accents and intentions (Bakhtin, 1981; Voloshinov, 1986); the concept of hybrid texts in which "two semantic intentions appear, two voices" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 189); and the notion of the chronotope (Bakhtin, 1981b). The last of these is extended from

the context of the novel to explore representations of time and space in the narratives of Herbs' songs.

In poems, as Terry Eagleton explains, meaning is as much a matter of form, including aspects of rhythm, tone, pitch and structure, as it is a matter of content. Meaning (the semantic) is grasped in terms of its dialogic relationship to sound, rhythm, structure and so on (the non-semantic), which also generate meaning. In examining these songs on Herbs' album, the experience of performance is limited to recorded musical, vocal and verbal (sonic and phonic) elements. It is possible, however, to take account of aspects of experienced musical form and the impact of these on meaning in the context of the album as an event at a particular historical time. These aspects include the effects of musical genre and style, including features such as Pacific influences, tempo and polyphony in Herbs' recorded performance of these songs, as well as rhythm, tone, sound intensity, structure and harmonisation. Furthermore, while much of what was recorded may have been played "live" at the time of the recording, recording studio technology allows for the electronic manipulation of sound and the insertion of sonic elements such as the sounds of the sea that are woven into the track "One Brotherhood". These additional elements, which may not have been easy to incorporate in live performances at the time, serve to extend dialogic relationships and to augment meaning. In considering these features, I draw on Herbs musicians' own descriptions of their music as well as other New Zealand musicians' comments on Pacific reggae.

In addition to Eagleton's examination of the relationship between language and form, other scholars' ideas are involved here in encounters with Bakhtin's theories. These include theories related to concepts of identity (for example, Bhatia & Ram, 2001a; Frith, 1996; Hall, 1990; Hermans, 2001a), and to the theorisation of popular music as a marker of cultural identity (Shuker, 2008). There are also encounters between Bakhtin's concepts and other notions that relate, for example, to the appropriation and localisation of musical genres and to the micro-genre of the slogan (see Pechey, 2001). These are productive in testing the value of Bakhtin's ideas and analytical tools in this context, as well as their relevance in theorising the discourses of social commentary, resistance and protest in Herbs' songs.

### **Utterances as responsible moral deeds**

Bakhtin's identification of ethics as a dimension of language and discourse and his conceptualisation of utterances as responsible moral deeds are particularly compatible with an analysis of song lyrics that engage with ethical values associated with opposition to racism and indigenous peoples' loss of rights and land. Bakhtin's theorisation of dialogic discourse, building upon an early philosophical concern with inter-subjective relationships that was later recast in terms of discursive interaction (see Bakhtin, 1993; Brandist, 2014; Hirschkop, 1999), incorporates the social act of speech as an act of commitment and position-taking, in which language choices are ethical choices.



Herbs' songs speak *inter alia* of political struggles over human rights, and this analysis of those songs is positioned in a theoretical framework that also politicises language and discourse (see, for example, Hirschkop, 1986). Bakhtin conceptualises language as embodying dialogic social relations based on different world views and values, and as a site of struggles between centralising authoritative, monologic forces and decentralising dialogic forces. Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia signifies the strata of socially determined linguistic forces within a language and in its products. As Morson and Emerson (1990) explain, dialects, socio-ideological languages and genres embody differing values, conceptualisations and social experience as well as the contingent social and historical forces that form language. Language users, and particularly those involved in creative work, face the need to make ethical and political choices between these different discourses: to "actively orient [themselves] amidst heteroglossia ... move in and occupy a position for [themselves] within it" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 295).

### **Discourse and heteroglossia**

I employ the word discourse in two main ways that draw upon Bakhtin's theory of dialogic relations in language and discourse, his own usage of the Russian term *slovo* ("word"), translated as discourse, and his concept of heteroglossia. Discourse is thus understood here as an approach to the "choice of linguistic means" in a particular utterance (Bakhtin, 1986c, pp. 84–85), and as stratified and institutionalised sets of speech practices characterised by particular values, meanings and objects.

Bakhtin's conceptualisation of the variety of discourses in the heteroglossia of the modern novel has relevance for the analysis of texts that represent subordinate voices and those that construct political resistance. As David Lodge (1990) explained, a range of discourses in the discursive, literary space of a novel establishes "resistance ... to the dominance of any one discourse" (p. 22). Developed at a time of volatile political and social tensions in the Soviet Union, the notion of heteroglossia foregrounds language as the material of conflicting ideologies (see Hirschkop, 1986) and challenges the authority of monologic discourse, such as the discourse of the Stalinist state (Shepherd, 1989b).

Although some might regard it as a leap to extend the political values associated with Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia in a literary context to the social and political realm, as Ken Hirschkop (1999) and Simon Dentith (1995) argue, the concept has significant implications for critiquing civil society. Bakhtin uses the term to denote the dialogic, social and institutional nature of discourse (Hirschkop, 1986), as well as the involvement of discourse in social struggle and historical becoming. The concept thus offers a prism through which to view the historical, political and social implications of language in practice (Blackledge & Creese, 2014).

### **Dialogism in discourse**

Bakhtin's theory of dialogism in discourse is complex and operates on a number of levels. It includes an emphasis on social context in the construction of

meaning that is particularly relevant to an analysis of songs that comment on specific events and social issues. Bakhtin views meaning as a dialogical experience dependent on factors beyond basic propositional content. These include events and circumstances as well as the words of others that help to determine stylistic form and content in a particular social and ideological environment at a particular historical time. The dialogic conceptualisation of meaning stresses its inter-subjective quality as a social act: “the fact that it is always found in the space between expression and understanding” (Hirschkop, 1999, p. 4). Meaning “emerges” from the relationship between discourse and context (Zbinden, 2006, p. 17), in an utterance’s response to previous discourses as part of a chain of communication, in its addressivity and orientation towards a future response, and in the responsive understanding of those who listen or read. While understanding is dependent on the reader’s or listener’s background of knowledge and is “a correlation of a given text with other texts ... and reinterpretation, in a new context” (Bakhtin, 1986f, p. 161).

In practice, Bakhtin’s acknowledgement of social and cultural context, of “the social life of discourse outside the artist’s study” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 259), is largely implicit in his work on Dostoevsky for example, or no more than generalised, as in his analysis of Dickens’ *Little Dorrit*. However, the absence of more explicit connections between discourse and social forces in his work could be explained by the fact that much of Bakhtin’s life was lived through periods of political turmoil and oppression. What is important is that Bakhtin points to a “sociological stylistics” (1981, p. 300) that considers the ways in which the language of discourse is embedded in context and also constructs it.

Bakhtin’s ideas may at times be considered idealistic, ambiguous and flawed, and may include apparently contradictory elaborations of the concept of dialogism, as some have argued. Nonetheless, as Ken Hirschkop has pointed out, the great level of interest in Bakhtin is because of the relationship that his concept of dialogism constructs between literary values and socio-political values, and its significant contribution to the project of democracy. The same socio-political values underpin the resistance to racism and authoritarian oppression witnessed in the current period. They are just as important today in struggles to protect democratic principles and processes.

In the context of a life lived through the First World War, the Russian Revolution, Stalinism and the Second World War, Bakhtin’s overarching philosophical task was to seek an understanding of what constitutes an ethical act in inter-subjective relations,<sup>10</sup> which led to an eventual focus on discursive interaction (Hirschkop, 1999). In doing so, he built upon the work of philosophers and theorists such as Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831) and Max Scheler (1874–1928) to produce innovative theories and concepts that have been widely influential across discipline areas.<sup>11</sup>

Bakhtin may have been forced by political circumstances and his experience of exile in Kazakhstan to refrain from overt political and social commentary in a way that Herbs musicians were not. However, the connection between Bakhtin’s lived history, his theories and concepts and the ethical motivations that helped

engender them provides a highly sympathetic and productive framing for this analysis of Herbs' album.

### Approaches to analysis

In the spirit of Bakhtin's view of understanding as active, essentially responsive and dependent on the reader's or listener's background of knowledge and experience, this exploration is viewed as a particular response and interpretation. It applies those tools of literary and discourse analysis from Bakhtin's work that seem most relevant to the interpretation of social commentary, resistance or protest in the album and in each song. Choices made thus reflect the fact that relationships and features that are seen to contribute significantly to the construction of meaning in one song may not be seen as relevant in another. Such choices are part of an interpretative textual enquiry that, as Bakhtin's theories suggest, and Fiona Paton (2000) argues, is contingent on an exploration and rich description of the context of a text's production, including other texts, and its orientation towards its reception, as well as close attention to language and style.

In line with Bakhtin's focus on the meaning of utterances and on understanding and given the referents of Herbs' lyrics and Bakhtin's emphasis on the significance of social context for meaning, my analysis has begun in this chapter by broadly identifying key social, political and ethical themes in the lyrics. In Chapter 4 I include a more detailed examination of relevant historical issues and events in contemporaneous and subsequent texts that relate to these themes.

In investigating Herbs' songs, I draw on my interviews with the band's songwriters, Toni Fonoti and Phil Toms, and focus on three key areas of dialogic relations. These areas include relationships between the songs and the social events they reference, between the Jamaican reggae genre and Pacific musical traditions, and those embodied in discernible references to specific other texts, such as particular Bob Marley songs. In addition, Bakhtin's (1981b) concept of the chronotope (differing configurations of time/space relationships) in literary texts is employed as a framework for analysing relationships embodied in representations of space and time in Herbs' lyrics, and their meaning.

The analysis of meaning also explores the choices Herbs' songwriters make among the heteroglossia of the English language, and choices of narrative style, such as the use of particular forms of double-voiced discourse and the use of polyphony in the recorded performance of songs. Popular songs that reference highly contested social issues and realities, as Herbs' songs do, share similar rhetorical purposes to the "fictional, verbally inventive moral statement[s]" of poetry referred to by Terry Eagleton (2007, p. 25). I supplement Bakhtin's ideas about the relationship between content and form in *Discourse in the Novel*, by extending aspects of Eagleton's contemporary approach to the analysis of poetic discourse, in *How to Read a Poem*, to popular songs. Internal dialogic relationships constructed in features such as rhyme and repetition are therefore investigated in

the song lyrics as similarly “compressed structures of language” (Eagleton, 2007, p. 52). Building on the close reading of Herbs’ songs, I also explore the images and text on the record sleeve, including the printed list of the songs on the two sides of the record album, and examine the key themes and recurrent features of language use that produce its discourses in more detail.

Having identified the significance of the reader’s or listener’s background of knowledge and experience, it seems relevant to refer briefly to my own. This study and writing this book have combined my long-standing interest in popular song lyrics and a love of reggae with my research interests in the areas of language and discourse. They have provided me with an opportunity to learn more about the culture, history and stories of Aotearoa New Zealand through the medium of a highly valued but under-researched cultural artefact, with the help of the musicians who produced it. Music is important to us all. It forms a soundtrack for our day-to-day lives and we use it to control and change our emotions and frames of mind (Frith, 2007). It transmits and articulates cultural memory (Bennett, 2010); produces expressions of place (Frith, 1998; Mitchell, 2009); and has unparalleled power to articulate a sense of individual, group or national identity (Johnson, 1997). Furthermore, Bakhtin’s insistence on the importance of context for the construction and understanding of meaning provides theoretical support that, among other functions, serves to legitimise an investigation of Herbs’ songs as literary works and social and ethical acts, in relation to their social, cultural and historical context. With this support, I have at last been able to respond meaningfully to the literary tradition that dominated my own undergraduate studies, and which has been widely criticised for its focus on literary texts that firmly isolated them from their cultural and historical contexts.

## Notes

- 1 Aotearoa New Zealand brings together a Māori name for the country with the European name and is increasingly adopted by organisations and writers in recognition of the nation’s bicultural foundations.
- 2 Director of APRAAMCOS’s New Zealand Operations Anthony Healey cited in APRAAMCOS (2012).
- 3 Well-known New Zealand composer, multi-instrumentalist, singer and APRA New Zealand Writer Director Don McGlashan spoke of the influence of Bob Marley and of Herbs’ particular cultural significance.
- 4 The album title and the title of the song by the same name are written as *Whats’ Be Happen?* on the album cover.
- 5 The interviews with Toni Fonoti and Phil Toms took place on 5 October 2012, and 21 November 2013 respectively.
- 6 Roots reggae as defined for example by Weber (2000) is the form popularised internationally by Bob Marley and others, featuring full instrumentation and harmonized vocals; it is less frequently heard now in Jamaica, where “dancehall” reggae form predominates, with spoken vocals and computer-generated backing.

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- 7 While the focus here is on Herbs' 1981 record album, it should be noted that in 1982 the band released a cassette album entitled *What's Be Happen? Special Pacific Edition* to commemorate their Pacific Tour that year to Fiji and Tonga. The cassette included the six tracks on the original EP, and three further songs written by Toni Fonoti that were recorded at Mascot Studios at the same time: "French Letter"; "Can't and Shan't" and "Dub: French Letter".
- 8 A special limited re-issue of *What's Be Happen?* was released in 2019 by Tereapa Kahi, Hugh Lynn, and John Baker to coincide with the release of the documentary film, *Herbs: Songs of Freedom*.
- 9 Applied linguistics is broadly defined by the journal *Applied Linguistics* as the application of theory in the study of language use in specific contexts (<http://applj.oxfordjournals.org/>) that emphasises language as a system of communication and a form of social action (see also Kaplan, 2010).
- 10 First explored in Bakhtin's manuscript written between 1919 and 1921 and later published as *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (1993).
- 11 See discussions of such influences by Craig Brandist (2000, 2002) and Brian Poole (2001).

## Discography

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