

YOU ARE EITHER WITH US OR WITH US: CONSTRUCTING A SAMOAN NATIONAL IDENTITY THROUGH INCLUSION AT THE SAMOA OBSERVER

Associate Professor Linda-Jean Kenix
Media and Communication Department
School of Social & Political Sciences
University of Canterbury
New Zealand



JOURNALISM: VERSION I

- Co-creates a shared communicative narrative (Berkowitz, 2000)
- Expansively adaptive and culturally responsive (Deuze, 2005)
- Differences across geographic regions (McNair, 2003)

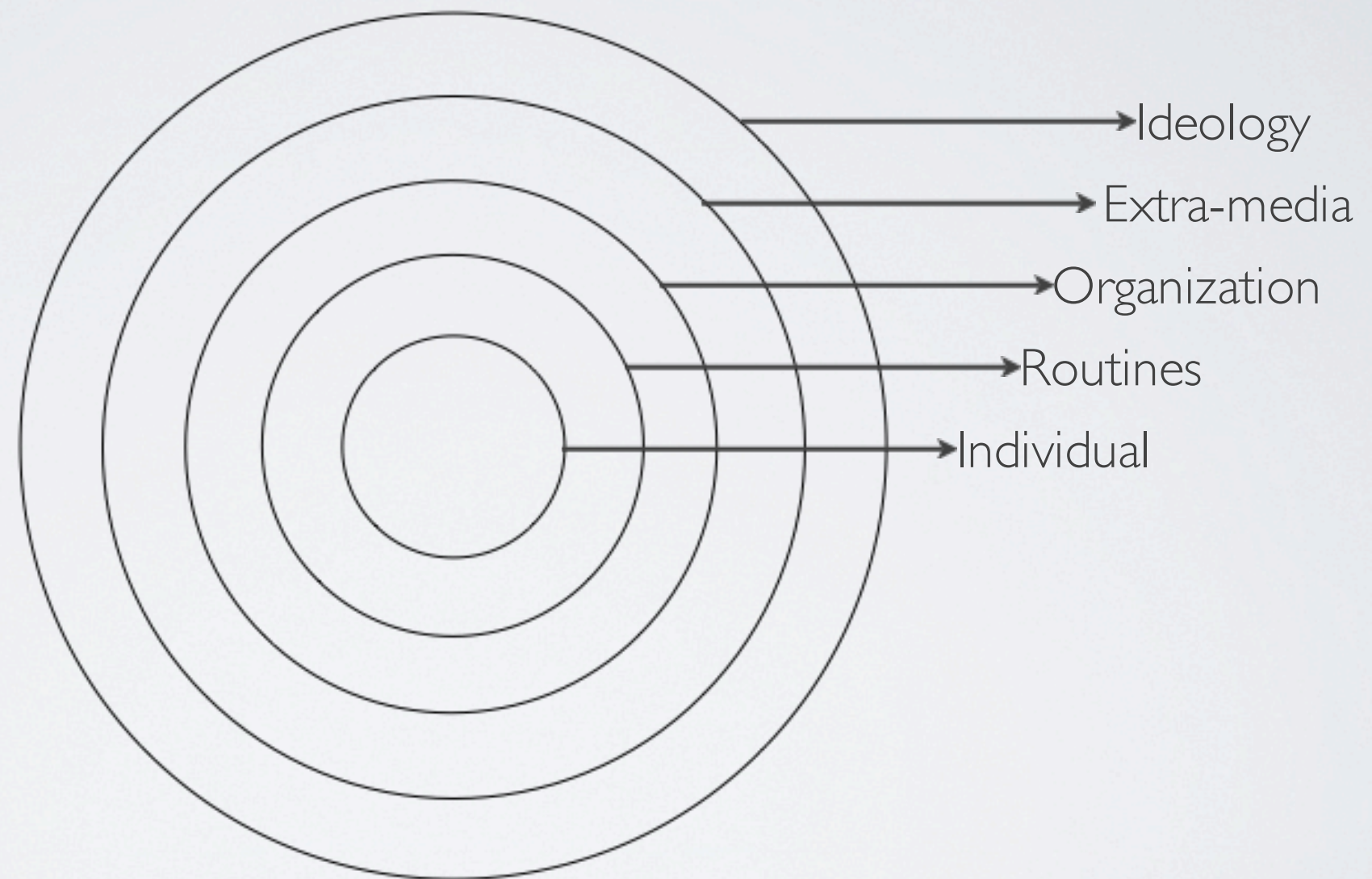
JOURNALISM: VERSION 2

- A “universal stock of professional beliefs”
(Donsbach & Klett, 1993, p. 79)
- Professional values maintain dominant sense of what is journalism (Deuze, 2005)
- Professional ideology of journalism (Zelizer, 2004)
- Ecumenical set of normative journalistic behaviors
(Donsbach, 2008)

JOURNALISM TRAITS

- Truth, authority, freshness, transparency (Robinson & DeShano, 2011)
- Interpreter, disseminator, adversarial, mobilizer
(Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996)
- Empowers audiences as active citizens (Rosen, 2000)
- However...
 - Drawn from western societies (Hanitzsh & Mellado, 2011)
 - Few comparisons of audiences (Heider, McCombs & Pointdexter, 2005)
 - What about culture?

HIERARCHY OF INFLUENCES



CULTURE & HIERARCHY OF INFLUENCES

- Culture is missing...
- Several ideologies exist at the cultural level
(Robinson & DeShano, 2011)
- Hierarchy & Influences model is rooted in 'top down' ideological transmission from "higher power centres in society" (Shoemaker & Reese, 1990, p. 223)
- We must remember that it is "impossible to separate news from community" (Deuze, 2008, p. 850)

SAMOA

- 1914: New Zealand became colonial ruler after Germany
- 1962: Independence
- 1978: The Samoa Observer began
- 1997: Western Samoa became Independent State of Samoa
- ...still no formalized codes of journalistic practice, rare journalism training, contestation with government

METHODOLOGY

- Focus groups & interviews with 21 journalists & 47 audience members from June - August of 2012
 - Snowball methodology...word of mouth, email, Facebook
 - 8 of 21 journalists with the Samoa Observer
 - Audience members 19 to 63 years old in Apia

METHODOLOGY

- What is -- and also what should be -- journalism in Samoa?
- Is there a relationship between culture and journalism in Samoa?
 - Ongoing discussions acknowledging co-construction of meaning in interview process (de Cillia, Resisigl & Wodak, 1999)
 - 'Member checks' (Creswell, 1998) to clarify themes and dominant discourses (Fairclough, 1995)
 - Three-step review process of recurrent discourse (Strauss & Corbin, 1988)

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

- Journalism as a site of (inverted) cultural struggle
 - Journalists: cultural values support work
 - Role of importance as tusitala
 - “We are tusitalas”
 - Government as colonial and oppositional
 - High autonomy & high interventionism appropriate

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

- Journalism as a site of (inverted) cultural struggle
 - Audiences: journalism threatens cultural values
 - Journalism is colonial institution that is not fa'a Samoa
 - “They should be telling our stories. Tell us what is going on. Good stuff. For us.”
 - Government is “one of us. They know Samoa.”
 - Low autonomy & low interventionism appropriate

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

- Cultural knowledge as journalism training
 - Journalists: Knowing Samoa is knowing journalism
 - “You can’t be a journalist in Samoa and not be Samoan.”
 - Cultural authority performed as Samoan loyalty
 - Audiences: The practice of journalism is poor culture
 - Journalism is “not Samoa. You don’t act like that.”

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

- Endurance as a cultural measure of journalistic value
 - Journalists: Importance is in journalism's historical legacy
 - “Fa’a Samoa has always been here. We have to draw on the past to understand where we are going as, as a profession. As a people.”

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

- Endurance as a cultural measure of journalistic value
 - Audiences: Immediacy is a failing of journalism
 - “Why is this important? Where are you going? We’ll get there when it is important to be there.”
 - “If it is important, we’ll know about it. Maybe not today, but someday.”

CONCLUSION

- Large agreement found not due to common education, background or training in both groups
- Modernity and tradition are multi-dimensional & complex
- Journalism in Samoa must attempt a demonstrated interconnection of fa'a Samoa
 - E.g. Talanoa needed in content?
 - Liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000) central to understanding contemporary journalism in Samoa

CONCLUSION

- Culture as the enveloping influence of hierarchy of influences
- Culture is constitutive to Samoan journalism...toward opposing ends across audiences & journalists
 - Culture inverted the perceptions across audiences and journalists of interventionism, market orientation, power distance and autonomy/heteronomy

LIMITATIONS

- Interviews in English
 - Future studies with interpreter
- Mono-cultural limitation to Samoan context
 - Future studies in other countries for cross comparison
- Small sample size
 - Future studies employ survey research