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

- Individual
- Routines
- Organization
- Extra-media
- Ideology
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