'Telling the brown stories': an examination of identity in the ethnic media of multi-generational immigrant communities

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Abstract

Ethnic media models tend to categorise ethnic news media as alternative, diasporic, community or ethnic minority language media. This paper argues for a different way of looking at Pasifika news media that recognises identity as a dominant force in their construction and practice. Through analysis of producers' discursive practices and the texts of two major Pasifika media in Aotearoa/New Zealand – *Tagata Pasifika* and *Spasifik* – this paper finds identity work lies at the heart of what Pasifika news media do. Producers deliberately set out to do Pasifika identity and be the Pasifika voice: about and for all Pasifika. Yet, the texts studied here suggest that by emphasising identity Pasifika news media risk falling back on well-established, often racialised, versions of Pasifika identity that misrepresent the diverse and shifting identities of New Zealand's Pasifika population, especially its New Zealand-born youth. An examination of ethnic minority news media in identity terms, then, can usefully illuminate powerful production forces, including the influence of minority communities and their elites on ethnic minority media.

Key words: ethnic media, Pacific, journalism, identity

Introduction

Pasifika news media[1] in Aotearoa/New Zealand are self-consciously a media of identity, describing themselves as by, for and about Pasifika: 'Pacific people telling Pacific stories', telling 'our stories… because no one else is'. Yet, the identity of New Zealand's Pasifika communities is not straightforward. The Pasifika population is diverse and hard-to-pin-down (Anae, 2001; Fairbairn and Makisi 2003: 40; Macpherson, 2001), comprising at least 13 distinct languages and cultural groups, migrants as well as New Zealand-born, and speakers of Pasifika languages and, increasingly, those who can speak only English. It is also a population in flux. Unlike a generation before, the majority are now New Zealand-born, predominantly young

(much younger than preceding migrant generations), less likely to speak a Pasifika language and more likely to identify with multiple and not just Pasifika ethnicities (Statistics New Zealand and Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2010). Increasingly, these younger New Zealand-born Pasifika identify not with their island or ethnic identity (such as Samoan or Tongan), but also with a broader ethnic identity encompassing all Pacific Islanders and indigenous urban Maori youth, with whom they share more in common than with their island-born parents (Borell, 2005: 205; Teaiwa and Mallon, 2005: 210-211). Given this context of change, how New Zealand's Pasifika news producers imagine and construct Pasifika identity merits attention.

In addition, Pasifika news media navigate an interesting path as the 'other' minority in New Zealand, between the largely ethnocentric mainstream media of the dominant Pakeha[2] majority (Abel 2006) and the increasingly successful media of the indigenous Maori minority. Pasifika media comprise mostly small, family- or church-run newspapers and a handful of radio stations and radio and television programmes (only some of which are state-funded). Maori minority media, by comparison, are larger in scale and better-off, especially broadcast media, which are mandated and funded according to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand's founding power-sharing document[3]. For instance, Maori Television, which was launched in 2004 after a long political struggle by Maori, has flourished against the odds to become arguably the nation's default public service television broadcaster (Smith & Abel, 2008). Like Pasifika news media, Maori news media are ostensibly by, for and about Maori, and yet audience research (Ross, 2012) conducted as part of this wider research project suggests Maori Television draws a sizeable Pasifika audience, which appears to be both alienated by mainstream media and looking for more 'brown' stories. Yet, this shared 'Polynesian' identity sits within a history of political tension and resource competition between Pasifika and Maori, as well as categorisation by dominant media and government institutions that has traditionally lumped Maori and Pasifika together as the 'brown Other'. In fact, Pasifika and Maori have fought hard to be treated as separate entities and some Pasifika producers still resist the identity (some even oppose the conglomerate pan-Pacific grouping, preferring a focus instead on Samoans or Tongans only). Again, in the jostling for a pan-Pasifika audience, definitions of identity are important.

How Pasifika news media producers do identity work, then, is important, not least because it is identity that producers themselves say is key to what they do: this study of two of the major Pasifika media in Aotearoa/NZ finds producers are clearly intentioned about what it means to be 'Pacific', and they construct and perform identity with more obvious deliberation than mainstream media. It is important, also, because their identity work brings the competing forces of production into starker relief. For such reasons, it may be more useful to conceive of these Pasifika media as *identity media* rather than ethnic or minority or alternative media. Ethnic media models tend to categorise ethnic media as alternative, diasporic, community or ethnic minority language media (see, for example, Atton, 2003; Karim, 2003; Forde et al 2009; Howley, 2005 and 20010; and Cormack and Hourigan, 2007). This paper sets out to think through Pasifika media differently, arguing that these categories do not fit the New Zealand Pasifika experience. Moreover, they tend to overstate the homogeneity of ethnic groups[4], understate the construction of ethnicity, and take for granted the existence of the 'community' these media target, despite the fact that 'Pasifika', like 'Asian' or 'black', is a politically, culturally and racially constructed category (Omi and Winant, 1994), so how it is represented, as well as the 'machineries' of representation, are crucial to understanding its meaning (Hall, 1996b: 443). For example, the positioning of Samoan media in New Zealand as 'ethnic media', when in Samoa, where Samoans are dominant, they are normal, unremarkable and not 'ethnic', needs to be explored within structural and ideological contexts to understand the effects of power on these identity positions.

This investigation into how producers do identity work at two quite different (old and new) Pasifika news media finds that identity is evolving less noticeably within these media than either the shifts in New Zealand-born Pasifika youth identity described above or the idea of identity fluidity would suggest. It has become a truism within the social sciences and ethnic media scholarship that identity is dynamic, contested, and 'always in process' (Hall, 1996b: 2; Matsaganis et al 2011: 70-72; Downing and Husband, 2005: 14), but the major point arising from this analysis is that within these Pasifika news media there is an enduring dominance of traditional, orthodox Pasifika identity that requires explanation. Accepting Hall's assertion (1996b: 2 and 4) that identification is conditional, this paper examines Pasifika news media identities as the

product of specific historical and institutional sites and specific discursive formations and practices. It finds that producers' identity work is restricted and shaped by the expectations of audiences and traditional Pasifika elites, the influence of the dominant majority, institutional and professional pressures, and producers' material circumstances. These media are not, as they claim, for and about *all* Pasifika. More accurately, they are about *some* Pasifika peoples and not others. By examining who is represented in these media, and how, this paper aims to demonstrate that identity is a useful tool for teasing out the complex role and place of Pasifika news media in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Material

This paper examines the discursive practices of two high-profile Pasifika media and their producers[5] – the State-funded television programme *Tagata Pasifika*, which is the longest-running Pasifika media in New Zealand, and the newer seven-year-old independent magazine *Spasifik. Tagata Pasifika* is a weekly 25min news and current affairs television show produced by a small Pasifika team within state-owned Television New Zealand (TVNZ). It is funded by New Zealand on Air to serve New Zealand's Pasifika population, and is screened on TVNZ's TV One. *Spasifik* is a privately owned, commercial production – an English-language bi-monthly news and current affairs magazine 'dedicated to both the Maori and Pacific peoples'. Both are produced for national pan-Pacific audiences and in English rather than Pasifika languages, which makes them an instructive study – without recourse to language[6] or geographically specific or ethnic locales, they must work harder at constructing their Pasifika identity.

I draw on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with *Spasifik* and *Tagata Pasifika* producers and a comparative analysis of media content from these two outlets during the 2011 Rugby World Cup[7], which provided an opportunity to examine New Zealand versus Pasifika identities within two news contexts: the Rugby World Cup (RWC), September 9 to October 23, 2011, which pitted the Samoan, Tongan and Fijian national rugby teams against New Zealand's national team, and the 42nd Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Meeting, held in New Zealand September 6 to 9 to coincide with the opening of the cup. I focus primarily on Pasifika producers' discursive construction of identity – the cultural codes and resources they drew on, how they

applied them, and what they constructed – but with the understanding that this discursive work is socially situated. Thus, the examination of how producers understood identity and used cultural norms and discourses in their talk and media texts to represent identity takes into account that producers' identity construction is mediated by their interactional, organisational and institutional contexts (Holstein and Gubrium, 2008: 379-380).

My analysis of producers' identity work was exploratory and inductive. In the media texts, I systematically examined and compared who was represented, what topics and themes were featured, and how. I looked closely at what roles people were identified with, where and how they were situated (for instance, whether their ethnic identity was signified and how, and whether their ethnic identity as 'Tongans' was preferred over their national identity as 'New Zealanders'), and the language used to flag people (Billig, 1995), such as 'that team' for the New Zealand All Blacks and 'our teams' for the Pasifika rugby teams. Having identified patterns within and between each media, I looked at whether and how these discursive patterns were reproduced in producers' own talk to examine the everyday reasoning that producers used to construct and objectify 'Pacificness'.

The stories

Tagata Pasifika produced 13 stories and packages on the Rugby World Cup (including dedicating two-thirds of an episode to an expert panel interview) and these focused almost exclusively on Pasifika teams, Pasifika players and/or Pasifika fans. Stories about Tongan, Fijian and Samoan teams and their fans opened the first three episodes and comprised a substantial part of the following two. In contrast, *Tagata Pasifika* included the New Zealand rugby team only a handful of times, and in one story it was subordinate to the story's main focus, Tonga, and in another two (an interview with Pasifika All Black Ma'a Nonu, and a 48-second clip on New Zealand's semi-final win), which ran *after* the Pacific teams were knocked out of the cup, *Tagata Pasifika* focused on the All Blacks' Pasifika players. Significantly, the programme reported all Pacific nations' games, but not all of New Zealand's, including its quarterfinal match. The final, won by New Zealand, was reported in passing in its lead story:

> Angela Tiatia: But first, what a massive weekend. Unbelievable.

Tom Natoealofa: Yes, unbelievable all right. Awesome. Go the All Blacks. So proud.

Angela Tiatia: And now that we have the Rugby World Cup in New Zealand hands, we have the New Zealand election just over a month away.

Tagata Pasifika's wrap of the tournament with an expert Pasifika panel similarly subordinated the All Blacks by airing well before the completion of New Zealand's games, and immediately after the exit of the Pacific nations. It also focused on the Pacific teams' performance, Pasifika players, and Pacific rugby issues; interviewer John Utanga did not mention the All Blacks until he was more than 15 minutes into the 16min30s special. *Tagata Pasifika's* coverage implicitly assumed ownership of the Pasifika teams, but rarely ownership of the All Blacks, which, ironically, has many Pasifika players; and it framed identity clearly in terms of Pacific, not New Zealand, homelands. Contrast that with Maori Television, which owned the whole All Blacks team and positioned itself as a national television channel.

Many of the programme's stories were not about rugby per se, but about celebrating Pasifika identities. Its first story to open the tournament, on the 'Ikale Tahi[8] and its fans, depicted parades of Tongan red shirts, drumming, and players and fans alike performing traditional dances. 'We're here at Western Springs where the team will be training down there,' reporter John Pulu said, 'but for the rest of us, we're here to celebrate Tonga day.' The story was punctuated by (rare) performances of Pasifika language[9] with Natoealofa opening his introduction in Tongan and Pulu cutting mid-package to a 90-second clip of Tongan students performing poems and speeches for Tongan language week.

Notably, *Tagata Pasifika* 'celebrated' some identities more than others – Samoan and Tongan fans were featured far more than Fijian fans[10]; other Pasifika fans whose 'national' team was the All Blacks were invisible and identities were represented unambiguously as Pasifika. Despite the fact most Pasifika are now born in New Zealand, a dual Pasifika-New Zealand identity was signified only three times – and twice New Zealand loyalties were clearly subordinated to Pasifika ones. When asked if the red (Tongan) shirts would come off and the black (New Zealand) ones go on given the Pacific teams had exited, *Tagata Pasifika's* expert panel and interviewer laughed. Samoan-born New Zealand Black Fern[11] Fiao'o Fa'amausili (who wore Samoan colours) said, 'I think we'll just keep the original ones on and keep

supporting the All Blacks'. The subtext was clear: one's identity is Pasifika first and always, and it was absurd to suggest otherwise.

Both in its rugby coverage and especially its other stories *Tagata Pasifika* reinforced orthodox Pasifika identities by reproducing and privileging constructions framed within cultural tradition or homelands. Pasifika homelands have considerable symbolic influence as 'authentic' referentials against which 'Pacificness' is measured in New Zealand, and the values and behaviours privileged as most truly Pasifika tend to favour those in the homelands (Mila-Schaaf, 2010: 208, 219). 'Homeland' items figured in six out of eight *Tagata Pasifika* episodes, and performing arts (more than half of which featured traditional performance) in all eight. The programme also reproduced dominant stereotypes through continual references to Pasifika rugby and league players' 'Pacific flair'[12], and to Pasifika athletes, performing artists, and church-goers, but not business owners or scientists or IT professionals.

In contrast, its one item on the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting was devoid of obvious Pasifika constructions. It was a straightforward news package reported in professionally neutral language; there was nothing distinctly 'Pacific' in its focus or style. *Tagata Pasifika* is produced within Television New Zealand's (TVNZ) professional culture, and at times it reported entirely within those norms, as in this example. At all times, it was constrained by that institutional position, reporting *for* an audience rather than standing alongside them. Intriguingly, its reporters' and presenters' language was remarkably neutral. They seldom talked about 'our communities' or 'our people' – unlike their interviewees who were far more proprietary – and when they did, it stood out from their usual formal 'objective' language.

Spasifik did not cover the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting, but devoted its special edition, led by a feature on tournament boss Martin Sneddon, to the world cup. As tournament chief executive, Sneddon was a newsworthy subject, but, as a Pakeha, a surprising choice to open the magazine and frame the Pacific nations' involvement. Mainstream media have been criticised elsewhere (Loto et al, 2006: 102) for failing to give Pasifika the opportunity to frame their own experiences and speak directly

through the media, and the same was true here. Of the Pasifika and Maori featured in *Spasifik*'s rugby stories, only two (former All Blacks Jonah Lomu and Michael Jones) had a voice. Its visual representations, however, were strongly Pasifika. A half-page picture of Lomu and an inset story on Jones, for instance, dwarfed Sneddon's small photo.

In some ways, the two outlets related quite differently to Pasifika. Apart from its lead story, *Spasifik*'s rugby subjects, like *Tagata Pasifika*'s, were clearly 'brown', but unlike *Tagata Pasifika*, the magazine focused on Pasifika *and Maori*. The magazine is branded as 'Pacific and Maori proud' and seven of 30 features were on Maori subjects, including two columns by Maori contributors. Pasifika voices and representations dominated the magazine, but there were considerably more Maori representations in *Spasifik* than on *Tagata Pasifika Pasifika*, where Maori featured only a handful of times (and were signified as Maori only once). Arguably, *Spasifik*'s mixed-identity product better reflected the blended Polynesian identity evident among some Pasifika audiences and the wider Pasifika community[13]. Unlike *Tagata Pasifika*, *Spasifik* also portrayed Pasifika as All Blacks supporters and generally better represented the identities of New Zealand-born or raised Pasifika as well as the tensions inherent within a Pasifika/New Zealand identity. One story chronicled the 'straddling [of] two worlds'; another quoted Jonah Lomu on his divided loyalties and described his reception in Tonga in ways that problematised his Tonganness:

> Amid the fanfare of his return were deafening whispers of it being so long between visits, of Lomu revealing his fractured relationship with his at-times abusive father Semisi in his book … and that he turned down a request to visit by the Royal Family. It seems that no matter how famous a Tongan you are, you don't criticise your parents in public and you never turn down a request from the Royal Family.

Thus, *Spasifik*'s producers provided quite different understandings of the generic category 'Pasifika', which were often in opposition to *Tagata Pasifika.*

However, despite its broader representations *Spasifik,* too, reinforced stereotypes and was, in some ways, more narrowly orthodox in its construction of identity than *Tagata Pasifika.* The magazine continually described Pasifika and Maori rugby players in typecast and essentialist terms – as adding 'unpredictability', 'colour', 'renowned physicality and flair' – and presented Pasifika in racialised terms as unmistakably 'brown'. It also resorted to a 'homeland' discourse, profiling the

'return' to 'their islands' of well-known Pasifika, some of whom were New Zealand-born. Significantly, *Spasifik* also listed people's ethnicity or 'home' village at first mention of their name – 'Tigilau Ness (Mutalau, Niue)', 'Frank Bunce (Niuean, Samoan)', which was a clear demonstration of traditional Pasifika cultural ideals – knowing and having connections with one's 'homeland' community and family is an important form of capital in Pasifika social spaces (Mila-Schaaf, 2010). Notably, *Tagata Pasifika* rarely labelled its subject's ethnicities (leaving them implicit in its content) and never identified 'home' village.

Thus in *Tagata Pasifika*'s content we see, broadly, the construction of Pasifika, but not New Zealand-Pasifika identities, 'brown' but rarely Pakeha or mixed ethnicities, and, repeatedly, the celebration of Pacificness within narrow orthodox frames of 'homeland', tradition and performance. *Spasifik*'s content was subtly different in two ways: there was a broadening of identity with the inclusion of New Zealand-Pasifika and Maori identities and a richer portrayal of the complexities of Pasifika identity, but also a narrower construction of orthodox identity through 'home' village and ethnic classifications. These texts suggest that by emphasising Pasifika identity, producers are at risk of falling back on particular well-established versions of that identity – sometimes a racialised version that reproduces dominant ideological constructions, but more often essentialist, traditional or orthodox versions that are characterised by a nostalgic allegiance to and fetishisation of the 'homeland' and 'homeland' culture (Naficy, 1993).

Producers' narratives

Producers' talk underscored the constructed dimensions of these textual representations by revealing their intent to perform Pasifika identities – and certain identities at that. *Tagata Pasifika*'s executive producer described his programme as 'a news and current affairs driven programme *of identity*' and scarcely referred to its news production; *Spasifik*'s editor described it as 'a magazine *and identity*, connecting people across New Zealand and the Pacific' [my italics]. They rarely talked about news production and where they did, it was in terms of authenticity and telling Pasifika stories missed by mainstream media or telling them in Pasifika ways: 'who's telling the story, who's telling the brown stories? Are white people telling our [stories]? Would you be comfortable with Americans telling Kiwi stories? No'.

Crucially, this discourse, of telling 'brown' stories in 'brown' ways, effectively set limits on how 'Pacificness' could be authentically performed. *Tagata Pasifika* producers argued that credible, 'authentic' Pasifika media should be led by Pasifika producers and fronted by Pasifika journalists, and what constituted 'Pacificness' was cultural knowledge, community connection, and, notably, appearance:

> I don't think we'd ever employ a Pakeha journalist unless they were half: half. In fact, we do have half … half Swiss and half Samoan. But you've got to have some connection to the Pacific community for credibility ... just credibility in that the person telling the story is somebody *who looks like they know* what they're talking about and is familiar with the issues, the language even, if you're lucky. [My italics]

So one was defined as 'brown' only if one looked 'brown'. By constructing 'Pacificness' in such racialised ways, producers inevitably included some and excluded others, notably mixed ethnicity Pasifika or those 'half: half' who happen to look 'white'.

Significantly, although producers spoke frankly and unequivocally about the fact of identity construction within their media, they were less explicit about *which* identities they reproduced or *why*. Routinely, they fell back on indistinct and taken-for-granted understandings of 'Pacificness', which more often than not reproduce traditional, orthodox identities that potentially exclude and mis-recognise the emerging generations of New Zealand-born and mixed ethnicity Pasifika. *Tagata Pasifika* producers spoke of their reliance on the spectacle of Pasifika performing arts as well as news from 'home' to celebrate identity and 'get the audience in', without reflecting on whether New Zealand-born Pasifika could or should recognise themselves in such constructions. *Spasifik*'s editor described his reliance on traditional Pasifika artwork 'to identify with the community and reach out, … create that ownership', but also his intent that *Spasifik* be a media space for Pasifika who are disenfranchised from their cultural traditions. His narrative repeatedly acknowledged differences between migrants and New Zealand-born, and Pasifika language speakers and English speakers, and also criticised migrant first-generation regulation of the 'authentic' ways of performing Pasifika identities. Yet, despite a demotic narrative that challenged the dominant Pasifika identity discourse (and a product that was more inclusive than *Tagata Pasifika),* he still reproduced orthodox Pasifika ideals and identities, such as locating one's village and ethnicity, even though he conceded many

New Zealand-born Pasifika, like him, probably could not name their village. Indeed, this investigation reveals that traditional cultural representations are much more durable than we give credit for. The contradictions between continuity and change are always in play. The enduring dominance of traditional, orthodox Pasifika identity within these Pasifika news media clearly contradicts the notion that identity is 'always in process' (Hall, 1996b: 2) – and is out of step with the identity shifts among New Zealand-born Pasifika youth.

Discussion

The persistence – and reification – of particular versions of Pasifika identity is partly an effect of dominant and Pasifika hegemonic forces, as well as wider structural forces. Pasifika news media still struggle within a racialised political economy that restricts the range of identity called on. The notion that ethnic identity is a personal choice or freely constructed performance overemphasises agency at the expense of these structural forces. A *Tagata Pasifika* producer said of his experience of being categorised:

> 'People never ask me if I (am) Swedish – not one – and I have Swedish in my mother's ancestry. Not one person has ever asked me. They always ask me, 'what have you got in you; you've got something in you?' You know that's the dominant culture looking at that'.

Pasifika producers choose their representations from existing symbolic resources and they perform identities within the limits of cultural conventions (Moores, 2005:161) and the dominant categorisation of ethnic groups. With respect to Nagel (1994: 156), white New Zealanders have considerable latitude in choosing ethnic identities (English, Scottish, Dutch, Pakeha, New Zealander and so on), but New Zealanders of Pasifika ancestry are confronted with essentially one ethnic option – brown. While Pasifika can and do make intra-group distinctions, the power of racial discourse makes these internal differences unimportant in comparison to the fundamental 'black/white' colour boundary. Thus, Pasifika producers' identity work is about not only self-identification – what you think your ethnicity is – *but also* the dominant outsiders' designation – what they think your ethnicity is (Nagel, 1994: 154). The positioning of Samoan news media in New Zealand as 'ethnic media' must be understood as an effect of a particular structural and ideological context. Pasifika news media are a minority culture media situated in the wider context of a racial political economy (Abel, 2011) that influences both producers' material means and

the frames of reference they can employ (Kosnick, 2007: 166). *Tagata Pasifika* and *Spasifik*, like ethnic media elsewhere (Browne, 2005; Cottle, 2000), are constrained by poor state funding and small audiences that are too poor or too scattered to attract advertisers, and are compelled to target the broadest possible audience – a Pasifika conglomerate. In the case of *Spasifik* and *Tagata Pasifika*, producers who are already constructed by dominant institutions and mainstream media as the 'Other' necessarily reinforce that construction (rather than deploy other niche identities, such as Cook Islands Maori or Tuvaluan) because the economic and structural realities of their media production dictate that.

Moreover, producers navigate a tension between finding and articulating a voice as a minority ethnic group and being forced or allowed to speak *only* as a member of that group (Sreberny, 2005: 445). *Spasifik*, through its heavy reliance on government advertising, and *Tagata Pasifika*, through its dependence on state funding and the goodwill of its (Pakeha) bosses, are positioned, as are ethnic media elsewhere (Cottle, 2000: 17; Cohen, 2003: 146), by state regulatory frameworks and policy, and the state's ideas about multiculturalism and its reification of a conglomerate 'Pacific Island' ethnicity and community. Pan-ethnic identities such as Pasifika are rooted in the dominant group's assignment of identity categories (Omi & Winant, 2001). That is not to say that producers are not actively involved in characterising themselves as Pasifika, but to recognise that dominant institutions and mainstream media continually reinforce the 'groupness' of Pasifika media. Producers alluded to Pakeha funders, bosses and advertisers, as well as their material conditions, as influencers of their product, including its identity. *Tagata Pasifika* producers described being tasked by New Zealand on Air and TVNZ with being 'everything to everybody', when, ideally, the show would be carved up for different audiences:

> If we had the resources and the time you would really have a Samoan
> programme or you'd either cut it across some ethnic lines or you'd cut it
> across age lines or the biggest divide, New Zealand-born and island-born.

Pasifika producers' identity constructions were thus circumscribed by structural forces and shaped by hegemonic ideas and narratives from the dominant space. The reproduction of stereotypes within *Spasifik* and *Tagata Pasifika*, for instance, is possibly an unavoidable consequence for minority groups attempting to stake out

identity within a dominant society – they cannot escape altogether the categorisations of the dominant group (Jenkins, 1997).

Having said that, identity is a product of internal definition and group identification as much as it is a product of external categorisation, and Pasifika communities also have a role in shaping the identities presented in Pasifika news media. There are proper ways of being Pasifika and, as Appiah says (1994: 162-3), the line between recognition and compulsion is a blurry one. Through the power of recognition (Mila-Schaaf, 2010: 133), Pasifika audiences and particularly Pasifika community elites authorise the legitimacy of Pasifika news media – and their identities. Hooks (1996: 105) describes elsewhere consumers' heavy policing of the authenticity of black producers' work, and the same appears to happen here. Producers might *identify* their media as Pasifika, but to have it *identified back* is never a given, especially if they operate beyond the limits of what is constituted and regulated in Pasifika social spaces as 'Pacific', such as being in a Pasifika language (Southwick, 2001: 125; Mila-Schaaf, 2010: 262). Hence, producers' identity work was about more than simply locating one's media or oneself as 'Pasifika', or even finding an audience; it was also about recognition and acceptance or, as Butler (1995) suggests, the burden of recognition.

Key to this process is the meaning that Pasifika producers invested in the ethnic identity they shared with their audiences and their felt obligations to those audiences. This study finds that the meaningfulness of that relationship effectively narrows the producer-audience distance that Thompson (1995) describes in mainstream mass media, that is, the 'mediated quasi-interaction' typified a communication done over a distance, and that is one-way and lacking reciprocity, where 'neither producers nor recipients are under any mutual obligation to take account of the responses of the other' (Thompson, 1995: 98). This notion of a distant media-audience relationship underestimates the connection that Pasifika media producers had – or believed they had – with their audiences. In Pasifika news media producers' identity and 'community' work, producers perceived a more active relationship and interactive audience; one that had the power to mis-recognise and reject Pasifika media as legitimately belonging in-group. As such, they constructed, symbolically, a much closer Pasifika community, in which differences between producers and consumers

were subsumed by their ethnic commonality. Whether or not such a community existed is not the point. The reality of community lay in producers' perception of its vitality and the ways in which they made it a referent of their Pasifika identity (Cohen, 1985: 118). Whether or not audiences actually exercised their power to mis-recognise is also beside the point. What was important was the meaning that Pasifika producers attached to the shared relationship and their felt obligations to those audiences.

For one, the meaning that producers assigned to their audiences had material effects. More often than not, Pasifika producers appeared to take defensive action to anticipated community criticism or mis-recognition. They tended to restrict their productions to certain cultural and representational parameters (typically, the 'doxa' identity ideals that Mila-Schaaf (2010: 263) says have hegemonic status over others in the New Zealand Pasifika space), or they compensated for unorthodox representations with conspicuous efforts to prove in-group belonging, often by resorting to 'authentic' identities based on orthodox or nostalgically traditional identities. *Spasifik* magazine's departure from Pasifika norms – by being in English and combining a Maori and Pasifika 'Polynesian' identity – arguably accounts for its resort to Pasifika artwork in its logo and explicit village and ethnic labels to stamp its 'Pacificness'. Conscious that many Pasifika might regard it as 'not really Pacific', the magazine's producers have to take care not to be 'too palagi[14]' or 'not Pacific enough'.

Producers' juggled the identity expectations of, and their felt obligations to, their communities against other pressures from the market or State. *Spasifik's* editor, for example, described balancing the economic survival of his magazine when he rebranded it as Pasifika and Maori against a strongly felt obligation to maintain a Pasifika-only focus:

> While there is certain advertising targeted at Pacific, Maori in terms of resources is far greater. I didn't want to lose the Pacific identity but I knew if we could tap into even a smidgeon of Maori advertising it would help us financially … Especially when advertising dried up in 2008 and I thought, 'well, we need to diversify otherwise it's going to struggle'.

He also described having to balance the need for advertising revenue or sponsorship (which, for most Pasifika media, was in short supply) with community expectations of Pasifika values of service and Christian ideals, particularly when weighing whether to

advertise loan sharks, alcohol or gambling venues. In all these discursive moments, producers conceived not of an anonymous, passive audience, but an audience with a voice – 'People are really good at ringing up. They're getting better at writing in, but they can ring up and just let you have it. They won't hold back,' said a *Tagata Pasifika* producer. In producers' imagining of audiences – and in reality – Pasifika audiences hold the power to legitimate identity.

It is important to understand that Pasifika producers' identity work is more than just a conceptual exercise; it is both performed *and experienced* (Madianou, 2005:523). Producers were practically and emotionally invested in these constructions. It was not just the identity of their media that they re-presented, but also their own. When asked what it was that made their media 'Pacific', producers invariably located their own identities, describing their own community connections, how often they attended church, how often they visited their 'home' islands and so on, and there are strong cultural pressures to do so.

> There's a different sort of credibility that you have in the Pacific community. When you go out there and they ask, 'Who are you?' they're not asking what qualifications you have, necessarily, but they're asking, 'What gives you the right to stand here before me? Who is your family?' that kind of thing.

Pasifika producers' identity work, then, is connected to deeply personal feelings about belonging, exclusion, acceptance and rejection (Mila-Schaaf, 2010: 250). This coupling of producer and media identity was complemented by a strong felt relationship to their audiences – a much closer relationship in both producers' imagining and practice than that supposed by the model of 'quasi-interaction'.

This represents a lessening of the barrier between producers and audiences (which Forde et al (2009) also found among indigenous audiences and community broadcasters in Australia) and suggests even more influence in terms of identity authorisation among certain Pasifika audiences.

Arguably, the close producer-audience connection affords more influence to Pasifika community elites and their hegemonic discourses about the proper ways of being 'Pacific'. Producers who are (or who simply feel) tightly connected to Pasifika spaces are all the more conscious of Pasifika normative values and group boundaries – and all the more susceptible to the policing of particular versions of authenticity and

identity. Thus, while we can see some nuanced differences in the identity discourse and practice of Pasifika news media producers, such as between *Tagata Pasifika* and *Spasifik*, overall the identities they produced and reproduced are narrow and generally limited to traditional and stereotyped representations of 'Pacificness', because they reflect the broader power relations in Pasifika spaces where Pacific-born, Pasifika-speaking and migrant identities are privileged over others (Southwick, 2001; Luafutu-Simpson, 2006; Mila-Schaaf, 2010). In this way, Pasifika ideologies of the proper ways of being 'Pacific', along with dominant ideologies of 'race' and 'ethnicity as well as the effect of wider structural forces, work in combination to restrain some versions of Pasifika identity and maintain other, usually traditional, versions.

Conclusion

Thus, despite significant differences between Pasifika groups (particularly between different generations), and evidence of shifting youth identities (Anae, 2001; Borell, 2005: 205; Fairbairn and Makisi 2003: 40; Macpherson, 2001; Teaiwa and Mallon, 2005: 210-211), the Pasifika identities constructed within these two media are, to varying degrees, narrow and surprisingly resistant to change – and certainly more stable than the idea that identities are completely constructed, fluid and contested otherwise proposes. The wider-ranging identities produced in the newer, younger *Spasifik*, compared with *Tagata Pasifika*, suggest that identity within Pasifika media is dynamic and evolving in some respects. However, the continuity and predominance of narrow traditional and orthodox Pasifika identities in most Pasifika news media suggests that 'Pacific' identity is evolving more slowly in the Pasifika media sphere than the changing Pasifika demographic profile in Aotearoa/New Zealand suggests. As Southwick (2001: 125) suggests, given that more than 60% of people who live in New Zealand and claim a Pasifika ethnicity are New Zealand-born, the practice of exclusionary normative group boundaries is becoming an important issue, not least for news media producers. The question becomes to what degree the ideological, cultural and structural forces identified here will position Pasifika news media closer to or further from the communities they seek to serve – and what, if any, implications that has for the future relevance and reach of Pasifika news media, particularly if they fall too far out of tune (Matsaganis et al, 2011: 241) with their target communities.

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Notes

[1] For the purposes of this investigation, 'Pasifika' news media are defined as news and current affairs media produced in New Zealand by and for New Zealand's main Pacific groups, that is, predominantly Samoan, Cook Islands Maori, Tongan, Niuean, Fijian, Tokelauan, and Tuvaluan communities.

[2] White New Zealander as opposed to Maori or Pasifika.

[3] Some Pacific broadcasters, including *Tagata Pasifika Pasifika*, do receive Government support, but their legislative mandate is weaker and their funding is smaller.

[5] *Spasifik* editor, *Tagata Pasifika Pasifika* executive producer, *Tagata Pasifika Pasifika* senior reporter, and two former *Tagata Pasifika Pasifika* reporters.

[6] As with other conglomerate groups (Matsaganis et al 2011: 263), Pasifika do not share a common language, so Pasifika language media are limited to the small ethnic-specific audiences who understand them. To maintain viability, media such as *Spasifik* target the larger conglomerate Pasifika group, but can do so only in English.

[7] The September/October 2011 edition of *Spasifik* (Issue No. 46, Special Rugby 2011 Collector's Edition) and *Tagata Pasifika Pasifika* episodes 25 (September 8, 2011) to 32 (October 27, 2011), immediately following the October 23 tournament final.

[8] Tonga's national team, it means 'sea eagles'.

[9] This was the only time presenters used a Pasifika language for anything other than a greeting.

[10] Notably, Samoans make up 50% of all Pasifika in New Zealand (131,103), Tongans 18% (50, 478), and Fijians 4% (9,864).

[11] New Zealand women's rugby team.

[12] Pasifika and Maori are typified in physical terms as strong, fast, and 'naturally' talented, but rarely in terms of leadership, intelligence or ability to make decisions under pressure. Hoberman (1997: 125-126) says the dichotomy, replicated elsewhere, is a function of colonial psychology and justifies white male authority.

[13] More than 20 per cent of 0-4 year old Pasifika in the 2006 Census identified as Pacific *and* Maori (Statistics New Zealand and Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2010), and 22 per cent of *Spasifik* readers in a 2010 survey identified as part Maori (*Spasifik*, 2010).

[14] Samoan word used to refer to white New Zealanders (as opposed to Maori or Pasifika).

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