Talking about identity, community and belonging: The locative practices of Pacific news media in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Abstract
This article argues that New Zealand’s Pacific news media are key sites where producers negotiate identity, community and belonging through what are described as locative practices. A qualitative analysis of interviews with 23 Pacific media producers and journalists finds that, regardless of their location or size, Pacific news media routinely invoke and perform community and are more like smaller, hyper-local community media in the intimacy of their relationship with their audiences. Producers achieve this by foregrounding their Pacific identities, their connection to community and traditional values of service. Indeed, it is these locative practices, more than others, that underpin the distinctiveness of Pacific and other ethnic media and their enduring relevance to ethnic audiences.

Keywords
Ethnic media, community, identity, locative practice, Pacific media

Introduction
The scholarship on Indigenous and ethnic minority news media has advanced various roles for ethnic media, such as political advocacy and providing a voice for communities overlooked by mainstream media, as well as explanatory models that increasingly emphasise the cultural forces at work in these media (for general works, see Browne, 2005; Forde, Foxwell and Meadows, 2009; Hanusch, 2014; Matsaganis, Katz and Ball-Rokeach, 2011). By considering ethnic media in terms of how ethnic minority producers understand these media, this article suggests a further model: of ethnic media as a media of identity negotiation. By analysing the discursive practices of 23 Pacific news media producers and journalists in Aotearoa New Zealand, it provides original evidence of how Pacific media producers construct Pacific communities through strategic ploys of identity and belonging, while in the process of producing news for them.

The discussion that follows explores the ways in which Pacific news media are a complex object – as an identity-based media, they are constantly being redefined and reconstructed in different contexts – and examines various ways to analyse the field, including frameworks of practice and geo-social journalism. It explores the role of New Zealand’s Pacific news media via interviews with Pacific media producers to ascertain how producers make meaning about the forces shaping and, for the producers, legitimating Pacific media production. Through doing so, it finds that these fora are key sites where producers negotiate community, belonging and identity (where identity is understood in broad terms of community, relationships, connection and one’s ‘place to stand’). It argues that the various Pacific media practices identified in this

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study may be understood as *locative practices* – that is, strategic practices of identity and connection that are intertwined tightly with ideas of community, interrelationship and one’s ‘place to stand’, and that therefore must be understood within their differently situated contexts.

**New Zealand’s Pacific news media**

Pacific news media are small compared with most other media in New Zealand, where the mediascape is dominated by outlets that are largely Pākehā dominated and, in the commercial sector, foreign-owned (Myllylahti, 2014). Outlets include a range of mostly small, family- or church-run newspapers; two national magazines (*Spasiilik* and *Suga*); a handful of radio stations, including the state-owned national station Niu FM; a handful of television programs (such as *Tagata Pasifika* and *Fresh*); and a growing number of online media such as *Moana TV, Kaniva Tonga* and *TheCoconet.tv* (Kailahi, 2009; Utanga, 2007). They are mostly under resourced and heavily reliant on state funding and patronage from other funding sources, and there is a high degree of churn within the field. They operate on different scales, with mum and dad or church-run newspapers sitting alongside medium-sized corporates, such as *Spasiilik* magazine, and larger public broadcasters such as Niu FM. They are also diverse in terms of media type (including whether they are state owned or funded, commercial and/or community media), funding, location, language and audience (multi-ethnic or specific ethnic, national or local). Several are cross-platform and many blur the lines between traditional corporate and community categories, which makes it hard to generalise about the Pacific media landscape or to categorise according to established theories of community media, minority language media or alternative media.

New Zealand’s Pacific news media also face several challenges. Unlike other ethnic minority media, such as Latino media in the United States, New Zealand’s Pacific media are discrete: most do not have parent companies in their ‘homeland’ on which to call for financial or production support or content. That means that what they do for their New Zealand-based Pacific audiences, which are poorly served by mainstream media (Loto et al., 2006; Spoonley and Hirsh, 1990), matters. On top of these structural challenges, Pacific news media are grappling with significant digital transformation of the media ecosystem and significant intergenerational and cultural transformation within their target Pacific population (Ross, 2017). These media – especially those that serve more than one ethnic group – are therefore required to be many things for a population that is scattered and tremendously diverse.

**Understanding the ‘community-ness’ of Pacific news media**

The scholarship on community media is a natural starting point for looking at the role played by Pacific news media in the construction of community, although community media are focused primarily on localised communities and not necessarily communities that are ethnically different. That said, many ethnic media are also small, locally situated productions that serve a particular neighbourhood (Viswanath and Lee, 2007, cited in Matsaganis, Katz and Ball-Rokeach, 2011: 207) and the idea of local community and community voice and cohesion is often prevalent in the work of ethnic media producers (Budarick, 2016: 2). There is a growing body of work looking at ethnic or immigrant media that serve localised audiences (Forde, Foxwell and Meadows, 2009; Molnar and Meadows, 2001; Rodriguez, 2001, 2016), including media that serve ethnically and geographically specific communities (see Ball-Rokeach, Kim and Matei, 2001; Lin and Song, 2006; Lin, Song and Ball-Rokeach, 2010).

Hess and Waller (2014) argue that ‘community’ has been used to describe media with very different forms and functions, and is in fact a weak theoretical foundation for building understanding of the changing place of community media in the digital era. For a start, the concept of community media is slippery. Such media have been variously studied as alternative,
radical, independent, amateur, and participatory and citizens’ media (to name just a few examples), and Atton (2015: 3) warns that each incarnation hides as much as it reveals. While not wanting to refute that the interaction of geography and ethnicity can shape the experiences of different communities (Matsaganis, Katz and Ball-Rokeach, 2011: 12), the geographically bounded aspect of much community media research is particularly problematic for this study. This is largely because it fails to account for different types of relationships and communities – communities of interest, virtual or online communities, and transnational communities – and is a difficult fit for many Pacific news media, which straddle multiple geographic (and ethnic) spaces.

In the same way, the tendency to view ethnic media within a community framework that focuses on non-commercial, amateur community-owned and run media as opposed to corporate or public service media (Deuze, 2006) fails to account for many Pacific news media that, like ethnic media elsewhere, operate mainstream market models and are either privately owned and profit driven, or heavily influenced by mainstream professional values and styles (Browne, 2005; Lazarte-Morales, 2008). The research focus on ‘alternative’ media (see Atton, 2015; Downing et al., 2001) is similarly problematic, given the heavy borrowing of mainstream content, styles and practices by Pacific news media. Indeed, Kenix (2011) argues that the distinction between alternative and mainstream media more generally – particularly commercially minded alternative and mainstream media – is increasingly hard to draw. Further, arguments for the participatory nature of community media are belied by empirical work such as that by Naifz (2012), which found that those who participated in Pacific community radio were often powerful elites rather than grassroots community members.

Reader and Hatcher (2012) argue that community journalism has tended to be studied in silos, with scholars focusing only on commercial print newspapers or not-for-profit, citizen-owned radio or media produced by community volunteers; scholars therefore need to adopt new approaches to break out of these old conceptual boundaries. Atton (2015: 9) and Carpentier, Lie and Servaes (2003) similarly caution against reductionist understandings of alternative and community media, arguing instead for a multi-theoretical approach that takes account of the situated nature of these media to explain their diverse content, diverse audiences and diverse practices. For this reason, this study attempts to step back from the potentially narrow categories of citizen-run, alternative or geo-ethnic community media to look instead at the community-building practices of a broad range of Pacific media (Couldry, 2004). In this respect, Rodriguez’s (2016) call to centre our focus on human agency and context, and Hess and Waller’s (2014, 2017) ‘geo-social news’ framework provide helpful steps forward. Hess and Waller’s concept of the geo-social, in particular, broadens ideas of localness and community to account for complex social relations and formations, as well as social spaces that transcend a narrowly fixed idea of place. This article draws on their idea of a ‘sense of place’, which is more than something physical (Hess and Waller, 2017), to explore the role of Pacific news outlets in shaping identity and a sense of place within the ‘local’ New Zealand and ‘global’ Pacific Rim context.

Research methodology

Because the broader scholarship on ethnic media is fragmentary and often an awkward fit for the New Zealand Pacific context (Ross, 2017), this study draws on it in a way that is sensitive to practice and driven by listening more than theory. It attempts to examine Pacific news media by paying attention to what Pacific peoples say and do in relation to their media practices, which also reflects a commitment to a Pacific research methodology (Health Research Council of New Zealand, 2004). This article draws on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 23 Pacific media producers and journalists that, together, represent a purposive sample of New Zealand’s Pacific news media, chosen for typical cases and maximum diversity. The producers interviewed represent diverse media (print, radio, television and online), diverse ownership and
organisational structure (commercial, community and public broadcasting), diverse language (English, bilingual and Pacific language only) and diverse target audiences (pan-Pacific and particular Pacific audiences, as well as national, local and regional audiences). Interviews were conducted face to face and were semi-structured to give participants the freedom to say what was important to them. A brief guide was used to give each interview a shared focus of inquiry, but interviews were kept deliberately loose and open-ended; questions broadly probed how producers defined Pacific media, what they thought made their outlet Pacific, what they did that was different from media that did not have a Pacific identity, who they saw as their target audience and how they interacted with them.

As a former journalist and a woman of Pacific as well as Pākehā heritage, I am both and neither insider and outsider in relation to these media producers. As others in that in-between space have described (Mila-Schaafl, 2010: 16; Southwick, 2001: 5), how acceptable we are perceived to be in Pacific or Pākehā spaces is situational and contextually dependent. As a third-generation member of the diasporic Pacific community (and a journalist of more than fifteen years’ experience), I was an insider. As someone who could claim only ‘part’ Pacific ethnicity, who didn’t speak a Pacific language and who was positioned differently from many of the research participants by educational, professional and socio-economic experiences, I was an outsider. That location between insider and outsider positions meant there could be no taken for granted subject, so I have taken extra care to reflect on my interaction with research participants and to draw on advice from a Pacific Advisory Group, comprising community and media representatives who oversaw and provided advice on the research project, the participation of Pacific communities and my interpretation of cross-cultural meanings (see Forde, Foxwell and Meadows, 2009 for a similar approach).

Locative practices of connection, ‘villageness’ and service

Pacific producers employed several narratives to imagine and construct communities, and to locate their media in relation to them. A common narrative was about being ‘out in the community’ and related to community engagement as well as media location. For instance, at the time of interviewing, Pacific Media Network producers were planning the network’s shift from upmarket Ponsonby to South Auckland, where Pacific peoples are strongly grouped (Maré et al., 2011, cited in Chen, 2015: 69). Though driven in part by financial constraints, producers explained the move in terms of the need to be close to community: ‘We have a greater pull [than other Pacific media], but what we’re not doing right now is we’re not being part of the community.’ Such talk indicates a need to repair the sense of community connection and is an important marker of the Pacific ideal to be an active part of one’s community. Producers routinely called on this ‘out in the community’ narrative to demonstrate their ‘connectivity’ with and belonging within Pacific communities – their media attended Pacific events, they were where Pacific peoples were, they ‘go out and see what’s really happening out there’.

There’s a lot of cultural stuff, funerals and things that we rarely cover unless it’s a very high-profile person, but we will sometimes cover others because we want to be seen out and about in the community and covering more than what you see in mainstream media. It’s important that we’re there and seen to be there. We have to be there for the good and the bad, otherwise people won’t open up to you. (Pacific media producer A)

One radio producer explicitly contrasted this with dominant media, which she criticised as being a ‘one-way street’. Their reporters contacted her when they wanted information, but there was no reciprocity when ‘our community’ wanted publicity for events. Pacific media, by implication, demonstrated better care for Pacific communities.

Producers also constructed their community connection with a ‘go-to’ narrative, describing themselves as the go-to media for relevant information as well as for handling story tips. One
radio producer said, ‘This radio station is like a public centre of communication for our community because this is where they get all their information.’ Another said, ‘Samsonian people, they don’t go to the Yellow Pages; they ring us … If they want information for something, they ring Radio Samoa. They don’t know any other phone number.’ Producers variously described community members calling in with stories ‘every day’, and one stressed that all her stories were community initiated. Most called on this narrative to demonstrate not only their community credentials but also their news credentials – to prove that they were on top of events in the community or were the pre-eminent news media for the community.

By far the most common narrative used by producers was a discourse of ‘villageness’. Producers universally located themselves and their media in the community – in their Pacific family networks, in their churches and so on. When describing how he imagined his typical listener, a radio producer said, ‘The person who shops at my Pak’nSave in Mt Albert.’ Samoa Multi Media promoted its web television with, ‘MoanaTV isn’t a channel trying to reach the Pacific Community. MoanaTV is part of the Pacific Island community!’ Producers routinely talked about ‘connectivity’, ‘relationships’, ‘ownership’, ‘belonging’ or their sense of connection to their ‘own people’. One characterised the closeness of the relationship between Pacific media and Pacific communities in terms of felt pressures. She fought harder for stories about her community – ‘You’re doing stories about your own people. It’s pretty weighty, and it does mean more’ – and sensed enormous pressure from her community to do even more. ‘It’s a huge burden when you’re approached … by Aunty so and so or their church, ‘It’s a good story. You should be doing this.’ Another producer characterised the connection in familial terms of trust, partnership, reciprocity and sacrifice:

We’ve served them for a long time. They know we don’t have a hidden agenda. They know who we are and the fact that we are involved in church, we have faith in God, and we live what we believe, and we’re out there when the community is doing things. That’s where the newspaper comes in, because our staff are there to cover it and we promote the community. We’re publishing all their events and stuff like that. So, it’s a partnership; it’s a relationship. That’s what I mean by connection. We’re not just there to get their money. (Pacific media producer B)

The community embeddedness that producers invoked was a different thing from the mainstream experience, where journalists can be quite separate from those they report on. For instance, living in different areas and mixing in very different socio-economic groups (Matsaganis, Katz and Ball-Rokeach, 2011: 214), and following professional norms of objectivity and independence that distance them as neutral or disinterested observers rather than community participants. This is more than just a geographic or social association for Pacific producers. These ties are bolstered by Pacific cultural understandings of family, family obligations (such as donating money at fa’alavelave ceremonies), and normative values of group solidarity that tightly bind Pacific producers to their extended families and communities. The ‘village’, too, is conceived not just in terms of a particular media outlet’s staff and target audience, but also the wider Pacific media network, community organisations and even their subjects – that is, the Pacific people who are profiled in their media. For instance, a radio producer called on the ‘village’ to promote his station’s closer connection to New Zealand musicians:

With Nesian Mystic, they’ll be played on Flava or Mai or whatever, but we can own them or bring them into our fold, because we can say there’s a Samoan in there, there’s a Cook Islander in there, and they speak about that in their songs. We can talk to them about Donald’s mum who works at Foodtown, who is a Tongan mum who works at Foodtown. That’s the twist, that’s the difference that we have over any other radio stations. (Pacific media producer C)
This discourse of ‘village’ speaks to shared identities and group belonging across different communities, and not just audiences, in different contexts. Tagata Pasifika producers, for instance, took seriously the need to be all things to all people. One said the program was often accused of being too Samoan or too Auckland focused (‘Tagata Aukilani’) and it developed a database to track its stories to ensure inclusiveness:

I can pull out a report that breaks it up where our stories come [from], what kind of stories they are, what ethnic group has been served and most of the time most of our stories are of a general nature. They’re not just one community … For a while there we had nothing but Samoans. So it’s changing, little by little. (Pacific media producer D)

Similarly, Pacific producers universally invoked a discourse of service to authenticate their commitment to their communities and provide substantive content to their locative practices. Every producer interviewed for this research typified their work in some way or another as service to their community. For some, this was in terms of preserving language and traditions – for instance, the Pacific-language radio producer who was shoulder-tapped by her elders to create an in-language program for a community whose language was under threat. For many, it was in terms of informing the community: providing information in language or information that was relevant to Pacific peoples, but missing in the mainstream; providing health and education advice or uncovering scams targeting the Pacific community – ‘stuff that we know it will help our people’ or ‘what’s good for our audience, for ourselves and our community’. In addition, producers consistently cited their own personal sacrifices or those made by their media in service to their community. This included instances such as foregoing income by banning advertisements for junk food, alcohol and gambling; providing community notices for free; working to mentor, upskill and train other Pacific journalists and broadcasters; and promoting other Pacific artists or businesses.

In the mainstream media if you don’t have the dollars you don’t operate and it’s all business driven. Where, in our Pacific media, it’s community driven, it’s community focused – and communities mean sports groups, family groups, church groups, and they’re all operated by donations and subs and things like that. So what do you do? You can’t [charge them]. Those are our listeners, those are our supporters and what you operate is part of them. They call Radio Samoa our radio because it’s their language; it’s their culture. (Pacific media producer B)

Underpinning this service discourse was a strong discourse of betterment – improving the lot of Pacific peoples, getting Pacific peoples off welfare, getting Pacific youth out of gangs – and a focus on positive news stories and aspirational role models for Pacific communities.

All of these discourses were called on to demonstrate producers’ commitment and connection to their communities. In different ways, they also cultivate and legitimate power by aligning with Pacific cultural and social capital. The concept of service (tautua) to elders, family and community is an important governing principle in Pacific spaces, and a track record of labour and service to the collective is closely associated with the granting of symbolic capital and status (Mila-Schaaf, 2010: 257). Often, these discourses were called on to demonstrate one production’s worth over another – that X was better than Y because it cared more or had ‘our’ people’s best interests at heart. In doing so, these locative discourses and practices also establish producers’ rights (over other media) to represent and speak on behalf of a community. By underpinning producers’ efforts to be the pre-eminent voice for Pacific communities, they become important symbolic resources in a contested Pacific media and community space. To an extent, service to one’s community may also increase economic capital. The success of a newsroom depends on establishing relationships with the people it serves, and service can help to boost a newsroom’s relevance and audience, and find the public support it needs to endure.

The various narratives of community identified here seem to have several functions. First, there is an element of authenticating community-ness and establishing Pacific credibility to the
researcher, to funders, to audiences and to the broader Pacific community. These discourses also reflect Pacific cultural values and producers’ location in the Pacific sphere. Family links, obligations and community-orientedness (subsuming individualism for the good of all) are key Pacific values (Mila-SchAAF, 2010; Robinson and Williams, 2001), as is the importance of making connections face to face (Health Research Council of New Zealand, 2004, 2014). Hence discourses of reciprocity, service and being ‘out in the community’ in some cases reflect producers’ own cultural background, and more often perform expected cultural values and norms to a Pacific target audience.

In media production terms, these narratives are also part of establishing bonds of intimacy between media and their audiences (Thompson, 1995). In their discourse, producers deployed symbolic performances of Pacific values or connections and a ‘routine “deixis”’ (Billig, 1995: 11) that continually encouraged the listener to imagine a shared place of ‘us’. Commonalities were continuously constructed through the habitual use of ‘our people’ and ‘our community’, and the repeated flagging of connections, such as ‘we connect with each other’, ‘we know our roots’, and ‘there’s an element of that knowing, familiarity, understanding’. Sometimes, a Pacific group boundary was explicitly spelt out: ‘It’s a brown person who has lived the life of a brown person and being able to connect with someone else within the village or within the community.’

I want people to know that they own what they listen to; it’s theirs. If you were listening to me or someone else listening to the station this morning, they could say, ‘Yeah, that’s Niu FM. I relate to that station. It’s a part of my life style, it’s a part of what I do, it’s about – I own my car but I also own whatever is happening on Niu FM. I like that song, I’m a part of that.’ It’s all being a part of, I guess, that’s what I mean. It’s their life; it’s their experiences. You were asking about what makes us Pacific; it’s that, it’s about sharing stories about their life, their livelihood. (Pacific media producer C)

Similarly, producers deployed intimate performances, such as the first-person address used in many of Spasifik’s feature stories or the magazine’s (and Niu FM’s) habitual reference to Polynesian ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’. Pacific producers also deployed particular modes of address that constructed specifically ‘Pacific’ communities, most obviously through Pacific languages but also through distinctive styles of discourse, as noted elsewhere by Miller and Slater (2000). Producers described their use of formal or chiefly Samoan language, respectful language or correct pronunciation as marking their Pacificness. Morley (2000: 110–11) argues that only those with access to the relevant cultural capital will feel interpellated by and at home within the particular forms of sociability that these producers offer. Interestingly, a Niu FM producer described the style of English language the station used on air, and especially in its social media, as consciously positioning the station as belonging to its younger Pacific community. The style can be characterised as a mash-up of shorthand text-speak, Facebook language and Pacific phrases that increasingly are identified as a youth Polynesian style:

I don’t know whether it’s Pacific language, all I know is that the audience that we communicate with, they speak in the language of today. They speak in like a text language, but they throw in Pacific words … And that’s how we talk as Samoans … Short, sharp language and then in amongst that, it is island phrases, which from my point of view is a great thing because I know that 1) we’re talking to the people we need to talk to and 2) and they still love their culture but they know that ‘hey this is where I’m at’ type of thing. (Pacific media producer E)

This example is revealing, because the producer not only thinks of community and identity in non-traditional terms, but also feels a need to justify that. Clearly, to claim language in this way as ‘Pacific’ is not quite the norm. Similarly, negotiated claims can be seen in talk about practices that arguably break from traditional or dominant Pacific norms in relation to Pacific Beat Street, Spasifik and working in mainstream media.
The community and service discourses identified in this study also appear to be as much about developing, negotiating and reinforcing producers’ own identities as they are about negotiating Pacific media identities:

> I think that other media don’t come from a place, their communities aren’t at the bottom of the scale … it’s just a story, they go and do it. But when we do a story and it’s about our community it has – it means more to you because you have the weight of culture behind you. It doesn’t affect how you do the story, but you have the weight of culture, you have the weight of your background, your family, and so when you do a story, any story, it means more. (Pacific journalist G)

Being ‘Pacific’ meant something in terms of which producers worked where, with whom and how, and Pacific identity was a motivation not just for the development and production of Pacific media (Matsaganis, Katz and Ball-Rokeach, 2011: 10), but also for steering the careers of Pacific producers.

**Conclusion**

Although the Pacific news media in this study performed identity and community in different ways, through different content and with recourse to different resources, they all expressed and practised a culture of community through discourses of ‘villageness’ (an inclusive identification rather than spatial location) and traditional Pacific values of ‘service’, as well as through community-oriented practices that strongly invoked and reinforced Pacific community ties. In their talk, producers and journalists shared a close identity with the communities on which they drew, and they viewed themselves as community stakeholders; they invoked a strong sense of connection to Pacific communities and an even stronger sense of responsibility towards them. In practice, they were more often than not embedded in the same communities, which were not necessarily communities of place. Even at Pacific media that were commercial enterprises and at larger outlets serving pluralistic and dispersed communities, producers demonstrated lived connections to their communities and strong Pacific values of attachment and service. In many cases, they drew no distinction between media producer and community member: ‘We live what our listeners live for the most part,’ said one. As Browne (2005: 125) notes, the key to success in encouraging a community’s support seems to be an outlet’s ability to demonstrate its attempts to serve the community. Cohen (1985: 98) argues that can be done in more of a cultural field than a structural form: community ties exist in the minds of a community’s members and need not be accompanied by geographic or sociological assertions of ‘fact’; what is salient is not so much the substance of supposed community interaction, but more the need to call it into being (1985: 110).

What emerges strongly from the interviews with Pacific media producers’ is that there appears to be not such an abstract public for these media. Pacific news media seem to be connected to, or at least identify a connection to, communities in a way that is less apparent in mainstream media (Reese et al., 2007, cited in Meadows, 2009). By locating themselves in these ways, Pacific producers establish connections that appear to be tighter than in mainstream media. Regardless of their media outlet’s geo-locale, type and size, producers performed a community-building role that was intimate in its relationship with the imagined audience, and Pacific media were more like smaller, hyper-local community media in the closeness of their relationships with their communities. Even larger, nationally focused media such as Niu FM were akin to small community media in their outlook and practice of community. This finding suggests that the weakening of the barrier between Indigenous media producers and audiences identified in Australia (Forde, Foxwell and Meadows, 2009) is not confined to Indigenous media, but is also a characteristic of other identity-based media.

Indeed, these various practices of connection, identity and community orientation can arguably be seen as locative practices – that is, strategic attempts to locate oneself and one’s
media in relation to community (a positioning of connection and belonging), in relation to other
Pacific and mainstream media (a positioning that draws on dissimilarity and ‘otherness’) and as a
symbol of the legitimacy of one’s identity claims. This is about identity, but it is also more than
that. In describing these practices as locative, I draw on the socio-spatial concepts of
tūrangawaewae and va, which are more powerful and expansive concepts for understanding
identity in terms of what Brown Pulu (2002) describes as ‘belonging-ness’ – that is, community,
relationships and connection. Literally, tūranga (standing place) and waewae (feet), the Māori term
tūrangawaewae refers to places where we feel especially empowered and connected, and that are
‘our foundation, our place in the world, our home’ (Royal, 2007). It can refer to place but it also
has meaning socially and can refer to relationships and important ancestors (2007). Broadly, the
concept speaks to the connections that give us our sense of security and foundation, and that
locate us in the wider world. It is, I suggest, a helpful lens for viewing the practices described in
this paper as more than just practices of identity, but as multi-faceted practices of identity and
relationships and the right to represent. It builds, too, on Hess and Waller’s (2017, 56) concept of
‘sense of place’ as a tool for conceptualising individuals’ connections to particular geographic
spaces without assuming that they are located within such physical spaces. The Samoan/Tongan
concept of va, which invokes the notion that we are part of a complex web of interdependent and
reciprocal relationships (Mila-Schaaf 2010), similarly helps us to understand identity positions as
temporal and relational and locative practices as grounded in specific relationships and contexts,
but not necessarily bounded by geography or physical space:

In Tongan communities, relationships or the space between any two individuals, groups
or between communities and nature are defined by the context in which the interaction
occurs. Thus, when the context changes, the relationship changes also. (Taufe’ulungaki,
2004, cited in Mila-Schaaf, 2010: 107)

In these ways, the concepts of tūrangawaewae and va help to underpin an attempt to explain
and theorise Pacific media producers’ practices as locative, rather than just identity or
community driven. They help to keep the social and relational aspects of identity to the fore,
and to understand these practices in multidimensional terms as both structured and structuring.
In this respect, the tendency in ethnic media literature to focus on types of media – for instance,
diasporic media (Georgiou, 2006), Indigenous media (Hanusch, 2014) or community media
(Howley, 2005) – creates categories that make it harder to describe and theorise these kinds of
identity/community-building and locative practices. Indeed, this study suggests a need for re-
thorising ethnic/diasporic/community/alternative media in ways that can better account for the
identity work of Pacific media, whose locative practices encompass a sense of
identity/community/’belongingness’ that is not well accounted for in the existing literature.
Western theories, for instance, are not fully adequate to understanding the broader meanings of
va and tūrangawaewae/tu’ungava’e, which are grounded in a southern Pacific context. By
drawing on these Pacific and Māori socio-spatial concepts, this article suggests it may not be the
stuff enclosed within media texts that define Pacific media as much as it is the locative practices
that their content and media production reflect. In other words, the category of ethnic media
may be understood better in terms of these locative practices of invoking and maintaining
identity/community/belonging.

Moreover, by teasing out producers’ locative practices for closer examination, it becomes
clearer that Pacific media are powerful symbolic referents of Pacific identity – not just for
producers’ imagined audiences or communities, but also for producers themselves. Pacific
media producers were deliberately intentioned in their (re)production of Pacific identities and
saw their media as an important forum in which Pacific peoples could see and hear themselves
– especially given that they were largely invisible elsewhere. They felt a strong sense of
responsibility in this mission, and their personal identities were intimately entwined with it in
ways that are not immediately evident to mainstream journalists. Like ethnic and Indigenous producers in Australia (Forde, Foxwell and Meadows, 2009), Pacific media producers interviewed for this project had a close identity with the communities on which they drew – ‘we live what our listeners live’ – which, with further study, may prove to be a defining characteristic of marginalised identity media. It was also apparent that, regardless of their media outlet’s size and type (community or commercial; print or broadcast), producers performed an identity- and community-building role that was intimate in its relationship with their imagined audience. Pacific producers expressed and practised a culture of community (through discourses of ‘villageness’ and service, and community-oriented practices) that continually generated and reinforced ties and blurred the line with their audiences. There was not an abstract public for Pacific producers, which arguably makes Pacific media distinctive – at least from the mainstream, where journalists can be quite separate from those on whom they report. Indeed, these community discourses and practices are intimate locative performances – they are as much about developing, negotiating and reinforcing producers’ own identities as they are about negotiating the identity of Pacific media and their imagined audiences.

Indeed, Pacific media – even large-scale commercial media – are more like smaller, hyperlocal community media in the closeness of their relationship with their communities (Rosenberry, 2012: 25), and what is significant about this finding is that this appears to have little to do with their geo-locale or the scale of their media product. It is possibly these locative practices of invoking and maintaining identity/community/belonging underpin the distinctiveness of Pacific and other ethnic minority media. In fact, when we view people’s practices, as Couldry (2004) suggests, as media-related and not necessarily in themselves about media, Pacific media emerge more clearly not as diasporic or ethnic media, but as key sites of identity negotiation.

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**Notes**

1. European New Zealander.
2. Pacific Media Producer F.
3. Pacific Media Producer H.
4. Pacific Media Producer B.
5. Pacific Media Producer C.
6. Pacific journalist G.
7. Sports journalists possibly have the closest relationship to their communities.
8. *Fa’alavelave* (Samoan) is an obligation, donation or gift, usually to family or church.
9. Nesian Mystik was a New Zealand Hip-Hop/R&B group, the members of which were of Cook Islands, Tongan, Samoan and Māori descent.
10. Flava and Mai are commercial Auckland radio stations.
11. Nesian Mystik band member Donald McNulty.
13. Other scholars (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001; Browne, 2005; Forde, Foxwell and Meadows, 2009; Lin and Song, 2006; Matsaganis, Katz and Ball-Rokeach, 2011; Reader and Hatcher, 2012) have identified a similarly blurred line between ethnic media producers and their audiences.
References


