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Pacific Islands Diaspora Media:
Sustaining Island Identities Away from Home *

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*** work in progress, contact authors for final version**

Abstract

This paper is based on a pilot project that has a first objective to identify Pacific Islands Diaspora media in New Zealand and define the role they play in Pacific Island communities in regards to addressing their communication needs. The second objective is to formulate a methodology that will inform an extensive research project.

Despite an extensive and newly emerging literature on diaspora communities and ethnic media as distinct research fields, there is limited evidence of research on Pacific diasporas and the increasing presence of Pacific diasporic media across the Asia Pacific region countries. The research seeks to identify the different forms and content of diasporic media available to South Pacific Islands diasporic communities in New Zealand, the information needs of these communities, the role of these media in sustaining their island identities and the extent to which these media promote integration in the host country, socio-cultural separation from their new environment, and/or creation of new hybrid cultures/identities. New information technologies, such as internet, are also taken into consideration as they provide with new sources of information and contact with home and the wider diasporic communities around the world. This will provide an in-depth analysis of the content offered by diasporic media and the extent to which it meets the needs of Pacific diasporic communities in the wider Asia Pacific region.

The paper provides an overview of the South Pacific Islands Diaspora communities and their media. It focuses on communities living in New Zealand, a country with the highest concentration of Pacific Islands diasporic communities. It presents the conceptual and methodological framework and outlines the main methods designed to collect data (focus groups with selected island communities to define their information needs and media use, a media survey to identify the goals and the content offered and in-depth interviews with journalists and community leaders).

Introduction

The growing visibility of diasporas, as expressed in their numerical presence, but even more so in their cultural practices and the development of projects of cultural particularity and expression, challenge ideologies of cultural homogeneity and imaginings of ethnic and cultural hierarchies in national and transnational spaces (Bailey et al., 2007:2).

The newly emergent and increasing literature on diasporic communities and diasporic/ethnic/ migrant media as distinct research fields (Cohen, 1997; Bailey et al, 2007; Browne, 2005; Karim, 2003; Georgiou, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2006; Huang, 2004) reflects the increasing importance of understanding diasporic communities and identities.

A large number of Pacific Island people have formed diasporic communities around the world. Although they are often grouped together as islanders, P.Is, Pacifika and Pacific people (Perrott, 2007:8; Teaiwa and Mallon, 2005:208; Macpherson, 2004:139; Morton, 1998), they have formed lively communities with their own distinctive identities and in some cases with their own media. Whilst NZ hosts the largest Pacific Islands diaspora communities in the world (McCarthy, 2005; Spickard et al, 2002; Spoonley et al, 2004), little is known in terms of their information needs and media use. Because of their transnational nature, the Pacific Islands diasporic communities, like any other diasporic community, depend extensively on “media and communication technologies for sustaining relations and connections across distance and diverse subgroups” (Georgiou, 2007:17) and also with their host society.

Diasporic media’s increasing visibility and influence, not only within their diasporic contexts but also across the wider society they operate, open up new and alternative ways for expression and representation while at the same time they challenge the established hierarchies of control over cultural resources within ‘western mediascapes’ (Bailey et al., 2007:2). The strong relationship between media and diasporas demands more attention, as Georgiou argues, “in order to understand important cultural and political developments in transnational scapes and cosmopolitan times” (opcit).

There is limited evidence of research on pacific diasporas and the media catering for these distinctive communities in New Zealand and elsewhere. This paper is based on a first attempt towards a conceptual and methodological framework for a New Zealand based pilot project that aims to signal the need for a larger Pacific Islands diaspora media project.

Diaspora & Diasporic Media: towards a Conceptual Framework

The concept of diaspora has developed new meaning and it is today applied to a growing list of migratory groups. Diaspora as a concept is now involved in debates around migration, post-migration, people's multiple sense of belonging and loyalties beyond national boundaries (Karim 2003; Georgiou, 2007; 2005; 2001; Cohen, 1997; Safran, 1991). Cohen's classification of and distinction between different diasporas - victim, labour, trade, cultural and imperial diasporas - is not only indicating the changing conditions of diasporas through time and conditions but also the significance of the diaspora phenomenon (opcit).

The study of diaspora has attracted attention from several disciplines and research perspectives including anthropology, sociology, international relations, human geography, immigration, cultures, multiculturalism and communication (Karim, 2003:1; Georgiou, 2007:11). Communication and media is though a new field of research within diaspora studies and is borrowing concepts from other disciplines while it is expanding. An example could be the description of Diasporas as "imagined communities" in order to "emphasise the diasporic connections facilitated by various media and the simultaneous consumption of the same content by members of a transnational group" (Karim, 2002:2). Diasporic communities and their identities are constantly debated and re-imagined, producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference (ibid: 4; Hall, 1990:235). Media play an important role in this process as diaspora people depend on various forms of communication and media in order to sustain a sense of shared identity.

Although diasporas share a lot of similarities – a common historical homeland and immigration experiences - they are at the same time different as "their present and future are shaped in diverse contexts and largely through difference experiences" (Georgiou, 2004:6). Similarly, Pacific diasporas are shaped by different experiences, depending on their location. Would the Tongan diaspora in the US share the same characteristics with this in New Zealand? And would a second generation Tongan youth in Auckland share the same identity with his island born immigrant mother or even with another Tongan youth in San Francisco? The experience of immigration is not shared by all members of a diasporic community:

Diaspora implies that a sense of particularity and ethnic belonging is not only attached to the experience of migration, but it might have an on-going importance for younger generations who have not experienced migration processes ... diaspora implies that particular cultures survive, transform and remain relevant even when members of an ethnic community have not lived in the original Homeland (Georgiou, 2001:1)

Because diasporas tend to be on the margins of two cultures and two societies which are "never completely interpenetrated and fused" (Park, 1969 quoted in Huang, 2004:3), they often create mechanisms of "coping with the apparently contradictory needs to integrate in the latter and to

maintain aspects of their distinct identity and contact with the former” (Tsagarousiannou, 2002 quoted in Huang, op. cit). In this process of coping and transformation, the concept of hybridity becomes useful for understanding better Pacific Islands diasporic minorities, how like other diasporic minorities are:

... characterised by internal diversity, especially within generations ... how diasporic cultures are not homogenous, harmonious or singular expressions of community consensus ... and how they actually involve negotiations and conflicts within and outside the group (Georgiou, 2001:1).

The concept of hybridity implies:

... multiple points of departure and multiple destinations, it implies instabilities and inequalities, not only in the meeting of two different cultures or populations, but within any of those cultures, group and communities, as much as in-between (ibid).

This element of hybridity within the Pacific Islands community is reflected in the presence of pan-Pacific Islands diaspora media, like the Pacific Radio Network and the Spasifik magazine. Whilst these media address these communities as one big pacific community in diaspora, they also cater for the individual needs of these communities as separate and distinct ones with news programs in different languages and demographics, assuming that Pacific Islanders in diaspora have multiple identities.

It is important here to note Karim’s argument that a “transnational group’s non-dominant position in global cultural contexts generally remains a key indicator of its status as a diaspora” (2003:2). The global English or French for instance, he argues, cannot be treated as diasporas because of their languages’ and cultures’ privileged places in the transnational media. Diaspora and migrant communities, as mentioned above, are on the margins of two cultures and often face exclusion in their host societies, including the symbolic and cultural sphere and the media in particular where they tend to be under or misrepresented, as it is the case with the Pacific Islands communities in NZ (Georgiou, 2007, 2004; Spoonley, 2004; Misa, 2008). Audience of the Pacific Radio Network often call in anger to ask for a more balanced cover of pacific community related story that they felt the mainstream media have misrepresented (Richards, interview with author, 30/5/08). This sense of misrepresentation and/or lack of representation among these communities seems to increase the value of diasporic media, particularly their political and cultural role (Georgiou, opcit). These media, particularly those locally based, by addressing these communities directly with messages that are not filtered or constructed by the mass media, can better meet the communities needs for information and entertainment (Spoonley: 2004:13).

The existence of diasporic media cultures is not a new phenomenon. Diaspora press has over a century’s history of circulation and diasporic and ethnic radio has established a vibrant presence in urban and multicultural settings for several decades now. Ethnic, multicultural and diasporic

television is also making a mark in urban mediascapes. Diasporic media production includes material produced locally, nationally and transnationally and consumed locally and translocally (Bailey, 2007; Karim, 2003:11-12).

Diasporic media can play diverse roles. Spoonley identifies two types of media in this case; those which operate locally to meet community needs in their host country and those which connect the community back to their country of origin (2004:12). New technologies such as global satellite broadcasting systems, videos and internet have greatly enhanced the ability of communities to maintain transnational connections, to sustain transnational communities and to provide audiences with the “ordered, orderly, familiar [and] knowable” (ibid.). According to Huang (2004:10) the emergence of diaspora media is the most observable advantage contributed to diasporas by globalisation:

They came to be a distinguished phenomenon with the benefit of globalisation and the requirements from diasporas who demand something particularly coherent with their double consciousness and dual identities (even multi-identities (ibid.).

Georgiou provides a new approach to diasporic media in her argument that diasporic media challenge the traditional framing of media as a three-step process (production, text/representation and consumption/audiencehood) (2007:22). As their audiences are dispersed across territories and linguistic and cultural zones, diasporic media combine transnational and locally produced content by professional and amateurs, individuals or communities. In addition diasporic media:

... have initiated and participated in the development of spaces for communication in local and transnational level and have thus contributed to the emergence of local and transnational public spheres. Most of them are small in scale and they do not meet the professional and commercially driven format of large mainstream media. ... [they] function as community and alternative media, aiming to provide information and positive (self-) representation unavailable to mainstream media (ibid:24).

And that is where diaspora media come to play an important role against exclusion, often experienced in migrant/diaspora communities. Tsagarousianou (2002) contributes to the arguments about the significance of diasporic media by adding that their role in informing definitions of community and identity is broader than the promotion of a transnational identity or diasporic awareness. An equally important role, she argues, is found in their contribution to the process of formation of diasporic identity at the local level. They often attract an audience based on a certain familiarity of their homeland culture but contributing to the construction of a new hybrid culture as well. Spasifik magazine’s outlook, for instance, indicates the profile of a diaspora media that caters for the hybridized identity of NZ born, educated, young, English speaking segment of the Pacific Islands diaspora (Logan, communication with Papoutsaki, 21/5/08).

Diaspora cultures are complex and multilayered constructions that become autonomous of their home based culture. This is particularly the case for established diasporic communities that incorporate second and third generations born in the host country. Depending on their point of departure and time in the host country, diasporas' uses of both diasporic and mainstream media changes.

Research by Elias and Lemish (2008:21) showed the host country's media shape and spread negative stereotypes of immigrants and exposure to them causes feelings of alienation among immigrants towards the host society and fosters their social segregation. While diasporic media preserve the 'immigrants' cultural heritage, relieve feelings of nostalgia and strengthen the sense of intra-group solidarity cultural preservation (pg23), their research also indicated that immigrants who are the 'heaviest' consumers of media in the host language tend to adapt with greater ease. The mass media in the host culture and language provide significant assistance to immigrants in their adjusting to new surroundings. These findings pose certain questions in regards to integration of diasporic communities in their host countries. Spoonley (2004:12) in assessing the role the media in multicultural societies poses some key questions:

Do the immigrant media constitute an important factor in maintaining the cultural well being of the community in questions or does this media act as an impediment to successful settlement? Or do immigrant media contribute equally to well being and facilitate settlement?

It is important to acknowledge the role that such media play in providing a "safe place for ethnic cultures to thrive, whilst at the same time providing an entrée for newly arrived immigrants who wish to adapt to their new environment" (Mahtani 2001 quoted in Spoonley, 2004:12). The function, though as Spoonley argues, of easing their arrival and post arrival process and contributing to cultural and language maintenance must be balanced by broader questions of societal integration and understanding. The question is one of integration and intergroup activity, as he puts it (ibid.).

Georgiou (2007) would argue that diasporic minority media cultures are "strategic positions for self-expression and representation not set points of difference". Each community needs to negotiate their media use and representation in both community and mainstream media. The better we understand these needs, the easier it will be to address them.

Pacific Islands Diasporas in New Zealand and their Media

There are increasing references to Pacific Islands communities living abroad as Pacific diasporas. Howard (1999) refers to the modern dispersal of Pacific peoples as the diaspora that has taken place since World War II . Morton's (1998) research examines diasporic Tongan youth in Australia and their effort to create their own culture. Her research indicates that their cultural identity is constructed in conjunction with their roles of family and the church, and reinvented in response to the host culture.

The significance of Pacific diasporas is signalled by McCarthy (2005:42), Chief Executive at the Ministry of Pacific Islands Affairs, who argues that people from New Zealand's many Pacific diaspora communities can and do play significant individual and collective roles in helping to secure a peaceful Pacific. Spickard et al. (2002) in their book on *Pacific Diaspora: Island Peoples in the United States and Across the Pacific* explore the 'transnational or diasporic model' in examining the Pacific communities living abroad, which emphasises continuing links with their people at home or elsewhere abroad. They also explore the 'pan-ethnicity model' which is more pronounced among second and third generation Pacific Island migrants who are increasingly seeing themselves as Pacifika people with one identity.

Referring to this contested identity, Perrott (2007) in his article on '*Pacifika: Identity of Illusion?*' captures the dilemma of New Zealand-born Pacific youth of how to call themselves. The article appeared as a cover story at the weekend magazine of a mainstream NZ newspaper, indicating that Pacific people, one of the most visible minority groups in NZ (Teaiwa and Mallon, 2005, p.207), are becoming an important identity group that would merit the attention of mainstream mass media. Pacific Islands people are visible in the NZ society not only because of their numerical presence but also through their involvement in national sports and the cultural life of the country (ibid).

Although there is a significant body of work on Pacific islands and Pacific islands people in NZ (see reference list), there is a noticeable lack of research on how these communities communicate with each other, with home and with their host country environments; how they are represented in the mainstream mass media; what are their information needs and how they satisfy them; what diasporic media are available to them, their content and how they provide for their communities. The most extensive body of work in the broader area of immigrants and media in NZ comes from Spoonley's (2004; 2001; 1990) research which gives a researcher on Pacific diasporas and media a good starting point.

Pacific communities in NZ could be described as trade diaspora, at least at its initial migration stage. Increasing labour demand produced rapid growth in the size of the Pacific migrant population (Logan, 2006) which has been on a continuing increase, primarily from internal growth since the 1980s. It is one of the fastest growing populations in the country. The Pacific descent population is expected to grow by 181 per cent by 2051, from 232,000 to 599,000, making up 18 per cent of New Zealand's population (Cook et al., 2001, quoted in Macpherson, 2004:137). Some islands have seen more than half of their population migrating to NZ and elsewhere and in some cases (Cook Islands and Niue), 70 per cent of their diaspora members have been born in NZ (Macpherson, 2004:136, 139; also see Crocombe, 1992; McCarthy, 2005; Teaiwa and Mallon, 2005).

Table 1 People from pacific countries in homeland and in NZ

COUNTRY	NO. IN HOME COUNTRY	NO. IN NZ	% IN HOME COUNTRY	% IN NZ
Samoa	182,700	115,000	61	39
Cook islands	21,000	52,000	21	79
Tokelau	1,500	6,200	19	81
Niue	1,600	20,000	7	93
Tonga	98,300	40,000	71	29
Fiji	836,000	7,000	99	1
Tuvalu	9,600	2,000	83	17
Other Pacific	7,472,200	7,000	99.99	0.001

Source: author adapting from McCarthy (2005:44)

Macpherson (2004:139) observes that the gradual replacement of the term Pacific Islanders with the terms Pacific people in both ‘official and popular discourse’ is an acknowledgment of the fact that most Pacific descent people are no longer from the ‘traditional island homelands, and that their commonalities derive from culture rather than place of birth’. This indicates a need to also acknowledge that these communities will start playing a considerable social, economic and political role in the New Zealand society. New Zealand born Pacific people are increasing becoming upwards mobile and this social mobility has made them increasingly “visible in roles which challenge earlier social stereotypes held of them by Pakeha/Europeans” (2004:140).

However, when it comes to Pacific Island people, one needs to overcome the popular tendency to look at them as one single group. According to Macpherson (2004:138), “ this representation of the pacific population as a relatively undifferentiated entity, shapes, and limits, analyses of its future socio-demographic impact”. It also shapes how the wider society and media understand these communities. At the same time, research shows that the New Zealand born Pacific children, like most children of immigrants, differ from their island born parents in various ways (Tongan youth focus group with authors, 4/4/08; Macpherson, 2004; also see Crocombe, 1992:13). They have more polyethnic social networks and are loosing fluency in their mother tongues (Collins, 2008). This is more prominent in smaller islands groups while cultural retention is higher among the largest communities like the Samoans who can provide more cultural reinforcement.

The current debate is whether we now have new ethnic identities which focus on shared Polynesian descent, pan-polynesian or ‘nessian’ identities e.g. ‘New Zealand borns’, ‘P.I.’s’, ‘Polys’, or pasifikans (Teaiwa and Mallon, 2005:210; see also article by Perrott, 2007). Teaiwa and Mallon talk

about these identities as another resource for Pacific youth, promoted largely through the popular culture that has emerged around a dynamic new music and small business tee shirt industry (opcit).

When studying diaspora communities, one needs to take into consideration the socio-cultural context of the hosting country. New Zealand's dominant cultural debate, for most of the 1980s, revolved around national identity and 'post-colonialism' and the emergent biculturalism (Spoonley, 2004:2). As the demographic make up of NZ has changed since then introducing multiculturalism as a new element in the New Zealand identity, the media have come to play a critical role in exploring what this means for those who live this country (ibid:3). Spoonley's extensive research on immigrants and media in NZ, tells us that there have been periodic attempts to characterise and criticise these new arrivals:

In the post-war period, ... the pre-eminent and most sustained campaign involved the immigration and settlement of pacific peoples, often indiscriminately (...). ... Pacific peoples were defined as being a threat to lay and order, as competing for various resources ... and as 'overstayers' (13).

Representations of Pacific Islanders in mainstream media have often been negative and marginalizing (Misa, 2008). There have been complaints about a certain lack of respect in how New Zealand covers its own Pacific islands people and how it covers the pacific (Field quoted in Tully, 2005:296). The New Zealand public gets an overdose of islands cyclones, coups, murders, crashed airplanes, tribal fights in Papua New Guinea and ethnic tensions in Fiji (Crocombe, 1992:137). This lack of representation or mis-representation of Pacific Islands must be frustrating for the Pacific people in New Zealand. Opportunities for Pacific Island communities to present "counter-images, express resistance to, or enter into dialogue and 'talk back to' historical stereotypes continue to be limited, especially when, and where, Pacific Island media efforts might have the most impact" (Pearson, 1999:261).

Pacific diasporic media come to cover this gap. As these communities have become more established in NZ, immigrants media have started to develop with community and government funds such as access Radio and Planet FM. Research by Monteiro and Cruickshank (2006) studied the media of Chinese, Indian and South African communities in NZ and how they are used to negotiate the immigrants' roles and identities within their adopted country. They argued that such channels provide a credible source of knowledge to the immigrants for their particular needs, depending on their level of integration.

New Zealand is the only country where a range of Pacific Islands languages is broadcast on radio and television (Crocombe, 1992:130). There are now a number of radio stations and programmes ranging from Niu FM and 531PI which meets pacific peoples interests (see table 2) through to those which are

provided in a variety of Asian languages (Spoonley, 2004:18). There are also discussions about creating a Pacifica TV channel, based on the Maori TV model (see PIMA website for this debate).

Radio stations are primarily diaspora in nature. Pacific Radio Network, New Zealand’s pan-pacific broadcaster - operator of Niu FM, Radio 531pi, and the Pacific Radio News service – is the main Pacific radio provider, widely accessed by the communities. Run by the Board of the National Pacific Radion Trust, it received substantial financial assistance by the NZ government.

Press is mostly based on islands newspapers imported to NZ but there are also NZ produced, like the *Spasifik* magazine that includes *SPASIFIK Sport & Leisure* (oceania media limited <http://www.spasifikmag.com/aboutus/>) which is a good example of diaspora media, entirely addressed to the Pacific population of NZ, urban, English speaking, mostly 2nd or 3rd generation.

Table 2. Pacific Islands media, media content and associations (NZ)

PRINT			
Samoa	Fiji	Tonga	Niue
Samoa Post (weekly)	Fiji Observer (monthly)	Taimi o Tonga (twice weekly)	Fakapulou Tala Niue (fortnightly)
Samoa Times (weekly)	Fiji Guardian (fortnightly)	Talaki Newspaper (weekly)	Niue News (weekly)
Voice of Samoa (weekly)		Kele’a Newspaper (weekly)	
Samoa Observer (weekly)		Tau’ataina (monthly)	
Auckland Pacific Today (weekly)			
Magazines			
SPACIFIK (bi monthly)		Islands Business	
TV			
Maori TV		Triangle TV (Pacifica programs)	
Other regional community channels with Pacifica programs			
Radio			
<i>Pacific Media Network</i> : NIUFM (all Pacific Island ethnic groups) & Radio 531PI (all Pacific Island ethnic groups)			
Access Radio (all Pacific Island ethnic groups) operated by Planet FM			
Radio Samoa (bi lingual Samoan & English)			
Internet:			
several websites e.g. www.pacificislandsradio.com/index.htm for Pacific radio online, www.escapeartist.com/pacific/pacific.htm , www.radiodx.com http://www.polycafe.com/ with various forums: CAFE PATIO (General Forum), KR (Discussion RoundTable), SACRED FIRE (Religion), BIG MANGO (Sports), ALOFA LOUNGE (Love & Friendship)			
Other:			
Pacific Islands Media Association (PIMA)			
Pacific Media Centre (AUT)			

Source: authors

Some mainstream media have Pacifica programs on a regular basis: *TVZN 1* has *Tagata Pasifika* on Monday nights, although some people complain that it is too late to attract mainstream audience and has failed thus increase awareness of Pacific issues. *Triangle TV*, a community Auckland based channel has allocated slots for several Pacific content programs such as *Creative Fiji Aotearoa*,

Pasefika Nius, Samoa Nei Gallo, TV Samoa. The Maori channel also has Pasifika content: *Pacific Affairs: Tagata Pasifika* and *Pacific Beat Street* (a youth program which also airs on TV3, CTV Canterbury television, tvCentral and TV Rotorua and Channel 9 -Dunedin). The *Pacific Beat St* aims to ‘... delivering stories on New Zealand’s latest issues, music, sports, fashion, technology and much more all with a distinctly Pacific flavour’ (www.pacificbeatst.net). This type of programs shows a need to provide media content for both pacific and NZ wide issues from a Pacific perspective or in a pacific style.

A significant contribution in terms of access to media in pacific diasporic communities, comes from the new information technologies based on the internet which provide low cost options while creating virtual networks that connect pacific diasporic communities across the world fulfilling a variety of functions (see for example the Kava Bowl website, set by to connect Tongans at home and abroad). Alan’s (1999) case study on Rotuma serves as an example of pacific based virtual communities gives us a very good example of how new technologies have been embraced by dispersed pacific island populations around the world in an effort to maintain a community away from the islands. These virtual networks, supplementing traditional diaspora and mainstream media, have interesting implications for questions of identity and cultural/language maintenance. Undoubtedly, diasporic media provide an important alternative to the mass media but, as Spoonley (2004:19) reminds us, do these media contribute to a common public debate about a culturally diverse and inclusive society? To be able to express your cultural identity is important and for many reasons to any member of diaspora/immigrant community:

... cultural membership is a precondition of autonomous moral choices, and itself reflects an autonomous cultural choice that is worthy of respect; it is a “constitutional” aspect of one’s identity which affects one’s sense of status and self-respect (Kymlicka, 2001 quoted in Spoonley, 21).

Pacific Island communities have established channels of communication in NZ, both formal and informal, traditional and virtual, from the ‘coconut wireless’ to church newsletters and radio stations. However, the information circulating and the issues debated through these channels are invisible to the outside society. As Monteiro and Cruickshank (2006:13) argued in the case of other migrants media in NZ, “the reach of these media channels is limited to the boundaries of these communities and does not appear to influence stories in the mainstream media” (p.13). We need to understand the implications of this, along with the implications of the lack of representation in the mainstream media.

There is such wide mis-representation and under-representation of the Pacific Islands population in the NZ mainstream media that many Pacific islands people are turning to Pacific Diaspora media such as the Pacific Radio Network to listen to their stories from their perspective but also to listen to mainstream news not only from a Pacific perspective but a Pacific way too (Richards, interview with

Papoutsaki, 30/5/08). This implies different news values, news that follows the Pacific story telling mode. Observations from participants in this research project have indicated that Pacific audience makes a distinction between mainstream media news style and Pacific ways of presenting news. They like listening to Pacific radio for instance because it is providing a wider context for the stories.

A Pacific Diaspora Media Pilot Project: towards a Methodological Framework

Methodological choices need to reflect the special nature of diaspora communities and thus allow space for every day life, experience and culturally specific ways of communicating and information sharing to be incorporated in the research design. Georgiou (2007:26) suggests open methodological and multi-method approaches which are proven to be more productive in recording and interpreting media practices and the diversity of migration and diaspora experience. For this pilot project, a combination of methods has been chosen, both quantitative and qualitative through participant observations, focus groups, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Use of such a combination allows for ‘mutual confirmation of measures and validation of findings’ and a ‘means of refining, broadening and strengthening conceptual linkages (Berg, 2001:5).

The main research question that this pilot project seeks to address is ‘What role do diasporic media play in addressing the information needs of the Pacific Island communities in NZ’. Some of the leading sub-questions look at what forms of diasporic media exist; what content they provide; what are the communication needs of the Pacific Island communities; and how are these needs met by existing diasporic media. By addressing these questions, it also hoped to provide some insights about the role of diasporic media in sustaining cultural identities and whether diasporic media promote socio-cultural separation or assist integration in the host country.

The pilot phase includes a) focus groups with community members (adults and youth); b) a *media survey* to identify the goals and the content currently offered by Pacific diasporic media and c) in-depth interviews with journalists, editors, programmers and community leaders.

The researchers are largely using Browne’s (2005) typology of studying ethnic minorities’ media which identifies eight structural elements seen as central to understanding ethnic minority media activity in a broader societal context. Of those elements, the following have been identified and adapted as relevant to this research. Core questions will be adapted and applied to each survey:

1. Types of outlets
Electronic, print, internet; Accessibility; Terrestrial, cable, satellite, imported from island
2. Levels of service (geography)
International/transnational, regional, national, province, local/translocal, neighbourhood
3. Policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there government policies that assist Pacific Island media in acquiring licensed outlets? • Are there policies/laws/codes of ethics that safeguard good practices?
4. Operational Goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the main <i>raison(s) d'être</i> of these outlets? • Which goals appear to be predominant? • Maintaining links with the 'ancestral homeland'? • Preserving, restoring or advancing the use of a pacific island language? • Providing and/or restoring a sense of pride in the pacific community's accomplishments (cultural, social, political, and economic)? • Combating negative stereotypes, especially those provided by media? • Indicating how diaspora and mainstream media can/do work together? • Serving as source of information on health care, education, financial aid etc? • Illustrating that pacific island communities are capable of operating media services?
5. Media Service-Pacific Community Links
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the service have a community board? • Does the service conduct audience research?
6. Primary Audiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One's own pacific island group? • Inclusive of other pacific island groups? • Which age, gender and geographical location is the focus on? • How is contact between audience and media taking places?
7. Programming
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information, education, entertainment (contemporary, traditional, popular, etc) • Is the programming representational or participatory?

At this pilot phase, selected members of the Samoan and Tongan communities within the Auckland region compose the focus groups with the potential of including one more community representing a smaller island, such as Niue or Tuvalu. The communities are arbitrarily chosen at this stage. The focus groups are divided into adults and youth. Youth represents a special population segment of diaspora communities. As most of the Pacific young people are second generation, their different experiences might have shaped different identities and different thus media needs and use.

The researchers have approached Pacific Island community centres (mostly church-based and in the case of young participants, sports or other community clubs) to ask permission access participants through the assistance of community leaders (pastors, sports coaches etc). Churches are an important component of Pacific diasporic communities; they provide social opportunities, mediate between immigrants and their new society and are sites for reaffirmation and reconstitution of cultural identity (Morton, 1998). Most community activities take place around the Church and it is seen as appropriate for the focus groups to be conducted in church community halls.

The following groups of questions indicate the general areas of information the research team is interested in gathering from the focus groups and are only general guidelines allowing participants to indicate other areas of more relevant information:

<i>General media use</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What types of media are you aware of? • What types of media do you use? • How do you access this media? • How do you make use of this media (information, entertainment, education, helping to integrate in the New Zealand society etc)? • What are your thoughts on the media content available to you?
<i>Awareness and use of Pacific Media</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What types of Pacific media are you aware of? • What types of Pacific media do you use? • How do you access this media? • Have you ever participated in a talk back show? • How do you make use of this media (information, entertainment, education, keeping in touch with your community and what happens in your island, help keep language use etc)? • What are your thoughts on the media content available to you?
<i>Communication Needs</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the needs of your community? • What are your individual needs? • Do you have any suggestions of ways to improve and/or extend the existing media and its content?

Some initial methodological observations from the first phase of this project so far indicated the important of having a cultural insider in the research team. A Pacific Islands research assistant has been providing the appropriate cultural know-how, establishing connections with the Pacific Islands diverse communities, coordinating with community leaders, advising the main researcher on cultural protocols and facilitating communication with interviewees.

Considerable time has to be spent with community leaders and in the communities in order to better understand them before any interview/focus group. The observation and general discussions provided useful insights that informed the researcher in ways of better conducting interviews with participants. Communicating with Pacific Islands communities indicated that the more informal the setting and tone of the interview the better the feedback is. The presence of another Pacific Islands person as the in-between has had a positive impact on the participants' attitude towards the research. Furthermore, one has to observe Pacific ways of relating information, which requires establishing a personal rapport with the interviewers before starting the interview and during the interview.

The main observation on the use of Pacific diaspora media indicates that Pacific Islands communities in the Auckland region are a multi-layered group that comprises of: island or origin; time of

immigration (1st, 2nd, 3rd generation immigrants); age; residence (South Auckland vs West Auckland vs other areas); integrated or non-integrated; proficiency in island language; level of education; interests. The role and use of Pacific media and Pacific media content seems to be very different amongst these groups. Any data analysis therefore will have to take these elements into consideration.

Conclusions

As Pacific people are becoming more visible in numbers and impact with their contribution to the New Zealand society, the need to approach their communities from a diaspora perspective becomes more apparent. Their modes of communication and use of media, both diasporic and mainstream, can help us better understand their needs as communities.

The value of conducting research in this topic is two fold. Firstly it will enable the researchers to study Pacific diaspora media specific to the NZ socio-cultural context and secondly create a methodological framework that will inform the design of an extensive research project exploring the wider needs of diasporic communities.

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