

MĀORI IN UNEXPECTED PLACES:
WATCHING MĀORI ON TELEVISION

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ABSTRACT

*This paper draws on a study of audience responses, prompted by understandings of the power exerted by representations in television dramas. The wider study explored Māori and non-Māori meaning-making, emotions, feelings, and affective practices that arise when viewing Māori representations on locally produced television dramas. Findings from focus group responses to an episode of the local television drama *The Brokenwood Mysteries* are organised here, using a framework of the expected and unexpected that aligns with theories of Kaupapa Māori and affect. Three key themes emerged: ‘The Expected and Unexpected’; ‘Reflection and Challenge’; and ‘Motivations and the Writer’s Responses’. Although attention is on Māori, Pākehā responses are included. Māori were deeply affected and worked hard to pre-empt and address what they saw or expected to see. Although some Pākehā expressed discomfort and concern when responding to negative representations of Māori, they did not demonstrate the same levels of negotiation and contestation.*

Keywords: television drama; Māori, audiences; Kaupapa Māori; affect

INTRODUCTION

In a multitude of ways, sometimes routine, sometimes exceptional, television plays an intimate role in shaping our day-to-day practices and experiences – at home but also outside it, at work, at school, in our conversations with friends, family and colleagues, in our engagements with society, politics and culture. (Ang 1991, 68)

Although widely understood as entertainment, television dramas bring highly selected ‘realities’ to the screens of almost every household in the land, influencing identity, norms, practices and the kinds of lives, communities and nation

we aspire to and foster. Whether accessed via real time or one of the multiple platforms currently available, the power of television, including television drama, should not be underestimated (Ang 1991). As an entrenched genre within a heavily mediated world (Hall 2001), such programmes elicit audience engagement, debate, dissent and affect. Audiences experience emotional responses, make meanings, and get to know themselves and others through this influential and powerful medium. However, this is not unproblematic. Impacts extend beyond leisure and diversion, producing and reproducing social life by suggesting and progressively naturalising mores in significant domains, including cultural orientation, identity positioning and social inclusion. As a result, indigenous communities have debated and challenged representations that perpetuate dominant discourses and stereotypes, understanding that ‘something vital is at stake’ (Shohat and Stam 1994, 181).

This paper draws on a study of audience responses and affect, prompted by understandings of the power exerted by representations in television dramas. The wider study explored Māori and non-Māori meaning-making, emotions, feelings, and affective practices that arise, for example, exclusion and discrimination, when viewing Maori representation on locally produced television dramas. We drew on media and affect (Gorton 2009; Tyler 2008). This paper explores focus group responses to an episode of the local television drama, *The Brokenwood Mysteries*. Although attention is on Māori, Pākehā responses are included. Findings are organised using a framework of the expected and unexpected (Deloria 2004), which aligns with theories of Kaupapa Māori and affect (Moewaka Barnes 2018; Moewaka Barnes *et al.* 2017; Wetherell 2012).

BACKGROUND

Limited research explores television drama and indigenous representations, and less is related to audience responses. What is available points to under-representation and a limited and/or negative scope of depictions (Fitzgerald 2010; King 2009; Merskin 1998; Miyose and Morel 2019; Nolan 2009; Pack 2013). Only a small body of research exists that examines Māori representation on mass television (Blythe 1994; L Pihama 1996; Yan *et al.* 2021). Martin Blythe (1994), who examined Māori representation in film and to a lesser extent television from 1910–1988, argued that representations directly relate to evolving concepts of nationhood. Trisha Dunleavy examined prime time television drama production up to 1999, with a follow-up 2011 study tracing the development of local film and television within the context of wider production environments (Dunleavy 2005; Dunleavy and Joyce 2011). However, neither effort focused on Māori representations. A study of the Māori supernatural

television series *Mataku* (2001, 2002, 2005) found it offered a 'complex array of Pākehā, Māori and bicultural identities' while being grounded in indigenous worldviews (Glynn and Tyson 2007).

Studies and critiques of Māori representation in television news coverage provide evidence of the perpetuation of negative and dominant constructions and the influence this has on audiences (Abel 1997; Hodgetts *et al.* 2004; McGregor and Comrie 2002). Our media study found that Māori were heavily under-represented in the news and, when Māori issues were covered, they were presented in strongly negative terms. The persistence of these forms of racist stereotyping reinforces commonly held beliefs about Māori, undermining Māori identity and participation in society. For example, the over-reporting of Māori and child abuse in the news media associates Māori with criminality and violence, a familiar discourse that normalises racism (Moewaka Barnes *et al.* 2012; Nairn *et al.* 2012;). Non-Māori audience responses to these forms of representation associated Māori with being 'bad', resulting in a reluctance to engage with Māori or learn about Māori culture (Gregory *et al.* 2011). Māori audiences drew links between dominant forms of news coverage and racism, including the role media plays in contributing to the discriminatory practices they encountered on a day-to-day basis (Moewaka Barnes *et al.* 2013).

A contrast to these audience responses comes from a small body of research exploring Māori audiences viewing Māori Television (a free-to-air channel, indigenous television broadcaster mandated to promote *te reo Māori*). This includes Vanessa Poihipi's (2007) study of Māori women's responses to Māori Television, and Jo Smith's (2016) interrogation of Māori audience views on Māori Television content. Responses from participants in both studies include a strengthened sense of identity, and feeling proud to be Māori. Smith's (2016) findings point to additional uplifting emotions and feelings, described as joy and happiness by one participant.

Consistent with audience responses to Māori Television, Māori reported feeling uplifted and having a sense of pride when viewing positive depictions in the first Māori driven dramatic feature film, *Ngati* (Barclay 1987). In contrast, they described feeling uncomfortable, belittled, irritated, embarrassed and insulted, along with a deep sense of anger and sadness, at negatively perceived Māori representations in *The Piano* (Campion 1993) (dir. Jane Campion non-Māori 1993) (Moewaka Barnes 1999). A study grounded in specific *iwi*, *hapu* and *whānau* connections and understandings reported that Māori participants demonstrated a range of responses to local films, including relief in seeing characters in the feature film *Once Were Warriors* (Tamahori 1994) that were

familiar, but rejecting constructions of Māori as senselessly violent (Wilson 2013). A Māori participant in the media study recalled being banned from entering the home of his partner's parents because the parents had seen *Once Were Warriors* (Tamahori 1994), which reinforced their belief in the construction of Māori men as violent and criminal. Davinia Thornley (2011) explored Māori responses to and relationships with the films *Ngati* (Barclay 1987) and the first exhibited dramatic feature film solely directed by a Māori woman, *Mauri* (Mita 1988). Participants felt connected to the films, recognising the power of the medium, and spoke of being affected in tangible ways (Thornley 2011).

Internationally, Sam Pack conducted reception studies with both Navajo and 'Anglo' participants by screening visual media about Navajo that included film and television drama (Pack 2007, 2013). Despite inaccuracies, Navajo viewers were happy, 'surprised and even grateful that their culture and stories were even portrayed on film at all' (Pack 2007, 124). Given the scarcity of such stories and representations of Navajo, Pack concludes that 'beggars can't be choosers' (Pack 2007, 125). He proposes that, contrary to assumptions that audiences 'process information in a similarly unproblematic manner', there is an established link between 'culture and communication' and 'interpretative strategies' (Pack 2013, 223–224). Therefore 'reception is never a matter of passive acceptance but always a process of creative adaptation and unintended consequences. Meanings constantly shift and are subject to multiple interpretations', although there is more likely to be a dominant consistent interpretation (Pack 2013, 241). As a result, the 'media do not affect all equally or in the same fashion' (Pack 2013, 224).

JoEllen Shively (1992) and Elizabeth Bird (1996) reached similar conclusions about differences between ethnic groups when comparing indigenous and non-indigenous responses to the Western genre film, *The Searchers* and the 1990s television series, *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*. Responses were grounded in very different worldviews and experiences, including the experience of being either the coloniser or the colonised.

Audience responses to and understandings of visual media are inextricably linked with other texts, experiences and histories (Bobo 1998; Fiske 1986; Nolan 2009). Theorists propose that 'resistant' or 'oppositional' readings occur when television texts are interpreted in ways that are empowering, but where such meaning was not intended by the writers/production team (Bird 1996; Condit 1989). However, Bird found that although Native American participants would draw on experiences of colonisation when interpreting character responses, oppositional readings were rare.

Little research in Aotearoa/New Zealand explores audience reception to locally produced television drama. A survey of youth (ethnicity not stated) canvassed responses to the soap opera *Shortland Street* (1992–current). Respondents felt that the drama represented a ‘Pacific’ New Zealand because of the familiar locations and the range of ethnicities, including Māori, Pākehā and Pacific (Moran 1996). Similarly, Joost De Bruin’s analyses of *Shortland Street* audiences (ethnicity not stated) found that ethnic diversity on screen was valued because it reflected New Zealand society, and Māori representation was generally viewed positively (De Bruin 2011).

Little is known about how representations of Māori on local television dramas may affect individuals and groups within our society. The genre can be understood as a critical form in popular culture that utilises public funds to reflect and enact, in a myriad of mundane and explicit ways, an on-going or episodic sense of identity (individual and collective) and everyday relations.

THE RESEARCH

The study ‘Affect and identity in contemporary television drama’ aimed to understand how contemporary Aotearoa/New Zealand television dramas affect our lives, including identity, social cohesion and cross-cultural relationships. Episodes from *The Brokenwood Mysteries*, *Westside*, *Find Me A Māori Bride* and *Shortland Street* were selected for audience viewing from a database established as a part of the research. The database consisted of local dramas (comedy, ‘soap operas’, series, one-offs) broadcast and accessible on the free-to-air television platforms TVOne, TV2, TV3, Prime and Māori Television, primarily funded by NZ On Air (NZOA). The dramas were collected over a two-year period from 2014 to 2016. During this period, there was an increase in funding for local drama from the government agency, NZOA, the major funder of local television programmes. However, Māori Television, predominantly funded by Te Māngai Pāho (a government agency that promotes Māori language and culture and funds Māori television programmes), was limited in drama production due to the high costs of production. An examination of the television drama database found that few (1) included characters that were identifiable as Māori, (2) provided a substantial storyline that included Māori, and (3) included substantial Māori-Pākehā interactions. The four selected dramas fulfilled these criteria along with the requirement that each viewing would not exceed 40 minutes in length to keep to the 60–90 minutes allocated for each focus group.

METHODS

Twenty-five focus groups were conducted with 107 individuals from Te Waipounamu and Te Ika a Māui (South and North Islands) mostly residing in Te Ika a Māui urban centres (Te Tai Tokerau/Northland, Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland, Taranaki/New Plymouth, Te Whanganui a Tara/Wellington and Ōtautahi/Christchurch in Te Waipounamu); participants were predominantly Māori (49) and Pākehā/New Zealand European (50), with the remaining 8 identifying as Samoan, Fijian, Filipino, Indian and Pacifica. Five interviews with a total of 7 participants were conducted with a writer from each of the four selected television dramas (n=4) and the funders, Te Māngai Pāho (n=2) and NZOA (n=1).

The interviewer (first author) attempted to replicate a typical viewing situation. The approach was informed by audience studies, including indigenous audience studies. Pack (2007) argues for the need to replicate or include household and family audiences in a 'natural viewing environment', and Helen Wood (2009) conducted in-home audience research. In this study, the majority of focus groups were conducted in participants' homes, and participants knew each other: they were whanau, students, friends or colleagues.

Each focus group viewed one of four dramas. A selection of dramas allowed for a range of responses and provided data for in-depth case studies focused on each episode as well as analyses of broader themes across focus groups. The purpose was to explore audience meaning-making and affect: the feelings and emotions engendered as a result of viewing a local drama.

After the viewing, a semi-structured discussion occurred during which participants talked about their reactions to the drama. Participant responses during and after the screening were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, including responses such as laughing and emphasis on words or sentences. Six of the focus groups were filmed with participant permission. The aim was to apply Wood's affective research method, text-in-action, in order to capture audience responses (emotional, physical, verbal) while watching television programmes (Skeggs *et al.* 2008; Wood 2007, 2009). Notes were also taken by the researcher. Participants were encouraged to talk about and express any emotions or feelings they experienced during and after the viewing.

For this paper, we drew on six focus groups conducted in cities across the country. Group 1 consisted of three Māori females, 30 to 60 years old, from a tertiary institution in Ōtautahi/Christchurch. Group 2 consisted of six Pākehā, five females and one male, 30 to 60 years old, who knew each other socially

and lived in Ōtautahi/Christchurch. Group 3 consisted of three participants, one Māori female, one Pākehā female and one Pākehā male, 30 to 40 years old, who were based in Te Whanganui a Tara/Wellington. Group 4 consisted of four Māori participants, three females and one male, 16 to 30 years old, who lived in Te Whanganui a Tara/Wellington. Group 5 consisted of three Māori participants, two female and one male, in their 20s who were tertiary students in Taranaki/New Plymouth. Group 6 consisted of five Pākehā participants, three females and two males, 50 to 80 years old, who resided in Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland. Participants are identified here as either Wahine (Māori woman), Tāne (Māori male), Male (Pākehā) or Female (Pākehā). Two focus groups were filmed; data is predominantly from the audio recorded discussions occurring subsequently.

APPROACH

Emerging western theory in the area of *affective practice* challenges social research by following what participants do, engaging with and including emotions and feelings as significant elements of social life (Wetherell 2012). Affective approaches provided opportunities to think about and investigate relationships between television dramas and meaning-making, emotions and feelings engendered, *e.g.*, anger, pride, curiosity, fear or revulsion, and affective practices that arise, *e.g.*, exclusion, discrimination, inclusion, approval and rejection. Margaret Wetherell (2012, 2) argues that ‘the advantage of affect is that it brings the dramatic and the everyday back into social analysis.’ As Wetherell (2012, 13) points out, the ‘flows of affect can mesh, for example, with the manufactured flows of images on television screens.’ For example, Imogen Tyler (2008) draws on the UK television comedy *Little Britain* to establish links between female working-class stereotypes, affective reactions such as disgust and mockery, and wider societal practices of exclusion. Affective approaches provide ways to understand the feelings and emotions that might be engendered when watching local television dramas in Aotearoa/New Zealand, including actions and behaviours.

Kaupapa Māori, grounded in Māori concepts, aspirations and experiences (*e.g.*, manaakitanga, transformation and decolonisation), informed all aspects of this research, including the methods, methodological approach and analysis (Mahuika 2008; Moewaka Barnes 2000; Pihama 2020; Tuhiwai Smith 1999). Previous research built on Kaupapa Māori theory to develop a Kaupapa Māori film theoretical framework with which to examine film texts and shed light on filmmaking environments in Aotearoa/New Zealand, including funding, processes of filmmaking and exhibition, alongside the aspirations of Māori filmmakers (Moewaka Barnes 2018). In the current research, the framework

has been adapted for television dramas and extended to include audience responses. This study recognises that the stories we tell, hear and see go beyond mere entertainment: stories bring a form of ‘reality’ to the screen that affect everyone’s lives.

ANALYSIS

Drawing on affect and Kaupapa Māori theory, thematic and discursive analyses were also used to draw out key themes and inform audience meaning-making (Clarke and Braun 2017; Patton 2004). The organisation of key themes for this paper was inspired by Philip Deloria’s (2004, 11) theory of the expected and unexpected, and what this tells us about dominant discourse and ideology, exposing colonial ‘relations of power and domination’. He explains that responses to the unexpected can produce affective reactions that are shaped by expectations. Deloria gives the example of a Native American woman in a beauty parlour wearing a beaded buckskin dress and sitting under a hair dryer while receiving a manicure. The juxtaposition of modernity and urbanity (beauty parlour) and indigeneity (primitive and rural) with the expectation that a Native American woman would be a worker not a client elicited incredulity and laughter, where dominant expectations questioned the veracity of the image. Deloria proposes that the ‘ideological chuckle’ can reaffirm the validity of the viewer’s expectations (Deloria 2004, 3–4). Behind these reactions lies something more sinister: the history and tools of colonisation that entrench and perpetuate colonial racism and oppression.

When discussing the facets of expectation, Deloria asks the reader to make the following distinction: the anomalous reinforces dominant categories and expectations, and ‘the unexpected...resists categorization and, thereby, questions expectation itself’ (Deloria 2004, 11). Although Deloria’s theory was specific to Native American representations, I applied the concept to Aotearoa/New Zealand audience responses to Māori representations in local television dramas. Three key themes emerged from the analysis: ‘The Expected and Unexpected’; ‘Reflection and Challenge’; and ‘Motivations and the Writer’s Responses’.

THE BROKENWOOD MYSTERIES, PLAYING THE LIE

This paper examines responses to the first 40 minutes of the episode, *Playing the Lie* from *The Brokenwood Mysteries* (2014). *The Brokenwood Mysteries* is a murder mystery drama series set in a rural town in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and filmed in the greater Auckland region. Each episode is a standalone story with a runtime of two-hours. The head writer is Tim Balm (Pākehā), and the series

has a range of directors and writers. The two lead characters are Pākehā police officers Detective Senior Sergeant Mike Shepherd and Detective Constable Fern Sutherland. Three Māori characters appear in the first series: two male and one female. Two are recurring Māori characters: Jarred and Tania, who has a minor role. Walter appears in one episode; all three Māori characters have links to violence or criminality.

SYNOPSIS

As a procedural drama, the episode *Playing the Lie* focuses on solving a murder. It was directed by Michael Hurst (Pākehā) and written by James Griffin (Pākehā). A Pākehā woman golfer is found murdered on the local golf course. Jared becomes involved because his Uncle Walter, who only appears in this episode, is a suspect with a criminal conviction. Walter is a member of the local golf club and a committee member. He appears in an early scene on the golf course with a group of Pākehā golfers who are all potential suspects. In the first episode of the series, Jared operates on the edges of the law, dealing in illegal firearms. However, as the series develops, his knowledge of wine and horticulture emerges. In this episode, Jared's friendship with Detective Mike Shepherd is evident, and he is working on the Detective's vineyard. No Māori women characters appear in this episode.

FINDINGS

The expected and unexpected

Prior to the screening of the drama, Māori participants spoke of expecting the worst, waiting for the inevitable, holding their breath and feeling anxious, prior to viewing the drama. They were pleasantly surprised to see Māori characters, but were apprehensive about the forms the representations would take.

Wahine: As a Māori, when you watch things...you get really conflicting emotions because you want to see Māori representation, but you don't want it to be tokenistic...or you want it to be, like, meaningful.

In many ways, the Māori character of Walter (a murder suspect) was expected, and Māori participants were critical. While warming to him, they were also troubled and angry about his characterisation as the stereotypical Māori who broke the law, and was obstinate and aggressive.

Wahine: And you still have to make him into someone who went to

jail... violent...to show his anger...is that the only way that Māori can [be]?

A range of participants, Māori and Pākehā, felt that the writers were using audience expectations of Māori as violent and criminal to place suspicion on Walter, setting him up as a key murder suspect. Pākehā viewers critiqued Walter's character and felt that audiences may draw on 'common sense ideas about Māori men' as violent and short tempered. They did not express concern or anxiety about Walter's potential to be a murderer. In contrast, Māori expressed enormous relief when it was revealed that Walter was not the murderer. In a raised voice, one Māori male participant stated that if Walter had been the killer, 'I'd have been so mad'.

Questioning the characterisation of Māori men as aggressive, one young Māori woman spoke of her father as not fitting this category. She did not view her experience as an anomaly, describing her father as 'soft, real kind', the complete opposite to Walter. In doing so, she challenged the existence of the category and pointed to the role of media in progressing Māori men as violent and hostile.

Wahine: Typical, here we go again sort of thing. It wasn't offensive: I didn't take it that far. It didn't even annoy me really. It was just, it was that, oh, ok, like, just another Māori character on TV.

Although expecting to see aggressive and violent Māori male characters, Māori participants spoke of feeling deeply disturbed by these categories, identifying links between stereotypical depictions of Māori and the emotions, feelings and behaviours they engendered and reinforced. The following participant imagined responses from a non-Māori audience, where expectations would be reinforced and dominant representations accepted as the norm, something that they (Māori) feared.

Wahine: Suddenly, we find that he's [Walter] got this history with the police and there'll be people out there going, 'Oh, yeah, there's the Māori culture.'

Concern was expressed about the damaging effect this had on them as Māori, as well as society generally.

Wahine: Yeah...that the only Māori culture that was portrayed in there is actually quite demeaning.

Wahine: What kind of messages [are sent] to us as Māori, and also to other people ?

As a result, participants were concerned that negative responses would affect day-to-day interactions between Māori and non-Māori.

Wahine: It de-minimised the actual efforts you see in [the] day-to-day life of cultures actually trying to mix together.

The following quote represents the thinking of many of the Māori participants when they encountered either the absence of Māori on screen or negative representations:

Wahine: You [individual and group identity] don't feel valued or useful or necessary...[or] valid.

Another participant was frustrated and angry at the lack of Māori characters and the predominance of Pākehā characters:

Wahine: I'm pissed off! I'm so angry. Every detective is white. There are only two Māori characters out of twenty of them...no detectives are brown ...kind of assumes only white people can be high up... it annoyed me... I'm just hoha.

Observing that only two Māori male characters and no Māori women appeared in the episode, this participant was alarmed about the messages this was sending to her young daughters. In particular, the message that Māori women are of no importance and Māori do not hold positions of power. She was concerned that these forms of representation would potentially limit her daughters' options and understandings of who they are and what they can become. Her anger was also evident in her body language. During the viewing, she moved from being relaxed, to crossing her arms, and eventually curling up in a foetal like position on the couch. Her facial expression included tightened lips and tense muscles. The embodied response reflected the strong emotions and feelings she experienced during the viewing.

Māori and Pākehā participants pointed to the unexpected aspects of Jared's character, an affable and intelligent young Māori man. In this example, the unexpected was welcomed and enthusiastically received, by Māori in particular, with one participant exclaiming:

Wahine: Like, *wow*, there's finally a Māori character on TV [that we can relate to].

Māori male participants were relieved and heartened to have the rare opportunity to see a non-stereotypical, positive representation of themselves in the media.

Tāne: I was *relieved*. I was like, 'Oh my god!' They are, like, running Māoris into the ground at the moment. I was like, 'Ohh!'... Yeah, he kind of contradicts any Māori stereotypes.

Tāne: Because he was- he was a cool part of the programme.

Participants had clear expectations about the types of Māori representations they would see. Resisting categories, the representation of a young Māori male as charismatic, likeable, charming, skilled and cool rather than the expected Māori male as inarticulate, violent and criminal, resonated strongly with Māori participants.

Māori in unexpected places and with unexpected knowledge

Deloria writes about Indians in unexpected places (Deloria 2004) and doing unexpected things. Here I refer to Māori in unexpected places and with unexpected knowledge.

Māori playing golf

An early scene shows a group of golfers, including Walter, the only Māori, on a well-kept golf course. Participants, Māori and Pākehā, noticed and commented on Walter's presence in this scene. It was unexpected because a Māori was playing golf on an expensive looking golf course. This participant identifies the representation as an anomaly:

Female: Yeah, it was weird to see him in, like, a Pākehā dominant sport being in that kind of surrounding... So, when I think of a golf club like that in this beautiful plush setting, I think primarily of, ah, white middle- to upper-class.

Dominant expectations that Māori do not play golf and, if they did, it would not be with a group of middle-class Pākehā, questioned the veracity of the image. Māori participants from Ōtautahi/Christchurch, Te Waipounamu (South

Island), while identifying it as an unexpected representation, thought it could be an anomaly to others. They pointed to regional differences between Māori – one of the few regional differences that emerged in the study overall – where Māori playing golf with Pākehā was the norm in Te Waipounamu.

Wahine: I'm used to living in a world where Māoris play golf alongside Pākehā, and it's a perfectly normal thing to do. But then that's the thing, too, is, I think, is the two worlds between North Island Māori and South Island Māori are so very different.

Deloria (2004, 5) is relevant here when he says: 'Even as it defines the unnatural and odd, the naming of an anomaly simultaneously re-creates and empowers the very same categories that it escapes'. Responses to the golf scene reinforce the notion that Māori do not belong on a golf course, being generally categorised and represented as working class and more likely to play a group sport such as rugby. Simultaneously, it raised questions for participants regarding their assumptions and expectations about Māori that are discussed in 'Reflection and Challenge': Māori, apart from Te Waipounamu participants, were disturbed that a Māori was playing golf with a group of Pākehā men. They expressed a sense of a return to normality, or equilibrium, when it was revealed that Walter did not like golf and was only involved so he could exact retribution. Perhaps as one participant commented, it was a concern that introducing a Māori character was tokenistic or it may be a response to implausibility: Māori they knew would not be interacting in this way with Pākehā. None of the participants thought the unexpected was humorous; rather, discomfort and suspicion were expressed.

Māori wine expert

A further unexpected representation was identified by both Pākehā and Māori participants: that of a Māori man (Jared) who appreciates red wine and is an articulate wine expert. It occurs when Jared arrives at Detective Mike Shepherd's house after finishing work on the vineyard. Jared is wearing cut off shorts and work boots – an expected Māori representation. As he strolls into the living area, the two characters address each other with familiarity and friendliness. The detective casually offers Jared a glass of red wine as they settle into an amiable conversation. Jared savours his wine, commenting knowledgeably on the chocolatey, plum, peppery notes with a nice finish and full body – the unexpected. The representation is radically different from the expected, working against dominant notions of Māori men as criminal, aggressive and heavy drinkers (Maynard *et al.* 2013). Extremes of representation in terms of the expected and

unexpected were highly visible in this scene, and as a result provoked multiple responses. Jared's knowledge of wine is introduced in an earlier episode, and the detective's acknowledgment of his expertise earlier in the scene indicates that Jared's knowledge of wine is established.

The embodied response was a chuckle, that Deloria suggests is an ideological chuckle. We have named it the Discomforting Chuckle as it can apply to responses from Māori and Pākehā participants. Pākehā participants spoke of 'giggling', 'finding it amusing', and 'a bit of humour'. The amusement stems from the belief that Māori are not knowledgeable about wine or articulate, and the response 'takes direct aim at the impossibility of the image' (Deloria 2004, 4). For Māori participants, the Discomforting Chuckle was complex, as anger and suspicion were present. While admitting they laughed about Jared's knowledge and appreciation of red wine initially, they expressed concerns as to why the scene was amusing and who would respond with laughter.

Tāne: We did laugh.

Wahine 1: I think that we were supposed to laugh at that, and we did [participant laughs]. I think that was a comedic thing... I think we were supposed to be like, 'Oh, there's this young Māori boy—oh, what? He's commenting on the notes in the wine'... I think it was supposed to be funny... A dodgy joke. It was weird.

Wahine 2: Yeah, yeah, I can comment on wine like that but... [laughs].

All: [Laughing]

Wahine 1: I think the audience was supposed to be surprised.

Tāne: Yeah, because you did look at him weird at first, and then, when he explained it, we're like, 'Oh, ok, so he does know what he's talking about. At least he's not a stupid Māori who's drinking it just to get drunk. He knew what he's drinking.'

These participants questioned their own reactions and if it was a deliberate comedic device employed to elicit humour. Then they go on to resist the anomaly and distance themselves from a comical response suggesting that 'others', *i.e.*, the audience, would be surprised by it, seeing it as an anomaly and therefore an implausible representation. Māori participant responses can be described as the Discomforting Chuckle: a dodgy joke that made them feel uncomfortable.

Māori participants were also concerned about the Discomforting Chuckle in response to the expected, in this case the ‘happy go lucky’ Māori. Resisting the expected, and acutely aware of colonial constructions of Māori as childlike and amusing (Wall 1997), participants expressed concerns about how Jared interacted with the Pākehā detective:

Wahine 1: ...[H]e [Jared] was kind of a little bit like your stereotypical, like, happy go lucky...

Wahine 2: Young Māori male.

Wahine 1: ...[H]e was like, ‘Oh, help yourself to a drink.’ He’s like, ‘Oh, don’t mind if I do’ [laughs].

Wahine 3: Yeah, hard, exactly. It’s like it’s familiar, but, at the same time, it’s like we can laugh at that, but I don’t want other people laughing at it [laughs].

Tāne: ...[S]o, it’s the fact that it’s true, you know it’s...

Wahine 1: Yeah, it’s tricky stuff, aye.

Wahine 2: It’s internally conflicting in some ways.

Wahine 1: It is internally conflicting.....you don’t want everybody... being like, ‘Oh, this is what all Māori people are like.’

The participants were aware of non-Māori audience reactions to these categories and the implications of the Discomforting Chuckle. The durability and effect of dominant constructions is exemplified by the Māori participant’s response: ‘you don’t want everybody’ thinking ‘this is what all Māori people are like’. The excerpt above is one example of the embodied responses that occurred between Māori participants, such as laughter, smiling, eye contact and head nodding, as well as finishing off each other’s sentences.

Reflection and challenge

Internal reflection occurred with some participants who responded to the Māori golfer scene as anomalous. One Pākehā participant questioned her own and others’ uncritical acceptance of stereotypes and norms:

Female 1: But it does make me think about how much we either do or don't challenge those stereotypes, even if they're put in our face.

Female 2: But you don't know that you don't know.

Female 1: No.

Female 2: So, how can you?

Female 1: Mm, but we watch, as we said before: we watch so much on television and we watch it at this level. We don't actually sit there and analyse what's going on.

While Female 1 critically engaged with expectations, her fellow participants were silent apart from Female 2, who posits ignorance as a reason for uncritical acceptance. In doing so, Female 2 excuses herself and others from any obligations to challenge and resist dominant constructions of Māori. Female 1 raises concerns that television, a seemingly innocuous 'background noise', infiltrates the mind, dampening any interrogation of expected representations of Māori:

Female 1: ...So, we do know, but we just don't do it...often when we're sitting down watching television and it's just kind of a...

Female 2: A background noise?

Female 1: ...[A]lmost as a mind-numbing technique.

A Māori participant who accepted the anomaly questioned the motivations of the production team. Her initial reaction was that the inclusion of Walter in the golf scene was deliberate to counter accusations of racism:

Wahine: Token's kind of like when they fill in a brown character or something to make it look like they're not racist...So, I was thinking it tells kind of, like, 'Oh, they have to throw in a Māori on the golf course so that they don't look like they're racist'... That's what I thought, 'cos it was, like, just 'cos I noticed.

A Pākehā participant also questioned the motivations of the production team, but then examined her response to the unexpected representation:

Female: It was almost like [production team] were trying to have

some Māori characters, but we'll put them in Pākehā roles...but then I don't know. Maybe that's kind of stereotyping too, and saying this is what we think a Māori character should be...I don't know... It's quite tricky thinking about how to put characters into roles that aren't stereotyping, but are also realistic.

Reactions to the image of a Māori playing golf in a luxurious setting were troubled. While it reinforced the expectation that Māori do not play golf, it also resulted in challenging the intent of the production team and, for a few, mostly Māori, the questioning of expectation itself.

Motivations and the writer's responses

Māori and, to a lesser extent, Pākehā deliberated on the motivations of the production team, including writers. Pākehā participants who had watched earlier episodes were aware of Jared's earlier portrayal as a suspicious Māori character, operating on the wrong side of the law. His elevation in later episodes to an endearing ally of Detective Mike Shepherd led participants in one Pākehā focus group to ask if the writers changed their minds during the series:

Female: You are making him sound like a hooligan now, rather than a charismatic young person.

Male: Yeah, well, that's right. That's where he starts off in the series, which makes his sort of elevation to this more confident form a little bit more surprising in a way.

Female: Maybe they changed their mind.

The head writer revealed that he wanted to include Māori characters and avoid stereotypes. He deliberately attributed traits to Jared's character that were unexpected:

Head writer: I needed him [Jared] to play as a suspect briefly, so I kept him as the kind of hooligan...you couldn't quite work out...what side of the tracks he was on. And that was deliberately ambiguous. But I knew then and there that I wanted him to be a character that was completely surprising...I wanted him to be everything that you don't expect him to be...So, in the next episode, he knows all about wines and he can quote the Latin names for plants.

In this quote, the anomalous nature of Jared is revealed as being ‘everything that you don’t expect him to be.’ This reinforces the character as not only unexpected but as also stepping outside a stereotype. Implicit in this is the existence of expectations that Māori men do not know about wines, or the Latin names for plants. As discussed, Māori welcomed and questioned the unexpected. In response to the expected, the following Māori participants asked why the production team reverted to the stereotype of the happy go lucky Māori.

Wahine 1: I’ve always been challenged by the fact that he’s [Jared] put across as this very intelligent, onto it Māori...But he has to talk like a hori.

Wahine 2: The happy go lucky cheeky bugger.

Wahine 1: The happy go lucky cheeky bugger who just happens to be really bright and onto it, and it’s, like, so, why do you have to package him in this way?

Māori participants suggested that stereotypical traits were deliberately ascribed to Māori characters so they were recognisable and familiar to non-Māori audiences, particularly Pākehā.

Wahine: But then at the same time it was like...they were relying on stereotypes for the audience to understand that character as well. Like the way that he [Jared] was talking.

Wahine: But on top of it, it’s like they sort of tried to keep a part of the stereotype [Walter]. Just that little bit: just not to go too far away from what we are used to seeing or something.

These responses were discussed with the head writer who talked of creating a ‘safety net’ for a Pākehā audience. Over time, and as the result of a growing awareness, the writer believed his approach changed:

Head writer: I would probably feel what that person’s alluding to is a kind of safety net for the Pākehā audience. And I would feel less in need of that [now]...I think [about] five years ago when I started writing *Brokenwood* and what I write now, there’s been an evolution in there as well.

However, Māori participants felt that reproducing dominant constructions of

Māori reached further than a desire to make Pākehā viewers comfortable. They speculated that it was an attempt to appease and appeal to the dominant audience and, in doing so, retain viewership while not being too offensive to Māori.

Wahine 1: Like, maybe they were trying to portray...a different Māori character [Walter] in a positive way, but they tried to keep that little bit of...stereotypical behaviour...to stop anyone from saying, like, 'that's nothing like a Māori.'

Wahine 2: I actually think that they were playing it safe, like, they didn't want to offend Māori too much, but the viewers would go down, so they just kept it, like, balanced basically.

As a result, Māori participants challenged writers to think more carefully about how they represented Māori.

Wahine: It's not necessarily a blame thing. It's just a, guys, come on, think about this a little bit harder... It's just like, come on, people.

This raises the issue of the dominance of Pākehā male writers: the head writer and episode writer were Pākehā males. The main funder of drama, NZOA, has no criteria regarding the ethnicity of characters in dramas they fund, and inconsistent policy requirements about the ethnicity of the production/creative team.

DISCUSSION

The series and episode were chosen because, at the time, it was one of the few local dramas that included Māori characters who were a substantial part of the storyline. This was mainly due to the head writer's intent to include Māori characters and non-stereotypical representations. Without this motivation, Māori characters may have been entirely absent or at best completely side-lined. However, Māori participants felt that the Māori characters were constructed to appease Pakeha while not being too offensive to Māori. As Herman Gray (2005) argues, audiences are marginalised, *e.g.*, Black, Latino, as it is the white subject who must be satisfied. The absence of Māori leads, and Māori women characters, signals that Māori women are of no importance, and Māori are generally not central but serve as supporting characters. Marcia Langton (1993, 24) argues that one of the most 'natural' forms of racism in representation is the act of making the other invisible. Unsurprisingly, Māori participants in this study were grateful to simply see Māori on screen. It was an additional and unexpected bonus when a Māori suspect was not the murderer.

As an audience, Māori were deeply affected and worked hard to pre-empt and address what they saw or expected to see. Against a backdrop of colonisation and negative stereotypes that pervade Māori representations, they undertook multiple forms of meaning-making and negotiated complex responses. They were very active: intellectually, imaginatively and emotionally. Affective reactions, including embodied responses, were marked in Māori participants. Although some Pakeha expressed discomfort and concern when responding to negative representations of Māori, they did not demonstrate the same levels of negotiation and contestation.

Deloria writes of Indians in unexpected places and doing unexpected things. In this study, Māori and Pakeha participants noted a Māori playing golf and a Māori male with wine expertise as unexpected. Māori in unexpected places (Māori golfer) was seen by some as anomalous, *i.e.*, this was not a usual place for stereotypical Māori. Seeing the representation in this way reinforces dominant constructions of Māori. As Deloria (2004, 5) points out, 'the naming of an anomaly simultaneously re-creates and empowers the very same categories that it escapes'. However, in viewing this as an anomaly, some participants began to question their perceptions of stereotypes, reflecting on the assumptions and expectations they held. In this way, while stereotypes are reinforced, tensions emerge as participants become troubled by their reactions to the unexpected, and the surfacing of stereotypical and potentially racist perceptions to the expected.

Māori and Pakeha welcomed the unexpected representation of a Māori male who was charming and intelligent; Māori were particularly relieved and enthusiastic. However, responses were complex regarding unexpected knowledge (Māori male wine expert). The exchange was met with a chuckle, which Deloria (2004, 4) describes as a response to the 'oddly threatening' and 'unfamiliar'. Named in this paper as the Discomforting Chuckle, the embodied response was expressed by Māori and Pakeha audiences. Like Pakeha, Māori spoke of responding with amusement. However, Māori then resisted the anomaly and distanced themselves from a comical response. They felt uncomfortable that others would respond to the unexpected as an anomaly and therefore an implausible representation, reinforcing the category it escapes.

CONCLUSION

Indigenous peoples understand the power of media in perpetuating hegemonic constructions, indigenous absence and erasing colonial histories. In a world all too saturated with troubling and damaging images, representations without

context remind us of the effects of colonisation. Hegemonic constructions become painful reminders that we are not valid or 'valued'. The implications of expected and unexpected representations on our screens argue for the need to pay attention. 'Mere entertainment' can provide a backdrop where cumulative, dominant and negative representations of Māori are consumed and reproduced. This has been described as a form of 'wallpaper', the seemingly innocuous background noise where colonial racism and oppressive discourses may go unnoticed or denied while being uncritically absorbed. Television is not merely entertainment but is felt and speaks to Māori as individuals and as a collective group. As media producers and as viewers, we seek and create narratives and representations that are counter hegemonic, affirming of diversity and reflecting the realities of Māori lives. Māori do not consider television to be merely entertainment or an innocuous background noise, but understand that 'something vital is at stake' (Shohat and Stam 1994, 181). This 'something vital' has wide implications for Māori, individually and collectively, including our position in society, racist assumptions and practices, established norms, and the effects on societal relations.

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NOTES

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