Decolonising public service television in Aotearoa New Zealand:

Telling better stories about Indigenous rurality

Abstract

In settler-colonial countries like Aotearoa New Zealand, television programmes about rurality are fundamentally entwined with the nation's colonial history, but how this context impacts on locally made, public service television content and production is seldom examined. Utilising data collected from interviews with programme makers and a novel bi-cultural friendship pair methodology, we examine how a high-rating mainstream programme, *Country Calendar,* conceptualises and delivers stories about Indigenous Māori and consider the extent to which these stories represent a decolonising of television narratives about rurality. The findings highlight the importance of incorporating Indigenous voices and values, the impact of structural limitations and staffing constraints on public service television's decolonising aspirations, and challenges reconciling settler-colonialism with the show's well-established "rosy glow". While rural media are often overlooked by communication scholars, our study demonstrates the contributions they might make to the larger task of decolonising storytelling about national identity.

****

Television plays a major role in public life (Wells et al., 2021) and in shaping ideologies of the nation and national identity (Jenner, 2018). In settler-colonial countries like Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) and Australia, television programmes about rurality are fundamentally entwined with the nation's colonial history, but how this context impacts on locally made, public service television content and production is seldom examined. Since the 1990s, there have been increased global demands for cultural diversity and pluralism in public service broadcasting, resulting in greater provision for minority groups and better recognition of cultural rights (Jenner, 2018). Public service broadcasters and funding agencies must juggle the provision of content about and for minority audiences, which will often include Indigenous peoples, with pressures amplified in the contemporary transnational and commercial environment where audience reach matters (Sand, 2021) and support for public service values is being eroded by competition, commercialisation and populism (Holtz-Bacha, 2021). Yet the apparatus of public service broadcasting is itself embedded in the established power structures of settler-colonial nations, arguably limiting its ability to meaningfully engage with Indigenous storytelling.

The concept of decolonising media forms the theoretical framework and underpins the method of this study into one of NZ’s longest running and highest rating television shows, *Country Calendar* (*CC*). Regularly watched by over half a million New Zealanders and usually the second most-watched television show of the week (only TVNZ’s evening news attracts more viewers), *CC* is broadcast on state-owned Television New Zealand (TVNZ) and partly funded by New Zealand on Air (NZOA), the Broadcasting Commission. Touted as ‘quintessentially New Zealand’ and tapping into aspects of national identity such as connection to the natural world (Bell, 1996), attachment to place (Relph, 1976) and ‘Kiwi ingenuity’ (McCreanor, 2005), it tells the real-life stories of people who live and work on the land. These stories are told within a well-recognised formula, centred around themes of progress and community, and with a positive spin (Fountaine, 2020; see also Waller et al., 2020). NZ is one of many nations where ‘the countryside is intimately and inextricably linked to notions of national identity’ (Agyeman and Spooner, 2005: 199), but the substantial economic role of the country’s agricultural sector elevates rurality and farming as touchstones of national storytelling and popular culture.

However, the rural mythologies of NZ national identity are not uncontested; e.g., ‘New Zealand’s rugged, farming, number 8 wire identity…rooted in its colonial settler past…[does] not take into account Māori identity and culture’ (Golriz Ghahraman cited in Daubs, 2021: 34). Such critique, which notes the absence of NZ’s Indigenous people, undermines public service programming’s claims that programmes like *CC* are reflecting national identity. Indeed, previous analysis of 25 years of *CC* programming documented the absence of stories about Māori subjects, and few Māori sources (Fountaine, 2020), despite sustained NZOA funding during this period. More recently, some 2019 episodes referenced Māori land ownership and sustainability but lacked explicit focus on highly relevant Indigenous concepts such as kaitiakitanga or environmental guardianship (Craig, 2020). Our article examines how mainstream *CC* conceptualises and delivers stories about Indigenous Māori and considers the extent to which these stories represent a decolonising of television narratives about rurality.

Decolonising media

Decolonising involves a decentring and dismantling of the naturalised white perspectives and cultural apparatus at the heart of settler-colonial nations. Informed by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which states the right of Indigenous people to create their own media, and the requirement for national or state media to reflect Indigenous cultural diversity, decolonising media ‘challenges us to reform media and to challenge the replication of domination in the field: who gets to speak, the stories that are told, those stories that get picked up and generated, and those stories, too, that are silenced’ (quoted in Elliott, 2016: 4). In the words of Ngugi wa Thiong, decolonising is about ‘focusing on achieving greater forms of cultural and political representation' (cited in Daubs, 2021: 38) for marginalised peoples. Aotearoa commentator, Miriama Aoake (2018), goes further, arguing that decolonising requires a shift in who controls the media.

Decolonising 'involves multiple sites of perpetual struggle that are ongoing and always in a state of renewal and negotiation' (Jo Smith, quoted in Daubs, 2021: 41). Indigenous media outlets, focused primarily on producing content by and for Indigenous viewers, are vital to global efforts to decolonise the media landscape. In NZ, the formation of Māori broadcasting agency Te Māngai Pāho and the launch of Māori Television in 2004 were important steps in recognising broadcasting as a cultural taonga [treasure], contributing to the revitalisation of Māori language and culture. But scholars such as Elliott (2016), Daubs (2021) and Sand (2021) argue that mainstream media also play a role in telling stories which feature Indigenous languages and cultures, partly because they tend to reach large audiences and therefore increase visibility. Further, as noted in the context of Canada's truth and reconciliation project, mainstream audiences generally include those 'with the most to learn about Indigenous experiences' (Elliott, 2016: 8). In her analysis of Indigenous public service broadcaster NRK Sápmi's show *Muitte mu*, Sand captures the compromises and controversy that can result from attempts to bring Indigenous cultural practices onto the national media agenda. Sand argues that *Muitte mu* had a 'laudable goal, especially as the majority seldom sees Sami content in Saturday prime-time, and because the series represents a positive approach to it' (2021: 509), but concludes that in a competitive media environment, trade-offs are inevitable. These tensions between majority and minority Indigenous audiences are also a feature of the NZ broadcasting landscape.

The Aotearoa NZ context

Aotearoa NZ has a population of 5.1 million people, including Indigenous Māori (17%) and Pākehā (non-Māori, European New Zealanders, 70%). Te Tiriti o Waitangi or the Treaty of Waitangi, signed in 1840, provides the basis for the ongoing relationship between "the Crown" (government) and "tangata whenua", people of the land, who were iwi, hapū and whānau that came to be known collectively as Māori. Its key principles of partnership, protection, and participation form the core of biculturalism that underpins all aspects of government policy, including those related to broadcasting (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2001).

Although there has been growth in transglobal digital and social media platforms, in NZ as in other nations, local, free-to-air television remains the single most used medium by national audiences (NZOA, 2021). NZ's state television network has a complex history of public service and commercial funding (Comrie and Fountaine, 2005), operating on market principles and returning a dividend to its government owners. A new public service entity, combining TVNZ and public radio assets into Aotearoa New Zealand Public Media, will begin operating in 2023 but funding uncertainties, a lack of support from the political right and questions about its independence (RNZ, 2022; Thompson, 2022) mirror the global pressures on public service broadcasters (Holtz-Bacha, 2021), which occupy a 'central yet challenged position in domestic media landscapes' (D'Arma et al., 2021: 683). Currently, TVNZ's most popular commercial channel, TVNZ1 (which airs *CC*), typically reaches around 41% of the overall national audience (including 30% of Māori). As a commercial channel, it can apply for additional funding from NZOA; this funding is allocated to *CC* under the Factual Roadmap guided by consideration of how the project 'reflect[s] and develop[s] New Zealand identity and culture'. NZOA's Rautaki Māori strategy, while not a funding stream, evaluates funding decisions with respect to 'progress against diversity outputs' and supports the provision of quality Māori content for a general audience, interesting use of te reo [the Māori language], and the inclusion of Māori perspectives. While

Māori Television promotes and develops Māori language and customs, and thus plays a key role ‘in disrupting the hegemony of New Zealand settler society and in affirming an Indigenous form of social agency’ (Smith and Abel, 2008: 4), our focus in this article is on mainstream television, with its higher profile and larger audience arguably able to ‘reassert the importance of Māori culture on a wide scale’ (Daubs, 2021: 36).

Indigenous people, media and rurality

Decades of scholarship have documented the invisibility of Black and Indigenous peoples in Western mainstream media (e.g. Elliott, 2016; Sand, 2021). In the US, media framing of social struggles delegitimises the aspirations of Indigenous and Black people more than any other movement or group (Kilgo and Harlow, 2019). In NZ, mainstream news and journalism underreports and negatively frames Indigenous Māori. When Māori are portrayed, depictions tend to be stereotyped, negative and conflictual (e.g. Comrie and Fountaine, 2005; Moewaka Barnes et al., 2012; Walker, 2002). Interwoven patterns of representation construct Pākehā as norm: ‘rarely named as a group they are routinely constructed as natural, the nation, the ordinary, the community’ (Moewaka Barnes et al., 2012: 197), with Māori cultural knowledge and practice downplayed and Māori sovereignty over natural resources positioned as a threat. Further, Māori success (when acknowledged) tends to be on Pākehā terms, ‘aligned to Pākehā agendas and values’ (Moewaka Barnes et al., 2012: 210).

However, there is anecdotal evidence that these patterns are slowly changing. Local media’s long standing complicity in discriminatory reporting was acknowledged in news provider *Stuff*’s 2020 apology to Māori (Johnsen, 2020) and other moves to inclusivity in mainstream media include public radio RNZ’s efforts to integrate te reo in what Daubs (2021: 27) calls a ‘“toddler step” toward decolonisation’. The mainstream media are now voluntarily ‘using Māori words in their prime-time broadcasting, despite hundreds of complaints from

English speakers who say they feel excluded by the use of the Te Reo language' (Roy, 2017; see also Triponel, 2021).

Less academic attention has been paid to Māori representation in rurally focused media, despite Māori's substantial involvement in and contribution to NZ's rural economy (Nana et al., 2021). On one hand this absence is not unexpected: globally, there are few studies examining how dominant and marginalised ethnic groups are depicted in rural media and scant or inconsistent engagement with race and ethnicity in the Western rural studies tradition (Carrillo et al., 2021). Media and communication scholarship has only recently begun to grapple with the complicity between mainstream media and settler-colonial practices. Waller et al.'s (2020) study of Australia's *Country Hour* radio show is one of the first to interrogate how specialist rural programming's preoccupation with productivity discourses marginalises Indigenous people and concerns while legitimising and valorising settler-colonial ideals and values. Arguing that media have a duty to be more inclusive, Waller et al. document just two examples (from their national dataset of 291 stories) that include Indigenous perspectives, but 45 stories that were 'missed opportunities'. They conclude that *Country Hour* 'cultivates an agrarian imaginary that obfuscates the ongoing colonial project by valorising non-Indigenous uses of land…, social activity and wellbeing' (818). Consequently, audiences are spared stories that might disrupt their worldview or 'trouble the rural imaginary' (818). Further, as Waller et al. warn, invisibility in media discourse readily translates to exclusion from policymaking.

Method

The research objective of understanding how *CC* conceptualises and delivers stories about Māori and to what extent these stories represent a decolonising of television narratives about rurality is addressed in this study through a series of activities. These comprise three data collection phases: interviews with *CC*'s producers and directors (in 2018) about their efforts to tell more Māori stories, in response to the absences documented in Fountaine (2020); identification and transcription of seven *CC* episodes from 2019 and 2020 showcasing or referencing Māori; and subsequently, an in-depth interview style conversation between the four authors, framed as two friendship pairs (one Māori pair of Lisa and Farah, and one Pākehā pair of Susan and Sandy, with the former of each pair being closely tied to farming). Friendship pairs were employed because they provide 'an effective means through which to ensure a more natural setting within which to negotiate identity talk' (Banister and Hogg, 2004: 857). All interviews and conversations were digitally audio-taped and transcribed. During the development of this paper, ongoing reflexive processes were employed, where reflections on previously generated narratives and follow-up conversations between the pairs were elicited and evaluated. While the voices of the Māori and non-Māori co-authors are combined in the paper as we address our overall research objective, we attribute the perspectives of each individual researcher in acknowledgement of the ways our views are shaped by our respective cultural identifications and backgrounds.

During the study's second phase, the two first authors transcribed and noted key visuals for seven episodes of *CC*, three airing in 2019 (*Land of Beef and Honey, Motu Magic, The Long View*) and four in 2020 (*Deep Roots, Shear Guts, Mighty Manuka* and *Kelly's Heroes*). The episodes represent *CC*'s stories about Māori over two years and ranged from being solely about Māori subjects and/or including predominantly Māori sources (e.g. *Shear Guts*), to stories about bicultural couples (e.g. *Mighty Manuka*) and Pākehā subjects with some connection to Māoridom (e.g. *Deep Roots*). All four co-researchers considered the episodes before meeting, as prompts for discussing *CC*'s representation of Māori. Latterly, Lisa extended the initial focus by nominating other episodes, *From the Ashes* (2018) and *To the Island* (2021), which were subsequently discussed extensively. Collaborative methods in studies of rurality help in ‘narrating the multiple senses of belonging that emerge in the midst of encounters between majority/minority populations, or between colonisers and colonised’ (Panelli et al., 2009: 362).

As an outcome of the study, we present a narrative that draws on all phases of the research and integrates perspectives on how Māori stories are addressed in *CC*. This is arranged around themes of real Māori voices, structural and staffing constraints, and reconciling settler-colonialism with the show’s well-established ‘rosy glow’.

‘Real Māori voices telling Māori stories’

Producer Julian O’Brien’s views on the importance of *CC* incorporating Māori stories were influenced by a critical incident in the mid-2000s:

> The tuna heke [eel migration] …was a big community gathering [in Northland]...someone said to me, … ‘so this is [for] *CC*, right?’…I went ‘yeah’ and he said ‘oh, ok, that’s kind of odd because you don’t do Māori farmers’…I felt kind of devastated…So [now] I’m thinking, we do stories about the people on the land and so how can the tāngata whenua not be part of that?

Both associate producer Dan Henry and Julian felt privileged to oversee a prime-time platform they believed could deliver ‘real Māori voices telling Māori stories’. Dan spoke of such stories having ‘a unique flavour… tone and heart’, linked to geographic regions and exemplified by informal ways of speaking. He gave the example of young Māori forestry workers’ conversation in a programme: ‘“I thought I knew heaps about forestry, but not even”. That’s awesome. It’s [not] reductive…it’s genuine’. Similarly, director Kerryanne Evans regarded the increased presence of te reo in stories, spoken by both Māori and Pākehā, as an indicator of *CC*’s engagement with Māori stories (‘We’ve let the language live a little bit’) alongside greater acknowledgement of customary practices, such as using plant-based remedies. Thus, Pākehā and Māori values were blurred into a style that was understood and valued by these Pākehā programme makers as uniquely NZ and promoting positive societal change: ‘The more that our audience gets to hear that, the more they understand it…The more Māori voices you can put on the TV, the more different voices, women and children…you’re reflecting what’s happening in our society’ (Kerryanne). Further, Kerryanne believed that incorporating and reflecting NZ’s diversity cements *CC* in the local television landscape: ‘If we continue to reflect what our country is doing and…changing, then we are just as vital in telling our country’s story as anything else’.

Our friendship pairs also observed *CC*’s increased use of te reo and reference to Indigenous concepts like kaitiakitanga but felt that this inclusion was patchy and variable. Farah said ‘I feel like they [*CC*] can see that [te reo] is something that most New Zealanders can relate to now’ but she felt it was also important for shows featuring Māori to engage with aspects of generational loss around stories and language. For instance, in *Deep Roots,* when Pākehā farmer Phil Guscott was telling his grandchildren the story of their Māori ancestor, Te Aitu-o-te-rangi Jury, ‘it was nice because he was saying something they don’t acknowledge…it was an attempt to try and tell a story, maybe a watered-down version…but at least the story is being told…not den[ied]’. Lisa was more cynical about the meaningfulness of including this connection late in the episode, suggesting that an equally significant Pākehā ancestor would be ‘plastered on a wall…or one of those children would have said, “that tipuna [ancestor], my middle name is her name”. Because that’s how we connect in te ao Māori [Māori world view], it’s the names they carry’.

Farah particularly valued stories where external markers of Māori identity co-existed with a deeper incorporation of what it means to be Māori. She was actively looking for expression of Māori values and principles, and noted that ‘sometimes they would actually…say kaitiakitanga…sometimes they don’t’. Sandy and Susan noted Pania King wearing a greenstone taonga while speaking to the camera in *Motu Magic*. Farah also referenced this episode, observing that ‘there is an element of wearing your Māoriness in an obvious way…maybe to compensate for not having a really good understanding at a deeper level but it can also be a way of …embracing completely and utterly’. She noted that Pania had tā moko [facial tattoo] and her children had te reo names, but that the episode focused on her commitment to trapping pests, improving water quality, and native planting: ‘She had those external markers that we would associate with being Māori but I also felt that they incorporated what it means to be Māori in the way they did their farming’. Similarly, *From the Ashes*, where kuia [female elder] Moyra Bramley fronted an award-winning Māori enterprise (Onuku Trust) deeply embedded in te ao Māori and cultural values, was unanimously agreed to be an excellent example of *CC* storytelling about Māori farming.

The strong female subjects in *Motu Magic* and *From the Ashes* prompted Farah to observe that

> Māori men and Māori women tend to tell their stories differently …I know lots of strong Māori women who are very good at being Māori in a proud way…often they are the matriarch…trying to lift their whole whanau [extended family]…I know a lot of Māori men…who just resort to the stereotype of the funny guy…the clown.

She noted this tendency in *Land of Milk and Honey* which established a Māori connection for the two central subjects, sisters Gabriel and Mere Vaka, but focused on their grandfather Eddie Matchett joking and laughing with them rather than fully exploring the culturally important aspect of him handing his land to his granddaughters. Sandy also recognised that Matchett was presented as a stereotype: ‘the hard case old rural Māori fella! The way he spoke English, his style of humour and happy-go-lucky approach, his narratives about the townies coming to nick their manuka honey and disappear off back without paying respect to the locals'. Farah was attuned to this portrayal of Māori men and was cautious of *CC* replicating it; however, she was also mindful that this persona is one legitimate narrative of post-colonial Māori identity, and she did not want *CC* to ignore it, just allow it to sit alongside a fuller range of other narratives and identities that defy cultural stereotypes.

Lisa and Farah's te ao Māori also prompted reflections about the lack of genuine interconnectivity between subjects and culture in some of *CC*'s efforts to tell stories about Māori on the land. *Shear Guts*, which profiled Māori shearer Stacey Te Huia and his bid to set a new world record, included little overt content about Te Huia's cultural identification, at least in the eyes of Sandy and Susan who noted the episode's primary emphasis on his associations with a motorbike club and church. But for Lisa, who observed that Te Huia appeared to be living away from his iwi [tribe], 'his tribe was a different tribe…a bike gang tribe…[and] enabling him to maintain his wairua [spirit]…his religious tribe.' And Farah asked herself 'what is it that a tribe provides?...a wider sense of whānau, whānaungatanga [kinship]…manaakitanga [support and care for others] in some ways. Like, where does he feel nurtured?' In swiftly recognising the deeper cultural dimensions underpinning the surface story of Te Huia's involvement with church and gang, our friendship pair analysis captures an underdeveloped cultural lens in *CC*'s storytelling. A similar framing was noted by Farah in discussion of *Mighty Manuka*: '[At first I] wasn't sure where the Māori component was…I didn't know whether the guy that was the focus was Māori…when I saw his wife it was "oh, ok'…there's the Māori connection"'. She observed that the *CC* voiceover initially talked about landowners but it wasn't specified until much later that these were Māori, and this was an important absence for her. Lisa commended this episode for profiling humble Māori leadership which emphasised the intent to provide economic benefits for Māori, by Māori: 'that's a great story. For Māori, by Māori, on Māori land…there's nothing better than that, from a Māori perspective'.

Analysis of these examples demonstrates that *CC* is able to relay compelling and authentic Māori farming stories which potentially resonate with both Pākehā and Māori viewers. However, not all stories achieve this standard, and our discussion identified instances of tokenistic references, underdeveloped connections and cultural stereotyping. It appears that *CC*'s storytelling about Māori is more convincing when the cultural narrative is already strongly embedded in the story and its subjects; when the story is clearly one of 'for Māori, by Māori, on Māori land'. However, to more reliably recognise and harness the cultural dimensions of rural life for Māori subjects living outside this paradigm, we turn our attention to the case for Māori directors and storytellers.

'So I challenge you: who on the *CC* team is Māori?'

As noted above, *Shear Guts* referenced two dimensions of Stacey Te Huia's life outside competitive shearing and our pairs agreed that this left no time to develop any deeper cultural aspects of the story. The interviews with programme makers also canvassed the constraints of commercial television making: each *CC* episode runs for a commercial half hour (23.5 minutes), and directors limit the subjects they include in a show to aid conciseness. Director Howard Taylor mused that a *CC* episode about a Māori farm cadet programme was 'less successful…because there were so many people in it.' Yet Farah and Lisa argued that a Māori director would have recognised and prioritised the expression of Te Huia's cultural identity within his story. Lisa explained that

> just like…my pepeha [introduction for this research discussion] is a watered down version because of the audience…it's all about context. [Te Huia] would've known that and so I challenge you: who on the *CC*…team is Māori? Because when you look through one lens…or ask for one perspective, you are going to get the answer you want.

The consequences when a Pākehā director tells a Māori story without full understanding of the context or issues were clearest for Lisa in a 2021 story she selected for discussion, *To the Island*. For Susan and Sandy, this story about Dan Tarrant, who had left his job in the local aluminium smelter to start farming on remote Ruapuke Island, was a surprising choice for *CC*; Māori subject aside, they found it to be inconsistent with the recognisable *CC* formula, with its typical focus on progress and success. Interviews with *CC* directors and producers had emphasised the need for Māori stories to be 'valid' within the show's formula, and not tokenistic. For example, Julian and Dan referred to following the Ahuwhenua Trophy for Māori Farmer of the Year to identify 'legitimate farming stories, not just Māori on the land' and the existence of 'really good business success stories'. Lisa agreed that *To the Island* was a second-rate, cringe worthy show ('it was like they'd had a short week at the office'), telling the story of 'a train wreck waiting to happen', and she was upset that such a story was centered around a Māori subject. But it was also emblematic of the perspective that can be missing in storytelling from a Pākehā worldview:

> a Māori [director]…would have shown that the particular bit of land that hapū [clan] was left with is an island, for goodness' sake. 30kms off the country. How can you make this financially work?…That's the story…the powerful narrative would have been that here's this young guy who's always wanted to do this. This is the only bit of land their hapū still have. He knows that it's probably not going to be a goer but he's had this drive in him.

Lisa regarded the real story here as the expectations of whānau and hapū and the huge responsibility on young Māori to make something from the land. This deeper understanding of the complex relationship between Māori and their tribal land is necessary to effectively and meaningfully tell the underlying story of *To the Island*, and thus to develop the decolonising potential of *CC*.

Our Māori friendship pair were clear that a Māori director would have more chance of recognising the local dynamics of a story, and be able to pinpoint the key issues and appropriate people to include. Associate producer Dan conceded this point: ‘we would tell …better Māori stories, if we had a Māori director...that is something that will happen in the future.’ Director Katherine Edmond explained how, ‘It’s hard [for existing directors] to find the right talent [and] properties. A lot of Māori properties…are owned by hundreds of shareholders…[hard] to find that one person…[we] don’t have any particular knowledge of te reo or…those sort of things that would get us in the door’. Such gaps in cultural knowledge will be apparent to Māori viewers, with Farah relaying how, in *The Long View*: ‘I cringed a little when [the Pākehā daughter] walks into the marae [traditional meeting place] because I am thinking that might be tapu [sacred] or is she allowed in there?’

However, producer Julian explained the challenges of recruiting a Māori director, when such people are already very busy, in great demand and commanding high salaries across the local communications and television industries. Exacerbating this is what he described as the ‘extraordinarily slow staff turnover’ at *CC*. Farah thought recruiting Māori directors for a mainstream television show like *CC* would require bravery and a willingness to compromise from both sides:

> Somebody [at *CC*] needs to be brave enough to…bring somebody in that’s got a Māori worldview…and it has to be a Māori who can handle the fact that [they will need to] compromise…and not have it completely from the Māori worldview. And that’s challenging…the Pākehā side says it’s too Māori and you get it from the Māori side saying it’s not Māori enough.

One such compromise would likely involve accepting a reduced number of Māori perspectives and curtailing some aspects of traditional oral storytelling within a story. With reference to the *CC* formula and the commercial constraints of mainstream television, Farah joked that 'you couldn't squeeze us [Māori] into 24 minutes'. This expansiveness is in direct tension with the Western storytelling model embedded into NZ mainstream television, and is thus one of the central challenges to decolonising *CC* storytelling. Longer speaking times are common in Māori media, reflecting a principle that 'everyone who wants a say is entitled to be heard' (quoted in Comrie, 2012: 287). However, when talking about *The Long View*, which featured the Pākehā managers of a Māori land block but did not directly incorporate the perspectives of the Indigenous landowners, Farah identified a possible way for *CC* to decentre the Pākehā narrative within commercial time constraints: 'they can still stick to the formula but…[have] that story from the perspective of the managers and [then] do it from the perspective of the Māori landowners [in the following week].' Of course, storytelling about the land in a settler-colonial country like NZ is inherently challenging, particularly for a show like *CC* that is popular in part for its 'rosy glow'.

'Unspoken but quite clear'? Reconciling the legacy of settler-colonialism with the remit for positivity

Although not explicitly discussed with respect to telling Māori stories, *CC*'s producers and directors all explained in their interviews that *CC*'s remit is to be positive and **not** current affairs. This brings a reluctance to feature potentially polarising subjects (e.g. overt political beliefs) and a preference for focusing on what they perceive as the audience's shared national values. Julian regards *CC*'s success as linked to 'the way [NZers] see themselves, that we're connected to the land…obviously it applies to Māori and I think it applies to Pākehā because our ancestors settled the land'. Our Pākehā and Māori friendship pairs reflected this shared sense of identification with the land. Susan still refers to the 6th generation family farm where she grew up as 'home', while Farah referred to her iwi land, to which she can always return, as more meaningful than the block of land she had mostly grown up on. As Farah acknowledged, intergenerational farming and community are not ‘things that are just Māori’ and as Julian suggested, they do tap into shared national values.

Our analysis reinforces that connection to the land therefore provides *CC* with a socially valued ‘peg’ on which to hang many of its stories, undergirding what we perceive as the mana [status, influence or authority] of stories such as *From the Ashes*. When Moyra Bramley, Chair of Onuku Trust, was enabled by *CC* to tell her people’s compelling story of farming and business success, this was possible within the *CC* formula partly because the extent of Onuku’s success distracts from any backstory of land confiscation, and the context did not raise the same issues of cultural dislocation or unsuitable land settlements as present in some other episodes. As noted previously, we observed that Te Huia in *Shear Guts* did not tell an overtly ‘authentic’ Māori story. Lisa understood this omission to reflect his relocation to another part of Aotearoa for work and the disconnection often experienced by young Māori who are unable to tell stories from their own whenua or ancestral land. Interestingly, director and former producer Howard Taylor mused that what directors tend to see as a lack of suitable Māori stories for *CC* in fact reflects patterns in farm ownership. Referring to *CC*’s 50th anniversary programme, which he had directed in 2016, he explained:

> We revisited five people we’d filmed in the past, and the Māori story…a family whose land was on the coast, surrounded by white farms. The only way to get to it was by driving on the beach. Poverty…And why the poverty? Because their land had been taken off them…as an unspoken, but quite clear, story of the history of NZ, I think that was really quite telling.

CC funders, producers and indeed many viewers are invested in what Waller et al. (2020) term the valorising of rural values but as Howard’s comments suggest, this gloss can only be maintained without a full acknowledgment of NZ’s colonial history, how land was lost to

Māori, and the ongoing consequences for Indigenous wellbeing. As a Māori woman thoroughly embedded in the agricultural sector, Lisa's attachment to *CC* has gradually been eroded by her growing awareness that this history is not well recognised. Instead, for example, she observes national rhetoric about the productivity of certain prime dairy country, without acknowledgment of this region's history of land being 'lost, stolen, acquired, whatever you want to call it'. Further, she observes that many in the rural sector do not want to engage with this backstory, meaning it is not often told in mainstream media or is selectively told and superficially monetised in commercial or export branding. Footage from a Māori corporation AGM that was briefly included in *The Long View* impressed Sandy with its display of competent management, at odds with what she identified as familiar cultural stereotypes about Māori not looking after their land ('they let it go to gorse, waste, whatever') and an aspect of rural governance of which she had not previously been aware. This reinforces Lisa's view that this important dimension of NZ primary sector governance, reflecting the complexity of Māori land title, is missing from *CC*: 'we [Māori] live AGM to AGM…it's your chance to go home and reconnect…in time you'll take your children…they'll get to meet all their cousins and learn of the food that comes from that geographical space'. Farah and Lisa laughed that it came across on this episode of *CC* as 'very civil' when such hui [gatherings] are usually 'a drama-filled day' to the extent that Lisa says it 'could be its own reality TV show'. Farah speculated that the politics and controversy inherent in these events may be one reason *CC* has not covered this aspect of Indigenous agriculture but it is also likely that these opportunities are not visible or readily accessible to Pākehā programme makers.

Discussion: Decolonising television narratives about rurality

The enduring popularity of *CC* with NZ viewers reinforces the continued relevance of the rural to notions of national identity. The programme's well documented impact on its subjects’ media profile, reputation and financial performance (e.g. Fernglen Farm, 2020; Parkes, 2021) also points to its discursive power (Jungherr et al., 2019) in the Aotearoa NZ media landscape. It is the premise of this article that this reach and power make *CC* an important focus for efforts to decolonise television narratives, though we also acknowledge that a truly decolonised mediascape must include media created and controlled by Māori, as well as programming that meaningfully incorporates Māori diversity into mainstream, national storytelling. As Lisa noted, ‘[when] we tell our own stories [e.g. on Māori Television]…it’ll be predominantly Māori watching…which is awesome. But…the people that hold the power [regarding]…the things that you want to influence…will be watching *CC*’.

Given this discursive power, it is encouraging that *CC* producers and directors express a commitment to including more Māori stories on the show and acknowledge that such stories have a distinctive flavour, tone and heart reflecting Māori people’s status as tangata whenua and resonating with Pākehā audiences through a shared love of the land and a growing familiarity with te reo. The role that Māori television makers would play in establishing better connections to Indigenous farmers and telling more authentic Māori stories on *CC* was also accepted, including by some directors who recognised their own limited skills and networks. The established formula of *CC* and the conventions of ‘good television’ have undoubtedly been driven by the predominantly Pākehā worldview of the show’s makers, sources and subjects, audiences and funders. But this has not prevented *CC* from telling compelling and inclusive stories of Māori success, as our analysis identified with respect to *From the Ashes* and *Mighty Manuka*. The show’s existing emphasis on sources telling their own stories, in their own voice, is an attractive and empowering narrative for Māori, as well as being consistent with the decentring of Pākehā perspectives and aligning with the broader principles of decolonised media content.

However, despite programme makers’ awareness and goodwill, and occasional success in telling Māori stories, our analysis concludes that *CC* is not truly decolonising storytelling about rurality in NZ. One simple constraint is the commercial imperatives which limit the number of subjects per episode, conflicting with Māori’s collective style of land ownership. *CC*’s ‘best’ and ‘worst’ representations of Māori, as identified in our cross-cultural friendship pairs analysis, were generally differentiated by the presence or absence of authentic interview subjects with a clear connection to their whenua, which brings mana and economic sovereignty, engenders respect and is empowering. The consequences of settler-colonisation, including dislocation from iwi and hapū land, are a more complex story for *CC* to tell, inside its convention of apolitical positivity and its status as a flagship programme for both TVNZ and funding agency, NZOA, which are both invested in its continued high ratings. A more transformative shift in *CC*’s representations of Māori is currently also limited by the absence of Indigenous creators. The episodes we identified as least successful in terms of the principles of decolonised media contained underdeveloped cultural narratives that demanded deeper familiarity with te ao Māori. Indeed, our unique methodological approach enabled us to identify a telling contrast between our pairs’ readings of *Shear Guts*, which likely mirrors gaps in the cultural knowledge of *CC*’s Pākehā directors. While our Pākehā pairing of Sandy and Susan identified Stacey Te Huia as a Māori subject through surface aspects of his identity and appearance, they missed what Farah and Lisa immediately recognised as the deeper cultural dimensions of his affiliations with church and gang. Being able to competently and confidently identify and tell a range and variety of Indigenous stories is key to centralising the place of Māori as tangata whenua, and reinforces the importance, in both local and global efforts to decolonise media content, of building Indigenous perspectives into the heart of programme making.

Additionally, while some staff referred to *CC*'s improved track record in including Māori language, we argue that *CC* could in fact be doing more. While the media-driven integration of te reo into news and current affairs television has prompted some audience pushback, *CC* has a demonstrated ability to manage the different and often conflicting expectations and preferences of its mainstream and specialist rural audiences. A similar approach to decentring Pākehā expectations around language might reasonably be anticipated given government funding priorities and NZOA's Rautaki Māori strategy. However, achieving systemic change would require the language and cultural skills of Māori television makers, yet as Julian also explained, diversity and representation remain significant challenges for the industry, particularly with respect to meeting the criteria of Rautaki Māori. A 2019 wānanga [forum] recorded industry concerns about the number of untold local stories due to lack of funding, training, and skilled and experienced Māori creatives in the workforce (NZOA, 2019). If there are barriers here, we must turn our attention to the funding model of NZOA and the broader settler-colonial context of NZ.

CC already produces highly popular television for a relatively small financial investment of public money by NZOA (in 2021/22, NZ$596,580 to make nearly 15 hours of television). For this funding, *CC* arguably already does vital 'heavy lifting' in representing rural people, an audience sector not often depicted in prime-time television. Thus we suggest that if the current funding regime contributes even indirectly to the challenges of recruiting a Māori director for *CC*, and thereby limits the full and complete representation of Māori stories on the show, there is a clear mandate for *CC* to receive more funding to explicitly deliver on better integration of Māori stories. This would help offset the tendency for state bureaucracies to 'project whiteness on and create white advantage in rural spaces' (Carrillo et al., 2021: 432) and answers the call for 'institutions to enact required reforms for decolonisation' (Wainwright, 2020). However, given the local and global threats to public media funding and models, securing such economic and political support may be a difficult task.

CC offers a powerful, existing platform from which to tell the many stories of Māori farming to both mainstream and Indigenous audiences. Greater acknowledgement of the country's colonial history must occur as part of a broader cultural conversation in Aotearoa NZ (Shaw, 2021), as in other settler-colonial nations, and we agree with Waller et al. (2020) that rural broadcasting is an ideal site for such work. We argue that *CC* is uniquely placed, given its enduring popularity, close connection to audiences who live and work on the land, and where there are clearly relevant and suitable stories to be told, to better acknowledge and contextualise NZ's colonial history to a mainstream audience. *CC* enjoys the same sort of 'social privilege' that Daubs (2021: 40) notes has seen powerful Pākehā media figures help 'naturalise te reo'. Further, public service broadcasting, in NZ and other settler-colonial nations, has a responsibility to confront its obligations to provide fuller and more complete representations of national identity that encompass Indigenous people, including within programming aimed at a mainstream audience.

Indeed, if 'a multi-faceted approach that includes the "decolonisation" of traditional mass media seems to be an effective way to support Māori language and culture' (Daubs, 2021: 38), a high-profile, iconic television programme explicitly about those who live on the land is a key site for engaging with a new and more inclusive rural NZ identity. As Lisa argued, *CC* 'absolutely has the ability' to step outside its comfort zone because of its consistently good ratings, and it is therefore a question of funding and motivation, and then how they frame the stories they tell; Māori are particularly well placed, for example, to offer narratives exploring the diversification required to address climate change. Such material, on prime-time television, would also help offset the documented tendency for NZ's mainstream media to marginalise and stereotype Māori, and endorse the economic contributions and mana of Indigenous people living and working on the land.

Conclusion

In undertaking Indigenous and Pākehā co-analysis of high-rating popular television about rurality in Aotearoa NZ, we have contributed fresh insights into the work required to decolonise media storytelling about national identity in settler-colonial countries around the world. Our unique methodology, utilising friendship pair narratives to reflect Māori and Pākehā, urban and rural stakeholders, alongside the perspectives of programme makers, has enabled us to explore what better and more inclusive storytelling might look like on mainstream television from multiple perspectives. In the case of Aotearoa NZ, stories for Māori, by Māori, on Māori land are an integral part of this vision. We look forward to further work, from scholars in other settler-colonial contexts and with different ethnic and cultural perspectives, that extends this important conversation. Given the global forces currently eroding the key democratic values of public service media, we suggest such studies also scrutinise diversity and plurality among commercial providers of agricultural and rural content. The larger tasks of decolonising broadcasting and telling better stories about Indigenous rurality across a range of countries, media and platforms are all the more vital as urgent environmental and resource challenges become entwined with race and rurality (Carrillo et al., 2021). Our study also has important implications for social policy and funding streams as governments seek to build stability and social cohesion through the development of inclusive national identity, including via public service broadcasting and new public media initiatives.

References

Agyeman J and Spooner R (2005) Ethnicity and the Rural Environment. In: Cloke P and Little J (eds) *Contested Countryside Cultures: Otherness, marginalisation and rurality*. London: Taylor & Francis, pp.197-217.

Aoake M (2018) *It's time to start decolonising our media*. Available at: https://thespinoff.co.nz/atea/10-02-2018/its-time-to-start-decolonising-our-media (accessed 10 February 2022).

Banister EN and Hogg MK (2004) Negative Symbolic Consumption and Consumers' Drive for Self-esteem: The Case of the Fashion Industry. *European Journal of Marketing* 38(7): 850-868.

Bell C (1996) *Inventing NZ: Everyday Myths of Pakeha Identity.* Auckland, NZ: Penguin.

Carrillo I, King KQ and Schafft KA (2021) Race, Ethnicity, and Twenty-First Century Rural Sociological Imaginings: A Special Issue Introduction. *Rural Sociology* 86(3): 419-443.

Comrie M (2012) Double vision: Election news coverage on mainstream and indigenous television in New Zealand. *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 17(3): 275-293.

Comrie M and Fountaine S (2005) Retrieving public service broadcasting: Treading a fine line at TVNZ. *Media, Culture & Society* 27(1): 101-118.

Craig G (2020) Representations of Sustainability and Environmental Welfare in Country Calendar. *Communication Research and Practice*. DOI: 10.1080/22041451.2020.1785191.

D'Arma A, Raats T and Steemers J (2021) Public service media in the age of SVoDs: A comparative study of PSM strategic responses in Flanders, Italy and the UK. *Media, Culture & Society* 43(4): 682-700.

Daubs MS (2021) Public service radio, indigenous language, and decolonization: Lessons from New Zealand. *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 28(1): 27-45.

Elliott PW (2016) *Decolonizing the media: Challenge and obstacles on the road to reconciliation*. Available at: www.policyalternatives.ca.

Fernglen Farm (2020) *Farmers turned TV stars? Our Country Calendar story*. Available at: https://fernglenfarm.co.nz/announcement/our-country-calendar-episode/ (accessed 14 January 2022).

Fountaine S (2020) Themes of connection and progress in rural television: New Zealand's Country Calendar 1990–2015. *Media International Australia* 174(1): 109-124.

Holtz-Bacha C (2021) The kiss of death. Public service media under right-wing populist attack. *European Journal of Communication* 36(3): 221-237.

Jenner M (2018) *Netflix and the re-invention of television.* Cambridge, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Johnsen M (2020) *Stuff apologising for racism against Māori 'a very positive move'*. Available at: https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/te-manu-korihi/431808/stuff-apologising-for-racism-against-maori-a-very-positive-move (accessed 3 August).

Jungherr A, Posegga O and An J (2019) Discursive power in contemporary media systems: A comparative framework. *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 24(4): 404-425.

Kilgo DK and Harlow S (2019) Protests, media coverage, and a hierarchy of social struggle. *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 24(4): 508-530.

McCreanor T (2005) 'Sticks and Stones may Break my Bones . . .': Talking Pakeha Identities. In: Liu J, McCreanor T, McIntosh T, et al. (eds) *New Zealand Identities: Departures and Destinations*. Wellington: Victoria University Press, pp.52-68.

Moewaka Barnes A, Borell B, Taiapa K, et al. (2012) Anti-Māori themes in New Zealand journalism – toward alternative practice. *Pacific Journalism Review* 18(1): 195-216.

Nana G, Reid A, Schulze H, et al. (2021) Te Ōhanga Māori 2018. The Māori Economy 2018. Reportno. Report Number|, Date. Place Published|: Institution|.

NZOA (2019) *Factual wānanga.* Wellington: New Zealand on Air.

NZOA (2021) *Where are the audiences?* Available at: https://www.nzonair.govt.nz/research/where-are-audiences-2021/ (accessed 14 January 2022).

Panelli R, Hubbard P, Coombes B, et al. (2009) De-centring White ruralities: Ethnic diversity, racialisation and Indigenous countrysides. *Journal of Rural Studies* 25(4): 355-364.

Parkes M (2021) *Acting the goat as Country Calendar looks at a time before cows*. Available at: https://www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/tv-radio/126456269/acting-the-goat-as-country-calendar-looks-at-a-time-before-cows (accessed 14 January 2022).

Relph E (1976) *Place and Placelessness.* London: Pion Ltd.

RNZ (2022) *New state broadcasting entity passes first hurdle in Parliament*. 26 July. Available at: https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/471645/new-state-broadcasting-entity-passes-first-hurdle-in-parliament (accessed 9 August).

Roy EA (2017) *New Zealand broadcasters refuse to stop using Māori words*. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/28/new-zealand-broadcasters-refuse-to-stop-using-Maori-words (accessed 14 January 2022).

Sand SA (2021) Indigenous Television for the Majority: Analyzing NRK Sapmi's Muitte Mu (Remember Me). *Television & New Media* 22(5): 501-515.

Shaw R (2021) *From Parihaka to He Puapua: it's time Pākehā New Zealanders faced their personal connections to the past*. Available at: https://theconversation.com/from-parihaka-to-he-puapua-its-time-Pakeha-new-zealanders-faced-their-personal-connections-to-the-past-164553 (accessed 14 January 2022).

Smith J and Abel S (2008) Ka whawhai tonu Mātou: Indigenous television in Aotearoa/New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Media Studies* 11(1): 1-14.

Te Puni Kōkiri (2001) *He tirohanga ō kawa ki te Tiriti o Waitangi. A guide to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi as expressed by the Courts & the Waitangi Tribunal.* Wellington: Te Puni Kōkiri.

Thompson P (2022) *Merging commercial TVNZ and non-commercial RNZ won't be easy - and time is running out*. Available at: https://theconversation.com/merging-commercial-tvnz-and-non-commercial-rnz-wont-be-easy-and-time-is-running-out-179077 (accessed 9 August).

Triponel TR (2021) *Viewers unhappy with use of te reo Māori in television, BSA declines complaints*. Available at: https://www.nzherald.co.nz/kahu/viewers-unhappy-with-use-of-te-reo-Maori-in-television-bsa-declines-complaints/55CEBYEDYBJG6PTE67LK53OCW4/ (accessed 14 January 2022).

Wainwright R (2020) *Explainer: what is decolonisation?* Available at: https://theconversation.com/explainer-what-is-decolonisation-131455 (accessed 14 January 2022).

Walker R (2002) Māori news is bad news. In: McGregor J and Comrie M (eds) *What's news: Reclaiming journalism in New Zealand*. Palmerston North: Dunmore.

Waller L, Mesikämmen E and Burkett B (2020) Rural radio and the everyday politics of settlement on Indigenous land. *Media, Culture & Society* 42(6): 805-822.

Wells C, Friedland LA, Hughes C, et al. (2021) News media use, talk networks, and anti-elitism across geographic location: Evidence from Wisconsin. *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 26(2): 438-463.

MASSEY UNIVERSITY

MASSEY RESEARCH ONLINE **http://mro.massey.ac.nz/**

Massey Documents by Type Journal Articles

Decolonising public service television in Aotearoa New Zealand: telling better stories about Indigenous rurality

Fountaine, S

2022-10-25

---

http://hdl.handle.net/10179/17814

17/01/2023 - Downloaded from MASSEY RESEARCH ONLINE