

Selling Beats and Pacifications: Pacific music labels in Aotearoa/New Zealand/Niu sila

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When looking at rap music in the United States, Basu and Werbner (2001) point out that while there is much written on the aesthetic and cultural aspects of rap music, there is little on what they call 'ethnic entrepreneurship'. This study focuses on the production of Pacific hip hop and pop in Aotearoa, through dedicated 'Pacific' and/ or 'Māori' record labels and distribution houses, in order to gain a better understanding of New Zealand hip hop and Pacific pop as cultural products. Like other small popular music independent record labels, most of the companies examined in this study specialized in a particular type of music genre (for instance hip hop, soul or reggae), while some centered on the ethnicity of the artists (i.e. Pacific Music, Māori music) with varied genre.

While we primarily investigated Pacific focused labels, we also refer to Māori dedicated labels and distributors. Many of the Pacific focused music companies in New Zealand produce specifically hip hop (rap) and r 'n' b music. This parallels hip hop labels in the U.S. which are not only music production companies but also examples of 'ethnic entrepreneurship' (Basu and Werbner 2001). Māori artists and so-called 'second generation' Pacific artists have had commercial success in New Zealand with a local strain of hip hop which regularly appears on the local sales charts and appeals to the wider New Zealand population.

Negus (1999) argues that the involvement of record companies in musical production must be considered. He posits that the flow of influence runs both ways: "industry produces culture and culture produces industry" (Negus 1999: 490) concluding that to comprehend any music culturally, the economic production mechanisms must also be examined:

Production does not take place simply 'within' a corporate environment created according to the requirements of capitalist production or organizational formulae but in relation to broader cultural formations and practices that may not be directly within the control or comprehension of the company. (Negus 1999: 490)

Negus argues that cultural explanations are not enough to understand the cultural force that is (in particular) rap music, because besides being an aesthetic practice and cultural form, rap is also a “self-conscious business activity” (Negus 1999: 489). In support of this Negus highlights how rap magazines not only talk about the music and culture, but also feature articles about management and career planning. This aspect of production is significant in Aotearoa where dedicated Pacific and Māori labels and music distributors: a) participate in community and political events, b) highlight Pacific and Māori ethnicity in their mission statements and promotion material, c) build a catalogue of artists based on ethnicity, and d) maintain community connections as a business. Many of the label names themselves immediately call attention to their ethnicity/identity focus.

Ironically, while popular music is primarily circulated via the mainstream media and capitalist production, many music connoisseurs maintain an aesthetic that ‘good’ popular music is produced in opposition to mainstream values and systems. Corporate control of pop musics is believed to produce a homogenous mainstream aesthetic, devoid of oppositional politics. According to Hesmondhalgh, Indie culture (and we would argue any so-called ‘underground’ pop music cultures like punk and hip hop) see aesthetics (that is the actual quality and sound of the music produced) as an “inevitable outcome of certain institutional and political positions” (Hesmondhalgh 1999: 36). This translates into dominant control by major record corporations limiting creative and political freedom, creating an ‘inferior’ music product. Maintaining institutional separation from major labels is believed by supporters and fans of independent labels to ensure aesthetic diversity and authenticity. ‘Indie’ music enthusiasts insist that institutional arrangements have traceable aesthetic outcomes (i.e. ‘mainstream music is awful’, ‘independent music is real music’). This may or may not be the case musicologically but the emergence of ethnically driven record labels is believed by those who initiate and participate in these Pacific branded companies to produce a diverse, community related, culturally oppositional music product. While many of the labels we examined here may have formed because of lack of attention or interest in their product from major labels, these companies’ distance from the larger capitalist ‘machine’ is then read by themselves and the music fan community as likely to generate a more ‘authentic’ and community connected product, a more ‘honest’ reflection of the stories and feelings of Pacific and Maori young people. Signing with a ‘major’ record label would supposedly limit the creative freedom of an artist as their goal is solely to generate radio play and commercial success, whereas these ethnic oriented local labels often define their motive as to develop Pacific and Māori young talent. This reiterates the notion of Negus’s “self-conscious business

activity” but a consciousness which is less ‘self’, and more ‘community’.

This paper explores a number of Pacific oriented music labels and distribution houses in New Zealand showing how they reinforce notions of aesthetic diversity, political independence and democracy commonly assumed to be present in the formation and product of independent music labels. However in this case, there is also an added cultural component, showing how identity formations and strategies operate at all levels of music creation. Culture and identity can be read not just in the end aesthetic product, but notions of an urban Pacific contemporary identity shape the very instigation, motivation, and production of the music. These companies may have formed in response to neglect by corporate powers, but this ‘independence’ has now fostered the utilization of ethnic-based production, creation and marketing strategies. This phenomenon not only caters to a particular audience, but has developed a specific strain of talent and music, which ultimately reaches a mainstream audience, all the while maintaining a cohesive branded ethnic identity.

Background

We examined a number of Pacific branded music companies:

- D1 Entertainment – based on the talents of producer/musician Dominic Leauga. D1 has released one compilation album (primarily r ‘n’ b and hip hop styles) and have a number of Pacific artists they are developing further.
- DawnRaid Entertainment – a South Auckland based hip hop and r ‘n’ b label with a number of successful commercial and chart appearing releases (including rappers Savage and Mareko and singers Adeaze and Aaradhna). All their artists are of Pacific descent. The company has a name significant to the Pacific community.
- King Music – not ‘Pacific’ owned, but dedicated to the distribution of both local and overseas Pacific musics. This independent music distribution company exports New Zealand created Pacific music as well as distributes both independent and major label Pacific artists locally. They have also branched into production creating now two ‘Supafresh’ Pacific pop music compilation CDs which feature artists like Che Fu (from major label Sony), D Kamali (independent), Adeaze (from DawnRaid), Pacific Soul (from Pacific Dream Records) and Peta & the Immigrantz (from D1 Entertainment).

- Maorimusic.com – not a company per se, but a website that highlights and sells Māori music artists. The site itself can be seen to be ‘defining’ a notion of Māori music, i.e. from a range of relevant genres like reggae, hip hop, and Māori language music. The music promoted is all from Māori artists, and most of it has Māori imagery and themes. They also feature a rare few Pacific artists (like Te Vaka) and artists of both Pacific and Maori descent (like Che Fu). They have a ‘World Music’ section which features ‘new age’ and dance mix sounding Māori and Pacific musics which appeal to an international (European and U. S.) ‘world music’ market.
- Oyster Entertainment – a live entertainment company finding live Pacific acts for venues (from a range of styles from ‘traditional’ Pacific to cabaret, to hip hop). Their name Oyster reflects the owners’ Cook Island Heritage. They have a variety of Pacific musicians and groups including Pacific Pop group Fou Nature and
- Pacific Dream Records – formed initially to release the successful Samoan pop sensation Jamoa Jam, they also developed the girl group Pacific Soul and some solo acts (all artists are of Pacific ethnicity).
- Urban Pacifika Records – the first dedicated Pacific pop label in New Zealand. It released its inaugural groundbreaking compilation in 1996 (suitably named ‘Pioneers of a Pacifikan Frontier’) featuring Pacific hip hop and r ‘n’ b acts like Moizna, Dei Hamo, a.k.a Brown and The Lost Tribe. They have branched now into Māori music with a sub label called Gifted and Māori.
- Vaimutu Records – an Auckland based company that makes Cook Islands music (e.g. Brother Love, Chuck Upu and The Kabin Bread Boyz) and distributes it locally, to the Cook Islands and around the Pacific. Many of their acts are managed into their live work by Oyster.

The field work consisted of interviews with artists and company owners during the course of Televave’s Master’s dissertation (2004), and long term friendships, relationships and observation by Zemke-White. Over a period of years we examined the progress, releases, web sites and media interaction of the companies, and have studied many of their music releases.

For political background, the Māori are the indigenous caretakers of the land of Aotearoa. Colonized by the British in the 1800s, they are still struggling today to maintain their language, lands, *tikanga* (ways) and self-esteem in the face of racism, and poor social statistics. The migrations of their Polynesian cousins from various Pacific islands to New Zealand began in earnest in the 1940s escalating in the 1970s. The Pacific population in New Zealand continues to grow today. There are six main Pacific Island groups in New Zealand: Samoan, Cook Island, Tongan, Niuean, Tokelau and Fijian. But now there is a group of 'New Zealand-born' Pacific young people, who may have a whole new set of complex values and world view to their immigrant parents (Macpherson 2001). These record labels and their musical outputs offer a valuable text for understanding this cultural phenomenon.

One important point of note is that 'Pacific Islander' and now 'Pacific' are terms used in New Zealand to identify people from a number of different Pacific Island countries (and their New Zealand-born descendants). However, the use of this 'blanket' term can conceal and undermine the historical, social, political and cultural uniqueness of each Pacific Islands society. An irony of this possible blurring is that Pacific record companies themselves and their branch of young artists often reinforce and perpetuate this notion of being generally 'Pacific'. While Māori and Pacific are often linked together (biologically as Polynesians; socially as marginalized peoples in New Zealand society) they have distinctive colonial histories in relation to New Zealand and these record labels highlight the parallels, but current identity distinctiveness of these two groups. Phil Fuemana's Urban Pacifika Records (UPR) focuses primarily on ethnically Pacific artists (with genre like r 'n' b, hip hop and gospel) but to reflect his Maori heritage Fuemana formed a separate label called Gifted and Māori (www.giftedandmaori.com). He did this in part to take advantage of specific government funding initiatives aimed at specifically Māori music (Fuemana pers. comm.) but this separation is also reflected in the wider community, e.g. separate Māori and Pacific Music Awards.

Independent labels

The production of popular music is characterized by a particular economic approach comprised of the interaction between a very small number of so-called major record labels (and their many subsidiaries, some with different company names) and thousands of much smaller labels (often known as 'independent'), many of these localized. The global industry has seen recent mergers which have resulted in just three major global record companies. BMG and Sony merged in 2004 becoming SonyBMG. EMI and Warner merged the same

year and PolyGram and Universal had already become one in 1998 (PolyGram was the result of a previous merge between Polydor and Phonogram). The sales charts in the U. S. A., Britain or New Zealand show that the domination of these three labels is often over 90% of the main pop charts in any given week (pers. obs.). In 1975 Petersen and Berger found evidence that hegemony of music companies decreased the amount of creativity and diversity in popular music, but the recent mergers may perhaps present an even more dire possibility for diversity.

Independent labels and the so-called 'majors' have been in a symbiotic relationship over the last four decades, interacting to produce what we call the body of popular music. Negus (1999) warns that this situation is too complex to be collapsed into a simple economic model of corporate control and he shows how major record companies purposely have rap and other sub-genre produced by linked independent companies and production units. The smaller labels are autonomous and separate, usually asserting a distinctive aesthetic, politics or local creativity. But this relationship is also used to veil the monopoly of the major labels, especially for genre of pop music which are seen as being outside corporate control (e.g. alternative or punk).

Banks (1998) shows how almost all the affiliations and linked business related to music distribution (like radio and MTV) merely reinforce the significant power imbalance between major and independent labels. While most artists would like to have their music heard widely and to make a good living from their music, it is generally known that musicians are not treated equitably by the music industry. Many artists barely break even, even those with seemingly successful sales (McLeod 2005).

The term 'mainstream' is problematic, as it can indicate success in the music business with critical and chart success, but can also be used to denigrate music deemed to be 'inauthentic' because it is 'manufactured' (i.e. by a company, rather than an 'artist'). Bennet (1999) and Thornton (1995) state that, despite its widespread use, the term 'mainstream' is impossible to quantify. The term is even more complex when applied to rap music which is 'mainstream' in its commercial success, had and has 'underground' or street based roots, and is still often marginalized in terms of race and power (Negus 1999).

Independent labels maintaining business links with the major labels is seen by many musicians and record store owners as a "means of reconciling the commercial nature of pop with the goal of artistic autonomy for musicians" (Hesmondhalgh 1999: 35). In the

case of New Zealand, having specific Pacific and Māori dedicated independent record labels not only guarantees some musical diversity in the musi-cultural milieu, but also cultural diversity in the actual ethnicity of the artists. This major/independent production/distribution relationship has as yet not been the case with these Pacific labels, as most are still operating completely on their own. The exception is South Auckland based hip hop label DawnRaid who have signed with Universal Music for distribution in New Zealand and with Warner Music Group for distribution in Australia (posted as news on their website www.dawnraid.co.nz 30.05.2005).

The bigger record companies have in some cases been supportive of local artists and marginalized musical sub-genre (e.g. hip hop artists Che Fu and King Kapisi), yet for the most part the major labels' offices in New Zealand exist to promote overseas acts, especially from the U.S. and Britain.

In relation to independent record labels, there are significant discourses around the concepts of racism, democracy, politics, authenticity, and identity which we applied to the Pacific music labels considered here. Despite marginalization, independent labels can offer authenticity to a music and often "assume[s] an ideological orientation against what are perceived as the exploitative practices of major record labels and big business more generally"(Harrison 2006: 290).

Racism

Basu and Werbner (2001) assert that in the United States there has been a continued racism from the dominant music corporations which we argue has been paralleled in New Zealand. Hip hop in particular was only genuinely recognised as New Zealand music in the last few years. Borrowed forms such as rock and pop were given classic status as New Zealand music (in particular Split Enz and the 'so-called 'Dunedin Sound' of the 1980's) but hip hop artists usually had to defend their choice of copying an American music. This suggests a racism not only in the music industry but also the music and general media.

Using Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, Basu and Werbner (2001) claim that racism has not only forced many groups to struggle to find their own ways into the economy, but their marginalization has given them something 'different' to sell:

Increasingly, design impacts on all commodities. In the face of racism and discrimination, resourceful ethnic groups with no capital have been able to gain access or even invent cultural capital, that is, the knowledge of how to package and sell a particular form of culture” (Basu and Werbner 2001: 241)

The music industry may, in many ways, try to snub rap music and other non-white musics but at the same time they desire the appropriation and commodification of these genre (Basu and Werbner 2001). Various local rap artists have released hip hop songs with some success since 1988. Despite number one chart successes for local rap songs, rap was not recognized in local music awards until 1997 when “Chains” (DLT featuring Che Fu 1997) won the award for best single (decided by public vote). In the same year rapper/singer Che Fu won best male vocalist, rapper Danny Haimona of Dam Native took most promising male vocalist and rap group Dam Native won ‘Most Promising Group’. A rap song won an Australasian Performing Right Association (APRA) Silver Scroll Award (for songwriting) in 1999 (King Kapisi ‘Reverse Resistance’). While of course there is no explicit ‘proof’ of racism, there was much accusation in the music industry of rap and hip hop being an ‘American’ genre (with local hip hop artists merely practicing mimicry) whereas rock, pop and Alternative rock were recognized exclusively up until that time as genuine ‘Kiwi’ music. One location where this bias is apparent is APRA’s (Australasian Performing Rights Association) 2001 list “30 Best Songs Composed by New Zealanders” which despite a flourishing hip hop subculture since the late 1980’s featured only one rap song (“Chains”). The rest were primarily rock, pop and alternative rock.

Major labels’ delay in recognizing the saleability and authenticity of hip hop and rap music in New Zealand could be attributed to a racially derived Eurocentrism widespread in the local music industry. This lack of faith arguably necessitated and fostered the development of specifically Pacific, or ethnicity based, record labels to develop hip hop which was popular for Pacific and Maori youth. This negligence arguably has prompted a greater musical diversity, local ownership, and ethnic assertiveness.

It was racism that inspired the name of rap label DawnRaid. The term ‘dawn raid’ refers to an infamous phenomenon in Pacific immigrant history. In the 1970s an economic downturn in New Zealand saw Pacific Islanders blamed for the country’s economic woes. The immigration department undertook ‘dawn raids’ on Pacific Island dwellings to look for ‘over-stayers’ (temporary Pacific workers in New Zealand on expired working. Label co-owner Brotha D explains:

Yeah like our company name, DawnRaid, that relates to back in the seventies the police used to come and hunt down our people because they stayed in this country too long. They used to kick in our doors early hours of the morning before dawn, before everybody got out of bed. Then they'd grab the overstays, and lock 'em up, put 'em back on the plane, fuckin chuck them back to the islands in hand cuff and shit. If that's not a form of slavery, I don't know what the fuck is. (Brotha D 2001 interviewed in Murdadog 8/4; 82 accessed at www.dawnraid.co.nz May 2006)

Just like U.S. hip hop labels using titles like 'Death Row Records', Dawnraid Entertainment utilizes and transposes this negative phrase. It now signifies one of New Zealand's premier hip hop labels, and a prominent and successful independent record company. Established by Danny Leaosavaii (Brotha D) and Andy Murnane (YDNA), DawnRaid emerged in 1999 with a vision to cultivate the 'hidden talents' of hip hop artists in South Auckland (www.dawnraid.co.nz). Leaosavaii and Murnane felt that the major record companies were not catering for the needs of Pacific artists and especially hip hop. Leaosavaii had already had some success with his group Lost Tribe and wanted to try keeping some of the money for himself. DawnRaid now has expanded to include a range of connected businesses including a hairdresser (Klasscuts), a clothing line, DawnRaid Promo Print, DawnRaid Graphix, and a recording studio. A classic example of 'ethnic entrepreneurship', this links to the concepts of independent music labels seeing a greater number of persons (and groups) being involved in the music industry.

Democracy

The democratic reality of having independent music labels has allowed marginalized people to have a greater part in the music industry than the monopoly of the big three labels would otherwise allow. Hesmondhalgh (1999) showed that part of the punk ethic was the democratization of the music industry, meaning basically, more people were involved. Basu and Werbner assert that the commodification of black culture placed substantial sub-cultural capital in the hands of young black men and women:

Hip hop culture, and more particularly rap music, has generated economic opportunities for those with cultural capital beyond the few highly publicized success stories. (Basu and Werbner 2001: 247).

These few 'highly publicized' success stories that are referred to in the rap world are people like Suge Knight, Sean Combs (P Diddy), Russell Simmons, even Queen Latifah, and Jay Z. This has been matched, on a much smaller scale, by DawnRaid entertainment, whose co-founder Brotha D made his name into the *Listener* magazine's 2005 'power list' (Watkin 2005) underscored with: "The *Listener*'s list of the most powerful people in the country contains some new names and undermines plenty of popular assumptions". Brotha D is listed there, the article says, as someone politicians 'want to take their picture with', an 'arbiter of cool', who has the 'pulse of the streets'. Negus (1999) would find this typical and ironic, as he found that 'the street' was constructed similar to this in the U. S. where rap is negotiated in the 'suite' (in the executive suite of a large corporation') but has to look as if it has come from 'the street'. Brotha D defies this by actually keeping his business located in his lower socio-economic home suburb in South Auckland (the 'street') and maintaining obvious connections with his surrounding community and ethnic networks, rather than moving his company to a higher end respected business district, more distanced from the Pacific community (i.e. the 'suite').

The 'democracy of independents' has seen the rise of hundreds of small record labels in New Zealand, many dedicated to a particular region, city or music genre (e.g. dub, house, punk etc). This democratic 'space' has engendered a number of ethnic centered music labels. While Hesmondhalgh asserted that independent labels allowed for more 'people' being involved in music making, the New Zealand situation shows that independent labels can result in more 'kinds' of peoples involved, i.e. 'ethnicities' finding a space in the music industry, in New Zealand. For example Vaimutu Records produces Cook Islands language and style musics; and Pacific Dream Records makes and internationally distributes Pacific pop musics.

An interesting case is the local chart-topping mixed Pacific hip hop/pop group Nesian Mystik which is signed to a medium sized independent label not specifically connected with Pacific music. The group members have started their own music label, Arch Dynasty, to advance Pacific hip hop talent. Nesian Mystik obviously feel that they have knowledge and experience that they can offer to other bands and see the benefits of starting their own label. Their website states:

Arch Dynasty is the platform for New Zealand's (Aotearoa) finest music. More than just a label, Arch Dynasty is THE sound.

From a dream to reality, artists Nesian Mystik created a positive platform for artists to produce innovative music, and deliver it to the world. (www.archdynasty.com)

So rather than helping new artists to sign to a major label, or even the label they themselves are signed to, Nesian Mystik insist that having their own company can offer 'innovative music' and they can create a specialized 'sound'.

Bell (1998) argues that inferiority and isolation (he was talking about a geographical isolation, in the case of Grunge music) can translate into artistic freedom. So, in our case, being excluded from major labels has liberated Pacific artists and in particular hip hop music, from corporate mediation (and possible standardization). This distance from the corporate system can also give a music, an artist or a record label the aura of 'authenticity' which for some pop musics (in particular hip hop) is crucial to the aesthetic.

Authenticity

It is understandable that musicians and record companies should want their music to matter, to be consumed and battled over on the largest stages (Hesmondhalgh 1999: 53).

The recurring invocation of authenticity is not isolated to hip hop culture. They also take place in other cultures that, like hip hop, are threatened with assimilation by a larger, mainstream culture (McLeod 1999:134).

There is always a necessary compromise for independent labels, and particularly pop musics which derive their authenticity from their distance from the 'mainstream' music industry, to rely sometimes on major labels. While 'independent' and/or marginalized musics and styles are predicated on their distance from the 'taint' of capitalism, usually the ultimate goal of a music (especially if the music is attached to an overt politics) is to get one's art/music 'out there' and their message 'known', and to become famous music stars. Of course independent musics and companies do have sales as a goal (they need to 'make ends meet'), but there is a notion that there are other factors equally as important such as politics, or a distinctive authenticity derived from 'the streets', or 'marginalization' or 'anti-capitalism'. Pacific pop music labels advocate music and culture as priorities, with sales less imperative (but most likely still a very welcome outcome).

Vela Manusaute of the entertainment group 'Kila Kokonut Krew' (who produce music, theatre and television) explains this notion on their web page:

Rolling out from the south side of Auckland, the largest Polynesian city in the world, Kila Kokonut Krew brings you the new flavour of real raw entertainment. Kila Kokonut Krew will not stand for this. We rise against the mainstream manipulation of New Zealand media, not out of hate for anyone, but out of love for our Pacific people. It is the Pacific Media Renaissance. We Pacific Islanders have a right to be seen on television and have our stories and struggles be told to our children. We battle against rubbish television our children are force fed. We cannot relate to most of the rubbish on television. We, the Kila Kokonut Krew, are Pacific Islanders and it is for Pacific Islanders we exist for. WE REPRESENT OUR PACIFIC COMMUNITY, a community no mainstream media want to represent.

(www.kilakokonutkrew.com/history.htm May 06)

The marketing of rap and other African American musics has seen the converting of the salience of 'blackness' into capital. This may be said to be similar to the selling of 'Pacific-ness', especially a Pacific hip hop in New Zealand. By celebrating Pacific-ness with an aesthetic and community motive, this in turn generates an authenticity that may be a salable commodity. Hip hop in Aotearoa has come to be dominated by Pacific and Māori artists and is even represented on Pacific television and at festivals as authentic contemporary Pacific culture (Zemke-White 2005).

D1 Entertainment has artists of primarily Samoan and Tongan descent. Rappers The Immigrantz from this music label celebrate Pacific culture with humour on their rap single, making fun of a perceived cultural propensity for being late:

You can run, you can hide
But there's no escaping
From the Immigration clique
We got the new flavour in the air
Now we hope you understand, because my stylin', typical
Fresh, like my timin', I can't help it
Cause my blood is from the islands.....

We keep it real
This is how we do it island style
("Island timin'" on Various 2004a)

The Immigrantz capitalize on their 'marginalization' and celebrate their 'difference'. Their cultural (even racial) point of alterity is celebrated as both their selling (on the label) and identity position.

Snapper (2004) would argue that being on an independent label is the only way The Immigrantz and other acts can maintain their 'authentic difference', as artists with major labels are trapped in a 'fixed exchange' with their listeners and their output is supported by an industry only interested in attracting 'buyers', not looking for intellectual or cultural exchange and community.

Others investigating popular music and independent labels assert that sometimes even the crudeness of technology available to independent labels can become an aesthetic in itself (Harrison 2006). The ultimate authenticity derives, however, mostly from the ability for those distanced from the 'mainstream' and/or major labels to critique the capitalist system itself; 'independence' offers a space for oppositional politics.

Politics

Oppositional politics are often a key feature and motivation of independent music labels. Independent labels are possibly more free to produce music with more oppositional politics (i.e. anti-capitalist or anti-mainstream sentiments) as these messages may be more likely to be suppressed by corporate major labels, as has happened, for example, with punk (Hesmondhalgh 1999). However, Hesmondhalgh (1999) warns that just because a record label is independent this does not mean that its product has radical politics.

Is a record label that is set up to specifically promote and sell to a particular ethnicity inherently politically oppositional? Is it, regardless of product, automatically asserting political difference? It has been argued that hip hop and any 'black' music is always political, regardless of textual subject matter (Rose 1994). This could also apply to any Pacific or Māori music in New Zealand which is subjected to a range of institutional and media practices that suppress their arts.

Basu and Werbner (2001: 247) say black musics have an inherent 'politics of style' as there is no simple way of defining where the political in music begins. We argue that these Pacific companies, regardless of the textual subject matter of any of their product, also offer political statements about identity, ethnicity and style. Even names like The Immigrantz

or Savage hearken to a racist colonial past. These companies have chosen to, or had to, bypass the mainstream music industry. While they are operating in a pattern with great precedent (independent music labels), independent Pacific oriented music labels offer something unique to the market, maintain aesthetic control, and reap their own profits. Their existence and consciousness inserts a missing cultural, racial and musical dimension into the mainstream music industry and social milieu.

Pacific and Māori rap artists have used hip hop to offer oppositional racial and political messages through their lyrics. Rappers like Che Fu, King Kapisi, Dean Hapeta, Nesian Mystik, Foolsouljahs, and Feelstyle have all critiqued colonization and white racism in their texts. Ironically, Che Fu is now on the major label SonyBMG, and King Kapisi is on Festival/Mushroom, a subsidiary of Warner Music Australia. This highlights the fact that hip hop music, whether on major or independent labels, has been able to offer oppositional critiques, supporting Boyd's (1995) assertion in relation to rap music that:

The commodifying impulses of the music industry have opened a space for selling cultural products, which in their very construction undermine the structure distributing them (297).

Hip Hop

The Pacific record companies we came across all deal with rap music in some way. Rap music and culture can be linked with race, ethnicity and identity issues, and, while incredibly successful commercially, are still marginalised in many ways. Rap is inherently political. McLeod (1999) calls hip hop a "self-identified, resistive subculture" (146). He argues that hip hop has mitigated mainstream success with a 'carefully constructed authenticity'.

Hip hop is grounded in its original New York roots, but has also become a global phenomenon with local appropriations in Europe, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia. In Aotearoa, hip hop has shown particular relevance for young people of Pacific and Māori descent who have made it their own by fusing specific and global influences and identities (Zemke-White 2001). Aotearoa hip hop culture and rap music have seen tremendous commercial and cultural success for individual artists, but there has also been a matching development of dedicated record labels and companies, many of whose goal is to develop and market specifically Pacific artists who do hip hop and other pop forms.

Rap's connection to marginalized ethnicities, its basis in the 'street' and its offerings of cultural pride have seen it come to represent, and be represented by, Pacific artists. Hip hop and its African American sister art, r 'n' b, have become a facet of a distinct 'urban' Pacific aesthetic as seen in magazines (*Spasifik*) and films (*Sione's Wedding*).

American rapper Kanye West eloquently explores the complex commercial/social relationship of selling black music to white people in the U. S.. On his 2005 album *Late Registration*, West refers to a 'dark diction' (rap music) which has become 'America's addiction' and parallels this with drug trafficking:

That's that crack music nigga
That real black music nigga
That's that crack music, crack music
That real black music, black music

Our father, give us this day, our daily bread
Before the feds give us these days and take our daily bread
See I done did all this ol' bullshit
And to atone, I throw a lil' somethin somethin on the pulpit
We took that shit, measured it and then cooked that shit
And what we gave back, was crack, music
And now we ooze it, through they nooks and crannies
So our mommas ain't got to be they, cooks and nannies
And we gon' repo everything they ever took from granny
Now the former slaves trade hooks, for Grammy's
This dark diction, has become America's addiction
Those who ain't even black use it
We gon' keep baggin up this here, crack music
(“Crack Music” Kanye West featuring The Game, 2005)

The explosion of hip hop as an irrepressible market force has seen huge esteem and commercial success for many African Americans. Rap culture provides economic incentives and artistic goals which for some may open escape routes from the deprivation of the inner cities (Basu and Werbner 2001: 256)

Having dedicated rap labels in the U.S. has facilitated the ability of young black artist and entrepreneurs to have greater control of their intellectual property (Basu and Werbner 2001:

249), and the development of Pacific record companies in New Zealand has had the same outcome. Rap's feature of personal stories and auto-biographical narratives has seen the marketing of Pacific rap artists not just as selling a music and emerging potentially from poverty, but also as projecting a 'style of self' into the world (Dyson on U. S. hip hop culture, 1993:15) contesting 'the powers of despair and economic depression'. Dyson (1993: 15) argues that rap music (in the U. S.) "generates forms of cultural resistance and transforms the ugly terrain of the ghetto existence into a searing portrait of life as it must be lived by millions of voiceless people". By cultivating and releasing hip hop music, then, these Pacific music labels are telling important stories that would normally go unheard.

Besides hip hop, these record labels also produce various forms of reggae, r 'n' b, and gospel. These genre are also grounded in African American cultures, religion and history. So while it may look like mere mimicry of American pop musics, these genre choices on ethnic labels signal racial, political and social alliances and synchronies. These music styles, like hip hop, are also less accepted by the mainstream (white rock dominated) New Zealand music community. Like hip hop, these musics have been subject to racist structures and bias necessitating the development of independent labels to express these music preferences and connections.

This lyric from Urban Pasifika's Gospel compilation expresses community, ethics, identity, ancestry, and history from a distinctive Pacific Diaspora perspective, one most often not catered for by major labels:

When I really thought about it then it dawned on me
I got so many cultures in my own family
Maori, Cook Island, Aboriginal
Irish, Scottish, Tone Tokelau
We all different but we all family
They got my back when I got me a catastrophe
("Red & Yellow, Black & White" James Holland on Various 2005)

Networking

A distinctive feature of 'ethnic entrepreneurship' is networks. As Basu and Werbner point out:

Within the rap industry an entrepreneurial elite has achieved outstanding success. But this elite, we demonstrate, has risen from the ranks of micro-enterprises, building on the networks and expertise that these have generated collectively. (Basu and Werbner 2001: 239)

The emergent culture of entrepreneurship is embedded in locally forged networks of kin as well as cultural know-how, but expands to more mainstream connections within the cultural industries a large kinship, neighbourhood, ethnic and friendship ties gain access, information and contacts through these ties. (Basu and Werbner 2001: 253)

This is particularly evident in New Zealand with Pacific and Māori focused record companies. In order to build up an audience (or market) most Pacific acts, rather than only playing bars and clubs, also perform at Pacific community events such as Pacific festivals, fundraisers, health awareness events, Pacific markets and Pacific Fashion shows. Many performers also have family and church networks, as family and religion are core Pacific values (Anae 2002).

The Pacific community, as a large minority group in the New Zealand cultural milieu, has developed a small number of Pacific focused television and radio spaces. Pacific focused Radio stations such as Niu Fm (“the beat of the Pacific” www.niufm.com), Radio Samoa (www.radiosamoa.co.nz) and 531 PI (“Bringing Pacific People Together” www.531pi.co.nz) play many of the artists and albums from these Pacific labels. Niu Fm broadcasts on 12 frequencies nationally with a stated urban adult contemporary format aimed at 18 to 39 year old New Zealand born Pacific Islanders. Radio Samoa and 531PI are Auckland only. There are specific Maori radio stations (www.tmp.govt.nz/radio/radiomap.html and www.ruiamai.co.nz/iwi.html) which support music from Maori dedicated music companies. Music from these Pacific and Maori oriented labels appears often on Pacific Television programmes such as *Tangata Pasifika* (tvnz.co.nz), on the Maori Television channel (www.maoritelevision.com) and on Triangle Television (www.tritv.co.nz).

The existence of local ties invigorates claims to authenticity, especially for hip hop artists and entrepreneurs. For hip hop, authenticity is gained by an artist maintaining close links to their neighborhood, often via their record label. Music videos from artists on these Pacific labels often feature rappers against the background of their ‘hood’ (neighborhood, suburb), references are made in raps to local cultural landmarks or events, and friends and family are often featured on videos (for instance D1’s “Koko Luv” and Savage’s “If you love Savage”),

highlighting the Pacific and hip hop aesthetic and practice of community. DawnRaid, as previously mentioned, have kept their office based in the humble neighborhood of Papatoetoe despite their commercial success as a music company. In addition, they started a community trust in 2001 to educate young people about the music business (<http://www.dawnraid.co.nz/communitytrust/>).

'Ethnic networking' has also seen the utilization of international Pacific diaspora networks, particularly in Australia and the U. S. Groups from Pacific Dream records have toured in the United States and DawnRaid artists have been actively gigging in Australia. Both companies are seeking to reach the Pacific diaspora communities in these locations. Australia even has its own Pacific radio show, the 'Cher Bro Show', in Melbourne, playing primarily New Zealand produced Pacific pop music aimed at the Pacific diaspora community (www.cherbroshow.com). This is consistent with Stokes (2004) who found that major recording corporations are no longer considered the only site of agency in the global circulation of music styles.

Conclusions

Authenticity claims and their contestations are a part of a highly charged dialogic conversation that struggles to renegotiate what it means to be a participant in a culture threatened with assimilation (McLeod 1999: 147)

Popular music, perhaps more than many other media, has been particularly receptive to social and ethnic diversity (Lipschitz 1999). This is evidenced in New Zealand through the range of Pacific and Māori artists in the mainstream charts and on radio. The term 'Pacifications', used in the title of an independent Pacific distributor's Pacific pop music compilation, refers to a Pacific aesthetic - a style; a behavior; a set of themes and semiotic strategies - developed by Pacific and Māori music artists who localize pop music styles to express unique Pacific explorations. This aesthetic has been supported in the New Zealand music industry primarily by a number of dedicated ethnicity-centered independent music labels.

In a study of music in Los Angeles and Miami, Lipschitz (1999) found that:

The grass-roots realities of everyday life for residents of global cities like Miami and Los Angeles rarely find expression in public pronouncements by politicians or in the public relations-oriented journalism of commercial, electronic, and print media. The

ways in which people make meaning for themselves in the context of dramatic social change can be discerned, however, through critical interpretation of the links between changes in popular music and the demographic and social life of the city. (Lipschitz 1999, 213)

Lipschitz argues that popular music serves as a sensitive register of changes in black and Latino communities and that the development of hip hop and other localized pop musics reflects new trends in commercial culture and new emerging identities.

Music has been one way to celebrate culture and identity and negotiate new identities based on contemporary locations. The growth of the Pacific population in New Zealand has led to the birth of Pacific record companies, an increase in Pacific artists, and a proliferation of Pacific musics. Pacific dedicated record companies play a vital role in the promotion and recognition of Pacific artists and Pacific pop in New Zealand. They highlight that 'culture' and 'identity' are essential to the production point of music creation. 'Pacific identity' is then used by these companies as a tool to promote the music, artists and companies. This consequently helps to source a Pacific audience (especially via Pacific media like radio, print and community events) and markets a potentially saleable contemporary Pacific identity to the wider New Zealand public.

Hip hop and r 'n' b musics form a part of a distinctive Pacific pop identity in New Zealand, and artists such as Adeaze, Savage, Jamao Jam and Peta are cultivated and distributed by Pacific independent record labels. These companies offer a democratic alternative, allowing marginalized cultures, ethnicities and music sub-genre to flourish both inside and outside the mainstream.

While it is important to consider the complex notions of Pacific identity via contemporary Pacific music artists and lyrics, this study has shown that negotiation of ethnic identity also operates at the level of music production and economy. While a monopolistic music industry may produce homogenization, independent labels may act to ensure that the industry is comprised in part by diverse cultures. In the case of New Zealand, Pacific entrepreneurship is producing Pacific industry, and producing a contemporary, branded, Pacific culture. This press release paragraph from King Music distribution house (which focuses on Pacific artists) sells Pacific culture as a particular pop music sound, a thriving sub-culture, a market success and an inexorable movement:

We are proud to present the next selection of the best in NZ Hip-Hop and R&B... Urban Pacific music is now truly established as its own developed sound. The rich and diverse musical wealth and pure talent of its artists has created a momentum which is now unstoppable, as proven by the increased volume of radio play and chart success accomplished by Pacific Hip Hop, R&B and Soul artists... (Promotional paragraph from King Music's second compilation album accessed 31 May 06 from http://www.kingmusic.co.nz/item_detail.lasso?id=81583)

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Discography

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Adeaze 2004 *Always & for Real* DawnRaid
Alphrisk 2005 *The Best Kept Secret* DawnRaid
Che Fu 1998 *2b S.Pacific* BMG
Che Fu 2001 *Navigator* Sony
Deceptikonz 2002 *Elimination* Dawn Raid
Feelstyle 2004 *Break it to Pieces* Can't Stop
Footsouljahs 2002 *Stylez Deliveriez Flowz* 2Much Records
Ill Semantics 2002 *Theory of Meaning* DawnRaid
Jamoia Jam 2000a *Samoana Soul* Pacific Dream Records
Jamoia Jam 2000b *The Future* Pacific Dream Records
Jamoia Jam 2001 *Tama Mai Le Pasifika* Pacific Dream Records
Kanye West 2005 *Late Registration* Roc-a-Fella
King Kapisi 2000 *Savage Thoughts* Festival Mushroom
Lole 2000 *Samoana* Sista Records
Mareko 2003 *White Sunday* DawnRaid
Marina *Marina the album* Pacific Dream Records (year unstated)
Nesian Mystik 2002 *Polysaturated* Bounce Records
Pacific Soul 2002 *Pacific Soul* Pacific Dream Records
Savage 2005 *Moonshine* DawnRaid
Various 1999a *Pioneers of a Pacifikan Frontier* BMG/UPR
Various 1999b *Southside Story* Dawn Raid Entertainment
Various 2001 *Southside Story 2: International* Dawn Raid Entertainment
Various 2003 *Gifted and Maori Vol 1* Gifted and Maori
Various 2003c *Wahine Vol 1* Gifted and Maori
Various 2004a *D'Luscious* DI Entertainment
Various 2004b *Gifted and Maori Vol 2* Gifted and Maori
Various 2004C *Supa Fresh: Beats and Pacifications* King Music Ltd
Various 2005 *Urban Gospel Vol 1* Urban Pasifika
Various 2006a *Sione's Wedding Soundtrack* DawnRaid
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