Sue Abel

"The Public's Right to Know": Television News Coverage of the Ngāpuhi Media Ban

On February 5 1840 a large number of Māori chiefs met at Te Tii marae down the hill from the Treaty House at Waitangi to debate at length whether or not they should sign the Treaty of Waitangi the following day. Ngāpuhi, the local iwi, have continued to hold an annual hui at the marae on the days preceding Waitangi Day, February 6 to mark the significance of the day and continue to debate Treaty issues. In 2003 the iwi decided to ban all mainstream media journalists from the hui on the grounds of the mainstream media's continual inadequate and damaging coverage of Waitangi Day and its related issues. Mainstream media had over the years continually overlooked what went on for several days at Waitangi, focusing instead on what was often merely a few moments of conflict. The response by these media to the ban ranged from apoplectic to bemused. This paper analyses TV1 and TV3's coverage of the media ban in the context of previous coverage of Waitangi, and argues that while the ban was criticized by mainstream media professionals because it contravened "the public's right to know", the mainstream media, both in its historical coverage of Waitangi issues, and in its coverage of the media ban, itself denied the public information and perspectives that belong in the public arena.

In earlier work I have argued that New Zealand mainstream television news has been monocultural in that it has marginalized and/or misrepresented things Māori (Abel 1997). I argued that this monocultural bias was not intentional; that news workers set out to do their job as well as they could given the constraints and conventions within which they worked. Rather, it was a result of these organizational and institutional constraints, of conventional and unconscious notions of news values, and of ignorance of things MāoriMaori on the part of a largely Pākehā news room.

I still acknowledge the power of these constraints and conventions, and

also acknowledge that both television channels have taken active steps to recruit and support Māori journalists. There are also more Pākehā reporters these days who do try to be sensitive and attuned to the issues involved. Nevertheless, the vehement response by news chiefs and some news workers to Ngāpuhi's media ban suggests they still had very little understanding of either the nature of their coverage of things Māori, or of the implications of the Treaty that Waitangi Day commemorates, and that they had learnt little about bicultural reporting in the years since 1990. Indeed, the coverage suggests the strength of an underlying and continuing monoculturalism and ethnocentrism, and a failure to seriously examine practice, rather than just a mere ignorance.

To put the coverage of the media ban into context, I outline below two areas from my earlier analysis of the coverage of Waitangi Day 1990. The first is the construction of a national unity which is paradoxically based on a division into "them" and "us", where those who protest about Māori grievances are cast as "them". Allied to this is an analysis of the narrative structure of news bulletins as a whole, and the individual stories within them, which always positions protest about Māori grievances as disrupting "harmony".
I will then discuss what is known as the 'spitting incident' from 1995, before turning to consider coverage of Ngāpuhi's media ban in 2003.

History

But first we need to consider the importance of history. To fully understand many issues to do with Māori, or with the interaction between Māori and Pākehā, an understanding of New Zealand's colonial and more recent past is required. Television news, however, finds it hard to give such history, both because of the limited time within a news item, and because it is so reliant on moving (in both senses of the word) visuals. It is much easier to broadcast images of present day protest action than it is to broadcast images of past Treaty violations.

There are also cultural issues at stake here. To Māori, as with many others of the world's peoples, the past has traditionally been more important than it has to Western people. Speaking very generally, for Māori the past is an intrinsic part of the present and even the future, while for Pākehā the past is out of sight, behind us. Pākehā news workers, therefore, even if they know of the historical background to a news story, may not see this history as strictly relevant. This both results in and is reinforced by the news value of 'frequency', identified by Galtung and Ruge (1981 [1965])) as very common in Western media. Galtung and Ruge discovered that those events which became news stories were of about the same frequency as the news bulletins, i.e. of about a daily span. What happened today is what is important. Those things that happened in the past, or over a longer time frame, are much less likely to make it into the news.

It is this evacuation of history from the news that contributes to its monocultural nature.
To tell a story without taking the past into account can in itself be seen as a monocultural practice. At the same time, it also produces a version of events which favours Pākehā as the case studies below will demonstrate.

And so (appropriately) to history, and the 1990 television news coverage of Waitangi. 1990 was the sesquicentennial of the signing of the Treaty, and was initially seen as a time to celebrate '150 years of nationhood'. However, there was a strong body of opinion in the country that it was inappropriate to celebrate a Treaty that had been violated so many times. The 1990 Commission (set up the Government to coordinate the year) therefore decided that the Treaty would be commemorated.

At Waitangi in 1990 were a wide range of events. Perhaps the two most important were the visit of Queen Elizabeth II, and the massive gathering of MāoriMaori from all around the country in the days preceding Waitangi Day. Queen Elizabeth had been invited to attend by the 1990 Commission, who saw her role as 'reaffirming the relationship between the Crown and the Māori people', the signatories to the Treaty. Māori had gathered both to support the tribal waka which

were making their first official appearance on the day, and to debate Treaty issues at lengthy hui on local marae in the days leading up to Waitangi Day. But television news conflated the variety of events and points of view into a 'celebration' of the anniversary of the Treaty and of national 'unity' – a troublesome concept at the best of times, but particularly so in this context, where it was predominantly defined as meaning "we are all one people". It is worth noting here that there was no coverage at all of the large and, for Māori at least, important hui at Te Tii marae. This was not then considered to be of interest to the mainstream viewing audience.

"Us" and "Them"

Paradoxically, one mechanism for creating this unity was the construction of "us" and "them". This division of people into "us" and "them" is so widely documented in news around the world that it is now a commonplace among critical theorists (for example, Allen 1999; Hartley 1992). Abel (1997) documents in detail how this is constructed in television news coverage of Waitangi Day 1990, 1994 and 1995. Here "us" included most Pākehā and so-called "tame" Māori – those who appear to fit into mainstream society without a fuss, who perform in kapa haka groups at official ceremonies, who in fact provide the point of difference internationally that makes us feel like 'New Zealanders'. "Tame Māori" in television's Waitangi Day were incorporated into, and helped construct, a "we are one people" discourse. "Wild Māori" on the other hand, were those Māori who demanded that the Treaty not be celebrated, who not only refused to join the national party at Waitangi but insisted on spoiling it for other people.

This division of Māori was played out again and again across a range of stories. Two particular images repeated three times on Waitangi Day, summed up the division. The first was of an attractive young Māori woman in traditional costume singing and swinging poi. The second was of a rather scruffily dressed, long-haired young Māori man being dragged away from protest action by police. Television news loves drama, conflict and emotion, and images like these between them provided all three. It is the continual predominance of images like the second that contributed to Ngapuhi's media ban.

Narrative Structure

The narrative structure of most news stories follows a format which contributes to the construction of "us" and "them" outlined above. Philosopher Tzvetan Todorov (cited in Fiske 1987) has suggested that (fictional) narratives begin with a state of equilibrium or social harmony which is disrupted, usually by the action of a villain. The narrative charts the course of this disequilibrium and its final resolution in another, preferably enhanced and more stable, equilibrium.

John Fiske (1987) relates this model to news, pointing out that newsworthy events are those that disrupt or restore equilibrium. The state of equilibrium is not in itself newsworthy, and is only described implicitly in its opposition to the state of disequilibrium, which is usually described in detail. Importantly, he suggests that there is ideological work involved in the selection of which events are considered to disrupt or restore which equilibrium, and in the description of what constitutes disequilibrium.

In mainstream television reporting of issues concerning Māori and Pākehā, such ideological work can be seen as based on particular cultural understandings and empirical knowledge of the importance of the historical background to the present-day event.
The TV news coverage of Waitangi 1990, for example, assumed that "celebration" (a term that the 1990 Commission had asked be replaced by "commemoration") was the state of equilibrium, that this was disrupted by protestors, and that equilibrium was restored, usually by police arrests - effectively depoliticizing protest by making it a law and order issue. This pattern structured headlines, individual stories, and even the bulletins themselves. One example from TV3 on February 6 shows this at work:.

The Waitangi celebrations turned nasty today as protestors

> taunted police lines. While the nation's attention was on the 150th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty, a small but aggressive group did their best to disrupt the occasion. [live sound of scuffle between police and protestors]. A melee developed at a police cordon on a bridge leading to the Treaty Grounds. Voices were raised in anger and the Queen was told to go home. At the end of the day the police had arrested 13 people. But despite the confrontation the day was enjoyed by tens of thousands of people from all around New Zealand.

This story takes the construction of "us" and "them" further, as protestors are not only seen as the force of disequilibrium, but are also separated out from "the nation". Once they have been dealt with, "we" get on with our party.

But a longer view of history might suggest that the state of equilibrium existed before the breaches of the Treaty, and everything since then has been a state of injustice or disequilibrium. In such a reading, protestors are working to restore the equilibrium, not disrupt it.

Ian Stuart (2002) has also used this model to show the difference between what he calls a 'Pākehā narrative' and a 'Māori narrative', applying it to the "occupation" of Pakaitore/Moutoa Gardens in 1995. He suggests a Pākehā narrative would see the status quo (equilibrium) as the Wanganui Council controlling the Gardens, with the arrival of Māori protestors as a disruption, and the restoration of the status quo, or the creation of a new status quo, happening when Māori left the Gardens. This was indeed the pattern followed by both broadcasting and print mainstream media. A Māori narrative, on the other hand, would see the status quo as being the time when Māori controlled Pakaitore. The subsequent takeover by the Council, the re-naming of the site as Moutoa Gardens, and the exclusion of Māori from the management of their ancestral lands all constituted a disruption and deterioration of this status quo. In a Māori narrative, equilibrium would be restored when the Council and Māori became partners in the management of the Gardens. In fact in February 2001 the land under contestation was vested in the Crown and a Management Board consisting of three District Council members, three members from Whanganui iwi and a Crown representative was set up to administer the land. This agreement, however, did not receive the headlines and intense media focus given to the earlier "occupation".

The significant factor in both of these examples is that the Māori narrative goes back much further in time, into history, than does the Pākehā narrative, where the state of equilibrium is essentially the very immediate past. History, and the meaning it gives to present-day events, is evacuated from the news coverage, militating against the possibility of a Māori narrative.

In my earlier research I noted that by 1995 there had been some improvement in the news coverage. But there were still many instances of monocultural reporting. One in particular has relevance to the coverage of the Ngāpuhi media ban. During the powhiri on Waitangi marae the official party was vigorously challenged by Tame Iti fromTūhoe, who in the process spat on the ground in front of the official party four times. The drama of this incident was increased by Iti's physical appearance – he is a big man and heavily tattooed (i.e. he supplies television news with dramatic visuals). The mainstream media reported that he had spat in the Governor-General's face, but several people who had been present told me that it was actually a young woman who had done this. Shots of Tame Iti's challenge appeared ten times in the television coverage of the day, symbolizing what was portrayed as the extremism of the protest action that day. But Māori informants have told me that such actions were part of the rituals of encounter, and were not necessarily offensive in Māori tikanga. This is not to suggest that all MāoriMaori supported Iti's actions – in fact some publicly deplored them - but it does demonstrate that the incident was more complex than mainstream news suggested it was; that there were (at least) two ways of interpreting Tame Iti's challenge. But rather than have any acknowledgment of this, a "Pākehā" interpretation prevailed as the only one possible, and Tame Iti became a symbol of MāoriMaori "extremism".

I turn now to look at aspects of the 2003 coverage of the media ban.

TV3's coverage was particularly loaded. The issue at stake was defined not as "Is there substance to the allegations that mainstream media representation of things Māori is overwhelmingly negative" but rather "Is the ban racist?" The intro to the first item told us that 'organisers deny they are being racist', wording that suggested guilt without explicitly saying so. This framed the whole item, as reporter Jane Young asked those she interviewed whether they agreed the ban was racist (and sometimes asserted as much herself). Rather than ask Ngāpuhi kaumātua Bruce Gregory to explain the reasons behind the ban, she practically demanded that he explain how it wasn't racist. TV3's coverage here can be seen as an example of what Fiske (1996) calls 'dislocated racism'. Fiske argues that racism may be seen as dislocated 'when it is apparently to be found only in the behaviours of a racial minority and never in those of the white power structure' (1996: 272). It is relevant here that both channels asked Pākehā media practitioners to comment on the ban, but not Māori media practitioners.

Mark Sainsbury's report for TV1 was much more cautious and evenhanded, and not framed by an assumption of racism, as was TV3's report. Nevertheless, there were underlying assumptions and significant omissions which, like those in the TV3 coverage, bear closer analysis.

News just "happens"

It is a long held and basic tenet of news scholarship that news, whatever medium it appears in, does not offer us an unmediated 'window on the world', or hold up a 'mirror to society'. For example, Stuart Hall has argued:

> Journalists speak of 'the news' as if events select themselves. Further, they speak as if which is the 'most significant' news story, and which 'news angles' are most salient, are divinely inspired. Yet of the millions of events which occur every day in the world, only a tiny proportion ever become visible as 'potential news stories': and of this proportion, only a small fraction are actually produced as the day's news in the news media. (Hall 1981: 234).

In the television coverage of the media ban there seemed to be no understanding of the role that news workers play in the selection and construction of what is news. Rather, the assumption was indeed that news "appears", it just "happens". There were examples of this on both channels. Mark Sainsbury, summarizing the day for TV1TV1, discussed how 'events [at Te Tii marae] went so smoothly, and it was constructive', and then told us 'It would have been the one event where they would have if you like got the kind of coverage they were after. Instead it was turned around and the story became the fact that media – including ourselves – were forced to stand outside. And that shifted the focus'. Jane Young on TV3 told us 'Waitangi 2003 seems destined to be remembered for one message: no video, no camera'. What happens here is that the mediating hand of the largely Pākehā media which chooses, to a large extent, what Waitangi will be remembered for, is, to use Roland Barthes' term, exnominated, or made invisible (Fiske 1987: 44). It is precisely this Pākehā perspective and narrative of Waitangi which has so angered many MāoriMaori, and which ironically led to the ban in the first place.

"Us" and "them"

Equally ironically, Jane Young from TV3 described the ban as creating 'an unfortunate situation of "us" and "them"', obviously oblivious to the fact that this is precisely what the news media had themselves been creating over a period of years. "Them" here was constructed in different ways. TV3's coverage included the ubiquitous "hand-over-the camera" shot as a member of Ngāpuhi attempted to block a TV3 camera operator from filming. This not only positioned Ngāpuhi as "them", but also reinforced visually the role of TV3 as our intrepid reporters, trying to get "us", the media and the viewing audience, vital information that was being denied us.

TV1One's 6pm bulletin on 5 February opened with an image of a kaumātua speaking inside a meetinghouse (presumably at Te Tii

marae), accompanied by the words on screen "Guarded comments". The spoken headline was 'The words they didn't want you to hear. We're inside the Waitangi marae that's been declared off limits to many'. We are immediately (and very explicitly) into "us" and "them" again, with TVNZ positioning itself as the seeker-out of truth on behalf of the audience, while the sensationalist style suggests that Ngāpuhi are plotting a conspiracy. This operates verbally in the same way as TV3's inclusion of the hand over the camera. "We" are fighting on "your" behalf (and here the audience and TV1 are constructed as a unity) to get the information we all need and to ensure democracy prevails. The reports that followed made no reference to these "words they didn't want you to hear" – as with all coverage of Waitangi over the years, what Ngāpuhi might be talking about is not really seen as relevant. Granted, mainstream media were not allowed to take their cameras into the meetinghouse, but they still had access to sources to follow up after the hui what had been discussed.

As well as being a total misreading of what the ban was about, this headline, as with much other media coverage of the ban, fudged the distinction between the national marae at the Treaty Grounds at Waitangi (which is open to the public), and Te Tii marae, which is on Ngāpuhi tribal land. TV1's headline, then, invited and encouraged its viewers to feel righteous indignation.

Sainsbury's report itself was less inflammatory, and in his piece to camera he made the distinction clear. As is usual, he probably had no say in writing the dramatic headlines and intro that accompanied his story. He did however consistently refer to Te Taumata Kaumātua of Ngāpuhi as "they". While this may have been a matter of expediency, given both the limited time available and the fact that for some of his report Sainsbury was speaking ad lib, it nevertheless had the effect of again separating out "them" from "us".

The freedom of the media and the public's right to know

The freedom of the media and the public's right to know was a constant theme after the media ban, both from the media themselves, and in talkback radio. Both of these concepts obviously have value in the democracy that New Zealand professes to be. However, in this particular context (and no doubt in others as well), the meanings of these slogans and their ramifications are not as clear cut as they were made out to be.

Gavin Ellis, editor of the *New Zealand Herald* and Chairman of the Commonwealth Press Union (New Zealand Section) is quoted in *Scoop Media* on 5 February 2003 as saying 'This ban is an obvious and unacceptable challenge to media freedom and the right of the New Zealand public to have access to information that should be in the public arena'.
((<http://scoop.co.nz/mason/stories/PO0302/S00034.htm>, downloaded 28.0/3./2003).

This raises the question of why the matters that Ngāpuhi met to discuss before Waitangi Day over a period of many years, have not been considered 'information that should be in the public arena' before. Instead, the media focus has been on ceremonial activities on the Waitangi marae (as opposed to Te Tii marae) and on protest action. In addition, Māori perspectives on a wide range of issues have not been considered 'information that should be in the public arena'. Instead such perspectives have either been ignored, trivialized, or presented as marginal, and not of equal value or validity as mainstream perspectives.

The media focus on the Waitangi marae in earlier years, and the significant absence of any substantial mention of the hui at Te Tii marae, could be seen as suggesting that while what happens on Waitangi is public, what happens on Te Tii is not. This is to a large extent true. While members of the public have always been welcome at Te Tii, the marae is not public land (this is a point that Mark Sainsbury made clear, although he did not extrapolate on the ramifications of that). The fact that the marae is not public land, however, raises questions about the media's assertions of their right to enter. It has to be asked if the same outrage would have been expressed if they had been denied access to (say) a shareholder's meetings in the private

offices of a Queen St business.

What precisely was the ban about?

Television news, perhaps because it concentrates more on what is happening rather than why, spent little time explaining what the ban was about. As a viewer myself, I was initially unclear whether the ban was because of coverage specifically about Waitangi Day and the preceding days, or if it was because of general coverage of MāoriMaori issues. The public understanding of Pākehā, based on broadcasting and print media reports, seemed to be that the ban was imposed because Ngāpuhi wanted to censor media coverage of what could be seen as the negative aspects of Waitangi Day.

TV3's Jane Young was, as I discussed above, more concerned about establishing that the ban was racist than in finding out why it had been imposed. TV1's Mark Sainsbury was more objective here. He explained early in his item that Te Taumata Kaumātua were concerned 'over the controversial images from past years'. This was accompanied by visual images of protest action at Waitangi. Bruce Gregory, identified as 'Marae Kaumātua', was then heard saying 'It was based on the question of what we saw as the mainstream reporting which seemed to reflect so adversely on all the negative things...' Sainsbury went on from here to talk about the ban itself, with sound-bites from Gavin Ellis, Ngāpuhi kuia Titewhai Harawira and Leader of the Opposition Bill English all expressing outrage. Gregory's explanation, then, was not only cut short, but swamped by voices opposing the ban. Nobody engaged with the substance of his explanation, brief and rather vague as it was.

This leads us to a side, but nevertheless relevant, issue. The contemporary propensity for very short sound-bites in television news has been criticized many times. Apart from being outnumbered, Bruce Gregory has two disadvantages here. Hall et al (1978) have pointed out how those who are putting forward an alternative point of view to that constructed as 'commonsense' by the news media need more time to explain it because it is likely that it will be unfamiliar to most of the audience. I have also been told by several Māori informants that, while many Māori who deal regularly with television have learnt to master the soundbite, the more traditional Māori way of talking which can be both circular and metaphoric does not lend itself to 30 second (or less) clips.

Sainsbury offered a less outraged response to the ban than did other media, but essentially suggested that the Ngāpuhi concern was about the screening of particular images, and the debate was therefore whether they should be censored or not. A similar position was taken by Paul Holmes in that night's *Holmes Show.* This is, however, a simplistic version of the issue at stake, which was not about whether a particular image is screened, but rather about the way some images shot on the day are continually given prominence over others, or are used in a particular way to tell a particular version of events (e.g. Tame Iti). Gideon Porter, then Māori reporter for Radio New Zealand who was himself subject to the ban, told me:

> The main thing upsetting elders was that they believed a few minutes of protest confrontation always overshadowed two to three days of other activities – and TV media in particular tended to (literally) zoom in on anything controversial and relegate other activities to a sentence or two, buried somewhere in the middle or end of an item – by which time it was far too late as people had already made up their minds Waitangi was yet another violent and confrontational affair. The elders believed Māori media (which still reported the controversies) put things into much better perspective. (Personal communication, 7 May 2003)

This explanation of the ban did not appear on television news.

The *Holmes Show* did set up a debate about the issue, but the promo for the show (which is all many people would have seen) opened with footage of Tame Iti's challenge in 1995. Holmes then addressed viewers as follows:

> Are these the types of images Ngāpuhi don't want us to see? Is it censorship? Is it racism? Or by banning the mainstream media are they simply trying to protect the Waitangi celebrations? Well we discuss this. Holmes tonight, 7 o'clock.

Holmes here both relies on and reinforces the encoded meaning of Iti's challenge as one of Māori extremism, rather than of rites of encounter. The "us" he addresses is ambiguous – is it Don Brash's "mainstream"? Does it include Māori viewers?
Although he follows this with the idea that another viewpoint might exist this was, as Gideon Porter reports, at the end of the promo. Nor does this other viewpoint (presented as the only one) address the substance of Ngāpuhi's complaint – the issue of mainstream media coverage.

Why was the media ban imposed?

What television news did not tell its viewers in any depth was why Ngāpuhi felt so strongly about previous media coverage, and whether they in fact have a case. In respect of coverage of Waitangi Day, my own work has set out in detail, using as a case study coverage of Waitangi Day 1990, 1994 and 1995, precisely the distortions and omissions that Ngāpuhi have referred to. East Coast MP Janet Mackey, writing in the *Opotiki News* 20 Feb 2003, had pertinent comments to make about television news coverage of Waitangi Day. Among other things she argued:

> News coverage has told me very little about the speeches of the people who are there to celebrate the treaty. One could be forgiven for thinking that sometimes the only people that attend Waitangi Day are the protesters, the Prime Minister, Titewhai Harawira and the navy.
>
> In my view that is less than balanced reporting. Hundreds of other people attend. Many of them make speeches. Reporting of the substance of Waitangi Day is minimal, given the media time given over to any dissension or disruption.
>
> I am actually interested to know what spokespeople from the various regions have to say about the treaty from year to year as we deal with the process of settlements which are not easy for either party. I am not interested in an annual rundown on the opinions of Titewhai Harawira, nor am I interested in coverage that ignores most of the proceedings.

There seemed to be no understanding on the part of Pākehā news workers reporting on the media ban that Ngāpuhi might have a case – that a large number of Māori (and indeed many Pākehā) feel strongly that Māori views, Māori issues and Māori tikanga have consistently been ignored, marginalized or misrepresented over a period of years. This suggests considerable insularity and ethnocentrism on the part of the mainstream media. Derek Fox argued in subsequent radio coverage that Māori have chosen to withdraw from mainstream media, and that they do not write letters to the editor to complain about coverage of things Māori. Other Māori informants have told me the same thing over a number of years. But there is now an increasing body of literature, written by both Māori and Pākehā, about the representation of Māori in the New Zealand media. Most of it is very accessible, and one would have expected that news management would try to keep abreast of these issues. Yet Mark Jennings, TV3's head of news and current affairs, said in a TV3 news story 'You don't just kick people out for no real reason'.

Who holds the power?

There appeared to be no understanding by mainstream media of relations of power. Gavin Ellis, speaking in Mark Sainsbury's story for TV1, said 'Imagine if the reverse was the case and other organizations said they were not going to allow Māori media to be present, there would be righteous indignation at the very suggestion of it, and I think we should take the same attitude here'. This totally ignores the

differences in power that the two media have in terms of agenda setting, and the reason for the ban in the first place. It also ignores issues of institutional racism on the part of the mainstream media. By institutional racism I mean the perpetuation by organizations, institutions or agencies of policies and practices which operate to the advantage of the powerful group and to the disadvantage of particular racial/ethnic/cultural groups

Todorov's narrative theory is once again useful. Mainstream media saw the present state of their news coverage of things Māori as the state of equilibrium, and the ban by Ngāpuhi as the disruptive force. Equilibrium would presumably be restored if the ban were to be lifted. For those who instigated the ban, the mainstream news coverage was itself the state of disequilibrium, and equilibrium presumably would not be restored until mainstream media showed themselves capable of bicultural reporting.

What television news's response to the Ngāpuhi's media ban revealed, then, is its continuing underlying monoculturalism. The ban was attacked on the grounds of the media's 'Right to Know', but this principle has been selectively applied by the media itself, as the public's right to know about Māori perspectives and Māori tikanga is denied.

Postscript

This article was originally a short paper given at a conference in February 2003. As I re-write it in late 2005 there seem to be reasons to be optimistic and reasons to be pessimistic. In September 2003 Hone Edwards took up a newly created position as TVNZ's Kaihautū, or guide on dealing with Māori Maori charter issues. Edwards is concerned at the nature of news coverage of Waitangi issues, and has been keen to instigate plans for people from TVNZ news (including Bill Ralston, Head of News and Current Affairs) to meet with Ngāpuhi prior to Waitangi Day. That this has not happened seems to be because of communication difficulties with and within Ngāpuhi. On TV3, Māori reporter Mereana Hond has been given considerable encouragement to report positive stories about te ao Māori, and stories which establish a wider context. This year at Te Tii marae the second item in TV3's bulletin was a report by Hond on the significance of the hui at Te Tii marae, in the course of which she observed that politicians and protestors were merely a sideshow to the real business. Nevertheless, the main stories and the headlines still focused on the politicians and protestors, and the main story was the *lack* of conflict.

Ngāpuhi once again announced a ban on non-Māori media in 2004, but reaction to this in television news took second place to the reception at Te Tii marae of Prime Minister Helen Clark (under fire from Māori because of the Government's plans on the foreshore and seabed) and Leader of the Opposition Don Brash (under fire from Māori because of his recent speech at Orewa setting out National Party proposals on Māori "privilege").

It seems appropriate to end this paper with a comment on the overwhelmingly positive response Brash's speech had from many Pākehā New Zealanders. Support for the National Party increased 17% in political polls over subsequent weeks. Stuart Allan, writing about racism in the news, suggests:

> The intricate, often subtle ways in which white perspectives shape the framing of news reports concerning race-related issues can have a profound effect on public attitudes to racial discrimination (as well as on those of government policy makers), an effect which an otherwise conscientious white newsworker might never have intended. (1999: 165)

I would argue that both these statements have been relevant to New Zealand for some time, and are particularly relevant now, at a time when the strength of feeling from Pākehā seems to be causing the present Government to re-think its stance on Treaty issues and policies that might be considered to be privileging Māori. While, as Allan suggests, this may not have been the intention of those newsworkers concerned, news coverage like that of the media ban works to 'reproduce the dominant position of the white majority within a racially divided society'.

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