From private performance to the public stage: Reconsidering ‘staged authenticity’ and ‘traditional’ performances at the Pasifika Festival

Jared Mackley-Crump

Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, NEW ZEALAND

Abstract

Over the past sixty years, the phenomenal growth of international tourism has been paralleled by the phenomenal growth in festivals held across the world (Gibson and Connell 2005a), and the increasing academic attention given over to understanding this human phenomenon. Performances of culture in tourist settings are often viewed as inauthentic, staged purely for the benefit of tourists and not reflective of the everyday, contemporary lives of those performing. This article presents a new approach contesting this enduring perspective, best known through the notion of ‘staged authenticity’ (MacCannell 1973).

Drawing on research conducted in the diasporic Pacific festival space in Aotearoa New Zealand, this article focuses on how those from within the festivalised communities view their performances. This method gives agency to the actors, allowing them to define performances and festivals from an emic perspective. From this perspective, performances of musical traditions challenge the notion of staged authenticity. Rather than representing material performed purely for the festival environment and for cultural tourists, the diasporic
festival space represents a movement of material from largely homogenous community contexts into the multicultural public sphere. Furthermore, the contextually appropriate notion of nonlinear temporal relations shows how these performance traditions function contemporaneously, as an important component of Pacific cultures and the current performance repertoires of the communities from which they come. This notion in particular challenges the idea that touristic performances represent a (re)staging of authenticity. Rather, traditional musical forms represent one way in which diasporic Pacific communities authentically represent themselves within the festival space.

**Keywords:** festivalisation; Pasifika; New Zealand; traditional music; staged authenticity

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**Introduction**

Pacific festivals in New Zealand celebrate the Pacific cultures and peoples who migrated there resident during the second half of the twentieth century. From tentative beginnings in 1972, the establishment of schools-driven, performance-oriented Polyfests from the mid-1970s, and the impact of the multi-sensory consumption of the Pasifika Festival from 1993, there are now around twenty-five annual festivals spread from the northern-most towns to the bottom of the South Island.

Festivals are a ubiquitous feature of human societies, throughout the ages. Notions of ritualistic and collective celebrations of harvests and seasonal cycles, religious activities and worship, family and tribal/community rites and life-cycles represent festivals as they are historically understood (e.g. Falassi 1987; Young, Bowles and Wilson 2011). The post-World War II West experienced a phenomenal growth in the number and type of festivals, a trend that continues apace and is increasingly global (e.g. Connell and Gibson 2005a; Ryan 2006). While many of these historic forms remain central, and the notion of collective celebration remains integral to understanding the meaning of festivity, the scope, form and function of festivals have been significantly expanded. They are now also commercial enterprises, and we have festivalised numerous aspects of our lifestyles and the places in which we live. Music, food, and arts festivals, and festivals centred around many other specific interests are increasingly a part of the events calendars of towns and cities across the world. Places now compete in a global marketplace to be known as ‘eventful cities’ (Richards and Palmer 2010), using event strategies to attract prestige, investment and people in an age where urban

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development is driven by ‘experience economies’ (Pine and Gilmore 1999). The increasing global movement of peoples adds another dimension to the festival landscapes where these communities now reside. Migrants bring with them celebrations and festivals, and these are transplanted into new home environments. As a tool for celebrating cultural diversity and promoting social cohesion, the growth of multicultural and diasporic festivals attest to the fact that our societies continue to grow ever more distinctly diverse (Duffy 2005).

This article is about the performance of ‘traditional’ musics within the diasporic Pacific festival space. To date, there has been little theoretical exploration in this area, in spite of the growth of interest, across disciplines, focused on understanding them. It addresses and adds to the ongoing debate about the nature of cultural performances in tourist settings. An influential perspective is that of ‘staged authenticity’ (MacCannell 1973), where cultural performances are viewed as inauthentically recreated, as staged purely for the benefit of tourists. In this article I present a counter view, focusing on the source of material and context of performances, and provide a contextually-appropriate reconsideration of the nature of musical traditions in festival settings. This method differs from prior research that employ an etic analytical approach; in this respect it is not an analysis of festival performances. I argue that an emic point of view, based on the words of those from within the communities being staged, illuminates new perspectives.

The field for this study is the annual Pasifika Festival, held on the second Saturday of March at Western Springs Park, Auckland. As part of a larger doctoral project, ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in 2010. This involved working with the festival team for two weeks prior to the event, and conducting approximately fifty interviews with organisers and performers afterwards. Performances at the festival are characterised by the overall imperative that a balance between traditional and contemporary musics is presented. They represent a current-day rendering of diasporic Pacific cultural expression, displaying the ongoing importance of ancestral and homeland cultures alongside musical forms that represent the globalised realities of Pacific peoples in the twenty-first century. In this article, though, I focus on ‘traditional’ performances, as it is these that challenge the notion of ‘staged authenticity’. Rather than a (re)staging of authenticity, I argue that festival performances represent a transference of musics from community contexts into the festivalised public sphere; it is the context that changes, not the ‘authenticity’ of the material. To provide a theoretical context, I conclude by considering the notion of time to argue for a reconsideration of how (staged) authenticity and these performances are viewed. Pacific cultures are rooted in nonlinear conceptions of time, where the past is situated in dynamic relation to the present and future (e.g. Hau’ofa 2008). Therefore, rather than a re-creation of culture, related to a receding linear past, the performance of traditional musics represents a continuity that provides contemporary meaning in the creation and evolution of Pacific

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2 In this specific cultural context, reference to the performance of musical traditions is taken to explicitly incorporate dance, as one generally does not exist without the other, as well as notions of oratory and storytelling. Musical traditions and traditional musics are also used interchangeably as they essentially refer to the same phenomenon. The latter is generally used, though, to emphasise the music as a text, the former the tradition as a cultural practice.
cultures and identities in new diasporic homes. To begin, however, I offer an overview of pertinent literature and provide context for this research.

**Pacific Migration and Festivalisation**

There is no room here to account for the complex history of New Zealand’s relationships with the Pacific, and the factors that led to the large-scale migration of Pacific peoples in the 1960s and ‘70s. While this information is richly detailed elsewhere (e.g. Macpherson 2001, 2006; Fairbairn-Dunlop 2003; Walrond 2009), I offer a brief overview here. Drawing on historical relationships, the New Zealand government looked to the Pacific in the 1960s to fill labour shortages created by its rapidly expanding economy. At the same time, Pacific nations had experienced dramatic population increases that intensified pressures on limited resources and the availability of paid work. This provided impetus for those considering emigration as an alternative.

Migration primarily occurred from Sāmoa, the Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau, Tonga and Fiji. As favourable economic conditions persisted, the inflow continued, and the government ignored the fact that a number were overstaying their visas; migrants found work easily and the oversupply of labour kept wages from rising. However, the economic recession of the mid-1970s caused Pacific migration and ‘overstayers’ to become a political issue. After this time, migration was restricted, and the notorious ‘dawn raids’ era saw thousands of Pacific Islanders evicted from the country, an era that is well documented (e.g. Macpherson 2006). Economic stagnation continued into the 1980s, and the introduction of drastic neoliberal economic reforms, ‘Rogernomics’, further marginalised the position of Pacific communities; impacts that are still felt today. By the 1980s, however, Pacific peoples had become an established part of New Zealand’s demographic make-up. With birth rates considerably higher than average, the Pacific population continued to grow rapidly. From a number of just over 2,000 in 1945, people with Pacific ancestry now represent some 7.4% of New Zealand’s 4.25 million residents. Auckland, the field for this research, is commonly referred to as the ‘largest Polynesian city in the world’ (e.g. te Heuheu 2009). It is home to more than two-thirds of this 7.4%; some 200,000 Pacific people comprise around 15% of the city’s population.

Much of the literature about festivals in the Pacific is written with a focus on festivals as sites of identity construction and the maintenance of cultural traditions in the face of tourism and modernity (e.g. Bossen 2000; Bendrups 2008; Phipps 2010). These themes are also prevalent in much of the literature written about the largest regional event, the quadrennial Festival of

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3 To provide some context, I grew up and was schooled and socialised in Porirua, which has the second-largest Pacific community in Aotearoa, after Manukau/South Auckland. The son of a photographer, I often accompanied him to the community events (weddings, for example) he documented. With Tokelauan siblings, I also spent a lot of time attending a variety of Tokelauan community gatherings.


Pacific Arts (e.g. Simons 1989; Hereniko 1994; Brown 2001; Moulin 2005; Kuwahara 2006). Adrienne Kaeppler (1987, 165), for example, believes that the festival is an avenue through which Pacific peoples have come to feel a sense of shared cultural identity, calling it a ‘celebration of island brotherhood but separate ethnic identity carried out in an atmosphere of sharing’, a position Barbara Glowczewski and Rosita Henry’s later study reaffirms (2007). Pacific festivals in New Zealand are under-researched, and what exists largely avoids cultural identity (but see Mackley-Crump 2015). A small body of work focuses on the Auckland Secondary Schools Māori and Pacific Islands Festival, better known as Polyfest (e.g. Manu’atu and Kēpa 2002; Kornelly 2008). Its nature as a festival staged primarily by and for high school students means that these texts are predominantly contextualised within educational frameworks. More nuanced is Ruth Talo’s Masters thesis on the Pasifika Festival, the central festival studied here (2008). Talo’s work situates music and dance as one facet in a cultural geography that includes food, crafts, festival villages, stages, and sponsors. She touches lightly on the processes involved in the creation of diverse cultural identities, in what she calls a ‘grand arena of Pacific-ness’ (Talo 2008, 128). She notes that performances cater to a variety of different audiences and tastes, demonstrating the diversity of music within Pacific communities (2008, 71–75) and concludes that Pasifika can be seen to perpetuate and encourage the maintenance of Pacific cultures.

Cultural Performances in Tourist Settings

Performances at Pacific festivals fit within ongoing debates about touristic performances of culture. Here, MacCannell’s seminal work on ‘staged authenticity’ (1973) is central, and has been frequently employed since its publication (e.g. Cohen 1979; Halewood and Hannam 2001; Ckhabra et al. 2003; Wang 2007). MacCannell’s (1973, 590, 595) central thesis is that touristic settings complicate the distinction ‘between mere acts and authentic expressions of true characteristics’, and result in performances that carry a ‘staged quality’ and an ‘aura of superficiality’. Consequently, these performances become ‘morally inferior’ staged recreations of culture, as compared to ‘mere experience’ (1973, 599). Rather than an unwarranted wholesale critique, I want to focus here specifically on MacCannell’s ideas about performance material and the assertion that performances are designed to accommodate cultural tourists. Where MacCannell suggests performances are detached from the everyday culture, I argue the opposite: that Pasifika represents a transferal, by and large, of cultural performances from largely homogenous community contexts to the multicultural public sphere.

In a Pacific context, Christopher Balme has employed MacCannell’s work to critique the ‘negotiated authenticity’ of the Hawai‘i’s Polynesian Cultural Center. Through an analysis of performances at three of the Center’s villages – Sāmoa, Tonga and Hawai‘i – Balme (1998, 64) argues that actors perform particular cultural identities that are ‘vaguely pre-contact’ and

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6 Most articles about the Festival of Pacific Arts are generally written around a specific incarnation of the festival, and address certain issues within that event (see, for example, Cochrane 2002; Zeplin 2003; Yamamoto 2006; Yasui 2006, and a special volume of the Pacific Arts journal (no. 25, 2002), edited by Karen Stevenson).
authenticated through ‘ethnographic expertise’. For him the Center is an example of the ‘performative primitive’ allowing itself to be ‘staged and commercially exploited’ (1998, 56). It should be noted upfront that there are vast differences between the Polynesian Cultural Center and the Pasifika Festival: one features paid actors, is commercial in operation and reliant on tourists; the other is community driven, largely publicly funded, and is a space of both tourist and community interaction. As Balme (1998, 57) asserts, staged cultural displays are likely to be received as less authentic the less communities are perceived to be involved and the more commerce appears to be an imperative (1998, 57). The Center is ultimately far more intimately tied to Hawai‘i’s tourism industry and touristic constructions of ‘exoticness’. Indeed, Jane Desmond (1997, 102; see also 1999) critiques Hawai‘i’s tourism industry for continuing to perpetuate colonial legacies and narratives, naturalising difference by allowing tourists to ‘gaze’ upon the bodily ‘native’. Amy Stillman and Peter Phipps (1999 and 2010 respectively) offer more positive perspectives of culture as staged at the Merrie Monarch Festival, also a part of Hawai‘i’s tourism offerings, noting its centrality in the maintenance of the hula tradition and as a potent space for strengthening indigenous agency. And, even in this respect, Desmond (1997, 84) agrees, noting that tourist shows are not simply imitations of “the real thing” but feature songs and dances performed in community contexts elsewhere. Rather than the strict dichotomy of MacCannell’s front and back stage, she asserts a continuum, with a degree of overlap. The idea, then, that Pacific cultural performances in tourist spaces are exploitative of ‘performing primitives’ is already complex and contested.

A limitation of the abovementioned works is that they analyse cultural performances as texts, excluding the performer perspective. I employ the opposite position, placing performers at the centre of the research. This position is contextualised by employing literature about Māori cultural performance in tourist settings. This literature is not only richly detailed, but provides a setting that is fittingly similar in both New Zealand and Pacific contexts, albeit indigenous rather than diasporic. The texts describing Māori performance contexts also depict a tourist setting closer to those about which Balme and MacCannell write, while offering different conclusions.

The performance of Māori culture in touristic settings forms part of a larger experience of visiting a marae (meeting house). This involves being welcomed via a pōwhiri (formal welcoming ceremony), watching and taking part in cultural performances, learning about other aspects of Māori culture, and ending with a shared meal, usually the earth-cooked hangi. Aurélie Condevaux (2009) provides a model for using the voices of performers to uncover the meanings that can be attributed to performances of ‘traditional’ musics. For the ‘actors’, performances function as vehicles for cultural transmission and identity creation. Furthermore, this is their most significant function, as opposed to satisfying the preconceived expectations of visitors. While subtle differences were identified between tourist and community contexts, performances were fundamentally the same and performers did not dismiss tourist performances as cultural recreations: the main difference came from audience and context, not the degree of authenticity of the material performed (see also Taylor 2001; McIntosh and Johnson 2005). As Condevaux (2009, 147) notes, authenticity is not defined by ‘an exact reproduction of practices. What is presented in the shows, even if it requires
adaptation, is considered authentic if it is done with passion’. She concludes by arguing against criticising the adaptation of culture for the tourist stage, calling it ‘a no more fruitful approach than criticizing the dynamics inherent in culture and identity as hypocritical, insincere or inauthentic’ (2009, 156). Scholars, she asserts, do not necessarily have the expertise to judge what is authentic, and to describe tourist shows as inauthentic practices in which people are merely embedded is ultimately unsatisfactory.

Condevaux’s perspective offers a nuanced approach to the ‘mere experience’/‘staged authenticity’ binary that MacCannell proposed. The stage can be seen as providing a stimulus to maintain performance traditions and connect with notions of culture; tourists are implicated in the process of identity formation. Furthermore, material presented is not profoundly different to that performed in other non-tourist, supposedly more authentic settings. The question I seek to answer, then, is does ‘staged authenticity’ act as sufficient theoretical framework for understanding the performances of ‘traditional’ musics at the Pasifika Festival?

**Contextualizing the Field: The Pasifika Festival**

The inaugural Pasifika Festival was held in 1993 as a partnership between the Auckland City Council and SPINDA, the South Pacific Island Nations Development Agency. The idea came from former journalist Roy Vaughan, who spent two decades covering maritime and Pacific affairs, and then two years working for the South Pacific Forum in Fiji. Returning to Auckland in 1991 he created a proposal for a South Pacific Week, to be held in conjunction with that year’s Pacific Islands Media Association conference. With timing constraints proving insurmountable, he instead contacted consular and community leaders and formed SPINDA, refining his proposal into a festival that comprised a community day, a fashion show, and a number of smaller events.

The inaugural festival was held from 6-12 March 1993, with the community day attracting 30,000 people. The festival grew quickly, attracting an estimated 40-50,000 people in its second year. In 1997, a council restructure resulted in the management of Pasifika being brought ‘in-house’, into a newly created events team. Having also experienced rapid growth, the fashion show was transformed into its own standalone event. During this time, the popular village concept was also introduced and, as event coordinator at the time, Pitsch Leiser, described it, the intention was to

create little pockets of particular identities, so you could go to Sāmoa, you could go to Fiji, you could go to Tonga. And the idea was that you would start to recognise the diversity within Pasifika…particular foods, particular rhythms.
The festival continued to grow into the twenty-first century, eventually reaching the 100-200,000 numbers that have become commonplace (see figures 1 and 2). The number of villages grew to eleven in 2014, representing the ten most populous Pacific communities in Auckland – Sāmoa, the Cook Islands, Tonga, Fiji, Niue, Tuvalu, Tokelau, Kiribati, Tahiti and newly added Hawai‘i – and indigenous Māori. Each has its own stage, and performances also take place on two other general stages. With the growth of the villages, the main international stage was eventually pushed outside of Western Springs Park, into its outer fields. An opening night concert, introduced in the 1990s and largely staged as a ‘variety’ concert, was reoriented with a community development focus at the time of fieldwork, as a way of creating links between community elders and culture bearers, on the one hand, and youth, on the other. Finally, it should be noted that the issue of community ownership, the degree to which local communities are involved in the festival’s organisation and direction, has been problematic since its inception. This remains an issue, despite efforts to change this perception and increase levels of community input.

Figure 1: Map of Pasifika Festival, 1995. Courtesy of Auckland City Council

The opening night concert was subsequently discontinued in 2013, and the main festival day extended to into a second day, so that it now takes place over an entire weekend.
Negotiating the ‘Traditional’/‘Contemporary’ Dichotomy

As previously noted, this article is drawn from doctoral research about the festivalisation of Pacific cultures. It involved ethnography and a substantial number of interviews with festival organisers and performers. Performers were drawn from each of the participating villages (and other subject positions) to ensure a range of opinions were captured that covered the diversity of Pacific cultures displayed (see Mackley-Crump 2015).

Performances at the Pasifika Festival are characterised by one overall imperative: that the festival contains a mixture of ‘traditional’ and ‘contemporary’ cultural expressions (see, for example, figures 3 and 4). It is important to note, from the outset, that these terms are problematic (Mackley-Crump 2015, 137–143). They have long been debated by scholars, especially in indigenous contexts, and are bound to the broader debate about notions of authenticity (e.g. Gibson and Connell 2005b). In a Pacific context, the impassioned debates that erupted in the 1980s, around the usage of cultural traditions in line with issues of globalisation, tourism, and ideas of ‘invented traditions,’ serve as a prime example of the contentious nature of cultural politics (e.g. Handler and Linnekin 1984; Keesing 1989; Linnekin 1990; Trask 1991). This dialogue is still relevant today (see, for example, Hanlon and White 2000, and DeLoughrey 2010, who offer pertinent summaries). However, in this research context, the terms ‘traditional’ and ‘contemporary’ were employed uniformly by
research participants, and reflect how they are used more broadly in media and public discourse. ‘Traditional’ generally refers to music and musical styles brought to New Zealand, which carries a degree of authority and/or antiquity, is performed largely within communities, and is not commercial. By contrast, ‘contemporary’ refers to music situated within popular music styles and performed largely, although not always, in English. This division, though, is not entirely unproblematic. At festivals like Pasifika, music is newly composed in what are ‘traditional’ styles. Additionally, the incorporation of ‘traditional’ elements by ‘contemporary’ musicians also means that their music occupies an unclearly defined musical space, and it is here that usage of the terms experiences some slippage. Furthermore, a central premise of the argument presented here is that notions of traditions as only belonging to the past and having little contemporary intrinsic cultural value are misguided.

The terms are generally employed by the communities and wider public/media discourse to refer to stylistic markers, and can therefore be somewhat although not entirely divorced from inferring meaning about the contemporary function of music traditions (i.e. ‘traditional’ does not mean only relating to a receding past and not contemporaneously valued). Musical styles that migrated to New Zealand are ‘traditional’, in spite of age, antiquity or contemporaneous use. The inclusion of Western instruments, styles, or production values marks music as ‘contemporary.’ Within the festival space, traditional singing and dancing are performed alongside contemporary popular forms, dominated by the genres of reggae, R&B and hip-hop. Choral singing in the Christian tradition is also featured throughout, and popular music groups performing Christian messages present a contemporary flavour. Besides styles indigenous to particular cultures, performances also reflect specific nuances, such as Bollywood dancing demonstrating the Indian-ness of Fiji, and brass bands having a particular association with Tonga. The above demonstrates how the festival already reflects a history of non-indigenous Pacific cultural influences that have become indigenised, or associated with certain Pacific nations. Alongside these, contemporary forms outside of the ‘popular’ and situated within ‘contemporary art’ also appear, such as performances of opera by a growing pool of emerging talent.

This overall cultural mélange provides a representation of diasporic Pacific cultural expression as it is currently situated; that is, performances of culture identified as intrinsically of Pacific origin mixed with other cultural forms of non-Pacific origin, performed by Pacific peoples. Although some blurring exists when the terms come into contact, as above, ‘traditional’ music styles and performances function to reflect the importance of ancestral links and ongoing connections to homelands and notions of Pacific cultures; ‘contemporary’ musics reflect the reality of the twenty-first century New Zealand environment. The distinction therefore pivots around perceived essence as well as function. But it also offers a way of understanding the festival space as staging an authentic representation of the diasporic Pacific cultures of New Zealand, of reflecting their contemporary spatial manifestation.
Figure 3: Performance of *fatale* in the Tokelau village, Pasifika Festival, 2010. Photo by Jared Mackley-Crump.

Figure 4: Performance of hip-hop in the Tokelau village, Pasifika Festival, 2010. Photo by Jared Mackley-Crump.
The Staging of ‘Traditional’ Performances

The focus here, however, is on the performance of musical traditions. One of the first things I learned about, upon beginning my fieldwork, was the purposeful reorientation of the opening night concert. Where it had previously been a ‘variety’-style concert, and featured performances primarily in ‘popular’ music styles, it now contained collaborations between young people and their village elders, who worked together to compose new songs in traditional styles based around the festival theme, in 2010 the frangipani flower and the centipede. The Fiji performers, for example, incorporated elements of *meke iri* (fan dance), the Cook Islanders the rhythmically frenetic *ura/hura*, and the Tokelauans the characteristically intensity-building (in speed, pitch and volume) *fatale*. Aside from the rhythmic spectacle of the Cook Islanders, and the culturally-related Tahitians, the inclusion of a *siva afi* (fire knife dance) into the Sāmoan performance provided the other high point of audible audience appreciation. At the rehearsal I met the Tuvalu village coordinator, who told me that they had many myths about the frangipani they were able to incorporate into their song. Furthermore, the internationally-recognised Tuvaluan/Tokelauan band, Te Vaka, popular on the ‘World music’ festival circuit, had a song on their latest album about Tuvalu, and they had been given permission to incorporate that into their performance as well.

At the festival proper, a sense of familiarity unfurled. Walking village-to-village, I was surprised by the number of not only songs, but also music/dance styles in general that I recognised intrinsically: Sāmoan songs like *minoi minoi* and *Sāmoana*, for example, *fa’ataupati* (slap dances) and seated *sasa*, Cook Islands string bands, and Tongan *ma’ulu’ulu* and *fa’ahiula* (seated dances). They were styles I had seen at or learned to perform for school *pōwhiri* (the welcome ceremony we would perform for visitors that included songs/dances from other Pacific cultures); moreover, they were song and dance styles I recognised from the various communities amongst which I had associated. Observing the audiences, members would sing along because they knew the words; these were their community songs. Often the boundary between audience and performer dissolved, with people rising from their seats to join performances from where they stood. In one particularly memorable example, the MC in the Tokelauan village decided that the performing youth group needed bolstering. She told the audience, ‘I know you know these songs,’ and asked for people to take the stage and join the group, before calling people by name, including her own mother. After a period of good-natured jostling, the enlarged group began its performance. This blurring of the audience-performer divide, common in Pacific contexts, supports the notion that the repertoire is familiar to both performer and audience, and was perfectly encapsulated by the Kiribati village coordinator, who later told me:

> at the end of the day, when they are [performing], people from the other communities, they end up joining; they end up singing. It’s not like, oh no, it’s not my group, in the end, they can’t help it.
A further demonstration of this came via Vou, a group from Fiji who performed on both the International and Fiji village stages. The performances were markedly different. The International stage performance appeared more formal and structured, and contained elements of ‘contemporary dance’, in a Western Art sense. The Fiji stage performance felt casual and less serious and it elicited knowing reactions from audience members, including moments of humour that befuddled the non-Fijians (myself included). It was more nuanced, more structured for an audience of cultural ‘insiders.’ Speaking afterwards to the lead choreographer Sachiko Miller, this observation was confirmed: ‘we still did traditional meke and stuff,’ she noted of the village performance, however there were items that ‘an international audience wouldn’t understand, but a Fijian audience would.’ A ‘taki song’, which references a particular Fijian drinking practice, is an example of material consciously chosen to reflect this ‘implied audience’ (Livingstone 1998), as Miller explained:

[It’s] about the things that people do in Fiji every day after work and because Fijian people know exactly what he is singing about and it’s so ridiculous, they all thought it was really funny, rolling around and laughing and were like, ‘that’s so true’, because they got it.

Another familiar aspect involved the ways in which some performances unfolded, such as in the Cook Islands village. Here, towards the end of some performances, dancers would bring Audience members onstage to dance with them, a move designed to create a light-hearted, humorous effect. *Ura piani*, more known locally as ‘around the world,’ is a characteristic associated with the Cook Islands, and occurs in both tourist and community contexts (Alexeyeff 2009, 77–78). Finally, an example from my fieldwork notebook highlights the similarities between Tuvaluan and Tokelauan performance contexts:

I am in the Tuvalu village to watch traditional performances by the Nukufetau community…interestingly, the community has eschewed the stage in favour of the ground in front of it, where younger members stand in two rows while older members are seated around the leader (and large box drum) in front of them. Rows of seats have been set up for elderly community members, while others stand around the perimeter. The style is *fatale*, of course, and it sounds, looks and is being staged exactly as I remember Tokelauan community events I attended growing up, apart from the distinctive sound provided by the empty ‘cabin bread’ steel container-cum-drum, which is a distinctively Tokelauan evolution.

**The Pasifika Festival and ‘Staged Authenticity’**

My hunch, then, was that ‘traditional’ performances within the festival space represent material transferred from often private community contexts into the public sphere, and I
wanted to test this theory in post-festival interviews. In these discussions, festival organisers,
village coordinators and performers alike were unanimous that songs and dances performed
were not specially (re)staged for the festival context. Rather, they are fundamentally the same
as those performed at other community events and celebrations. They do not represent
repertoire re-presented in a one-off fashion for the festival and its cultural tourists; they are
songs and dances containing Pacific cultures and stories that may be ‘traditional’ in style or
have a degree of antiquity, but otherwise provide contemporaneous meanings in their current-
day performance. Indeed, the new songs composed in ‘traditional’ styles for the opening
night concert are an apt example.

Reflecting this consensus well, the Tokelau village coordinator noted:

A lot of our culture, you will know through our songs and dances, ‘cause a lot of the songs
we sing are about what’s happening in Tokelau and what Tokelau is all about…The songs
have meanings; they’re not just songs. They’re actually explaining all about Tokelau.

A Tuvalu village performer suggested that, at the festival, the performances function to serve
the performers more than the audiences:

A lot of the dances that we perform we do anyway, at our own events and stuff. Some are
very old traditional ones, some are newer, but they’re the same. When we perform within
our own community, we get into our dance, we enjoy it…when we go to perform at
[Pasifika], the men are beating just as hard, the women are doing [the same] things, and I
notice that they’re not doing it as much for the audience as they’re just getting into
it…they’re not doing it for the Pākehās [Europeans], they’re doing it for themselves.

This recalls Condevaux (2009, 155) being told, within Māori tourist settings: ‘we enjoy it, not
be because of that [the tourist presence], but because we just like to sing and dance and it’s
actually a bonus that [other] people like it as well.’

Echoing her performer, the Tuvalu village coordinator explained that dancing and singing is
the way entertainment occurs at community events, and the festival becomes the public
display of that norm. She did note, however, that very old songs and dances, called
fakaseasea, are not often performed at the festival due to their antiquity. Similarly, a Fijian
performer noted that songs performed within the church on Sunday are solely of a religious
nature. By contrast, the ‘songs that we perform at Pasifika are a celebration of our land, our
genealogy,’ although she pointed out that these songs were performed at other community
events.

Some noted small differences between festival performances and other community contexts.
These were not so much in the material performed, however, but rather in the way it was
performed. As a Kiribati village performer told me:

Outside of Pasifika, we perform at independence celebrations and elsewhere. They are the
same, but different. They are the same sorts of dances, but they are a different type of
seriousness. When performing within our own community, it’s serious, as you are
performing for Kiribati people who will know the dance and will have expectations.
This notion was supported by her village coordinator, who described how performers view the festival context as less serious:

I always try to tell [performers] that you have to have the same passion and commitment that you have for national day; they are very passionate…and practise for that. If you see them dance, it’s just like you’re back in the islands…they look at it differently.

The informal nature of community performance contrasts with the formal nature in which villages are opened and closed, another characteristic transferred from community contexts. Each village features its own community-organised opening and closing ceremonies, which include speeches and prayer, welcoming of official dignitaries and special guests, and the performance of hymns and other formal items (such as brass bands in the Tonga village). The hymns are strictly religious in nature during this formal, ceremonial part of the festival, and this reflects the importance and continued central role of the church within Pacific communities. It also replicates how community events outside of the festival are also characterized by religious considerations. These ceremonies are not closed community events though, but take place within the context of the festival. Any attendee is free to observe the formalities, as I witnessed while watching the opening ceremonies at the Tuvalu and neighboring Sāmoa villages. The Sāmoa village coordinator later reflected on the formalities of opening the village:

We always open up with an ava ceremony, and we get the church to do that in the beginning. That’s just a cultural thing that we need to do…All our dignitaries are involved in the ava ceremony on the day; it’s just protocol.

The consensus of participants, in considering the Pasifika Festival and its performances of traditional musics, was that there is no fundamental difference between community and festival contexts, backstage and front, just as Condevaux (2009) asserts for Māori touristic performances. Although participants noted small differences in how the material was treated, with regards to the serious nature of particular non-festival community performances, this was not universal and only applied to certain contexts, such as Independence Day celebrations. The material is taken directly from living repertoires performed within the broader communities; the songs and dances are the same as those performed within other contexts, such as community celebrations and church functions. In short, performances at Pasifika fundamentally represent a transferal of material from predominantly private community contexts into the festivalised public sphere. The notion of ‘staged authenticity’ does not fit the festival space because the authenticity of the performance is not staged. As participants reflected, although the festival represents a different context, and it is true that this somewhat represents a negotiation in terms of the how and space of the performance, performances at Pasifika otherwise resemble and reflect the musics that are performed within the communities outside of the festival. And this is the essence of the argument presented here: that the material is an authentic representation of contemporary community musical practices and not, as the ‘staged authenticity’ thesis has it, material retrieved from musical
archives for the purposes of entertaining cultural tourists, and to evoke ‘authentic expressions of true characteristics’ (MacCannell 1973, 590). In other words, the authenticity of the material has not been negotiated.

The Nonlinear Nature of Pacific Cultures

It is clear that the notion of ‘staged authenticity’, where touristic performances of musical traditions are considered inauthentic re-creations, re-fashioned and re-packaged, and disconnected from the everyday social relations of a culture, is challenged by the Pacific festival space. The concept of ‘staged authenticity’ does not adequately account for musical traditions performed within Pacific communities that are later transferred to the festival space. In realising this was so, I began to contemplate notions of the past and the present, and started to consider and explore differing perceptions of time. Aligning with the opinions expressed by participants, I concluded that the role of ‘traditional’ musics within Pacific communities could be contextualised by applying a nonlinear understanding of time and cultural evolution; that differing perceptions of temporal relations could illuminate how and why the ‘staged authenticity’ thesis did not relate to the Pacific festival space of my study. The remainder of the article addresses this assertion.

Our understanding of traditional musics as something from the past, recent or distant, real or imagined, is based on a conception of time as linear and chronological, and has been dominated by Western musicological writing. Traditional and folk musics, therefore, become associated with a fixed point in time, continually receding and becoming less relevant to contemporary contexts. In Chronemics, the study of how societies use time, a broad distinction is made between monochronic and polychronic cultures (Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey 1988). In monochronic cultures, generally held to be Western European-rooted cultures, perceptions of time are rooted in the Industrial Revolution, viewed in terms of linear development and the organisation of time around the needs of capital. Polychronic cultures, by contrast, are more fluid, rooted in traditions, relationships, and cyclical calendars of religious and agricultural events (e.g. Cohen 1997).

Anthropological studies of time, however, have long complicated this binary. Alfred Gell (2000) argued forcefully against a division between time as either practical and progressively linear, or ideologically circular. He noted that the cyclical is not always ideological. Within societies rooted in so-called circular time, where past-present-future is not perceived as a linear sequence, there still exists a sense of schedule that coordinates activities: ‘after all, agriculture everywhere is cyclical and repetitive, year after year…[providing] a practical framework for planning (Gell 2000, 259–260). Furthermore, if time were truly cyclical, there would be no point to the ritualised renewal observations that anthropologists have applied to the ethnographic Other; the world would be constantly renewed regardless. Rather, he proposed a focus on the temporal relations of social life, of time-use within cultures and

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8 There is no room here to enter into an exploration of this debate, but see, for example, Bohlman 1988.
9 See Postill 2002 on the globalisation and subsequent pervasiveness of Clock and Calendar Time (CCT)
societies, because he sees elements of both linearity and circularity within them.\(^9\) It is thus a matter of perception, and the idea of division becomes moot: elements of cyclical ritual and activity remain prominent in industrialised cultures; elements of linear progression are present in non-industrial societies. Another key scholar, Nancy Munn, likewise problematised the notion of a binary temporal division. For her, time and space become time-space, a symbolic process where the present along with past and future, and the relationships between and within each, are constantly and contemporaneously being produced (Munn 1992, 116). These dimensions are realised only through the connections between people, objects and spaces, and as they are continually being re-made. Like Gell, this draws attention to temporal relations; to time not as a rigid linear or circular construct, but how time is situated and understood vis-a-vis its sociocultural setting.

In the Pacific, as a group of broadly related cultures with long histories of exchange (Hau’ofa 2008), this focus on temporal relations within sociocultural contexts becomes crucial. Pre-European contact societies revolved around cyclical calendars driven by religious ritual, rite-of-passage celebration and agricultural seasonality, although there was doubtless some sense of linear progression in observation of these cycles. The coming of European colonial powers and traders, of course, imposed Clock and Calendar Time onto existing temporal practices. In this study, any notion of a Pacific conception of time is further complicated by the fact of Pacific cultures in diasporic Westernised settings. Nonetheless, there are numerous aspects of Pacific cultures and epistemologies today that point towards the importance of nonlinearity in temporal relations, where time as a concrete construct is not emphasised, but rather time-space relations, be them of the past, present and/or future. In the context of festivals, ‘traditional’ musics, and ‘staged authenticity’, trying to ascertain the degree to which performances are refashioned from the past is, perhaps then, to approach the issue from the wrong angle. A more fruitful perspective is to consider how these performance traditions are situated within temporal relations of contemporary social life. As Rosita Henry (2008, 66) so eloquently argues,

by using the performances as a mode of cultural transmission and acquisition of embodied knowledge, indigenous people challenge the idea that their dances are a mere theatricalised presentation of fixed traditional forms. They question the dominance of a discourse that, by producing and celebrating a peculiar concept of ‘traditional culture’, might deny them the contemporary reality of their lived experiences and any agency to control this reality.

In Pacific cultures, temporal relations are shaped by a ‘tremendous recourse to the past’, and to the ‘ways of the ancestors’; the past is situated ‘in dynamic relation with the present and future rather than as an epoch fixed in time’ (Lal and Fortune 2000, 484). The past, present and future are combined into an all present and all embracing ‘now’ (Thaman 2002, 234).

\(^9\) In a similar sense, Gonzalo Iparraguirre recently proposed a focus on ‘cultural rhythmsics’, where the relationship between life rhythms and social processes ‘enables us to grasp the cultural diversity and the coexistence between different human groups, from their daily rhythms, their habits and customs, which, all integrated, constitute a cultural rhythmic’ (2015, 18).
Relationships to and conceptions of the past are therefore considered through a particular lens:

That the past is ahead, in front of us, is a conception of time that helps us retain our memories and be aware of its presence. What is behind us cannot be seen and is liable to be forgotten readily. What is ahead of us cannot be forgotten so readily or ignored, for it is in front of our minds’ eyes, always reminding us of its presence (Hau’ofa 2008, 67).

This nonlinear conception of temporal relations is reinforced by the ways in which Pacific peoples are organised genealogically, and to the lands to which genealogical ties relate. The Tongan concept of tauhi vā is salient here. Tevita Ka’ili (2005, 92) explains how tauhi vā is the practice of ‘reinforcing people’s connection in space,’ nurturing ties through the reciprocal exchange of economic and social goods. He shows how relationships are reinforced and sustained across time and space, between generations of extended families, villages, communities, and even inter-diasporically:

I came to the realisation that Tongans and Native Hawaiians are recreating a vā for themselves based on their belief that all Moanans originate from common ancestors. By linking themselves to common ancestors, Tongan and Native Hawaiians locate their genealogical connections, which create (reestablish) a vā/wā between them (Ka’ili 2005, 103-4).

Tauhi vā is a manifestation of the importance of nonlinear temporal relations in Pacific cultures, because it emphasises ongoing sociospatial relationships over a linear passing of time. These connections, from other spaces, places, and times, continue to be a foundation for the organisation of social relations in the present (Ka’ili 2005, 93). Tauhi vā also helps to contextualise the importance of the Pasifika Festival as a space in which Pacific communities come together to reaffirm a history of socio-cultural interconnectedness, both within and between communities (Mackley-Crump 2014). David Gegeo sees a related nonlinear nature in Pacific migration. Referring to space as the routes one occupies while in motion, and place as the roots from which one originates, he views return migration as circular, driven by a desire for reconnection with ancestral cultures and the ‘source of recurrent waves of cultural revitalization’ (Gegeo 2001, 496; see also Macpherson and Macpherson 2009). For Gegeo, a person can be anywhere in space and still be inextricably tied to place. Importantly, place also refers to genealogy, one’s location within a kin group that reaches both backward and forward in time (Gegeo 2001, 494).

The centrality of nonlinear temporal relations is also reflected as part of other cultural practices. Oratory, as with music traditions, is an art form through which stories, histories, and genealogies are passed through generations and continually added to as a body of knowledge. Circulated via repetition, oratory is maintained as a living entity that differs from Western perceptions of knowledge as written, fixed and made static in a process of linear evolution. As Wood (2003, 361) puts it, the ‘library of Oceanic knowledge is found in performance’. And Albert Wendt (1996) has related the Sāmoan vā (space) with the practice
of tatau (tattoo), showing how the art-form represents the idea of nonlinearity. Like Ka’ili above, he explains that vā is not space that separates but instead holds entities together in the ‘Unity-that-is-All’ (Wendt 1996). He cites the well-known expression ‘Ia teu le va’, ‘nurture the vā, the relationships’, noting the centrality of this concept in cultures that value group unity more than individualism, ‘who perceive the individual person/creature/thing in terms of group, in terms of vā, relationships’ (Wendt 1996). Vā, as with tauhi vā, is based in relationships, circular because they do not pass in linear fashion, but are re-cycled across generations and create new vā based on histories of prior vā. The practice of tatau, then, reflects this wholeness:

It is] part of everything else that is the people, the aiga [family], the village, the community, the environment, the atua [God], the cosmos…[It] relates the tufuga ta tatau [tatau master] to the person being tatau ed and their community and history and beliefs…and the future because a tatau or a malu is for the rest of your life and when you die your children will inherit its reputation and stories, your stories, stories about you and your relationships. The tatau and the malu are not just beautiful decorations (Wendt 1996).

Applying a nonlinear conception of temporal relations to traditional musics provides a different understanding of what they mean, and how they function within communities. Performances of these traditions at Pasifika, as I have demonstrated, are not re-created from a past that is no longer relevant, or retrieved from repositories that contain the long-forgotten songs of Pacific cultures, recontextualised for the benefit of a consuming public. Rather, festival performances of music traditions reflect the continuity of a music canon that remains widely performed, a part of the reality of twenty-first century Pacific communities. New songs and dances in traditional styles exist alongside those written in other times, and mix with performances of hip hop, reggae, and other contemporary styles, to create diasporic Pacific cultural expression. In this sense, alongside the ‘contemporary’, the ‘traditional’ serves a contemporaneous function, in playing a continued central role in the contemporary musical life of Pacific communities. The holistic nonlinear nature of Pacific temporal relations explains how the ‘traditional’ functions within the festival space.

The Performance of Identity in a Festivalised Space

The ethnographic fieldwork and opinions of research participants confirm the hypothesis that performances of traditional musics reflect, by and large, a transferal of performances from largely private, homogenous community contexts to the multicultural public sphere and are performed in much the same manner. Additionally, individual anecdotes demonstrate the significance of festivals allowing for the public performance of Pacific cultures, and how this assists in the process of identity creation, much in the way that Condevaux (2009) asserts. A Sāmoa village performer, for example, noted:

Knowing your language and knowing who you are is a whole part of my cultural identity, as a Sāmoan, and performing is a way of displaying this publicly, representing Sāmoan
people and encouraging our community…I think performing at [Pasifika] has influenced me a lot…I think I can actually sing more Sāmoan songs than I can speak; so, in a way, I’ve learned the language through music.

Two Niuean sisters asserted the same, with one noting that ‘the actions, and the words of the songs, portray our Island and the people’, and the other explaining that the process of learning dances increased their sense of their Niuean-ness: ‘It’s like we belong somewhere, we belong there, we know where we come from, our heritage, and our identity.’ Here, performances enhance a sense of distinct identity against a multicultural backdrop; being Niuean becomes enacted, defined, and is felt as distinct in the process. In a similar sense, a Fijian performer noted feeling ‘more Fijian’:

[It’s a] really good feeling, especially when it’s your own tradition. I mean, we don’t do it every day, even though we’re Fijian, so when you get to do something with your own culture, it just makes you feel better about yourself, like your identity, you feel like you belong somewhere…[Performing has] allowed me to be more in touch with my identity.

More than simply an identity marker though, the nature of public performance adds another level of significance, rather than detracting from their authenticity, as a Tuvalu village performer stated. For her, performing is an opportunity to

get up and represent, to show that I’m Tuvaluan, and not a Cook Islander, or Māori or Sāmoan, to put our really tiny island’s culture on the big stage…and people have often never seen our dancing. New Zealand is so used to seeing the Sāmoan sasa, the Cook Island dancing…when they see Tuvaluan, it’s something different.

In her opinion, the festival elevates smaller communities to being ‘as important in the landscape as the Sāmoan’:

You’ve got your own village, your own stage. Being a little country, or culture, within the larger Pacific groups, we’re often on the side. But Pasifika really places value on us, and says you’re as important.

Likewise, the Tuvalu village coordinator also noted the significance of performing within a public context:

Dancing is a way of entertainment in every feast and community event, so that’s where we always do that. The festival is the public display of that, and it is an incentive for our young people…I think that, sometimes they are ashamed of being, ashamed of speaking the language. The festival is a way to make them think that, ‘yeah my language is important actually, my music, my dancing’. It takes away that feeling of…it’s not hidden, it’s public, and then they will say, ‘yeah, it’s important, the whole world is out there watching it, it’s not only confined to us’.
These anecdotes support the assertion that, for performers of ‘traditional’ musics, taking part in the festival serves contemporary functions. It assists in the process of identity creation in the multicultural New Zealand context. Pacific musical traditions provide present-day understandings of Pacific cultures, and what it means to be of the Pacific (as in Sāmoan, Tuvaluan, and so forth). They are not re-creations of traditions that are static, fixed or bound, and festival performances viewed as such, as music rooted in a linear past brought back to life for public consumption, represents a misunderstanding. They can be performances rooted in other times, indeed, but they are routed through New Zealand to provide contemporary renderings of Pacific cultures (Clifford 1997). Performances at Pacific festivals are sites where the continued importance and presence of ancestry and the past are fused with the present, in order that cultures are maintained and adapt moving into the future, and that this future is continually made present. It aligns with the popular Māori proverb, ‘you have to know where you came from, to know where you are going’, which many research participants noted (Mackley-Crump 2015, 176–177). This is logical when viewed through the lens of nonlinear temporal relations. In this respect the festival space cannot represent ‘staged authenticity’, material re-negotiated and staged for public performance. It is culture that is alive, offering insight into the experience of community settings.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been twofold: firstly, to add to the growing body of work problematising the notion of ‘staged authenticity’, by exploring performances of musical traditions within the Pacific festival space; secondly, and expanding on this, to offer a point of departure for how these performances of so-called ‘traditional’ musics are viewed, by situating them within a nonlinearity that reaffirms their ongoing centrality within contemporary diasporic Pacific contexts. Although I critique the idea of ‘staged’ or ‘negotiated authenticity’, I do not discount the work of either MacCannell or Balme. Indeed, the Pasifika Festival is a particular setting, unique to its New Zealand context. I do not seek to homogenise (or essentialise) performances of Pacific cultures into a singularly phenomenon. Rather, I merely offer a new approach, based on the belief that the words of those involved in these performances offer us new perspectives.

This approach shows that performances of ‘traditional’ musics at Pasifika are fundamentally the same as those that appear at other community events and celebrations. While the context is different, the material is the same, and performances serve performers as much as those who are consuming. This challenges the notion of ‘staged authenticity’, that cultural performances in tourist settings are inauthentic re-presentations staged for the tourist gaze. The blurring of the performer/audience divide, and the ways in which the importance of religion and formal protocol are incorporated into performances, are further demonstrations of how, rather than being inauthentically (re)staged, musical traditions are simply transferred from relatively homogenous community contexts into the multicultural festivalised public sphere.
These traditions do not only represent material from the oral archives of community elders; they are, in fact, the living repertoires that represent continuity and disseminate knowledge and stories of Pacific communities, and form part of contemporary understandings of what it means to be of the Pacific in twenty-first century New Zealand. The nonlinear nature of temporal relations helps us to understand how this is so, based upon the continued importance of ancestry and performance traditions that a linear conception of time views as fixed to an ever-receding past. The notion of nonlinearity more adequately accounts for performances in the Pacific festival space because it allows for the coming together of the past, present and future in an all-encompassing now. These performances do not represent a staging of authenticity, but rather reflects New Zealand’s Pacific communities as they choose to authentically represent themselves.

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