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Imagining resistance: Māori audiences resist trauma and reimagine representations in television dramas

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ABSTRACT

Television drama has implications beyond providing entertainment and beyond immediate audience reactions and responses. Māori focus group participants in my research on local television dramas were acutely aware of how they were represented on screen. As an audience they were deeply affected and worked hard to pre-empt and address what they saw or expected to see. Against a backdrop of colonisation and negative stereotypes that pervade Māori representations, they undertook multiple forms of meaning making and negotiated complex responses. Colonial trauma emerged as a deeply felt response to representations that reminded participants of the effects of colonisation; for example, the denigration of te reo Māori (Māori language) and issues of identity. When viewing troubling depictions, participants deployed strategies of resistance, including a response I termed ‘Imagining Resistance’ where, they created backstories and interpretations for characters’ motivations and behaviours.

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Introduction

Although widely understood as entertainment, television dramas bring highly selected ‘realities’ to the screens of almost every household in Aotearoa New Zealand, influencing identity, norms, practices and the kinds of lives, communities and nation we aspire to and foster. Whether accessed via real time or one of the multiple platforms currently available, the power of television, including television drama, should not be underestimated (Ang, 1991). As an entrenched genre within a heavily mediated world (Hall, 2001) such programmes elicit audience engagement, debate, dissent and affect. Audiences experience emotional responses, make meanings and get to know themselves and others through this influential and powerful medium; but this is not unproblematic. In Aotearoa New Zealand impacts extend beyond leisure and diversion, producing reactions, that, for Māori audiences, can be acute and are enmeshed in their lived experiences of colonisation.

Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994, pp. 182–184) argue that the ‘burden of representation’ or negative effects of representation sits firmly with the oppressed. They refer to Memmi’s (2000) notion of the ‘mark of the plural’ (p. 151) that describes the

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characterisation of the colonised (with their inherent depravity and deviance) by the coloniser as a collective undifferentiated entity. Therefore, any negative individual actions by a member of that group are representative of the entire group's perceived deviance. As a result, the oppressed group becomes 'sorely overcharged with allegorical meanings', making it an almost unbearable experience (Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 182). Representations of the dominant group do not suffer the same condition and an aberrant individual member is not seen to be representative of the group as a whole. They suggest that negative stereotyping generally is hurtful but representations do not all 'exercise the same power in the world' (Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 182).

In my Aotearoa New Zealand study of local television dramas, colonial trauma emerged as a deeply felt response to representations that reminded Māori participants of the historical and ongoing effects of colonisation; for example, the denigration of te reo Māori and issues of identity. When viewing troubling depictions, research participants deployed strategies of resistance, including a response I termed 'Imagining Resistance', where they created backstories and interpretations for characters' motivations and behaviours. This paper explores these elements, understanding that, for Māori, something 'vital is at stake' (Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 181) that speaks to who they are and how they protect their identity and sense of collective self-worth.

Background

Limited research explores television drama and indigenous representations, and less is related to audience responses; what is available points to under-representation and a limited and/or negative scope of depictions (Fitzgerald, 2010; King, 2009; Merskin, 1999; Miyose & Morel, 2019; Nolan, 2006; Pack, 2013). A small body of research examines Māori representation on mass television including television news (Abel, 2008; Blythe, 1994; Glynn & Tyson, 2007; Gregory et al., 2011; Moewaka Barnes et al., 2012; Nairn et al., 2012; Pearson, 2013; Pihama, 1996; Yan et al., 2021).

A study of television news in mass media found that Māori were heavily under-represented and Māori issues were covered and presented in strongly negative terms (Moewaka Barnes et al., 2012; Nairn et al., 2012). The persistence of these forms of racist stereotyping reinforces commonly held beliefs about Māori, undermining Māori identity and participation in society. In this study, non-Māori participants thought 'mass media depictions of Māori were predominantly negative, with Māori routinely associated with social problems' (Gregory et al., 2011, p. 60). Māori participants drew links between dominant forms of news coverage and racism, including the role media plays in contributing to the discriminatory practices they encountered on a day-to-day basis (Moewaka Barnes, Taiapa, Borell, & McCreanor, 2013).

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

expressed pride and affirmation when viewing positive depictions in the first Māori-driven dramatic feature film *Ngati* (dir. Barry Barclay, 1987). In contrast they described feeling uncomfortable, belittled, irritated, embarrassed and insulted, along with deep anger and sadness, at negatively perceived Māori representations in *The Piano* (dir. by Pākehā, Jane Campion, 1993; Moewaka Barnes, 1999).

Few studies were found that explored audience reception to locally produced television dramas (Moewaka Barnes, 2018; Moewaka Barnes & Moewaka Barnes, 2022). A survey of youth (ethnicity not stated) canvassed responses to the soap opera *Shortland Street* (1992-current). Respondents were pleased that the drama represented a 'Pacific' New Zealand, because of the familiar locations and the range of ethnicities, including Māori, Pākehā and Pacific (Moran, 1996). Similarly, Joost De Bruin's analyses of *Shortland Street* audiences (ethnicity not stated) found that ethnic diversity on screen was valued because it reflected New Zealand society and Māori representation was generally viewed positively (De Bruin, 2011).

However, little is known about how representations of Māori on local television dramas may affect individuals and groups within our society; even less is known about Māori audiences. The genre can be viewed as a critical form in popular culture that must be understood within a colonising society where representations do not all 'exercise the same power in the world' (Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 182).

The research

This paper draws on my wider study *Affect and identity in contemporary television drama*. The research explored Māori and non-Māori meaning-making, emotions and feelings engendered and affective practices that arise, for example exclusion and discrimination, when viewing Māori representation on locally produced television dramas.

A database of local dramas (comedy, 'soap operas', series, one-offs) broadcast and accessible on free-to-air television platforms, TVOne, TV2, TV3, Prime and Māori Television was collected over a two-year period from 2014 to 2016. The dramas were primarily funded by government agency NZ On Air (major funder of local television programmes) and to a lesser extent Te Māngai Pāho (a government agency that promotes Māori language and culture and funds Māori television programmes). The process of selecting the dramas for the study involved a scan, which found that few local dramas met the following criteria (1) included characters that were identifiable as Māori (2) provided a substantial storyline that included Māori and (3) included substantial Māori-Pākehā interactions. Episodes from *The Brokenwood Mysteries*, *Westside*, *Find Me A Māori Bride* and *Shortland Street* were selected. These four dramas fulfilled the criteria along with the requirement that each viewing would not exceed 40 minutes in length to keep to the 60–90 minutes allocated for each focus group.

Methods

Twenty-five focus groups were conducted with 107 individuals from Te Waipounamu and Te Ika a Māui (South and North Islands) mostly residing in Te Ika a Māui urban centres: Te Tai Tokerau/Northland, Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland, Taranaki/New Plymouth, Te Whanganui a Tara/Wellington; plus Ōtautahi/Christchurch in Te

Waipounamu. Participants were predominantly Māori (49) and Pākehā/New Zealand European (50), with the remaining 8 identifying as Samoan, Fijian, Filipino, Indian and Pacifica. Five interviews with a total of 7 participants were conducted with a writer from each of the four selected television dramas ($n = 4$) and the funders, Te Māngai Pāho ($n = 2$) and NZ On Air ($n = 1$).

I attempted to replicate a typical viewing situation with participants. The approach was informed by audience studies, including indigenous audience studies. Sam Pack argued for the need to replicate or include household and family audiences in a ‘natural viewing environment’ (Pack, 2007) and Helen Wood conducted in-home audience research (Wood, 2009). In my study most focus groups were conducted in participants’ homes and participants knew each other; they were whānau (family groupings), students, friends or colleagues.

Each focus group viewed a single episode selected from one of the four drama series: *Westside*, set in 1981, that follows a family and their friends who are involved in criminal activities; *Find Me a Māori Bride*, a mockumentary about two male cousins, grappling with their identity as Māori, who must find a Māori woman to marry in order to inherit the family farm; *The Brokenwood Mysteries*, a murder mystery series set in a rural town; and *Shortland Street*, a long-running soap opera centred on a hospital.

After viewing an excerpt together, each group participated in a facilitated semi-structured discussion in which participants talked about their reactions to the drama, with encouragement to express and elaborate on any emotions or feelings they experienced during and after watching the excerpt. The purpose was to explore audience meaning making and affect; the feelings and emotions engendered as a result of viewing a local drama. Participants are identified here as wāhine (Māori woman), tāne (Māori male) with data from those of Pākehā ethnicity identified.

Analysis drew on affective practice and Kaupapa Māori. Affective approaches (Wetherell, 2012) provided opportunities to think about and investigate relationships between television dramas and meaning-making, emotions and feelings engendered, e.g. anger, pride, curiosity, fear or revulsion, and affective practices that arise, e.g., exclusion, discrimination, inclusion, approval, rejection. Kaupapa Māori, grounded in Māori concepts, aspirations and experiences (e.g., manaakitanga (hospitality, respect), transformation and decolonisation), informed all aspects of this research, including methods, methodological approach and analysis (Mahuika, 2008; Moewaka Barnes, 2000, 2018; Pihama, 2020; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Thematic and discursive analyses were also used to draw out key themes and inform audience meaning making (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Patton, 2004).

Themes of trauma and strategic responses

The two key analytical themes covered here are colonial trauma and some of the strategies Māori participants spoke of to deflect, address, mitigate and resist trauma, anticipated or experienced, when viewing the selected dramas. Indigenous writers describe historical trauma as the legacy of ‘massive cataclysmic events’ (Walters, 1997) systematically perpetrated on a specific group of people (Braveheart, Chase, Elkins, & Altschul, 2019; Evans-Campbell, 2008; Pihama et al., 2014), with a shared identity e.g., ethnicity. Critically, the intention is genocide or ethnocide, ‘i.e. annihilation or

disruption to traditional lifeways, culture, and identity' (Walters et al., 2011) The resulting effects can be experienced individually and collectively and may be passed down the generations. Teresa Evans-Campbell and Karina Walters extend historical trauma to address the specific context of colonisation. They explain that Colonial Trauma Response reaction 'may arise as an individual experiences a contemporary discriminatory event or microaggression that serves to connect him or her with a collective and often historical sense of injustice and trauma' (Evans-Campbell, 2008, p. 332). The connection to tūpuna (ancestors) experiences and 'collective ancestral pain' can occur in a 'very immediate and emotional way' (Evans-Campbell, 2008, p. 331). As a form of wounding, Eduardo Duran refers to Native American communities' concepts of a 'soul wound', 'ancestral hurt' or 'spiritual injury' (Duran, 2019, p. 17). For Māori this could be described as a wounding of our wairua. Colonial trauma is a 'complex, continuous, collective, cumulative and compounding interaction of impacts related to the imposition of colonial policies and practices which continue to separate Indigenous Peoples from their land, languages, cultural practices, and one another' (Mitchell, Arseneau, & Thomas, 2019, p. 75).

Evans-Campbell and Walters suggest that 'events that serve as reminders of colonisation may be particularly apt to evoke trauma responses' (cited in Evans-Campbell, 2008, p. 329). For example, 'films depicting massacres may trigger reactions' in individuals who have not directly experienced the trauma (Evans-Campbell, 2008, p. 329). As well as cataclysmic events, Walters points to microaggressions, 'those everyday experiences', 'those everyday nicks' that 'might be really wearing on us, more than we realise'. One of those everyday discriminatory experiences is described as 'having to deal with stereotypes in the media' (Walters, 2007, p. 34).

Audience responses to and understandings of visual media are inextricably linked with other texts, experiences and histories (Bobo, 1998; Fiske, 1986; Nolan, 2006, p. 144). Meanings constantly shift and are subject to multiple interpretations (Pack, 2013, p. 241) although, there is more likely to be a dominant consistent interpretation (Pack, 2013). Theorists propose that 'resistant' readings occur when viewing television texts where meanings are interpreted in ways that are empowering and not intended by the writers or producers (Bird, 1996, p. 256). Elizabeth Bird found that Native American participants would draw on experiences of colonisation when interpreting character responses but found that oppositional or alternative readings were rare. She cites Celeste Condit who suggests that these forms of readings require 'more work of viewers than do dominant meanings' (Bird, 1996, p. 257; Condit, 1989). As Pack argues, 'reception is never a matter of passive acceptance but always a process of creative adaptation and unintended consequences' (Pack, 2013, p. 241). Strategies to resist and mitigate the effects of colonial trauma were one of the more active ways participants demonstrated creative and active responses when viewing local dramas.

Findings

Colonial trauma

For Māori participants, representations in drama were experienced and understood within wider discourses and constructions, including their position in society, racist assumptions and practices, established norms and the effects on societal relations. Māori

did not consider television to be merely entertainment or an innocuous background noise; they were acutely aware of how they were represented on screen. In these and other ways colonial trauma is ever present for Māori. Participant talk made it clear that they did not want to be further traumatised by what they viewed.

Prior to the screening of the dramas, Māori spoke of expecting the worst, waiting for the inevitable, holding their breath and feeling anxious. They expressed feelings of relief when Māori characters were represented positively and alternatively, grief, anger and feelings of exclusion and rejection in reaction to negative depictions or narratives that reminded them of the effects of colonisation.

Viewing dramas that depicted ‘everyday’ reminders of colonisation, such as struggles connected to language and identity as well as negative stereotyping, prompted deeply felt responses. Colonial trauma responses occurred across all Māori focus groups and were connected to personal and tūpuna experiences alongside felt obligations to future generations. Reminders of colonial practices and policies including the suppression of language and disconnection from people and place were more evident in groups that viewed the mockumentary, *Find Me A Māori Bride*. Participants reacted to the drama in an immediate and emotional way with expressions of grief, loss, anger and sadness. Some responses could be described as expressions of soul wounds or a wounding of wairua.

Pain and struggle related to te reo Māori was frequently discussed by participants. Historically, the state (termed the Crown) actively undermined Māori knowledge and culture, by suppressing language and practices. This was advanced through early educational policies and processes that assisted with the underlying agenda of assimilation (Simon & Smith, 2001, pp. 158–164). The ‘civilising mission’ was aimed at diminishing the very foundation of Māori knowledge and identity. One practice was banning the speaking of te reo Māori in schools, sometimes reinforced by corporal punishment. Participants recalled personal and whānau hurt connected to the suppression of language. One participant was reminded of corporal punishment, where she and her mother were ‘hit on the knuckles with a ruler’ by a Pākehā teacher if a single Māori word was spoken. The shame and anger she felt resonates with Ranginui Walker’s observation that the greatest damage ‘lay not in corporal punishment *per se*, but the psychological effect on an individual’s sense of identity and personal worth’ (Walker, 2004, p. 147). As a result, the participant stopped speaking Māori but was now committed to relearning and teaching the language, saying: ‘You do get it back very slowly. But you do get it, and it’s harder.’

A male participant remembered his father’s disapproving response when he wanted to learn te reo Māori. His story was greeted with surprise by a younger whānau participant who grew up with Kōhanga Reo (pre-school te reo Māori immersion) and Kura Kaupapa (te reo Māori immersion schools).

Tāne: I was brought up in the generation you see – my father told me when I started learning Māori – what are you learning that for?

Wāhine: Your Dad?

Tāne: Yeah, he said you shouldn’t – you are wasting your time.

The memory points to generational differences that reflect the Pākehā agenda of assimilation and later integration, where te reo Māori was promoted as a relic of ancient Māori life (Hunn, 1960, p. 15). Māori language proponent Hana O’Regan argues that the

propaganda of assimilation convinced the ‘majority that te reo Māori had no place in a modern, global world’ (O’Regan, 2006, p. 158).

Participants understood that previous generations made decisions within the context of colonisation. One participant painfully recalled how her mother rejected her Māori identity in favour of a Pākehā lifestyle as a way of surviving and attempting to gain acceptability.

Wāhine: She [mother] chose to turn around and live the white way because that was the only way. She thought that if you became white, you could survive. It made you better, you weren’t second class, and the, the sheer sadness. Yeah, [crying] the sheer sadness that she could give that up without realising what she was doing.

Feelings of shame in being Māori was a common thread across focus groups. Participants spoke compassionately and expressed sadness for Māori experiencing this trauma.

Wāhine 3: . . . there are a lot of lost Māori.

Wāhine: I can also see the sadness of them being really ashamed, not knowing who they are and don’t want to be Māori.

This participant recalls both her and her father’s shame and rejection of their Māori identity.

Wāhine: . . . we were brought up as real Pākehā because my Dad wasn’t a proud Māori . . . I just remember when I was younger we would say those bloody Māoris, like I wasn’t one myself.

Here she is acutely aware of her own internalisation of colonising discourses about Māori and the irony of her actions. The drama also reminded this participant of her friends’ struggles in exploring their Māori identity, wounded through the processes of colonisation.

Wāhine 2: I felt sad for them [mates] . . . they expressed that they wanted to know about their Māori side and what not . . . but I just felt sad or like, oh rats. Rat shit, another one that doesn’t know.

Feelings of shame were also a common participant response when encountering negative stereotypes. With colonial racism promulgated on multiple sites the experience can become overwhelming.

Wāhine: Yeah and repeated experiences of that kind of stuff – it kinda paralyses you a little bit because it like it takes your voice away because you’re just wow really [whispered] shit?

Racist discourses and representations were seen by participants as contributing to and reinforcing societal beliefs about Māori: ‘a way of stirring up our society’ [wāhine]. One participant was reminded of the frequently touted themes of Māori privilege and special treatment (Moewaka Barnes et al., 2012). As a university student she felt a deep sense of injustice about racist assumptions that Māori scholarships were common, easy to obtain and not based on merit. As she dismisses the discourse and stereotype, she highlights the deleterious and ongoing effects colonisation has on identity e.g. whakapapa (genealogy, connections).

Wāhine: I think that echoes some stereotypes around Māori and access to money . . . for example [it] is really hard for a Māori person to get a Māori scholarship because you need to know your whakapapa, like your iwi (tribe), your hapu (subtribe), you need to be involved in your community. And there's lots of Māori from Auckland who wouldn't have any of those connections . . . yet when we go to university, people have these stereotypes of us that we just got there on a Māori scholarship. When in fact, it's actually very rare and hard . . . people just think it's, oh you're this ethnicity so you just get all this free stuff.

Despite feelings of loss, grief and anger, participants spoke to the strength of Māori in surviving the brutality of colonisation.

Wāhine: . . . the whole sadness . . . the world of being colonised, I use the word invasion. We were so insignificant except we did have the courage and we did try to and in a funny sort of way we survived, we haven't completely gone under. But what it did to our people.

Many participants were committed to transformation including teaching and learning te reo Māori, reclaiming knowledge and actively bringing about political and social change. This young Māori woman, deeply disturbed at the way Māori are represented, felt pride and strength in being Māori. She challenged Pākehā to stop reproducing and promoting colonial and racist representations of Māori.

Wāhine: . . . my Māori really shines through in myself. Like I feel so much strength from that side of myself. And sometimes I feel bad about saying that but it's the honest truth. I see beauty in our culture and everything that has been lost along the ways. And that is why I really fire at Pākehā themes.

Strategic responses

Wāhine: You just get a bit . . . I get a bit tired . . . I feel under siege constantly . . . Sometimes there's niceness in not knowing.

The quote above reflects one participant's exhaustion at the unrelenting discourses and representations, prompting her to wish for 'not knowing', as a way of coping. Acutely aware of how Māori are represented and not wanting to be further traumatised by what they watched and how they responded, participants adopted a range of strategies to mitigate the effects. Strategies included the active reimagining of the characters' lives and motivations alongside more personal responses.

Imagining resistance

When confronted with troubling depictions, Māori participants engaged in reinterpretation or oppositional readings to develop a strategy I have named Imagining Resistance. Participants filled in an absent backstory or imagined an unintended narrative that explained or shed light on the motivations and behaviours of the Māori characters. These imaginings, not present or alerted to in the storylines or characterisation, provided a uniquely Māori interpretation that made visible Māori realities, including acts of colonisation and colonial racism. Imagining Resistance was constructed within the histories, experiences and worldviews of the Māori participants. These explanations

resisted a dominant interpretation that progressed hegemonic constructions of Māori. Pākehā participants rarely engaged in this form of meaning-making and engagement with characters and narrative.

The following instances stood out in the study, as they evoked considerable thought, energy and imagination from the participants. The first was in response to a Māori character (Walter) in *The Brokenwood Mysteries* episode, *Playing the Lie*. It is a familiar depiction of a Māori male; he has a criminal past, is a suspected murderer, aggressive and uncooperative. A participant located the character within the context of colonisation and racism. She imagined that he had experienced multiple acts of racism over his lifetime and his treatment in the storyline was yet another example, explaining his belligerent behaviour. Representing him as a criminal felt so familiar, that at first, she was 'angry and then sad'. She talked about the constant micro-aggressions he would have endured 'so when something shitty happens like that, he's already got enough for them to do him on'.

A preceding scene, where a young Māori male (Jared) and a Pākehā detective talk amicably over a glass of wine, also evoked considerable comment. In particular, many Māori participants questioned the veracity of the scene. During the conversation Jared attempts to persuade the detective that his uncle Walter is not the murderer. Participants found it doubtful that a Māori male would feel comfortable in the home of a Pākehā detective, given the ongoing acts of colonisation and racism. Participants went to some lengths to explain the nature of the relationship. Reasons included a romantic attachment, the Pākehā detective was a 'father figure' and that Jared was a peacemaker, 'the calm in the storm between the Māori and the Pākehā'. There were also creative responses that imagined wider reasons for his presence, speculating that perhaps Jared's whānau were 'not good people' so he did not spend time at home and any self-respecting whānau would not permit Jared to be friends with a 'Pākehā cop'.

One participant expanded on the idea of peacemaker as she found the scene disturbing. She pointed to white privilege and racism in the justice system that required Jared to use his personal relationship with the detective to take suspicion off his uncle Walter. Bound in experiences of colonisation she was reminded of a world where Pākehā power is dominant and Māori are forced to manipulate their position as a survival mechanism, stating that it is a 'sad reminder for me that's actually how you have to work the system'.

A further example of Imagining Resistance occurred in response to *Shortland Street*. This long-running soap opera was regularly watched by a participant who went into great depth to explain the motivations of a young Māori male from a low-income family, who was represented as a drug dealer, dishonest and overall trouble. Aware that she was working against the intended depiction, the participant created a counter narrative as she watched. With much thought and detail, she imagined the character's motivation to sell drugs was to provide for his family and sick sister because it was his responsibility as the eldest son. She described him as generous, but circumstances pushed him to behave in certain ways. The participant asked why he was put in this situation because, although the white privileged characters knew of the family's struggle, they did nothing to help financially. Instead, they vilified him for his actions and the audience was expected to see him as dishonest and guilty of criminal acts. When she finished her story, she described the experience as 'heavy and frustrating' but necessary to find the 'beauty of what he was trying to do . . . see the good side where there is bad . . . because I see Māori

being stereotyped'. When this was relayed to the writer, surprise was expressed at the interpretation but also pleasure (personal communication, 22 November 2018).

It's so much more than entertainment because 'that's us!'

Māori participants engaged with the dramas in ways that showed they were acutely aware that the stories we tell, hear and see go beyond mere entertainment. In contrast, Pākehā participants were less engaged; some spoke of feeling distanced and one participant described the drama as 'entertainment, it doesn't mean anything to me' (Pākehā female).

Understanding that negative stereotypes of Māori on screen became representative of Māori in general was raised by many Māori participants. They were concerned about the meanings conveyed, with one participant asking: 'what kind of messages [are sent] to us as Māori and also to other people? Another participant spoke forthrightly about Pākehā privilege where negative representations are not generalised to other members of that group. She argued that Pākehā do not view negative constructions of Māori as fictional or entertainment but understand it as the truth about Māori, in this example that Māori men are inherently violent.

Wāhine: ... on the TV, I don't think as Māori we feel that Pākehā understand that is still just entertainment ... like when you see Cheryl West in *Outrageous Fortune* not all Pākehā are like that ... they don't associate, being Pākehā isn't oh Cheryl makes us look dumb. But being Māori, Bert [*Westside*] makes us, people will think that all Māori are like Bert, or all Māori are like Jake in *Once Were Warriors* when it's not true.

To mitigate the effects of these types of troubling representations the participant talked about the mental and emotional work she undertakes. Prompted by watching the television drama *Westside*, she explains how she negotiated and processed intense responses to the dramatic feature films *Once Were Warriors* (1996) and *The Dead Lands* (2014), where Māori men are constructed as violent.

Wāhine: I try not to come out of a movie feeling really pissed off. I learnt you have to process all your emotions while you are there so that when you walk out you don't take it with you. Otherwise, I go away really bitter ... really angry ... I hope that by the time you get to the end of it, that it just becomes entertainment ... Because it is entertainment in the end.

The participant is engaged in hard work during the viewing as she does not want to experience or carry feelings of bitterness and anger. She described how, when she became deeply disturbed, rather than confront troubling and painful depictions, she would focus on an earlier scene she liked. Her goal is to relegate the dramas to 'entertainment', wanting them to lose their potency as traumatic experiences. This sentiment was echoed by other participants struggling to mitigate the effects of micro-aggressions in the form of negative media representations. To reiterate a previous participant's comment: 'I feel under siege constantly ... Sometimes there's niceness in not knowing'.

Viewing a drama with a Māori only audience appears to help mitigate these affects. Participants spoke of feeling uneasy when watching dramas that perpetuated negative constructions of Māori alongside a Pākehā audience. Feelings of being judged, colonial hegemony, 'typical Māoris' and protectiveness were raised in this context. The positive dynamics of being in a Māori only audience was expressed by many Māori participants.

In this situation, participants felt safe and comfortable in expressing their emotions and feelings because there were shared understandings and experiences. This participant quote sums up these feelings; Māori will understand whereas Pākehā will dismiss her concerns.

Wāhine: . . . if I brought this up . . . my issues like with *Brokenwood Mysteries*, up in Māori company it's like 'yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah girl, yeah girl', but if I bring it up in Pākehā company, it's like, just a story . . . it's not an issue for them because they're reflected everywhere.

Conclusion

Television dramas play an influential and powerful role, reaching far beyond entertainment. In this study, Māori participants were intellectually, imaginatively and emotionally engaged in far more active ways than non-Māori. When approaching the viewing experience, Māori undertook emotional preparation. They anticipated what they might see, describing waiting for the inevitable, holding their breath and feeling anxious.

The impacts of colonisation and the trauma involved were evident as Māori participants attempted to avert possible further trauma evoked by viewing Māori representations. This was not just individually felt but spoke to participants' awareness and concern about how such depictions affect Māori collectively and impact on wider societal relations. The considerable absence of Māori characters and the pervasive negative stereotypes gave a particular potency to the material viewed.

To avert trauma and mitigate personal affronts and affronts to Māori more broadly, a range of strategies were adopted. One strategy described here is Imagining Resistance. Māori participants created their own backstories or imagined a narrative that explained or shed light on the motivations and behaviours of the Māori characters, including placing them within experiences of colonisation and racism. This strategy provided a form of protection from trauma. Participants resisted what they saw as non-Māori interpretations and responses and demonstrated a critical understanding of colonisation and how it affects Māori experiences. Tied up in this was a sense of injustice driven by pride in being Māori and a desire to reframe negative representations and interpretations. As one participant said, she wanted to find the 'beauty . . . see the good side where there is bad . . . because I see Māori being stereotyped'.

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Filmography

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