

Iwi radio in the era of media convergence

The opportunities and challenges of becoming 'more than radio'

Abstract: Operating for the past 30 years, New Zealand's 'iwi radio' stations broadcast a mixture of te reo Māori and English language programming throughout the country. The 21 stations that presently operate were established as a strategy to improve upon the severe decline in the indigenous language. As radio stations, each initiative also affords individual Māori groups some autonomy in the mediated protection and promotion of indigenous identity. Collectively represented by Te Whakaruruhau o Ngā Reo Irirangi Māori, the iwi stations stand apart from the highly-consolidated mainstream commercial and public service sectors, but are now similarly confronted with the challenge of a rapidly changing media landscape. Utilising convergence as a prominent, albeit contentious, descriptor of media transformation, this article analyses the response of the iwi radio sector to convergence processes. Initiatives that include the integration of web and social media and the establishment of a networked switching platform to share iwi content highlight parallel opportunities and challenges for the iwi radio stations as they strive to become 'more than radio' on limited resourcing. This discussion highlights the experiences of radio practitioners tasked with the preservation and progress of indigenous voices in an era of convergence, providing further contextual insight into contemporary accounts of media transformation, radio and Māori media.

Keywords: broadcasting, indigenous media, Māori media, media convergence, New Zealand, radio, te reo Māori

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Introduction

IN OCTOBER 2018, Nanaia Mahuta, the New Zealand government's Minister for Māori Development, announced a sector-wide review of publicly-funded Māori media, driven by the need to 'ensure that Māori broadcasting is future proofed and fit for purpose as we move further into the digital age' (Mahuta, 2018). Included in the scope of the review is Te Whakaruruhau o Ngā Reo

Irirangi Māori and the network iwi radio stations it represents. The 21 iwi radio stations have collectively been in operation for over 30 years and represent an important breakthrough in establishing independent Māori broadcasting. This article details the findings of a research project that was conducted immediately prior to the review announcement in early 2018, concerned with similarly understanding how iwi radio stations and the sector as a whole are navigating contemporary processes of media transformation; identified herein as an era of media convergence.

The findings presented here are organised into key themes that highlight instances in which iwi radio stations are utilising digital technologies, negotiating the constraints of limited resourcing, exploring the prospects of networked rationalisation and grappling with their identity as radio organisations in an evolving media environment. These themes are not entirely distinct from one another, and aspects of these contemporary issues are in fact symptomatic of the difficult conditions in which these indigenous media were established. Ultimately, the insights of station managers and other stakeholders offer a first-hand account of the opportunities and challenges confronting the iwi radio sector as they sustain their commitment to revitalising Te Reo Māori and engaging their community audiences while at the same time becoming ‘more than radio’ (J. Taituha-Ngawaka, personal communication, May 3, 2018).

Radio in the era of convergence

The motivation for studying contemporary iwi radio in relation to media convergence began with a previous study that asked similar questions of the three largest organisations in New Zealand radio broadcasting: MediaWorks, NZME and Radio New Zealand (McEwan, 2016). The central aim of that study was to evaluate theories of media transformation against actual lived experiences in the context of the New Zealand radio industry. To this end, the concept of convergence was selected for both its mobility and endurance as a contested theory of media transformation, evidenced in recent policy initiatives in countries such as Australia (Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, 2012) and New Zealand (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2015).

As Meikle and Young (2012) explain, convergence, as a complex process of media transformation, is largely a site of contestation that manifests in both the development and impact of convergent technologies, as well as how these processes are understood and measured by various actors. This contest extends to scholarship: the disruptive promise of digital, networked and computing technologies touted by Negroponte (1995) and Rheingold (2000) was just as readily dismissed as technologically determinist rhetoric by critics who identified a tendency for these developments to entrench, rather than challenge, powerful capitalist institutions (McChesney, 1999; Murdock & Golding, 2002; Mansell, 2004; Mosco, 2004).

More recently, scholars such as Benkler (2006), Bruns (2008) and, most famously Jenkins (2006), continued to explore the democratising potential of convergent technologies. Jenkins goes so far as to suggest a cultural shift in the relationship between media producers and audiences, while critical accounts of media convergence have instead emphasised the perpetuation of neoliberal ideologies that favour ‘networked individualism’ at the expense of the ‘society-making’ tendencies of traditional mass media (Dwyer, 2010, p. 118). This research suggests that, as the sum of these various considerations of technology, industry and organisational structures, media practices and culture, convergence provides a meaningful prompt from which the complex experiences of media transformation can be located in unique contexts.

In the context of radio, the analysis of increasingly digitised practices such as contemporary broadcasting (Hendy, 2000; Cordeiro, 2012) and podcasting as a form of audio storytelling (Berry, 2006; Markman, 2012), has fostered renewed optimism for the future of the medium. As Lindgren and Phillips (2014) argue, ‘rather than diminishing in popularity, radio, always the most versatile of media, has reinvented itself to take most advantage of what digital technology has to offer’ (p. 5). This statement is made in relation to strong listener data in the United States, United Kingdom and Australia, showing that radio listening still appeals to the majority of those populations. In New Zealand, audience research returns similar results. A 2018 audience survey, commissioned by New Zealand On Air, found that 78 percent of New Zealanders listened to live broadcast radio, positioning it as the second most widely used media platform in the country, while an additional 18 percent of New Zealanders listen to domestic radio online (NZ On Air, 2018). However, in many cases, it is radio’s ability to adapt to new media developments that has inspired its description as ‘resilient’ (Oliveira, Stachyra, & Starkey, 2014).

For radio scholars such as Dubber (2013), Hilmes (2013) and Lacey (2018), the consideration of these adaptations and changes also provokes new philosophical questions regarding the very definition of radio. As Lacey (2018) suggests, ‘this single word, radio, is called upon to describe any number of different things—material, virtual, institutional, aesthetic, experiential. And, in turn, each of these meanings unfolds over time and in different contexts to reveal anything and everything’ (p. 110). The answer to this question is inconclusive, but it reveals that contemporary radio, like convergence, is a site of contested meaning that warrants further investigation.

Inspired by these questions, the author’s previous study of New Zealand radio found that accounts of convergence often favour a broad determinist logic of technology-driven media change that needs to also account for pervasive neoliberalism, government policy, consolidated media power and audience composition. Cognisant of the relative stability of their industry when compared

with other media sectors, New Zealand radio industry professionals indicated that technology-centred initiatives were more typically a response to a *perceived* need to change, rather than any significant loss of audience or revenue. Building on these findings, this study seeks to further understand how notions of convergence and radio are represented in New Zealand radio, by exploring the experiences of radio organisations that operate outside of the highly-centralised commercial and public service sectors.

Māori radio and the iwi network

The establishment of the iwi radio stations in Aotearoa New Zealand is historically important for a number of reasons. As Matamua explains, prior to the 1980s, Māori had been almost excluded entirely from broadcasting: ‘For the seemingly endless hours of non-Māori broadcasting that had occurred from 1921 onwards, including music, culture and programmes from around the world, Māori were given what were in effect only brief moments’ (Matamua, 2006, p. 48). The case for Māori-led broadcasting began to emerge in the 1970s as an extension of the wider case to save and revitalise te reo Māori (Mill, 2005; Mane, 2014) and later on the legal basis of Treaty of Waitangi obligations. The Te Reo Māori Claim (WAI11) presented to the Waitangi Tribunal, resulted in recognition of the Māori language as a ‘taonga’ in 1986² and broadcasting was subsequently identified as ‘vital in the fostering of the Māori language’ (Matamua, 2014, p. 336; Beatson, 1996). Government action in support of the recommendations pertaining to Māori broadcasting would take some time to eventuate, but through the 1980s the first of the present-day Māori radio stations, including Te Ūpoko o Te Ika and Radio Ngāti Porou, began broadcasting.

As Joyce (2008) explains, the *Radiocommunications Act 1989*, which would reposition radio spectrum as a leasable commodity to be administered by the New Zealand government, was similarly addressed by Māori through the channels of the Waitangi Tribunal. In addition to the basis of the language claims, a claim lodged in 1990 (WAI150) was concerned with the allocation of spectrum and centred on an apparent breach of Treaty principles relating to ‘rangatira-tanga’ (sovereignty) over radio spectrum as an economic and cultural resource. Resistance to the government sale of frequency licenses were pursued as far as the Privy Council and although ultimately unsuccessful, Joyce (2008) argues that the subsequent ‘commitment to Maori language broadcasting enacted by the establishment of Te Māngai Pāho in 1993 was a productive cultural outcome of the discourses mobilised by the 1990 claim to radio spectrum’ (p. 131). As Mill (2005) explains, by 1993, 21 iwi radio stations had been established, and Matamua (2014) suggests that the *Broadcasting Amendment Act* of the same year, which established Te Reo Whakapuaki Irirangi (known as Te Māngai Pāho), was a significant step towards the realisation of independent Māori broadcasting: ‘The

Broadcasting Amendment Act stated that the nature and scope of Te Māngai Pāho would be to fund programming for broadcast on radio and television, which is produced for, and about, Māori interests” (p. 341).

References to iwi radio in this article, and elsewhere, will often point to the current 21 radio stations funded by Te Māngai Pāho. However Mane (2014) notes the various models that have operated since the inception of Māori-led broadcasting. Comparison is drawn between: ‘pan-tribal, whānau, hapū and iwi’ based stations that prioritise Māori language and culture, while resisting commercial imperatives and ‘iwi driven, commercially’ based stations that sought to establish an economically-favourable platform for iwi and stations that maintain a firm commitment to Te Reo Māori and their communities while also exploring the potential for commercial broadcasting to support the overall operation. The stations discussed in this article represent various aspects of these models, although their stated kaupapa and formal obligations to Te Māngai Pāho ensure that each station is committed to the revitalisation of te reo Māori.

To meet this objective, the 21 iwi stations are each allocated operational funding of \$500,000 per year to meet a daily quota of 10.5 hours of Māori language content (Te Māngai Pāho, 2018).³ Examples of additional funding include the Radio Waatea national Māori news bulletin and a contribution to Te Whakaruruhau o Ngā Reo Irirangi Māori, the administrative body that represents the collective interests of most stations. Te Māngai Pāho’s latest annual report states that iwi radio stations are meeting their objectives. Recent audience research also indicates that 30 percent of the Māori general population listen to iwi radio, with 15 percent listening regularly during the week. Listenership has also grown significantly with Māori youth seemingly outperforming the general population (39 percent and 18 percent respectively) (Te Māngai Pāho, 2017b). Despite these relative successes, later sections of this article will highlight the sense of urgency shared by iwi radio stations to simultaneously fulfil language objectives and produce engaging radio in a changing media environment. This challenge can have a direct influence on the way that stations organise and operate, drawing comparison with the extended questions regarding contemporary radio forms and practice as discussed above.

Research approach

As this study sought to extend the scope and generalisability of the previous project concerned with New Zealand radio, it utilised a similar research method of semi-structured interviews with individual iwi station managers identified as representative experts in their field. In total, one-off interviews were conducted with nine station managers, representing over 40 percent of the iwi stations. Additional interviews were conducted with a representative of Te Māngai Pāho, providing clarification on funding strategies and insight into some of the digital platforms

used to connect and monitor the stations and with the former Chair of Te Whakaruruhau o Ngā Reo Irirangi Māori, providing further historical context.

Limitations on the number of interviews that could be conducted were seen as a consequence of feasibility, rather than the willingness of station managers to participate. In the previous study of commercial and public service radio sectors of New Zealand, it was posited that three organisations account for the vast majority of radio listening in New Zealand. As such, the feasibility of that study was supported by the centralised structure of networked radio in which most operations were based in the major centres of Auckland and Wellington. Iwi radio presents almost the opposite situation; the vast majority of iwi stations are widely dispersed throughout New Zealand and each station represents a semi-autonomous radio practice that is unlikely to mirror any other station in the network.

The importance of ‘kanohi-ki-te-kanohi’ (face-to-face) (O’Carroll, 2013) in communicating with Māori participants became immediately apparent, and significant travel was required to conduct interviews. This had the immediate benefit of situating the researcher, albeit briefly, in the lived contexts of iwi radio stations. The researcher was warmly invited into the communities of the stations visited and there was a strong sense of affinity established between both the researcher and the participants in most cases. However, as a non-indigenous researcher, there is some lingering dissatisfaction with the decision to transfer an existing research approach to an indigenous case study and future research will instead seek to build upon the principles of Māori research and partnership. However, where possible efforts were made to maintain channels of communication with participants for the purposes of feedback and consultation. The researcher also met with the executive members of Te Whakaruruhau o Ngā Reo Irirangi Māori to share research findings and consult with the network in the interests of partnership and their response to the Māori Media review.

Connecting with audiences and examining the PungaNet

Across the network, the individual station managers that contributed to this study expressed a firm commitment to implementing newer convergent practices into their overall operation as contemporary radio stations tasked with contributing to the promotion and revitalisation of te reo Māori. Erana Keelan-Reedy, station manager for Radio Ngāti Porou, recalled a network meeting five years ago, with former Te Māngai Pāho CEO John Bishara, as a key moment in the push towards digital technologies and platforms (Personal communication, April 26, 2018). Elsewhere, Bishara was similarly quoted as calling for stations to modernise and utilise the technological potential offered by practices such as podcasts to ‘improve the effectiveness of Te Māngai Pāho’s spending’ (McLachlan, 2016). Whereas these statements may indicate that digital technologies have the potential to supplant the conventions of radio broadcasting, at the ground level station managers were often

using online streaming, video and social media platforms to instead extend their radio operation and audience reach.

As Keelan-Reedy suggests, the potential for Radio Ngāti Porou's online presence is to act as a portal or 'one-stop shop' for Ngāti Porou content (Personal communication, April 26, 2018). Rather than communicate outwardly with other Māori or non-Māori audiences, most stations prioritise serving the iwi and hapū they are affiliated with and the region they originate from. In the context of their own research project with Tautoko FM (an iwi station affiliated with the Ngāpuhi iwi, based in the Northland region of New Zealand), de Bruin and Mane (2018) suggest that by recognising pre-colonial iwi and hapū as independent indigenous nations, the digital activities of Tautoko FM via Irirangi.net, the station's own website, or Facebook, support the simultaneous facilitation of national (tribal), international (inter-tribal) and transnational (diasporic) audiences. Consistent with de Bruin and Mane's (2018) account of Tautoko FM, this function is necessary for Radio Ngāti Porou (and other stations mentioned in this study), due to the wide migration of Māori that identify as, or are affiliated with, Ngāti Porou, away from the broadcast region. The 2013 census reports that, '71,049 people, or 10.6 percent of the total population of Māori descent, [are] affiliated with Ngāti Porou' (Stats NZ, 2013, p. 2), however as Keelan-Reedy explains, there are only 4,000 Ngāti Porou living in Ruatōria and approximately 11,000 in the wider region of Gisborne and the East Coast: 'the bulk of our people don't live at home. But they relate to how we talk, how we talk to each other, the whānau connections, our connections to the marae, our connections to our rugby clubs—fiercely passionate stuff!' (Personal communication, April 26, 2018).

Outside broadcasts of local club rugby games were just one example of the manner in which iwi radio organisations were merging the conventions of radio broadcasting⁴ and digital platforms to extend their audience, and Keelan-Reedy states that at the height of the local rugby season, the metrics for an online 'pick the score' competition revealed audience reach and engagement well in excess of the potential listener audience. Live video-streaming was similarly popular:

I filmed the club final last year, and for the first 12 minutes my image was sideways. It was the first time I had gone live on my phone and I didn't know how to read the comments as they were coming in. But I read them later and it was, 'Aunty! Turn your camera around!' Then someone saying, 'You can still watch it, just watch it [gestures sideways] this way.' It was quite hilarious! But a couple thousand people watched it, sideways, for 12 minutes, and they loved it! (E. Keelan-Reedy, personal communication, April 26, 2018)

In one sense, the integration of live video-streaming into radio practice represents the evolving consideration of radio as a 'screen medium' (Hilmes, 2013; Genders,

2018; Berry, 2013), where the material access to radio via screen-based devices is acknowledged and visualisation is used to extend and enhance radio content. This can be further identified in other iwi radio initiatives such as a segment called ‘Tiripapā Rap Battles’, recorded and filmed in studio at Tuwhāretoa FM, and distributed online via the station’s Facebook page. However, the extent to which the live video-streaming of a club rugby game can continue to be understood as *radio* is somewhat complicated by the primacy of video at the expense of audio content. Instead, this anecdote alludes to the value of iwi radio that persists in spite of the increasing complexity of defining the contemporary medium: ‘We’re the conduit to home for our people that don’t live here. For those who want a connection home—we’re it’ (E. Keelan-Reedy, personal communication, April 26, 2018).

Peter-Lucas Jones, the general manager of Te Hiku Media in the Far-North, presents a similar account when he explains that his organisation no longer self-identifies as a radio station, instead describing Te Hiku as an ‘iwi media hub’ (Personal communication, April 13, 2018). Although Te Hiku still operates radio stations on analogue broadcast frequencies, the preferred convergent description accounts for the diverse range of content and activity Te Hiku has used to ‘adapt and survive’ in a changing media environment, including digitised archives of historical content, multi-camera live-streaming of important events such as kapa haka competitions and short video content distributed on a digital platform. Recognised as one of the leading stations to embrace and invest in newer digital initiatives by other station managers, Te Hiku is an exception in that they are the only iwi station to hold a regional television license, but as Jones explains:

85 percent of our people do not live at home. They are not going to listen to the radio station, because the broadcast cannot reach them. Does that mean that they hold any less importance or we value them differently? Wherever they are in the world, our kaupapa is to provide access to ‘te reo o te kāinga’, and the way we do that now is through, what we call, our marae in the sky—our digital platform. (Personal communication, April 13, 2018)

The digital strategies that individual stations employ can vary, from new ways to capture and share community events via social media platforms, to the larger development of digital hubs for iwi content; however the sense of individual autonomy and responsibility to members of affiliated iwi as an audience drives most initiatives throughout the network of stations. As Bernie O’Donnell, general manager of Radio Waatea, explains, the ability to provide a ‘portal’ to Māori communities is a key strength of the iwi stations (Personal communication, March 26, 2018).

The community portal function of the iwi stations has also inspired and later challenged one of the key initiatives in Māori broadcasting: the PungaNet.

O'Donnell attributes the development of the PungaNet to former iwi station manager and government MP, Hone Harawira, who wanted the capacity to remotely communicate and share content among all stations in the network: 'The idea was about sharing our stories, that were uniquely Māori stories... that was the original intention of the PungaNet' (B. O'Donnell, personal communication, March 26, 2018). Following a government tender process, the PungaNet was developed for the iwi network by AVC and launched in March of 2009 (Zukina, 2010). Rawiri Waru, general manager of Te Reo Irirangi O Te Arawa and the current chair of Te Whakaruruhau, states that as a technological solution the PungaNet was the 'first of its kind' and an example of radio innovation emerging from the iwi network (Personal communication, April 27, 2018).

In theory, the PungaNet could ease some of the capacity challenges individual iwi stations face, by making relevant content from other stations available for the overall mix of programming. It is also utilised to distribute the shared news service contracted to Radio Waatea. Jaqui Taituha-Ngawaka, station manager at Maniapoto FM, suggested that the idea of the iwi stations functioning as a 'network' largely begins with the establishment of the PungaNet (Personal communication, May 3, 2018). However, across the network, station managers were also critical of the ongoing role of the PungaNet. Both O'Donnell and Waru explained that increasing emphasis on local content by the stations' funder, Te Māngai Pāho, was counterintuitive to the intended function of the PungaNet. In practice, the commitment of station managers to local stories (as highlighted above) and the preservation of local dialects—often referred to as 'mita'—also contributed to the under-utilisation of the platform.

In addition to working against the local priorities of iwi stations, the general sense of frustration that station managers had with the PungaNet was not directed at the platform concept or the idea of collaboration amongst stations—collaboration was often touted as an ongoing opportunity for the immediate future—but rather the burden that it placed on the limited resources that stations had access to. Taituha-Ngawaka explained that she had been openly critical of the lack of support and training received to make use of the platform as well as a lack of choice as to whether they subscribed to the service; overall, station managers identified that there must be a simpler and more cost effective way to connect with other stations using widely available infrastructure. Te Māngai Pāho Chief Executive Larry Parr similarly stated that funding for the PungaNet could be better distributed elsewhere, due to its present lack of utilisation. Annual reports for Te Māngai Pāho show that the ongoing maintenance costs for the PungaNet are just over \$830,000 per year—this is in comparison to the standard funding of each individual station at \$500,000 per year (Te Māngai Pāho, 2017, 2018). Parr's suggestion was that the same funding might be better utilised as a source of contestable funding for iwi radio content: 'that content might be a better driver

of connectivity' (Personal communication, April 23, 2018).

The extent to which iwi stations are embracing newer convergent forms of radio practice and are therefore representative of media transformation, can be immediately located in both the independent, day-to-day integration of digital tools like social media and video streaming and the larger infrastructural initiative of the PungaNet. As was the case with the other sectors of New Zealand radio, accounted for in previous research (McEwan, 2016), the response to new media platforms is largely driven by the perceived need to keep pace with changing audiences. However, there was a greater willingness overall, in the context of iwi radio, to engage with what this meant for individual operations. Whereas mainstream commercial broadcasters were either unfamiliar with the notion of convergence or had moved on from it, focussing on the reflexive need of their commercial operation, iwi station managers had contemplated the concept at length and considered its impact on their objectives and operation. While some technological initiatives presented inherent opportunity for iwi radio, the PungaNet, recognised as technologically sophisticated, did not easily align with the priorities of individual stations.

Resourcing challenges and the prospect of rationalisation

The ongoing development of high-quality content that capitalised on web and social properties was recognised by most managers as a key priority for their stations, but the capacity to do so was also said to be constrained by the limitations of current funding. Karam Fletcher, station manager at Tūwharetoa FM, identified that he could make a significant difference with the additional resources of a part-time video editor and a modest amount of funding to invest in cameras that could consistently capture the activities of the radio station. This would enable the station to develop its presence online, in co-ordination with the on-air broadcast and possible on-demand podcasting. He stated that this would be ground-breaking in the context of iwi radio and bring his station closer to parity with the capabilities of mainstream commercial radio stations (Personal communication, April 20, 2018).

These individual aspirations to develop the capacity to produce new convergent content were explained by Waru as being a feature of iwi stations: 'Because we are individual stations, it has allowed us to experiment—to a point' (Personal communication, April 27, 2018). Waru further explains that when Te Whakarurhau was able to present to the Māori Affairs Select Committee for the first time in early 2018, the case they presented was, 'to have that cushion, to be allowed to fail and then try again. We cannot afford to do that on what we get, and if you compare our funding to other [similar] kaupapa—it's hard' (Personal communication, April 27, 2018). For Waru, there was a disconnect between the level of funding allocated to iwi stations and the goals they were being asked to

pursue in the context of media transformation.

Stations that had been able to secure additional funding were subsequently developing new forms of content. For example, at the time that research was being conducted, Radio Tainui, based in Ngāruwāhia, was completing a web series consisting of 15 two-minute episodes using the station's announcers and staff as both the talent and producers of the video content. The series was majority funded by Te Mātāwai,⁵ and made available via the station website in addition to regular station content. While successful, Trina Koroheke, station manager for Radio Tainui, was also concerned with the sustainability of similar projects, recognising the expectation to continue to develop similar content, and the re-direction of station staff that also had to operate a radio station. For Koroheke, the web series was likely to benefit the staff involved in its production, both in terms of extra compensation and in terms of the opportunity to grow their profile, but how the content would ultimately benefit the station remained an open question (Personal communication, May 3, 2018). In the context of commercial radio in Sweden, Stiernsedt (2014) similarly observed that the growing profile and importance of radio personalities has the potential to create 'new uncertainties and new possible tensions within production—between management and staff—as the demands for autonomy, self-determination, and profit shares among the latter become increasingly hard to ignore' (p.304). For the iwi radio stations included in this study, the larger concern was the retention of staff on a constrained budget; Māori Television in particular, could offer higher compensation and had attracted much of the industry's young talent away from radio.

One possible response to the challenge of strained resources being discussed by the members of Te Whakaruruhau was the prospect of rationalisation. There was some recognition that iwi stations could consolidate their efforts into wider tribal regions as defined by Te Mātāwai and the 2016 Māori Language Act (L. Parr, personal communication, April 23, 2018). An example of such a grouping might be the four iwi stations that are affiliated with Tainui iwi and by extension the Tainui waka⁶—Radio Tainui, Maniapoto FM, Raukawa FM and Ngā Iwi FM. Taituha-Ngawaka, the station manager for Maniapoto FM, understood the rationale of consolidating some costs such as administration and human resourcing, but also identified that the current 21 individual stations helped to preserve local stories and dialect, and maintain differences that were vital to the revitalisation of te reo (Personal communication, May 3, 2018).

Government MP, former broadcaster and former Chair of Te Whakaruruhau, Willie Jackson, explained that when iwi radio was first established he did not agree with the strategy of independent, iwi-affiliated stations: 'I was like Derek Fox. I said let's have one big Māori national radio... let us just have one big station so we can put all our channels and resourcing into one setup' (Personal communication, March 23, 2018). Beyond regional reconfigurations that

reflected waka or the new Māori language strategy, the prospect of a national network was also discussed as possible network rationalisation. In the context of prioritising high-quality local content, Parr suggested that if such a network were to operate, individual iwi could have dedicated programming allocations to ensure sustained representation. Yet the nature of radio programming is such that certain time-slots in the broadcast schedule can expect to command a larger or more desirable audience, and how individual programming would establish and maintain parity remained to be seen. As Jackson explains, his view on the structure of the network changed after he became involved with Radio Waatea and his role as Chair of Te Whakaruruhau: ‘our statutory obligation was just to look after advancing the reo, but the iwi stations took on more than that. They became, in some areas like Kaitaia or Ruatōria, the centre of everything. In terms of community action, conduits for the community... So I became an advocate for them, because I admired the work our people were doing’ (Personal communication, March 23, 2018).

As indicated in earlier examples, iwi radio is uniquely positioned to provide a conduit or portal to individual Māori communities and any rationalisation would require compromises in leadership and direction. However, as Taituha-Ngawaka explains in relation to misgivings with the PungaNet—strong connections between the stations exist because of whakapapa, not technology. Therefore, the prospect of rationalisation, while not favoured, could still be seen as feasible: ‘As long as we feel we have control over our stories and how they are told... we believe we are here to protect, preserve, enhance te reo Maniapoto. As long as we feel safe in that, we’re open to change’ (J. Taituha-Ngawaka, personal communication, May 3, 2018). The preservation and promotion of local dialects, protection and restoration of content archives and being supported to tell their own stories (and not have their stories told by others) remained key concerns for station managers. This common response highlights the simultaneously shared and individual priorities that manifest when station managers are presented with the prospect of organisational or network convergences along lines of rationalisation and cost-efficiency. Whereas a larger organisation, such as the nationally-organised television broadcaster, has the resourcing to attract and retain emerging talent, it would likely undermine the iwi and/or community role of each individual station.

Problematising radio in the context of iwi stations

As the individual stations re-evaluate their role as sources of community content and grapple with challenges of resourcing and rationalisation, most station managers state that they would continue to operate as radio stations, or at least maintain the broadcast of radio content in coordination with other forms of media practice, for some time. There is, however, contrasting emphasis on

the value of identifying as a radio operation, rather than considering a more convergent approach in light of new priorities. Some station managers refer to the resilience of radio, having not succumbed to successive challenges from television and the internet. Waru, however, suggests that radio is more than a platform and instead a mode of practice that places emphasis on content, immediacy and accessibility. The previous comment from Jones, specifying that Te Hiku Media no longer identifies solely as a radio station, also reflects a growing emphasis among station managers to re-position as media centres or communication hubs for their affiliated iwi.⁷ Taituha-Ngawaka stated that Maniapoto FM had seen themselves as ‘more than radio’ for the nine years that she had been working there (Personal communication, May 3, 2018). Radio was recognised as the centre or hub of the organisation, but Taituha-Ngawaka added, ‘we know that we are not going to actually achieve the bigger purpose of connecting with our people if we just focus on radio’ (Personal communication, May 3, 2018).

Unlike the commercial sectors of the New Zealand industry that generally viewed broadcast radio as their primary asset (McEwan, 2016), there was an indication from the iwi stations that key characteristics of a radio operation present their own unique challenges. In addition to the resourcing concerns of recruiting and retaining staff, the cost of maintaining broadcast transmission was a significant burden for many of the stations. For example, Keelan-Reedy explains that Radio Ngāti Porou operates seven transmitters at costs into the tens of thousands of dollars to maintain their broadcast. Fletcher, from Tūwharetoa FM, likewise suggested that maintaining transmission sites was a challenge to all stations (Personal communication, April 20, 2018). Both Keelan-Reedy and Fletcher stated that they were in the advantageous position of being supported by their iwi or hapū to meet these costs (this was not guaranteed for all stations), however in the context of maintaining a radio operation the essential costs of analogue broadcasting were as much a challenge as they were an asset.

The act of producing radio also presented a unique challenge in that the practices and conventions that have worked favourably for mainstream stations in New Zealand’s commercial radio sector were difficult to negotiate in the iwi context. In her analysis of Māori Television, Smith (2016) recognises the many challenges of bringing the indigenous practices of te ao Māori, te reo Māori and tikanga into the the non-indigenous institutions of broadcast media. For Smith (2016), challenges may include programming decisions that reflect the ‘industry norm of privileging a camera-ready personality over that of a fluent speaker of te reo’ (p. 54). Although iwi radio and Māori television are structurally different, they are broadly tasked with the same objectives, and Smith (2016) suggests that: ‘The struggle to balance tikanga with the embedded norms of media storytelling is one faced by all state-funded Māori media makers’ (p. 56). Most iwi radio stations operate as charitable trusts, meaning that they do not generate private profit

or revenue, but they are also able to provide commercial services to supplement their allocated funding. As Waru explains, commercial radio strategy typically involves the targetting of niche audience demographics, that can be catered for in station format and content (Personal communication, April 27, 2018). Iwi stations, have the broad objective of promoting Māori language and tikanga for all Māori in their broadcast region, irrespective of age demographics. In practice, the priority of growing listenership among rangatahi (young people) would need to also be evaluated against station appeal to older listeners, complicating the strategic approach for each radio station.

The challenge of catering to a diverse audience also extended to debates over best practice for meeting the objective of promoting te reo Māori and tikanga. Since inception, iwi stations had demonstrated various approaches to programming that included a complete focus on Māori language and alternative approaches that sought to utilise bilingualism. Station managers that advocated for a bilingual approach explained it in the context of extending audience appeal to listeners that are not already fluent in the language. O'Donnell from Radio Waatea suggested that a bilingual approach had a greater role in the developing context of Māori language 'normalisation' and the ongoing challenge for station managers was to identify the 'winning matrix where the language meets commercial objectives' while also clarifying that, 'speaking English should never be about commercialism, it should be about how you grow a language' (Personal communication, March 26, 2018). There was subsequent frustration from some station managers with the content quota system that seemingly worked against fluid or responsive approaches to programming. This was also recognised by Parr, who suggested that future strategies may require less hours of te reo Māori content with a greater emphasis on quality local programming (Personal communication, April 23, 2018).

Contrary to being challenged by radio, one station manager that had experience in both mainstream commercial radio and the iwi sector explained that he saw government funding as unpredictable, whilst commercial advertising enabled his stations 'to determine their own future' (J. Dodd, personal communication, May 4, 2018). In Whakatāne, Jarrod Dodd was operating two individual stations, Sun FM and Tumeke FM, to simultaneously develop normalisation and cater to fluent speakers. While Tumeke FM could fulfil the statutory obligations of its public funding, in coordination with Sun FM, the two stations could deliver community engagement in a way that mainstream commercial radio organised from Auckland could not. For Dodd, this was about recognising the inherent value of Māori radio content and Māori radio audiences as local communities. Dodd emphasised this point by explaining that the distribution of commercial revenue between both stations was almost equal, and pākehā businesses were showing significant interest in advertising in te reo Māori. It was his view, that

embracing the conventions of radio, in regards to station promotion or visibility, as well as belief in the value of te reo Māori, was essential to the success of his organisation and the potential for success in other stations throughout the network.

Conclusion

The review of the Māori media sector announced in 2018 may yet prove to be a critical juncture for the iwi radio stations. It presents an opportunity to support station managers and their staff as they continue to explore contemporary radio practices and seek to develop their position as language advocates and storytellers for their communities. Conversely, at a policy level, any movement away from the support of iwi radio has the potential to disrupt the present establishment of iwi-based, community-centred media. These suggestions are speculative, but previous research (McEwan, 2017) and public statements from New Zealand On Air and Te Māngai Pāho (Barclay, 2016; Manhire, 2016) indicate that media policy renewal in the era of media convergence tends to coincide with a ‘platform-agnostic’ approach to media funding. Recognising that convergence, as one theory of media transformation, is still contentious, also reveals the ideological challenges in deciding a universally beneficial response to ongoing media developments.

As this article has demonstrated through the expertise and experiences of iwi radio stations, radio organisations are not fixed in their practices, nor is radio a technologically-bound concept that can be simply equated to a platform. The iwi stations function both as a collective, tasked with the revitalisation of te reo Māori, and individual operations that serve the requirements of their communities. The stated commitments of iwi stations to developing newer, convergent practices highlights a willingness to reexamine their role as contemporary radio stations and work towards the objective of becoming iwi media hubs that serve their local and diasporic communities beyond radio. Furthermore, the specific methods through which they achieve this objective is often decided locally, in the context of the individual station. Unlike previous research which found that other sectors of New Zealand radio celebrated their industry identity and the competitive advantages of ‘radio’ in the larger composition of New Zealand media. In the context of iwi stations, the challenges of limited resources, both in terms of funding and the consequent impact it has on staffing, seemingly constrains initiative when counted against the ongoing costs of maintaining an independent radio station. This is also in contrast to New Zealand’s commercial radio sector, that has used the conventions of radio networking and centralisation to rationalise costs and streamline operations—hence, the consideration of similar strategies for iwi radio going forward.

Thus, contemporary changes in iwi radio that respond to the pressures of media convergence, are not clearly defined by any essential features of radio as

exhibited elsewhere—in fact, radio is at times a challenge in and of itself. Yet, despite the apparent challenges associated with radio, it persists as a common marker for publically funded, community-operated Māori media, that has no apparent equivalent in New Zealand. Therefore, how the iwi radio stations will be assessed in the context of the present review, and future considerations of Māori media in the era of media convergence, may ultimately hinge upon the way that ‘radio’ is both interpreted and valued in the context of the contemporary Māori media sector. This article has argued that any such consideration needs to similarly identify the complexity and nuance of media transformation as it relates to radio. In contrast to New Zealand’s predominantly centralised media industries, the iwi radio stations represent an important exception that goes some way towards guaranteeing media autonomy that sustains iwi and community identity. This should be recognised irrespective of the marker of radio, while also recognising what iwi radio has represented for more than 30 years and whether these key aspects of the sector can be sustained *without* radio.

Notes

1. Often described as treasure or prized possession, taonga in this context can refer to both tangible and intangible goods, hence its application to te reo Māori.
2. Iwi stations have been funded at this rate since the 2014-15 financial year, having previously been allocated \$384,100 annually to produce a minimum eight hours of daily Māori language content (Te Māngai Pāho, 2014).
3. Outside broadcasts (commonly referred to as ‘OBS’), in which radio stations provide live coverage of local events, are a cornerstone of local radio practice and a key feature for the majority of iwi stations discussed in this study.
4. Te Mātāwai was established under the 2016 Māori Language Act as an ‘independent statutory entity’ tasked with protecting and promoting the Māori language (Te Puni Kōkiri, n.d.)
5. Waka in this context refers to the common ancestry of these tribes ‘back to the voyagers on the Tainui waka (canoe)’ (Swarbrick, 2015).
6. A recommendation that iwi radio stations begin to reposition themselves as iwi media centres can also be traced back to a feasibility study conducted by Te Māngai Pāho in 2014/15 (Te Māngai Pāho, 2015).

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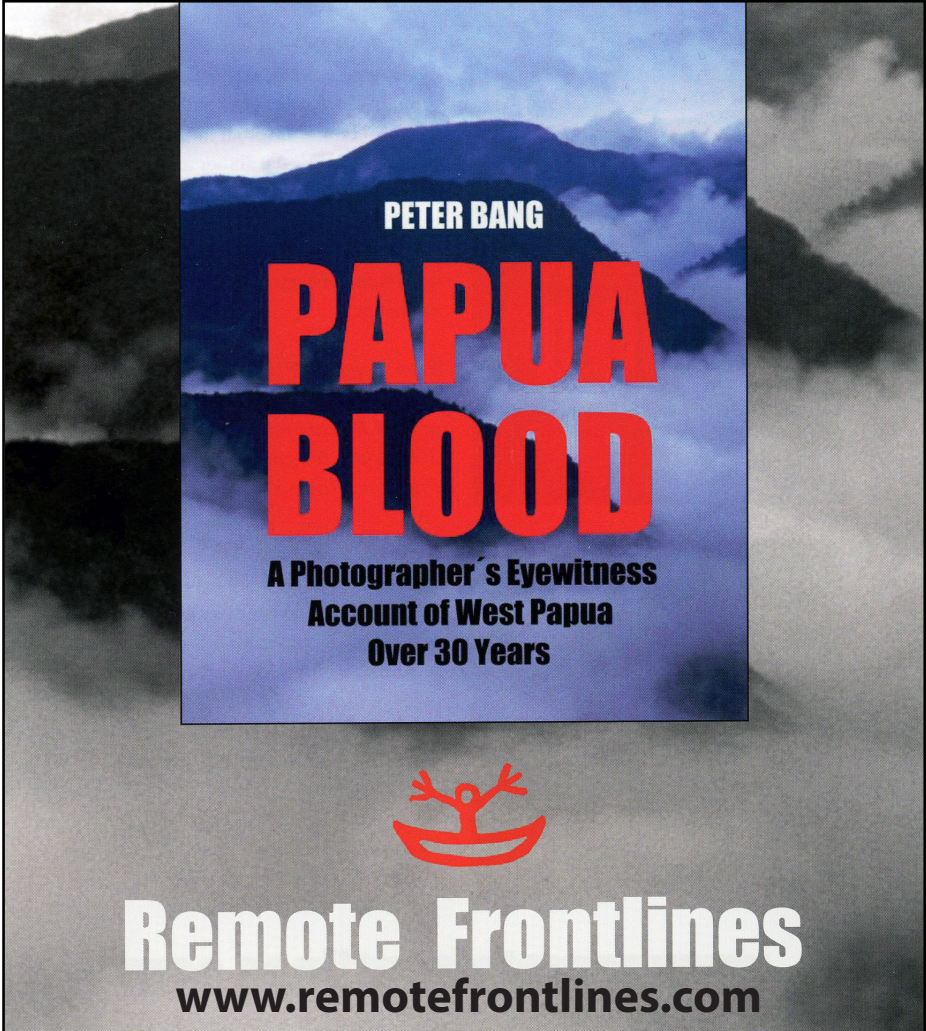
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