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What is This?

'Shadow publics' in the news coverage of socio-political issues

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Abstract

Coverage of contentious socio-political issues in the news media often involves the creation of 'shadow publics' that facilitate journalistic framing strategies. These publics are not easily identifiable but exert significant persuasive power by virtue of the authority ascribed to them. This article explores how the media create and legitimize certain shadow publics which then go on to influence public policy. The findings of the article come out of an examination of the extensive newspaper coverage of two highly debated issues – immigration and genetic modification – in New Zealand between 1998 and 2002. Although the coverage of the two issues was dramatically different, it was apparent that particular sections of the population were given greater voice over others in newspapers via the seemingly neutral yet strongly opinioned and influential shadow publics.

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Introduction

The media play a crucial role in the formation of publics, usually in response to an issue, event or question, and with respect to other publics (Dayan, 2001). And, as is well established, the way different publics are formed and engage with society has an effect on the very nature of the public sphere (Asen and Brouwer, 2001). Yet, despite the extensive media scholarship on publics (e.g. Dahlgren and Sparks, 1991; Dewey, 1927; Downing, 2000; Entman, 1997; Fraser, 1990; Habermas, 1991; Herman and Chomsky, 2002; Lewis, 2001; Lippmann, 1925; Negt and Kluge, 1993[1972]), little research has been done on how journalists create publics and how these amorphous, sometimes visible and sometimes invisible publics align with journalistic framing strategies. This article explores how journalists create and legitimize what we call shadow publics which can often influence the shaping of public policy. These shadow publics are not easily identifiable as composite groups but exert significant persuasive power by virtue of the authority ascribed to them.

We begin with a discussion of publics, as created by the news media, and an introduction of the idea of shadow publics. We then examine the specific contexts of the news coverage of immigration and genetic modification (GM) in New Zealand to illustrate and develop the concept of shadow publics, and finally end with some insights into how shadow publics created by the news media influence public policy.

At a simple level, a public comprises a group of actual people that takes a position on an issue and articulates that position in the public domain. All publics, in this sense, hold or subscribe to an agenda. Indeed, publics may be seen as 'quasi-groups constituted by mutual engagement in discourse aimed at determining the nature of social institutions including states' (Calhoun, 1999: 220). Yet, as Warner (2002: 51) explains, a 'public is as much notional as empirical. It is also partial, since there could be an infinite number of publics within the social totality' of a group perceived to be homogeneous. In contrast to publics which often come 'into being only in relation to texts and their circulation' (Warner, 2002: 50), Calhoun (1999: 220) defines communities as small groups formed 'through informal, directly interpersonal relationships'. Though a public may start as a community of people, it is not confined to material existence. In a civil society, public 'assumes a symbolic, rather than concrete form' (Alexander, 2006: 72). Unlike a private/public dichotomy, this symbolic vs. concrete form of public transcends the boundary of citizens' engagement with a social world. Generated by a discursive structure of media and the political and cultural dynamics that surround them, a symbolic public becomes open to strangers who can self-identify through the same discourse (Calhoun, 2002). Migrants from a particular country, for example, may constitute a community that seeks to maintain the language and culture of their country of origin for their children. However, when they are addressed by a politician during a mediatized election campaign, and thus brought into the public sphere, they become a part of a larger 'public' of immigrants or perhaps, more specifically, a public comprising 'minority immigrants', created by the politician's rhetoric, the media's reporting of the speech, and the reactions to the issue in the form of letters to newspaper editors. A notion of a symbolic public highlights these relationships, pointing out the links between 'state forms, means of making power visible/invisible (media strategies), and symbolic or discursive practices in the public sphere' (Ku, 1998: 173).

A good way of understanding how publics are discursively constituted through media discourse is, as Mules (1998) says, by making a distinction between the public and the audience:

> They are two different things. The audience exists as a social category brought into a certain relationship with the media, while the public is a creation of the media … The audience, for its part, becomes part of a media public through recognising itself in the mode of address adopted by the media in their attempts to create a public constituency. (1998: 25)

Following on from this, we introduce a concept of a shadow public to elaborate further on symbolic and concrete forms of publics and to investigate how the legitimacy granted to publics by the media allows them to have a role in policy-making on socio-political issues. In distinguishing the notion of a public from that of the broader community or society, we suggest that publics presented and constructed by the media have a similar fluid existence, manifesting at particular points in the media discourse and subsequently dissolving back into an amorphous community as media attention shifts elsewhere. Using the term shadow public to identify those that are unidentified as such enables us to highlight journalism's contribution to the mediation of reality and unpack the entrenched dichotomy between the marginalized and the powerful.

Public formation in the media is inextricably linked to framing, a process by which the media take particular positions on issues or topics while remaining seemingly objective (see e.g. Carragee and Roefs, 2004; Chong and Druckman, 2007; Entman, 2003; Klein et al., 2009; Porto, 2007). As Klein et al. (2009: 333) say, '(w)ords and images are both used to create news frames, thereby serving as mechanisms in the creation of public perceptions and opinions'. Behind the words and images stands journalism's attempt to accurately grasp social reality by selecting, gathering and presenting information on the issues in the public domain. The representation of reality is played out in the classic journalistic norm of a duel between clashing positions of publics, although the actual framing takes place in the way some facts are highlighted or underplayed or in the way some are tagged positively or negatively.

When Porto (2007: 312) specifically talks about 'interpretive frames', he emphasizes that they 'offer a specific interpretation of a political event or issue'. These frames have 'specific "sponsors", the various social actors that promote specific interpretations of political reality, including politicians, organizations, and social movements' (Porto, 2007: 312; see also Carragee and Roefs, 2004). Although all frames are interpretive,[1] we argue that frames are bolstered by 'sponsors' who are not always specifically identified as sources or interested parties. Journalistic use of frames is related to a need to cope with the tide of information. The imposed frames have epistemological and organizational dimensions: the epistemological component links the new information to the existing knowledge about the event, people or phenomenon, while the organizational dimension determines how this information is structured in the news text (Grunwald and Rupar, 2009). In studying the newspaper coverage of two major socio-political issues in New Zealand, namely immigration and genetic modification, this article develops the idea of a shadow public by defining it as a real or constructed group of people that a journalist perceives as being in the centre of a story she or he is writing on. What defines a shadow public is not its form of

appearance – it can be both concrete and symbolic, material and imagined – but its relation to framing and, therefore, the process of meaning-making in journalism.

Our point of departure from the argument that powerful groups, whether business or commercial science, come to speak on behalf of the public and in the public interest using a highly ideological manoeuvre,[2] is a need to understand the mechanisms journalists use to relate to the public debate. We argue that journalists engage with public debates not only by selecting, highlighting and underlining voices, as many studies based on framing analysis demonstrate, but also by sometimes privileging and sometimes simply constructing a desired middle point in these debates. It is in this process that shadow publics are created.

Thinking in terms of a shadow public gives the researcher an analytical tool for the systematic analysis of the news discourse around public policy issues. Pan and Kosicki's (1993) argument that news media play a significant role in framing public policy issues has been widely explored when it comes to the influence of sources on news production (Manning, 2001) or audiences (Lewis, 2001), but journalistic contributions to this socio-cognitive process have not received much scholarly attention. Talking about the construction of public opinion and popularity of opinion polls, Lewis (2001: 16) notes journalism's obsession with verifiable facts and 'both sides of the story' but also how, at the same time, the media work strategically to reinforce the status quo and maintain the power of pro-corporate political elites. This contradiction between journalism's scepticism towards reality and its role in the production of knowledge comes to the surface in the coverage of contested issues such as immigration and genetic modification. Exploring the concept of shadow publics allows for an analysis of the ways in which this contradiction manifests itself in news coverage and production of critical policy issues.

The context

This article looks at the different publics involved in the highly contentious mediatized debates around two different socio-political issues – immigration and GM – in New Zealand during the five years from 1998 to 2002 and examines journalism's role in the creation, maintenance and legitimization of these publics. We focus on GM and immigration issues because of the intense media coverage of these two issues, the salience of these issues during the two general elections (1999 and 2002) that took place in this time period, and the consequent new policies implemented by the government. In one policy change after the 2002 elections, the government lifted a moratorium on the release of genetically modified organisms into the environment, while, in another, the government replaced a broad-based points system for skilled migrants with a more restrictive system that placed much greater emphasis on a 'job offer' and on a much tougher English language test as part of the process for immigration (see Kurian and Munshi, 2006). Both issues may also be seen as embodying the discursive spaces where struggles over the neoliberal economic agenda of the state overlap with societal anxieties about national identity (see Kurian and Munshi, 2006).

In the course of the research for this article, it became apparent that the print media in New Zealand gave voice and legitimacy to certain publics in their reporting of the

politically charged topics of GM and immigration, a process facilitated by the creation of shadow publics. Drawing on theories around the creation of 'publics' and the 'public sphere', we unearth the processes of the formation of shadow publics that are harnessed, positively or negatively, thereby attempting to influence not only public opinion but also public policy.

Method

We started our collection of media articles on immigration and GM through a keyword search of *Newstext*, a database of newspaper articles in New Zealand. The newspapers searched included all the main print newspapers in the country – the *New Zealand Herald*, the *Sunday Star-Times*, the *Dominion*, the *Evening Post*, the *Dominion Post* (after the merger of the *Dominion* and the *Evening Post*), the *Waikato Times*, the *Daily News, The Press* and the *Southland Times*. One regional daily, the *Otago Daily Times*, was not included as it is not indexed by the database.

The keywords relating to immigration were 'immigration', 'immigrant', 'immigrate' 'migrant', 'migration' and 'migrate' while the keywords relating to GM were 'genetic modification', 'GM', 'genetic engineering', 'GE', 'biotechnology' and 'biotech'. The news reports, opinion pieces, features and letters to the editor were read and sorted first by year and by newspaper and then into themes, with a piece placed in as many themes as it could fit in. For GM, there were a total of 2224 articles and for immigration there were a total of 3571 articles.

Using the software programme Hilighter, which shows how many times a word appears in a group of articles, and then reading each article to determine the context of the relevant word or phrase, we identified publics within each theme. For example, within the theme 'food' in the articles on GM, the groups identified most often were 'consumers' and (common) 'people'. Although an important component of some forms of media analysis, a study of the visual images accompanying the articles is beyond the scope of this article. The articles were divided amongst the authors with each author reading a section of the total to identify the publics. A coding scheme that determined what constituted a public, and how a public was to be categorized and recorded was developed by the authors. A sample of articles were then selected from both GM and immigration and coded independently by the authors. These results were compared, and the process was repeated twice until there was 100 per cent agreement amongst the authors on the coding of publics. Once the reliability of coding was established, the entire corpus of articles was coded.

In analysing the media texts, we adapt a model of Fairclough's (1995: 57) discourse analysis which looks not only at a particular text itself but also the 'discourse practice' and the 'sociocultural practice' that constitute the text. Fairclough (1995: 57) describes 'discourse practice' as the 'processes of text production and text consumption' that envelope the text, and 'sociocultural practice' as the 'social and cultural goings-on' that provide the context of the event that the text refers to. In other words, we look at the text in relation to the context within which it exists to identify the publics created by the media in the coverage of GM and immigration.

Publics and shadow publics

Our conceptualization of a shadow public revolves around publics that can be both visible and invisible in a concrete and material sense, but are always present in a discursive sense. Drawing on Fairclough's (1995) analysis of the news media's role in the production of common ground, we examine the ways media associate this common ground with a specific public that we name a shadow public. Citing Kumar's study (1977) on the BBC, Fairclough explains:

> Its voice – personalized in its announcers, newsreaders and presenters – has evolved in a populist direction, claiming common ground (the 'middle road' and a shared 'common sense') with audiences, and often adopting a cynical, challenging and even aggressive stance to a variety of official institutions and personalities, including, for instance, government ministers. But the common-sense assumptions and presuppositions which the discourse of these key media personnel is built upon often have a heavily ideological character – naturalizing, taking as obvious, for instance, basic design features of contemporary capitalist society and its consumerist values. (1995: 46)

Journalists position a shadow public as constituted by people who form that part of society at the centre of public debate. Representatives of a shadow public are often sources of information in the news – their presence is based on expertise in the matter. Sometimes they are implicitly deemed to be a group within society that has an interest in the issue and has the experience of some type of consequences in relation to the issue. In all cases, a shadow public is a specific part of the public that is discursively constructed as a centre and relevant for policy-making.

A concept of a shadow public is quite different to that of a 'phantom public' described by Walter Lippmann (1925) as mere 'bystanders' with no real power to challenge the 'agents' of policy-making. This concept is also different from that of a 'counter public' which actively forms in response to marginalization (e.g. Fraser, 1990). Shadow publics are, in essence, amorphous groups organized by media discourse.

Let's take, for example, the headline of an article that appeared on the front page of a major newspaper in the nation's capital: 'NZ's loss if couple ousted, say supporters' (Morgan, 1999: 1). This headline brings attention to two publics. The first obvious public is that of the 'supporters'. This group of people is positively mentioned – their make-up and agenda are immediately clear to the reader. There is also what we call a shadow public contained within the report. The act of differentiating 'supporters' from anyone else implicitly invokes another public, comprising those who are not supportive of the couple. The existence of this shadow public is evidenced in the overt position of those opposed to illegal immigrants that is articulated elsewhere in the media in headlines such as 'Alert out in far North for illegal immigrants' (Gee, 1999); 'Officials struggling to win illegal immigrant battle' (Scanlon, 2001: 2); and 'Illegal immigrants could be in SI' (Martin, 2000: 3).

Similarly, a news report in the *Southland Times* (2002) is based on a statement issued by an easily identifiable public – a non-governmental organization called GE Free New Zealand. The spokesperson's comments on the ethical implications of trans-species transfer of genes into animals are all in direct quotes, such as:

'These experiments are like a scientific fishing exercise that may be good for investors but may be bad for New Zealand.

There is a clear threat to our export image'.

Yet there is a shadow public behind this news report as is evident in this paragraph of the report:

The main reasons given for the use of transgenic cows with genes from other mammals is for potential medical use and drug production. However, the GeneWatch UK investigation suggests safer, more humane alternatives are available.

The report refers to 'the main reasons given' without identifying who has given them, thereby creating and concurrently legitimizing a shadow public. It is not unreasonable to assume that the shadow public in this report is that of scientists, seen as experts whose views are presented as facts. The privileging of the shadow public of scientists is indeed recurrent and we discuss this in greater detail in the section on Media and GM later in this article. We turn now to look at the public formation processes in the specific media coverage of the two socio-political issues of immigration and GM.

Media and the immigration issue

The media coverage of immigration in New Zealand reveals how different kinds of publics, including shadow publics, are presented and constructed, and demonstrates how this construction of publics helps the media serve as 'important sites for the production, reproduction and transformation of ideologies' (Hall, 1995: 56). A frequent shadow public evident in media reports is that of a supposedly mainstream section of the population speaking in the name of a seemingly unified nation, as seen in the use of the catch-all term 'New Zealand' or 'New Zealanders':

New Zealand could not hide away in this part of the world if we wanted our children to have good jobs. Education was one of the key issues for improvement, but New Zealand also needed an expanding and dynamic population with greater immigration. (Weir, 1999: 10)

These sentences in the reporter's voice intersperse quotes from a senior bank executive calling on the country to focus on growing its economy by, among other things, boosting immigration and getting high quality listings on the share market. Investors and people in the finance sector are, of course, a major public in the report. But there is also a shadow public – a group of people who share the beliefs and values of what the newspaper believes to be the beliefs and values of 'New Zealand' as a whole. This is obvious in the sentence that ends 'if *we* wanted *our* children to have good jobs' [emphasis added]. 'We' and 'our' are personal pronouns that are attached to an agenda in the public sphere and therefore belong to a public, not a geographical land mass or political entity. By creating this shadow public and giving voice to it, the newspaper marginalizes those who are deemed not to have the beliefs and customs these articles attribute to New Zealand. At one level, the report is pro-immigration. However, the invocation of the shadow

public that claims to speak for the common good of the nation as a whole strengthens the neoliberal framing of the media, which implicitly makes the case for 'desirable immigrants' who are, as a major accounting firm is quoted as stating, 'high net worth individuals and entrepreneurs' (Fallow, 2001).

It is a similar shadow public that lurks in the background in an editorial of a Wellington newspaper that refers to a politician's concerns about the intake of refugees. It invokes the shadow public as it defines 'common good' for a generic New Zealand:

> Given New Zealanders' ambivalence towards refugees and immigrants of other-than-European extraction, Mr Prebble has a point. Jobless New Zealanders might not feel magnanimous. … If we fulfil our refugee quota with waifs and strays who need benefits and State housing, Ministers have an obligation to ensure that those who enter under the usual migration programme at least make a net contribution to the economy. (*Evening Post*, 2002)

In both these examples, it is the unnamed shadow public that steers the framing towards a certain kind of immigration, making a clear distinction between desirable and undesirable forms of immigration. This too is in line with the neoliberal leanings of the news media. As several critical scholars have pointed out, neoliberalism has given rise to race-based disparities despite its overtly colour-blind, market-is-all philosophy (see e.g. Goldberg, 2009; Lentin and Titley, 2011). The framing distinction between economically active immigrants and refugees (many from poor, war-ravaged nations) is manoeuvred by the shadow public which, at times, puts the spotlight on race quite explicitly, as in this opinion piece in a Christchurch newspaper that is critical of New Zealand's defence policy and its approach to immigration:

> Does Labour want New Zealand to remain a Western country? The Government's refugee policies, as well as its defence stance, suggest otherwise. For example, accepting UN-selected refugees, while we decline open entry to a thousand or two persecuted Zimbabwe white farmers. (Birss, 2002)

Clearly, accepting white Zimbabweans rather than 'UN-selected' [presumably non-white] refugees is seen as one strategy of retaining New Zealand's status quo as a predominantly white country, an issue that we discuss later in the article.

The reporting of crime in the context of the coverage of immigration provides yet another example of the news media's intervention in the ideological realms of the creation of publics. The issue of crime is reported in such a way that the publics the media create either need defending or are criminal. Reflective of what Hall (1997: 269) describes as a 'racialized regime of representation', articles about criminal behaviour or deportations highlight some publics in the immigration debate in New Zealand that are repeatedly and frequently associated with negative characteristics. In this way the reporting of deportations of people of a certain ethnic group may create an impression that some races/ethnicities in society have more criminal tendencies than others. Reporting that associates a particular race with repeated negative attributes is a type of ideologically-driven framing, and publics are formed, not around the core issue of whether a person who has committed a crime should be deported, but around the issue of whether a particular race/ethnicity is criminal or not, and whether New Zealand needs to be

protected against them or not. This negative framing of visible races occurs frequently in some newspapers in New Zealand. An example of this is in the following news story that was reported in four major newspapers of the country:

1   'Rapist will not be deported'

A former **Hamilton and New Plymouth** restauranteur, jailed for sex crimes, has won his appeal against deportation. (*Evening Post*, 2001a)

2   'Serbian rapist wins deportation appeal'

A **Serbian** rapist will be allowed to stay in New Zealand after he is freed from prison because deporting him would cause hardship to his partner and two sons. (*Dominion*, 2001)

3   'Rapist wins fight over deportation'

A **Yugoslav** immigrant serving a 10-year prison sentence for brutally raping the family babysitter has escaped deportation from New Zealand because his expulsion might harm his young children. (Gregory, 2001, *New Zealand Herald*)

4   'Deportation avoided'

A **Yugoslav** immigrant serving a 10-year prison sentence for raping the family babysitter has escaped deportation from New Zealand because his expulsion might harm his young children. (*Waikato Times*, 2001)

The use of racial or ethnic descriptors for criminals allows the media to position publics around a racial differentiation rather than the differentiation of criminals from non-criminals. In this example shown above, the only newspaper that avoided a racial/ethnic descriptor was the *Evening Post*, which appears to have deliberately described the criminal as having come from within a New Zealand community, a fair description considering the criminal in question had been in New Zealand long enough to have a family and children here. In choosing to assign the criminal in question an ethnic identity other than that of New Zealand, the three other newspapers reinforced the non-criminal, non-ethnic New Zealand as a shadow public and in positive terms although this public was not specifically mentioned.

The shadow public of a particular kind of New Zealander clearly serves as a means to differentiate those who do not fit the characteristics of the dominant group. Yet giving legitimacy to this shadow public does not merely entail characterizing the 'other' in negative terms. This shadow public is also invoked in the reporting of the 'other' in positive terms as that of the happy, well-settled migrant. The personal response of such an 'other' immigrant is an important element in these media reports. This happens most frequently in positive stories about migrants, such as the series in *The Press* (see Hoby, 1999, for a summary).

These stories picture an integration of the migrant into the community and focus on particular 'positive' attributes, such as gaining employment against the odds, being well spoken, loving New Zealand or being grateful. Here are some specific examples:

> This is a Muslim family, living life in the best way it knows in the way families do. 'I am,' says Hanif, 'a normal sort of Joe Blow running my life and paying my mortgage.' (Dekker, 2001)

> 'Happy' is one of the few English words they all know. 'Very, very' is another. They say they have been treated extraordinarily well here. 'It's good,' says Bilad. 'It's all green and beautiful. It doesn't have all the dirt.' She looks down. 'You don't have to wash your feet so often.' (Sell, 2001)

Quite remarkably, the stories that focus on negative stereotyping through the use of racial or ethnic descriptors in crime stories as well as those that play up the 'happy migrant' both construct a generic white New Zealand shadow public which is presented as different from a discursively demarcated immigrant public. As Dyer (1988: 46) notes, the normalizing power of whiteness in western society is such that it not only subsumes other categories – of class, gender, heterosexuality, for example – but 'it also masks whiteness as itself a category' (see also Hage, 1998). What the media coverage also points to is 'the *ethnic* character of nationhood' (Frosh and Wolfsled, 2007:107). The positioning of 'us' and 'them' in media discourses around immigration thus invokes a homogeneous New Zealand nation-state, embodied by a white shadow public, that renders cultural diversities and differences as outside the normative logic of normality and belonging. At the heart of this framing is the ability of both neoliberalism and liberal multiculturalism to permit and absorb difference through integration.

A different kind of shadow public also comes to light when we examine the dominant discourse around 'business' in the media coverage of immigration. The public attracted by this discourse is sometimes described simply as 'business', as in 'good for business …' or 'business needs …', but more often particular associations or agencies speak on behalf of employers and business people. It is notable here that the news media tend to quote such associations or individuals not in their capacity as representing the narrow interests of a specific public but as 'experts' speaking in the interests of the nation. For example, a *Dominion Post* article (Talbot, 2002) quotes the Employers and Manufacturers Association (Northern) chief executive Alasdair Thompson as saying that it was essential the 107,000 unemployed 'were integrated into the workforce and immigration policy aligned to match demand'. This comment is represented as a fact from an expert, yet could as accurately be represented as opinion from a member of a particular public.

The following article in the *New Zealand Herald* clearly links immigration policy to the 'needs of business':

> Business groups are applauding a plan to let up to 150,000 immigrants into New Zealand over the next three years – and its focus on getting more skilled people.

> Business NZ chief executive Simon Carlaw said skill shortages were rife. Mr Carlaw said until now the immigration process had been unable to deliver people with the skills needed in a reasonable time.

> … Immigration policy has not married well with the needs of business. (Taylor, 2001)

The public referred to here is a shadow business public, represented by experts using the discourse of business. The sources cited represent particular agencies but their views are

conflated to represent the entire New Zealand business sector. What this slippage between roaming experts and specific publics does is create a particular understanding of 'the national interest' that in fact serves the dominant neoliberal economic agenda of the state (see Easton, 1997; Kelsey, 1997).

These examples of journalistic constructions of publics, both visible and invisible, demonstrate the media's preference for the norms and values of a dominant group of society. In doing so, it creates a desired centre of public debate, often a platform for the general population to give vent to their own prejudices. The magnitude of media coverage on immigration opened the floodgates of letters to the editors of newspapers, many of which consolidated the 'us' and 'them' divide, as seen in the examples below:

> Good on you, Mr Peters. I am right behind you and am glad I am back down in this little part of the world away from all the evil, at the moment anyway. Keep them and Muslims away, I say. (Riverton, 2002: 6)

> Let us stop the influx of immigrants before our own culture is overwhelmed. (Brownie, 2002: 8)

Thus far, we have shown the processes at work in the representation and construction of shadow publics in the reporting about immigration. We can see that these shadow publics are not all equal, and are not all equally influential on public policy. We turn now to the media coverage of GM.

Media and the GM issue

Media discussions about GM frequently refer to *the public* but unlike the vague and fluid 'New Zealand' of the immigration publics, the 'New Zealand', or 'public' described in media reports about GM is highly characterized. Also, in sharp contrast to the media discourse on immigration, the generalized public (or the people at large) is mostly referred to as 'ignorant', 'uninformed', 'frightened', 'worried', 'afraid', 'anxious' and 'irrational', among others. Such negative framing of the generic New Zealand public is evident in all newspapers. For example, an editorial in the *Sunday Star-Times* (2002) talks about the unease of what it calls the *wider* public:

> The GE activists are also able to tap a deep vein of unease among the wider public. Most people may not switch their vote over GE, but they are worried about it. They are also bewildered by the scientific and technical complexity of the debate.

The editorial goes on to further define 'the wider public' as 'most' people, a term that demarcates them from a supposed minority who do not share the characteristics of the newspaper's 'wider public'. If most people are uneasy and bewildered by science, then the minority implicitly referred to here are confident and intelligent, an elite minority. The wider public is narrowed down further in the rest of this article to those who are worried about GM, and bewildered by the science and technicality of the debate. Thus the shadow public formed by this article are the people who are not bewildered by GM, who understand it and who are at ease with the technology. The use of this shadow public

comes in handy for the newspaper's own framing strategy, which aligns with a general reverence for science in the media and what Wilcox (2003: 227) calls reporters' 'lack of confidence in their own understanding of technical issues'. This reverence is particularly evident in New Zealand where 'journalists often have limited scientific training in areas that are rapidly evolving in extremely complex ways' (Michelle, 2007: 641). In such a setting, the shadow public of unidentified minority techno-literates is meant to proclaim an unstated correlation between science/knowledge and economic development, and, therefore, the public good from a neoliberal perspective.

It is in this context that media articles about GM frequently use the voice of experts or other elites, including scientists, business representatives, politicians, and political lobby groups:

Scientists:

Scientist Dr Tony Conner said people's concerns about modified foods were often because of inaccurate information. 'People get carried away with science-fiction concepts. They don't understand the technology or how it relates to everyday living,' he said. (Mair, 1998)

Business representatives:

The next company, DuPont, accepted there were public concerns about the technology. 'While much of these concerns arise from misinformation or alarmist exaggeration, we nevertheless believe that we should proceed with caution', it said. It recommended a national biotech strategy to help New Zealand 'realise the potential benefits' of biotechnology. (Samson, 2000: 2)

Politicians and public officials:

Ms Hobbs [then Labour Party MP and Minister for the Environment] said the issue of genetic engineering was alive in this country, and she wanted New Zealanders to be informed about it rather than frightened of it. New Zealanders had little awareness of how food was produced, but felt it was safe. (Barber, 2000)

Political lobby groups:

He was an expert witness for the New Zealand Life Sciences Network at the Royal Commission on Genetic Modification, due to report to the Government tomorrow. People who opposed GE crops fearing unknown human health effects were anti-science, Prof Ammann said. They were misleading the public because this do-nothing approach was intended for dealing with known negative trends such as species extinction. (*Evening Post*, 2001b)

The shadow publics of scientists, politicians, or business people are not formally referred to as publics but as neutral experts, and yet these so-called experts are often, in reality, parts of lobby groups themselves. The framing of such shadow publics gives certain groups the voice of legitimacy, enhanced by the presentation of a scientific view as fact rather than opinion, and the use of a technical vocabulary.

It is noteworthy that the newspaper reporters were themselves active participants in this framing of the public as 'confused'. So influential was the voice of the experts that references to the need to inform the public, or to a *confused* public, in the articles were often in the reporters' own words:

> While the politicians argued over labelling systems and thresholds for GE food, the public could be forgiven for feeling confused. (Beston, 2000)

Such cases are fascinating because they show how a majority public is accepted by the news media as scientifically illiterate, uninformed and ignorant. The particular framing around this public was narrowed over multiple repetitions to refer exclusively to those members of the public who were anti-GM. Although in any group of people discussing a concept there are likely to be some who are confused, the framing around the 'wider public' so frequently referred to never mentioned those people who are pro-GM and rarely acknowledged that many members of the 'wider public' may not be confused.

When alternate views are presented on issues around GM, though fairly infrequently, they appear in opinion columns or guest columns. While it could be argued that this is an attempt on the part of news editors to be inclusive, the use of opinion pieces gives this form of inclusion a sharp negative edge as, each time an alternative view is presented, it is explicitly referred to as an 'opinion' rather than being included in news articles where opinions often masquerade as 'fact'.

Mediatized marginalization

It is clear from this discussion that news media treatments of the publics created in the debates around immigration and GM differed significantly. In the coverage of GM, the public that was highly caricatured and frequently peripheralized on the basis of their identity was often the widest conceivable interpretation of a public, namely, the 'consumers' or 'New Zealanders' – a public that had not been marginalized until the period of coverage. In contrast, negative attributes in the media coverage of the immigration issue were associated with minority publics that had been already marginalized prior to the period of research.

As a result, the nature of the negative characterizations differed as well. Where the marginalization had occurred prior to the period of coverage, the negative tone of the news report was more implicit, as is evident in the example of the deportation of an alleged rapist provided earlier. Ascribing racial characteristics in a systematic way to criminals who belong to an already marginalized ethnic group is a reinforcement of the marginalization of that group by emphasizing racial boundaries and margins. However, where the public in question was not already marginalized, the negative characterizations were more explicit, as seen in the examples given about the publics around GM where the general public was frequently described as being uninformed.

The span of this research has captured two sets of marginalized publics, one already established and one in its infancy. In both cases, the use of shadow publics reinforced the marginalization, albeit in different ways. In the mediated immigration debate, there were hundreds of 'experts' who seemed to 'know' what was good for the country, whereas the debate about GM produced huge swathes of people who apparently knew nothing about the topic.

The findings show that despite the assumption that the centre is comprised of the majority or the mainstream (see Hall et al., 1994; Vasas, 2005), this may not always be the case. Instead of a population base, it is useful to think of centralization and peripheralization in

terms of the process of negotiating power around information gathering, dissemination and use. The centre comprises the people who define meaning and understanding. In these terms, the centre consists of the people who are in a position to be listened to by policy makers and therefore wield power. These people may comprise a very small section of the population. Once the centre has succeeded in exerting its influence by marginalizing the periphery, it may be seen to diversify from its original strong positions; a diversification that does not, however, change the discourse holding the marginalization in place. In the immigration debate, the articles showing the positive side of migration are an example of this diversification. Groups of immigrants, or individuals, are depicted for the positive gains they bring New Zealand society, but it is the centre through the voice of shadow publics defining and disseminating exactly what is positive and what is not. In the GM debate, this diversification is seen in the voice of scientists who say that although GM is a scientific issue, the public should be informed and consulted. Neither of these discourse diversifications has the effect of changing actual practice.

The process of mediatized marginalization, therefore, does not have a standard model but varies according to the context. Where the received knowledge is entrenched, the process of marginalization becomes implicit rather than explicit. The only difference between the way in which the anti-GM public and the non-white migrant publics are treated in the news media is that the marginalization of migrant publics is more entrenched. It has been happening for a long period of time (see e.g. Greif, 1995; Munshi, 1998) and, therefore, no longer needs to be explicit. The marginalization of anti-GM protestors, on the other hand, is explicit as it is a new issue where views are not so well entrenched.

Shadow publics and media influences on public policy

Although vastly different, the discourses around both immigration and GM closely intersect with each other. While the public debate on immigration centred around what type of person should be allowed into New Zealand, the Labour Party-led government introduced policy changes in 2002–3 that both tightened and whitened immigration, making it particularly difficult for people from non-traditional source countries to enter New Zealand (see Kurian and Munshi, 2006; Munshi and Kurian, 2009; Spratt, 2005). In the case of GM, while the media created publics around the dual issues of who held knowledge and who ought to be able to exercise it, the same Labour-led government introduced policy changes, allowing the lifting of the moratorium on the release of genetically modified organisms into the environment (see Bell, 2003; Kurian and Munshi, 2006; Munshi and Kurian, 2009).[3]

In both these cases, media coverage of the issues raises the question of whether resulting changes in policies on immigration and GM are a reflection of the influence exerted by two sets of media-created shadow publics that played an active role in legitimizing and marginalizing certain positions on immigration as well as on GM. Although a causal influence on policy cannot be established, it is worth noting certain significant aspects of the media construction of the publics that become evident through a discourse analysis of the articles.

In exploring how sources of investigative news stories set the agenda for investigative journalists, Feldstein (2007: 547) talks about the unseen but enormous influence of these

sources on policy-making: 'The source's role can be compared to that of a ventriloquist whose lips may not be obviously moving but who nonetheless supplies the voice for the reporter.' In a similar way, shadow publics exercise significant influence on policy despite being unidentified as recognizable publics. In the media coverage of immigration and GM in New Zealand, these shadow publics are not positioned as representing specific social, cultural, economic or political constituencies but as omniscient business and science, respectively. Existing within the shadow and not being seen as a public is clearly an advantage for these groups. They form the 'centre' in both of these issues that help marginalize the more visible publics. The point to note here is that the shadow publics are in fact very visible as experts and sources of legitimacy. What is hidden from view is that they too have vested interests, and they lobby for certain perspectives. The idea of the 'shadow' illuminates the play of lighting and darkness that throws some perspectives into sharp relief while keeping other/private interests in darkness.

Articles discussing the desirability of immigrants almost always focus on the ability of immigrants to contribute positively towards business. This discourse creates a public wherein the 'NZ' of 'NZ needs …' is a NZ with a business agenda. This is implicit in each policy declaration which uses phrases such as 'good for business …', 'contribute to business', and 'employers need …'.

Business clearly has a lot of influence on government policy and many newspaper reports identify immigration as the way to stimulate business. This is usually qualified, however, as immigration of a particular type, a type that can slot into a job invisibly. This desire for 'ease of employability' leads to tighter border controls on immigration. On making the pass rate for the English Language Test higher, Lianne Dalziel, then Minister of Immigration, admitted that the change would lead to fewer Asian migrants, but was quoted as saying: 'These changes are specifically designed to address the employability and settlement prospects of migrants' (Small, 2002). It is worth noting that the employability and settlement prospects of a migrant are seen and addressed as the migrant's problem and not that of the host community.

Alongside this immigration discourse is another that describes certain immigrants as being bad for New Zealand, costing lots of money, bringing bad health, crowding schools and hospitals, driving up house prices, and changing the face of New Zealand. This discourse was championed by Winston Peters, then leader of a political party called New Zealand First (and subsequently Foreign Minister of the nation from 2005 to 2008) (see Munshi and Kurian, 2009). However, the public giving voice to this discourse is never pinpointed as the reason for policy change and any suggestion of this is denied. Asked to comment on the 'whitening' of New Zealand's source of immigration as a consequence of the contentious discourses around migration in the years preceding, the then Immigration Minister Paul Swain was quoted as saying in 2004: 'It's not by design. It is by being much more targeted on the skills that are needed, much more targeted on the job offer and we also want good settlement outcomes' (Young, 2004).

A close examination of the discourses around GM reveals another powerful centre, namely science. As Nisbet et al. (2003: 38) point out, 'the media … powerfully shape how policy issues related to science and technology controversy are defined, symbolized, and ultimately resolved'. The framing of a particular issue, the creation of publics, and the consequent influence on policy are, therefore, interlinked. In the case of the GM

issue, the media framing created a powerful centre, the scientific elite who were almost exclusively portrayed as pro-GM. Although there is a strong core of anti-GM scientists and advocates who are knowledgeable about GM, this perspective was usually presented only infrequently in opinion columns. They remained on the periphery of the debate and seemingly unable to influence policy.

To understand the nature of the influence of certain publics, especially shadow ones, it is useful to think about the ideologies informing them. The ideology that led to policy changes on immigration and GM, influenced by dominant publics, aligns with the neo-liberal directions taken by New Zealand in the last two decades. Within this ideological frame, New Zealand is disposed to think of migrants as commodities, chosen for the economic benefit they will bring to the country in some predefined way. This means that it is ultimately employers who make the choices about which immigrants/commodities to use. Similarly, with GM, policy decisions are influenced by scientists for whom GM research is connected to corporate funding and profitability.

Conclusion

The power of some publics over others, actively encouraged by the mainstream media, is at the heart of the criticism of Habermas's idea of a public sphere where publics are meant to interact with each other on a presumed level platform (Haas and Steiner, 2001). The challenges to the Habermasian public sphere, including by Fraser (1990), suggest that 'journalists should encourage citizens to acknowledge and articulate social inequalities' (Haas and Steiner, 2001: 126) if indeed the public sphere is to be a level playing field. Yet, as this study shows, inequalities remain entrenched in the ways publics are created and maintained in the mediatized public sphere.

As Calhoun (2002) points out, the public sphere plays a role not just in allowing the public a means to influence the state (its original formulation), but also in shaping the publics themselves through media representations. Our research shows that the way issues are framed in news journalism are closely linked to the process of constructing what we call shadow publics that influence public policies through their seemingly objective and neutral positions on contentious issues. Yet, these publics are neither necessarily objective nor neutral. The manner in which the news media represent their views conceals their values, objectives, biases, prejudices and agendas.

In the course of our research we discovered, lurking in the shadows, publics who visibly, invisibly, or partially visibly helped frame issues for the news media. Unlike specific publics with a clearly defined agenda, these publics derived their strength and credibility from being represented as universal voices of reason and rationality who spoke for the 'common good'. The analysis of the coverage of the contentious issues of immigration and GM showed that, in both cases, dominant sections of society, be they politicians, scientists or businesspersons, steered the framing of issues through their role as sources of information. But they were not alone. The individuals and groups that represented the viewpoints of people interested in or affected by particular socio-political issues had their role in framing the issues too. In the case of immigration, this shadow public encompassed a section of Pakeha/European New Zealanders whose views were deemed to be representative of 'mainstream' New Zealand. In GM, the shadow public

constructed by the media were those members of society deemed technophiles who espoused the neoliberal economic agenda of the state. These shadow publics helped journalists find a narrative thread in mapping reality for their readers.

This analysis revealed that the process of meaning-making involves both concrete and symbolic publics. Along with the real groups of people that journalists transparently name either as a source of information or a part of society affected by the news, there are shadow publics that journalists position as the imagined centre of the society, and therefore who become the focus of the news stories they write. Such a process of constructing publics and framing issues allows for the legitimization of certain dominant perspectives, which in turn have significant implications for policy-making on contentious issues such as immigration and GM.

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Notes

1. We acknowledge an anonymous reviewer for clarifying this point.
2. We thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the importance of distinguishing between concepts of public and public debate as a way to understand the construction of news discourse.
3. Lifting the moratorium on field trials and release of GM crops and livestock was supported by both major political parties, National and Labour, although opposition to GM was evident amongst the general public, with a 2005 opinion poll conducted by the Sustainability Council of New Zealand showing 75 per cent of the public being opposed to GM food (Mole, 2005; Kurian and Munshi, 2006). The changes to immigration policy were largely in response to public anxiety about changing demographics, reflected particularly in the populist anti-immigration position taken by the New Zealand First party that was part of the coalition government at the time (Kurian and Munshi, 2006; Blackwell, 2011). No political party has sought to reverse these changes even with the government being led by the centre right National Party since 2008.

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