

Strategic solidarities: Cultural festivals, Relational Encounters and Diasporic Youth Identities

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Abstract

Cultural festivals have grown in diversity, scale and popularity in many migrant-receiving societies in recent years and schools have increasingly become involved in supporting these for intercultural exchange and celebration. While prior research has found that cultural festivals play a significant role in maintaining and enhancing cultural traditions, much less research has focused on the role that festivals play as sites of conviviality, cross-cultural encounters and solidarity – especially for school-aged young people. In this paper we examine three school-focused cultural festivals held in Aotearoa New Zealand, paying particular attention to how the diverse relational solidarities encouraged through cultural festivals shaped the identities of diasporic youth. A theoretical lens of solidarity was used to analyse the relational bonds formed through festival attendance, and how these might foster new possibilities for identity formation in multicultural nations. Our study revealed how three forms of solidarities (ethnic, trans-ethnic and school-based) served to affirm traditional cultural practices and identities, as well as strategically craft new, often plural identities. We reflect on the productive and inventive nature of such solidarities and how festivals provided a space to articulate counter-narratives about diasporic youth and assertions of status, belonging and citizenship.

Keywords:

cultural festivals,
solidarity,
identity,
conviviality,
migrant youth,
counter-narratives,
diaspora

Introduction: Cultural festivals and Ethnic Minority Youth

Cultural festivals have grown in diversity, scale and popularity in many migrant-receiving societies in response to the arrival of new and diverse migrant groups (Duffy, 2002, 2005; Mackley-Crump, 2015; Sanjek, 2014). Schools have increasingly become involved in such festivals – seeing them as prime sites to create opportunities for intercultural exchange and celebration (Kornelly, 2008; Moroşanu, 2018). Prior research has established that cultural festivals play a powerful role in ‘the mobilization of group identities’ (Appadurai, 1996, pg. 13) by serving to both create and sustain ethnic identities within multicultural nations (Bramadat, 2001; Sanjek, 2014). Yet the prevailing focus of prior research has been upon adult experiences of cultural festivals, often ignoring experiences of young participants. In addition, festivals have often been overlooked as sites of mixing, conviviality and cultural and cross-cultural encounters (Moroşanu, 2018; Simonsen, Koefoed, & de Neergaard, 2017). In this paper we examine the experiences of migrant youth at three school-based cultural festivals in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2018. Our focus was on the relationships and solidarities young people formed within and across ethnic and school groups with the aim of exploring the festivals’ relational potential in supporting the strategic articulation of diasporic identities.

We chose the theoretical lens of solidarities as an analytical tool for examining the multi-dimensional relational experiences of migrant youth, as this holds particularly salient opportunities to deepen understandings of political transformation and identity formation (Bauder, 2020). This approach builds upon earlier work on conviviality, cosmopolitanism, and everyday multiculturalism (see, Harris, 2013, 2014; Wessendorf, 2013; Wise & Noble, 2016), all of which draw into focus relationships and affinities and seek to better understand how people relate and live together in a culturally complex, mobile and global world (Gilroy, 2004; Wise & Noble, 2016). While solidarity is often used to describe homogenous, pre-existing bonds (for example., Durkheim, 1991), our interest was particularly in when forms of togetherness and solidarity *did something* that had an impact beyond affiliation – what we have termed, strategic solidarity. Drawing on Featherstone (2012) and Bauder (2020), this notion of solidarity as a productive and inventive practice is closely connected to the politics of place. Solidarity in this sense considers practices that not only cement existing identities and power relations, but also shape new ways of relating and provide novel possibilities of politicisation for those who experience oppression and marginalisation (Bauder, 2020; Featherstone, 2012).

Cultural festivals play a number of roles in multicultural societies. As Simonsen and colleagues (2017: 638) assert, festivals paradoxically ‘function as a form of social cohesion, while simultaneously they are sites of subversion, protest, exclusion and alienation’. Our interest in cultural festival experiences of ethnic minority youth in Aotearoa New Zealand stemmed from an awareness of their exclusion from mainstream forms of belonging, and experiences of discrimination and racism (Nakhid et al., 2016; Witten, Kearns, Carroll, & Asiasiga, 2019). Cultural festivals potentially provide a ‘disruption’ (Turner, 1986) from such experiences in their overt focus on celebrating ‘Other’ and our interest was in examining how cultural and cross-cultural encounters through festivals may provide strategic opportunities for identity articulation. Our paper therefore aims to contribute to the field of intercultural studies by firstly drawing attention to the role that cultural festivals may play in enabling the strategic cultivation of public identities of ethnic migrant youth and, secondly, interrogating the potential that the notion of solidarity adds to deepen our understanding of intercultural relations in an increasingly globalised world.

The paper begins by reviewing theories of solidarity and we position our approach among others who seek to examine more active and political constructions of solidarities (Bauder, 2020; Featherstone, 2012). We then examine how theories of solidarity have previously been applied to cultural festivals and consider how festivals can provide opportunities for the transformation of attitudes toward the self, as well as the ‘other’ (Lee, et al., 2012; Simonsen et al., 2017). We introduce the three youth-focused festivals in Aotearoa New Zealand which were the focus of this research (the *ASB Polyfest* in Auckland, and *Tu Tagata* and *Northern Regional Polyfest* in Wellington) and describe how we conducted our primarily ethnographic research. We then outline three forms of solidarity we noted at the festivals – ethnic, trans-ethnic and school-based – and consider how such relational solidarities were used strategically to affirm not only cultural identities, but also to assert new and emergent identities and counter-narratives for diasporic youth.

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Solidarity and Identity Politics

Solidarity broadly can be understood as a form of affiliation with a group or a culture (Bayertz, 1999). Traditionally, theorists such as Durkheim (1991: 31), have viewed solidarity as a sense of ‘groupness’ and shared common bonds which are derived by individuals and groups holding shared experiences and homogenous characteristics, or in Durkheim’s (1991) words, ‘solidarity by similarity’. Solidarity from this perspective assumes affinities between people that are automatic, natural and a ‘given’ (Featherstone, 2012; Hall, 2011). More recent theories of solidarity have drawn greater attention to the ways that allegiances can be actively constructed by individuals and groups as part of political activity and struggle (Bauder, 2020; Featherstone, 2012). Solidarities in this sense can include strategic alliances and social relationships that are ‘forged through political struggle which seeks to challenge forms of oppression’ (Featherstone, 2012: 5) and advance political gain. Featherstone (2021: 19) argues that this also ‘allows a focus on the generative, transformative character of solidarity and how solidaristic practices can shape new relations, new linkages and new connections’.

While Featherstone's work is largely derived by studying translocal politics and trade, Bauder (2020) takes up his theories of solidarity and applies them to the context of migration – arguing that understanding solidarity in this way enables 'different political actors [to] converge in ongoing social struggles' (1068). His work ties together a theory of solidarity with identity and marginality, and like Featherstone, sees solidarity as the active construction of a political stance and allegiances that can produce new political relations and subjectivities that enable 'those who experience oppression, marginalization and exploitation to speak, act and belong' (Bauder, 2020:1068).

Such notions of solidarity are tightly linked to the politics of place and our focus on Polyfests in Aotearoa New Zealand drew into focus previous work on forms of transnational Pacific place-making and solidarities founded on Indigenous and Pacific lenses of relationality and kinship making practices (Faleolo, 2020; Hau'ofa, 2008; Henderson, 2016; Mila-Schaaf, 2006; Teaiwa, 2007). Among these relational ways of being is the Pacific concept of *vā*, which emphasises a focus on relationships, to the extent that relationships are the most important dynamic shaping individual identity and the Pacific social world (Mila-Schaaf, 2006). Mila-Schaaf (2006: 10) describes *vā* as a socio-spatial concept 'used to describe the nature of the terrain that lies between us. It is the "imagined" space that we 'feel' as opposed to see'. *Vā* involves a relationally-dependent concept of identity that also conditions the ethics of relating in a way that requires reciprocity and maintenance, that, similar to Indigenous Māori principles, recognises that the sustenance and survival of those around you is also the sustenance of the self (Rata & Al Asaad, 2019: 226-227). While these intersecting forms of relating cultivate solidarities locally, they also, especially among Pasifika diasporas, provide collective and transnational ways of being as a type of solidarity: 'a collective aspect of a Pasifika worldview [that] anchors Pasifika wellbeing behaviours' (Faleolo, 2020:80). By privileging collectivity over individuality (Henderson 2016), these affiliations and kinships extend beyond a nation to include translocal links and solidarities within the "sea of islands" (Hau'ofa, 2008).

We found these relational understandings of solidarity alongside Featherstone's (2012) and Bauder's (2020) more agentic theory of solidarity especially generative for our context of multi-ethnic youth and festival participation as it recognises the potentially dynamic, transcultural and creative nature of solidarities, and how these open up the potential for agency 'to emerge from below' (Featherstone, 2012: 19) and in turn, shaping identities. Applying these ideas to our study drew our attention to the need to examine not only the

cementation of existing subaltern identities and shared affiliations between cultural festival performers, but also the ‘inventive’ character of solidarity that could potentially garner recognition, belonging, and citizenship status (Akoth, 2017). Cultural festivals therefore could provide a space where practices, experiences and legacies of marginality might engender different sites of political struggle, which in turn shape, contest and disrupt normative citizenship as it is practised and conceptualised (Turner, 2016). In the following section we examine previous literature on solidarities and cross-cultural interactions at festivals (Simonsen, et al., 2017).

Cultural festivals and solidarities

School-supported Polyfests in settler-colonial Aotearoa New Zealand

In recent years, the significant growth of immigrants to Aotearoa New Zealand has given way to a particular variant of superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007) that encompasses both the identity and sovereignty of Indigenous people (Māori) and significant flows of new immigrants (Spoonley, 2015; Spoonley, Bedford, & Macpherson, 2003). While constitutionally Aotearoa/New Zealand has an obligation of partnership between Māori and the Crown as enshrined in the Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi, dominant colonial narratives continue to consolidate White settler normativity (Terruhn, 2015), resulting in practices that undermine unceded Māori sovereignty both on institutional and interpersonal levels. As Kukutai and Rata (2017:35) point out, ‘nominal biculturalism’ and demographic multiculturalism aside, the “mainstream” into which migrants are expected to integrate remains, at its core, a fundamentally Pākehā [European] one’. This means that there is a hierarchy of belonging in New Zealand based on axes of success and willingness in upholding Eurocentric values, and axes of racialized proximity to White imaginaries (Hage, 2000), thus keeping ethnic minorities on the margins of White New Zealand.

Cultural festivals have grown in recent years in response to these growing levels of diversity in Aotearoa New Zealand (Mackley-Crump, 2015). The desire to recognise these cultural groups within schools has emerged as key sites for the facilitation of intercultural exchange and celebration as well as inter-school competition (Kornelly, 2008; Moroşanu, 2018; Williams, 2018). Polyfests in Aotearoa New Zealand are some of the largest of these festivals with a particular focus on the cultural expressions (dance, music etc) of Polynesia (the largest Pacific migrant group in Aotearoa New Zealand) and the wider Pacific. These

have gained popularity in schools since the original Polyfest in 1976 at Hilary College in Ōtara which involved only a handful of local schools. Forty years later, the *ASB Polyfest* is now the largest Polynesian cultural festival for students in the world. In 2018, the year of our study, over 100,000 people attended it over the four days with around 10,000 school students performing. While the focus of Polyfests is on Pacific cultural arts, the *ASB Polyfest* also includes a growing contingent of non-Pacific cultural performances. For example, in 2018, alongside the four Polynesian stages (Sāmoa, Tonga, Niue, Cook Islands) and the Māori stage, there was a Diversity Stage for all remaining groups (including smaller Pacific groups such as Fiji, Tuvalu, as well as Indian, Chinese, etc.). Other cities around Aotearoa New Zealand have smaller Polyfests where school students perform and often compete for prizes. Previous research of school-aged cultural festivals in Aotearoa New Zealand has identified their importance for ethnic minority youth as they provide opportunities for the affirmation of a shared non-majority position, identity-formation and even enhanced wellbeing and academic achievement (Homolja, 2019; Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2013; Kornelly, 2008; Mackley-Crump, 2015; Rubie-Davies, 2011; Williams, 2018). Our research builds up on this using ethnographic approaches which we outline below.

Methodology

Our research drew on ethnographic data collected at three Polyfests in 2018 that were attended by school-aged young people: the *ASB Polyfest* Auckland, (14-17th March 2018); *Tu Tagata*, Wellington, (27th July 2018); *Northern Regional Polyfest*, Porirua, Wellington (3rd August 2018). These three festivals were chosen in light of their school-supported focus, their significance and proximity. In 2018, 70 schools were involved at the *ASB Polyfest*, representing 252 performances. Our focus at this festival was on the Diversity Stage, and in 2018, this stage hosted 84 groups representing 26 ethnic backgrounds. The largest representation of performance groups was Indian (19) then Chinese (11), followed by Filipino (8) and Fijian (7) and a number of pan-ethnic and fusion performances (e.g. ‘African’) performed as well. The two other Polyfests were one-day events for Wellington school students that focused on Polynesian cultural performance. The *Tu Tagata Festival* in Wellington included six schools and an evening performance to approximately 3,000 people while the *Northern Regional Polyfest* in Porirua, Wellington included seven schools from the Porirua Basin and involved a full day and evening of performances to audiences of around two to three thousand people.

We chose to conduct our study through ethnographic methods in keeping with other ethnographic studies of festivals in order to explore the dynamics, expressions, meanings and lived experiences of the festivals, (Akoth, 2017; Duffy, 2002, 2005; Frost, 2016; Jaimangal-Jones, 2014; Johnson, 2007; Kornelly, 2008; Mackley-Crump, 2015; Sanjek, 2014; Simonsen et al., 2017; Williams, 2018). Following Frost's (2016: 570) assertion that festival experiences involve high levels of embodiment, for which it is beneficial that the researcher is 'locate[d] within the event, [...] lay[ing] emphasis on phenomenological, or at least experiential forms of analysis', both authors attended all three festivals in order to be present and experience events and meanings in ways that 'approximate members' experiences (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011: xx). While *Tu Tagata* and the *Northern Regional Polyfest* were only one day, our most sustained ethnographic involvement was at the four-day Auckland *ASB Polyfest*, where we spent most of our time at the Diversity Stage. In 2018, our university sponsored this stage, so we were also there in the capacity of a staff member and a postgrad student. In the other events we attended as audience members.

The primary data collection was therefore participant observation and we made extensive fieldnotes about the selection of music, dance and costumes presented on stage, performers' pre- and post- performance speeches and on-stage interviews with MCs and interactions within the festivals space. We also took photographs and collected official documents associated with the events (such as brochures and posters) and documented public announcements and media associated with the events. The longer *ASB Polyfest* also allowed us to mix and mingle with students before and after performances so where possible we conducted on-the-spot interviews with performers. Our research had ethical approval from our university [Victoria University of Wellington HEC#25149], and we wore identifying T-Shirts and name tags so that our interactive participant observation was overt (Jaimangal-Jones, 2014; Homolja, 2019).

Data were analysed through a 'general inductive approach' (Thomas, 2006: 238) to elicit salient themes, patterns and categories inherent in raw data to emerge. Data were initially coded through a process of open coding, allowing the data to lead the development of themes against which the data was then re-coded (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). The research focus questions, and direction of the study also helped to identify the initial codes of belonging, citizenship, identity, however, other themes emerged which were then included into the coding scheme (e.g. hybrid identities and fusion). Through the analysis of these themes, we arrived at another prominent theme – solidarity – that was then coded for again,

with three sub-categories emerging – ethnic and trans-ethnic and school-based solidarities. In the following we document these three forms of solidarity and how they shaped diasporic youth identities.

Cultural Performance and Solidarities

Ethnic group solidarities

Festivals offer high visibility for groups of performers who share an ethnic identity. As previous research has identified, performances at multicultural festivals provide opportune avenues for positive representation by allowing ethnic groups to distinguish themselves and have their identities celebrated (Bramadat, 2001; Kornelly, 2008; Sanjek, 2014, Williams, 2018). Our research confirmed this, with many performers expressing how being together through performances provided a shared sense of cultural identity, unity and affirmation. For example, the Waitākere College Filipino group described performing on stage as the ‘the best thing to happen to our culture’ (ASB Polyfest Diversity Stage). Other groups articulated how their performance enabled them to preserve their culture and ‘protect its future’ (Northern Regional Polyfest, Bishop Viard College Cook Island Group), and to show that their culture is ‘very much alive’ (Porirua College, Cook Island Group).

Shared ethnic solidarities were also established when performers referred back to the traditions and history in their ancestral homelands and used these to convey ethnic unity and to affirm status and recognition as new migrants in New Zealand. As this pre-performance speech given by a representative from the Manurewa High School Kiribati group shows, their performance was viewed as a connecting point between homeland traditions and contemporary togetherness New Zealand:

This isn’t just a milestone. This item holds far more importance than that. That’s because our dance is in commemoration of the Butiraoi shipwreck that happened on January 18th, 2018, this year. We lost 73 people, with only seven survivors. It was a great loss for our nation, and it impacted us greatly. In our dance, we will be performing the [inaudible dance name] which is a traditional dance to let enemies know that we are here. We have interpreted it into a way to let others know, that we as a country are here, together as one. We will then continue onto the Kawawa, a traditional war dance which demonstrates how powerful we are. Our final piece will be the Kabuti which will showcase what we have to offer to the community. We will proudly represent Kiribati. We are here. We are one. We are Kiribati. (ASB Diversity Stage)

Their speech conveys the significance of having a presence at the *ASB Polyfest* which was seen as an achievement and a milestone for this small population group of Kiribati, and also their distinctiveness, unity, strength and right to be in New Zealand.

Friendship with others was another important way of expressing cultural unity and identity and examining these provided important insights into how conviviality, affective bonds and mutuality (Harris, 2016) contributed to festival performances. Participation in the performances themselves enabled conviviality and new friendships to form within their cultural groups. For example, a group of Japanese performers from Avondale College stated how their dance allowed them to ‘be with some friends, new friends, dance together [as] outside of Polyfest there are few opportunities to get together’ (ASB Polyfest, Diversity Stage). Another Malaysian student (Epsom Girls Grammar) who had performed at *ASB Polyfest* five years in a row described how important building friendships through her participation were important to her:

Interviewer: So is performing (for the 5th year in a row) part of preserving your Malaysian culture?

Student: NO! It’s much more about finding a home. A place to belong. Community. It’s much more about community.

Bonds with others also appeared to give young people strength and courage to address negative stereotypes about their ethnic groups. For example, the Aorere College Indian group, in their pre-performance speech stated, ‘this is what we have to show you about our identity and cultural diversity. Tradition will always overpower Western influences’ (ASB Diversity Stage). In the context of New Zealand, this group showed their resistance to systems of cultural and ethnic oppression through their affinity as a group of performing Indian diasporic youth. One further illustration of this was by a solo dhol drummer from James Cook High School who made a strong statement about representing his Sikh Indian cultural roots and musical traditions. In his pre-performance speech, he explained that he took up dhol drumming as ‘it means a lot to be able to do this’, and that through his performance, he wanted to challenge negative attitudes toward his ethnic group, ‘because people discriminate and stuff lately, and this [drumming] shows that we’re not what you think we are. We are actually pretty advanced’ (ASB Diversity Stage). His reference to ‘we’ (Sikh Indians) shows the solidarity he felt with his community – but also the importance of

representing them – through the festival space provided at the Diversity Stage – to disrupt negative perceptions and assert alternative narratives and identities.

Trans-ethnic solidarities

The performers and audiences at the three Polyfests were primarily composed of youth and families of Pacific, Māori and various other ethnic backgrounds. White European New Zealander attendees were noticeably small in numbers at these events. This demographic composition established a sense of a different cultural space than the norm in New Zealand's White-dominated settler-colonial society, and was commented on by attendees, performers and MCs. For example, MC's at *Tu Tagata* and at the *ASB Polyfest Diversity Stage* explicitly referenced the state of collective Brownness at these events. For example, at the *ASB Diversity Stage*, the MC referred to the shared Brownness that included audience members: 'It's beautiful to be Brown, I love being Brown. If you're not Brown, you have a Brown heart'. Similarly, the *Tu Tagata* festival was opened by a presentation from a Pacific Member of Parliament, Honourable Aupito William Sio. He stated that this festival celebrated 'the four B's: Brown, Bilingual, Brainy and Beautiful' – a statement that was greeted by loud cheers from the audience. This comment asserted a type of trans-ethnic solidarity in the face of racialisation and othering by White New Zealand and affirmed strength and unity among various Brown identities at these events. This was also a political statement that attributed a counter-stigma, positive narrative to being Brown.

We observed many other illustrations of collective and trans-national solidarity at the three festivals. Common illustrations of solidaristic practices were when groups included performers from other ethnic groups or developed a 'pan-ethnic' dance to encompass other students' countries. Such trans-ethnic performances often occurred out of necessity (such as to support small numbers of performers from islands such as Niue or Tuvalu) or to pull together larger numbers to represent a broader region (such as the whole of the Pacific, India, Africa or Latin America). For example, at *Tu Tagata* the inner-city schools did not have the student numbers for small Pacific nations, so many joined with others and created a Pacific fusion of music and dance with a range of Pasifika, Māori, and a few Palagi¹ students. However, beyond the mere need for numbers, nurturing *vā* (Mila-Schaaf, 2006) by showing care and acknowledging received care for others' performance groups was also present in the space. For example, Aotea College's Tokelau group stated: 'half the group you see here are

¹Palagi: Samoan language – people of White European origin.

Tokelau, and the other half are not. We are a mixed group, but we are all a [...] family based on love for the Tokelau dance, and family based on Pasifika values' (*Northern Regional Polyfest*). Similarly, at the *ASB Polyfest Diversity Stage*, there were a number of pan-African performances while only one group was from designated an African country (Mt Roskill: Ethiopian). The Kelston African group, for example, acknowledged this approach, 'offering moves from Nigeria, Ghana, Congo and South Africa [wanting] to show the strength of our solidarity'.

The inventiveness of these practices confirmed the strength of cross-cultural friendships and collective worldviews (Faleolo, 2020), but also how festivals provided an openness for such cross-cultural possibilities (O'Grady, 2013a). Youth participants also picked up on the extent of this cultural diversity at festivals stating that it encouraged cross cultural mixing: 'it's so diverse, that you can just...meet new people, you know, see people you know. So cool' (Hawai'ian group, *ASB Polyfest Diversity Stage*). Friendships and loyalty to other students were also frequently given as explanations for why they chose to join groups other than their own ethnicity. For example, a Samoan student told us that helped out the Niuean group this year as he had friends there that he wanted to support.

These forms of transethnic solidarity in the performances served as a form of mutual solidarity that related not only to one ethnic group, but the attainment of something larger together – a strategic solidarity that elevated ethnic minority youth. This was illustrated well by the One Tree Hill College Fijian Indo-Chinese performance group at the *ASB Polyfest Diversity Stage*. This group performed an overt narrative of a re-imagined community (Anderson, 2006) of ethnic unity between the three major ethnic constituencies in Fiji within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand (see Figure 1). This group articulated pan-Fijian solidarities through their pre-performance statement that articulated a vision of a unified and harmonious multicultural community. Teaiwa (2007: 215) comments that while fusions of all kinds are occurring in Pacific Island cultures, Indian-Fijian mixes 'are still tentative':

We will bring to you a Fiji Indo-Chinese fusion dance, reflecting three of the diverse cultures: Indian, Chinese and Fijian, weaving together the diverseness of cultural awareness. The culture of Fiji is a tapestry of Indigenous Fijian, Indian, European, Chinese and other nationalities. In this dance we will also honour our passed Indian and Chinese ancestors, who brought their culture to Fiji in hopes to create a bright future. Not just their families, but also Indigenous Fijians, together, hand in hand to prosper in the

land known as Fiji, in the hopes of not losing their culture, but binding together the essence of being from Fiji. We present to you our fusion. (ASB Diversity Stage)

The use of three different styles of clothing (Indigenous Fijian, Indian, and Chinese), all with an integrated colour scheme of red, black and gold tones (see Fig 1), reinforced the ‘fusion’ of three musical and dance traditions presented in their performance.



Figure 1: One Tree Hill College Fiji Indo-Chinese Group

Source: Author's own photo.

Following their performance, they reiterated this pride in their culturally diverse nation of Fiji by saying, ‘This is my culture, my country, I wish I were there right now... This is who you are... Hold on as we live in New Zealand and become New Zealanders in a new land’ (ASB Polyfest, 2018). Through this quote, participants hinted at the potential for festivals to provide a space for reimagining new identities, affiliations, and solidarities, through the ‘politics of possibility’ (O’Grady, 2013a) that performance could enable and thereby cement their presence and place of belonging.

School solidarities and cultural performance

One final type of solidarity we observed at the three festivals related to school-based solidarity. While only the *ASB Polyfest* awarded school prizes, it was evident at all three festivals that inter-school rivalry and loyalties were an important component to the cultural festivals. In this form of solidarity, performers demonstrated a sense of togetherness through their affiliation with their school, transcending ethnic or other differences. For example, schools often chose costumes to reflect their school's uniform colours or coat of arms and even modified song lyrics to include school references. School cheers and chants were also encouraged by MCs at all three festivals and performances would often end with school-targeted cheering which also reinforced school competition and loyalties. At the *Northern Regional Polyfest*, it was common for all performers from one school to receive *haka tautoko*² which involved a group of students from the school that had just performed descending from the stalls and moving into formations in front of the stage to perform a *haka tautoko* to honour a performance well done in a highly visible way. This contributed to the feeling of school solidarity, reciprocity, pride and belonging for all participants.

Participants also stated how important the school was to their performance. For example, following a Fijian performance, students from Ōtāhuhu College maintained that it 'feels good representing our school, aye', and that they would definitely perform again with the Fijian group 'but from Ōtāhuhu Colleegee!' (*ASB Polyfest Diversity Stage*). Four performers from Papatoetoe High School, similarly, expressed their desire for their school to be seen and celebrated and lamented a missed opportunity to watch their school friends who were performing on different stages in the festival. These examples of school-centred youth conviviality illustrated another kind of solidarity, founded through a shared experience of locality and school attendance, and extending beyond homogenous, pre-existing forms of ethnic identity to create a sense of collective belonging to the performance and in turn, the school, which they endeavoured to represent competitively.

Festivals, Counter-narratives and Identity-formation

Our study has illustrated how solidarities developed within the full experience of cultural festivals that affirmed pre-existing bonds and relationships within diasporic ethnic

² Haka is the Māori word for a traditional ceremonial dance and in this case, a haka tautoko is done to answer to, honour, and support the previous performance.

communities – but also extended beyond these in dynamic and even strategic ways to create new relationships and establish novel communities of practice (Bauder, 2020; Featherstone, 2012; Williams, 2018). In this discussion we explore what this might mean for the identity-formation of diasporic youth, the articulation of counter-narratives and the contribution of our research to solidarity theories.

In the context of cultural festivals, notions of solidarity are highly intertwined with notions of identity. Our analysis through the lens of solidarity revealed three types of solidarities – ethnic, trans-ethnic and school-based – that emerged and co-existed in the context of youth focused cultural festivals. We found many examples of ethnic solidarities that were characterised by ‘shared characteristics with another person or group’ (Hall, 2011, p. 2), but we also saw novel illustrations of trans-ethnic solidarities that expanded beyond the immediate bonds of pre-existing communities and drew in collaborators, convivial peers and place-based affinities based around school communities. These served to creatively shape old and new identities, and in doing so, break down traditional and normative centres of meaning, production and power (Teaiwa, 2007). Our particular interest in strategic solidarities – those that sought to achieve something through their togetherness – drew our attention to how these could serve to cultivate certain identities young people wished to be recognised by asserting claims of belonging and citizenship as members of this multicultural society.

There were also moments in which performers took the opportunity provided by the stage and an audience to assert certain identities or counter-narratives about their culture. Cultural festivals provided a venue for the mobilisation of these goals and collective assertions – often made from within one ethnic group – but also widening beyond this to include others. In keeping with other studies (e.g. Bramadat, 2001; Kornelly, 2008; Williams, 2018), we found that the three festivals provided a venue for these unified assertions to be made – through speeches before and after the performances, through the staging of the dance itself and through the collective symbolism (strategic) solidarities of togetherness achieved through such an event. This enabled, for example, the Aorere College Indian group (ASB Polyfest) to declare that ‘tradition will always overpower Western influences’, signalling not only a collective commitment to past homeland traditions – but also a contention that Western culture could not erase this. Similarly, the sole dhol drummer (James Cook High) at the *ASB Polyfest*, was keen to not only to represent and maintain his Sikh culture, but to provide a counter-statement to negative, discriminatory attitudes toward his ethnic group, and to show that ‘we are actually pretty advanced’. The formation of ethnic and trans-ethnic

solidarities was also crucial to profile collective representations and actions underpinned by (often unstated) shared goals (Nielsen, 1986) and in doing so provide possibilities to rethink ways of belonging and counter misrepresentations of cultural identity (Bauder, 2020).

Solidarities across ethnic groups were also used strategically to inform counter-narratives of identity. For example, the performance of the One Tree Hill College Fiji Indo-Chinese which integrated and combined three ethnic identities from Fiji to show the ‘binding together the essence of being from Fiji’, enabled them to ‘make a statement’ (Teaiwa, 2007: 216) about a trans-ethnic fusion of culture in New Zealand. This shared cultural performance of Fijian, Chinese-Fijian and Indian-Fijian youth articulated a particular plural identity that recognised their ancestors who had arrived in Fiji (Indian, Chinese), and simultaneously showed that they could ‘become New Zealanders in a new land’. As Bhabha (1994) reminds us, such constructions of identity are on-going articulation of difference that reflect moments of historical transformation. Such cultural performances can displace the dominant frameworks and assumptions by flowing through and breaking down polarizing ethnic discourses (Teaiwa, 2007). Further, these performances lay claim to belonging and citizenship in Aotearoa New Zealand, through practices and conceptualisations of citizenship that disrupt the dominant hierarchies of the social order (Turner, 2016) and assert intersecting ancestral traditions and histories.

School solidarities were a feature of all of three festivals. We observed that school affiliation provided an additional aspect of solidarity for diasporic youth that enabled them to develop relational and strategic bonds across ethnic identities by embracing a shared identity as school-affiliated young people. Shared loyalty and pride in their school communities brought together diverse young people, unified by competition and collective performance experiences. This combination of ethnic and school solidarities was compounded by the spatial location of school communities which are closely caught up in highly segregated landscapes of social class in cities like Auckland and Wellington (Thrupp, 2007). By supporting other performers from the same school, forms of school solidarity and reciprocity enhanced effective competition amongst inter-school rivalries, with an emphasis on “display[ing] in actions and attitudes that we are not primarily individuals but parts of a communal whole. [as] We are creatures within a context of relatedness” (Nokise in Mila-Schaaf, 2006: 13). Schools therefore became not only ‘transcultural communities of practice’ (Williams, 2018) and sites of intercultural mingling (Harris, 2016), but also were implicitly caught up in more political negotiations aimed to enhance school reputations and status.

Conclusion

In this study we used a relational lens of solidarity to study cultural festivals with the aim of highlighting the strategic and inventive character of solidarity (Featherstone, 2012; Bauder, 2020). The lens of solidarity made a number of contributions to the examination of diasporic youth identities. In the first instance, it drew attention to the relational qualities of cultural festivals and how these served as sites of shared and collaborative friendships, interactions and relationships. Such conviviality developed as students prepared for, and then participated in, their cultural performance, as well as through cross cultural encounters at the festival itself. The Brown multicultural space that the festivals cultivated provided a counter-space within White New Zealand whereby solidarities were fostered that enabled assertions of commonalities and togetherness within ethnic minority groups, but also the development of pluralistic relationships and identities.

Importantly, the lens of solidarity also drew attention to how relationships and alliances made through cultural performances could also strategically serve towards political and social gains through facilitating the telling of identity stories that asserted a particular kind of right or identity (Bramadat, 2001). In our study we observed how strategic ethnic, trans-ethnic and school-based solidarities fostered an intended narrative (or counter narrative) within a cultural performance that both affirmed traditional cultural practices and identities and created new visions, counter narratives and at times, multiple identities. These identities were cultivated at the intersection of ancestral heritages (links to former homelands, traditional stories and ancestors) and current identities (links to life in Aotearoa New Zealand and new cultures). Cultural festivals provided diasporic youth a space to affirm their place in Aotearoa New Zealand without losing touch with the past and in doing so, provided an opportunity to 'rethink ways of belonging' (Bauder, 2020:1076). In addition, ethnic minority youth also used the festival stage to address some of the forms of racism, marginalisation and exclusion they encountered in their daily lives which undermined respect towards their cultures and identities (author removed).

Our study showed how cultural festival settings enabled a liminal space (Turner, 1969) to emerge, where groups were temporarily freed from their usual social status and position and able to articulate new identities and representations. Cultural performances provided a form of 'status reversal' (Turner, 1969) as, for a brief moment, ethnic minority groups were given elevated and minor celebrity status (Bramadat, 2001) in a White

dominated settler-colonial nation. Their performances also at times enabled opportunities to claim belonging to the multicultural nation through this performance – such as the Manurewa College Kiribati group which laid asserted their presence in Aotearoa New Zealand by stating ‘how powerful we are’, and that we are ‘letting you know [...] [that] We are here. We are one. We are Kiribati’. Such examples illustrate how cultural festivals provide opportunities for groups to draw together, to claim status, belonging and citizenship (Akoth, 2017).

If we view solidarity as allegiances forged through political struggle (Featherstone, 2012), we can see that cultural festivals in increasingly superdiverse nations like Aotearoa New Zealand can serve as important liminal spaces of possibility and ‘radical openness’ (O’Grady, 2012a, 2013b). In such spaces, diasporic migrant youth not only created performances that bound together pre-existing communities, but as our study has shown, such performances also actively held a radical openness that could open up new political terrains and possibilities (Featherstone, 2012: 246). This radical openness provided the possibility for young people to creatively negotiate identities through the formation of strategic relationships and the articulation of certain narratives, and indeed, counter narratives (Bramadat, 2001). These ‘practices of subaltern region-making’ (Clifford, 2001) among diasporic youth can be seen as part of a wider struggle relating to the uneven landscapes and politics of place, identity and belonging in settler-colonial societies (Bauder, 2020). Our study has highlighted the ways in which cultural festivals can enable forms of solidarity and togetherness that can serve to consolidate old identities and re-imagine and strategically craft new identities.

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