
Editorial The ongoing challenges

THE notion that the war correspondents of today are essentially the same as their colleagues of, say the Vietnam war of more than four decades ago—but now armed with laptops, satellite dishes and digital cameras—is a fallacy. Australian author and media educator Tony Maniaty reminds us thus in this edition of *Pacific Journalism Review*. He writes:

There are notable exceptions—people who operate with vigorous independence from all authority and control—but these are rare: The emergence of a media-military complex, in which journalists are heavily integrated into the fighting machine and into the coverage of one perspective only of war, has fundamentally changed the nature of the business (p. 36)

Maniaty, author of *Shooting Balibo* and a consultant for the film *Balibo* (reviewed on p. 205), raises essential issues about international humanitarian law (IHL) and fundamental protections for journalists. Interest in IHL—the body of law which protects those not or no longer taking part in fighting, including journalists, and regulates the means and methods of warfare—has been steadily growing in recent times. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and New Zealand Red Cross together with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), University of Technology, Sydney (UTS), and Massey University in New Zealand hosted two conferences in Sydney and Wellington in May last year to reflect on the issues and consider strategies for the future. The Australian Red Cross and the Australian News Safety Group provided support for the Sydney conference. Both ‘Reporting Wars: Challenges and Responsibilities’ conferences looked at the relationship between the media, military and humanitarian aid groups and this was debated by leading journalists along with legal, military and government speakers.

In Sydney, the involvement of the ABC and UTS’ Australian Centre for Independent Journalism (ACIJ) no doubt contributed significantly towards the high level of media attendance. Its Wellington counterpart had the backing of Massey University’s School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing, but the media was not so well represented there. Nevertheless, spurred on by

the New South Wales Coroner's verdict in 2007 that found the Balibo Five journalists 'were shot and/or stabbed deliberately, and not in the heat of battle' (cited by Stephenson, 2010) to prevent them from revealing Indonesia's invasion of Timor-Leste, Australian journalists have drawn up a code to protect the safety of media professionals. (When the invasion began on 7 December 1975, a sixth journalist, Roger East, was captured in Dili by Indonesian soldiers and executed in the Timorese capital the following day.)

The 16-point safety code was launched at the Sydney Reporting Wars conference (McMahon, 2009). It calls on news organisations to fully ensure the physical and emotional safety of staff assigned to conflict and hazardous zones and that they are aware of international humanitarian law. Reported the ABC: 'The code discourages any risk taking in pursuit of a story and states counselling should be provided after coverage of traumatic events.' New Zealand has yet to take this path but a screening of the film *Balibo* and a follow-up seminar on 'Reporting Wars: The Ongoing Challenges' planned for AUT University on May 24, initiated and sponsored by the ICRC, is hoped to take the debate further.

This special edition of *PJR* has compiled a selection of commentaries and papers from the Sydney and Wellington conferences along with a broader range of research articles. In the opening commentary, keynote speaker **Chris Cramer**, global editor for multimedia at Reuters News, asks essential questions confronting the news media under the title of 'What price freedom? Global reporting trends and journalistic integrity'. He points out that besides the high number of media workers who die—often murdered in their home countries—are the economic challenges of a global financial meltdown. He asks:

Is the industry in such a mess, in such chaos and crisis, that fair and balanced reporting from conflict zones as well as other locations, is simply too expensive for much of the industry to bear? (p. 11)

Cramer also argues that the media must repair its breach of confidence with audiences and readers with a focus on greater transparency with the public.

Florian Westphal, of the International Committee of the Red Cross, writes about the vital relationship between the news media and humanitarian organisations in terms of shaping public perceptions about armed conflicts. And this relationship has been made difficult by decreased expenditure on foreign reporting.



TONY MANIATY

The Balibo Five filming at the old Portuguese fort in Balibo, Timor-Leste, shortly before being killed by Indonesian troops in 1975. A scene from the film *Balibo*.

Cait McMahon, of the Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma-Australasia in Melbourne, makes some strong points about ‘self care’ and ‘duty of care’ strategies for not only war reporters, but all the media professionals who are confronted by any work-related trauma.

Several New Zealand journalists and an educator—**Brent Edwards**, **Cameron Bennett**, **Michael Field**, **David Robie** and **Jon Stephenson**—give varying perspectives on experience in the field in conflict situations while Fairfax Media’s **Clive Lind** offers an audit of a desirable duty-of-care strategy for responsible media organisations. Radio New Zealand International’s **Walter Zweifel** writes about a West Papuan reportage case study.

Colonel Martin Dransfield and **Commander Shaun Fogarty** give insights into ‘embedded journalism’ with a New Zealand Defence Force perspective. Dransfield notes: ‘In short [the journalist] wanted a story, we wanted to tell our story, so we both achieved what we wanted.’

In the first of the research articles, **Dr Roderic Alley** of Victoria University’s Centre for Strategic Studies, writes about the ‘culture of impunity’,

while lawyers **Sophia Kagan** and **Dr Helen Durham** give another insight into IHL and protections for journalists.

Investigative journalist **Janine Cohen** provides an article about objectivity, fairness and balance and ‘bearing witness to atrocities’. **Shaun Filer**, a former US Marine Corps medic turned duty-of-care trainer for media organisations, offers a more practical extract drawn from his 2009 research thesis for the Queensland University of Technology. He examines what it takes to learn to survive the world’s most ‘difficult, remote and hostile environments’.

The themed section concludes with a historical article by **Dr Allison Oosterman** from AUT University about New Zealand war correspondence before 1915, and a review of the film *Balibo* by **Susie Eisenhuth** and the ‘appalling litany of lies’ that has shrouded the deaths in East Timor for so long.

In unthemed contributions in this edition, **Dr Crosbie Walsh**, adjunct professor of the University of the South Pacific, analyses political blogs in Fiji as a ‘cybernet democracy’ case study; **Dr Susan Forde** examines the ‘lure of the local’ in community news broadcasting; and independent journalist **Yasmine Ryan** deconstructs the ‘collective voice’ of the Pacific on climate change at the Copenhagen 15 conference in December 2009.

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