

## EDITORIAL: Fighting self-delusion and lies

**W**ELCOME to this double edition of *Pacific Journalism Review*, the second to appear as an independent publication. Since we last appeared, a world already groaning under the weight of COVID-19 and climate change has had to endure the added burden of Russia's murderous and unjustified attack on Ukraine. Ukraine has found allies all over the world, not least from those concerned that Russian leader Vladimir Putin, who now apparently thinks of himself as a Tsar, has used the war as an excuse to try to crush even further the few remaining free journalists and artists surviving in his mafia fiefdom.

To say that journalists have lost their lives covering the war goes without saying. Along with their lives have been the last shreds of truth in the Russian media. During the Cold War there used to be a joke based on the names of the two main Soviet newspapers, *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, which ran: 'There is no pravda in *Izvestia*, and no izvestia in *Pravda*.' (There is no truth in news, and no news in truth.)

When it comes to the war in Ukraine, it seems nothing has changed.

Those Russians who want to can still find the truth about what is happening online and, until recently, could see broadcasts from Ukrainian television. Despite this, we repeatedly read stories, or hear from our Russian friends, that their families back in Russia consistently deny that there is a war or blindly parrot the official Kremlin line about biological warfare facilities or claims that Ukraine had been infiltrated by Nazis or secret plans to invade Russia by NATO.

It seems almost surreal to us that anybody could believe such arrant nonsense. And yet this same delusion—this same willingness to be deluded—seems to have spread around the globe. Even as new hearings uncover more and more evidence of Trump's involvement in the attempted overthrow of the US government in January 2021, he still has fanatical followers who believe that he won the last election and a Supreme Court eager to follow his ultra right-wing agenda.

Similarly, there are national leaders in the Pacific who seem to truly want to believe that China really is their friend instead of being an aggressive imperialist power acting the same way the European powers did in the 19th century.

As our *Frontline* coverage of the anti-vaccination protests in Wellington makes clear, self-delusion and a willingness to be sucked down the rabbit hole of online conspiracies are also to be found in New Zealand. The protesters in New Zealand's capital were violent, abusive, incoherent, illogical and prone to circulate any nonsense that fitted their convoluted beliefs. Some of them really were wearing tin foil hats. Like the Muscovites freezing in their Soviet-era flats and some Pacific politicians relaxing in their palatial homes in Cairns, they wanted to believe.

Self-delusion must also have been present in the minds of those Filipinos who voted for ‘Bongbong’ Marcos, apparently willing to believe the lie that his father, President Ferdinand Marcos, was not a thieving, corrupt dictator who crushed dissent, presided over the intimidation of millions of people and the murders of who knows how many.

The truth, we have been told, will set us free. But what if those people whose minds are bound in the chains of conspiracy theories, propaganda and lies, don’t want to be free? What if they prefer to cling to their delusions?

The answer is that we—as journalists, academics and citizens—have to make sure that the truth remains available. As journalists and academics we have to continue reporting and researching and making our findings available through the media. As citizens we must keep demanding that accurate, reliable information is available to us.

We continue to do our part in this edition of *Pacific Journalism Review*.

**Khairiah A. Rahman** introduces our themed articles in the next section, which draws on the focus of the Asian Congress for Media and Communication (ACMC) conference hosted at Auckland University of Technology (AUT) in November 2021. They echo the concerns of all those who cherish freedom of the press and the truth. In what *Asia Pacific Report* editor **David Robie** describes as ‘an age of growing hate, intolerance and disinformation’, the need to hold the line against distortion and falsehood—what Robie calls ‘a disinfodemic’—is even more vital.

This is echoed in ‘*Rappler*, Facebook, Duterte and the battle for truth and public trust’, in which **Glenda M. Gloria** argues that without journalists who will tell it like it is, no matter the consequences, the future will continue to be one of alternate facts and manipulated opinions.

In ‘Marcos, martial law and memory: The past is our future in the Philippines’, **Sheila S. Coronel** investigates the way Bongbong Marcos tried to rewrite the history of his father’s brutal reign and manipulated the media in order to win the Philippine presidency—and succeeded. Although press freedom is enshrined in the 1987 Constitution, **Rachel Khan**’s study of the effect of outgoing President Rodrigo Duterte’s government’s hostility against media produces some disturbing findings.

From Indonesia, **Hermin Indah Wahyuni** and **Andi Awaluddin Fitrah** examine the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic as constructed by online news media outlets. They find that because the online media privileged the political context over health and the economy, they were able to play an optimal role in the crisis.

With a disinformation introduction by David Robie, our *Frontline* coverage analyses the siege of Parliament by a coalition of anti-vaxxers and right wing activists. As **Kate Hannah**, **Sanjana Hattotuwa** and **Kayli Taylor** demonstrate in ‘The murmuration of information disorders: Aotearoa New

Zealand, mis- and disinformation ecologies and the Parliament Protest’, the online barrage of misinformation and disinformation that supported and influenced the protests reflected not just global links, but also just how fractured the protests were.

**Byron Clark** argues in ‘The NZ media and the occupation of Parliament’ that the media must remain vigilant in the aftermath of the protests and investigate the disinformation networks behind the protests. Māori Television videographer **Rituraj Sapkota** reflects on what he describes as ‘the unprecedented hate’ directed at the media during the three week occupation in ‘The NZ Parliament protest: What the cameras in the crowd witnessed’.

Our unthemed section leads off with ‘Afghanistan, the Taliban and the liberation narrative: Why it is so vital to be telling our own stories’. Afghanistani broadcaster **Muzhgan Samarqandi** critically examines the reporting around the experience of New Zealand journalist Charlotte Bellis, who became the centre of news attention when she became pregnant and asked the Taliban for sanctuary.

Australian journalist and researcher **Linda Brady** presents a troubling report on conditions facing Queensland journalists in ‘Don’t rock the boat’: Pervasive precarity and industrial inertia among Queensland journalists’. Journalists are presented as largely divorced from union support, subject to unreasonable pressure from employers and with no seeming guarantee of employment.

In ‘Chinese New Zealanders in Aotearoa: Media consumption and political engagement’, Waikato University doctoral candidate **Zheng Jiancheng** reports on his research into the Chinese diasporic media in New Zealand.

In the *Photoessay* section, photojournalist **Todd Henry** looks at how kava consumption has spread through the Pacific and into the diasporic community in New Zealand. His ‘Visual peregrinations in the realm of kava’ also examines the way Pasifika women are carving their own space in kava ceremonies.

We follow this with *Obituaries* of two important figures in Fiji’s university and media circles: Academic **Robbie Robertson** and *Fiji Sun* publisher and editor-in-chief **Peter Lomas**. Robertson wrote extensively about the coups that have plagued Fiji and was well regarded as an advocate of democracy in the Islands. Lomas, on the other hand, was strongly criticised for making the *Sun* a post-2006 military coup government mouthpiece.

We finish with our reviews section. As usual, we have cast our net wide, with volumes on commercial fishing in the Marshall Islands (*Our Ocean’s Promise: From aspiration to inspiration: The Marshall Islands Fishing Story*), a beautifully produced collection of letters and recollections of the New Zealand Wars (*Voices from the New Zealand Wars. He Reo nō ngā pakanga o Aotearoa*), family history (*Wars Apart: From Cairo to Christchurch—WWII Letters of Love and Anguish*) and a new guide to Samoan oratory (*Lāuga: Understanding Samoan Oratory*).

Elsewhere, former *New Zealand Herald* editor-in-chief **Gavin Ellis** reviews veteran journalist **Jim Tucker’s** memoirs, *Flair and Loathing on the Front Page*,

which charts his career as a prominent journalist and media educator.

Professor **Matthew Ricketson** of Deakin University, who is co-editor of the *Australian Journalism Review*, reviews *The Trial of Julian Assange: A Story of Persecution*. In his assessment of the way Assange has been treated since he provoked the fury of the United States government by revealing its dirty secrets from the Iraqi invasion, Ricketson argues that Assange has been persecuted to warn off any other journalists or researchers trying to uncover the truth about how badly Western countries behave,

Not all our books are new. In our **Bookshelf** section *PJR* editor **Philip Cass** talks about the delights to be found in second hand bookshops. With Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II celebrating her Platinum jubilee, he looks at a timely discovery, a record of her visit to the Pacific, Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia in 1953.

As usual with *PJR*, our scope in this edition has been broad, our selection of articles eclectic and our aim, as always, has been to examine, to analyse and to critique the media and journalism in Asia and the Pacific.

**O**N the publication front, our independent strategy has been strengthened by the creation of the Asia Pacific Media Network|Te Koakoia Incorporated (APMN), a non-profit organisation. It held its first formal general meeting in July. After 28 years, first at the University of Papua New Guinea, then at the University of the South Pacific and finally at Auckland University of Technology, we hope APMN will make *Pacific Journalism Review* more sustainable and create new opportunities for academic and journalism freedom. We have received many messages of support, among them from Chris Nash, who pioneered the first doctoral programme in journalism at an Australian university, and Wendy Bacon, an investigative journalist and **Frontline** editor for *PJR*. They said: ‘We are very proud and supportive of what *PJR* has achieved over the years and wish it a long and successful life into the future. *PJR* has always been a Pacific initiative, and we are happy to support its transition to a new organisational home in New Zealand.’

*DR PHILIP CASS*

*Editor*

*Pacific Journalism Review*

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