

EDITORIAL: Will journalism survive?

WHEN current editor Philip Cass and I, as founding editor, started planning for this 30th anniversary edition of *Pacific Journalism Review*, we wanted a theme that would fit such an important milestone. At the time when we celebrated the second decade of the journal's critical inquiry at Auckland University of Technology with a conference in 2014, our theme was 'Political journalism in the Asia Pacific', and our mood about the mediascape in the region was far more positive than it is today (Duffield, 2015). Three years later, we marked the 10th anniversary of the Pacific Media Centre, with a conference and a rather gloomier 'Journalism under duress' slogan. The *PJR* cover then featured a gruesome corpse at the height of Rodrigo Duterte's callous and bloodthirsty 'war on drugs'—and on media—in the Philippines. Three years later again, the PMC itself had been closed in spite of its success.

In the middle of last year when we settled on a call for papers for *PJR* with the theme 'Will journalism survive?' we seemed to be on the right track given the post-COVID-19 pandemic surge of conspiracy theories and disinformation, Trumpian fake news, assault on democracy, and a disturbing global decline in public confidence and trust in mainstream media. The profession of journalism was and remains under grave threat.

However, little did we reckon on 7 October 2023 and the fact that the world would be thrown into such a dystopian upheaval as a result of a surprise and extraordinarily daring attack on Israel by Hamas resistance fighters breaking out of Gaza, the world's 'largest open-air prison' (War Child, n.d.). Prior to this attack, the 2.3 million Palestinians—two thirds of them younger than 25—living in the besieged 365 square kilometre strip had been subjected to four wars in 10 years since Hamas had won the elections in 2006.

As the latest, and by far the most devastating, Israeli war on Gaza entered its ninth month as we went to press, the verification of information about casualties had 'slowed to a crawl', lamented the New York-based media watchdog Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). An unprecedented number of deaths, with more than 108 Palestinian journalists killed by Israeli forces (Al Jazeera states 147 dead) since the start of the war, displacement, and censorship are all making it 'exponentially harder to confirm information about the conflict's devastating impact on Gaza's media community—and, by extension, about the broader impact of the war' (CPJ, 2024; Robie, 2024).

'At the start of the war it would take us a day or two to verify information about a journalist who had been killed or injured,' said CPJ programme director Carlos Martínez de la Serna. 'Collecting and vetting this information is now taking us weeks or months, and in some cases won't be possible at all.'

As the placard on our cover photo declares, 'the journalists of Gaza have

changed the world with their blood, truth and love'. The courageous local Palestinian journalists reporting truth to power were rewarded by being named the winners of the 2024 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize as they became the 'eyes and ears' of the Gaza Strip when Israel barred foreign media. Chief judge Mauricio Weibel said:

In these times of darkness and hopelessness, we wish to share a strong message of solidarity and recognition to those Palestinian journalists who are covering this crisis in such dramatic circumstances. As humanity, we have a huge debt to their courage and commitment to freedom of expression. (The Wire, 2024)

There appeared to be prospect for a permanent ceasefire after the US-brokered a nearly unanimous UN Security Council resolution for a three-stage peace plan ((Russia abstained)) to put a halt to the never-ending bloodbath. It seemed to be a desperate bid by beleaguered US President Joe Biden trying to shore up his weakening presidential re-election prospects in November. But his claims that Israel was on side lacked credibility after Hamas agreed to 'negotiate' while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continued to insist that the war would continue until Palestinian resistance was totally crushed (Will Israel accept the new UN Gaza ceasefire resolution?, 2024).

The day before the UN vote, on 8 June 2024, the Israeli military slaughtered at least 274 Palestinians and wounded about 700 in a savage raid on the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza Strip—the latest Israeli 'massacre of civilians'. Global condemnation followed the brutal attack on civilians while Israel celebrated the rescue of four Israeli hostages held captive in family homes (three other hostages were reportedly killed, according to Gazan sources).

'The rescue,' noted Al Jazeera columnist Belén Fernández, 'sent Israeli social media into a jubilant tizzy of self-congratulation and genocidal fanfare. The internet is awash with sensational accounts of the rescue and the captives' weepy reunification with loved ones—and never mind all those dead Palestinians.'

In the context of a war that has killed more than 37,000 people in Gaza—mostly women and children—in just over eight months, such 'collateral damage' may not seem all that shocking, but the cost of 53 civilian lives for each rescued captive is totally unacceptable to humanity. Fernández coined the phrase 'collateral genocide' to describe the depravity.

Gaza has become not just a metaphor for a terrible state of dystopia in parts of the world, it has also become an existential test for journalists—do we stand up for peace and justice and the right of a people to survive under the threat of ethnic cleansing and against genocide, or do we do nothing and remain silent in the face of genocide being carried out with impunity in front of our very eyes? The answer is simple surely.

As journalist and poet Caitlin Johnston says: ‘Saving Gaza is more than saving Gaza. It’s also about saving ourselves . . . Saving ourselves as a society . . . Saving ourselves from what the sociopaths who rule over us are trying to turn us into. Saving ourselves from the way propagandists are trying to twist and train our minds’ (Johnstone, 2024).

And it is about saving journalism, our credibility and our humanity as journalists.

In response to a global crackdown on truthsayers, whether they be students protesting on campuses, or journalists exposing the media manipulation, columnist Gideon Levy of the liberal Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* and author of the forthcoming book *The Killing of Gaza* remarked in an X post: ‘I was in the cafe in the Tel Aviv museum . . . a woman came to me and said only one word . . . “traitor”. This is the atmosphere [in Israel] right now. Saying the truth is treason. Feeling empathy towards the Palestinians is treason. Showing the suffering in Gaza is treason’ (Levy, 2024).

OPENING this edition of *Pacific Journalism Review*, is **Jonathan Cook**, an independent UK journalist and author who is expert on Middle East affairs, with a themed essay outlining two critical court hearings in February 2024. One was a week-long hearing in The Hague over a UN General Assembly request for an advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) over Israel’s illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories, and the other was a last-ditch appeal of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange against efforts by the United States to extradite him so that he can be locked away for the rest of his life. Both cases posed globe-spanning threats to our most basic freedoms. Had they been properly reported, argues Cook, the US ‘rules-based order’ would have been exposed as a hollow sham and world leaders would have dared not ‘arm a genocide such as Gaza’, and dared not ‘conspire in the starvation of two million people’.

New Zealand writer **Jeremy Rose** offers a ‘Kiwi journalist’s response’ to Israel’s war on journalism, noting that while global reports have tended to focus on the ‘horrendous and rapid’ climb of civilian casualties, especially women and children, Gaza has also claimed the ‘worst death rate of journalists’ in any war.

He is followed by independent journalist **Mick Hall** with a compelling research indictment of the role of Western legacy media institutions, arguing that they too are in the metaphorical dock along with Israel in South Africa’s genocide case in the ICJ. In the wider Oceania region, both public broadcasters, the ABC, in Australia, and RNZ in Aotearoa New Zealand, have fallen short of their editorial responsibilities by alleged omission, story framing, inaccuracies, passive editorial stances, ‘including a refusal to adjudicate contentious claims when the evidence was available’.

Following our themed section, **Alexandra Nicole Wake** and her RMIT colleagues lead the Articles section with a research report based on a UNESCO and World Journalism Education Council roundtable addressing the hot topic of fact-checking and verification. They argue that fact-checking is a vital part of the training tool box.

Peter Chen, John Cokley and colleagues continue a longitudinal national study of journalism employment in Australia and contribute to new understandings of journalism employment in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. They conclude that there is a trend to stronger centralised editorial control at the corporate level, urbanisation and homogenisation of media producers and product, and reduced opportunities for creative entry-level roles.

Jane Stevens and **Helen Stallman** explore how a consumer-centred coping approach to suicide prevention would augment existing media guidelines to influence community attitudes and behaviours in a way that contributes to health and wellbeing.

A team led by **Sanjoy Basak Partha** at the Bangladesh University of Professionals investigates the current state of AI usage and projecting the future in their country by evaluating professional journalists' 'Mental Readiness' across a variety of media companies.

Linda-Jean Kenix and Equadorean researcher **Jorge Bolanos** at the University of Canterbury explore the framing of electric vehicles in New Zealand and theorises the role it may have played in the uptake of EVs in the country.

Frederico Magrin examines how newsroom leaders are guided when shaping the news, posing the question: Do personal moral values play a role in Aotearoa New Zealand newsroom? **Joep Tarai** of Australian National University dissects the social media ecology of an influencer group with a case study of one of Fiji's largest and most influential online groups.

In two Commentaries, acclaimed documentary maker **Mandrika Rupa** provides an account of documentary work in Aotearoa New Zealand, with ancestral connections to Fiji, East Africa, UK, US and India, including her *Hidden Apartheid: A Report on Caste Discrimination*, while Wellington writer and publisher of *Solidarity*, **Eugene Doyle**, reflects on the assassination of Kanak independence leader Éloi Machoro in the context of the renewed pro-independence protests and riots in Kanaky New Caledonia in May 2024.

The *Frontline* section features three articles from **David Robie, Shailendra Singh** and **Geraldine Panapasa**, and **Kalinga Seneviratne**, all with University of the South Pacific connections who provide complementary perspectives on the theme of 'challenges for campus and community media in Asia-Pacific diversity': Robie, as former head of journalism at USP, provides an overview of challenges across the region and a Talanoa Journalism approach, current USP head Singh and Panapasa examine the practice of campus journalism education,

and Seneviratne questions the reportage of China and ‘watchdog’ journalism.

With the Photoessay, *PJR* founding editor **David Robie** and designer **Del Abcede** reflect on past image galleries and contributors as the journal and the former Pacific Media Centre evolved and feature a collection of 19 photographs of Palestinian protests against the war on Gaza in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

Two Obituaries are dedicated to the memory of the great globetrotting investigative journalist **John Pilger**, a self-described ‘maverick’ who ‘gave a voice to those who did not have a voice’ and who has died since the last edition of *PJR* aged 84, and West Papuan cultural identity linguist, writer and activist **Arnold Clemens Ap**. Pilger is farewelled by **John Jiggins** and the 40th anniversary of the assassination of Ap by Indonesian special forces has been honoured by **Nic Maclellan**.

Although the Reviews section is slimmer than usual, *PJR* still features wide-ranging books and documentaries, including the *Reuter’s Journalism, Media, and Technology Trends and Predictions 2024* (‘a grim year ahead, but some cause for optimism’), reviewed by editor **Philip Cass**; a timely book on how Israel profits from exporting the ‘technology of occupation and repression’ around the world reviewed by **David Robie**; and **Malcolm Evans** comparing the Al Jazeera documentary *October 7* and TVNZ on the war on Gaza; and **Annie Cass** reviewing the book *Excommunicated* about life within the Exclusive Brethren.

Other titles reviewed include *Return to Volcano Town* about the 1937-43 volcanic eruptions in Rabaul, Papua New Guinea, Joseph M. Fernandez’s landmark book on the age of the leak, *Journalists and Confidential Sources*; and *Come Hell or High Fever* on planning and preparing the world’s megacities for disaster.

AS MENTIONED earlier in this editorial, *Pacific Journalism Review* is celebrating 30 years of publishing with this edition, a remarkable longevity record for any journalism journal when recalling the journalism survival title theme. By comparison, the *New Zealand Journalism Review*, for example, lasted nine



Figure 1: ‘Kanak and Palestine . . . same struggle’: Kanak, Palestine and West Papua flags as defiant symbols of decolonisation at a London rally against the Gaza war in June 2024.

years (1988-1997) at Canterbury University. Founded at the University of Papua New Guinea in 1994, *PJR* was published there for four years and at the University of the South Pacific for a further four years, then at Auckland University of Technology for 18 years before finally being hosted since 2021 at its present home, Asia Pacific Media Network, since 2021. The journal will be celebrating its 30th birthday at the Pacific International Media Conference with USP's Professor Vijay Naidu officiating in July 2024. More about that in a future edition.

Pacific Journalism Review has received many good wishes for its birthday, some reproduced on pages in this edition. For a final message, we recall AUT's senior journalism lecturer Greg Treadwell who wrote in 2020:

Many Aotearoa New Zealand researchers found their publishing feet because *PJR* was dedicated to the region and interested in their work. *PJR* is central to journalism studies, and so to journalism and journalism education, in this country and further abroad. Long may that continue. (Treadwell, 2020)

In answer to our editorial title: Yes, journalism *will* survive, and it will thrive through new and innovative niche forms, if democracy is to survive.

Ra whānau *Pacific Journalism Review*!

DR DAVID ROBIE

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www.pjreview.info

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