
Editorial Meltdowns and militarisation

DURING the Pacific Science Inter-Congress in Fiji in July 2013, an integrated symposium on ‘Oceans and Nations: “Failed” states and the environment’ in the Pacific, was hosted at the University of the South Pacific. The brainchild of USP’s Dr Mohit Prasad and professors Victor Bascara, Keith Comacho and Elizabeth DeLoughrey of the University of California at Los Angeles, this drew its inspiration from another conference at Laucala Bay some two years earlier.

The 2010 Oceans, Islands and Skies Symposium (OIS), with papers published in a special edition of the USP literary journal *Dreadlocks* (Prasad, 2010-11) in 2012, had established the disruption to the traditionally organic and fluid nature of relations between artists, writers and performers in the Pacific by the contemporary crisis of the environment. A follow-up Oceans and Nations Symposium explored relations between impacts on the environment, and crisis in political and related development, among the emerging nation-states of the Pacific.

Issues of ‘failed’ nation-states, political meltdowns, coups and increasing militarisation have dogged the recent postcolonial history of the Pacific, as observed by Prasad and frequently reflected in the pages of this journal also.

‘This, aside from the political and economic effects generally noted as the main societal impacts from such crisis, has important social and cultural effects that are largely undocumented by academia as well as the media,’ notes Prasad.

The effects of political crisis on creativity through censorship, for example, are not adequately covered in current research and scholarship. Working with artists, writers, academics, special interest groups, government and the general community, the follow-up conference re-engaged some of these major themes of the 2010 OIS Symposium. At the same time, it moved into the more specialised concerns of the regional crisis within the overarching framework of the environment in crisis, regionally and globally.

The collaborative symposium between scholars based at USP, at the University of California Los Angeles, and others identified with Pacific studies in the region or further afield internationally, provided a vital way of bringing together scholars and cultural workers in an alternative culture of responses to issues as varied as the legacy of nuclear fallout to the ‘carbon colonialism’ threatening the existence of small island states.

Some 20 papers were delivered at the symposium, ranging from ‘Floating islands: A taxonomy of anxieties’ (John O’Carroll) and ‘From Telling to critical thinking for Pacific student success’ (Ulu Nawaqavanua and Poasa Tim Baice), to ‘US militarisation and indigenous communities in the Pacific’ (Leevin Camacho’s We Are Guåhan’s movement) and ‘West Papua: Another new nation in the Pacific?’ (Max Quanchi).

While the conference inspired the theme for this issue of *Pacific Journalism Review*, only three of the original papers presented have been developed into articles for it; though several other related papers are being published instead.

The edition theme is introduced by **Sky Marsen** (then of USP and now of the University of Southern California) with a commentary on the information gap between government regulation and citizen awareness on environmental issues and questions whether the media is playing an effective public role. She is followed by Professor **Satendra Nandan**, founding chair of Fiji’s Media Industry Development Authority (MIDA), who argues that freedom of the press, academic freedom and parliamentary privilege are advanced and strengthened by those who practise these with professional ethics and personal integrity and conscientiously deepen public trust, individually and collectively: ‘When these institutions are devalued, we are all diminished.’

The fate of the militarised Indonesian ‘colony’ (provinces) of West Papua and the politics’ of Melanesia are examined by Radio New Zealand International’s **Johnny Blades** in an informative commentary that provides insights into the strategic directions of the Melanesian Spearhead Group. The University of Canterbury’s **Steven Ratuva** fundamentally challenges the notion of ‘failed state’ which is premised, in his view, on culturally, historically and ideologically ‘slanted lenses’ and offers an alternative Pacific indigenous perspective on security systems based on kinship, reciprocity, communal obligation and communal labour. He focuses on four case studies—Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa and Vanuatu.

David Robie of the Pacific Media Centre questions the normative legitimacy of twin assumptions of ‘impartial reporting’ and ‘objectivity’ in the Pacific context of ‘carbon colonialism’, environmental journalism and evaluating risk. Communicating climate change is also the theme for **Usha S. Harris** who argues that Pacific communities are unlikely to respond to government policies promoting mitigation and adaptation strategies without an improved perception of risk at a local level.

A study by **Lyndal Rowlands** of the University of Melbourne and **Vipul Khosla** of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation finds that Papua New Guinean journalists are interested in reporting on development issues but that they lack appropriate opportunities to do so. The final paper in the themed section compares the contrasting educational fortunes of the Pacific's two main universities that include two of the key journalism programmes in the region, the national University of Papua New Guinea and the Fiji-based regional University of the South Pacific. **Scott MacWilliam** calls for a 'revitalised UPNG' which could in turn lead to a major reform of tertiary education.



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In this edition, there is also a portfolio of **Ben Bohane** photographs—his second with the 'Black Islands' theme, following the earlier one in September 2006 (Bohane & Dean). In this portfolio, entitled 'Melanesian mythical places with unreported conflicts: A portrait', marking publication of his book *The Black Islands* (2013), Bohane offers a rare glimpse of the 'forgotten' Bougainville, East Timor and West Papua.

This issue of *PJR* doesn't carry a *Frontline* investigative journalism and methodology section as usual, but *Frontline* editor professor **Wendy Bacon** includes an interview by **Lawrence Bull** with investigative journalists and multiple Walkley Award winners **Nick McKenzie** and **Richard Baker** about whistleblowers inside the Australian building racket.

The annual UNESCO World Press Freedom Day lecture in May this year, republished in this edition, featured former *New Zealand Herald* editor-in-chief **Gavin Ellis**, who deplored the state of contemporary media in New Zealand, in spite of the country being better placed than Australia and Pacific nations in various global media freedom indices:

We enjoy freedom of speech in New Zealand, even though the *Bill of Rights Act* guarantee can be over-ridden. We have a variety of privately owned news media, even though the vast majority are owned

by overseas interests. We have state-owned radio and television, even though our major television network was freed of its public service broadcasting obligations in order to pursue commercial goals ... The shortcomings are increasing and, if unchecked, ultimately threaten the way we function as a society. (Ellis, 2014)

In the unthemed section, **Allison Oosterman** of the Auckland University of Technology writes about the ‘silence of the Sphinx’—the delay in organising media coverage of World War II; **Lee Duffield** of Queensland University of Technology examines Student Reporting Abroad—a case study on a journalism project developed around internationalisation; and **Arkaitz Letamendia, Ion A. Del Amo** and **Jason Diaux** of the University of the Basque Country in Spain provide a theoretical analysis of the complex relationships between power, communication and resistance and offer a model for the emerging new forms of visual protest—Audiovisual Cultural Artifacts of Protest.

TWENTY years ago this month, the first edition of *Pacific Journalism Review* emerged from the University of Papua New Guinea. Since then, the journal has grown from strength to strength and as well as nurturing Pacific journalism and media research, the publication took over as leading New Zealand journal in this field with the eclipse of the *New Zealand Journalism Review* at Canterbury University, published there for nine years (1988-1997).

Something of a cross between *Australian Journalism Review* and *Index on Censorship* in its early years style, *PJR* was immediately confronted with issues over freedom of expression and ethics from the very first edition. The cover featured a gag on Papua New Guinea’s public broadcaster, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), as it was then, preventing reports on New Guinea islands’ political leaders discussing possible secession. A political cartoon, a distinctive feature of *PJR*, was already displayed on the cover, drawn by Jada of Word Publishing. As acting head of UPNG’s South Pacific Centre for Communication and Information in Development, Margaret Obi, penned in a message to *PJR*:

This first issue of *Pacific Journalism Review* offers a smorgasbord of journalistic skills ... of issues current, retrospective and concurrent on communication and information, some more contentious than others, such as ‘ecological genocide’. But the issue that is most prevalent in

PJR is that of professional ethics, responsibility and accountability by journalists and media agencies and their role in informing and being informed without fear or favour. (Obi, 1994, p. 95)

To celebrate this 20-year publishing milestone, *PJR* and the Pacific Media Centre are hosting a three-day ‘Political journalism in the Asia-Pacific’ conference at AUT University on 27-29 November 2014. Selected and peer-reviewed papers presented at this conference will then be published in a special souvenir book edition of the journal to be published in May next year. This will also include an analysis of the journal’s two decades of publication by Dr Lee Duffield, one of the editorial board members and co-editor of this edition.

Reading through the archive of articles published in the *PJR*, he says some essentials have not changed since the first edition: originality, a ‘Pacific’ character he is looking forward to explaining, and honest scholarship. His analysis does note the development of the journal’s academic standing and expansion of its readership in widening circles, though still rightly concentrated in its South Pacific base. He is working on a description of the editorial stance of the *PJR*, describing it, *pro tem*, as ‘not so much left, right or liberal, as very “journalistic” in character’.

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