Editorial Independent journalism

DISCUSSION about the role of journalism in universities too often leaves the impression that our main, and even only game, should be producing employees for major media corporations. This issue of *Pacific Journalism Review* assumes much more than that. The theme for the issue is investigative journalism, particularly material presented at the 'Back to the Source' investigative journalism conference hosted by the Australian Centre for Independent Journalism (ACIJ) and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in Sydney in September 2011. This was the second regional investigative journalism conference; the first, hosted by the Pacific Media Centre, provided the theme for *PJR* (MIJT, 2011).

These conferences, and indeed *Pacific Journalism Review*, are based on the notion that the goal of university based journalism is to develop links between journalists—whether full-time employees of major companies, freelancers, academics or students—in order to promote a more independent and critical culture of journalism in our region, without which democracy cannot flourish. This goal suggests a relationship much wider and more challenging than simply the production of qualified journalists.

Our aim in this issue of *Pacific Journalism Review* is to demonstrate a developing relationship which includes the collaborative production of journalism itself, the provision of spaces for open and honest discussion which cut across organisational boundaries, the development of links between the production of journalism and the scholarly study of it, and mutual support in providing access to innovative thinkers and producers outside our region.

ABC managing director Mark Scott reminded us of this when he said in his opening conference address that all those attending—journalists working in industry, academics and students—were united by 'a shared belief in investigative journalism as a necessary condition of authentic democratic life.' In the midst of rapid technological and economic challenges, conventional notions of investigative journalism as the province of well-resourced teams in major organisations are under challenge. This was one of the themes stressed by the conference keynote speaker Robert Rosenthal. Rosenthal is executive director of the Centre for Investigative Reporting in Berkeley, California, and has previously spent 30 years as an editor and reporter for major United

States newspapers. In Rosenthal's view, the last 10 years have seen one of the greatest transformations in information and technology in human history: as he puts it, 'we're in the middle of it; we're in the Petri dish now'.

Universities are part of the new culture evolving in the Petri dish. In a time of such intense change and experimentation, journalists and the public should be able to expect that universities will play a role in testing new models and putting new ideas into practice.

One of the purposes of conferences is to reflect on practice. This is something that investigative journalists do constantly, both in the process of producing stories, and in their aftermath. As the two case studies explored in transcripts from the conference sessions show, this reflection can encompass everything from the idea for the story, the overall strategy of the investigation and the practical obstacles that may be encountered, to its impact and the need to protect sources. These two case studies, the 'Dirty Money' investigation carried out by **Richard Baker** and **Nick McKenzie**, and **Linton Besser** and **Dylan Welch's** investigation of the relationship between the NSW Crime Commission and the Police Integrity Commission, are accompanied by a summary of the conference by Tom Morton and a transcript of Robert Rosenthal's speech, and can be found from on pages 17-29.

There is also space within the academic field of journalism for more scholarly research into investigative journalism. Some examples of this can be found in an earlier issue of *PJR*. For example, Bill Birnbauer discussed models of non-profit funding for investigative journalism in the United States in *PJR* (MIJT, 2011).

In this issue, we tackle other themes, including the formal legal restrictions and regulation which inhibit investigative journalism, and the informal tactics used by those who wish to stop journalists from exposing to the public information they would like to remain hidden.

Sources

The relationship between reporters and their sources lies at the heart of journalism. Given the vulnerability of many sources with first hand experience of wrong-doing or abuse of power, the relationship between investigative journalists and their sources is often especially sensitive and controversial—hence our conference theme, 'Back to the source'. **Kayt Davies'** article explores the tricky issue of balancing the need to protect sources with the need to establish the credibility of reporting from dangerous and

inaccessible conflict zones, such as West Papua. The same issue arises, albeit in a different form, in one of the case studies from the conference. 'Dirty Money', the ABC-TV *Four Corners* programme which highlighted allegations that Securency, a subsidiary of the Reserve Bank of Australia, had paid bribes through intermediaries to officials of foreign governments, was built around a single unnamed source: the 'Insider', a former Securency employee. **Nick McKenzie** and **Richard Baker**, journalists with *The Age* newspaper, talk about how they went about substantiating the Insider's claims, and Sue Spencer, executive producer of *Four Corners*, explains why she was prepared to commit to a story which she knew would not include an on-camera interview with the primary human source.

Linking academia and investigative journalism

This edition of *PJR* showcases the first examples of what the editors hope will be a regular feature of the journal: a section entitled 'From the Frontline', which will juxtapose journalistic practice with critical reflexion by the journalists involved.

Karen Abplanalp's 'Blood Money' case study details the author's investigation of the NZ Superannuation Fund's investment in the controversial US-owned Freeport copper and gold mine at Freeport in West Papua. Abplanalp describes the journalistic processes involved, and frames them within the context of peace journalism. Another mining operation, this time the Vale nickel mine and refinery in Goro, New Caledonia, is the subject of **Nicole Gooch's** article 'Sulfate Sunrise', published simultaneously in the *Global Mail* and in a longer version here in *PJR*. Gooch reflects on the differing understandings that her indigenous and no-indigenous sources have of environmental issues, and the need to locate the conflict around the mine in the broader political, economic and social context of decolonisation.

Many places and issues in our region are under-covered because of a scarcity of reporters on the ground, lack of interest by editors and managers, legal and illegal threats to sources and journalists, and geographical isolation which often works to the advantage of powerful business and government interests.

These two stories would not otherwise have been covered if not done by younger freelance journalists—in both cases postgraduate students inspired by their Masters Journalism courses and specialist knowledge. The production of journalism is increasingly recognised not just as a part of advanced course-work education, but as an integral component of higher degrees in

journalism as well. This is where the academy can make an important contribution, not only to developing new models of investigative journalism, but also to pursuing stories ignored by industry because they are put in the 'too hard' basket, or editors are unaware of the background issues. The universities and journalism research centres have the resources and mentoring skills to support such investigations.

Building a culture of investigative journalism across institutions and media organisations is crucial—and as Robert Rosenthal stressed in his keynote address to the conference, this culture needs to be open and collaborative. This journal hopes to contribute to forging such a culture and developing new relationships between journalists working in industry and the academy. As part of this process, the next investigative journalism conference in our region will be hosted next year by the academic journalists at Monash University.

Investigative Journalism and its adversaries

In a wide-ranging review of investigative journalism in Pacific countries, **Shailendra Singh** draws partly on his own experiences as a journalism academic in Fiji in analysing the strategies used by the Bainimarama government since 2009 to suppress critical journalism of all kinds, but particularly investigative journalism. Singh's analysis shows that suppression in Fiji is part of a wider pattern of suppression which draws on a range of techniques for suppressing investigative journalism throughout the Pacific, ranging from direct threats of violence to a lack of legislative protection for journalists' confidential sources and the public's right to information. When added to more general factors, including a lack of resources, these attacks have resulted in such a difficult environment for investigative journalism that in May 2009 the International Federation of Journalists joined 40 Pacific Island journalists from 12 countries calling on Pacific Island governments to defend and promote media freedom in line with their obligations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As Singh points out, restrictive policies are thwarting a promising growth of Pacific investigative journalism which exposed corruption and other abuses of power. Singh is not without hope, however, and calls for increasing collaboration between independent media and investigative journalists, NGOs and other civil society organisations as well as external support.

David Robie agrees with Singh that Pacific investigative journalists do have a proud record of exposing corruption, but is equally concerned about

the obstacles it now faces. In his article 'Drugs, guns and gangs', he focuses on a surprising new tactic being adopted by Pacific governments in targeting journalists by lodging complaints to the New Zealand Broadcasting Standards Authority and the New Zealand Press Council. He provides detailed case studies of the four complaints filed so far. Robie demonstrates the complexity of the issue by comparing two main responses, one that emphasises the importance of media accountability mechanisms as a healthier form of redress than censorship and more direct threats, and another, more cynical response that stresses that those threatened by investigative journalism will use whatever tactics are at their disposal to achieve their goals and for this reason, journalists should be wary of strengthening regulatory mechanisms of accountability.

Robie ends his article by raising a more general question about weaknesses in media accountability which has been underlined by the phone-hacking affair and its aftermath in the United Kingdom. The potential misuse of laws designed to protect individuals from invasion of their privacy by the media is also highlighted by **Tom Morton** in his article 'Dirty little secret: journalism, privacy and the case of Sharleen Spiteri'. Morton's article is based on an investigation carried out by himself and Eurydice Aroney for a radio documentary about the case of Sharleen Spiteri. Spiteri was an HIV + sex worker who caused a national furore in Australia in 1989 when she revealed in a television interview that she had unprotected sex with her clients.

Morton and Aroney's attempts to investigate Spiteri's subsequent treatment by the authorities—she was forcibly detained and then kept under 24-hour supervision for much of the rest of her life were consistently resisted on the grounds that this would breach her privacy. Morton argues that claims to privacy in this case are part of a broader trend in the use of privacy laws by government authorities to restrict reporting by journalists. In Australia, for example, Federal governments have used privacy provisions to deny journalists access to immigration detention centres, on the grounds that to do so would create a 'breach of residents' reasonable expectation of privacy' (MEAA, 2011, pp. 4-5). In the light of recent arguments in Australia for strengthened privacy protection, Morton raises the important question of whether privacy provisions operate to protect the rights of vulnerable individuals, or to protect government and its agencies from public scrutiny.

Besides the central investigative journalism themes, this edition of *PJR* also has a commentary by **Mark Pearson** examining the Reporters Sans Frontière's global media freedom index, as applied to the Pacific, and two

notable research articles in its unthemed section. One is a comparative analysis of the New Zealand accreditation scheme as applied to the country's journalism schools. The unit standards controversy was at one time a thorny issue for the universities, but **Grant Hannis** concludes that journalism courses 'derive value from industry input' while noting that in spite of a higher level of academic quality focus, the universities still succeed at the industry awards. The concluding article by a six-member team from the **Whariki Research Centre** at Massey University highlights the anti-Māori themes in New Zealand journalism and advocates better practice: 'Our challenge to media producers, and to Pakeha media audiences, is to find ways in which you can tell and read the news differently to represent Māori more fairly and our social order more honestly.'

Issues of media accountability are now part of public debate throughout the region. As we complete this journal, the relationship between News Corporation and the UK government is being examined by the Leveson Inquiry, with potential implications for News Corp's operations globally. The release of the Australian government's Convergence Review, which echoes the Finkelstein Inquiry's call for the establishment of a new media regulator, will no doubt reignite an already fiery debate about the future of media regulation in Australia. A similar debate is happening in New Zealand over a recommendation by the NZ Law Commission for the establishment of a single media regulator. It is appropriate therefore that our next issue in October, 'Rebuilding public trust in journalism' (see p.252), will be about the implications of these inquiries across our region.

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