

EDITORIAL: Terrorism and democracy

THIS edition of *Pacific Journalism Review* is a special issue on several fronts in this our 25th year. First, it is a double issue—the first in our history. Second, it began production as an ‘unthemed’ issue, partly to catch up with a backlog of accepted peer-reviewed papers that had missed recent themed editions. However, the tragic mosque massacre in the New Zealand city of Christchurch in March, and recent ballot box expressions over political futures and independence meant a group of papers emerged with a ‘terrorism and democracy’ theme.

New Zealand will be learning to live with its ‘loss of innocence’, as *Mediawatch* presenter Colin Peacock describes it, for the months ahead after the shock of a gunman launching his obscene act of livestreamed terrorism with a bloody assault on two mosques in Christchurch during Friday prayers on 15 March 2019 designed to go viral on global social media. Fifty people were killed that day, with another dying from his wounds several weeks later, unleashing an extraordinary and emotional wave of #TheyAreUs solidarity across the country. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, providing inspired and compassionate leadership to a traumatised nation, declared at the Hagley Park national memorial service two weeks after the atrocity:

As-salaam Alaikum. Peace be upon you.

They were words spoken by a community who, in the face of hate and violence, had every right to express anger but instead opened their doors for all of us to grieve with them. And so we say to those who have lost the most, we may not have always had the words.

We may have left flowers, performed the haka, sung songs or simply embraced. But even when we had no words, we still heard yours, and they have left us humbled and they have left us united. (Ardern, 2019).

The Christchurch outrage carried out by an Australian white supremacist who shall remain nameless in this editorial, following the precedent set by Ardern who refused to grant his name the notoriety he craved, has set many challenges to the journalism profession in a country that has had scant experience of terrorism. In the aftermath, the news media as well as the country at large have had to grapple with ongoing issues of discrimination and casual racism, as well as the forthcoming trial of the accused terrorist, the first person who will be tried under New Zealand’s *Suppression of Terrorism Act 2002*.

New Zealand news media organisations have agreed to a protocol for covering the trial of the accused gunman (see p. 28) in what *New York Times* columnist Kevin Roose branded the world’s first ‘internet-native mass shooting’ (Shafer, 2019). This includes restricting coverage of statements that ‘actively champion

white supremacist or terrorist ideology’, and the details of a manifesto of hate circulated to media and the Prime Minister’s Office moments before the attack began. The protocol, signed by senior editors representing *Stuff* (formerly Fairfax), Television New Zealand, Mediaworks, New Zealand Media and Entertainment (*The New Zealand Herald* group) and Radio New Zealand, has not been without controversy. Media Freedom Committee chair Miriyana Alexander, who is also *The New Zealand Herald’s* premium content chair, has said that within that framework, each newsroom would decide what would be appropriate.

While all New Zealand media have named the accused gunman in their coverage, *Stuff* editorial director Mark Stevens says there has been some re-consideration of this approach. At the very least, some news organisations have scaled back use of his name. However, although many commentators view the protocol and coordinated policy around coverage as a considered and responsible approach to the atrocity and maintaining the principles of ‘open justice’, there has also been some criticism, especially internationally.

A Canadian doctoral researcher studying media coverage of terrorist attacks criticised what he described as ‘hypocritical’ coverage in Western media. Writing in *The Conversation*, Houssein Ben Lazreg (2019), argued that while the ‘carnage’ had been condemned extensively across geographical borders, ‘some reporting in England and Canada has been troubling’. Among examples he gave in an analysis of newspaper coverage, the London *Daily Mirror* was cited for its reporting of an ‘angelic boy who former associates revealed was a likeable and dedicated personal trainer running free athletic programmes for kids’.

Just a week after the massacre, New Zealand announced that it would ban military-style semi-automatics and assault rifles and followed this up with the enacted new law just 26 days after the shooting. Along with French President Emmanuel Macron, Prime Minister Ardern has also led the so-called ‘Christchurch Call’ initiative for tougher measures against social media corporations that have been blamed for the proliferation of the 17-minute mosque livestreamed video and other ‘weaponised’ hate content. As Ardern complained to Parliament: ‘They are publishers, not just the postmen’ (Graham-McLay, 2019).

In an interview with RNZ *Mediawatch’s* Jeremy Rose, my colleague, assistant editor Khairiah A. Rahman, spoke of her research about representations of Islam and Muslims published in this journal last November. Research by her and Azadeh Emadi of Glasgow University in 2017 involving 14,349 stories that included the word Islam found that nearly 13,000 of them mentioned either terrorism or Islamic jihad.

There appears to be a growing misconceived hatred for a faith supported by 1.5 billion of the world’s population, but more importantly, this destructive trend is promoted by the media, consciously or not, and has the potential



MALCOLM EVANS/THE DAILY BLOG

Figure 1: The New Zealand media have been forced to think the way they work in the aftermath of the Christchurch massacre.

to ultimately cause an unnecessary and irreparable rift in civil society. (Rahman & Emadi, 2018, p. 185)

For every New Zealand story that mentioned Islam, there were seven that mentioned Islamic terrorism. The ratio in overseas newswire stories was even higher. ‘We found that stories tend to be more fair and balanced when Muslim voices are represented. And they tend to be negative or confused in their treatment of Muslims and Islam when the Muslim voice is absent or manipulated,’ Rahman told Rose (2019). She added that virtually all of the stories mentioning terrorism or jihad lacked a Muslim perspective.

However, the situation had ‘changed dramatically’ since the massacre. ‘In the last week... the New Zealand media did actually make a difference,’ Rahman said. ‘I think they’re leading the way. It’s not just about Muslims or Islam or Islamophobia, but it’s about representation of diversity and the different voices in societies where there is predominantly one sort of culture.’

Her views were shared by former journalist Mohamed Hassan, a graduate of Auckland University of Technology who now works for the Turkish public broadcaster TRT World in Istanbul: ‘The coverage has been incredibly sympathetic. I think a lot of the media has done really well and has been really generous in opening up those spaces and giving those spaces to Muslim voices.... myself included’ (Rose, 2019).

In this edition of *Pacific Journalism Review*, three writers—an Australian cartoonist living in New Zealand, an RNZ *Mediawatch* presenter and an Australian Muslim journalist, broadcaster and academic—present wide-ranging commentaries.

The New Zealand Herald's cartoonist **Rod Emmerson**, who worked on issues over Australia's 1996 massacre at Port Arthur, Tasmania, reflects on his experience of the 'heartache, turmoil and absolute dread'. RNZ *Mediawatch* presenter **Colin Peacock** analyses how New Zealand media have been forced to rethink the way they work in the aftermath of the Christchurch massacre, adding that their 'freedom to report the truth will take on a whole new importance'.

Nasya Bahfen of RMIT, who delivered the keynote speech at the annual Journalism Education Association of New Zealand (JEANZ) in Wellington in December 2018, examines the contrast between how multicultural Australia is 'in real life' and 'in broadcasting' with a breakdown of Census data. Including reflections in the wake of Christchurch, she shows how lack of media representation feeds into hateful stereotypes.

In Fiji, the country went to the polls in November 2018, the second general election in 12 years—and the second since the 2006 military coup—and **Sri Krishnamurthi** of AUT's Pacific Media Centre returned to his homeland to cover it. It was the first time he had visited Fiji since he joined the exodus after the first coup in May 1987, and he was determined to come to grips with the legacy of the 'coup culture'.

Jope Tarai of the University of the South Pacific offers an examination of the impact of social media. His findings showed that the ruling party of Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama had a 'significant advantage' in Fiji's social media landscape, but opposition efforts and Facebook 'reactions' were beginning to challenge this dominance.

Former Queensland University of Technology's academic **Lee Duffield**, who was in New Caledonia three months earlier in the lead-up to the historic referendum on independence from France in November, provides background on a history of oppression and racism, while **David Robie** files a Special Report from the Kanaky 'front line' about the vote. He had covered '*les événements*' three decades earlier having written the 1989 book *Blood on their Banner* about the conflict.

IN THE unthemed section, **Thomas Fearon** of Australian National University and **Usha M. Rodrigues** dissect the China Global Television Network's news values through using the 2015 port of Tianjin explosions that killed 173 people as a case study while making comparisons with CNN coverage. They argue that CGTN is increasingly torn between its 'dichotomous role as a credible media' and its propaganda function.

Bangladesh, one of the most environmentally vulnerable countries in the world, is examined by **Jahnabi Das** of the University of Technology Sydney through the role of its newspapers in covering river systems and climate change over a seven-year period between 2009 and 2015. She also looks at the influence

of journalists on the question for environmental justice.

New Zealand's 'iwi radio' stations have operated for the past three decades, broadcasting a mixture of te reo Māori and English language programming throughout the country. The 21 stations currently operating are part of a strategy to improve the 'severe decline of indigenous language'. **Rufus McEwan** of Auckland University of Technology charts the transformations of indigenous radio and Māori media.

Jale Samuwai and **Jeremy Hills** of the University of the South Pacific deconstruct the Climate Green Fund, which is portrayed as the 'timely saviour' for the climate finance needs for vulnerable countries. They argue that changes are needed in the way funds are allocated in future with a focus on Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS)

Malaysia's surprising general election result in May 2018 has been widely hailed as the advent of a seismic shift for press freedom in the country. **Joseph M. Fernandez** of Curtin University has examined the role of the country's draconian media control armoury that was often 'wantonly and oppressively' applied under the previous government and how the new government sought to repeal it.

In Manila, **Pauline G. Estella** and **Jonalyn Paz** of the University of the Philippines-Diliman argue for a rethink in the way the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is being reported with research that reveals while there is an adherence to the tenets of development journalism, there is actually a dominance of 'prominence' (prominent individuals) in news values.

Trevor Cullen of Edith Cowan University reveals in research over a 10-year period in Papua New Guinea between 2007 and 2017 that there has been a dramatic decline in coverage by the *Post-Courier* newspaper of the prominent health issues of HIV, malaria and diabetes since 2013.

In New Zealand, **Luciana N. Hoffman** of Waikato University and **Evangelia Papoutsaki** examine the communicative ecology and narratives of Latin American migrant women and the complexities of empowerment. A study in Indonesia by **Ana Nadhya Abrar** of Universitas Gadjah Mada deconstructs the relationship between the Governor of Central Java and coverage by two major Semarang daily newspapers and critiques the role of the provincial Press Club.

Finally, in the unthemed section, **Kasun Ubayasiri** of Griffith University explores the framing of the Rohingya in Bangladesh's largest circulating English-language daily newspaper, *The Daily Star*. He concludes the nationalist newspaper has failed to successfully deliver human rights journalism.

The journal edition concludes with an evocative portfolio of photographs in the Photoessay section by independent photojournalist **Todd Henry**. His *Gangsters in Paradise* portfolio of Tongan deportees is linked to the impressive work he did for a *Vice* digital media platform video before the New Zealand publishing arm closed down in a controversial cost-cutting move.

PACIFIC JOURNALISM REVIEW welcomes Nicole Gooch who has joined our editorial team from Australia. She has joined Khairiah A. Rahman as assistant editor and brings with her a wealth of Pacific and journalism experience. Her first article for the journal was a 2012 Frontline investigation, ‘Sulphate Sunrise’, which probed the Brazilian nickel producer Vale SA’s controversial operations in New Caledonia.

Nicole is passionate about journalism in the Pacific and is researching a doctorate about the extraction industries in New Caledonia, where she was born. She has postgraduate international affairs qualifications and has been lecturing at Wollongong University this semester. Nicole has practical experience as a journal editor, including having edited *PASA*, the Pacific regional magazine on sexual health, published quarterly by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). She will assist the Frontline section editor, professor Wendy Bacon.

As-salaam Alaikum to our *PJR* readers. Peace be upon you.

Professor David Robie

Editor

Pacific Journalism Review

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