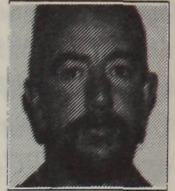


Tauiwi and Maori media: the indigenous view

Aotearoa/New Zealand is divided between the mainstream news media and the fast-growing Maori media with different perspectives. New Zealand journalism graduates need to be taught different media systems and news values.



By IAN STUART

IF WE look at the New Zealand news media now and beyond 2000 it is obvious that the biggest growth area is in the Maori media. For many years Maori have said the news media ignores their perspective on news and is not reporting Maori events properly. The news media failed to take notice of these claims and in frustration Maori set up their own media. In the last 19 years — but more so in the past five years there has been a huge growth in the Maori news media. There are now nine Iwi newspapers, 26 Iwi radio stations, a Maori radio news network and several Maori magazines, the most prominent being *Mana*. And now there is a Maori television channel — Aotearoa Television Network.

This means there are two major news information sources in Aotearoa/New Zealand — the mainstream (or Tauiwi) media and the Maori media. Both offer audiences a different perspective on events in New Zealand — a perspective based on the culture of the reporters and journalists producing the news.

What does this mean for the future of news in this country — and what does it mean for journalism education? I do not propose to answer these questions here but to offer some thoughts for the future direction of journalism and journalism education as Aotearoa/New Zealand moves towards the new century and a truly bicultural environment.

Before going any further it would be helpful to look at the reasons behind the establishment of a separate media for Maori. This may help to see the way back to a united news media. Part of the reason why Maori complained that the news media was not voicing their stories properly is the style of reporting

practised and taught in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Maori journalist and broadcaster Derek Fox sums the situation up well in *Whose News* when he discussed the way the Tauwi media did not cover Maori issues.

But it is obvious that reporters in Aotearoa/New Zealand do not cover any issues well. The failings are primarily in the areas of politics, the debate surrounding Tino Rangatiratanga [Maori sovereignty], race relations — all issues which affect society as a body.

In these areas our news media has followed the American interpretive style of reporting clearly telling readers and listeners what to think about events and issues rather than simply presenting both sides of a debate. Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than by a *One Network News* promo used before the 6 pm news which tells us that at 6 o'clock Television One will have everything that has happened during the day 'and what it all means'. Professor James Curran, of London University, summed it up when he described the news within a market-oriented system as

information which is simplified, condensed, personalised, decontextualised, with a stress on action rather than process, visualisation rather than abstraction, stereotype rather than human complexity.²

While I believe all these criticisms are valid and things need to change, the two I wish to focus on here are 'personalisation' and 'stress on action rather than process' as these are the important areas where issues, rather than action or people, can be dealt with. There are numerous examples of this in the Tauwi media. Again from television, supposed current affairs anchorman Paul Holmes promotes his program with: 'Somewhere in New Zealand there is someone doing something which you should know about — we will have that person.' Clearly a focus on personalities and action. And when confronted with 'issues' stories chief reporters, chief subeditors and other 'gatekeepers' commonly ask: 'What can we hang it on?' or 'Where's the news angle?'

What they are asking is what 'event' or 'person doing something' makes this worth putting in our newspaper?'. However, this dependence on action and people to hold up as 'news makers' is moving the news media away from its primary role which is usually simplified to 'telling people what they need to know to function within a democracy'. Action or newsmakers' are easy to report but public debate and public information is submerged under the immediacy of the 'news'.

In 1989, Jurgen Habermas traced the evolution of the news media from an avenue for public debate to a sector dominated by economic interests and expanded state powers.³

The media ceased to be an agency of empowerment and rationality and became a further means by which the public was sidelined. Instead of providing a conduit for rational-critical debate, the media manipulated mass opinion. It defined politics as spectacle, offered pre-digested, convenience thinking and conditioned the public into the role of passive consumers.⁴

Nowhere are these criticisms more clear in the news media in Aotearoa/New Zealand than in the reporting of the opposition Labour Party's problems in 1995. Political reporting focused on the party's 'poor position' in the opinion polls and the strategies the party was using to increase its ratings. There were few reports about what Labour's policies were but lots of reporting about its public relations strategies. There were few articles or programs about Labour's policies or where the country might go if Labour was in government. If there were articles about the party's policies they were accompanied by an analysis of whether those policies were vote catchers — not discussion about whether those would policies work or their effect on the country. But reporters are stuck with this because they cannot report party policies without an event to hang them on — a poor poll showing or party conference. Or even 'create' a news story by asking whether the poor poll showing means the leader is about to lose his or her position.

This style of reporting is not giving people the information they need to function in a democracy. Instead, it turns politics into a spectator sport — Habermas' 'politics as spectacle'. It has been said elsewhere that elections are called like a horse race — reporters use opinion polls to tell the people who is winning, who is coming second, which party is third, and so on. There is little debate and discussion about the relative merits of each party and their policies. But I would like to extend the metaphor further and say elections are no longer called like a horse race but more like a rugby league match. Parliamentary reporters call the action — the commentator role filled by people like TV2's Graeme Hughes; then political commentators comment on the action — the added colour role filled in league commentaries by personalities such as coach Graham Lowe.

Reporting politics in this way is not confined to Parliament. Veteran protester Sue Bradford was arrested in 1995 while protesting outside the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Auckland. A good 'play' by a political participant. She got herself on the national television networks. But what was she protesting about? The news media never told us. The same criticisms can be levelled at reports of the current debate (or lack of debate) surrounding the Tino Rangatiratanga issue. This is only brought to the fore

TE MAORI NEWS

TE WHARE KOROHO O AOTEAROA



ONCE WERE WARRIORS



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Te Maori News ... one of New Zealand's growing Maori newspapers.

during occupations and protests — when there is an event to focus on.

What were people told about the occupation of Pokaitore/Moutoa Gardens in Wanganui during 1995? The news media's heavily interpretive stories conveyed the overriding impressions of Maori radicals breaking the law and defying the legitimate authority of the state — people were not informed of the issues, accurately informed about what the occupiers wanted, what their grievances were or why they were occupying Pakaitore at that time. What the country got was simplified, personalised, news which stressed action rather than process. Maori justifiably argue that the Tauwi media did not report this event properly.

But this was just one example. All reporting of Maori land occupations focuses on action — 'protesters' interaction with the police, the public as well as attempts to move them off. People are never given information they need to make up their own minds on the issue — the news media manipulates public opinion by labelling people as 'radicals' and carrying stories which clearly tell people such radicals are breaking the law, creating racial tensions and 'doing nothing to help New Zealand'.

This process is not limited to politics or Maori issues. The American style of reporting has turned all public opinion and issues stories into a spectator sport. Opinion polls are used to show who is winning and social commentators discuss moves and strategies as if they were calling a sports game.

And where the news media does attempt to cover issues and present opposing points of view it fails to do so because journalists interpret the world from their own cultural standpoint. In his essay 'Mass Media and Democracy', Professor James Curran points out there are different ideas and systems of representation which groups use to advance their ideas in society.

Different ways of signifying and making sense of society, different linguistic codes and conceptual categories, different chains of association and versions of 'common sense' privilege the interests of some social groups while disadvantaging others. Put another way, the media's informational role is never purely informational; it is also a way of arbitrating between the rhetorical claims of rival interests — in a form that has an indirect outcome in terms of allocation of resources and life opportunities between different social groups.⁵

It is not surprising that Maori expressed dissatisfaction with the Tauwi media and then set up their own media outlets. So today we have two cultures relying on different news services. Maori and Tauwi are being given significantly different pictures of the world they live in and differing information on which

to base their political decisions. This divisiveness cannot be healthy for the country. And the loss of a large and growing sector of the audience cannot be good for news organisations which purport to provide information to everyone and relies on a large audience for advertising revenue and therefore economic survival. On purely financial terms the Tuiwi news media cannot afford to lose such a chunk of the population. This becomes even more apparent when population projection are considered. The Statistics Department projects a huge growth in the Maori population — basically Maori birth rates are a lot higher than Tuiwi rates. By the year 2016 Gisborne's citizens will be 50 per cent Maori. They already have an iwi radio station and iwi newspaper. Currently the Hawke's Bay high school population is 40 per cent Maori. They too have their own radio station and newspaper. What will it mean for our industry when those people leave school and start to use an information service — which one will they turn to?

Unless there are significant changes to the Tuiwi news media they will lose future Maori generations. What sort of changes need to be made? How can differing views of the world be presented in one newspaper or even within one story? The answer lies in the question — we need to present two world views within one story.

What we really need to change is the model we work to — both journalists and journalism educators. I believe we need to look to Europe, not America, for the style of news we would be teaching people to produce. The European style of reporting leans more towards presenting both sides of a story, relatively judgement-free and without telling the audience what to think about issues and events. This allows the audience to make up its own mind about an issue — to truly exercise their power in a democracy. There is much written about media models which fulfill this function. I suggest Professor Curran's essay in *Media and Society* as a good starting point. I therefore will not go into details on these models. But I would like to quote Curran's extrapolation of a media model from Habermas' ideas where:

Access to information affecting the public good is widely available, where discussion is free of domination by the state and where all those participating in public debate to do so on an equal basis. Within this public sphere people collectively determine through the process of rational argument the way in which they want to see society develop and this shapes in turn the conduct of Government policy. The media facilitates this process by providing an arena of public debate and by reconstituting private citizens as a public body in the form of public opinion.⁶

And

By staging a public dialogue in which diverse interests participate the media should also play a direct role in assisting the search for areas of common agreement or compromise. It should also provide an adequate way in which people can engage in a wider public discourse that can result in the modification of social attitudes affecting social relationships between individuals and groups.⁷

What this model assumes, and correctly so, is that the media is not made up of observers and reporters, but is a necessary, functioning, part of any society. This involves a substantial mind-shift for journalists and educators. This raises the problem of what is objectivity and how journalists can function in society without compromising their independence. I do not wish to enter that debate here but I would argue that by holding up all sides of an argument for public scrutiny and making it clear whose opinions are being expressed journalists are moving closer to the goals of objectivity than the interpretive style of reporting allows.

Clearly it is such a model the *Tauwi* media needs to adopt if it is to continue to function as the major information source in a bicultural society and meet the needs of both Maori and *Tauwi*. On the larger level, adopting this model would aid the country in public debates about all aspects of our society, including the current debate surrounding Maori calls for *Tino Rangatiratanga*. At present we are told, through the *Tauwi* media, that this means Maori want to take over this country and run it themselves without any input from *Tauwi*. This is presented as an undesirable goal. But is that what Maori want? Most people do not really know what Maori are asking for and have no true opinion about Maori aspirations because their media is not giving them the information they need to assess the relative merits of the issues.

What does this all mean for journalism educators? I strongly believe that as educators we have the role of empowering people, not of controlling people. But the current education system is focused on controlling us and our graduates so they fit the needs of a market-oriented media. We have the power to change the media in *Aotearoa/New Zealand* by what we say and do as academics and what we teach our students. Our graduates now need the skills to be able to cater for both Maori and *Tauwi* readers and listeners within the same newspapers and broadcast news bulletins, even within the same stories, if the *Tauwi* media is to keep, or attract back, the Maori audience.

In 20 years some of our current graduates will be the news executives. They need the skills and knowledge to be able to make decisions about bicultural reporting in the next century. Firstly I believe that our graduates need to be taught that there are different ways of organising the media and presenting

information than are currently used in Aotearoa/New Zealand. This may be happening in some courses but I believe graduates are primarily fitted into the expectations of the current news media heads and their market-oriented system.⁸

If future change is to happen our current graduates need to be aware of different models because they are the people who will make the changes. As well as being taught different models and how to make them work, our graduates need to be taught the expectations of the current system and how to work inside that system. But they must still be able to see it for what it is — one way of presenting news.

Secondly, we need to teach students about different concepts of what makes news. We need to teach more than just how to produce action-oriented news. A journalist's job is to 'get a story'. Too often this means getting enough information, or the right information, to fit market-oriented expectations. In the reality of market-driven news if the story gets too long it gets cut, or if it does not fit the gatekeepers' expectations, it gets spiked. We have all written stories to fit this structure: in fact, we know it so well we teach it to our students. But the stories which fit this structure are the event-oriented stories and will not be suitable if we change the model.

Even within the existing model our graduates need the skills to find the 'real story' and report it accurately. Primarily this involves being able to see behind the events to the issues underlying what is happening. There is some discussion about whether students should be selected for this skill or whether it should be taught on the courses. This area also needs further debate.

Returning to my examples of the Maori occupations. Such protests are currently being reported as events because that is all reporters are capable of seeing. Or that is the way the current news model allows them to be reported. But the occupations are only the physical occurrences in a social exercise which has an intellectual dimension (the issues) and a physical dimension (the occupations/protests). By the intellectual dimension I mean the ideas, concepts, thoughts, culture and philosophical background of the participants.

But like all such issue stories where something physical happens reporters are good at reporting the event and asking emotional questions: 'What did it feel like?' 'Are you angry?' 'Are you upset?' But in terms of telling people what is happening in their world and allowing public debate it is the intellectual dimension which is more important and most frequently missed. It is in this area that we need to give our graduates the skills to look for stories. We need to reorient our own thinking and then our students' thinking so we focus on this intellectual dimension. This is often described as 'in-depth' reporting though there is little of it in Aotearoa/New Zealand. If reporters could see an issue story, or the physical manifestations of an issue story,

In terms of its social context the news media would move closer to the model suggested by Professor Curran. This is not a difficult skill. We have all had the experience of being given a story to write which we know nothing about. Getting the story was a process of finding out everything we could about the event or issue, especially asking questions of the people involved, so we could report it accurately. We need to teach our students to ask the questions to probe for the intellectual dimension of issue stories.

But the primary skill they need is to be able to listen to people and report accurately what they hear — not simplifying everything to fit into the expectations of the existing news structures. The main thing we should teach our students is to listen for the differences in ideas and systems of representation different groups use outlined by Curran and quoted earlier.

This means a reporter out in the field does not necessarily need a strong background in Maori culture. What the reporter needs are the skills to listen to what people say and a model to work to which allows issues to be reported on their open merits. Within this idea of a differing concept of news we also need to teach students how to initiate and maintain public debates. What our graduates will need to know is how to write stories about issues to further the public debate, to present several sides of an argument or issue without colouring or interpreting anything people have to say. Ideas become news — not action.

Differing voices find it hard to be heard through our news media. Any public relations person worth a salary knows that to get a message across you have to stage a 'newsworthy' event. But this should not be the case. People with something worth saying should have free access to the media to have their say without staging events, many of which turn into protest action — and then



PHOTO: David Robie

TVNZ's *Holmes* ... a Taiwi focus on action

violent protest action. But in the current climate the action overshadows the worth of ideas. Changing the focus away from action presents a different kind of 'judgment call' and I admit this needs further debate and discussion.

Current headlining Maori 'radical' Ken Mair, along with other members of Te Ahi Kaa — Mike Smith, Syd Jackson and Annette Sykes — actually have quite reasoned and reasonable arguments to present to the country. But what the media shows is their headline-grabbing action — cutting down historic pine trees, occupying land, disrupting 'legitimate' activities. The media pushes them forward as 'radicals' and 'activists', creating the impression, in the Tauwiwi minds at least, that their ideas are not worth listening to. Reasoned and reasonable do not make news. As one of my former students said after interviewing Ken Mair — and being surprised at how reasoned and reasonable he was: 'The mainstream media works hard to make him look bad, don't they.' It is time the media told the public what the 'radical' arguments really are rather than focusing on their actions.

The third area that needs to change is language and presentation the media uses. The news media in Aotearoa/New Zealand uses words to describe people which are emotionally loaded and interpretive. Words like 'Maori activist' and 'Maori radical' have acquired negative connotations which the media supports and plays on. They sell newspapers. Our graduates need to be able to see the loaded content of such words and find more neutral ways to describe people. As is commonly agreed, 'One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter'. But both descriptions are emotionally loaded. Recently one of my former students came up with 'Maori rights campaigner' to describe Ken Mair. I suggest that such a description is a much more neutral description than 'radical'.

The sort of changes I am suggesting need to happen are not a major change in skills. Students still need good writing ability, shorthand, typing, and all the rest. What we need to change is the models of news we teach. Sooner or later the change will happen, whether we want it or not, and we must equip our students to meet that change. But I am going further than that and suggesting journalism educators need to actively work towards a change.

It will be obvious by now that changing the media and allowing people access to information so they can make up their own minds about issues not only affects the way Maori and Maori issues are presented in the news but affects all groups and sectors of society.

One example of this political reporting as we move into an MMP environment. Journalists who learnt their craft and honed their skills in a confrontational political environment are struggling to come to grips with how to report in the new environment.

Indeed I have seen it suggested in the news media that politics will become

boring under MMP. I suggest that the change to MMP will force political reporting to change. If MMP politics is not to deteriorate to a system of backroom deals, the media will have to become a forum for public debate, allowing everyone to have a say in the new era of consensus politics.

Conclusion

The media has to stop regarding itself as mere observers of society and events and place itself firmly where it really is — an important functioning part of any society. The public has a right to know what is really happening in Aotearoa/New Zealand and not only see what the media is conditioned to tell them, or what the media wants to tell them. But for people to get the sort of information it deserves the media needs to work to a different model — one which allows public debate in a non-interpretive forum. We, as the educators of the industry's future workers and bosses, need to equip our graduates with the skills to handle the changing environment.

Notes:

¹ Derek Fox, 'The Maori Perspective of the News', in *Whose News?*, edited by Margie Comrie and Judy MacGregor (Palmerston North, NZ: Dunmore Press, 1992).

² James Curran, essay entitled 'Mass Media and Democracy', in *Mass Media and Society*, edited by Curran and Michael Gurevitch (Edward Arnold, 1991, p 98). Curran's ideas form much of the base of this paper and I recommend it. While Curran is building a model for the larger organisation of the media — the macro level — many of his ideas lead to how reporting functions at the pen and notepad level.

³ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Polity). Habermas is quoted from Curran's essay.

⁴ Curran, *op cit*, p 83. Curran is paraphrasing Habermas.

⁵ Curran, *op cit*, p 101.

⁶ Curran, *op cit*, p 83.

⁷ *Ibid*, p 104.

⁸ See Ian Stuart, 'Journalism Training and the Free Press?', in *New Zealand Journal of Media Studies*, Vol 2, No 1, 1995.

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