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CARTOONING IN THE PACIFIC

The social construction of humour

Fiji journalistic cartoons, especially when making political critiques, tend to be too shallow with an irritating tendency to state and show the obvious, a cardinal sin in cartooning. There is no subtlety or double meaning.

By STEVEN RATUVA

CARTOONING is more than simply a journalistic medium. It is a mode of social discourse, which attempts to express some deeper sentiments, philosophies and ethos of a society in a deliberately provocative manner. The provocation is meant to induce individual or collective humour. Although humour is a multi-facet social construct, its primary function is to induce the human primordial characteristic to laugh.

Laughter itself has a number of socially symbolic significance. Firstly, it is a form of communication, to express one's recognition, whether instant or delayed, of the "message" in a loud and exuberant way. Laughter could readily signify that a person has "got the message".

Secondly, it is a form of social and psychological therapy to "soothe" tension within an individual or within a group. Individual laughter could become a social "medicine" by "pushing out" deep-seated anxiety. Group laughter is an important ingredient for collective identification and social solidarity.

Thirdly, laughter is also an important mode of escapism by diverting the mind away from one's problem. It "frees up" "serious thinking" in a light-hearted and entertaining way

Fourthly, laughter could be a medium for "criticism" and "subversion". In some contexts, humour is used deliberately as a tool to mock others. Mocking those in authority through humour is common in almost every culture. It is a

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subtle but very effective way of political and social "rebellion", which is confined to the private domain.

Cartooning through the media is a way of expressing humour for mass consumption. Cartoons invoke our primordial capacity to laugh, yet in a way which serves a purely social purpose. Cartoons invoke humour, and humour can be subversive. I do not wish to be indulged in any in-depth theoretical discussion about the sociology of humour and cartoons, but merely to explore a number of aspects of cartoons generally and their role in journalism, with particular reference to the Pacific.

Cartooning and journalism

The role of cartoons in newspapers and magazines can be understood in various contexts. Let us look at each in turn.

Breaking monotony

Firstly, cartoons provide a "break" from the monotony of reading. A cartoon is an abridged visual representation of a story. It is meant to have an instant appeal and recognition of a story, as an alternative to reading a lengthy piece. The expression, 'a picture is worth a thousand words' is applicable here. In many cases, editorial cartoons are pictorial summaries of the editorial article, and in most cases they do the editorial job better.

Generally, readers are easily stimulated by pictures, than by written words. But if two pictures of the same person are presented, one in the form of a photograph and the other in the form of a cartoon, the cartoon will create more interest because of the humour behind it.

Common identification

One of the intentions of the cartoonist is to make readers identify with his/her viewpoint. Mobilisation of peoples' sentiments is done through the medium of humour. Collective humour through the mass media provides collective identification among a mass audience of strangers. The "success" of a cartoonist to a great extent depends on how effective he/she manipulates the situation to his/her advantage through arousal of collective sub-consciousness.

To mock...To ridicule

One of the best ways to provoke laughter is by mocking and ridiculing others, and cartoonists do this deliberately on public figures. Because it based on humour, cartooning is a generally acceptable way of mocking others. People enjoy the humour and at the same time are able to understand the message behind the humour. In fact, laughing over a cartoon is due to two factors: the style of



Some of Steve Ratuva's earlier cartoons (circa 1992) for Fiji publications on this page and overleaf.



caricature, and the subtle message. The two normally reinforce each other. Mocking is a powerful political tool to win a psychological war over public figures, or anyone else for that matter. It is in this context that the cartoon itself becomes a site for power

The "Medium is the message"

A cartoon is not only a medium, it is also "the" message. The message is contained in the medium itself. The medium and the message "construct" each other in a symbiotic way. The caricatures and humour constitute the messages themselves. At one level, people laugh at what they physically "see" and on the second level, people laugh at the association between what they physically see and what they are supposed to mentally "see". Clever cartoonists are able to split what is to be mentally seen into other "levels" of conceptualisations. This is a way of constructing "double meanings", contradictions and "ironies" — three important means of presenting humour.

Focus of main story

One of the central roles of cartoons is to provide the focus for the main story of the day or week. Editorial cartoons provide the centripetal force around which the main story revolves.

Attract readership

In terms of marketing psychology, cartoon is a sellable commodity, which could influence the sale of a paper or magazine. Magazines like *Punch* sell purely on the strength of cartoons. In Japan, competition over publication readership is greatly influenced by competition over cartoon presentation. Many well-known newspapers or magazines rely on the reputation of their cartoonists to give their products prestige and marketability. Some well known cartoonists have their cartoons syndicated by other media outlets internationally.

Power

Sociologically, cartooning is an expression of power. Power flows from the tip of the cartoonist's nib and is represented at two levels.

Firstly, is power over the "subject" of the cartoon, say a politician or a public figure. In this case the cartoonist is able to manipulate the face, shape and so on of the subject freely, constructing and "breathing in" a new personality, but a personality which fits into the conceptual framework of the cartoonist. The cartoonist in this case plays god. He/she exercises the power of creation and predetermining the life of his character.

The second level of power is based on the epistemological relationship

between the cartoonist and the readers¹. To be understood, the cartoonist needs to create the necessary conditions for humour. This involves manipulating the readers' minds through caricature and other forms of "distortions". Thus being able to make people laugh is part of the subtle mind-controlling strategy. It is humour created in the context of the cartoonist's terms. Collective humour and laughter through cartoons in the mass media is an extension of the cartoonist's epistemological imperialism (mind control). This process could be psychologically addictive, especially when people get hooked to a particular form of humour or cartoonist.

Cartooning styles

There are different forms of cartooning, and these depend on the preferred style of the cartoonist. Cartooning style is the main "finger print" to identify cartoonists. Some cartoonists may change their styles from time to time to suit the occasion, but some of the basic distinctive "artistic mannerisms" are literally unchangeable.

Cartoons may either be one-dimensional or three-dimensional. One-dimensional cartoons consist of a variety of single or multi-line drawings. Some are casual or "quickie" representations while some are more formalistic and "real" with the use of shadows. Three-dimensional cartoons are usually shaded either in black and white or colour to give them a sense of "solid realism".

Cartoon humour is expressed either through the style of drawing itself, expressive representation (in the form of "distortions") or captions. The essential components of a good humorous cartoon are simplicity, subtlety and clarity. I do not intend to go deeper into the artistic technicalities of cartoons, so at this stage I would need to briefly look at cartooning in Pacific journalism.

Cartoons in Pacific journalism

Cartooning is relatively new in the Pacific and its development has not been as "progressive" as one would expect. This is due to a number of reasons. Firstly, there is an absence of formal fine art training, which would be useful in developing and fine-tuning cartoon drawing techniques. Secondly, Pacific humour is culturally geared towards direct verbalisation in a social group situation and has not really been fine-tuned for journalistic cartoons. Some cartoonists like Bill Bates (*Fiji Times* cartoonist in the 1970s), Bob ("Grass-roots") Browne of the *PNG Post-Courier*, Jada Wilson (*The Independent*, PNG) Patrick Fong (*Fiji Times*) and Laisiasa Naulumatua (*Fiji Times*) have in the past

come close to bridging this "gap". However, there is still a lot to be done in terms of facilitating Pacific humour in a graphically simple yet socially in-depth critique of life.

In Fiji, over recent years, there has been a general deterioration of cartoon qualities. Newspapers like *The Fiji Times*, *Daily Post* and *The Sun* have opted to use non-professional "cartoonists" who produce largely humourless and dry, cartoons, using artistically unappetizing child-like drawing styles. While art has to be appreciated for what it is, it is also important, especially for mass circulation papers, to present quality cartoons as a way of establishing and maintaining a good reputation.

Apart from the artistically regressed styles, Fiji journalistic cartoons, especially when making political critiques, tend to be too shallow with an irritating tendency to state and show the obvious, a cardinal sin in cartooning. There is no subtlety, double meaning or in-depth exploration to catapult the reader's mind to a higher level of intellectual and literary appreciation. In large measure, the drawings are either too "crowded", with unnecessary detail and without proper vanishing point perspective or too "empty" with no form, expression or literary substance.

All these criticisms are not meant to downgrade our cartoonists. Not at all. In fact they are meant to address what I believe is one of the most persistent problems in Pacific journalistic cartooning — a lack of trained and professional cartoonists. There are indeed a lot of talent and potential around that could be tapped and developed to improve journalistic cartooning. While we have had prolific artists and cartoonists such as Bill Bates, Bob Browne and Jada Wilson, cartooning in the Pacific still has not reached a particular threshold where it can lay legitimate claim to a recognisable and established "Pacific Style". Contemporary Pacific cartoons are poor imitations of Western cartoon styles and without an artistic flavour that could be developed to achieve something "originally" Pacific.

However, increasing globalisation of art techniques means that Pacific cartoonists must adapt their techniques to suit the growing global demand for more professional journalistic standards, while being able to evolve something that they could identify as "their own". The latter is increasingly more difficult to achieve because of the complex dynamics of socio-cultural and technological diffusion at the global level.

But whatever the complex sociological arguments are, still, the bottom line is, a good cartoon is trans-cultural and provides for a good laugh. Because, as

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they say, a picture is worth a thousand words.

Note:

¹ Epistemology refers to the sociology of knowledge. It looks at how we generate, transmit and acquire knowledge. Cartooning is a way of transmitting "knowledge" of a particular situation between the cartoonist and the reader.

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THE UNI TAVUR TESTIMONY 1

'I couldn't stop crying'

It was dubbed Black Tuesday — the night four people were shot dead during protests against World Bank structural adjustment policies in Papua New Guinea. The University of PNG journalism newspaper *Uni Tavur* published a special edition on 30 July 2001 with several students' accounts of their experience. Here are the stories of two young women.

By WANITA WAKUS

THE SOUND of gunshots woke me from my deep sleep. I could also hear the footsteps of people running along the exposed corridors of my dormitory. I opened the door, curious to know exactly what was going on, only to hear someone somewhere in the shadows of the trees yelling at the girls to get in and shut their doors. The sound of the gunshots seemed to be getting louder, so I assumed the gunmen were coming closer. I quickly shut the door and only opened my window curtains to see what was happening.

Out in the dark, the shadows of the huge trees swayed to the rhythm of the wind. I could see figures crouching, lying and hiding behind them. They were quite visible because some were in white T-shirts and lighter colors and it was quite easy to spot them. They were about 30 meters away from where I was actually standing. The only thing that separated me and made me safe was that I was in a building with a fence around me while they were at the mercy of the gunmen.

I knew I was safe as long as I stayed inside the doors of my room but I always came close to doubting my safety every time the sounds of gunshot and with it came the screams of the male students. When the gunshots were fired, I would walk up to the window and lift the curtains to see what was happening but I always saw the same sight of the boys trying to hide in the shadows of the dark. Since I was so tired I fell asleep amidst the sound of gunshots.

Chronology of a protest

By **UNI TAVUR**

Friday, June 15: Students hold a Student Union Day at the University of Papua New Guinea. The day is divided into two parts. The morning session is devoted to discussing problems of not enough lecturers, outdated books in the library, limited academic weeks, an expensive bookshop and other issues affecting the university.

Student Representative Council (SRC) president Augustine Moionges is in Mount Hagen and vice-president Kalogo Gima takes charge of this forum.

Afternoon session opens debate on the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) initiated land mobilisation programme. Students express concern about the Government being used by the two monetary organisations to "sell" Papua New Guinea to foreign developers.

By the end of the day, students declared war on the WB and IMF!

Saturday June 16: SRC members travel by boat to Motupore Island outside Port Moresby and hold a secret meeting. Minutes of the meeting are unknown.

Monday June 18: Most students are unaware that a strike is looming. They prepare for normal classes; SRC president Augustine Molones returns from Mt Hagen and calls on the students to stop attending classes and to attend a forum. He terms the boycott of classes as "voluntary". Students continue heated debates on privatisation and land mobilisation issues. The forum gets emotional.

Tuesday June 19: Students decide to "voluntarily boycott" classes again and remain at the forum area. After lunch, the SRC sends out parties to carry out awareness campaigns in all major suburbs of Port Moresby. The focus of the awareness is the WB, IMF, privatisation and land mobilisation. SRC also seeks assistance from the Electoral Commission to conduct a referendum at the university.

Counting of votes takes place at the Electoral Commission's office at Boroko overnight.

Wednesday June 20: In the morning, the SRC announces the results of the counting and declares that majority voted for strike action. The strike is to

last until Friday, June 22. Students go out to carry out awareness campaigns and also to mobilise support for the strike. The university administration warns students that the strike and referendum are illegal and urges everyone to return to classes.

Thursday June 21: Students continue awareness programme and attract hundreds of people to the Prime Minister's office at Waigani. All public motor vehicles (PMV) halt operations in support of the students. Most government offices at Waigani shut down. The SRC students and the public demand that Prime Minister, Sir Mekere Morauta, come out and receive their petition.

However, Sir Mekere sends cabinet ministers Philemon Embel (Provincial Affairs), John Pundari ((Foreign Affairs), Peter Ipatas (Mining) Ben Micah (Privatisation Commission chairman) and Police Commissioner John Wakon, but the crowd refuses to give them their petition.

Still the Prime Minister does not show up. The crowd decides to spend the first night around the old Pineapple building and outside Morauta House where Prime Minister's office is located.

Friday June 22: The crowd wakes up and waits for the Prime Minister all day. Police block vehicles from entering the Waigani government offices. PMV routes 7, 8, 11 and 15 had to be detoured. All buildings in the Waigani government offices have closed doors and hundreds of public servants stay out from work.

By 6pm, it becomes evident that the Prime Minister would not meet the people. But the crowd is determined and decides to spend the second night sleeping outside on the car park and PM's office. In the night, police attempt to disperse the crowd but the crowd ignore the police presence and continue praying and singing the national anthem and police give up.

Saturday June 23: Over the weekend, there is no communication between the PM and the SRC. The crowd keeps growing — reaching to about 15,000 — and the SRC reminds the people that they were to spend this night outside the PM's office as well. This is the third night; the crowd sleep outside the PM's office.

Sunday June 24: The large crowd still waits at the gates of Morauta House.

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The university is almost deserted as students decide to take up temporary residence at the PM's office gate.

SRC arranges transport for students to travel between the campus and Morauta House. Students return to the campus for shower, rest and meals before they return to the PM's office. Students and their supporters spend the fourth night outside.

Monday June 25: This time, the crowd is even bigger than before — about 20,000 plus as they wait for the Prime Minister. Around 12 noon, the Prime Minister sends word out that he would be meeting the protesters. Finally, Sir Mekere is escorted under very heavy guard.

The SRC presents its petition and gives the PM 24 hours to reply. While receiving the petition, the Prime Minister explains to the protesters that he will give some but not all answers the next day. Sir Mekere tells the crowd that some of the decisions have to be made by the Cabinet. In the meantime, he urges them to return to their homes. After the Prime Minister leaves, the SRC leaders tell the crowd that they were to spend the night outside and get their answers tomorrow. The protesters again agree to sleep outside Morauta House.

12 midnight: Heavily armed police personnel arrive at the Waigani government offices and order the people to leave the area within 15 minutes, but the protesters still maintain their positions. After three warning shots, the police fire tear gas canisters into the crowd and forcefully chase the crowd out of the area.

As the crowd disperses, it becomes violent. Along the way at the Administrative College near UPNG, two cars are burnt. Another car is burnt at the university's main entrance. Around university's main bus stop, a fourth car is burnt. Stones, bottles, and bricks being thrown by angry protesters damage many cars travelling along the main highway. The Big Rooster outlet at Rainbow is burnt down by arsonists and fire fighters travelling to fight the fire get stoned. Plants, signposts and streetlights along the Waigani Gerehu road are destroyed.

Police arrive at the scene and chase both students and members of the protesting public into the university premises.

It is during this period that students are eventually shot and some are

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wounded. Police concentrate heavy gunfire into the air and sometimes directed at the students.

The gunshots are heard in many parts of the the city. Police also fire lots of gas canisters into the campus. The bullets and tear gas do not deter the students.

The gunfire continues until 7am Tuesday morning, when the police withdraw and take up position at the Waigani police station.

Tuesday, June 26: The city of Port Moresby comes to a standstill as students continue to fight police with saticks and stones. A large crowd from Gerehu (stages 1-6), Rainbow, Moarata (1, 2 and 3), Ensisi, Waigani and Tokarara join the students. People from other areas too come in large numbers and demand the police allow them through to the Prime Minister's office for answers to their petition.

There is general disorder, destruction and looting in all parts of the city. However, the police refuse to let the crowd pass. Tensions between police and protesters mount and finally the crowd go on a rampage. Police fire rubber bullets and tear gas into the crowd and chase the thousands of people away.

The Governor-general declares a curfew in Port Moresby.

Wednesday, June 27: Students mourn the death of fellow students and anxiously await the news of those in hospital.

Wednesday, July 4: Funeral attended by about 3000 plus students, city residents, friends and relatives.

'Dear Mum and Dad'

'By sunrise, on this bloody Tuesday, June 26, Port Moresby came under siege. Four people, including two students from the University of PNG, had been shot dead. Their bodies were driven to the Port Moresby General Hospital morgue. Seventeen protesters with pellet wounds were admitted to the hospital's emergency ward.'

Quote from *Uni Tavur*

By ESTELLA CHEUNG

Dear Mum and Dad

I'VE GOT lots to tell you! Before I go on just one word of advice, "Don't believe everything you hear or read in the media" (that includes newspapers, radio and TV). I'm saying this because of the current situation here at UPNG, which you may have some idea about ... but I know that parents have it in their nature to be concerned about everything and anything under the sun that will affect their children. I bet you, that right now you have a thousand questions you are dying to ask.

Before I continue with what I want to say, I ask for your patience, time and understanding to read the truth about the whole situation because I want you to know the truth. I want you to draw your minds from being tossed about with endless questions and set the record straight. So please, bear with me.

On Saturday night (17 June 2001) my room mate and I were watching a movie on the big screen in the main lecture theatre. In the middle of this movie, the screen was shut off and the lights were turned on. The president of one of the Highlands provinces broke the news to those of us in the theatre that the following Friday (22 June 2000) PNGBC — our bank — was going to be sold out or privatised.

He explained how the land mobilisation programme would come into effect. From the brief lecture he gave us about the bad side of selling PNGBC,

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I learnt that if ever land mobilisation was imposed, we would be forced to register our own land in order to live on it and toil it. I'm sure you've heard about the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Well, since independence, Papua New Guinea has been borrowing so much from the World Bank in order to "develop" the country. Unfortunately, I am sorry to say we never succeeded. The reason is because of the WANTOK SYSTEM from which CORRUPTION is bred. PNG's loans are so big, not even our resources can pay them all back — like the Ok Tedi mine, Lihir mine, West New Britain palm oil, Jant, etc. So the loans just keep on growing year after year.

The government came up with a solution, a solution that will solve our debt problem as a country but one that will affect us as individuals even more. And that is to sell PNGBC and have people register their land. If they don't, their land is taken away from them and given to the bank. The bank will then rent it out to larger companies. The profit will then go to the World Bank to repay our loans. The registering of land would depend on the size of person's land. If you have a big piece of land you pay more, if you have small piece — you pay less to get your land registered.

But the majority of our people are subsistence farmers and live in rural areas where the land is the source of their children's school fees, clothing etc. This will NOT be fair on them, because they have no chance at all of keeping their land. If they cannot pay the registration fee before the set date their land will be taken away. So they will have to work on someone else's land to feed their children, and pay for their family needs.

Anyway, after the movie ended, we had a long talk about it. The majority of the students wanted to do something about it because they come from the rural areas. I felt that it was my responsibility to take part because my future depended on the land at home, and the future of my family depended on me.

So I disobeyed you and Dad's advice to me at the beginning of my first year. (Not to take part in any protest or strike). I couldn't stand and watch, and the thought of leaving school with no job and no place to settle, ticked me off! Besides, it was for a good cause.

The next day, Monday, classes were cancelled, but some still attended classes. There was a forum, and in the forum the issue was addressed again. People, who knew more about the issue, tried to educate everyone on it.

On Tuesday, we had a referendum vote on whether to go to class and at the same time address the issue or whether to stop classes and concentrate on addressing the issue. The majority voted for no classes. We did everything

ESTELLA CHEUNG

legally. For the voting part, we had some people from the Electoral Commission of PNG come down and conduct the secret ballot — so the final result was recognised and respected by the administration.

The referendum covered until Friday, June 22, then the following week everyone was expected to return to classes. Under the bylaws of the university, after 10 days of boycotting classes, the university will have to close for the rest of the academic year. So the Student Representative Council (SRC) told us that the referendum was only covering five days.

On Wednesday, we broke up into regional and provincial groups and we were given areas to do awareness campaigns for the public. The reason for this was to educate the public and at the same time get their support. We told them to meet in front of the Morauta Haus on Thursday morning and wait for the Prime Minister to come down and receive the petition, which was drawn up by the SRC. We covered the whole of the National Capital District. I was in the New Guinea Islands group. We covered the Gerehu area and downtown Port Moresby. By the time we finished, it was 5.30 pm. PMV drivers helped out with the transport by using their working time to drive us around to our located areas to protest. By the end of the day the whole of NCD was aware of what was happening. Our theme was non-violence, the Ghandi way. This was pointed out to the public and they were aware that we were going to address the issue using non-violence. The start of the protest was peaceful.

On Thursday morning, the NGI students made their way downtown to protest in front of PNGBC. We were yelling "rausim IMF, rausim World Bank" over and over. We got the attention of several PNGBC workers, who thought they'd support us a little from the top of the PNGBC building. It was interesting to see how much attention we got from the public. There were a few very thoughtful betel nut sellers, who bought us cold drinks, seeing we had been out in the sun for hours. Drivers tooted their horns to show their support as they drove pass, the public joined in with the yelling when we started losing our voices. For those of us who were engaged in a protest for the first time, it was fun. But for those who were in past protests, it was something serious and "fragile". Other regional groups were doing the same at different areas.

At lunch time we headed back to Morauta Haus. By the time we got there, there was already a large crowd gathered. Approximately 20,000 men women and children. Talk about public support, we practically had the whole of NCD there! (Except for the working class, particularly the ones who are stuck in their offices all day).

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Our student leaders sent word to the Prime Minister to come down and receive the petition. He sent other ministers instead. (A pretty cheap thing to do for someone of his rank). I'm not so sure who the ministers were, but boy did they have the time of their life! I mean they were shamed in public by the crowd and I suppose a handful of really impatient students who thought their waiting all day in the sun was a big waste. The poor ministers never knew they would be "baptised" with new names like "Tea boy" and "Beer-bel". Anyway, the students refused to give the petition to those ministers because our first petition this year was given to the Education Minister (just because the Prime Minister didn't come) and has had no response yet.

That night was the first night spent in front of the Morauta Haus. Both the students and the public were not going to give up and go home. It was a must that the Prime Minister received the petition in his own hands. Students told the public to go home, have something to eat and have a rest but they refused. So food and water was brought from the university mess to feed the public. It was amazing to see how understandable the public was, and how supportive and obedient they were to the student leaders. Just for that week, they committed themselves to a protest march, they totally forgot about the comfort and security of their homes; out in the cold and wind on the streets with no sheets or whatsoever to keep them warm, just to be with us.

Through the night it was peaceful, people sang songs, told stories, played cards and just did little, quiet things to keep them busy.

The crowd remained the whole day on Friday. The referendum was going to be illegal as of midnight on Friday. The Prime Minister still did not come.

On Friday night, the students and the rest of the crowd spend another night in front of Morauta Haus.

The same thing was done on Saturday night. On Sunday at 4pm, finally the Prime Minister came down to receive the petition. The SRC president, Augustine Molonges, handed it over to him and gave him 24 hours to respond to it. But did the Prime Minister respond after 24 hours, at 4pm on Monday? No. If he needed more time to discuss with his advisers, why couldn't he speak up and say so? Anyway the students and supporters, made it very clear to the police, and the Prime Minister that they weren't going to move until they had a response.

At around 9pm Monday night, students were making their way down to Morauta Haus for yet another night. This was illegal, but like I already said, "No response from PM, no leaving Morauta Haus for yet another night." Along the

Police drew their guns. The person in charge told the students to leave in 15 min. No one listened. After three warning shots, teargas was fired into the crowd... Then the police began hitting people with the butts of their guns.

way, they were stopped and sent back to the campus. The ones, who were already there since the afternoon, had no idea what was happening to the others who were supposed to make their way there. Police arrived at Morauta Haus, and drew their guns. The person in charge told the people to get up and leave the place in 15 minutes. No one listened. After three warning shots, teargas was fired into the crowd. People started running around, trying to avoid the sting of the teargas. After the firing of teargas, the police moved in and began hitting people, using the butts of their guns. Students started running away from the police. This was when the chase began. Police vehicles started going after the students. Female students, who couldn't think straight about their safety on the streets, were so afraid of the police they took off in every direction.

Somehow the police came all the way to the campus. What went on at the round about, I wouldn't know; but around 11pm they were already in the campus firing their weapons. The female students by then were already indoors. Teargas was fired as well as rubber bullets and live bullets. The shooting kept getting louder, which meant they were moving closer. The male students tried their best to keep the police from moving any further into dormitories by throwing rocks in their direction, cursing them. Female students fetched water buckets and passed them out for the guys to put out the teargas and wipe their eyes.

Watching from the very top level of Tuluon House, I could see the boys running around, diving behind trees and searching for rocks to throw. Then when the boys ran out of rocks, brave female students came out of the dormitories and collected rocks from the flower gardens and threw them out of the fence to boys. Several shots were fired towards our dormitories as well. I got hit on my right arm with a rubber bullet while I stood out on the balcony. It only swelled, but the swelling has already gone down.

All night the police were firing, and all night the male students were trying to keep them out. There was no rest for the boys. The shots were fired after every few minutes, and no pause as long as four minutes. It wasn't until between 6 and 7 on Tuesday morning did the male students try to surrender. The police had stopped firing for a while. It had been a long night, and the boys just couldn't take it any more, so they put their hands on their heads in a sign of surrender, and started waking towards the police. Suddenly the police started firing again and four guys were hit. The security vehicles picked them up and rushed them to hospital. One died instantly, another died in hospital. Around 9 am the police left. Students began to mourn for their dead fellow students. After everything quieted down, students found bullet holes in their dormitories. A female student found holes in her bed sheets and the wall in her room. A university building has little holes everywhere in the louvre blades, made from the bullets.

The relatives of one of those who got shot are now demanding K500,000 compensation from the SRC and another K500,000 compensation from the government. I don't know where the SRC is going to find that kind of money. But there was a coronial inquest and a Commission of Inquiry will investigate the killings.

Anyway, we had a state funeral for the dead on Wednesday, July 4. There were no classes. Opposition Leader Bill Skate flew in to attend. Speaker of Parliament Bernard Narokobi was there as well. Classes have resumed as usual. But just the other day, the Pro Vice Chancellor got this phone call telling him that there was a bomb in the basement of the library and in the computer labs.

The Library and computer labs were closed and the bomb squad was asked to come, but nobody came (The police have bomb experts, they were probably too afraid to even come in and check out the situation. Nothing happened after a long while, so the Pro VC presumed something was just trying to disrupt classes. But the computer lab and library are now open and school is back to normal.

Estella

□ *Estella Cheung is a second-year journalism student at the University of Papua New Guinea. This article was published in Uni Tavor, 30 July 2001. She later also gave testimony to the Commission of Inquiry.*

Trauma and reporters:

And the reporting of suicide in media

Trauma is an inevitable part of everyday life in the Pacific. The media is a powerful force and when used effectively it can help to mobilise assistance for victims and survivors. Sometimes, getting that message across has a psychological cost.

By ANNA SHADBOLT

THE REALITY of trauma, is that when an event appears to be over, there are often many people still suffering silently from their traumatic experiences. Not only the people who tragically lose their loved ones, but also the many personnel who are involved in the recovery phases that follow as part of their job or profession. These people include the police, emergency workers, airline staff, health workers, journalists and volunteers. Their reaction is called a stress reaction, but in particular, a traumatic stress response.

Disasters and traumatic events, by their very nature are shocking and sudden. The disaster may be a flood, an earthquake, a hurricane, a tsunami, a major accident, a war or civil unrest, but trauma may also result from a suicide, an industrial accident, or a motor car accident where only one death occurs.

This article firstly looks at some information about the psychological impact of trauma followed by a description of various types of traumatic events like disasters and suicide that have occurred in the region. A case study approach will address three key areas for the journalist:

- The impact of the reporting on the journalist;
- The impact of the reporting on the victims, the survivors, and the general public;
- Reporting of suicide in the media.

The impact of reporting traumatic events on journalists

Despite the large amount of research on the psychological impact of trauma on victims and emergency personnel over the past thirty years, little reference is made to the impact on media personnel following such events, yet the media are always there getting information out to the public. More recently, interest on the impact of traumatic stress on journalists is gaining recognition as it becomes acknowledged as a serious occupational health hazard. Some reports from recent disasters in the region illustrate the psychological cost of working in this area.

Tsunami in Aitape, Papua New Guinea

In July 1998 a tsunami virtually engulfed the villages in the Sissino lagoon area. The final death toll is still unknown, but it is estimated at over 2000 people. Sean Dorney reflects on his experience as a journalist working for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in PNG:

In the 20 odd years I was in Papua New Guinea, I covered many natural disasters and tragedies. But none of them affected me so deeply as did this freak wave, which crashed without warning ... The human tragedy of the Aitape disaster had, I said to them with tears welling in my eyes, no equal in my experience [*speaking more than 12 months after the tsunami*]. There were undoubtedly tensions between those engaged in the rescue effort and those trying to report on it ... the helicopter pilot who ... worked tirelessly ... to save many lives ... looked up and saw a cameraman out filming ... he told me he yelled out to those around him, "all he's interested in is the bloody pictures. Why doesn't the bastard get down here and help someone?" (Dorney, 1999)

The massacre at Port Arthur, Tasmania, Australia

In April 1996 an armed gunman killed 35 people, injured 18 and attempted to kill a further 20 people in Port Arthur, a popular tourist destination just south of Hobart in Tasmania. This has been identified as one of the worst massacres by a single gunman, outside a war situation, in the world. Richard Lower reflects on his part in reporting this disaster as the television editor for Australian Broadcasting Corporation in Tasmania:

The last thing to think about was the impact that this was having on the people who were going down to Port Arthur, because I never had to go

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down there. In fact, I have not been back Port Arthur to this day [over three years] ... I was observing it from a distance ... I started to notice things. I walked past an editing suite and saw an editor crying at the controls ... he said, 'I am sick of dealing with this material ... I don't want to cut it any more' ... while bulletins were being aired, the staff operating the autocue at the back of the room burst into tears ... or cadet ... said: "I am having second thoughts about my career options ... I don't think I want to be a journalist any more" ...

... We had to keep putting the material out ... Clearly people were being affected and could not do their job properly ... in this whole process, very few people care about the editor, and I do not recall anyone asking me how I was feeling. All the time I was asking the staff how they were feeling. (Lower, 1999).

The Air Fiji plane crash in Fiji

In July 1999, Fiji experienced its worst plane disaster when flight PC 121, flying from Suva to Nadi, crashed in the Namosi highlands. All crew and passengers



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died - a total of 17 people. The following information is based on information collected from journalists who were at the crash site.

An early morning call came for a small group of young journalists to head up to Namosi on the July morning of the Air Fiji plane crash. At the time when they left Suva, little information was known about the crash and whether there were any survivors. The thoughts that they had as they started their journey were only of the great story they were going to get — maybe the story of a lifetime, a Pulitzer prize winner! The expectations of the group were enormous.

When they finally arrived at the village they were told that they would need to go a few more hours on foot to get to the crash site. They decided to navigate their way through the inhospitable jungle. There were times along the way when they were ready to turn back as exhaustion set in from carrying heavy photographic equipment — but their youth, enthusiasm and adrenalin kept them going. (Shadbolt, taken from interviews in 1999 and 2000)

Each of these events can be clearly identified as large-scale disasters. The reality though, is that

a traumatic stress response occurs not only in a situation of a major disaster, but also in situations which are characterised as critical incidents. These incidents include any situation faced by an individual that causes him/her to experience unusually strong emotional reactions that have the potential to interfere with their ability to function either at the scene or later. (Mitchell, 1993) Some other types of critical incidents include:

- Sudden death of a child under tragic circumstances
- Any incident which poses a serious physical or psychological threat to the worker him or herself
- Multiple fatalities
- Exposure to body parts or dismembered bodies, as in an industrial accident
- Serious injury or death of a colleague in the line of duty, as has occurred in reporting of conflict situations
- A serious injury or death of a member of the public resulting from carrying out of your own duty, e.g. media vehicle collides with emergency vehicle or on-lookers when responding to a call out.

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Research with emergency workers suggests that everyone is affected to some extent by such events. Such psychological effects of trauma are completely normal, and it is expected that anyone experiencing such shocking and unexpected events would react in a similar way. It is when these stress reactions persist over an extended period of time that more serious mental health problems may develop.



Typical initial reactions following such an event will affect the individual's thinking, emotions and physical functioning. Some effects that have been reported by journalists, police, soldiers, and emergency personnel include those on the opposite page:

There are personal factors that contribute to the response that any individual journalist will experience. These include:

- *The level of involvement that the individual has at the disaster scene.* The

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REPORTED EFFECTS

PHYSICAL	THINKING	EMOTIONAL
Nausea	Slowed thinking	Anxiety/worry
Upset stomach	Difficulty making decisions	Fear
Tremors/shakes (lips, hands)	Difficulty in problem solving	Guilt
Feeling uncoordinated/clumsy	Poor attention span	Depression
Heavy sweating	Disorientation (place and time)	Sadness
Chills	Difficulty with calculations	Feeling lost
Diarrhoea	Difficulty concentrating	Feeling abandoned
Dizziness	Memory problems	Feeling isolated
Chest pain (must check with doctor)	Difficulty naming common objects	Wanting to limit contact with others
Rapid heart beat	Seeing the event over and over	Wanting to hide
Rapid breathing	Confusion	Worry about others
Increased blood pressure	Distressing dreams	Anger
Headaches		Irritability
Muscle aches		Feeling numb
Sleep disturbance		Easily startled
Loss of appetite		Shocked
Weight loss		Easily upset
Hyper-alertness		

Trauma effects: As reported by journalists, police and emergency services. (Adapted from Mitchell, 1990).

actual first-hand experience with death itself, usually on a large scale, and the extent to which the individual needs to work with the victims, dead bodies and/or bereaved survivors at the scene, all contribute directly to the psychological impact. For instance, Sean Dorney (1999) refers to the way he was personally involved in recovery of injured survivors at the tsunami in PNG. Journalists who are sent on "death knocks" (speaking to bereaved family of the victim) may be

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the first ones to inform family of the tragedy.

The way in which each individual assesses the situation. For instance, the individual journalist may become fearful for the safety of his/her own loved ones, or may actually experience direct personal loss from the disaster through losing a loved one. This means that she or he may be attempting to deal with her or his own grief and loss while also trying to report on the large-scale impact of the event on others. This situation would not be unexpected given the small size of many Pacific communities, hence adding to the psychological impact of such events on Pacific journalists.

Repeated exposure to traumatic events of this nature creates a cumulative reaction whereby one event triggers a powerful response that is a culmination of numerous traumatic experiences.

Negative public image. An added factor that impacts on journalists is the negative public response that often goes hand-in-hand with the job. By their very nature, journalists are viewed as insensitive and self-serving, as was evidenced in the report from Sean Dorney in PNG. In Fiji, the news media were cited before the Media Council because of "insensitive reporting" of the Air Fiji crash. There is no doubt that such a bad public image adds to the stress of an already difficult situation because they are viewed as "unfeeling". There is rarely any empathy given to the distraught journalist who is traumatised from completing his or her job (Castle, 1999).

Coping strategies

The immediate responses to the feelings of discomfort experienced in the aftermath of the disaster are known as coping strategies. Sometimes these work and sometimes they may add to the problems. Disasters often provoke a range of problems in social functioning which tend to relate to the emotional response to the experience of the disaster: "irritability leading to interpersonal friction; concentration difficulties leading to problems at work (Williams et al, 1993: 452).

Some typical coping strategies that often do not help are:

- Refusing to talk about personal experiences to others
- Shutting out others
- Avoiding activities or situations which bring back thoughts of the traumatic event — affecting all senses: smell, taste, vision, and sounds
- Burying oneself in extra work

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Increased consumption/use of alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and other drugs (Malt et al, 1989, Mitchell & Bray, 1990, Williams et al, 1993).

All of these strategies were reported in follow-up sessions with journalists and police after the Air Fiji crash. These included avoiding watching TV, taking up special projects which were very time consuming, increased use of alcohol, refusing to write any more stories about the event, not talking about the event to anyone (even 10 months later), changing jobs.

Research with emergency personnel has identified more effective coping strategies. Information about these options are usually provided at debriefing sessions as part of the educational component of the process to help individuals exposed to a traumatic event to use more constructive methods for coping with the emotional distress. These short term strategies facilitate the recovery phase and help to prevent more serious mental health problems.

The worst case scenario

In some cases the person who experiences a traumatic event can develop a serious mental disorder. As mentioned earlier, the way(s) in which an event, and one's involvement in it, is personally assessed, influences the psychological response to a traumatic event. The past experience of the individual is also important here and depending on how all these factors pan out it is expected that 5-20 percent of individuals will suffer from a more serious reaction that may result in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which is a chronic psychiatric disorder.

Clinical studies with emergency workers and military personnel have shown that a number of factors place people at risk for chronic PTSD. Some of these include:

- Nature and intensity of the stressor*
- Characteristics of the individual victim or helper*
- History of past stressful life experience*
- Characteristics of the recovery environment*

The recovery environment includes the workplace itself and the recognition given by management of the traumatic experiences of their workers. Hence, the extent to which journalists are expected to continue working on a story and the need to return to the disaster scene may add to the stress. Dorney (1999: 139).

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reflects on how his media organisation added to his trauma following the tsunami:

I recognise that I was traumatised by it all, not only because it was a tragic story but also because of the almost impossible demands that were daily, hourly, being put upon me...

Journalists, working at the Air Fiji crash site, were expected to continue with their scheduled rosters on the days following their arduous journey through the jungle, and some were involved in follow-up stories on the recovery of the bodies of victims.

A number of symptoms need to be present for this disorder to occur, which include:

□ Reexperiencing and intrusive phenomena (*memories; distress caused by triggers that remind person of event; nightmares that disturb sleep; flashbacks with panic & sweating responses*)

□ Psychological symptoms which are shutting out of feelings, numbing, denying responses

□ Arousal symptoms: irritability, sleep disturbance, hyper-alertness

However, these symptoms need to persist for three-six months for a diagnosis of PTSD.

Interviews with journalists following the Air Fiji crash indicated that all those interviewed had some of the symptoms that have the potential to lead to PTSD. Castle (1999) reports that journalists he interviewed following the tsunami in PNG showed similar symptoms. However, there has been no systematic surveillance of these stress disorders among journalists or the general community within the Pacific so far.

What is it that stops journalists from seeking help even when the distress they feel is affecting their ability to cope? Place (1992) recounts the aftermath of the Hoddle Street and Queen Street massacres in Melbourne in the late 1980s in his dissertation about the need for counselling services for journalists. He stated that one of the problems in the industry is the sense of "machismo" which infers that you need to be tough — and if you cannot hack it then maybe you are in the wrong industry. Interestingly this is a common theme found among the emergency services like fire-fighters, police and ambulance officers. All are

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male-dominated high-powered work places that have this "culture", and yet in many countries they have moved to recognising the need for psychological support services.

Lower (1999) participated in a debriefing session following the Port Arthur massacre. He said:

Looking back, holding the session was absolutely the right thing to do. People came up to me the next day or two afterwards and said, "Thank God we did that because virtually we were all going home of an evening and not knowing what to do."

There is some disagreement among psychologists about the most effective methods for managing trauma. Despite this, Red Cross International, police and emergency personnel in many countries believe that the debriefing process is an important component. Some journalists who are working in the area of trauma management also argue that the process is useful, especially when incorporated as part of a peer support structure (Place, 1992; Castle, 1999). The effectiveness of peers for psychological support is increasingly recognised as a model that reduces the stigmatisation often associated with such support. For more information about establishing a peer support programme refer to Robinson and Murdoch (1991).

Prevention is better than the cure

There is increasing recognition that some of these problems are preventable. As media organisations recognise the real impact that working with traumatic events can have on their personnel they start to examine their own systems of support and management. The financial costs of lost man-hours, high staff turnover, and poor productivity will provide the impetus for looking seriously at this occupational health and safety issue within the media industry as it did in the emergency services.

A well-planned preventative approach needs to have three components:

Appropriate management of media coverage of potentially traumatic events. The industry needs to look at how the expectations they place on their journalists may add further to the stress that is experienced. As mentioned earlier, Dorney felt that the demands placed on him were excessive. Others have reported that the use of inexperienced journalists on "death knocks" is a poor practice (Place, 1992; Castle, 1999). Place (1992) also states that different media have different

needs and protocols, i.e. print, radio, television and internet. Each sector needs to review its practices in light of this knowledge and experience.

Pre-trauma education of personnel about the psychological impact of trauma

Basic training in journalism, whether at a university or on the job, needs to incorporate some training about trauma, its impact on the individual and its management. The information contained in this chapter and the resources listed at the end provide a good starting point for developing a knowledge base in this field. An elementary understanding of human behaviour, emotions like grief, problem solving and stress are key areas of psychology that would add to this information.

Adequate follow-up care and support for those who work with traumatic material, both at the scene and back in the newsroom. Typical guidelines used by emergency personnel in countries like Australia and the United States for those who are exposed to serious critical incidents or traumatic events are compulsory debriefing following critical incidents, peer support networks, and provision of professional counselling services. This is not the case with emergency personnel in Fiji. In fact, when debriefing and counselling services were offered, by the Red Cross and the National Advisory Council on Mental Health, following the Air Fiji crash, only a few police and journalists used them.

As stated earlier, there are often barriers to seeking help. Place (1992) suggests that with the right leadership and training, the media industry in Australia could establish an in-house peer support network for managing trauma. This model is consistent with the informal networks that develop within the Pacific. The access to internet facilities could help the isolated journalist access a trained peer for psychological support. The impetus for such a programme needs to come from the industry itself.

The impact of reporting on the victims, survivors and public

Journalists are not the only victims of media coverage of trauma — the consumers of the reporting are also potential victims of trauma. Research has shown that victims, survivors, families, friends, and communities, use media coverage to help them find meaning in the disaster or traumatic event that has occurred (McLellan, 1999). While reporters may regard their work as today's news, the affected public, repeatedly examine media reports to help them make sense of the, often senseless, event.

McLellan (1999, 59) found that various media reports and images following

the Port Arthur massacre and various industrial accident deaths in Australia triggered distressing responses. Some of these responses included:

- Physical stress symptoms: increased heart rate, palpitations, cold sweats
- Horrendous flashbacks
- Disturbing dreams
- Deep depression
- Substance abuse
- Episodes of self-mutilation
- Suicide ideation or attempts

These responses occurred after the event or even months later, especially at anniversaries or times when some similar event resulted in recycled details, often with no warning.

Some of the reports that followed the Air Fiji crash in 1999 were considered insensitive and inconsiderate of the families of the victims as well as disturbing to the general public. Some articles used very graphic language that enabled the reader to readily visualise the horror of the scene — an exercise that may result in a traumatic reaction, especially for the family and loved ones of these victims so described (Shadbolt, 200: 290-291). Morbid headings are somewhat disturbing as they may start family members of victims imagining that their loved ones had been mutilated. This style of reporting was not restricted to the print media, but also on radio and television. The community backlash against this style of reporting of this tragedy resulted in submissions to the Fiji Media Council.

In its ruling, the Media Council recognised that journalists in Fiji had had little exposure to such disasters and hence lacked experience in dealing with such material. It also acknowledged the important role that media must play in reporting such tragedies to the public. Overall it asserted that the Council's Code of Ethics, which was not in use at the time of the plane crash, now provides adequate guidelines for future reporting of such disasters, particularly two sections:

- DISTRESSING MATERIAL:** Editors, producers and broadcasters of news, current affairs and documentary programmes should take particular care in deciding whether the inclusion of graphic detail and intensity of violent or distressing material is warranted by its relevance and to aid public understanding of the subject. Special consideration must be given

to possible transmission of particularly disturbing images... (Section 6, Broadcasting [Television and Radio] programme Code of Practice)

TASTE AND DECENCY: They should not include material which is offensive to prevailing general standards of taste and decency, or likely to prejudice respect for human dignity among its audience bearing in mind the manner and time of transmission (Section 1, *ibid.*).

Such guidelines provide an excellent framework for guiding responsible reporting. But they cannot stand alone for they lack sufficient rationale for their existence in the case of dealing with traumatic events. It is imperative that editors, producers and broadcasters understand the nature of trauma and its impact on people, including themselves and their reporters, before they are able to make such judgements. For instance, when the report of the Air Fiji crash appeared on the current affairs program on Fiji One it was obvious to the trained viewer that the reporter was himself traumatised, and hence unfit to judge how to regulate the amount of information to give. It had been less than 24 hours since he himself had been subjected to the horrific crash site.

McLellan (199: 64-66) presents a scathing report of the poor practice of Australian media personnel following the Port Arthur massacre in 1996. She reports about the insensitivity that prevailed in getting the story at any cost. Her findings identify three main areas of concern:

- Legal/ethical/moral issues* that concern and/or distress those dealing with the media after a traumatic event;
- Dubious practice* in the field
- Newsroom* and publication decisions that cause further alarm

McLellan (1999: 66) provides some pertinent reasoning for the malpractice that was evident from her study. Some of her perceptions that are pertinent to this region include:

- Young inexperienced journalists believe that their career will be on the line* if they do not deliver
- Decision-makers under-estimate the number of people potentially traumatised* by an event
- Despite industry-wide code of ethics... distribution and discussion of best practice information related to the covering of traumatic events is patchy*
- Journalists and decision-makers receive little training about trauma and*

its impacts

- Journalists and decision-makers are not encouraged to reflect on the ramifications of their actions*
- Journalists and decision-makers use deadlines and competition to excuse malpractice*

More sensitive approaches to victims and survivors will help both parties and increase the job satisfaction of the journalist. For instance, when sent out on a "death knock", making the effort to place greater focus on the needs of the interviewee rather than on the story. Cote and Bucqueroux (1996, cited McLellan, 1999) provide some tips for the interviewing in such situations which are provided here as a guide for better practice.

The reporting of traumatic events is difficult and challenging. As professionals, journalists must decide what is important to report and what is not. Ethical guidelines already exist to help this judgement to be made. As one becomes more knowledgeable of the costs associated with reporting trauma, one is in a better position to judge the stories that are best left only half told.

The next section looks at another difficult area of reporting. Suicide is treated separately as there are some special aspects that relate only to this area of reporting.

Reporting of suicide in the media

As mentioned in the previous section, people use media reports to help them understand and give meaning to events that occur in their communities. Research in many countries throughout the world have shown that when media sensationalises or gives prominence to the reporting of suicide there can be an increase in the rate of suicide — referred to as copycat suicides. This creates a difficult dilemma over the reporting of suicide. In countries like Australia, very few suicides are ever reported in the media (Herman, 1996). This is not the current practice of the print media in Fiji.

In 1999, on Christmas Eve and again on New Year's Eve, eager school children awaited the early results of their examination performance. These would be published in the print media for all of Fiji to see. The front page of *The Fiji Times* on 5 January 2000 saw the headline:

EXAM FAILURE TRIGGERS SUICIDE

This was an article that reported the suicide of a young 16-year girl from poisoning, allegedly because she had failed her Fiji Junior (Form 4) examinations. Following the publication of this article considerable follow-up coverage was published and broadcast in the media.

Suicide is a serious mental health problem in many Pacific Island countries. Police statistics for Fiji show that for the months of January and February 2000, there were 23 deaths by suicide and 21 non-fatal suicide attempts reported to police. Police state that accurate data collection is often difficult, especially for non-fatal attempts, where medical attention is not required, as families tend not to report the matter to police. The statistics for Fiji do not attempt to prove that there were copycat suicides following the article on January 5, but they do show that there are many vulnerable people in the community. The media industry needs to be aware of the potential impact that reporting may have on the behaviour of its readers.

In Australia, the federal Ministry of Health and Aged Care, has developed a media package for the reporting of suicide as part of its suicide prevention strategy. A summary of their suggestions is provided in the table on the opposite page. Each suggestion provides a rationale for its inclusion in these guidelines.

If we refer back to the *Fiji Times* article referred to earlier we can assess the extent to which it conformed to these guidelines.

Key concerns about the reporting of this juvenile suicide are:

- The article was on the front page [Refer to point 1]
- The headline was sensational — linking exam results to the untimely death of the child and used the word “suicide” [Refer 3, 7]
- The article provided precise details of the suicide method used [Refer 4]
- The journalist interviewed the parents of the young victim. [Refer 8, 9]
- The article included statements that infer some level of neglect or responsibility on the part of parents/family for the tragedy [Refer 8, 9]
- The article did not provide any contacts or mental health messages suggesting that help is available for readers who may be in a vulnerable mental state. [Refer 10]

The *Fiji Times* article contravened many of the suggested guidelines for the reporting of suicide. Admittedly it is unlikely that the reporter had access to this material but when I approached the editor of the paper and offered information about the problems in their reporting of suicide little interest or concern was expressed and the offer was declined. This attitude demonstrated a certain level of naiveté about common practice in the reporting of suicide in the press.

QUICK MEDIA GUIDE ON SUICIDE

1. Place the relevant story on the inside pages of a newspaper, magazine, journal in the second or third break of TV news, or further down the order of radio reports rather than making it a headline, front page or top of the bulletin piece.

Researchers have discovered a link between front page of prominent stories and increased incidence of copycat suicide. Prominently featured stories are more noticeable and given greater weight in terms of importance of notoriety to audiences. This can make suicide a more credible course of action to some vulnerable people.

2. Don't constantly repeat stories on suicide, especially on TV and radio have the effect of normalising suicide for viewers and listeners.

People can become “desensitised”, as they do to many forms of violence or harm, through constant exposure and repeated messages.

3. Use the word “suicide” sparingly and cautiously.

Evidence suggests reports that are highly emotionally charged, which use sensational headlines, and/or which have an over-emphasis on the word “suicide” are more likely to encourage imitation suicide.

4. Don't use overly explicit descriptions, photographs or footage of the method and location — they can be particularly dangerous.

A step by step description can provide an impetus and mechanism for some vulnerable people.

5. Be careful with celebrity suicides — consider the repercussions.

Recent research has found that reporting of celebrity suicides can influence suicide rates in some cultural contexts and times. The air of tragedy and the almost “legendary” status of celebrity suicides can, unfortunately, add to the perceived glamour and attraction of suicide for some young people.

6. Try to give the bigger picture to help educate people about suicide.

Stories on the strong relationship between mental illness and suicide risk — for example, depression as a risk factor for suicide — can help to place the situation into context. It can also help people understand it is not a separate one-step event but that it is part of a bigger problem and challenge for society.

QUICK MEDIA GUIDE ON SUICIDE *continued***7. Avoid glamorising suicide in dramatic presentations.**

In depicting suicide as part of a storyline in a drama, emphasise the devastation following the act rather than focusing too heavily on the act itself. Also stress the finality and don't overdramatise the act.

8. Remember: The bereaved are often at risk themselves.

Professional ethical guidelines and industry codes of practice for contact with the bereaved is the best guide

9. Some suggestions for language:

Instead of referring to a first suicide attempt as "unsuccessful", try saying the first suicide attempt was "not fatal".

Rather than reporting a "suicide epidemic", talk about increasing rates. It may not be a powerful but it is more accurate.

Instead of referring to a person as a "suicide" or a "depressive", use terms such as "died by suicide" or "the person was depressed at the time of his or her death".

If it is necessary to describe the method of suicide, then instead of saying "the woman died after placing a hose inside her car window" simply state that "the woman died of asphyxiation".

Replace descriptions like a "bizarre suicide pact", by saying "the deaths were allegedly planned by the couple".

10. Promote the use of mental health services.

Including phone numbers and details of local help services or mental health services at the end of a report offers people immediate assistance. This is particularly important if the story has distressed them or prompted thoughts of suicide. Where appropriate, include the National Help Line numbers like St Giles Hospital in Fiji, or a medical practitioner, psychologist or social worker.

(Taken from Department of Health and Aged Care, Australian Government, 1999)

The National Advisory Council on Mental Health in Fiji, is in the process of developing policy guidelines for reporting of suicides in Fiji in consultation with the Fiji Media Council and various media organisations and interested bodies within Fiji.

The need for best practice

Trauma is an inevitable part of everyday life in the Pacific. The media is a powerful force and when used effectively it can help to mobilise assistance for victims and survivors. Sometimes, getting that message across has a psychological cost. The recognition and management of that cost will ensure that journalists and the general public benefit from the process.

As part of a fledgling media industry, it is important that Pacific journalists work towards achieving best practice while also ensuring the maintenance of their own and their community's psychological well being.

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□ *Anna Shadbolt is a psychologist. At the time of writing this article, she was at the University of the South Pacific and a member of the National Advisory Council on Mental Health in Fiji. She has been researching the impact of media coverage of disasters and traumatic incidents on journalists. A shorter version of this article was published in The Pacific Journalist.*

Reporters and the police

— too close?

Criticism about the "homophobic slant" of coverage of the John Scott double murder in Fiji extends to both how Police Commissioner Isikia Savua's statements were reported and how the media used leaked information to "paint a picture which could not be corroborated".

By 'ANA TUPUELUEU

POLICE and the media in Fiji have faced severe criticism over their handling of the John Scott double murder case. Overseas news programmes such as ABC's AsiaPacific and independent commentators have challenged the ethics of both the media and the police — and raised legal issues such as sub judice and contempt of court.

"The coverage has some media observers fearing the relationship between police and reporters has become too close for comfort," wrote *Pacific Beat's* James Panichi on August 2. "Crime reporters may pride themselves on establishing close relationships with police in an effort to obtain exclusive inside information for their stories, but where should the line be drawn?"

Even Fiji's most influential newspaper has questioned some of the reporting, saying the national code of ethics had been breached.

"The family of the murdered Red Cross director John Scott has called for the media to exercise some restraint and sensitivity in its reporting of this gruesome crime," said *The Fiji Times* on July 28.

The family's desire is understandable and justified. Parts of the media have been insensitive and less than balanced in their desire to beat their rivals in this most competitive of industries. There is little doubt that the Fiji Media Council's code of ethics — drawn up in consultation with the industry — has been breached. Unverified reports, facts sensationalised

'ANA TAPUELUELU

beyond recognition and pure hearsay have all been seen in the light of day in Fiji's media. We as an industry can and should do better.

Criticism about the coverage extends to both how Police Commissioner Isikia Savua's statements were reported and how the media used leaked information to "paint a picture which could not be corroborated", says Panichi.

Commentators such as Swasti Chand, coordinator of Fiji Media Watch, a non-government organisation lobbying for higher media literacy, is highly critical. She accuses the Fiji media of a "close relationship with authorities" leading to an unfair and homophobic slant in news coverage.

Another critic has been politics professor Scott MacWilliam at the University of the South Pacific, a former journalist. Other critics have suggested some Fiji journalists are gullible. Many critics consider some statements of the Police Commissioner and the media reporting would have "fallen foul of contempt of court" laws in many Commonwealth countries.

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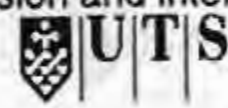
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REPORTERS AND POLICE

But media spokespeople have defended the role of Fiji news organisations, and the police have also defended their actions. Pacific Islands News Association president William Parkinson says: "Obviously it's been a very difficult story to cover. It isn't only that John Scott was very well known in the community. I might add a person well known in the media. And the murder being very dramatic and rather aggressive added to the story. I believe the media had the right to cover the murder. They had an issue to cover and it certainly wasn't something that they could ignore or push aside."

Fiji Media Council chairman Daryl Tarte says the murders were the most sensational and high profile case in Fiji for a long time. "It was to be expected that the killings would be given prominence in all the media and that is their right and their responsibility. Each media organisation reported it in different ways and I would imagine members of the public could be offended at some of the reporting."

So far, the Media Council has not received any formal complaint from the public on the issue.

Sergeant Unaisi Vuniwaqa, a police media spokesperson, has defended the role of the police. "We made every attempt to keep the public informed of every update in this case as it was a case of public interest," she says, pointing out that the lifestyle of the pair was common knowledge.

Fiji Red Cross director John Morris Scott gained international attention for his humanitarian role in supporting the hostages during last year's seizure of Parliament. He and his long-time partner, Gregory Scrivener, were found hacked to death at their Princess Rd home in Suva on July 1.

Comments from police sources began appearing just days after the killings. When members of Scrivener's family in New Zealand suggested the events may have been linked to Scott's humanitarian role during the crisis, police were remarkably quick to reject political factors.

When allegations were made that the men had been tortured, Commissioner Savua suggested the violence was linked to the victims' lifestyle choices, saying "you must not forget that John Scott was a known homosexual".

Condemning the newspaper and television coverage of the killings as "sensationalist and homophobic", Fiji Media Watch's Chand says: "We're not happy with the media handling of the double murder of John Scott and his partner. The stories were speculative, investigative journalists techniques were not used, accurate and balanced reports were not published, and the media's reporting created fear in the gay community."



Fiji's Police Commissioner Isikia Savua (above centre) and (inset) the murdered pair, John Scott (left) and Greg Scrivener.

Credits: *The Sun* (top),
New Zealand Herald
(right)

QUOTE:

"Crime and anti-social behaviour, especially involving violence, should not be glamorised or reported, portrayed or detailed in a manner, which on reasonable judgement would be likely to encourage or incite imitation or experiment. Editors, journalists and broadcasters should pay particular regard to the context, time of transmission and probably effect and the likely audience or readership of such items. Special attention should be paid to the likelihood of such material being read, seen or listened to by children."

— Fiji Media Council code of ethics

REPORTERS AND POLICE

Associate Professor Scott MacWilliam, of the University of the South Pacific's history/politics department, says two quite different issues were at stake.

"One is, does the media encourage, for instance, Police Commissioner Savua to issue statements that really shouldn't be issued, or is it the media's duty to report what the commissioner says without actually assessing the words thoroughly?"

"If the police commissioner issues a statement, is that automatically newsworthy or should the media make some kind of assessment? The other one, of course, is whether journalists encourage the police commissioner and other people to issue irresponsible statements. Simply by asking leading questions or by pestering them for statements, or something like that."

Professor MacWilliam is also surprised about the kind of official police statements issued. "I would have thought many of the statements are sub judice and the case is yet to be tested at law. He says it is a possibility that the police commissioner could manipulate the media, as "leading figures always manipulate journalists".

Daily Post reporter Mithleshni Gurdayal defended her newspaper's reporting of the murders. "Media has a full right to publish things about their personal life that would lead to the discovery of the killer".

□ 'Ana Tapueluelu is a Pacific Media Initiative-sponsored Diploma in Pacific Journalism student at the University of the South Pacific. This article was originally published in the September issue of *Wansolwara*.

Talking the wrong talk?

If a serious commitment were made to produce a quality Fijian daily, I don't doubt that it would soon outsell all the English ones. Next time anyone in the Fiji media suggests that a major problem today is that the Fijian people are so ill-informed, maybe they should question the Fiji media.

By PAUL GERAGHTY

WITH three daily newspapers, numerous periodicals, two television stations, and a host of radio stations, you'd be tempted to call Fiji's media healthy, even vibrant. But there's just one little problem. Consider, for example, a nation such as Belgium. Approximately 39 percent of the population speak French, 60 percent speak Dutch, and maybe 1 percent speak German. Accordingly and unsurprisingly, the language of the vast majority of media output is French and Dutch. But if German was the language of all the daily newspapers in Belgium and most of the other media, would we consider that to be a healthy situation? I think not — we would say that the media are not serving the people. We would say that the French and Dutch speakers, who constitute the bulk of the population, are being deprived of their right to information and all the other benefits of the media, and that the media are giving an unfair advantage to the German-speaking minority.

So why are we so willing to accept a similar situation in Fiji? Something like 50 percent of the population have Fijian as their first language, and maybe 45 percent speak Fiji Hindi. There are in fact far more speakers of Rotuman in Fiji than there are first-language speakers of English. So with all three daily newspapers and all periodicals in English only, as is the case also with most of the broadcasting time — is this not a very blatant case of tyranny by the minority?

Let me put it another way. After the Belgian football team has performed

and the nation has watched on TV (usually, it has to be said, not very impressed with their performance), some of the players will be interviewed in French and some in Dutch, and some who are bilingual will be interviewed in both Dutch and French, and the public will hear and understand their responses. Some will no doubt be translated simultaneously, or later dubbed or translated with subtitles. In the end, everyone knows what excuses the players have come up with for the latest national embarrassment. Switch now to the National Stadium at Muanivatu (if it were actually situated in Laucala it would sink into the mangrove swamp, but that's just by the way). Our boys have just earned a win and the nation is agog to hear the words of wisdom of the players. The TV interviewer is a native speaker of Fijian, as are all the players interviewed, as are indeed most of the people watching. Yet the whole process is done in a language that is foreign to them all. Isn't this whole charade a bit silly?

In my opinion it is — but there are of course what might be called mitigating circumstances that make the situation in Fiji rather different from that in Belgium. That doesn't mean however that we should accept the situation and not attempt to change it.

Before I proceed I should explain that my remarks will be directed primarily at the Fijian language. The situation with regard to Hindi is to some extent comparable, and much of what I have to say will also apply to Hindi; but at the same time there are some important differences, notably that the standard Hindi language is very different from that spoken in Fiji, and uses an alphabet that many local Hindi-speakers are not very familiar with. We should bear in mind also that the Fijian language is not spoken only by Fijian people. It is also the first language of practically all the Melanesian community, and of a considerable number of part-Europeans, Rotumans, Chinese, and various Pacific Islanders, as well as being a major language of inter-communal communication.

The main reason for our media being so skewed in favour of English is simply historical: Fiji was a British colony for nigh on a hundred years, and it has been argued that it is still in a sense a colony of the largely English-speaking nations of the nearby antipodes. For the same reason most media in French Polynesia still favour French, though Tahitian is the everyday language of conversation.

Still, this is not the whole story. After all, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and even India all have long histories of colonisation, but the local language media in these countries are very strong. One consideration of course is the economy of size — these countries have populations in the tens or even

PAUL GERAGHTY

hundreds of millions. Another factor is that Fiji has a rather different history from these other colonies. Literacy is relatively new, and very imperfectly developed. For the first 90 years or so of literacy in Fiji, education in Fiji was largely in the hands of the missions, and Fijian was used as the main language of instruction. In the 1920s there were Fijian language text-books for all the subjects that were then being taught — arithmetic, history, geography, health science, Fijian, English and even Latin. But since the entrusting of education to New Zealand authorities around 1930, Fijian (like Maori was then in New Zealand) has been practically banned from Fiji's schools. There are still, incredibly, many schools where students are punished for speaking their native language. The end result is that many Fijian-speakers are only minimally literate, that is, they can read and write in Fijian, but actually use that literacy very little, if at all.

Then there is the "bridge" myth, a hoary old excuse that still gets the occasional airing even today. As part of their rationalisation for ignoring Fijian (and Hindi), colonial educational authorities put forward the theory that English is essential as a bridge between the two major communities. This is of course patently absurd; it would be equally ridiculous to claim that in order for all French-speaking and Dutch-speaking citizens of Belgium to get along, they must all learn German. The obvious way for people of different cultures to get along is to learn about and respect each others' language and culture, not to attempt to communicate through a language which is foreign to both communities. There is also a more sinister reason for the persistence in the media and elsewhere of a language very few people speak — the existence of a post-colonial elite who believe it to be to their advantage to be more colonial than the actual colonists ever were. Many Fijian-speakers in positions of power do not want to see access to information or to government services made easier to ordinary Fijians through the use of their language, for the simple reason that the elite derive much of their own power from their knowledge of English, and expanded use of Fijian would make them redundant. So, even though the 1997 constitution stipulated that all Fijian and Hindi speakers are entitled to government services in their own language, no steps were ever taken to implement this ideal, and speakers of languages other than English continued to be treated as second-class citizens. There was maybe an excuse in the colonial era for the neglect of local languages, because many of those in positions of power simply couldn't speak them. Now that they have been replaced by people who are themselves speakers of local languages, that excuse is no longer valid.

Maybe, you may say, English is still the most effective means of communication, because it's taught in schools and most Fijians can read it well enough. Maybe you're right (though I doubt it). The thing is, we simply don't know anything about the effectiveness of different languages in the media in Fiji. It sounds to me like a question either the Fiji government or an institution like the University of the South Pacific should have tackled eons ago, but to my knowledge the only nod in that direction ever made was a very small-scale study by USP's Makareta Waqavonovono published about 20 years ago in *Pacific Perspective*. Millions of dollars are spent locally every year on publicity campaigns of all sorts, from driving to alcohol abuse to health and nutrition, and in most cases they are all in English, and simply mindless repetitions of what is done overseas — and nobody has a clue as to whether they make the slightest difference to public awareness or not.

You may argue then that English newspapers sell far more than Fijian newspapers, which proves that they are more effective media. That more copies are sold is undoubtedly true, even though there hasn't been an independent survey recently to determine exactly what the figures are.

What I would argue is that sales figures can be misleading, because the average readership of one Fijian newspaper is considerably greater than that of an English-language newspaper — perhaps a ratio of something like five to one would not be an exaggeration. More importantly, if even a tenth of the funding and resources and general commitment that go into the production of English-language newspapers was diverted to Fijian-language newspapers, then we might see a dramatic rise in readership. Many Fijian-speakers are not interested in Fijian-language newspapers simply because they are, on the whole, of such poor quality. If a serious commitment were made to produce a quality Fijian daily, I don't doubt that it would soon outsell all the English ones. Just because we can understand the reasons for the status quo, it doesn't mean that we should meekly continue with it. That is surely to deny the main reason for the existence of media. So next time anyone in the Fiji media suggests that a major problem today is that the Fijian people are so ill-informed, maybe they should wonder whether the Fiji media themselves are not part of the source of that problem.

□ Dr Paul Geraghty is senior lecturer in linguistics at the University of the South Pacific. This article originally appeared in a shorter form in *Wansolwara*, September 2001, as "Are Fiji's news media talking the wrong talk?" geraghty_p@usp.ac.fj

Behind the gold medals

'The culture of silence that engulfs most Fijian students needs to be discouraged. And those who have failed must remember that there is nothing wrong with failure — but there is plenty wrong in giving up.'

By ANDREA WAQA*

EXCELLING in virtually everything she embarks upon, Wainikiti Waqa is the inspiration Pacific Islanders need. Waqa has worked her way up from reporter to editor and also topped academic standards at the University of the South Pacific, graduating with four gold medals in 2000 while working as a subeditor at Fiji's Daily Post. She was appointed acting editor for The Sun in February 2001 but resigned in July when offered a scholarship to work towards her masters degree.

You were a subeditor and also a part-time student, how did you balance your work schedule?

I worked in the afternoons so I chose courses that were held in the morning. For my core classes, I had no choice but to attend whenever I was required. But Jale [Moala, then *Daily Post* editor] worked out a schedule for me that was a win-win situation for me and the company.

Four gold medals. People will be saying, wow, being a Fijian and also a mother, how did you do it, especially with the other commitment to family?

My husband gave me insurmountable support. So too did my sisters, my brothers, my sister-in-law, my parents. I would come home and the food would be ready, house cleaned, the little one (a daughter) washed, dined and in bed. One of the first things my husband did, after I enrolled at USP, was to buy me

* The two Waqas are unrelated.

a computer. Then because I had to travel from home-work-university-work-home, we decided to invest in a car. But generally, my family have to take a lot of credit. I had decided on the first week of my first semester in 1998 that I will get three gold medals — I stayed focused. It's easy if you really work towards it. That I got an extra one was a pleasant surprise. But it became a family joke — they will say, "don't disturb her she is trying to get her gold medal".

How did you discipline yourself in regards to your work and friends who could be a distraction for you?

I enjoyed being distracted. I think that at some time, the distractions kept me sane. I would go along with my friends and yarn and drink grog until wee hours of the morning when a major assignment was due next day. But everything has its limits and at times you just have to say "no" when you know that your study schedules are way behind.

Why did you want to further your education, and how did you get your scholarship?

Almost everyone I know has a BA. So I wanted to get an MA — and I didn't want to do it at USP. I felt that I needed to branch out and further my horizons. There was also high expectation from those back home for me to seek out a higher degree. My study at University of Hawai'i is actually funded by the US government under the Pacific Islands Development Programme. It was actually advertised in the local newspapers and I was reminded about it again when I visited Scott MacWilliam's (USP history/politics associate professor) room the day before it was due. So I ran around, compiled and complied with the



Wainikiti Waqa: Persistence and a family joke.
Photo: USP BULLETIN

ANDREA WAQA

requirements needed, faxed my application and followed up by sending everything by mail.

Many people don't realise that you are the first Fijian, in fact the first Fijian woman to receive any gold medal and four for that matter. How do you feel about that? When you were studying did you have that in mind to win four gold medals?

I am not sure about being the first Fijian woman to win a gold medal. What I know is that I am the first Fiji Islander to get four gold medals. I suppose I was happy about it at first — to be exact, I was on another world but I had to come back to earth. I am normally a very down-to-earth person. I am honoured that I am recognised for something other than being a journalist. I hope that other students, especially Fijians, may be inspired by my achievements and would go out there and get five medals. It's not tough — all it needs is dedication.

Many Fijian students on campus are on scholarship and after the first semester this year many of them have lost their scholarship because they didn't perform well for them and for the standards of the FAB scholarship board. What advice can you give to students in regards to discipline with school work and assignments?

Fijian students who come to USP suffer because the transition from school to university life is so difficult for them to handle. I am talking from experience. What is needed is a change in our education system in schools. It is too exam-oriented. Perhaps throughout the year continuous assessment should be encouraged so that student can adapt to university life.

Some of the Fijian students that don't do well in uni. are probably very bright students, who studied too late — and really did not put much effort in their course work. At the same time, most are tasting freedom from home for the first time. Their social life prospers while their academic life takes a nose-dive.

Then there is peer pressure. The students need to manage their time well, they need to say no to some social activities, they need to be moderate, they need to balance their life so that they get the best of everything.

This is my opinion, it's not gospel ... but moderation is the key. They must stay focused, remember why they are at USP and prioritise their needs. Often Fijian students don't talk in class. The culture of silence that engulfs most Fijian students needs to be discouraged.

Then again, those who have failed must remember that there is nothing wrong with failure — but there is plenty wrong in giving up.

□ *Andrea Waqa is a final-year BA student journalist at USP.*

PROFILES IN MEDIA: Tevita Momoedonu

Live with 'Radio Tevita'

Election fever and new ways of campaigning were a colourful part of the 2001 Fiji elections. With the elections came innovative ways from the media industry in educating people and making them aware of issues.

By NOORA ALI

TEVITA MOMOEDONU, host of the new and popular Bula 100 talkback show, takes a pause: it's quarter to eleven and the show is about to start. A first election talkback show held in Fiji where politicians and experts on various subjects are invited to share their views, agendas, aspirations and mingle with the real people over the phone for one hour daily.

It's all about the elections, any questions on the related subject from anyone is answered by the chosen guest of the day.

Well yes! It's a talkback show and Tevita is the host. He gets a bit — not much — just a bit worried that the guest for the day, Dr Nur Bano Ali wouldn't turn up. After all, two more personalities who were invited to be on air for the day had cancelled for various reasons.

In the meantime Momoedonu talks about himself and the show. He answers questions sitting in the large studio waiting for eleven o'clock — for the show to start. Tevita doesn't feel that this is the first show of its kind.

He says, "I think this has been done previously," and adds that "there is a lot of interest in politics this time around". He's eager to tell us about the programme, being a journalist himself and working for Pacnews regional news cooperative and doing part time work with the Fiji Broadcasting Corporation.

Momoedonu seems to really enjoy and love his work. Sitting very comfortable, he starts to relate how he got into journalism, but it had to be interrupted as the guest for the show arrives just on time.



Spreading awareness: Radio Fiji's Bula FM100 elections host Tevita Momoedonu goes live on talkback. Photo: WANSOLWARA ONLINE

The show gets underway and Momoedonu steps into his professional shoes as the host for the much talked about Bula100 talkback show.

Dr Nur Bano Ali had a little something to say before the show got underway: "Journalists should get more experience in the business field to cover business stories more efficiently" Don't we all agree?

After small technical problems and a little delay the show starts: "Today we have here with us Dr Nur Bano Ali, a well respected accountant and business adviser ..." and the show takes off. The topic for the day "Economics of the various political parties."

Micro finance: Economics, micro finance, foreign investment, VAT, untapped resources, mismanagement, private sector and public sector talk goes on.

With everyone understanding everything, how much we understood is much too, you get enlightened on the real aspects of the talk and how it actually affects the normal people.

You want to sit and listen because it is insightful, educational and spreads awareness. The atmosphere is not a totally serious one; there is a level of

entertainment involved too. When calls start to come in from the public one after the other it gives an idea of just how many people must be listening to Bula100 from 11 to 12 noon daily.

It is intense and on the spot. With just an hour for the nation to question the experts. Call after call and calls even after the show ended, people are interested to know.

Momoedonu puts on his serious face and carries off his work. He uses the research he had done for the show to pose his own questions whenever there is a disconnected call which can be about half the calls that you get.

The real conversation started when the show ended and off air. It cannot last long because busy people have jobs and other important things to do.

It was time for Momoedonu to do the final preparations for the next show. This was the last leg of the month-long election talk back show which would go off air the day before voting starts. The guests for the tomorrow's show are to be editors from the Fiji media industry and Momoedonu suggests they get the editor of the journalism student newspaper *Wansolwara* on the panel.

While talking, Momoedonu reflects on the show and shares his views about it with us.

"I think this particular programme is good because it examines the manifestos, it gives the members of the public an opportunity to question leaders as well as party policies.

"I think the response has been very good because we have got calls from as far as Lautoka and Labasa, and I have received feedback from the general public, from the people that I have talked to and the people that I know. People are keenly following the programme because of the questions that are being posed to the guests and their reply, whether it makes sense or no sense. I think in a way it is entertainment in itself in addition to being informative."

Talking more on the show he tells us how much preparation is needed. Like in today's show the topic of economics. "I don't know very much about economics, so I have to do research on such topics because you don't want to sound stupid on air, you have to know something, not everything."

From an Australian-educated geologist to a journalist, Tevita is very aware of what is going on and is passionate about his present job. "From one extreme to the other." He talks about his present profession, saying that he had some reservations coming to journalism, because some people tend to have a low perception of journalists, thinking they're just busybodies.

But he adds, "it is for the benefit of the whole country. I see journalism now

NOORA ALI

from a new angle. You get to talk to everyone ... from street kids to ministers and presidents.”

An environmental journalist is where he would like to see himself in the future, but he also mentions that he would like to keep his options open, with geology still very much in his mind. He talks on about the lack of incentives to continue in the field of journalism, pointing out low wages for a profession of very hard work.

Finally, Tevita tells us that he is a believer in playing the game by the rules. In the game of journalism, the rules are a lot. It would be safe to say that the talkback show has kept people tuning in. It's fun, it's informative and it adds to the ongoing election fever in Fiji.

□ Noora Ali is from the Republic of the Maldives and a third-year BA in journalism student at the University of the South Pacific.

BEST IN THE PACIFIC



2000 JEA OSSIE AWARDS

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WINNER: Dr Charles Stuart Prize for Best Student Publication any medium
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of the South Pacific

PROFILES IN MEDIA: Michael Field

Banned from the Pacific

'It is the way the Pacific's ancient régimes hold onto power. All journalists are under siege. In Fiji, it is an extraordinary assault, coloured by racism, that is tearing apart the media and political system.'

By **BERNADETTE HUSSAIN**

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE correspondent Michael Field isn't too popular with authorities in the Pacific. He has already been banned from three island nations, appeared on the blacklist of another and criticised for a number of stories he has done on the region.

The New Zealand-based South Pacific correspondent is the first to admit that covering the Pacific is tough. Field was banned from Tonga in the early 90s, Kiribati last year, and Nauru this year; he appeared on Fiji Government's blacklist; and he was criticised for his reporting on the ethnic war in the Solomons.

His experience with the Kiribati and Nauru governments have been most recent and the Kiribati affair saw him receive a mention in this year's annual press freedom report by press group Rapporteur Sans Frontières (Reporters Without Borders), while a host of protests backed him over Nauru.

Early last year Kiribati President Teburoro Tito declared Field a prohibited migrant because of reports on the environmental mess on Tarawa, including human excrement on its beaches and fuel oil in the main water lens of the atoll.

In a statement in the official *Kiribati Gazette* last year, Tito said that Field had written "untruths" about the development problems. He said the ban on Field was made on behalf of the people. Tito said the i-Kiribati people respected their country and did not want someone from outside to show disrespect. He added that the people of Kiribati always showed respect to the dignity of other

BERNADETTE HUSSAIN

countries.

In Nauru, he was banned from the Forum apparently because of his stories about the laundering of mafia money through the country.

As for Tonga, Field had been covering it for nearly 20 years and it came as no surprise that police chief Clive Edward banned him from entering the kingdom. Edward claimed that Field had been "culturally offensive", but declined to discuss it. "Now they have the nerve to say my stories are one sided — well whose fault is that?" said Field soon after he was banned.

Tonga removed Field's automatic entry status in 1993, apparently in reaction to coverage of the country's pro-democracy movement and Tonga's sale of passports to Asians. But this ban has not failed to stop him, and Field continues to cover Tonga from New Zealand.

Putting the Pacific situation into perspective, Field said the reaction of these countries was not a personal thing.

"It is the way the Pacific's ancient regimes hold onto power. All journalists are under siege. In Fiji it is an extraordinary assault, coloured by racism, that is tearing apart the media and political system," said Field.

He was back in Fiji in August, covering the elections there after his banning from Nauru.

"In the Solomon Islands last year a couple of other journalists and I had gone out to a bridge where ex-Fiji Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka was to negotiate a truce. Radio Australia's veteran correspondent Sean Dorney, had come up with an explanation for why Guadalcanal and Malaitan Islanders were at war.



Michael Field: Bannings an incentive.

Photo: WANSOLWARA

The former had a matrilineal society while the Malaitans were aggressively patrilineal.

"I asked George Grey, the leader of the rebels, what it was that he did not like about Malaitans.

"Do you know what we call them'," he said.

"Dog sperm'."

Field had no reservations about reporting that. The story came back to Honiara where the local newspaper used it.

As a result of this, the state-owned Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation's general manager Johnson Honimae took Grey's comments a step further.

"Overseas journalists don't care what happens as a result of their stories," he said. "If that reporter was in Honiara, he would have been killed," Honimae told the University of the South Pacific's journalism newspaper *Wansolwara*.

Field says that being kept out of some of these island nations was just part of the ball game.

"These governments, mainly made up of aging chiefly men, do not like the young, university educated people who constitute the Pacific media.

"The Paradise Journalism helps the establishment. Non-Pacific reporters, often on airline freebies declare how beautiful the beaches are, how happy the natives are and how good the singing is in church. Cultures and societies are reduced to one dimension. The problem is that those of us who go beyond it get banned."

But life and reporting goes on for Field who reports on these countries through sources while he works from New Zealand.

"I don't see these bans as hurdles and it just gives me the incentive to work harder and report on the truth."

□ Bernadette Hussain is features editor of The Fiji Times.

Reviews

IAN BODEN

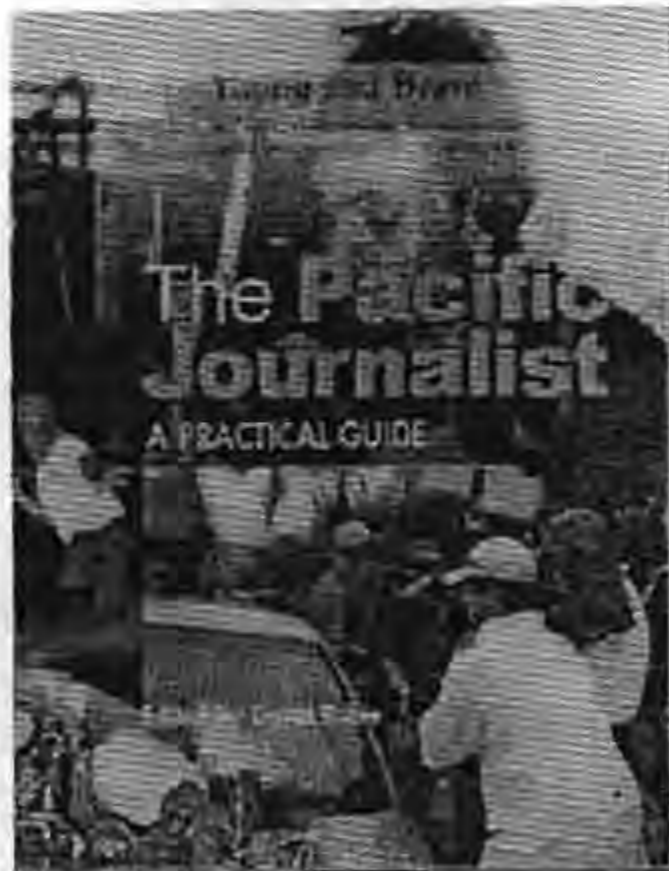
Executive Editor and Training
Coordinator of *The National* (PNG)

An unusual, insightful Pacific book

The Pacific Journalist: A Practical Guide, edited by David Robie. Suva: University of the South Pacific Journalism Programme/USP Book Centre, and South Pacific Books (NZ), 2001, 372 pp. ISBN: 982-01-0385-1.

VERY rarely does a book appear in the South Pacific that is generated within the region and intended for those working here. Even more unusually does such a book address itself to the needs of Pacific Islands journalism, to the rights of the public to be informed, and to the responsibilities and obligations of journalists.

Add to that an attempt to cover not only the print media, but to address television, radio and on-line news dissemination and you have a book with the potential to become a landmark publication.



The Pacific Journalist, edited by David Robie and jointly published by the Journalism Programme at the University of the South Pacific (USP) and the USP Book Centre comes close to fulfilling that potential. It is an interesting concept, this combined how-to-be-a-good-journalist manual and commentary on Pacific issues.

Robie, who by this stage of his career has amassed a great deal of experience and knowledge of this region, writes cleanly and with a sense of direction, giving easily accessible and readily absorbed information that

many younger journalists will find most welcome.

Historically journalism in the region has perhaps flowered best in Papua New Guinea, although Fiji through USP — and one suspects with strong prodding from Robie — is producing qualified journalists in increasing numbers.

The editor of *The Pacific Journalist* spent five years in PNG as the head of a high-profile journalism department at the University of PNG. That course produced a number of distinguished journalists, people of the calibre of Kevin Pamba, a regular contributor to *The National*, now lecturing at PNG's other journalism school within Divine Word University at Madang.

Robie is now the University of South Pacific's journalism coordinator. *The Pacific Journalist* sets itself modest aims. "I hope this book will contribute to raising professional and ethical standards among journalists around the region," the editor says at the end of his acknowledgements.

One of the admirable qualities of this book is the emphasis on student journalists, their opinions, their reasons for wanting to join the profession, and their hopes for themselves and their countries.

The first section of 'The Pacific Journalist' concerns itself with news values, but begins by posing the ques-

tion "why do Pacific Islanders want to become journalists?" The answers to that question, quoting students from three Pacific countries, make an excellent springboard for what follows, which takes the reader from the basic consideration of journalism — the functions of the media, the qualities needed to become a journalist — through to questions all journalists should ask themselves when they write.

Is it significant? Does it have human interest? Is it topical and relevant? Robie's approach is sensible. The text is interspersed with quotes underlining the points he seeks to make, and illustrations, generally of reproduced news pages give both good examples of appropriate and even courageous writing and a fair sprinkling of clangers, some of which have led to defamation cases against writers and publishers alike.

And that is the concern of the second section of the book — media law and ethics. There is an informative chapter on the legal systems of the Pacific as they effect journalists, by Philip Cass and an article on corporate pressure and ethics by Mala Jagmohan, a former editor of Fiji's *Sunday Times*, which will generate a few wry smiles among those writing in a region notorious for the heavy hand of commercial interests.

A useful chapter on reporting and the courts by Robie follows; and then

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a fascinating article on political reporting and editorial balance by Jale Moala, who is one of the region's most distinguished journalists, and former editor of *The Fiji Times*, the *Daily Post*, the *Pacific Islands Monthly*, and *Islands Business*.

There is a section devoted to the print media, with strong articles on feature writing, layout and sub-editing, followed by another for the broadcast media. That section includes a chapter by Pat Craddock — "Radio journalism and the interview" — who like Robie works at USP [he has recently moved to Mozambique where he also trains broadcasters], and who has had experience in Kiribati, Tonga, the Solomons, as well as PNG, where I recall working with him at our own NBC some 20 years ago.

Television reporting is covered by Ingrid Leary, who produced the remarkable *Maire*, the documentary about living with AIDS in the Pacific. The last two sections deal with online reporting, including web publishing and editing, and there is an excellent finale "Issues in the Media". This forms an invaluable postscript to the book with four outstanding articles.

Samantha Magick is the political and communications officer with environmental group Greenpeace, and she is the former news editor of Communications Fiji Ltd. Magick writes on the relationship between the Pa-

cific media and non-governmental organisations, an issue of major concern to many journalists in this region.

Anna Shadbolt contributes a valuable chapter on trauma as it affects journalists covering disasters, military confrontations and unexpected deaths. Ms Shadbolt is a psychologist who was a lecturer at USP.

The third article comes from Trevor Cullen, long known for his advocacy of journalism that addresses AIDS in the Pacific, and a former lecturer at Divine Word University in Madang. This is a trumpet call to Pacific journalists to wake up to what is no longer a threat, but has become a sad fact of life — the Pacific and especially PNG are now among the world's growth areas for the disease.

Cullen makes many valid points in his article. Let's stop being politically correct, he says, because the issue is bigger than that — but let's observe the sensitivities of covering AIDS. Cullen emphasises the human face of the disease and the need for Pacific journalists to be proactive rather than reactive to coverage of AIDS in the community.

The last article in *The Pacific Journalist* is contributed by the ABC's regional journalist Richard Dinnen, who is based in Port Moresby. Dinnen's article "Outside looking in — foreign correspondents" is alone worth the price of this book. He gives

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a rare insight into the thinking of a scrupulous and ethical journalist working in an environment and covering issues as remote from his own culture as the Earth is from Pluto.

Dinnen writes with precision and a fine understanding of the joys of using the English language. In an article that covers 33 pages, he begins by pointing out the ironies of fly-in, fly-out foreign correspondents in the Pacific, those "who don't know a *vatu* from a *ratu*, an *atoll* from an *Ayatollah*, or *Polynesia* from *Indonesia*".

There are significant sections that broadly cover decision-making. He seeks to establish the bases for determining what Pacific stories are newsworthy, and in what context, writes of covering conflict and regional relationships and includes an excellent section on being a stringer, which should be required reading for every Pacific island freelancer.

All of the chapters in *The Pacific Journalist* have resource and further reading lists, there is an excellent glossary and a chronology of Pacific events, legal terms and their meanings and a detailed index.

The book is clearly the initiative of David Robie, and the sub-title, "A Practical Guide" is the best brief description of the book's value to Pacific journalists.

It is hard to imagine any Pacific newsroom twelve months hence with-

out a much thumbed copy of *The Pacific Journalist*, simply because it brings together under one cover so much information that is of value to journalists working in the region.

Robie and those who have contributed the excellent articles deserve commendation for this publication, which I have no hesitation in recommending to students and young journalists, those who would like to be journalists, and grizzled old hacks like myself who sometimes need to be reminded of the basics of our profession. □

BOB HOWARTH

Queensland Newspapers' Editorial Technology Manager, who has taught subbing, design and internet courses for the Commonwealth Press Union in Papua New Guinea

Lesson for the internet Down Under

Newsgathering on the Net, edited by Stephen Quinn. Second edition. Melbourne: Macmillan, 2001. 80 pp. ISBN 0-7329-5599-8

AFTER REVIEWING the first edition, then using it as a teaching tool, a new review is simple: It should be on every reporter's bookshelf and in every newspaper reference library.

I'm also pleased to report our head librarian ordered three copies a month before I got my review copy.

Dr Stephen Quinn, director of the Research Unit for Computer-Assisted Reporting at Deakin University, Geelong, Victoria, and if anything has simplified the message in the second edition. Chapter One covers journalistic skills for the new millennium and my favourite subject CAR — computer assisted reporting.

Other simply presented chapters



include explaining the jargon of the Net, managing bookmarks, email for newsgathering, listservers and newsgroups for news gathering, assessing information quality, and a look at the future.

"If the internet seems a huge project, don't despair," Dr Quinn advises. "remember the best way to eat an elephant — one spoonful at a time."

I had two copies of Dr Quinn's first edition.

One is currently in use in Papua New Guinea and the second graces the book shelves of the journalism reference library of the Gambia Press Union in Banjul, Gambia, West Africa.

One of the most useful tips in this

new edition is about how the Net can help that threatened industry species — freelancers.

"Even a student just coming out of university can opt for self-employment. It just takes great ideas, creativity, vision and perseverance — and not necessarily a large bank account," Dr Quinn wrote.

"This is not an easy option, but the young 'techno-journalists' have the ability in the internet environment to make a living without a corporate parent."

With the widespread industry semi-freeze on hiring new staff, this book, if you'll pardon the old cliché, is an absolute must for any journalism student and for that matter, Net-deficient news executives.

PS: My review copy has gone to a bookshelf in Dili, East Timor — even though East Timor's journalists still have (to their great disadvantage and the shame of the UN) very restricted Net access. □

**NOORA ALI**

Final-year double major in journalism at the University of the South Pacific

Frozen in time? Not so likely in tropical Fiji TV

Fiji Waves, produced/directed by Natalie Gouin. Canadian television documentary, 57min, 2001. Montreal, Quebec: Écran Total. ecrantotal@qc.aira.com

FIJI WAVES starts with a moving glimpse of Fiji. But it isn't meant for Fijians.

In fact, the almost hour long docu-

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mentary shot in Fiji in late 1999 is meant to enlighten those that live in the "first world" — Canadian viewers.

The major and the most interesting part of the documentary deals with how globalisation, modernisation, new imperialism is affecting the minds, lifestyle and culture of the people who live in Fiji with the introduction of television.

The intro doesn't last very long and doesn't really make much sense either. Maybe it would, from a "first world" perspective, certainly not from where I stand in the so called "third world".

It goes something like isolated, not connected, spread like flowers in the largest ocean of the world, frozen in time, giving whoever watch it a picture of the cliché "paradise island lost in time image". Which wouldn't be very true to hang on the shoulders of Fiji. It just wouldn't fit too well.

However, there are good things to come, including the more than relevant issue of the part television plays in Fijian society. Television in all senses — including the introduction of videos and *Fiji One*.

The documentary focuses heavily on Fiji Television and shows that more than 90 percent of what is aired on Fiji TV happens to be western serials and sitcoms.

A wide range of media people and community advocates talk about the

irrelevance of the programmes we get on television, the effect of them on the Fijian society, youth, culture, traditions and way of life.

From the start of the documentary, Fijian villages, little, big and bigger Fijians come into view in close range. The romantic picture of the Pacific Islands comes into view.

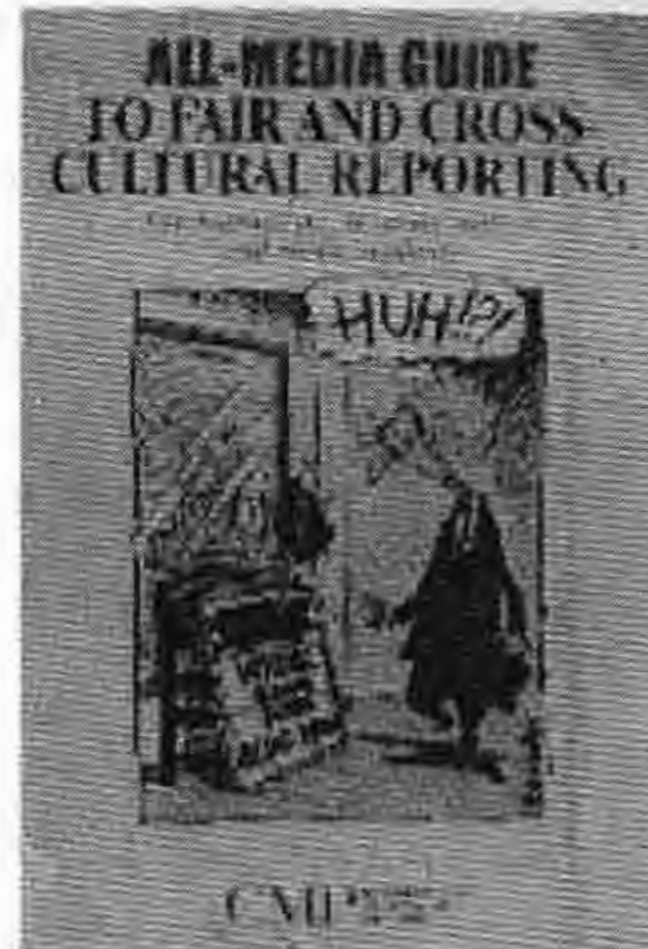
This would appeal to the outside world. The documentary shows what outsiders like to see of Fiji — drums beating, grass skirts shaking, kava ceremonies and friendly smiling faces with lovely beaches in the background.

It looks untainted by the serials and sitcoms which air diligently every night from 7pm onwards on *Fiji One*.

But this isn't so, according to the interviewees. These voices belong to well known media personalities from Fiji, and some from outside, working in Fiji, including a couple of our very own journalism students, a very confident villager with a flower behind his ear and also a Fijian village chief.

This documentary not so loudly says that globalisation in the form of television is slowly erasing an identity of a nation and its people with an efficient eraser. It is sensitive in portraying Fijian culture — it makes us think, it makes some of us angry.

But then it's not made for us Fijians. It's Fiji packaged for the outside world.



PRIESTLEY HABRU

A Solomon Islands double major in journalism at the University of the South Pacific

Handy guide for dealing with ethnic reporting

All-Media Guide to Fair and Cross-Cultural Reporting, by Stephen Stockwell and Paul Scott, Australian Key Centre for Cultural Media Policy, Griffith University, 2000.

TO BECOME an effective reporter in any multi-cultural society, avoid embarrassment for using wrong terms and be able to adapt to the culture and

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lifestyle of people different from your own, then this survival booklet is a must.

Imagine a country with 250 language groups with different cultural norms and ethnicity and as a reporter, you're striving to get across news coverage that will be accepted by these diverse people.

This is the scenario this media guide is aiming to educate for journalists. In 1788, Australia had 250 language groups. This is year 2001 and no doubt there will be more than 250 language groups in the country now.

A product of two former working journalists who are now both educators, it has proved very useful. Co-authored by Dr Stephen Stockwell and Paul Scott, this 40-page media guide is designed for journalists, programme makers and media students.

Employed as a reporter for 4ZZZ, JJJ and *Four Corners* programme of ABC Television in Australia, Stockwell is a senior lecturer in the Journalism Department of the School of Arts at Griffith University. He has written five books and more than fifteen reviews, journals and academic papers.

Paul Scott has worked as a producer and a documentary worker before his current position as a lecturer at the Department of Communication and Media Arts at the University of Newcastle. His research interests are in the

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Media and Indigenous Australians, professional education and surfing media.

Published last year at the Nathan Campus of Griffith University, the book targets Australian media workers in addressing the hindrances of covering stories in such a diverse people with diverse cultures.

Yet the book itself cannot be limited to Australian audiences only. It is also highly relevant in our case in the Pacific Islands. Read the book and put Fiji, Solomon Islands or any other Pacific Islands country in the place of Australia and the parallels are clear.

With more than 80 languages in the Solomons and more than 600 languages in Papua New Guinea, the Pacific region itself covers almost three quarters of the world's languages.

The fourteen chapters highlights in many instances the treat that Australian journalists for that matter should undertake when it comes to covering issues such as that of its indigenous people, ethnicity and multi-cultural setting of its society.

With the all-too-familiar rules for media workers to strive for truth, objectivity, fairness and accuracy, balance and honesty, the book tells how a journalist should approach these goals in its diverse communities and people.

On the whole the contents of the book, seek to erase findings by "both the National Inquiry into Racist Violence

and the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, that the media in Australia play an unintended but significant role in creating and maintaining intolerance and prejudice base on race". (Preface, page iv).

This media guide tries to "combat that tendency with a straightforward account of how to report cross-cultural issues fairly, combined with some practical tips to covering the diverse communities and individuals in Australian society." (Preface, page iv).

Illustrated with cartoons to portray their points, the authors also provide references to the legislation, guidelines and codes that are relevant to be followed by all media industries in Australia.

For instance, there is mention of the Commonwealth's 1995 Racial Hatred Act and Various State's Racial Vilification, the New South Wales Anti-Discrimination Act, the Western Australia Criminal Code and the Queensland Anti-Discrimination Act as guidelines to abide and prosecute those who are not complying. (Chapter 7, page 14-15).

The authors simplify the text into an everyday vocabulary that even a high school student can easily understand. With each chapter ranging from one page to just four pages at the most, it makes for very comprehensive but thorough information in a short and journalistic style of writing.

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With input from Scott, whose research interests is in the media and indigenous Australians and from the wealth of experience of Stockwell, it is easy to identify that their intention, is to avoid the stereotyped images of racism, aboriginality, ethnicity and culture which the media can be led to pursue in their coverage and reporting.

"A stereotype is never the full story." (Chapter 6, page 12).

The pre-conceived idea by the dominant culture and its practices in any particular society can undermine other ethnic and language groups thus regarding their own as what they want the world to be. This has to be discouraged at any cost. A reporter of Fijian or Indian background has to accept the multi-culturalism of his or her society and report with dignity, fairness, without fear or favour.

Aboriginal should not be used as a noun, because it is a term with general application to the people, flora and fauna that existed in any country. (Chapter 12, page 28).

Words that they recommended be avoided are "half caste", "quarter-caste" and the overuse of collective pronouns such as "them", "they" and "those people". If they are "them", then who are "we"? (Chapter 12, page 29).

Although they acknowledge the fact that it is quite hard to get a full

account of the story in a multi-cultural society like Australia, they emphasise the need to get to know the customs, preferences, codes of conduct and dislikes of the indigenous people like the Aborigines and the Torres Strait Islanders.

This is relevant in the Pacific Islands context. Take Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, or even Fiji, Vanuatu and New Caledonia where the society is heterogenous. Thus each nation has different language groups and ethnic backgrounds.

Customs and codes of conduct in Malaita Province in the Solomons differ from those of Santa Isabel province, as do those those of Tolai people in the East New Britain Province of Papua New Guinea from those of Chimbu province in the PNG Highlands. Differences in religion, language, customs and norms exist between the Fijians and Indians, Rotumans, Melanesians, Micronesians, Polynesians and Chinese in Fiji.

So a journalist has to really get to know the chiefly system, landowning groups, the indigenous Fijian protocol or the Chimbu people protocol and their views before trying to write a news story about them.

To guarantee fairness prevails and assuring their reporting is accurate, balance and ethical in "Australia's diverse culture and also in the Pacific

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means media workers also need a high degree of cross-cultural competence," (Chapter 2, page 2).

This means that the journalist "who aspires to tell the full story has to leave behind the familiar and approach the unfamiliar with curiosity, sensitivity, respect and moral imagination to understand the world from a cultural perspective that may differ from their own." (Chapter 5, page 10).

An appropriate approach when covering the indigenous and diverse Australian society "is to ask around and see what protocols apply in the community with whom you want to work." (Chapter 14, page 31).

One of the strengths of the book is that the authors are able to put together their wealth of experience and research in a sort of a formula-like medium that workers in Australia and the Pacific countries will find very useful.

Perhaps what they say in the book, reflects what they themselves have experienced and would like their successors to be more competent than them. It isn't selfish after all for Stockwell and Scott to help young Australian and Pacific Islands journalists today with this valuable contribution.

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