

# 8. Pasifika solutions for Pacific problems

**Commentary:** The issues that challenge the stewardship of Pasifika peoples are as complex and diverse as the Pacific itself. We have our own conceptual tools that help us understand these complex issues. Our problem has been that we have a hard time using the tools of others and we end up with somewhat distorted understanding of our own issues. No wonder we have problems sometimes in communicating our issues to the people we serve. Telling our own stories, in our own language, with our own conceptual tools, so that we can construct meaning and bring understanding is the aim of Pacific journalism.

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THINK it is of great significance that the World Journalism Education Congress (WJEC) in July 2016 was held in the city of Auckland. Not only is it the biggest Polynesian city in the world, it is also the one city where Pacific peoples have a substantial influence in every social sphere.

Auckland is the hub of education, trade, transportation and communication for Western Pacific Island nations. There are many of us from the Pacific Islands who regard Auckland as home, or our second home.

I want to emphatically call on journalism educators and journalists from around the world, to please give your fellow journalists and journalism educators in our Pacific region your kind attention and to help our trade so that we can lift the level of journalism in our region to something we can be proud of.

Despite our small population and land size, we are not insignificant. Covering one third of the Earth's surface is the vast Ocean called the Pacific, a term that refers to both people and place. This is our home. It is where we live. This area stretches from the Arctic to the Antarctic, from Asia to the Americas and includes the most dynamic volcanoes on earth as well as the highest reaching mountains, stretching from the ocean floors to the heavens.

The Pacific is home to the richest diversity of air, land and sea life on Planet Earth. Among its 30,000 islands live multitudes of Islanders. Some of us are brown. Some are black and some are white. But we are all Oceanians, human

beings with dreams and aspirations, with rights and needs to be met.

We are proud of our ability to live and adapt to the unique challenges that we face in our world.

The Polynesians were definitely the most skilled seafarers of Pasifika. Their large, double-hulled canoes sailed throughout the vast waters of the Pacific looking for new lands and new conquests as well as trading partners.

The famous English explorer Captain James Cook wrote in his diary about the three visits he made to Tonga in the 1770s. He wrote that he was surprised by the size and speed of the Tongan double-hulled canoes, known as *kalias*. They would sail teasingly behind his ship and circle it while it was going at full speed. The *kalias* were so large they could carry up to 200 warriors.

Our ancestors built those double-hulled canoes to sail all over this vast Pacific ocean.

As the late Professor ‘Eveli Hau’ofa wrote: ‘We are not islands of the seas, but a sea of islands. That is our home.’ Hau’ofa was the son of Tongan missionaries to Papua New Guinea, whose academic work revolved around the islands of Oceania. He was born a Tongan, raised in Papua New Guinea and settled in Fiji where he worked at the University of the South Pacific until he died.

The ocean, Hau’ofa wrote, does not separate us, rather it connects us. Its endless resources and opportunities offer sustainable life and creativity.

The issues that challenge the stewardship of Pasifika’s peoples are as complex and diverse as Pasifika itself. Our people, but especially those from Tuvalu and Kiribati, face challenges with global warming and climate change; Tokelau and Niue are islands that are no longer home to most of their people; there are Island nations in Polynesia and Micronesia that have been victims of French and American nuclear testing; there are fellow Islanders in West Papua who are being oppressed under the colonial rule of an Asian power and there are Island nations that are more and more dependent on aid from outside. Our people are being killed off by an unforgiving enemy, Non Communicable Diseases; there are Island nations whose future both economically and politically will be more determined by others than themselves; and there is—the ongoing re-colonisation of all Pasifika by economically powerful nations—both Western and Eastern, a phenomenon that has put the peoples of Pasifika back into the subservient role that was common in the golden era of colonisation.

We have our own conceptual tools that help us understand these complex issues. Our problem has been that we have a hard time using the tools of others and we end up with somewhat distorted understanding of our own issues. No wonder we have problems sometimes in communicating our issues to the people we serve.

Telling our own stories, in our own language, with our own conceptual tools, so that we can construct meaning and bring understanding is the aim of

Pacific journalism.

We may not be successful in achieving this aim in many of our islands, but if we fail, it will not be for lack of trying.

Ken Doctor of Newsonomics.com asks: ‘What is the difference between being informed and being educated?’

‘What’s the line between learning something new and being taught something new?’

Journalism and education are both about knowledge.

Are news media and universities just two ways of doing the same thing—gaining knowledge? But not all knowledge is appropriate. Relevancy is often begging at the door of journalism education.

There are quite a number of stories that need to be told and analysed. These are stories and issues that are part of the realities of our life in the Pacific:

- The impact of climate change—flooding, hurricanes, tsunamis
- The impact of nuclear testing—Marshall Islands and French Polynesian stories
- The impact of unemployment—labour mobility solutions
- The impact of NCDs—deaths, loss of income, creation of poverty
- The impact of the abuse of power—violence, corruption and addictive behaviours
- The impact of ignorance, being vulnerable to exploitation
- The impact of the geopolitical shifts of power.

In our region, there is a geopolitical shift taking place in which power no longer exclusively belongs to the West, but is shared by Asian powers. Washington, London, Canberra and Wellington no longer dictate what goes on in the Pacific. Beijing, New Delhi, Tokyo and Seoul have joined in the power struggle in our region.

Yes, SHIFT happens!

Stories need to be told from the perspective, not of power, or of the oppressor, but of the vulnerable and the oppressed; those affected by the decisions and actions of the powerful.

Many of the ‘solutions’ being offered for our region are not necessarily ours, but are being derived, imported and imposed from distant and differently oriented continents. The ‘solutions’ have brought with them more complex problems that compound those we’ve been trying to resolve.

I call on you, our Journalism Educators, to include Pasifika in your curriculum and to help us in our quest to deliver quality journalism to our people.

*Kalafi Moala, a Tongan author, commentator, broadcaster and publisher of the kingdom's first independent newspaper, Taimi 'o Tonga, delivered this concluding keynote speech at the World Journalism Education Congress (WJEC) conference at Auckland University of Technology in July 2016. He is on the editorial board of Pacific Journalism Review and is the author of Island Kingdom Strikes Back: The Story of an Independent Island Newspaper—Taimi 'o Tonga and other books. kalafiml@gmail.com*

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