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# Pacific

Journalism Review

## CLIMATE CRISIS & CORONAVIRUS

EDITED BY

PHILIP CASS,  
HERMIN WAHYUNI,  
ANDI FITRAH,  
KHAIRIAH RAHMAN,  
NICOLE GOOCH &  
DAVID ROBBIE

### RETHINKING THE SOCIAL WORLD

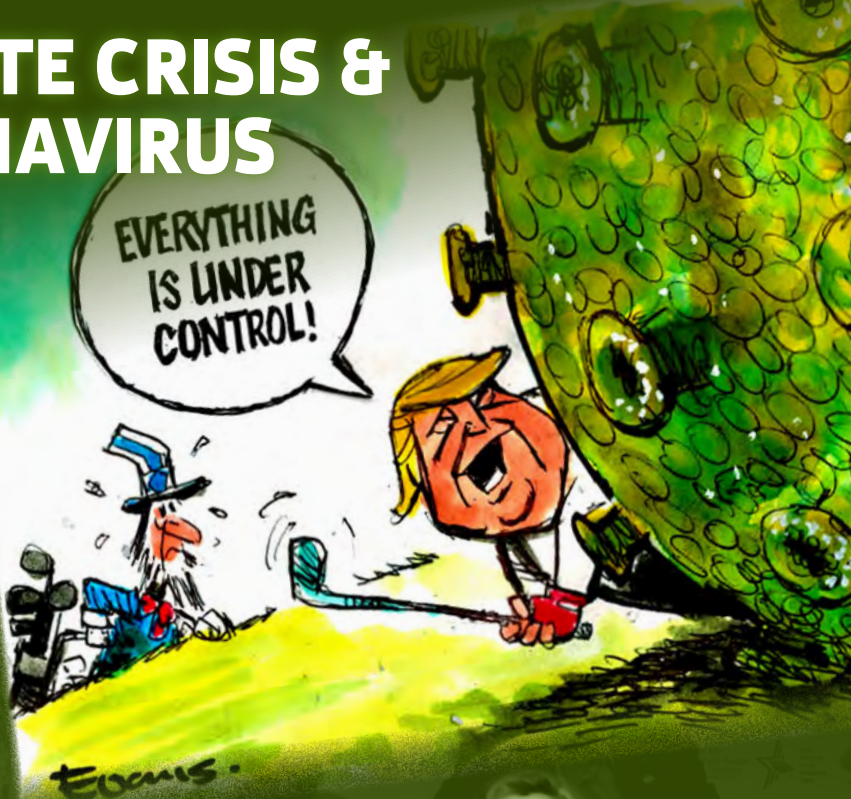
- ✦ Journalism, ASEAN and the pandemic
- ✦ The climate migration discourse in ASEAN
- ✦ Micro-celebrity and risk communication in Indonesia
- ✦ Climate justice and the Pacific churches
- ✦ Injustice vs insecurity in the Pacific
- ✦ Rotumans and the 'coconut wireless'

### FRONTLINE SPECIAL REPORTS

- ✦ A watershed year for journalism research
- ✦ Jill Emberson: A lifetime of empowering others
- ✦ The nexus of political documentary
- ✦ Countering a COVID 'disinfodemic' on campus in NZ

### PLUS

- ✦ Reporting Black Lives Matters: Deaths in custody journalism in Australia





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## EDITORIAL: Under the pandemic siege

IT IS possible that future generations will think that BC stands for Before Coronavirus—and possibly that AD stands for After the Donald.

All joking aside, here in Aotearoa New Zealand we have been far luckier than most countries, with early and decisive action by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and her advisers rapidly bringing the pandemic threat under control. Several Island nations remain COVID-free, thanks again to early intervention and strong measures, including border control.

In countries which did not react properly, the results have been catastrophic. The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2019) has predicted that the appalling death toll in the United States will reach and possibly surpass 250,000 by the time Donald Trump is finally ejected from the White House.

Comparatively safe as we are in New Zealand, this is still the second edition of *Pacific Journalism Review* we have produced with COVID-19 in the background and even when the pandemic is over, or at least brought under control, we will still be threatened by a host of challenges—not least that of climate change, which has already forced internal migration in Papua New Guinea and Fiji and threatens to do the same in the ASEAN region, with its incomparably larger population.

It was significant that the first national leader to congratulate US President-elect Joe Biden was Fijian Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama (Roche, 2020), who tweeted: ‘Together, we have a planet to save from a #ClimateEmergency and a global economy to build back better from #COVID19. Now, more than



ever, we need the USA at the helm of these multilateral efforts (and back in the #ParisAgreement—ASAP!)

This edition of *PJR* therefore focuses on the theme of ‘Climate crisis and Coronavirus’ and is linked to the ‘**Rethinking the Social World**’ online symposium on Social Sciences 2020 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, on August 24-25. This is a biennial international event organised by the AUT Pacific Media Centre’s partner Centre for Southeast Asian Social Studies (CESASS) at the Universitas Gadjah Mada. The theme of the symposium, held in partnership with the PMC, addressed the changes that communication and information technology has brought to societies in the Asia-Pacific. We are grateful to our co-editor for this edition, **Dr Hermin Indah Wahyuni** from UGM for co-ordinating papers from the symposium.

The articles in our Themed Section are drawn from papers presented at the symposium and which reflect current research and thinking on related topics in the ASEAN region. The section begins with **Pauline Gidget Estella**’s investigation of how good journalists are at interpreting and disseminating technical or scientific information in a time of crisis. These skills are vital if people are to make informed decisions in a time of global crisis.

She is joined by **Anggita Marthin** and **Louis Budiman**, who argue that ASEAN governments have by and large, been unprepared to deal with migration caused by climate change. The situation is complicated because of the unresolved debate about the legal status of such migrants.

**Lidwina Mutia Sadasri** examines how the Indonesian government used two social influencers, @dr.tirta and @rachelvennya, to deliver information about COVID-19, a response taken amid an absolute maelstrom of misinformation, conspiracy theories and wild speculation on the internet.

**Laila Alfirdaus** examines how the Indonesian bureaucracy politicises environmental evaluations in resource-dependent areas, applying minimum standards, but sometimes co-opting NGOs when outcomes might offend powerful interests.

**Philip Cass** looks at the role of mainstream churches in facing climate change challenges in the Pacific and argues that they need to be understood not just as super-NGOs, but organisations driven by profound religious beliefs. This article was the basis of an online presentation to the Third Pacific Climate Change Conference in Apia, Samoa, in October 2020.

**Akhteruz Zaman** and **Jahnabi Das** consider how various policy advocates have attempted to influence public discourses about climate displacement in Oceania by examining policy documents and newspaper articles in Fiji and New Zealand. They find quite distinct discourses emerging in both countries.

**Mohamad Saifudin Mohamad Saleh** and **Harald Heinrichs** investigate the types of environmental issues represented in Malaysian newspapers and Environmental Non-Governmental Organisation (ENGOS) newsletters. An examination of factors in the selection of stories by both social actors finds that on

both sides, story selection is often driven by similar criteria.

Our *Frontline* section begins by looking at a significant shift in research classifications. The Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classification (ANZSRC) 2020 decision on disciplinary categories has profound implications for journalism as a research discipline, confirming it as a sovereign discipline distinct from communication and media studies. **Chris Nash** analyses the impact this change could have.

*Frontline* editor **Wendy Bacon** reviews the life and achievements of campaigner and journalist Jill Emberson, focusing on her work with ABC Radio's feminist *Coming Out Show* and *Ties that Bind*, which looked at Tonga and the Tongan diaspora in Australia.

**Norman Zafra** examines how political documentary embodies the traits and functions of alternative journalism through *Obrero* ('worker'), his documentary project about Filipino workers who came to New Zealand after the Christchurch earthquake.

Continuing our coronavirus theme, editor **David Robie** and **Sri Krishnamurthi** deconstruct a four-month 'Coronavirus Plus' initiative conducted by the Pacific Media Centre at AUT in response to the pandemic, using the *Asia Pacific Report* website, [asiapacificreport.nz](http://asiapacificreport.nz), as the publishing platform.

As a reminder that serious problems continue behind the pandemic, our Unthemed Section looks at issues of racism in Australia, oppression of West Papuans and the political implications of the internet in the Pacific.

Nearly 30 years after the release of the report of the Australian Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, **Bonita Mason** builds on Wendy Bacon's seminal 2005 work to report on how Australian journalists have covered Aboriginal deaths.

The internet continues to develop as a means of binding diasporic Pacific communities together and in this article **Rufino Robert Varea**, **Jason Titifanue**, **Romitesh Kant** and **Renata Varea** examine how it has allowed Rotumans in Fiji to inform and educate themselves and their networks about political issues of Rotuman interest.

The oppression and harassment of West Papuans, so often reported in these pages, goes on unabated as **Justito Adiprasetio** reports in this examination of the aftermath of an attack on a West Papuan student dormitory in East Java in August 2019.

**Levi Obijiofor** and **Shailendra Singh** offer interview-based insights into how Indian journalists in the world's largest democracy are coping with major economic, technological and political developments, including digital disruptions and other pressures under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Hindutva' government.

'Eve-teasing' is a euphemism for street-based sexual harassment, and **Ra-jonna Mowly** and **Nasya Bahfen** analyse this widespread issue impacting on the emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing of Bangladeshi women. The authors conclude the media can play a vital role with coverage and by raising awareness.

Finally, our Reviews Section features another selection of books we think will interest you, including publications on the current crisis in the industry by expatriate New Zealand journalist-turned academic Mel Bunce, BBC broadcaster John Humphrys' autobiography, an account of reporting on the decades of war in the Middle East by veteran Arab-New Zealand journalist Tuma Hazou and poetry written during the coronavirus lockdown.

Regular contributor **Lee Duffield** leads off with a timely review of a new book arguing that journalists need to implement new ways of reporting on race as the United States is racked by violent racial clashes and the demands of the Black Lives Matter movement have spread globally.

Elsewhere in this section, editor **David Robie** tackles two thought provoking books by Kalinga Seneviratne on the myth of truth in journalism and new ways of practising the profession using mindfulness.

Pacific affairs journalist **Michael Field** is in charge of this edition's *Bookshelf*, musing on the virtues of Herman Melville and recalling conversation with Epele Hau'ofa, author of the classic *Tales of the Tikongs*.

## **Sabbatical**

After more than 26 years of publication, *PJR* is taking a sabbatical. Founded by our editor, Professor David Robie at the University of Papua New Guinea in 1994, *PJR* has travelled across the ocean to the University of the South Pacific in Fiji and then to Auckland University of Technology.

Along the way we have established a strong presence in the academic marketplace, scoring extremely well across a range of academic publication indicators and providing space for voices from Asia, Australia and the Pacific as well as New Zealand.

This year we have produced two large volumes, both over the 300-page mark. Both have reflected international collaborations with academics and journalists in the Pacific, Asia and Australia and have brought together an enormous range of interests, opinions and ideas.

After all that effort, it is time to recharge our batteries and take some time to plan for the next phase in our development. David is standing down as editor and our current associate editor, Philip Cass, has taken up the reins. We look forward to reuniting in the future.

DR PHILIP CASS

Editor

*Pacific Journalism Review*

[www.pjreview.info](http://www.pjreview.info)

IN NOVEMBER 2020, when Joe Biden finally ushered in his presidency pledges amid the narrow triumph in the swing state of Pennsylvania, he wasted no time in adding to his modest twitter output, just like his predecessor Donald Trump. Three days earlier the President-elect had fired off a tweet to renew a promise that the United States would rejoin the 2015 Paris Agreement, marking the end of a four-year assault on climate protections under Trump's leadership. Ironically, the tweet was on the very day that the Trump Administration officially abandoned the Paris Climate Accord (Farand & Gerretsen, 2020).

'And in exactly 77 days,' he tweeted, 'a Biden administration will rejoin it.'

The Paris Agreement requires all countries to present new or improved climate targets to the UN. As the world's second highest greenhouse gases emitter (after China), the US is critical to meeting the Paris of limiting the global heating "well below 2<sup>0</sup> C" and to target even lower to 1.5<sup>0</sup> C.

Elected on the most ambitious climate platform ever presented by a presidential candidate (and gaining more than 77 million votes, the most ever), Biden pledged a \$2 trillion 'clean air revolution'. The journey ahead will be rocky and frustrating. The remnants of Trumpism and an obstructive outgoing administration will provide many barriers.

This journal is producing its third edition based on climate change (albeit complicated by the coronavirus pandemic) following the 'Climate change in Asia-Pacific' special edition produced in mid-2017 and the 'Disasters, cyclones and communication' issue in mid-2018. It has a strong commitment to human rights and environmental studies in a media and journalism context.

However, the current climate and health challenges are being addressed against the backdrop of a so-called post-truth world that is playing out in the Asia-Pacific region as critically as elsewhere, including the US. Issues of conspiracy theories, disinformation and hoaxes had such an impact on the fringes of the New Zealand election in October that commentators such as RNZ *Mediawatch's* Colin Peacock were driven to ask: 'Should we fear fake news in our politics?'

Based on the experience of the US elections in 2016 and beyond and the Brexit debacle and an avalanche of 'fake news' in later ballots in Australia, France and other countries, concerns were high. As it turned out, 'fears that foreign political consultants and fringe parties would turn Facebook followers and fake news in the [New Zealand] election proved unfounded' (Peacock, 2020). However, while New Zealand's major parties also 'mostly ran a clean game online', Peacock pointed to the online misinformation that was mostly about COVID-19 and to New Zealand research linked to the Digital Election Campaigning Worldwide project with warnings about the future risks.

Four years in the White House by a president globally regarded as a serial liar has 'accelerated the drift towards post-truth, and the media is shackled to that acceleration', writes *Guardian* political editor Katharine Murphy, who has



raised critical questions about the role and responsibilities of journalists and journalism when dealing with fact-checking and known untruths. In response to major networks pulling the plug on a presidential ‘florid fantasy’ about fake votes and fake polls in the wake of the US election, she had this to say:

Faced with this reality—a lying, dangerous demagogue openly hostile to political conventions and democratic norms—media outlets face difficult choices. Do networks refuse to broadcast the lies? Do media outlets disrupt the tirades with live fact-checking? Broadcast the news (and a president speaking meets the news test) without interruption, but put straps at the bottom of the screen alerting viewers to form their own conclusions? (Murphy, 2020)

As she says, ‘puncturing self-serving propaganda’ is the primary duty of serious journalists. Over the past 26 years, *Pacific Journalism Review* has done its fair share of ‘puncturing’ and bringing critical issues before our media fraternity, both through more than 1000 research articles published, and its range of critical reviews and actual journalism (especially through our *Frontline* section pioneered by **Wendy Bacon**).

Founded at the University of Papua New Guinea in 1994, the journal has also had a five-year stint at the University of the South Pacific, but its longest home has been 18 years at Auckland University of Technology. In the wake of our 20th anniversary celebration at AUT six years ago, colleague and friend **Lee Duffield** wrote a reflective article for our birthday edition in which he concluded that *PJR* had always emphasised its ‘regional identity’. *PJR* has been, he added, dedicated to

Adopting its own ‘Pacific’ style of discourse and inquiry, [f]or 20 years it has been focused on Pacific issues, for and by people and institutions of the region—while always open to linkages and inputs from major global centres. (Duffield, 2015).

As this has been a transitional and final edition for me as founding editor at the helm and in the ‘frontline’, it is an opportunity to thank and acknowledge many people who have contributed and shared with me on this waka voyage. Some of them are featured in a 2014 birthday cartoon by **Malcolm Evans** and others have joined since or been involved earlier. First, **Philip Cass**, who is taking over as editor. I am delighted that Philip is taking on this challenge as he was with us as a *wantok* from Wewak, Papua New Guinea, contributing right from the beginning in Port Moresby. He has also been a dedicated and voluntary reviews editor and associate editor for the past seven years.

**Del Abcede** has been the designer since the embryonic Pacific Media Centre was launched in 2007 and took over as the publishing ‘umbrella’ from AUT’s

Pacific Journalism Review  
20th Anniversary 2014

Some editorial and production staff  
and contributors since 1994

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School of Communication Studies. She has carried the burden and stress of hours and nights of endless layouts to meet the never-ending deadlines.

A tribute to mentors Wendy Bacon, Chris Nash, Trevor Cullen, Mark Pearson, Pat Craddock, Lee Duffield and Shailendra Singh. They are all in the cartoon. So too are Champion Ohasio, Ben Bohane, Allison Oosterman, John Miller, Tui O'Sullivan, Kevin Upton, Barry King and cartoonist Evans is riding a dolphin.

Not pictured in the cartoon are others who have contributed in various editorial roles such as Khairiah A. Rahman, Peter Cronau, Nicole Gooch, Camille Nakhid, Heather Devere, Jim Marbrook, Joseph Fernandez, Evangelia Papoutsaki, Susan O'Rourke Alan Samson, Murray Horton, Linnea Eltes, Eric Loo, Ian Richards, John Henningham, Martin Hadlow, Sandra Kailahi, Alex Wake, Kayt Davies, James Hollings, Danilo Arao, Sasya Wreksono, Kalafi Moala, Crispin Maslog, Ramon Tuazon, Daya Kishan Thussu, Fernando Sepe Jr, Mariquit Almario-Gonzales, Belinda Lopez, Pauline Gidget-Estella, Johnny Blades, Ian Stuart, Alex Perrottet, Sitiveni Ratuva, Faith Valencia-Forrester, Kasun Ubayasiri, Alan Robson, Angela Romano, Katheryn Bowd, Hermin Indah Wahyuni, Andi Fitrah, Vissia Ita Yulianto, Victor Mambor, Scott MacWilliam, Tony Clear and also our manager Edelita Clark. Plus our Tuwhera digital support team Luqman Hayes and Donna Coventry. Thank you all (and anybody I have inadvertently overlooked) for the contribution over the years, as a journal like this relies on considerable teamwork and an enormous amount of voluntary input.

Part of the *Pacific Journalism Review* story has been told in a YouTube video by AUT screen production graduate Sasya Wreksono (2014), who interviewed

several of our contributors and editors on both sides of the Tasman. At the time of our 20th anniversary, I wrote what I will echo today in that over our more than two decades ‘we have achieved precisely what we set out to do, being a critical conscience of Asia-Pacific socio-political and development dilemmas’.

*Tenk yu tumas ... lukim yu*, Philip, and good luck to you and your future crew for the media waka journey ahead.

DAVID ROBIE

Founding Editor

*Pacific Journalism Review*

[www.pjreview.info](http://www.pjreview.info)

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# 1. Journalism competence and the COVID-19 crisis in Southeast Asia

## Toward journalism as a transformative and interdisciplinary enterprise

**Abstract:** The COVID-19 crisis across the world has posed a daunting challenge to journalism as a discipline. Indeed, how the journalism profession performs at this time could have game-changing implications on its already beleaguered role as a source of information in society. This article deals with the subject of journalistic competencies necessary in such crisis times, when interpreting and disseminating technical or scientific information becomes crucial in news work in a region that is vastly different from the West or the ‘Global North’—Southeast Asia. The issues and relevant concepts of journalistic competence and science journalism, especially in the time of digital and economic disruptions are discussed in relation to: 1) literature on journalistic roles and the character of media systems in Southeast Asia, and 2) data from in-depth interviews with selected experts from 31 countries. This article argues that, based on literature and a growing consensus among experts, journalism can best strengthen its role in society by shifting its standards and norms under a transformative and interdisciplinary perspective, which for a long time has been hindered by the inertia of the industry and industry-centered journalism education.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, digital media, Global South, journalism, journalism education, pandemic, science journalism, Southeast Asia

PAULINE GIDGET ESTELLA

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THE global coronavirus crisis came at a time when journalism is also facing crises of different sorts. Drok (2019) explained that these crises are ‘financial’ and ‘functional’ in nature and occurred as part of the transition from the ‘mass media model’ of journalism in the 20th century to the ‘network model’ of the 21st (p. 8). The financial, he wrote, refers to the added pressure



of generating revenues stemming from declining ad profits, tighter competition, and ‘decreasing willingness to pay’ for professionally produced news (p. 8). The functional, meanwhile, refers to the ‘declining relevance and meaning of journalism for various groups and communities in society’ (p. 8). However, as the pandemic crisis created a strong need for reliable and accessible (scientific) information, the journalism profession found the daunting challenge by which it could establish its new role(s) in societies.

The convergence of technologies, enabled by the internet coming of age, granted audiences instant access to a multitude of sources online, and with it also came hostile audiences with populist attitudes or audiences distrustful of mainstream news (see Fletcher, 2019; Newman et al., 2019; Newman et al., 2020). Right-wing populist movements have taken advantage of surging internet penetration rates, so much so that digital media has become ‘a precondition for success’, wrote Schroeder (2017), who compared four cases from the US, Sweden, India, and China. In a more recent work, Schroeder (2019) explained how the ‘issue of media manipulation’ has become a dominant theme in digital populist campaigns, hence the ‘antagonistic relations between populists and traditional media’ (p. 8).

It is in this kind of terrain that journalists are trying to perform their perceived roles in the middle of a pandemic. It becomes important to ask: what should journalists possess, in terms of competencies, to navigate this terrain and deliver relevant pandemic-related information to their publics? Through which or whose perspectives can this question be answered (i.e. in the perspective of the employer, what competencies constitute competence? What about in the perspective of a private citizen? A scholar?). How can a journalist be described as ‘competent’ and who (or what) defines ‘competence’? These questions are crucial if journalism is striving to perform its role of being the ‘beacon of reliability’ (Drok, 2013, p. 156; see also Opgenhaffen et al., 2013; Weaver et al., 2007) in the online sphere with seemingly endless options for content. In other words, these questions beg to be addressed as journalism is distinguishing itself from all other sources that now challenge its gate-keeping function, considered a thing of the bygone pre-internet era.

This work aims to address these questions within the context of Southeast Asia (SEA), an environment characterised by rich diversity in political, cultural, and economic conditions (Estella & Paz, 2019) and a rapidly expanding internet market (Google, Temasek, and Bain and Company, 2019, p. 9). SEA has ‘emerging democracies’ (Chua, 2013) as well as countries in ‘democratic decline’ (Powers, 2018, p. 307), high-income economies and low-to-middle-income economies, and partly free to tightly controlled media systems (Estella & Paz, 2019, p. 196). The conditions of SEA that are alien to the conditions of the ‘West’ or the ‘Global North’ create an interesting case study under the

spirit of ‘de-centering’, to borrow Muhlmann’s (2008) term, the discourses in journalism and communication studies. Loo’s (2013) statement best describes the Southeast Asian condition:

...the media in parts of Asia had travelled on a different path dotted by traditions and customs, centuries of struggling for independence from colonial rule, followed by struggles for press freedom from authoritarian post-colonial states, and where press freedom was legislated—such as in the case of Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand, and where private media ownership has led to excessive commercialism and corruption to this day. (Loo, 2013, p. 46)

This article argues that in this kind of environment and with the challenges posed by the pandemic crisis, journalistic competence should be developed based on an interdisciplinary and transformative paradigm, one that deviates from the well-entrenched industry-centered perspective (see also Folkerts, Hamilton & Lemann, 2013; Harcup, 2011; Mensing 2010). This perspective privileges technical training and industry-set norms and standards with the principal aim of producing graduates for the mainstream industry. This article began with a discussion on the character of the political and media systems in SEA, as well as pertinent journalistic roles, because any discussion on journalistic competence is a futile exercise if not properly contextualised. This work also includes a brief review of the state of research on journalistic competence particularly in SEA. The last section deals with the interdisciplinary and transformative paradigm, and how such an approach to journalist training or journalism education is necessary in today’s circumstances.

### **The Southeast Asian condition: The need for a critical-reflexive approach**

SEA as a geographical realm is comprised of 11 territories: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam. As a political bloc, SEA countries, apart from Timor-Leste (with observer status), constitute the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), a regional intergovernmental group established supposedly to promote ‘economic growth’, ‘peace and stability’, and ‘active collaboration’ among its member states (ASEAN Secretariat, 2017, p. 3). Although ASEAN has been in the process of regional integration as early as 1997, its leaders launched the ‘ASEAN Community’ only in 2015, with the goal of arriving at a ‘rules-based’ and ‘cohesive’ regional group with narrowed development gap and ‘free movement of goods, services, and investments...capital and skills’ (ASEAN Secretariat, 2013). ASEAN leaders aim to meet the ‘critical targets’ of the integration by 2025, but several scholars have already expressed scepticism toward

the ‘progress reports’ of ASEAN (Menon & Melendez, 2016) and toward the possibility of integration and its relevance to the greater population of over 600 million citizens (Dosch, 2015; Desker, 2015; Heydarian, 2015).

Perhaps one of the challenges to the integration is the highly diverse array of political, economic, and cultural systems of SEA (Löffelholz & Arao, 2011, p. 17; see also Estella & Paz, 2019). The region has presidential republics (Indonesia and Philippines) and parliamentary democracies (e.g. Singapore) to military government (Myanmar) and communist/socialist republics (Laos and Vietnam). It is also ‘one of the most religiously diverse regions in the world’, as it includes Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Thailand, which has the largest percentage of Buddhists globally, and Philippines, which has the biggest number of Roman Catholics outside Latin America (Pew Research Center, 2012, cited by Jereza, 2016, p. 90). It is home to a great number of migrants from India and China as well as many indigenous peoples and other minority groups (Meijknecht & de Vries, 2010, p. 77).

In terms of national wealth, the region has high-income economies (Singapore and Brunei) to middle and low-income economies (e.g. Philippines, Laos, and Cambodia). Cuyvers (2019) wrote that there is a ‘development gap’ between the ‘newest and least developed members’—the ‘CLM’ or Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar—and the rest of the ASEAN countries, particularly those with national income that rivals that of many developed countries in the Global North (e.g. Singapore and Brunei) (p. 4). Cuyvers also compared the ASEAN countries in terms of different indicators such as GDP, Human Development Index, and poverty incidence, showing that SEA indeed has a strong mix of developing and highly developed countries, with varying conditions of educational, technological, and innovative infrastructure (p. 4).

What is of particular importance to this article is the character of media system, journalistic roles, and ‘journalism paradigms’ in the region because these directly circumscribe the discourse on journalistic competence. It should be noted that in the majority of SEA countries, big data on journalistic roles or journalism cultures is absent (except for Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, and Philippines), although there is a wealth of qualitative studies about journalism in the region. The same goes for news consumption behaviour: It was only recently that the attitudes of audiences toward news and their gateways to news have been profiled through large-sample research (see for example Newman et al., 2019; Newman et al., 2020). This could be seen in two ways: First, journalism studies is still in its infancy in many SEA countries because of underdeveloped research and development (R&D) infrastructure as well as poor appreciation for journalism research (see for example Hanitzsch, 2005; Estella & Löffelholz, 2019), and second, because journalism as a field is still struggling to gain a footing especially in societies that are in transition (Lehmann-Jacobsen, 2017).

However, the fact that there are more studies employing qualitative approaches (e.g. descriptive and discursive works and case studies) suggests that in areas like SEA, the common research tradition focuses on describing or to some extent theorizing the unique circumstances of the region, which are best examined through methods like participant observation or ethnographic approaches. These circumstances—colonial past and post-colonial consciousness, authoritarian regimes, poverty and huge inequalities, strong traditions and customs, among others – make this environment vastly different from the Global North or West, from which most of the perspectives and methodologies in the field of journalism studies and journalism education originated. Therefore, as Robie (2019) has argued, there is a need for research to be ‘nuanced’, ‘culturally appropriate’, and ‘reflexive’ enough to appreciate the ‘complex media cultures’ of the Pacific region. From this decolonising project stemmed new research frameworks and methods particularly in the Pacific region, such as the ‘*talanoa*’ approach (Robie, 2019). The research philosophy of ‘*talanoa*’, a Fijian term for ‘frank face-to-face discussion with no hidden agenda’, focuses on ‘public interest, civil society and community empowerment’ (Robie, 2019, p. 12). Clery (2014, cited by Robie, 2019, p. 6) described this approach as ‘purposeful talk’, with an emphasis on exploratory dialogue in addressing the needs of the community. In such an approach, the scholar (or the journalist, as this approach is also applicable to journalism practice) is not a detached observer, as opposed to the default stance of the researcher in many Western-Global North studies.

Furthermore, the reality of the media in SEA presents a case against the ‘liberal hegemonic model of journalism’ (Nerone, 2012; see also Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016), which has its roots in Western democracies. This hegemonic model, imported by developing countries by the beginning of the 20th century, privileges public sphere journalism (political affairs journalism) over private sphere journalism (lifestyle or home and consumption affairs) (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016, p. 4). As a result, democracy has long been considered as a requirement for the ‘perfect’ form of journalism to exist even though this ‘has not been supported on the ground’ (Zelizer, 2013, p. 465) as only a minority of the world’s population live in democratic systems (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016). This hegemonic model also created an ‘undemocratic form of journalism scholarship’ (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016, p. 5) that is Western-centric in terms of perspectives and methodologies.

The media systems in SEA countries are far from those in the Western or Global North democracies—most are tightly controlled under authoritarian or semi-authoritarian governments. In fact, in the World Press Freedom Index (WPI) 2020 (Reporters Without Borders, 2020), all SEA countries, except Timor-Leste and Malaysia, are in the bottom third of the rankings. The WPI measures the ‘degree of freedom’ of journalism in 180 countries through a set of indicators such as legislative framework governing the media, pluralism, and



abuses. Below is a table indicating the current ranking of the Southeast Asian countries, as well as some notes on the state of media freedom taken from the Index and related literature (Table 1).

It is clear from the table that while no two countries in SEA (or in the world) have exactly the same political environment, and while each country has its own unique circumstance, there are trends that run across almost all countries in the region. The journalists in SEA, perhaps with the exception of Timor-Leste, have long been operating within an environment characterised by decades of political suppression, self-censorship, harassment of journalists, and other methods of control that continue to this day, most of which are shifting into digital forms and spaces (e.g. the need to work amid cyberattacks and ‘troll’ armies that sabotage online political discourse). However, while Timor-Leste is ranked higher in the Index than most SEA countries, it has to be emphasised that its environment is far from a rosy picture, as its journalists also struggle with poor wages and poor working conditions, a chronic dilemma that is common in many SEA environments.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the development journalism paradigm is firmly established in the region (Estella & Paz, 2019). The main premise of development journalism is that the profession should ‘play a central role in disseminating governmental or national policies to inform and educate the masses as well as mobilise them for the concerted effort at bringing about economic development’ (Wong, 2004, p. 26). Development journalism puts emphasis on ‘the promotion of unity and state agenda’ (Estella & Paz, 2019, p. 198), in stark contrast with the goals of the watchdog-adversarial paradigm that is popular in many Western democracies particularly in the 20th century. Interestingly, although the role ‘reporting things as they are’ is popular among journalists in Indonesia (Muchdar & Masduki, 2016), Philippines (Tandoc, 2016), Singapore (Duffy & Kim, 2016), and Malaysia (Hasim et al., 2016), studies dealing with published content revealed a continuing adherence to the tenets of development journalism (Cenite et al., 2008; Estella & Paz, 2019; Massey & Chang, 2006).

For some scholars, development journalism is a ‘compliant’ (Loo, 2013, p. 14) form of journalism primarily because of its preference for government sources and news frames set or favored by the state. What makes this problematic, according to them, is that it can allow authorities to ‘hijack’ it (Ali, 1996, p.148) and make it ‘government say-so journalism’ (Lent, 1978, p. 1), all under the notion that a free and critical press is a luxury for developing nations. Such a paradigm sits well in authoritarian and semi-authoritarian states, where authorities more often than not have the power to interpret whether or not a text is a ‘threat to national interest’ or security (Estella & Paz, 2019, p. 199), and where journalists support the promotion of state agenda, whether as an outcome of political pressure or internalisation of state-determined roles.

However, for other scholars, development journalism is not simply the

**Table 1: The state of media freedom in Southeast Asia, 2020**

Country	World Press Freedom ranking	Notes on the state of media freedom
Brunei	152	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. State censorship and low level of autonomy, resulting in self-censorship (RSF, 2020).</li> <li>2. Curtailed freedom of information. A 'malicious' comment is punishable by five years in prison, while any statement deemed blasphemous or promoting apostasy is punishable by death (RSF, 2020).</li> <li>3. Government closure of publications (IFJ, 2019).</li> </ol>
Cambodia	144	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A climate of fear and self-censorship (CCIM, 2017; RSF, 2017). 'Defamation and 'lèse-majesté' laws are widely used to circumvent [media freedom] provisions envisaged in article 41 of the constitution' (RSF, 2020).</li> <li>2. Journalist killing and harassment (Wake, 2018; CCIM, 2017).</li> <li>3. Struggling to cope with the rise of new media (Lehmann-Jacobsen, 2017).</li> <li>4. Factions owning news media use to malign their opponents, (the result being 'unbridled reporting with no clear ethical guidelines that often sees public decency being violated'(Loo, 2006).</li> <li>5. Political patronage as an obstacle to professional practice (CCIM, 2017; Loo, 2006)</li> <li>6. Poor journalism ethics as a consequence of low salaries (Loo, 2006).</li> </ol>
Indonesia	119	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Human rights violations against news media workers particularly in West Papua, (Robie, 2017, pp. 40-47). These violations appeared to have increased in frequency in the time of current president Joko Widodo's term, especially in West Papua, 'where violence against local journalists continues to grow' (RSF, 2020).</li> <li>2. Self-censorship, a 'legacy of the Suharto era' (Wahid, 2006, cited by Tapsell, 2012), continues and has attained the status of an "industry-endorsed practice" (Tapsell, 2012, p. 228; see also RSF, 2020).</li> <li>3. Commercialisation of the press, media corruption and malpractices (Loeqman, 2003, cited by Hanitzsch, 2005; Loo, 2013)</li> <li>4. 'Cartelisation' of media ownership that threatens editorial independence (Harymurti, 2010, cited by Tapsell, 2012; Dhyatmika, 2014).</li> <li>5. Problematic framing of religious and cultural conflicts (Sharp, 2013; Steele, 2012) and 'scandalisation' or 'soap-operafication' of government corruption (Kramer, 2013, p. 61).</li> </ol>

Laos	172	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continuing state censorship and self-censorship (RSF, 2020)</li> <li>2. Heavy restrictions on access to information and political expression (Downie, 2000; RSF, 2017).</li> <li>3. Laotians are turning to the internet and social media, but 2014 decree penalises internet users who criticise the government (RSF, 2020).</li> </ol>
Malaysia	101	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Government restrictions act as obstacles in the 'media liberalisation' and modernisation process (Tapsell, 2013, p. 613). The Malaysian government has long been 'imposing prior restraint' and 'encouraging self-censorship' as 'routine forms of media control' (George, 2003, p. 247).</li> <li>2. With the defeat of the ruling coalition in the 2018 elections, the media freedom atmosphere has become 'more relaxed', with previously blacklisted publications being allowed to resume operations without fear of harassment (RSF, 2020). According to RSF (2020), the 'Orwellian' provisions of the anti-fake news law enacted by the previous government were repealed, but 'archaic laws' threatening media freedom are still in place, such as 1948 Sedition Act and the 1972 Official Secrets Act (see also Wake, 2018).</li> <li>3. Authorities 'tailor their political interventions narrowly', which means giving the media ample legroom for economic activities but at the same time putting their foot down on any expression deemed critical of the government, hence the term 'narrow tailoring' (George, 2003, p. 247).</li> <li>4. Self-censorship is a product of centralisation in media ownership (George, 2003).</li> <li>5. 'Poor wages and working conditions' (IFJ, 2019, p. 26)</li> </ol>
Myanmar/ Burma	139	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Censorship, harassment, and imprisonment of journalists have given rise to citizen journalism in new media, albeit still restricted. Despite the rise of Myanmar in the Index in the past years, it is now in decline. Levels of self-censorship are rising, especially after two journalists received a seven-year prison sentence for trying to report on the massacre of Rohingya civilians (RSF, 2020). It appears that despite coming from a long history of military rule, the new government headed by Aung San Suu Kyi also does not put much premium on media freedom (RSF, 2020).</li> <li>2. Curtailed freedom of information and expression (RSF, 2017), Neumann (2002) described the country as the 'most information-starved' (p. 20) in Asia.</li> </ol>
Philippines	136	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Journalist killings and human rights violations against alternative and community journalists (Conde, 2017; RSF, 2017, 2020).</li> </ol>

Philippines	136	<p>2. Commercialisation and conflict of interest emerging from media ownership structure (Teodoro, 2014; Tuazon, 2007).</p> <p>3. Lack of job security and poor salaries (Tandoc, 2016).</p> <p>4. Accusations against media integrity spread by paid 'disinformation networks' in the internet (Ong &amp; Cabañes, 2016, p. 1), which clearly took advantage of the fact that the country is labeled 'social media capital of the world' due to very high levels of social media use and a rapidly increasing rate of internet penetration (Estella &amp; Löffelholz, 2020).</p> <p>5. The 'populist' president Rodrigo Duterte and his supporters have been making tirades against journalists since he assumed office in 2016, even going as far as labeling them as 'lowlifes' and fake news peddlers (Chua, 2020), contributing to the atmosphere of hostility toward the media.</p>
Singapore	158	<p>1. Severe government restrictions on media freedom (George, 2003; Lehmann-Jacobsen, 2017); Karppinen (2015) noted that the city-state earned its status as a global 'anomaly' because it has combined a highly successful capitalist economy with tight control over its media system (p. 333)</p> <p>2. Self-censorship among journalists (George, 2003), an outcome of the Singaporean authorities' repertoire of actions in suppressing media freedom, which include suing 'critical journalists, or applying pressure to make them unemployable, or even force them to leave the country' (RSF, 2020).</p> <p>3. For journalists, there are 'OB markers,' which refers to topics, issues, or public figures that are considered 'out of bounds' in reportage (RSF, 2020).</p>
Thailand	140	<p>1. A long history of state censorship and human rights violations against media practitioners (Harfenist, 2017), which continues to this day with the 'total control wielded by the elite surrounding General Prayuth Chan-o-cha, who is now prime minister, defence minister and chief of the Royal Thai Police' (RSF, 2020). 'Draconian legislation,' such as the newly adopted cybersecurity law, and a justice system that is not autonomous created an atmosphere of fear (RSF, 2020).</p> <p>2. Lack of job security for journalists (IFJ, 2019).</p> <p>3. Cyberattacks are becoming a bigger threat to the profession (IFJ, 2019, p. 47).</p>
Timor-Leste/ East Timor		<p>1. The state of media freedom in Timor-Leste is far better than that in its neighbouring countries in the region. For instance, no journalist has ever been jailed since the country won its independence in 2002 and its constitution continues to guarantee media freedom and free speech (RSF, 2020).</p>

<p>Timor-Leste/ East Timor</p>	<p>78</p>	<p>2. However, there are laws that journalists fear can put political pressures on the practice. Defamation laws were allegedly used as means to crack down on journalists investigating corruption (Guterres, 2020). 3. The 2014 Amendment to the Media Code law established a ‘press council’ in charge of regulating journalism, exercising ‘disciplinary authority’ on practitioners, and revoking professional credentials. The amended law, supposedly guaranteeing press freedom, was criticised by the Human Rights Watch, which pointed out that such an agency could be used to censure content and harass journalists (HRW, 2014). The creation of the Press Council is a ‘step to the right direction’, but the 2014 law ‘poses a permanent threat to journalists and encourages self-censorship’ (RSF, 2020) 4. ‘Poor wages and poor working conditions’ (IFJ, 2019, p. 54).</p>
<p>Vietnam</p>	<p>175</p>	<p>1. Media system remains tightly controlled by the state but dependent on external market for revenues (Lehmann-Jacobsen, 2017; RSF, 2017). 2. ‘Struggles for professionalism’ among journalists (Lehmann-Jacobsen, 2017, p.18) 3. Poor exercise of freedom of information and expression (Nguyen, 2008; RSF, 2017). The ‘level of terror has risen sharply’ in the past three years, as many bloggers were jailed in connection to their posts and the authorities established a military cyberwarfare department targeting dissident content-makers and defending the Communist Party online.</p>

**Note:** Compiled by the author from the Cambodian Centre for Independent Media (CCIM), Reporters Without Borders (RSF), World Press Freedom Index 2020 and other sources as detailed.

propaganda arm of the state, arguing that many have missed the core concepts underpinning the practice. Kalyango et al. (2016), for instance, wrote that development journalism is ‘interventionist, developmental, and educational’ (p. 3) as journalists act as ‘agents of change’ that help the grassroots sectors participate in development initiatives (Estella & Paz, 2019, p.199; see also Anand, 2014). Robie (2014, 2019), meanwhile, has proposed a kind of development journalism that has watchdog elements: the ‘critical deliberative paradigm’ of journalism which aims to empower the disenfranchised by enabling ‘the participation of all community stakeholders’ (p. 84).

**Science journalism, COVID-19, and the subversion of professional norms**

The COVID-19 crisis has underscored the role and potential of science journalism, especially at a time when the availability—and quality—of pandemic-related information could be a life-or-death matter. In fact, in US and Europe,



Casero-Ripolles (2020) found that news consumption and audience engagement increased significantly in the time of the pandemic, as citizens who usually are not interested in current or public affairs found themselves ‘reconnecting’ with news (p. 9). Surprisingly, legacy media, especially the television, appear to have ‘reclaimed’ part of its ‘journalistic authority’ in this health crisis as seen in audience preferences and trust levels (Casero-Ripolles, 2020, p. 9), despite data pointing toward its declining relevance as news sources (Newman et al., 2020). Casero-Ripolles concluded from the data that in exceptional situations such as ‘risk to human life’, citizens tend to follow news as a key activity, validating Schudson’s (1998) idea that audiences are ‘monitorial’ citizens who appear inactive but ‘poised for action if action is required’ (p.311, cited by Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2012, p. 5).

However, whether or not the case is similar in the SEA context or the Asian context has yet to be determined through empirical research. It is obviously important to profile audiences’ attitudes toward sources of information at a time like this, especially because COVID-19 cases continue to increase in SEA and countries like Indonesia and the Philippines struggle with exponential increase of cases, crippled healthcare systems, and ‘democratic distress’ (Warburton, 2020). In Indonesia and Philippines, like in other countries outside SEA, political administrations seem to be using the pandemic crisis as leverage for consolidating power through measures criticised as draconian or as a breach of human rights (Basuki, 2020; Deinla, 2020). In environments where the health crisis is complicated by civil unrest, power struggles, or political manoeuvres, the journalism profession can perform game-changing roles. It has to be reiterated that while SEA has countries like Singapore and Brunei, where educational and technological infrastructure are globally competitive, it also has countries in which educational deprivation levels are high and R&D infrastructure remains mediocre, two factors that can act as obstacles to flattening the COVID-19 curve. Mass media, therefore, assumes a greater burden in educating audiences about the health crisis (at least in a normative sense). As Nguyen and Tran (2019) observed, news in ‘Global South’ settings ‘plays an almost exclusive role in informing and engaging laypeople with science’ and its various implications (p.1).

Indeed, the crisis brings a ‘test of capacity’, to borrow Kunelius’ (2018) phrase, to journalism similar to how climate change ‘offers an unavoidable testing ground and laboratory’ for the practice—a ‘forced opportunity’ (pp. 219-220). He explained that a ‘systemic problem’ such as the threat of climate change forces journalism to rethink its default positions and professional virtues. For instance, he wrote that climate reportage subverts the time and rhythm logics of mainstream journalism: ‘Journalism is in the business of storms, floods, summits and elections, whereas climate change is about trend, trajectories, predictions and probabilities of models’ (p.220). Reporting on the pandemic crisis likewise

challenges textbook norms and ways of doing journalism, more so at the time when actors sowing disinformation online are actively trying to delegitimise journalism as a source of information (see for example Ong & Cabañes, 2018), or when information is distorted by digital populist movements to shift public opinion (Schroeder, 2019).

Apart from the critical reflection that science journalism requires (from professionals), a significant degree of multi-literacy is also becoming a prerequisite. Chan (2015) wrote that “science writing requires scientific literacy and the literary muscle to inject enthusiasm into the bounds of reported information” and practitioners that have both are ‘few and far between’. She also observed that in Asia, the standards of science journalism remain wanting, as scientific discovery ‘faces an uphill battle in capturing the imagination of the public’ and ‘significant language and cultural barriers’ stand firmly in place. Nguyen and Tran (2019), through a systematic literature review, found several themes on science journalism in the Global South: 1) ‘heavy dependence on foreign sources, especially the media of the Global North’, 2) ‘the low status of domestic science news in newsrooms’, 3) ‘uncritical science reporting that easily lends itself to influences of non-science vested interests’, 4) ‘tight grip of politics on science journalism’, and 5) ‘ineffective relationships between science and journalism’.

### **Toward interdisciplinary and transformative journalism**

As mentioned, the previous two sections provide the contexts on which any discussion on journalistic competence and journalism education should be based. To put it briefly: Journalists in SEA are operating in a highly diverse environment (and even individual countries are far from homogenous) in which more and more citizens are living an ‘onlife’, to borrow Floridi’s (2015) term, which refers to a life lived in a ‘hyperconnected reality’ where it is ‘no longer sensible to ask whether one may be online or offline’ (p. 1). They are also working in an environment with journalistic roles and a journalistic paradigm that are quite different from those in the West or much of the Global North, rooting from authoritarian and semi-authoritarian governments and controlled media systems. The journalism profession in these areas is also, in one way or another, affected by systemic problems such as high income inequalities and poor educational and R&D infrastructure.

In this terrain, what then constitutes the so-called journalist’s ‘toolbox’, or a set of competencies for successful practice? To address this question, ‘competencies’ and ‘competence’ have to be defined first. ‘Competencies’ is broader than other seemingly similar terms such as ‘ability’ or ‘skill’; it refers to skills, attitudes, personality traits, dispositions, and knowledge (Himma-Kadakas, 2018; Sturgess, 2012) that are acquired through ‘learning processes when an individual interacts with his or her environment’ (Klieme et al., 2008, p. 8). Journalistic

competence, meanwhile, is the summation of competencies—a competence construct—necessary for practice.

The question of what competencies constitute the journalist's toolbox in SEA can be framed in different ways. Is it in the perspective of the corporate employer, whose aim of maximising profit has in numerous instances taken precedence over public service? Is it the perspective of the editor, who attempts to balance commercial pressures and the journalistic norms that he or she acquired through socialisation with peers and mentors? Are we talking about competencies that are needed to thrive in the workplace, without necessarily trying to fulfill the normative function of journalism in society? Or are we talking about competencies for quality journalism that may or may not be profitable? In any study on journalistic competence and journalism education, the researcher has to specify which lens he or she will be using to approach the topic.

This article seeks to focus on the character of journalistic competence that will allow the profession to retain its place and relevance in society by, above all else, fulfilling its normative roles and at the same time coming to terms with this disruptive age. The journalist's toolbox of competencies—or journalistic competence as a whole—should be transformative and interdisciplinary, and as such there is a need to veer away from the industry-centered perspective that, as discussed, can be anti-innovation and 'anti-intellectual' (Hanna, 2005, p. 127; see also Harcup, 2011).

The arguments are based on extant literature and in-depth interviews with 46 experts from 31 countries, systematically chosen on the basis of research on related fields, academic tenure and reputation, and experience as practitioner prior to embarking on an academic career (or working as a practitioner and academic at the same time). The data from the interviews were analysed through a qualitative coding method done via the MAXQDA 2020 software. Codes were generated from extant literature, but new codes were added whenever ideas or concepts that do not fit in the original set of codes emerged. The data that was previously coded was then revisited—a circular process.

The interviews have yielded many points of discussion, but the article focuses on reflections that are most relevant to the current context(s) of SEA, hence the discussion on the transformative and interdisciplinary way of doing and learning journalism.

A 'transformative' way journalistic practice and education rests on the capacity for critical reflection (Harcup, 2011; Rodny-Gumede, 2016), which means 'posing questions about how and why things are the way they are, what value systems they represent, what alternatives might be available, and what the limitations are of doing things one way as opposed to another' (Richards & Lockhart, 1996). This critical reflection goes beyond critical thinking as a basic human competency—it is not simply about a journalist reflecting on his or her

quality of work. It is a capacity to critique (or even subvert) as well as a capacity to employ research tools or techniques to understand relevant contexts in a more scientific manner. In other words, critical reflection in the context of this work employs academic tools and theory that are often neglected in industry-centered journalism training or education, which, as Hanna (2005) said, can be ‘mercenarily anti-intellectual’ (p. 127).

In the case of SEA, journalists would benefit from competencies adopting a critical and scientific approach to knowing the political and media systems of their respective environments, as well as its history, culture, and pertinent laws. For interviewees based in Singapore, it is through this competency that Singaporean journalists are able to critique political and media systems, identify the so-called ‘OB markers’ in reportage (a set of topics and public figures that cannot be criticised, as previously discussed), and be ‘flexible’ in approaching these issues. For another interviewee in Singapore, this means an awareness of the fact that the watchdog journalism, the yardstick for liberal Western democracies, cannot be the norm in an environment like Singapore, and for such a paradigm to prevail, it would entail structural or systemic changes in the environment as well as professional cultures, otherwise, it would not be possible at all.

Equally important is the capacity to critique prevalent journalistic roles and journalism paradigms and not simply accept them as unimpeachable. In this way, we see the significant place of academic methods and theory in the journalist’s toolbox because only through these can contexts be truly understood. As Rodney-Gumede (2016) wrote, journalism education especially in the Global South should be ‘research-based’ and ‘comparative’, allowing journalists to locate their environment in the global state of research. Second, by maintaining a critical-reflexive stance, journalists become more open to change because they are constantly questioning ways of doing and are wary of the inertia of journalism cultures, or, as Harrington (2012) called it, ‘journalism orthodoxy’, in which methods and norms are standardised as part of the ‘intellectual domain’ of journalism, something that professionals and even educators are fiercely guarding even if it becomes hostile to the innovation that the current times call for (p. 159). This capacity also has its own important place in the journalist’s toolbox especially in societies where, as Lehmann-Jacobsen (2017) noted, journalism is in transition or journalism is still struggling to find its footing or role in society.

The ‘interdisciplinary’ character of journalism practice and education, meanwhile, necessitates the ‘breaking down of disciplinary boundaries’ between journalism and media studies (Harrington, 2012, p. 156; see also Hirst, 2010), and even between journalism and other fields outside media and communication. Some of the experts interviewed believed that apart from multiskilling across platforms, a journalist can benefit from a knowledge base from other fields and then learn practical skills in journalism (or a bachelor’s degree in other fields,

say computer science, health science, or economics). Several experts share the idea that a journalist can either collaborate with IT experts in weaving interactive narratives online or learn data science methods to analyse audience preferences. Competencies in knowing the digital audience and evaluating and curating on-line information—competencies that in the past decade were not even included in the journalist’s toolbox—have gained more currency now than previously imagined. These are crucial especially for professionals who work in Southeast Asian countries where the rapid increase in social media use has also led to digital populist campaigns, echo chambers, fake news peddlers, and troll armies, some of which were reportedly employed by authoritarian governments in the region.

In SEA, the multiskilling of journalists, or the expansion of the competence construct, is nothing less than a requirement by the conditions in which low to middle income countries grapple with the pandemic crisis and all its economic and political ramifications. Competencies in science journalism, as discussed in the last section, become indispensable especially in countries where many social institutions and public services have been neglected for decades, thus leading to high levels of educational deprivation and poor healthcare figures, which in turn contributed to the increasing number of COVID-19 cases. It is clear that communicating COVID-19 rests on competencies in properly understanding the disease, the public health issues that surround it, and in knowing the audience well enough to create journalistic content that, simply put, could inform and save lives. An interdisciplinary journalistic education should also be the key to addressing what the deficiencies in science journalism in Global South settings as identified by Nguyen and Tran (2019), particularly the problem with ‘uncritical science reporting that easily lends itself to influences of non-science vested interests’ and the ‘ineffective relationships between science and journalism’. The latter in particular could be addressed by developing the competencies in adopting a scientific and critical approach to contexts (as discussed under the transformative way of doing journalism).

In the case of COVID-19 reportage, a significant degree of science literacy, coupled with a critical awareness of political and socio-economic systems, might be the key in helping journalism strengthen its role as curator or verifier of information in the age of online echo chambers and information distortion. In settings like SEA, where political and media systems are begging for change, and where social institutions buckle under the weight of crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative for journalists to consider a rethink of the established ways by which journalism is done and taught.



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# 2. The discourse of climate migration

## Unravelling the politics of ASEAN's environmental policies

**Abstract:** Climate change has inevitably created impacts globally ranging from regulatory changes to affecting social communities. Among these impacts, climate migration becomes the unprecedented and significant one. Millions of migrants are environmentally displaced and the Southeast Asia region is noted as one critical hotspot of the movement. This issue presents challenges for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as there is a need to enlighten and signify the urgency of the problem, knowing that climate-induced migration is still under-discussed within the regional body's policy-making. Thus, this article aims to analyse why climate migration is under-discussed in ASEAN's environmental policies and how the ASEAN regional framework lacks preparation to overcome challenges coming from climate change primarily on the issue of climate migration. In doing so, qualitative research method and discourse analysis will be used with data collection obtained from publications, academic journals, articles, and official reports. This article found that environmental communication and climate politics are the main elements that construct the discourse of climate migration within the policy-making of ASEAN. Moreover, a reflection on the discourse of climate migration in other regions such as the Pacific will be delivered.

**Keywords:** ASEAN, climate migration, climate geopolitics, climate refugees, discourse of environment, environmental communication, Indonesia, Kiribati, Pacific, policy-making

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### Introduction

CLIMATE change has disrupted many aspects of human lives, including migration. Changing and extreme climatic conditions such as sea-level rise, floods, and droughts are among the causes of environmentally induced migration. This type of human migration caused displacement of 18.8 million people in the world in 2017 (IDMC, 2018, cited in Ober 2019, p. 1). If there is no significant improvement in global climate mitigation, it is predicted

that there will be around 143 million of internal climate migrants worldwide by 2050 (World Bank, 2018, p. xxi). Southeast Asia is noted as a ‘hotspot’ of climate change due to the increasing climate change impacts on the region’s high population and archipelagic geography. The Global Climate Risk Index stated that the Philippines, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam are included in the category of the world’s 10 countries most affected by climate change (Overland et al., 2017, p. 1). A 70 cm sea-level rise by 2100 for Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam—thus highlighting the potential of future settlement crisis especially for coastal and highly populated regions including Jakarta, Manila, Bangkok, and Yangon (ASEAN, 2015, cited in Overland et al., 2017, p. 2).

The so-called ‘climate refugee’ term in the media worldwide has been politically contested and debated. This, according to Myer (2015, p. 344) is due to ‘conceptual difficulties’ about climate migration. These difficulties include ‘the diversity of scenarios of climate migration, the fact that climate change exacerbates pre-existing migration scenarios but does not create new forms of migrations, and the indistinctiveness of individual climate migrant’. Until now, there is still no international consensus on the definition of climate refugee—even the United Nations does not define climate refugee as a legal type of refugee. Myers (Myers, 1995, cited in Hartmann, 2010, p. 235) tried to legitimise and popularise the term by stating that ‘environmental refugees are persons who can no longer gain a secure livelihood in their traditional homelands because of environmental factors of unusual scope, notably drought, desertification, deforestation, soil erosion, and water shortages, also natural disaster such as cyclones, storm surges and floods’. In responding to such a politically contested term, this article recognises the sense of urgency by media, government officials, and academicians on the portrayal of environmentally displaced people as climate refugees which often describes the situation of cross-border displaced people. Nevertheless, this article will be limiting the scope of analysis into two types of climate migration, 1) internal/within the border, and 2) external/cross-border.

This article argues for the analysis of climate migration in the context of ASEAN’s policy-making and on the promotion of the importance of a stronger regional framework in ASEAN. This article found that the issue of climate-induced migration is still under-discussed within the agenda of ASEAN policy making. In answering the research question ‘why is the issue of climate migration in Southeast Asia still under-discussed primarily in the regional body of ASEAN?’, discussion about ASEAN’s environmental communication and climate politics is essential as they are the key elements in the making of the discourse of climate migration. The role of policy makers and journalists is also crucial in the dynamics of climate politics and environmental communication. Moreover, just like other normative studies, this article argues that ASEAN needs to take further action in order to prevent future conflicts or crises.

## Literature review

By mapping existing literature sources, it is found that political environmental writing offers several major approaches to analyse the issue of climate migration, such as but not limited to human rights approach, security approach, and ultimately post-structuralist approach (discourse analysis) that this article uses.

### *Human rights approach*

Prioritising human rights is believed to be how this issue should be approached. Through embracing resistance and political debate in the term climate refugee, O'Neill emphasises how advocates have been enforcing environmental protection for basic international human rights (O'Neill, 2009). This underlines the linkage between environmental discourses and human rights issues at the global level. Similarly, Jaswal and Jolly (2013) argue that the issue of climate refugee is not only rooted in environmental matters but stems from the issue of human rights where poor citizens in developing countries could become disproportionately affected by current international law. The lack of clear legal instruments for climate refugee mitigation prolongs the issue. McAdam & Limon applied the human rights approach for the analysis of climate migration issues where they argued effective and just solutions should derive from the protection of migrants' rights for the mitigation and adaptation policies (McAdam & Limon, 2015).

### *Security approach*

To some extent, the way climate migrant is being portrayed by the 'traditional security approach' is similar to how refugees in general are seen as a threat to the stability of a nation's security. Political contestation and securitisation too often accompany this approach to underline cautions of the existence of climate migrants. Hartmann's article underlines this idea of how climate policy could be distorted by such portrayal of security threats that climate refugees could bring (Hartmann, 2010). By analysing it through the US national policy, she found it harmful if climate refugees keep being portrayed in a 'neo-Malthusian' way where they become a security threat that needs to be solved through military operations (Hartmann, 2010).

However, the branch of 'human security' takes into account the importance of human lives and intersects with the human rights approach. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1994 introduced the human security concept where it does not deal with weapons but with human life and dignity (UNDP, 1994). An article from Ruppel & van Wyk (2013) underlines this approach from an African perspective to see how climate change-induced migration would impose conflicts, pressure on human security, and especially challenges for vulnerable societies. Thus, this phenomenon requires immediate actions to protect human lives for the sake of human security.

*Post-structuralist approach (discourse analysis)*

Post-structuralist approach within the environmental study is linked to ‘governmentality’ and ‘environmentality’. This originated from Foucault’s work on governmentality in cementing the technology and power/knowledge for state and social control coming from governing. The emergence of subjects then becomes internalised, created into regulations under the system, and circulated as a discourse that constitutes knowledge. Agrawal, following Foucault’s view, deepened the post-structuralist approach by highlighting environmentality through understanding how environmental politics could emerge with its characteristics that are affected by ‘transformations in knowledges, politics, institutions, and subjectivities’ (Agrawal, 2005, p. 202).

While human rights and human security approaches are needed to further progress climate migration as a larger discussion, discourse analysis offers deeper looks on how the issue has or has not been constituted in the global, regional, or local governance to take part in the needed actions. The gap that this article aims to fill is in the analysis of ASEAN’s politics in regard to climate migration through the assessment of its Foucauldian governmentality and environmentality in order to achieve the goal where Southeast Asia can protect its human security from the worsening climate. By understanding its politics, institution, and identity, the production of climate-induced migration as an environmental subject is needed to be included in the ASEAN’s institutional framework.

**Methods**

Drawing on secondary data from academic works, journals, articles, and official reports, this article uses a qualitative research design in processing the collected data and discourse analysis in analysing the data. The use of qualitative research is in line with this article’s aim of bringing up the normative value of climate mitigation on human migration in Southeast Asia. With strong emphasis on the question ‘why?’, the qualitative approach is expected to provide causal analysis in answering this article’s research question which focuses on the factors behind the under-discussed climate migration topic within ASEAN policymaking. Discourse analysis is used in analysing the role of verbal language (political statements, meetings, debates, campaigns) and non-verbal language (policy documents, written news, academic writings) in the construction of the discourse of climate migration in ASEAN. These forms of language exist within ASEAN’s environmental communication and climate politics.

By analysing the climate politics and environmental communication of ASEAN, several key findings related to the connection between climate migration and environmental policies are generated. First, although climate activism by the media is increasingly growing in ASEAN countries, climate politics still provide challenges to some extent. Second, at the regional level, institutional weaknesses

such as the bureaucracy of ASEAN hinders the process of creating climate migration as a discourse subject. Third, existing ASEAN's framework, working groups, and cooperation too often focus only on urgent matters such as haze or forest fire without giving much room to introduce, arrange, and establish in-depth discussion for possible environmental threats such as climate-induced migration. Fourth, there is comparatively weak commitment to refugee protection and little contribution to climate mitigation by ASEAN members.

This article also explains the implications of climate migration in ASEAN by dividing the discussion into internal and external climate migration. The results show that the performance by ASEAN member state governments and media is unsatisfying. Research findings also imply that a sense of urgency within the discourse of climate migration among ASEAN members is still lacking, unlike in other regions such as the Pacific where climate migration is one of the most discussed topics within regional policy-making.

### **Climate journalism in Southeast Asia**

In Southeast Asia, environmental journalism has been showing a growing contribution to the subject of climate migration. In *ASEAN Today*, Martinus (2020) offered an analysis that climate change in Asia could trigger a higher migration influx. In the Southeast Asia region, Chen Chen Lee in an op-ed at the *Bangkok Post* demanded that ASEAN make decisive responses in order to tackle the issue of the Mekong River that previously had not been dealt with holistically (Chen, 2020). In the IMF's magazine *Finance & Development*, Prakash highlighted that a dual challenge is faced by Southeast Asia—in that it needs to arrange climate change adaptation and its development strategies related to global warming. He acknowledged Southeast Asia's heavy lean on oil and coal, then added with its deforestation, that made ASEAN member states 'undermining national pledges to curb emissions and embrace cleaner energy sources' (Prakash, 2018). For Asia-Pacific, Randall wrote in *The Diplomat* about Asia-Pacific's climate migration and how Pacific Island nations had limited choices about relocations (Randall, 2017). *The Diplomat's* article, written by Fetzek and McGinn (2020), also suggested that the Asia-Pacific area needed to prepare for the upcoming challenges from climate security by coming up with precautionary and preventive initiatives to keep its region's stability.

Although climate activism by the media is increasingly growing in ASEAN countries, climate politics still presents some challenges. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) published a 'red alert' as reporters who have covered environmental issues worldwide met staggering hurdles with 10 being murdered in the past five years and 'more than 50 press freedom violations linked to environment journalism have been registered' (RSF, 2020). A high percentage (66 percent) of the cases come from the Asia and America regions, with Southeast Asia having the



cases of Muhammad Yusuf being killed in Indonesia, Pratch Rujivanarom being killed in Thailand, and a murder attempt on Brandon Lee in the Philippines (RSF, 2020). Also acknowledged by Carthew and Linnarz (2012, p. 10), their report explicitly stated that ‘increased risks of intimidation, violence and, even in some cases, deaths are increasingly encountered by Asian environmental journalists.

Journalism reportage contributes to the discourse about the climate migration issue. As Dijk (1985) wrote about media and discourse, ‘discourse is no longer just an “intervening variable” between media institutions or journalists on the one hand, and an audience on the other hand, but also studied in its own right, and as a central and manifest cultural and social product in and through which meanings and ideologies are expressed or (re-)produced’. This reproduction of knowledge is displayed through various media reports and coverage on media channels and academic writing, boosting the urgency of this issue. Tze Ni Yeoh in *ASEAN Today* highlighted that in a diverse region like ASEAN, it was necessary for global and regional coordination for sharing of knowledge and resources. (Tze, 2020). In response to COVID-19, an article by Farajalla (2020) in *The ASEAN Post* underlined the need for actions in facing climate change as it was argued that this was more threatening than the pandemic itself.

Robie and Chand have acknowledged that there is a need for a ‘greening of media initiatives’ and capacity improvements in order for news media and journalists to be able to engage deeper into environmental communication (Robie & Chand, 2017, p. 199). As RSF mentioned in the Copenhagen Summit 2009 (COP15), the media holds a ‘crucial role in helping decision-makers to adopt policies and rules that will lead to the desired changes’ when it comes to climate change (RSF, 2010). Looking at this case through environmentality, journalism and academic writing have contributed to the spread of knowledge for the general public.

### **The institutional dimension of ASEAN**

Discourse analysis, as Howarth defines it, derives from ‘linguistic and non-linguistic material’ whether it is written or spoken, intended to add the objects, words, or practice experience for the subjects involved (Howarth, 2000). Understanding institutional dimensions of politics and changes also corresponds with post-structuralist discourse theory (Panizza & Miorelli, 2012) and in the case of ASEAN it should be noted that the tendency of climate migration being under-discussed here stems from bureaucracy politics and identity in its governmentality and environmentality. As noted by Agrawal, environmental political studies has ‘conceptual building blocks of power/knowledge, institutions and subjectivity’ that he defined as ‘environmentality’ (2005, p. 216). Applying Agrawal’s environmentality concepts on the issue of climate migration in Southeast Asia, ASEAN has *power/knowledge* as a regional *institution*

that governs environmental regulations and frameworks, and it comprises *subjectivity* that comes from the representatives of member states to ASEAN politics. This incorporates the production of limited environmental identities that ASEAN upholds. The slow process of creating climate migration as a discourse in this regional body is analysed through the ASEAN's formal policies, ideas, and actions.

In the climate change and migration issues, ASEAN has been criticised due to two factors: its members' limited contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and its members' reluctance in committing to the international law on refugee protection (only Cambodia and Philippines, which ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention). Looking at the low performance on climate mitigation and weak commitment to refugee protection by most of ASEAN members, it is visible that the urgency level of the climate migration issue within the region is strengthening and the institutional role of the regional body on such issues is getting more challenged. Bringing this issue in advance is needed before ASEAN member states experience noticeable loss of its sovereign land, resources, and primarily its citizens' lives due to climate change that would increase the number of climate migrations. Geiger argues that the future will be uncertain and filled with difficulties if states and institutions only aim to 'simply manage' the challenges without addressing the governance for global environment-induced migration. At the regional level, Cristani et al. argue that regional institutions play a big role in facing this challenge, however ASEAN as a regional institution has shown its hesitance to develop clearer rules for the climate refugee issue (Cristani et al., 2020). ASEAN's existing governmentalisation of its environment is found to be too limited to the production of knowledge based on major urge and acceptance by its representatives on deciding which issue remains a priority. The perplexity of arranging environmental priorities within this institution is too often affected by the severity of repeated environment issue cases. On the issue of haze or forest fire, the severity of the problem becomes pushed annually to be tackled by creating coherent frameworks, such as the ASEAN Haze Agreement on Transboundary Air Pollution. However, the reluctance to underline some other environmental issues is shown in its frameworks and policy making.

A survey by Elder and Miyazawa (2015) exhibits three positive factors and five challenges over ASEAN's decision-making process for regional environmental cooperation. To some extent, ASEAN has shown its progress in devoting its effort towards more progressive environmental identity such as through ASEAN Haze Agreement on Transboundary Air Pollution, ASEAN Programme on Sustainable Management of Peatland Ecosystems (2014-2020), and the ASEAN Declaration on Heritage Parks. However, its achievement is limited to a few topics, and the topic of climate migration still has not received its spotlight compared to the others. This links back to Elder and Miyazawa's findings that ASEAN still faces

challenges such as bureaucratic and fragmented organizational structure that result in slow decision-making process and lack of substance in its Working Groups (Elder & Miyazawa, 2015). As ASEAN has the power to decide which issues matter and which do not, it could act as an institution that enables the emergence of certain environmental issues as discourses where state and social control are reflected in some of the frameworks of ASEAN's climate efforts. Meanwhile, environmental cooperation in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint is written in point D10 for Climate Change and the ASEAN Working Group on Climate Change (AWGCC) has been established under the ASEAN Environment Ministers Meeting's formulation. However, the issue of climate migration has not been considered yet. ASEAN's technology to regulate and form the environment identity of the region needs to consider this issue to break a pattern of 'business as usual' within ASEAN policies in handling regional crises.

### **Internal and external migration in Southeast Asia**

Prolonged floods in Muara Baru settlement in the coastal area of North Jakarta researched by Triarko Nurlambang (2012, p. 74-83) is the major reference for this article's section on internal migration. The research found that despite the high vulnerability of Jakarta to climate migration, there is still weak capacity of the local government and weak knowledge by the local people on climate mitigation.

Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia, is predicted to have many displacement areas, especially in the northern part of Jakarta by 2035 due to climate change (Susandi, 2009, cited in Nurlambang, 2012, p. 79). As a coastal and highly populated region, Jakarta is geographically vulnerable to climate change as sea-level rise has been related to prolonged flooding—the most frequent disaster in Jakarta. Climate conditions in the city are also worsened by high intensity of gas emissions coming from transportation and manufacturing activities. The impacts by floods on the region have been quite severe due to government weaknesses such as undelivered early warnings to most of the local people and comparatively little assistance (in comparison with NGOs) to the impacted population (Nurlambang, 2012, p. 79).

Another area in Southeast Asia that has a potential to be the origin of both within and cross border climate migration is Mekong Delta. It has been noted as an area that is vulnerable to changing climate conditions such as rising sea level by scientists and international organisations (Tuan & Chinvanno, 2011, p. 214). Research by Padilla (2011) provides several environmental characteristics of climate change issue in the Mekong Delta. Since 1981 until 2011, Mekong Delta has experienced a 30 percent annual increase in rainfall, shifting rainfall patterns, an average temperature increase of 0.5 C in Can Tho as the largest city in the Mekong Delta and an average sea level rise of 3 mm per year in the waters

around the mouth of the delta, and it is also predicted that there will be a rise in the average level of Vietnam's seas 'by 28-33 cm by 2050 and by 65-100 cm by 2100 as compared to the 1980-1999 period' (Padilla, 2011). Moreover, while most of the Mekong Delta area already has a high risk of flood, the melting of Tibetan Plateau glaciers near the Mekong River's headwaters caused by climate change could increase the threat of flooding.

The economic aspects and demographic setting of the Mekong Delta have been considered as the key factors that can lead to not only internal but also cross-border migration. According to Padilla's research, Mekong Delta is well-known for its agricultural output that provides 46 percent of national food production and 80 percent of total rice exports—which makes Vietnam as the world's second largest rice exporter. Therefore, the Mekong Delta has a significant economic value for not only the livelihoods of the Vietnamese population but also other countries. Furthermore, NIC Conference Report (cited in Padilla, 2011) noted that 'the decimation of the Mekong Delta will push millions of Vietnamese north into Ho Chi Minh City and beyond into the Central Highlands, as well as over the border into Cambodia'. The highly populous and geographical location of the Mekong Delta can result in the flow of Mekong Delta refugees and potential ethnic conflict based on socio-economic factors.

### **Responses to climate migration**

According to Nurlambang (2012, p. 79), a survey on the population of Muara Baru during the flood hazards in 2007 showed that '64 percent of respondents never participated in any training seminars on climate change or natural hazards' and 'almost all respondents said that they had no traditional knowledge of disaster management'. Frequent floods in Muara Baru might have also been caused by other factors such as changing climate conditions and environmental degradation caused by human activities. However, it is clear that a more proactive role by the local, national, and regional government could have mitigated and reduced the impacts resulting from the urban floods in Muara Baru and other parts of Jakarta. Looking at the role of government and the understanding by the local people on climate change, climate mitigation measurement in Jakarta is still problematic. The issue of climate change and migration is still uncommon among the local policymakers and academics (Nurlambang, 2012, p. 76). Governmental instruments on environmental and spatial management do exist but such measurement has not been understood comprehensively among the local policymakers and not implemented consistently (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2009, cited in Nurlambang, 2012, p. 81).

Research by Wahyuni (2017) analysed the role of Indonesia's journalism education in the media coverage on climate change issues. In Indonesia, the coverage of climate topics in the mainstream media is still relatively lower than

other political topics such as corruption and election. While this is considered as the internal factor within the country's media journalism on climate change, the external factor mostly comes from the way climate politics mediate the media coverage. Cronin and Santoso (2010) explain how climate politics influence the media coverage on the 'reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) issue in Indonesia. The research shows that although REDD+ politics is increasingly covered in the media, the clash of interests by powerful political actors are still inevitably creating impacts on the media coverage, making the discourse of REDD+ politically driven.

In Vietnam, according to Pham and Nash (2017), several adaptive measurements to climate change exist such as 'the National Strategy on the Prevention and Disaster Reduction, the National Target Programme to Respond to Climate Change, the Decision 380/QD-TTG on the pilot payments for forest environmental services, the National Strategy on Climate Change and the National Programme on REDD+'. Nevertheless, more detailed and comprehensive plans seem to be absent on many sectors that are impacted by climate change. They further argue that although the government, NGOs, and the media share the same stance that climate change is one of the most serious problems to the country, there are still substantial and political problems in the media coverage on climate issues. The mainstream media is limited by its capacity in understanding and delivering substantial and sufficient knowledge about the implications of climate change. Government as one of the main significant sources for information in the media also provides political challenges to media freedom in Vietnam.

In the discourse of climate migration in ASEAN's policy-making, this research paper found that ASEAN's legal and policy framework has maintained the weak status of climate migration issue within the problem definition process and priority list of policy making among member states. Research findings by Petz and Rum (2020) on the current progress of climate-induced migration management by ASEAN show that there are two main problems: absence of comprehensive law on climate-induced internal migration by member states and absence of regional measurement on climate-induced cross-border migration among member states. ASEAN has indeed law and policy instruments on climate mitigation but none of their documents directly address environmental-induced migration. Moreover, the research also provides a comparison between ASEAN and other regional bodies such as African Union (AU) specifically on the importance of a regional convention as a starting point in addressing the issue of climate change migration. The progress made by AU has been highlighted by its 2009 Kampala Convention which aims to protect and provide assistance to internally displaced people with certain criteria referring to the types of migration caused by natural disasters. On the other hand, lack of political will and initiation among ASEAN members have resulted in the absence of a regional convention—a crucial



platform and starting point in constructing and strengthening the urgency level of climate change migration. Going back to the discourse of climate migration within the scope of ASEAN policy making, these problems have exacerbated the under-discussed climate migration topic.

### **Climate migration in the Pacific: The case of Kiribati**

In low-lying island states such as Kiribati, migration is adopted as a measurement or strategy in responding to climate change (Gunawansa, 2015, p. 321). Kiribati and other countries in the Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) are considered as one of the most vulnerable areas to climate change and predicted to be ‘the origin of the first climate change refugees’ due to several ‘implications: (1) coastal effects of sea-level rise (including erosion inundation); (2) reduced quantity or quality of water resources; (reef degradation; (4) reduced agricultural productivity; and (5) impacts on human health (eg, changing disease vectors, heat-related diseases, water-borne diseases’ (Campbell, 2014, p. 2-3).

In the developing of discourse of climate migration in Kiribati and other PICTs, not only the media and international organisations, but the regional governments and scientific groups, also play a key role. They share a consensus that climate change is the number one problem that the region needs to address (Titifanue et al., 2017, p. 136). The government of Kiribati has been actively implementing adaptive measurements to handle climate change and pushing for stronger mitigation efforts to the international community.

In many UN general assemblies and conferences, there is a common agenda shared by Kiribati and other PICTs: addressing the impacts of climate change on the people of PICTs. The continuous meetings about climate change at the international level have indeed influenced climate diplomacy by states, including PICTs who are aware that international coordination is important (Carter, 2016, cited in Titifanue et al., 2017, p. 140; 142). Although PICTs failed to defend its climate interests during the Copenhagen climate change conference in 2009 known as the COP15 (Bedford & Bedford, 2010, p. 89), good news came from Fiji which publicly announced that it would arrange the admissions of climate migrants originating from Kiribati and Tuvalu. A big leap was made by PICTs during the COP21 in 2015 where PICTs strongly contributed to the negotiation process that has led to the Paris Agreement (Robie, 2017, p. 42).

One controversial event that highlights the discourse-making of climate migration in Kiribati is the ‘migration with dignity’ policy advocated by former President Aote Tong. It stresses the idea that the neighbouring countries such as Australia, one of the biggest polluters in the world (Tiffen 2010, cited in Robie, 2014, p. 69) and New Zealand should see climate migration as a legitimate action by the population of Kiribati, who have little choice other than to ultimately

migrate and prepare working skills in order to adapt to new places (Walsh, 2017). Another event that has strengthened the legitimization of climate migration is the case of Ioane Teitiota, who sought a ruling by the UN Human Rights Committee about his family's claimed status of 'climate refugee' that was not accepted by the New Zealand courts (UN Human Rights, 2020). Although he and his family were deported to Kiribati, his case was the first of an individual who had requested human rights protection on climate change-induced migration to the UN body. Moreover, despite the progressive climate advocacy by former President Anote Tong that has been altered by his successor, Taneti Maamau, Kiribati still actively pushes for a climate change agenda at the international level, including at the 25th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change where the president challenged and urged developed countries to have a more proactive role in mitigating the changing climate conditions (Wootton, 2019).

While the PICTs' leaders are in line with the stance of the media on climate change advocacy, the local population also has a prominent role. Robie (2014) elaborated on how Pacific communities could promote climate change advocacy by using information communication technology (ICT) and enforcing 'bottom-up regionalism'. Social media as one form of ICT has been used by organisations and individuals to spread awareness on climate change and has been seen as a potential key factor to strengthen 'citizen journalism' and 'climate activism'. Furthermore, one phenomenon that shows the bottom-up regionalism or grass-root movement in the Pacific is the 'Warrior Day of Action' climate campaign by the Fji-based chapter of 350.org with the theme: 'We are not drowning. We are fighting'. This message aims to empower Pacific peoples, delivering the idea that the people of PICTs and the international community should focus more on mitigating climate change rather than putting pessimistic, hopeless views about the future for the Pacific.

### **Concluding considerations for ASEAN climate migration policies**

Agrawal observed environmentality through the creation of shifts in the practice and consciousness on the emergence of a new political and environmental subject. Discourse, in the Foucauldian view, competes for social influence in the construction of a subject and the meaning and interpretation of it (Sharp & Richardson, 2001). So far this competing of influence has been displayed in ASEAN by what has and has not been initiated in the policies. According to Burr (1995, cited in Sharp & Richardson, 2001) there are four characteristics in the approach of discourse analysis: 'critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge; historical and cultural specificity; and knowledge is sustained by social processes; knowledge and action go together'. Reflecting from the characteristics, the knowledge that has been circulated by journalists and academicians will yield no result if the actions for this issue are not taken by the government's technology in

advancing ASEAN's preparation for climate change and climate-induced migration phenomenon.

By acknowledging the knowledge/power relations of ASEAN as a regional government body, the formulation of thorough framework to prepare itself and look after this issue will lead to potential prospects and benefits such as but not limited to improvement of interstate relations in ASEAN on economic, political, and social aspects and the creation of climate migration agenda by implementing regional framework and leadership that promote 'humanitarian assistance, the rights of the migrants, climate change cooperation, and international security' (Mayer, 2015, p. 348). However, it still remains a challenge for ASEAN to further overcome its politicisation of which issues remain important. ASEAN member states are still dependent on fossil fuel (Overland et al., 2017, p. 11; Mayer, 2015, p. 356) thus complicating their efforts on creating more environmental discourses.

The use of language in communicative interaction contributes to the social construction of an object to become a discourse. The way the media outlets and public discussions articulate the issue of climate migration creates a sense of new knowledge and building bricks for the issue itself. By using the discourse analysis, this article could also contribute to the discourse itself by providing texts and further policy discussions to be considered by ASEAN's power and technology to bring further environmental issues as a subject in policy discourse especially in regard to climate-induced migrations in Southeast Asia.

Kraemer (2017) noted that climate migrants were not the only people directly affected by climate disasters, because the movement could be driven by conflict, instability, destabilisation, and economic factors that are aggravated by climate change triggers. Understanding this, ASEAN should consider the various triggers of climate migration and creating the needed mechanism. Reflecting from the discourse of climate migration in the vulnerable Kiribati and other regional bodies such as AU, the current policy frameworks of ASEAN seem to undermine the urgency of climate migration. There are different geographical aspects between the region of Southeast Asia and other regions but initiations such as convention among ASEAN members could be a starting point for the making of the discourse, then of communication and coordination in managing the impacts and preventing the risks from climate migration. In the Pacific, there is a strong connection between government leaders and media on the same acknowledgment of climate migration. While in ASEAN, the circulation of texts have not yet reached into governmental texts, thus underlining the gap between media and government. A stronger sense of regionalism could be one method in promoting political will among ASEAN policymakers and initiating further regional policies.

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# 3. Micro-celebrity participation and risk communication in Indonesia

A content analysis of @dr.tirta and @rachelvennya Instagram posts during the COVID-19 pandemic

**Abstract:** Information dissemination in the media, specifically social media, is one of the critical channels of information related to the COVID-19 outbreak sought by the public. The information presented has been related to accurate and reliable situation reports and false information in various forms, not only text-based but also audio and visual. The chaos of data, coupled with a central response that seemed unprepared, shaped the Indonesian community's perceptions of the COVID-19 outbreak. This fact related to the massive number of internet users in Indonesia is one aspect of the government's decision, in this case BNPB (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana; officially National Disaster Management Authority), to engage strong social media influencers. The government collaborated with some influencers to enable public engagement through online social media platforms in the context of COVID-19—two of them being @dr.tirta and @rachelvennya. The platforms also gained more visibility after being appointed COVID-19 influencers. They updated information about COVID-19 on their social media accounts with picture posts and Instagram stories, either individually or in collaboration with others. This study aims to analyse the practice of the Indonesian government's agency using micro-celebrity to deploy a risk communication frame and the delivery of the message by a celebrated person.

**Keywords:** content analysis, Indonesia, Instagram, micro-celebrity, new media, participation, risk communication, social media influencers

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## Introduction

**T**HE COVID-19 pandemic and how the Indonesian government responded until the end of March 2020 is still a serious discussion. Moreover, many contradictions have emerged in the handling of the crisis. Global information collected, as stated on the World Health Organisation website, showed detailed situation reports. The 70th situation report on 30 March 2020 confirmed at that time around 693,224 cases globally with 33,106 deaths (WHO, 2020)—a far cry from what the figures had reached by October 23 with more than 41 million infections and 1.1 million deaths.

The increasing number of victims showed the growing need to properly handle outbreaks from all aspects—government, society, and the media. At the level of communication science, as stated by Qiu et al. (2016), in the context of risk communication, the communication model used needs to be mapped through communicators, messages, communicants, feedback, and noise that arises, with the ideal benchmark of two-way communication models.

Information management on risk communication for COVID-19 in Indonesia currently shows relations between communicators that tend to be less integrated. The slow process of delivering information makes several non-linear decisions from the central government to regional governments. Recorded until 29 March 2020, when the government had not yet decided to quarantine parts of the country, media records mention a list of areas in Indonesia that imposed lockdowns, including Tegal, Tasikmalaya, and Papua (Dzulfaroh, 2020). The lockdown discussion led to debate within the community regarding regional quarantine decisions, although not everybody understood ‘rights’ and ‘obligations’ when a region applied local quarantine.

This phenomenon led to a fluctuation in community trust of the government’s central command in handling of COVID-19 risks. Trust is one of the main elements that must be present in risk communication, as stated by WHO (2005), in guidelines relating to communication over outbreaks. Another intriguing element that can be found in Indonesia was the government’s effort, in this case through the BNPB (Badan Nasional Penganggulangan Bencana/National Authority of Disaster Management), to collaborate with influencers to discuss the COVID-19 pandemic (Siagian, 2020). According to Siagian, the government was unable to work alone on disaster management. Moreover, that activity was claimed as action and collaboration between elements of society and government.

In this case, celebrities—referred to as influencers involved in health risk communication COVID-19—are interestingly seen, from the perspective of communication, precisely the message delivered. Studies related to celebrity efforts and their contribution to the public are not new. However, looking at how many celebrities cooperated with the National Authority of Disaster Management (BNPB) with the lack of brief disclosure delivered on the media is one thing. The

other thing is the controversy that finally surfaced about the content provided primarily by its influencer, a more attractive issue to be examined. The information's quality and values, which lie in its celebrity's content about the COVID-19 issue, became the focus of this study.

Information dissemination in the media, specifically the internet, which is one of the primary sources for information sought by the public related to the COVID-19 outbreak, has become increasingly relentless. The information presented has been related to accurate and reliable situation reports and false information in various forms, not only text-based but also audio and visual. The chaos of data, coupled with a central response that seemed unprepared, shaped the Indonesian community's perceptions of the COVID-19 outbreak. Even on online social media, there was a sad response from people on Twitter to the current conditions as illustrated in Figure 1:



**Figure 1: Marzuki Muhammad's tweet on Twitter trending topics**

Source: <https://twitter.com/killthedj/status/1244912394846875648> Twitter, 31 March 2020

The figure is a Twitter screenshot of Marzuki Mohammad, an Indonesian artist. His tweet's content told us that on the COVID-19 pandemic issue, people were still thinking about political matters, and regarding lockdown as one kind of provocation, above humanity, as stated on #AwasProvokasiLockdown. Provocation or anything included in information disorder regarding COVID-19 is not uncommon in Indonesia.

In this context, the meaning of provocation is the chaotic condition in Indonesia because of the issue 'provocation lockdown' in the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to anarchy, as stated in the article *Independensi* (2020). The provocation lockdown is related to some regions having anxiety about whether they needed to implement lockdown policy.

This should become an urgent concern, considering that Indonesia is ranked fourth in the global lists of countries with many internet users, behind China,



**Figure 2: The highest number of internet users in 2020, Q1**

TOP 20 COUNTRIES WITH HIGHEST NUMBER OF INTERNET USERS - 2020 Q1						
#	Country or Region	Internet Users 2020 Q1	Internet Users 2000 Q4	Population, 2020 Est.	Population 2000 Est.	Internet Growth 2000 - 2020
1	<a href="#">China</a>	854,000,000	22,500,000	1,439,062,022	1,283,198,970	3,796 %
2	<a href="#">India</a>	560,000,000	5,000,000	1,368,737,513	1,053,050,912	11,200 %
3	<a href="#">United States</a>	313,322,868	95,354,000	331,002,651	281,982,778	328 %
4	<a href="#">Indonesia</a>	171,260,000	2,000,000	273,523,615	211,540,429	8,560 %
5	<a href="#">Brazil</a>	149,057,635	5,000,000	212,392,717	175,287,587	2,980 %

Source: <https://www.internetworldstats.com/top20.htm> Internet World Stats

India, and the United States. Moreover, the COVID-19 outbreak meant people were advised to observe social and physical distancing. It boosted internet usage because working and learning were being done at home using an online network, and the production and consumption of COVID-19 content was also done online.

The fact related to the massive number of internet users in Indonesia (Figure 2) is one aspect of the government’s decision, in this case, BNPB, to engage with strong online social media influencers. BNPB was looking for people who have a good number on public engagement to participate in becoming an actor in delivering information on the context of COVID-19. Wahidin (2020), in his article in Alinea.id, stated that the Prevention Deputy of BNPB, Lilik Kurniawan, decided to collaborate with influencers to broaden the reach of socialization and to be an alternative solution from the problem that stated by RRI and Indo Barometer survey that there is the distance between government and the society.

The list of influencers (Figure 3) that BNPB asked to strengthen the information dissemination process related to the COVID-19 outbreak have diverse backgrounds—activists, sportsmen, and millennial generation figures. From the graphic, each person’s network can also understand the impact of amplifying the message conveyed by each influencer. In the context of the value of popularity and strong attachment to the audiences, these influencers’ messages or

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**Kesaktian Influencer Covid-19**  
DI JAGAT MAYA

Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana (BNPB) menggandeng 20 influencer top untuk menyosialisasikan penanganan Covid-19 kepada publik. Selain dari kalangan selebritas, influencer yang setuju membantu BNPB berasal dari aktivis, olahragawan, dan tokoh milenial.

**NAMA-NAMA TERPOPULER**

- INDRA BEKTI**  
Aktor dan pelawak. Punya sekitar 2 juta pengikut di Instagram @indrabekti dan 4,1 juta pengikut di akun Twitter @indrabektiastl.
- RACHEL VENNYA**  
Selebrgram pemilik akun @rachelvennya. Punya 4,5 juta pengikut di Instagram.
- TAQIR MALIK**  
Dikenal sebagai pelantun ayat-ayat Alquran dan pendiri Taqychan Group. Punya 1,8 juta pengikut di akun Instagram @taqir\_malik.
- SARAH ALANA GIBSON**  
Selebrgram pemilik akun @sarahalibson21. Punya 1,3 juta pengikut di Instagram.
- M ATIATUL MUQTADIR**  
Mantan Ketua BEM Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) dan aktivis Dempet Dhuafta. Punya 1 juta pengikut di akun Instagram @fathuur\_.
- TIRTA MANDIRA HUDDI**  
Akrab disapa Cipeng. Aktif berkepalanya di kitabisa.com. Punya sekitar 674 ribu pengikut di akun Instagram @dirtirta dan 75 ribu pengikut di akun Twitter @tirta\_huddi.
- OLGA LYDIA**  
Model dan selebritas. Punya sekitar 162 ribu pengikut di akun Twitter @OlgaLyDIA dan 57 ribu pengikut di akun Instagram @olgalydia.
- AKBAR RAIS**  
Dritter nasional. Punya 138 ribu pengikut di akun Instagram @akbarrais.
- TASYA KISSTY**  
Selebrgram berhijab. Punya sekitar 222 ribu pengikut di akun Instagram @tasyakissty.
- M ARIF ROSYID HASAN**  
Tokoh milenial dan mantan Ketua PB HMI. Punya sekitar 10 ribu pengikut di akun Twitter @muhammad\_ers dan 15 ribu pengikut di akun Twitter @muhammad\_ers.

**Figure 3: Influencers collaborating with BNPB**

Source: <https://www.alinea.id/infografis/kesaktian-influencer-covid-19-di-jagat-maya-b1ZJU9sL7>



content are significant for study. The risk communication message and celebrity value of @dr.tirta and @rachelvennya as two of the 10 BNPB influencers with the highest followers will be analysed in this article.

### *Dr Tirta*

Dr Tirta is a figure who has been active in online social media for a long time. He is a medical general practitioner and a businessman who owns a premium shoe-cleaning business. However, with his presence in the COVID-19 pandemic context, his eccentric style of communication means dr. Tirta is increasingly stealing the spotlight. His Twitter account @tirta\_hudhi has 237,000 followers, while his Instagram account @dr.tirta has 1.2 million followers (Daryono & Widayanti, 2020). This high number of followers has made him influential among his followers and some actors or activists who collaborate with him.

Dr Tirta is an alumnus of the Gadjah Mada University Medical Faculty in Yogyakarta and has studied general practice (Daryono & Widayanti, 2020). Dr. Tirta had worked as medical staff at the Turi (sub-district in Yogyakarta) Health Center and UGM Yogyakarta Hospital and became a junior doctor at Dr Sardjito Hospital Yogyakarta. Currently, Dr Tirta also has a television programme, *What's Up Doc. with Tirta*, on the Indonesian private television station iNews.

The figure of Dr. Tirta, who is often called '*cipeng*' (Bahasa Indonesian for Chinese, his race, and *pengkolan*, which means turn) has gone viral after he became known as an active volunteer to campaign against the coronavirus outbreak. By uploading his social media accounts, followers can see updates to COVID donation activities that he and his colleagues are doing. In Yustiana (2020), he is said to be a volunteer who goes directly to some hospitals in Jakarta, which consumes most of his time to ensure the availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) for his fellow workers. Dr Tirta also often conducts live sessions on Instagram and collaborates with various parties, including business people affected by the coronavirus, public officials, medical personnel, fellow students, and others.

### *Rachel Vennya*

The second micro-celebrity who became the object of this research is Rachel Vennya, an Instagram celebrity who is also an entrepreneur. She has some businesses, including culinary supplies (Taichan Fried Satay, Rumah Sedep with a traditional menu, and Ngikan), beauty products (a slimming brand named Slim Beauty Product), and fashion fields (Mahika Kids, Raven is Odd, Vel the Modest) (Profil Artis, 2020). Rachel has been a make-up artist, and she attended Make-Up Artist School at La Salle College International.

As a micro-celebrity, Rachel Vennya often becomes a brand endorser to various online shops to promote their products. With her 2 million followers, she charges between five million (NZ\$510) and 10 million rupiahs (NZ\$1,020)

for a one-off endorsement. Through her Instagram stories, she can upload more than five products from different online shops a day (Liputan6.com, 2020).

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, she and some other micro-celebrities were lined up to become influencers who collaborated with BNPB in the process of disseminating coronavirus information. She was also raising funds through a crowdfunding platform in Indonesia, Kitabisa.com. In less than 24 hours of fundraising, more than 1.1 billion rupiahs (NZ\$10,200) was gained on Monday, 16 March 2020 (Ansori, 2020). Until Wednesday, 23 March 2020, the fundraising had reached 7,392,212,295 rupiahs (Rantung, 2020). She later donated this to the Indonesian Red Cross, some hospitals that treat COVID-19 infection cases, and informal sector workers.

### **Literature review**

This section will divide the literature review that supports this article into two parts: risk communication with its message aspect and celebrity participation in disasters.

#### *Risk communication and messaging*

The study of risk communication in Indonesia is still limited in practice because it overlaps with crisis communication. Covello (1992, in Sato, 2015, p. 6) defines risk communication as ‘the exchange of information among interested parties about nature, magnitude, significance, or control of a risk’ (Qiu et al., 2016, p. 4) defines risk communication with its emphasis on the two-way communication process and is bound to all stakeholders in the whole process of risk assessment and management. Its participation aims to make stakeholders aware of the process at each stage of risk assessment and management and ensure that all stakeholders clearly understand the logic, results, significance, and risk assessment limits. Covello and Sandman (2001, in Qiu et al., 2016, p. 4) divide the evolution of risk communication into four historical stages, ignoring the public, explaining risk data to the public, establishing dialogue around the public, and public integration based on the role of risk communication in the process of risk assessment and management.

While the concept of crisis by Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer in Sellnow & Seeger (2013, p. 7) is defined as a specific, unexpected, non-routine event that creates a high level of doubt and is a significant threat to high priority goals. The definition above shows that there is a specific characteristic that distinguishes risk communication and crisis.

Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer in Sellnow & Seeger (2013, p. 8) also offer perspectives to map the causes of crises, including decision-making errors, negligence, accidents, natural changes, and unanticipated events. These causes can be categorised into three categories: (1) natural errors, and interactive complexity;

(2) failure in warning, negligence of risk perception, and future review, and (3) interference in alertness.

WHO provides a list of acceptable communication practices when an outbreak occurs, including (1) trust, which is interpreted as the purpose of communication during an outbreak is to communicate with the public in a way that can build, maintain, or restore trust. Point (2) is announcing early; this is related to the time the message was delivered, honesty, and completeness that made it the most important thing of all communication during an outbreak. Point (3) is transparency, characterised by the relation between the outbreak situation manager and the public if contextualised with an outbreak situation. The practice of transparency gives the public a chance to ‘see’ the process of gathering information, assessing risk, and the decision-making process associated with control over the epidemic. Point (4) is public; this is based on the need for public understanding, which is significant in achieving effective communication. The last point is planning, which means that risk communication must be combined with planning, which prepared important events in all aspects of the outbreak response (WHO, 2005, p. 2-7).

Corresponding with trust determinant factors, Covello and Allen (1988, in Sato, 2015, p. 7) present Seven Cardinal Rules as the principles of successful risk communication, namely (1) *accept* and involve the public as a legitimate partner, (2) *plan carefully* and evaluate risk-communication efforts, (3) *listen* to the public’s specific concerns, (4) *be honest*, frank, and open: trust and credibility are extremely difficult to rebuild once lost, (5) *coordinate* and collaborate with other credible sources, (6) *meet the needs* of the media, and (7) *speak clearly* and with compassion.

During the risk communication process, all aspects of communication are expected to be integrated to achieve effective communication, mainly when the internet provides easy access to information production and consumption. McIntyre, Spece, & Lachlan (2011 in Sellnow & Seeger, 2013, p. 151) state that one of the media’s main uses is to satisfy information needs. The media plays a significant role in diffusing this information because ‘media exposure is a popular method of overcoming a crisis’. Response to major disasters covered in the news illustrates the nature of new media, allowing users to receive and create content shared with others. Indeed, the web has become a coping mechanism (Associated Press, 2007, in Heath & O’Hair, 2009, p. 421).

The logic of this study will follow that Holladay (2010 in Sellnow & Seeger, 2013, p. 140) stated that it is crucial that organisations participate in the process of news framing. That happens because the way information is framed in news reports could influence public perception in the context of media content in risk communication. Organisational participation in the framing process begins by tracking the public’s information about organisational responses to crises.

Springston & Lariscey (2003, in Heath & O'Hair, 2009, p. 421) also mentioned that disease prevention, public health education, and building relationships between medical providers and patients and populations at risk is the application of information sharing practices on new media which is essential. The importance of sharing information on the internet is in line with this research study's object, that is, the message conveyed by celebrities or influencers in the context of COVID-19. Hence, the messages transmitted by influencers are significant to be studied.

In analysing the social media's content of two micro-celebrities regarding with risk communication, this study using what in Saxon (2019, p. 1311) stated as the quality of risk information in media coverage, which breakdown into five aspects that are: (1) risk-magnitude information, (2) self-efficacy information, (3) risk-comparison information, (4) sensational information, and (5) thematic and episodic content.

As in Dudo, Dahlstrom, and Brossard (2007, p. 435), risk-magnitude information deals with how likely individuals are to contract, become ill, and/or die from infectious diseases (Roche & Muskavitch, 2003). Risk measures can be either qualitative or quantitative in nature divided into quantitative risk measures without a contextual denominator and contextual denominator.

Self-efficacy describes the degree of control individuals feel they must alter their exposure to risk (Witte, 1995). There are two specific types of information that can increase self-efficacy concerning infectious diseases: symptom information and examples of personal protection (Roche & Muskavitch, 2003, in Dudo, Dahlstrom, and Brossard, 2007, p. 436). The instance of symptoms information regarding COVID-19 mentions the fever, 14-day incubation period, and out of breath. From now on, personal protection on the COVID-19 pandemic is washing hands, wearing masks, physical and social distancing.

Another indicator is risk-comparison information, which helps readers understand the risk related to a situation more clearly by providing a known risk for comparison purposes (Dudo, Dahlstrom, & Brossard, 2007, p. 437). In the COVID-19 pandemic context, some information brings up the case of H1N1 influenza, Spanish flu, Ebola, Zika, and many other pandemics.

Another dimension of risk information being tested here is sensationalism that compromises the extent to which media users consider and issue's risk (Covello et al., 2001, in Dudo, Dahlstrom, & Brossard (2007, p. 437). This study uses two types of sensationalism: the extent to which worst-case scenarios and loaded words (Friendman et al., 1987, in Dudo, Dahlstrom, & Brossard, 2007, p. 437) are used. In coding the content, the coder refers to worst-case scenarios with information that depicts the most extreme negative outcome possible, like the extinction of mask, hospital bed, and thousands of death cases. Whereas in coding loaded words, the guide is an emotionally-charged language that is shown by using repeated words, capital letters, exclamation marks, hyperbole.

The last indicator regarding risk information is thematic and episodic content, which differs from the news in the whole context with episodic frames. In that case, the coder will mark content that giving single and specific cases in episodic and thematic content with content that sharing knowledge surrounding the issue of COVID-19.

### *Celebrity participation in disaster*

Celebrities and the public have an inseparable relationship. This relationship happens because the term celebrity is recognised by others who worship the star. Even today, with a less strict hierarchy than before the internet existed, we can easily find ordinary people, who are part of the public, transformed into celebrities.

The fact that ordinary people quickly become celebrities is in line with what Turner said in Marshall (2016, p. 90) that the practices of celebrities that were initially elite and hierarchical have mutated to be more expansive and inclusive regarding interactions and participation with and by the public. This new mode of participation has had the effect of blurring the differences between production and consumption, celebrities and fans, and traditional celebrity also ordinary people or micro-celebrity. It is about the expansion of public buying of celebrities and how the celebrity's discursive penetration into a way that interferes with the social side. Thus, public engagement in celebrities tends to increase.

Corner and Pels (2003, in Couldry & Markham, 2007, p. 407) state that celebrities are an essential component of public debate on issues that require public resolution and being part of political personalisation. Weintrab & Kumar (1997 in Couldry & Markham, 2007, p. 408) also mentions the term public, which has a boundary in celebrity with two types. Those two types are the boundary between public and private space (the boundary that raises the question of what is accessed by the public) and the boundary between public and private issues (which then bring up the types of issues that are needed, not needed, which are resolved collectively). The things that will be examined in this paper in the context of public participation are closely related to the type of public that is considered a public issue or common concern, specifically in this study directed to the COVID-19 outbreak.

The participation of celebrities who appear as spokespeople in a campaign, or specifically referred to as celebrity advocacy, is not strange. However, each celebrity's high significance and dynamics brings with its value is interesting to be studied. In this case, the object of the study is the message conveyed by these celebrities. Todd (2005, p. 1) states that celebrities who lend popularity by devoting themselves to help others have some added value to make the media interested. In that context, one can see that there is a growing culture of celebrity obsession, creating a cult of visibility.

A potential advantage of using a celebrity spokesperson over a non-celebrity is that the audience is more readily identified as a familiar spokesperson. Social learning theory states that individuals tend to imitate others' behavior when they believe they are like the intended model (Bandura, 1977, in Shead et al., 2011, p. 171). The highlight about imitating the intended model's behavior is in line with the research conducted by Caulfield & Fahy (2016, p. 24), which states that celebrities' influence is impossible to recede. The nature of popularity in modern life means that scientists must view celebrity culture as an opportunity to bind citizens to the science of policy debate.

Indeed, researchers in communication science have known for a long time that once citizens leave formal education, the primary source of information about science comes from media, with today's audiences seeking information from internet search engines and social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Traditional celebrity culture and new media are becoming increasingly influential, like a seemingly pointless stream of celebrities who supports products, lifestyles, and ideas (Caulfield & Fahy, 2016, p. 24). As long as media coverage is focused on celebrities, celebrities will develop power structures to influence people. Under appropriate conditions, celebrity attachment can effectively increase organisational profiles or social issues, allowing messages to resonate with a broad audience (Todd, 2005, p. 19).

Caulfield & Fahy (2016, p. 24) also state that celebrities can use their visibility to incorporate scientific ideas into political discussions, draw attention to issues, and mobilize public action. Thus, the placement of stars in activities related to the public is significant. However, it is necessary to consider the celebrities' aspects of being engaged in activities to be carried out. Todd (2005, p. 19-21) stated that celebrities' element is biographies, credibility, good fit, transparency, high recognition factor, cultivate a relationship, repeated exposure, acquiesce to the cause, relevance, and point of entry.

Although Todd (2005, p. 22), Caulfield & Fahy (2016, p. 25) also state that celebrities have more than just a cultural presence. According to in-depth analysis in the *British Medical Journal (BMJ)*, celebrities also have a substantial impact. They significantly influence the range of health behaviours, such as cosmetic surgery, cancer screening, tanning, smoking, and even suicide rates. Furthermore, studies have shown that celebrities helped promote the marketing of unproven therapies and products, such as stem cell treatments. While difficult to quantify, there seems to be little doubt that celebrities play a role in developing trends like gluten-free diets, juices, health practices, and detox diets worth millions of dollars.

With this celebrity value's strength, this study will strengthen the research of messages conveyed by influential celebrities through the Instagram social media platform that disseminates information about COVID-19. Celebrities that are positioned as the subject of this research are included as micro-celebrity,



who gained their celebrity status from the internet and limited by the audiences that they have, which was followed by a minimum of 6,000 user accounts and shape content with a specific theme niche (Tilton, 2011, p. 2). Micro-celebrities convey information and explain particular topics to their audience. The number of ‘followers’ who limit a micro-celebrity reach is vital in seeing their ability to build meaningful conversations on specific issues in narrower and more intimate communities and networks.

In this study, celebrities selected are based on the strength of the trigger’s conversation in interactivity with and between audiences or internet users. Concerning this, it is hoped that this study will see the quality of information conveyed by celebrities mentioned in the introduction.

## Methods

This study will be developed to map the quality of messages delivered by celebrities assigned by BNPB in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This research’s study object is message content uploaded by celebrities on Instagram social media as a platform used by celebrities, Dr Tirta and Rachel Vennya. Their content recording period is for one month after they were assigned as BNPB’s influencers to convey risk communication messages with directions from BNPB. The method used is content analysis.

Content analysis by Babbie (2007, p. 371-376) is stated as a set of methods for analysing the communication’s symbolic content. The basic idea is to reduce the overall scope of the communication to a group of categories representing some characteristic of study interest. Content analysis is a study of recorded human communication. Many forms that are the object of study are books, magazines, web pages, poetry, newspaper, songs, electronic mail, and uploads on the internet. Krippendorff (1980, p. 21) states that issue analysis is a research technique commonly used to examine objective, systematic, and quantitative descriptions of the content implied in communication.

Several assumptions related to content analysis, according to Berelson (1952), are: (1) content analysis assumes that conclusions about the relationship between purpose and content or between content and impact can be made valid, or the actual relationship is built up, (2) content analysis assumes that the manifest content study is meaningful, and (3) content analysis takes that the quantitative description of the communication content is very meaningful.

Several stages will be carried out in the content analysis which is contextualised by this study according to Babbie (2007, p. 317-376), including (1) identifying the category of content to be coded, (2) defining categories according to objective criteria that can be applied by everyone, (3) systematically selecting and coding objects within the framework of objective criteria, and (4) reporting the frequency of categories into coded content. In conducting content analysis,

researchers used QDA Miner 5 software version 5.0.15 to process the data both from images and documents.

QDA Miner is a qualitative and mixed-method software with unparalleled computer-assisted coding, analysis, and report writing capabilities. The copyrighted software owned by Provalis Research Corp (Provalis Research, 2011). In this research, QDA Miner is used to keep all documents for @dr.tirta (40 Instagram postings) and @rachelvennya (6 Instagram postings), in the form of photos, both single and serial, coding schemes, codes, and notes in a set of files called ‘a project’. The analysis tools on QDA Miner used by researchers on this study are coding frequency, distribution of codes, and co-occurrence link to describe the tendency of those micro-celebrity’s content in the context of COVID-19 pandemic.

In the first stage of data analysis, researchers identifying the category of content to be coded by mapping the content uploaded by @dr.tirta and @rachelvennya on Instagram for one month after they were appointed as influencers who helped BNPB—April 21-May 21, 2020. The process of identification shows that 242 content titles were uploaded by dr. Tirta and 59 content titles uploaded by Rachelvennya. The population was then sampled by considering the focus of a specific study on Instagram uploads in photos, both single and serial images. Finally, the unit analysis was narrowed to 40 postings of @dr.tirta and six postings of @rachelvennya which were then processed in this study.

Two independent coders who studied communication science were used to assess inter-coder reliability. Coders were trained on using the recording instrument, and coders were not connected to prevent a discussion on the coding process. Inter-coder reliability was tested using inter-coder agreement on QDA Miner 5 using agreement criterion: presence or absence in case, using statistic Krippendorff’s alpha. The result shows that cumulative 91.7 percent on inter-coder reliability.

## Results and discussion

In explaining the risk communication studied in this study, the finding section will describe the data analysis results in Figure 4. This figure shows the data processing of @dr.tirta and @rachelvennya’s Instagram content highlights risk communication indicators, ranging from risk-magnitude information to thematic and episodic indicators, including the coverage. On QDA miner, the unit analysis could be merged, both documents and images.

If compared, in the risk-magnitude information indicator, qualitative risk information has the dominant portion compared to quantitative data, as shown in the figure, which is 23 counts with 2.9 percent codes of all cases. Comparing qualitative and quantitative data was very different from quantitative information in being absent from all tested samples. Only 5 cases were detected (7 percent),

**Figure 4: Risk communication coding analysis**

Risk Communication	Count	% Codes	Cases	% Cases	Nb Words	% Words	K-pixels	% Image
Risk magnitude information								
> Quantitative risk measures								
* Quantitative no contextual	5	0.60%	5	7.00%	27	0.40%	-	0%
* Quantitative with contextual								
> Qualitative risk measure	23	2.90%	20	28.20%	172	2.70%	381.8	67.30%
Self efficacy								
* Symptom information	4	0.50%	4	5.60%	67	1.00%	-	0%
* Personal protection information	90	11.30%	48	67.60%	383	6.00%	-	429.40%
Risk comparison information								
* Science-related risk	1	0.10%	1	1.40%	-	0%	7.9	1.40%
Sensational information								
* Worst-case scenarion	1	0.10%	1	1.40%	-	0%	6.2	1.10%
* Loaded words	27	3.40%	23	32.40%	321	5.00%	71	12.50%
Thematic episodic content								
* Thematic	20	2.50%	19	26.80%	1672	26.00%	96.4	17.00%
* Episodic	24	3.00%	23	32.40%	1265	19.70%	624.5	110.10%

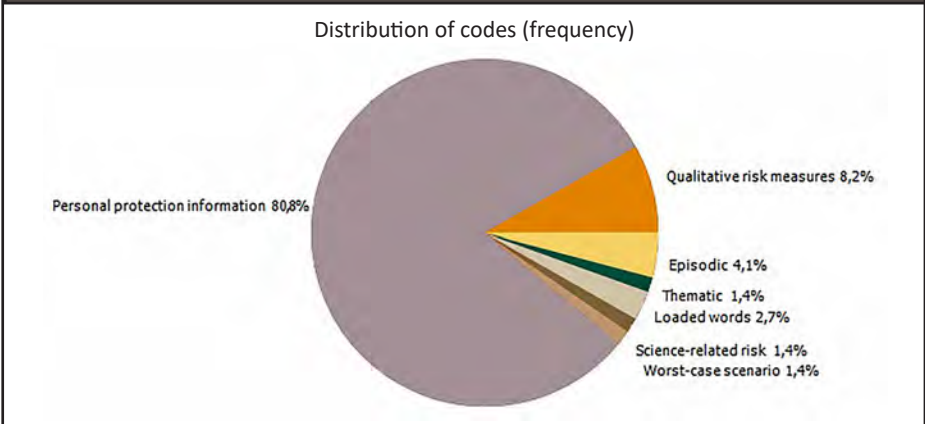
Source: Data processed researchers, 2020.

showing quantitative without contextual information. Annotation related to qualitative indicators was found explicitly in documents and images stating that there was content, saying that ‘the COVID-19 pandemic is a terrible threat’. Qualitative indicators appeared in the content stating the loss of medical personnel due to coronavirus. Quantitative indicators were found in the content and/or figures that related to the number of victims and the availability of preferred hospitals as the implication of the COVID-19 pandemic. One quantitative content seemed as follows: ‘Corona impact destroys local sales brands by up to 75 percent’.

@dr.tirta and @rachelvennya’s content categorised on self-efficacy showed the dominance of personal protection information content compared to symptom information (Figure 5). In total, 48 cases (67.6 percent) of the content appeared to describe the things that needed to be done to avoid the COVID-19 pandemic using health protocol. The form of personal protection information included text and hashtags, such as #quarantine, #stayathome, #dirumahsaja, washing hands, wearing masks, physical distancing, and social distancing. For symptom information, only 4 cases (5.6 percent) were detected, which, when viewed in the content, included fever and cough symptoms that led to suspicion of COVID-19.

Risk communication-related indicators include risk comparison aspects that show a risk of a pandemic associated with science-related compared with influenza,

**Figure 5: Risk communication variables pie chart**



Source: Data processed researchers, 2020.

for instance. If we are looking at the data analysis, it shows that there is only one case (1.4 percent) with 7.9 k-pixels (1.4 percent).

@dr.tirta and @rachelvennya’s Instagram content only detected one case related to the worst-case scenario on the sensational information indicator. The same number as the science-related risk indicators that have been previously described. Another aspect that often appears is ‘loaded-words’, which appeared in 23 cases (32.4 percent) or as the pie chart stated as 2.7 percent of all risk communication’s content. Loaded words were shown through content in hyperbole language. This finding is also in line with the characteristics of the micro-celebrity, specifically Dr Tirta who was labeled as a ‘*ngegas*’ (or fast-paced) person who delivered message along with his intense emotional tone.

As stated in the findings figure, the episodic and thematic aspects were not far apart in the last indicator. If seen from the case column, there are four points adrift, which is 19 (26.8 percent) for thematic and 23 (32.4 percent) for episodic. The findings can be understood in connection with the nature of Instagram content, which was not explicitly intended for long and in-depth articles such as newspapers. However, several thematic contents still appeared, considering that information conveyed includes fundamental aspects, such as a comprehensive discussion by having the points who, what, when, why, and how. One of which appeared when the content talked about the significance of COVID-19 donations in the form of personal protective equipment or disinfectant chamber, which began with a background story, who was donating, to whom would the donation will be given, when it was donated, how the donation process would be carried out, along with documentation of the process itself.

Another variable used to analyse this study’s object was an Instagram platform that breaks down into four main indicators. The figure shows the content type in

**Figure 6: Instagram platform coding analysis**

Instagram	Count	% Codes	Cases	% Cases
> Type of content				
* Text embedded in a single image	1	0.10%	1	1.40%
* Single image without caption	-	-	-	-
* Single image with caption	34	4.30%	34	47.90%
* More images without caption	-	-	-	-
* More images with caption	11	1.40%	11	15.50%
* Text embedded in more images	-	-	-	-
> Element present interactant				
* No interactant	9	1.10%	9	12.70%
* Male	133	16.60%	57	80.30%
* Female	36	4.50%	18	25.40%
* Spouse	1	0.10%	1	1.40%
* Children	2	0.30%	2	2.80%
* Parents/Family	1	0.10%	1	1.40%
* Friends	1	0.10%	1	1.40%
* Kids	-	-	-	-
* Teenager	-	-	-	-
* Workers	14	1.80%	12	16.90%
* Colleague	1	0.10%	1	1.40%
* Celebrity	40	5.00%	38	53.50%
* Important figure	23	2.90%	13	18.30%
* Health workers	38	4.80%	31	43.70%
* Ordinary citizen	5	0.60%	4	5.60%
> Characterisation of the content captions				
* User tagging	128	16.00%	36	50.70%
* Hashtag	21	2.60%	15	21.10%
* Emoji	15	1.90%	8	11.30%
* Link	1	0.10%	1	1.40%
* Location	25	3.10%	18	25.40%
> Source				
‡ Individual				
* Individual general	12	1.50%	10	14.10%
* Individual health related	2	0.30%	2	2.80%
‡ Organisational				
* Organisational general	40	5.00%	25	35.20%
* Organisational health related	11	1.40%	8	11.30%

Source: Data processed researchers, 2020.

the content, dominated by single photos with captions (34 cases or 47.9 percent). However, @dr.tirta and @rachelvennya also used the serial photo feature on Instagram with caption (11 cases or 15.5 percent), which has a complementary

nature of a series of documentation in answering detailed questions regarding the events depicted in the photos (Figure 6). The next indicator was the interactant element that appeared, generally in images type content. The figure showed male interactants' dominance, reaching 80.3 percent of cases, followed by celebrities, health workers, females, important figures, workers, non-interactant, ordinary citizens, children, colleagues, and parents.

All of the aspects of the indicator of the content caption is filled. In each detected element, the study's object appears in the study's content that the 'link' aspect only found 1 case (1.4 percent) occurs. The most prominent aspect was user tagging, 36 (50.7 percent), followed by location, hashtag, and emoji. User tagging is a feature that is the essence of a social media platform because user tagging builds a network with its 'community'. One of which is by including other account owners to participate in appearing in Instagram uploads to be further notified and given space to participate in content, either in the form of comments, likes, or upload reposts.

The last indicator was the source of content, which was divided into individual and organisational. In the results of data analysis, it was stated that the dominance was shown in sources originating from general organisations as many as 25 cases (35.2 percent) followed by individual general (14.1 percent), organisational health-related (11.3 percent), and at last is personal health-related (2.8 percent). If traced through coded content, the findings come from public organisations uploads that raise donations, such as Kitabisa.com, kurirkebaikan.id, Dompethuafa, BNPB, and some logistic organisations. Meanwhile, health organisations emerged from the Ministry of Health information, health workers, and several hospitals that interacted with donations. The next indicator, general individual sources, is shown to several colleagues, colleagues discussing business, MSMEs, events, and public officials. In comparison, individuals with a health background come from medical personnel such as doctors in charge of hospitals or doctors who volunteer.

As written on the BNPB website on 20 April 2020, the government spokesperson for handling COVID-19, Achmad Yuriyanto emphasised that the coronavirus could only be prevented with strong discipline and a spirit of cooperation carried out by all elements of the nation continuously. COVID-19 can only be prevented with strong discipline and a spirit of cooperation using masks, keeping our distance, and avoiding crowds. This statement also goes along with the information published by the Indonesian national newspaper *TEMPO*, written by Akbar on 21 March 2020, stating that influencers would be asked to campaign for a culture of clean and healthy living and to implement social distancing by staying at home during the emergency period of this outbreak. It also answers how far the influencers were mirroring the central government's message, then Dr Tirta and Rachel Vennya had already done it through their Instagram feed,



picture, hashtags, campaign, even with their donations and fundraising. However, each of them has difference in substance and frequency.

## Conclusion

A study on the participation of micro-celebrities appointed by BNPB as influencers about risk communication carried out for one month during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was conducted through its content analysis, shows several interesting things. Dissemination of information about COVID-19 that ran through influencers with different backgrounds offers very different perspectives, even though they are united under one body of BNPB. The further processed data analysed using link analysis with the highlight on co-occurrence showed that some knots converged. The intersection is on celebrity figures, including male, organisational general, single image caption, health workers, personal protection information, and more images caption, an important figure, female, and location. A bold line connects those four first aspects, and it means that its relationship is strong with each other.

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# 4. The politics of local government environmental evaluations

## Assessing bureaucracy in post-*Reformasi* Indonesia

**Abstract:** This article argues that bureaucracy plays politics in Indonesia, not only during the electoral periods, but also in public service. Using the case of environmental evaluation in local government, where natural resources comprise most of the local economy, this article discusses the politics of bureaucracy in undergoing daily governing processes. The environment and natural resource businesses are two opposing fields. Environmental evaluation becomes a contentious area and is usually highly political. This article identifies the bureaucracy's politicisation in environmental evaluation as occurring in at least in two forms—in measurement and in project implementation. In terms of measurement, bureaucracy tends to use minimum standards, while in project implementation, there are some occasions where bureaucracy tends to sub-contract the work to the third party, usually NGOs, especially in relations to sensitive issues, so that it is politically safer for them, once the result is not as pleasing as expected. This article uses some cases in Central Kalimantan, East Kalimantan, Central Java, and Bangka Belitung, and applied case study as research approach.

**Keywords:** bureaucracy, case studies, environment, environmental communication, environmental evaluations, Indonesia, local government, natural resources, public policy, Reformasi

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### Introduction

**T**HIS ARTICLE discusses the politics of bureaucracy in the case of environmental evaluations in four provinces in Indonesia—Central Kalimantan, East Kalimantan, Central Java, and Bangka Belitung. It is usually

seen that bureaucracy is commonly politicised by politician executives and political parties in order to pursue their political and economic interests through public policy. Bureaucracy is described merely as an instrument for achieving particular political purposes. In fact, bureaucracy is not static like a machine. Bureaucrats play politics and actively take part in shaping the face of public policy.

In Indonesia, bureaucracy's politicisation is inseparable from the country's regimentation. During the Indonesian New Order, patron was centered in Suharto and bureaucracy in the country was made to totally serve Suharto's interest. Following the fall of the Suharto authoritarian regime in 1998, patronage became dispersed into local government, and local executive heads became the center of power. The introduction of decentralisation policy and direct elections in Indonesia since *Reformasi* era<sup>1</sup> have brought consequences, not only on the strengthening of democracy, but also on the rise of the oligarchy (Diprose, McRae & Hadiz, 2019).

Decentralisation, together with direct elections since the *Reformasi* era, however, are seen not only to strengthen democracy. They also have excesses in the rise of a new oligarchy. Decentralisation together with direct elections have created new 'local kings', which refer to the powerful figures as local government heads, who became strongmen. Local leaders being chosen democratically through elections, but then misusing their power for personal interest has led the country into patrimonial democracy (Webber, 2006). As Webber (2006, p. 411) argues, patrimonial democracy refers to the weak rule of law and state's incapacity to govern in a country, despite the democratic election processes. Although elections are relatively democratic, governance runs slow, and is interest and elite-biased (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 1984; Haugaard, 2016). Bureaucracy is described merely as a tool for political elites to fulfill their personal interests. Bureaucracy, as such, is politicians' object of power.

This article, however, tries to reveal a different point of view. Using the case of environmental governance in regions rich with natural resources in Indonesia, this article reveals that bureaucrats also develop political strategies to either avoid career risks or pursue their own interests. Based on field research conducted in four natural resource rich regions in Indonesia between 2018 and 2019—East Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan, Central Java and Bangka Belitung—this article argues that in a situation where elite-driven politics feature most, the face of decision-making processes, bureaucracy also plays politics. Bureaucrats not only play politics during electoral periods by supporting particular candidates to secure their positions in government offices (Berenschot, 2018), but also in the daily making of public policy. The case of environmental evaluation in local governments sheds light clearly on how bureaucracy applies particular political approach in environmental governance.



Based on its research findings, this article argues that bureaucracy's politicisation in environmental evaluation occurs at least in two forms, namely in the measurement and in project implementation. In terms of measurement, bureaucracy tends to use minimum standards, while in project implementation, they tend to sub-contract the work to the third party, especially in relation to sensitive issues, so it is politically safer for them, once the result is not as pleasing as expected. In natural resource-rich regions, where exploitation is rampant, and political structure is paternalistic, there is almost no room for bureaucracy, especially in the Environmental Office, to consistently comply with environmental standards set up by the national government. If they do so, then it means they risk their professional career, because the local government heads are in charge of the bureaucracy's structure and promotion.

Decentralisation and direct election era, as such, have forced bureaucracy not only to comply with administrative regimes, where daily businesses are made to fit with legal regulations, procedures, and mechanisms. This also has forced bureaucracy to make a deal with political regime, so that they have to move strategically in order to make sure their tasks accomplished, and their careers are safe. The case of environmental evaluations in natural resources-rich regions have let us know clearly how the politics of the bureaucracy runs in daily governance and policy making.

This article seeks to enrich the existing studies on the politics of the bureaucracy that have already had a devastating impact (see Moe, 1989; Peters, 2001; Meier & O'Toole Jr., 2006; Esmark, 2020). This article also tries to deepen the political sense of environmental evaluation, which is rarely explained from the framework of bureaucratic politics studies (see for instance Fruh at. al., 1976, Lazzari and Levizzari, 2000; Cheung & Leung, 2008; Shonensein, DeCelles, & Dutton, 2014; Lovebrand, Mobjork, & Soder, 2020). This article aims to gain a deeper meaning of the politics of bureaucracy by portraying the practices of environmental evaluations in Indonesian local government.

### **Research methods**

This article draws on empirical experiences in four different provinces in Central Kalimantan, East Kalimantan, Bangka Belitung and Central Java. Except for Central Java, the provinces are known to rely economically on natural resources. Central Kalimantan is the centre of oil palm plantation. East Kalimantan is the centre of coal mining. Bangka Belitung is the source of tin. Yet, in Central Java, the regions where cement factories are established, as Pati and Rembang, cement industries also play crucial roles in local economy. The research applied case study as an approach to elaborate the issue and use in-dept interviews and direct visit to collect data. There are 20 informants in Central Kalimantan, 12 in East Kalimantan, 11 in Bangka Belitung, and 30 in Central Java. The informants

consist of business actors in companies and community, regency government, provincial government, NGO activists, journalists and university academics. Direct visits were conducted to palm oil plantation and mining areas, community cooperatives, government offices, media offices and NGO offices. In 2018, field work the location included Central Jawa Province, while in 2019 it included Bangka Belitung, East Kalimantan and Central Kalimantan.

### **Bureaucracy, politics, and environmental governance**

The relationships between bureaucracy and politics have always been an interesting topic to discuss. Peters (2001, p. 12) has highlighted that the politics of bureaucracy reveals the interconnectedness between bureaucracy, the public (citizen), and the (elected) governments in governing processes. In theory, what bureaucracy does is administrative, to operationalise decision making, administer it, and put everything into paper. The politics of bureaucracy tries to see bureaucracy as political actors more empirically in daily decision-making practices. As such, it does not see bureaucracy as merely as an object of power. Rather, it sees bureaucracy as another political actor that equally plays crucial roles in a room called policy making and governance, entailing some interest within (Pekonen, 1985), and exerting influence on policy outcomes (Whitford, 2002, p. 167-168).

Some studies have been done on the politics of bureaucracy, including in developing democracies. There are at least four main interrelating scopes that scholars discuss in the study of the politics of bureaucracy—the structure of bureaucracy (Whitford, 2002; Moe, 1989; Rockman, 2001; Warburton, 2018), the (bureaucratic) processes—the administration (Meier, 1997; Peters, 2001; Spicer, 2015; Jiang, 2018; Bartl, Papilloud & Terracher-Lipinski, 2019; Shidarta & van Huis, 2020), the modes of the politics of the bureaucracy (Wood & Waterman, 1991; Wood and Waterman, 1993; Waterman, Rouse, & Wright, 1998; Balla, 1998; Furlong, 1998; Meier and O’Toole Jr., 2006; Rudalevige, 2009; Tanwir & Fennel, 2010; Ahn & Bretschneider, 2011; Naseemullah & Chhibber, 2018; & Chan, 2020), and the policy and political implications (Meier, 1997; Bucchi, 2009; Rogers, 2019; Esmark, 2020).

Environmental governance is a field where the politics of bureaucracy can be clearly seen, yet the studies revealing this are still not many. Environment is a contentious issue (Marantz & Ulibarri, 2019), moreover if it is related to natural resource (Edwards & Heiduk, 2015, Delabre & Okereke, 2019). It is contentious because it is prone to tension or conflict, sometimes it involves repression, and displacement, and its governance tends to be interest-based and elite-biased (Van Der Heijden, 2002).

Yet, there are not many studies that see this contention as a depiction of bureaucratic politics. In the Indonesian context, the contention gets more complex with the introduction of decentralisation policy and direct elections. The two

newly introduced policies have brought excesses on the strengthening of local oligarchy, of which actors can be usually related with business backgrounds, including with natural resource businesses (Fukuoka, 2012; Tomsa, 2015; Aspinall & As'ad, 2016; Hidayaturrehman, Ngarawula, & Sadhana, 2020).

Decentralisation and direct election bring together administrative and political regime to local governments, which later force bureaucracy to adapt and comply with the daily governing processes (Berenschot, 2018). As elected politicians in top executive positions determine bureaucratic appointment and promotions (Berenschot, 2018, p. 139), patronage and partisanship in bureaucracy becomes unavoidable (Demir, 2017, p. 157). This sometimes puts pressure on the bureaucracy, even tensions within (Konkipudi & Jacob, 2017, p. 10). In natural resource-rich regions, the pressure sometimes is heightened, given the multiple actors involved within, including those that come from the capital of Jakarta, the related provinces and the regency itself, as well as the huge resource accesses being contested. Yet, bureaucracy is not only politicized, as Berenschot (2018) argues, they also take part in the game and play politics.

### **Environmental policy, politics and bureaucracy: The case studies**

Environmental evaluations in Indonesia are regulated through Law No. 32/2009, Government Decree No. 27/2012 and the Ministry of Environment's regulation No. 16/2012. The laws identified key terms which relate to environmental evaluations, including Strategic Environmental Studies (*Kajian Lingkungan Hidup Strategis*-KLHS), Environmental Impact Analysis (*Analisis Mengenai Dampak Lingkungan Hidup*-AMDAL), Environmental Quality Standard (*Baku Mutu Lingkungan Hidup*), Environmental Audit (*Audit Lingkungan*), and Environmental Permit (*Ijin Lingkungan*). The terms can be referred as mechanisms to regulate development policies prior and following the policies are implemented. The definition of these terms according to the laws are as the following.

Strategic Environmental Studies is a series of systematic, comprehensive and participatory analysis conducted to make sure that sustainable development principles have been made as the basis of and integrated with development activities in particular regions and/or policies, planning, and/or programmes. Environmental Impact Analysis is a study on the important forecasted impacts of businesses and/or activities planned to be conducted on environment, which is used as a basis for decision making on the business and/or activities' execution. Environmental Quality Standard refers to threshold or level of particular living things, substance, energy or component and/or polluter tolerable to bring impacts on environment. Environmental Audit refers to evaluation analysis on obedience of business and/or activities on laws and policies made by the governments. Environmental Permit refers to permit given to parties conducted business and/or other activities, which are included in those obliged with the fulfillment of

Environmental Impact Analysis or Environmental Management-Environmental Control, as an effort to protect and manage environment. Environmental Permit is a requirement for those willing to gain business and/or activity permit.

Strategic Environmental Studies, Environmental Impact Analysis, Environmental Permits are types of environmental evaluations prior to a business and/or activity to consider the impact on environment. Meanwhile, Environmental Audit is conducted during and following a business and/or activity operated and ended. The aims are clear. Environmental evaluation is meant to make sure that the business/activity is safe for the environment in the future. Environmental capacity is measured to see whether it is able to bear the forecasted impacts of the businesses and/or activities. Evaluation during and following the operation of a business/activity is meant to ensure that the level of environmental impacts of the businesses/activity still fit with the threshold set up by the government. As both environmental evaluations are crucial in development policy, are equally highly political (Ombudsmen of Republic of Indonesia, 2013), this article refers to both mechanisms in its analysis.

Although regulations have been clearly mentioned for environmental evaluations, implementation in practice remains a problem. As Ombudsmen of the Republic of Indonesia's investigation shows, all the problems originated from the involvement of consultants hired by companies to administer environmental permit (2013). The consultant merely functions as middlemen that links between companies and staffs in Environmental Office, including Local Environmental Governance Body (*Badan Pengelolaan Lingkungan Hidup Daerah-BPLHD*). In some cases, environmental permit administrators in BPLHD forced companies to use only BPLHD's partner consultant and turn over particular amount of money for getting the environmental recommendation released. Otherwise, permit administration would not be processed (Ombudsmen of Republic of Indonesia, 2013). The similar phenomena are found in the four cases being studied in this research.

### *Central Kalimantan*

Central Kalimantan is one of the biggest palm oil producers in the world with 16,000 km<sup>2</sup> land coverage and 183 companies in 2019 (as reported by *Tirto*, 2020). Common violations against environmental regulations found in Central Kalimantan, according to the findings of Environmental Investigation Agency and Telapak, Pusaka, and Save Our Borneo, the local NGOs in Central Kalimantan, is plantation without legal environmental permit. The case, which can be referred as an example, is Suryamas Cipta Persada (2012) (Environmental Investigation Agency, 2012), Genting Plantation (2018) (Pusaka, 2018) and Salonok Ladang Mas (2019) (Save Our Borneo), the leading palm oil plantation companies in the region. Another violation relates to environmental quality standard, resulted from palm oil companies' activities that polluted rivers in the province, as in the case of Sukajadi Sawit Mekar (Antara New, 2018) and

Mustika Sembuluh (2019) (*Borneo News*, 2019). However, as an environmental activist states in Central Kalimantan asserts, ‘Non-enforcement is a clear mode of politics. The government is aware of the violation, but Office of Environment does not impose its power to correct the wrong-doing’ (Environment activist, interview, July 2020).

In addition to non-enforcement, another form of politicking in environmental evaluation is the incompatibility between what is seen in the field and what is written in the report. An informant in a government office asserts,

It sometime happens. We can see from the naked eyes that rivers’ water quality is degrading. The watercolor is not clear, but as written in the report the water quality index increases. Meanwhile, we can see clearly that concession for plantation in the region expands, forest and peatland fires still occur, air quality clearly worsened. Yet, written index told us its quality increases. (Government office informant)

As such, despite the long existing desks for regulating environmental issues, Offices of Environment in local governments is almost not functional. Decentralisation and local direct elections become a crucial context to explain the dysfunctionality of environmental offices in resources-rich regions in Indonesia. An interview with a government officer in Central Kalimantan implies that things become more difficult because the (palm oil) companies’ owners get involved in practice politics, handle executive seats in local governments, and dominate the political decision making. Therefore, all the policies are oriented to support palm oil businesses. ‘If the local leaders come from palm oil company, in decision making processes, they then become the men of the companies’ (Government officer, interview, October 2019).

Finally, the politics of bureaucracy in environmental evaluations is manifested through the sub-contraction of an NGO to conduct the environmental assessment. An informant, an environmental NGO activist in Central Kalimantan, says,

I realise, [the] Office of Environment has some environmental laboratories. However, they still lack capacity. On the other hand, the bureaucracy is not rare to face pressure and intimidation, as experienced by the Office’s chief in an emission research project that tries to measure the impact of forest and peatland fires. Therefore, it is us, NGO, that support them to do their jobs. The government is weak, that they allow us, as a civil society organisation to get involved within. We [are] like as if we are doing a government’s job. (Interview, June 2019)

Sub-contracting NGO, therefore, can have positive implication on the one hand, but can also have the negative one on the other hand. By distributing assessment job to NGO, at least, the bureaucrats in Office of Environment still has

awareness of the importance of monitoring the business impacts on environment. On the other hand, this, however, implies risk aversion, in which the bureaucrats avoid any risks born by the assessment result, once it is not as pleased as expected.

### *East Kalimantan*

East Kalimantan is the largest producer of coal in Indonesia. Until 2018, coal production capacity in East Kalimantan covered almost 60 percent of national coal production (Extractive Industries Transparency, 2020, Ardianto et. al, 2019). Despite the ups and downs, in 2019, East Kalimantan produced 7.8 million metric tons. East Kalimantan, however, is known not only as among the richest provinces in Indonesia. It is also known as among the most environmentally destroyed regions. Mining in East Kalimantan has left highest number of pits in Indonesia—1735.

As in Central Kalimantan, non-enforcement is applied to deal with environmental complexities in East Kalimantan. As Toumbourou, Muhdar, Werner, and Bebbington (2020, p. 12) there is already Local Government Decree No. 8/2013, which opened up possibility for enacting law on reclamation and mining illegality. However, Mongabay investigation (2014) reveals law enforcement does not work. In addition, as #BersihkanIndonesia, a coalition of environmental NGOs, comprising Auriga, Green Peace, Indonesia Corruption Watch, JATAM (Jaringan Anti Tambang or Anti-mining Network), Walhi (Indonesian Environmental Forum) and YLBHI (Indonesian Legal Assistance Foundation) (2020), asserts, the policy scheme launched later through Law No. 4/2009 on Mineral and Coal Mining, Government Decree No. 78/2010 on Reclamation and Post-Mining, the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Regulation No. 26/2018 on Good Governance and Supervision of Mineral and Coal Mining Operations, and Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Regulation No. 7/2014 as amended by the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Regulation No. 26/2018, to tackle the mining pits and reclamation issues does not touch the roots of the problem, namely mining illegality. Through the relation, the government of Indonesia means to oblige companies to deposit some fund to guarantee post-mining responsibility. However, the #BersihkanIndonesia coalition asserts that the regulations are prone to corruption and potentially violated.

In addition to non-enforcement, confirming the Ombudsmen's finding, politics of bureaucracy in environmental evaluation in East Kalimantan is manifested through third-party sub-contracting, which relates to environmental permit. An ex-staff member in an environmental consultant company in East Kalimantan adds, 'The company drives the environmental consultant and assessment committee to approve their environmental permission proposal' (Environmental consultant, interview, July 2019). This statement confirms WALHI (Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia or Indonesian Environmental Forum), an environmental NGO in



Central Kalimantan, that Ministry (and Offices) of Environment and Forestry are not more than a national government's instrument to proceed their interest-based policy (Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia, 2020).

Another interesting practice of the politics of bureaucracy to see is the involvement of academicians in environmental project. An informant, who is an environmental activist in East Kalimantan asserts, 'Environmental impact assessment, conducted by an environmental consultant often involves academicians, some of them are professors, but as you may see, academicians are for legitimation' (Environmental activist, interview, July 2020). In addition, data deletion is the most common practice in environmental evaluation. An informant, who is an environmental activist in East Kalimantan, said, 'As an example, if the acid level in water is not acceptable by regulations in environmental impact assessment, then we do not present it in the document. Another way is to change the written number' (Environmental activist, interview, July 2019).

### *Central Java*

Central Java is among the most densely populated provinces in Indonesia, with the population density 1022 per km<sup>2</sup> (2014). Its economy depends on trading and farming, yet there is potential for mining in some regencies. Oil and mineral mining are among natural resource-related activities in the provinces, with cement getting more important in shaping some regencies' economies, including Rembang, Pati, Blora, Grobogan, and Kebumen. Protest against cement mining has been massive, yet, the movement is often politically defeated, although there is already a legal verdict ruling that the mining is illegal, as in the case of Kendeng Mountain, Rembang.

Rather different from Central and East Kalimantan, environmental politics in Central Java is manifested in local government's disobedience to the national government in its environmental policy. As Enggarani and Spaltani (2019) argue, the politics of disobedience is manifested through the disregard of the High Court's decision on the environmental permit status of PT. Semen Indonesia, which is counted illegal, by changing the name and coverage of the company from PT. Semen Gresik to PT. Semen Indonesia, and from 5.2 to 2.93 km<sup>2</sup> [through Decision Letter No. 660.1/30, 2016 (*Tirto*, 2016)]. In addition, as Hadi, Purnaweni and Prabawani (2019) identify, the disobedience is also manifested through the unwillingness of the Central Java Province and Pati regency government to incorporate the Strategic Environmental Assessment in their environmental permit policy on cement industries.

Interestingly, the local bureaucrats also impose its politics in environmental policy by not completing environmental data, including environmental support and environmental capacity data, which are useful to refer to permit the new mining industry or not. The institution does not have recorded annual notes on the quality of water, air and soil. All these issues confirm an informant, who has

a background as a civil society organisation activist, who says, ‘[The] Office of Environment or Office of Environment and Forestry is not helpful to preserve environment. They rather look [as if they are] the gate opener for extractive and plantation business expansions’ (Civil society activist, interview, August, 2020).

### *Bangka Belitung*

Bangka Belitung is used to be known as the biggest tin producer in the world. Currently, the production decreases, yet Bangka Belitung remains putting tin mining as the backbone of its economy, in addition to tourism. In 2018, Bangka Belitung produced 70,000 tons of tin ore (Ardianto, 2019), involving PT. Timah, Tbk, a state-owned company, as the main operator, which produced about 40 percent of tin, and the rest 60 percent is by private companies owned by foreign businessmen from China, India, Japan, and Taiwan (Ibrahim, Haryadi & Wahyudi, 2018; Stocklin-Weinberg, 2017; Ibrahim, Haryadi, & Wahyudi, 2018, p. 365) both offshore and onshore. Not only improving local wealth, tin mining is also seen to cause environmental destruction, in which offshore practice is seen to cause dangerous mining pits, while the onshore ones has led to seawater pollution.

Referring to Haryadi (2015, p. 52), bureaucratic politics in tin mining in Bangka Belitung is manifested through the inconsistent enforcement of environmental evaluations. In some occasions, the local government looks to strictly ban illegal mining operation, but in the other occasions they look to omit the practices. Similarly, in some mining areas, miners are arrested in the name of law enforcement, but in some other areas, miners are let to run their mining activities. On the one hand, inconsistent enforcement is political, because it implies the government’s motive to look as if they are committed for law enforcement. On the other hand, it leads to public distrust. Instead of resulting in positive impression from the public, inconsistency has led the perception that the government is unfair and selective (Ibrahim, Haryadi & Wahyudin, 2018, p. 375).

In addition to inconsistent enforcement, another face of the bureaucratic politics in Bangka Belitung is also manifested in non-enforcement of environmental laws, especially in onshore-mining. *Mongabay’s* reportage in 2020 reveals, tin mining has been refused by fishermen in Bangka Belitung, for polluting rivers and sea water (*Mongabay*, 2020). However, the local government never shows its seriousness to ban the onshore-mining practices, or to make sure that the pollution threshold is in acceptable level.

If traced further, all the problems of mining in Bangka Belitung rooted in the Environmental Impact Assessment that is not enacted strongly (Erwana, Dewi & Rahardyan, 2015). An informant in the region, who is an environmental activist said, ‘The environmental impact assessment is a copy paste from another region’ (Environmental activist, interview, September 2019). In addition, Environmental Impact Assessment documents issued by the Local Office of Environment only cover two suction vessels in South Bangka sea. Meanwhile, in that area, there

are dozens suction vessels operated to exploit tin. This implies that the assessment is placed merely a formal requirement, rather than as a way to make sure that despite the mining business, there is a guarantee that environmental damage can be managed and reduced.

### **Not merely being politicised, bureaucracy also play politics**

Empirical experiences from Central Kalimantan, East Kalimantan, Central Java and Bangka Belitung have shown us that bureaucracy and politics is inseparable. The inseparability is not only caused by the intense interference of politicians and political parties in public policy, which need bureaucracy to set up the planning, budgeting, and implementation design. It also is caused by involvement of bureaucracy in the political grounds in the policy making area. The political system that shifted from authoritarian regime to a more decentralised one in Indonesia has led some changes in the bureaucratic politics forms. If in the past bureaucracy was centered to only serve the Suharto's regime in central government, in post-*reformasi* era, bureaucracy was shifted to serve the new local king born by direct local elections since 2005. Yet, due to the vast authority of local government heads in managing local bureaucracy, as in terms of mutation and career promotion, bureaucracy started to play politics, not only to serve the executive politicians, to safe their careers, as well as to gain material benefits through corruption (Busse & Gröning, 2013, p. 18).

Empirical findings in the four case studies confirm Peters (2001), Berenschot (2018), Demir (2017), and Konkipudi and Jacob's argument (2017) that bureaucracy in the environmental sector is unable to avoid politicisation—an objectification of bureaucracy for supporting elite politicians' interests. Yet, from the findings we can also see that bureaucracy is not merely being politicised. They also play politics.

The politics of bureaucracy in environmental evaluations, both prior and following the natural resource-related business execution, based on research findings collected from fieldworks in the four provinces, can be seen at least in three forms. The first is in terms of non-enforcement or inconsistent enforcement of environmental laws. The second is in terms of environmental data management. The third is in the sub-contraction of environmental project implementation.

Non-enforcement is a common practice of politicking, which can be explained as a risk aversion mechanism of local bureaucracy on disciplining environmental impact threshold by the companies. As findings in Central Kalimantan, environmental damage is hard to legally follow up because the local strongmen dominate the executive positions in the region, either in provincial or regency governments. Similarly, in East Kalimantan, coal mining is owned by a national politician, who has influence in national decision making. For local environmental bureaucrats, enacting environmental assessment will mean putting high risks on their bureaucratic

career in government office. Meanwhile, in Central Java and Bangka Belitung, the adherence of state-owned companies that operate the mining industries, make it difficult to regulate, because of the intimacy of the companies with executive politicians, as well as national political parties (Mietzner, 2007, p. 250).

Environmental data is a sensitive thing. It shows us clearly whether the institution functions well or not, and, further to what extent the institution enjoys autonomy in doing their assigned tasks. Data is key to understand the politics of bureaucracy, as in many occasions, it can legitimise or delegitimise policies that has implication to wider public, like plantation permission, plantation impacts, mining legal status, and mining impacts.

Meanwhile, environmental project sub-contraction, can have double implications. The first one is on the participation improvement of environmental policy implementation, in which non-government actors are allowed to participate in government-led environmental studies. However, on the other hand, this implies another risk aversion strategy. Environmental audit, for instance, requires high expertise on environmental studies. Environmental NGO usually has experts, which have ability to conduct such research. By involving experts from NGO, the local government can reduce the possibility of flaws in its analysis.

The empirical practices of the politics of bureaucracy in environmental evaluations as highlighted above enrich the existing studies that bureaucracy is a political entity (Peters, 2001). Bureaucracy does not only become the object of politisation (Berenschot, 2018; Demir, 2017) but also takes part in the political game, which in this case is done by applying the politics of non-enforcement, data management and project sub-contracting.

## **Conclusion**

From the above discussion, bureaucracy is not merely a machine for politicians to help them achieve their interests through policy making. Bureaucracy also plays politics, because bureaucrats also have their own interest in public policy. The apparent interest of bureaucracy is related to career safety, as in terms of mutation and promotion. Another interest related to rent seeking, namely, to seek for material benefits from the policy the bureaucrats administer. Non-enforcement of environmental laws is the common mode of the politics of bureaucracy in environmental governance, followed with environmental data management that include data deletion and deliberate absence. Finally, environmental project sub-contraction is the last mode of bureaucratic politics, conducted though the devotion of environmental assessment to the third party, to avoid further risks, once assessment is conducted by the Office of Environment itself. The findings have shown bureaucracy is not merely an administrative body in the governmental institution. It needs to be seen as an active political actor, as well, in policy making.

## Note

1. *Reformasi* refers to the changes in Indonesian politics that brought Indonesia out of authoritarian regime under Suharto's administration into a new era, identified with a more decentralised governance, called *Reformasi* era, since 1998.

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# 5. A common conception of justice underlies Pacific churches' message on climate change

**Abstract:** This article presents an overview of the role mainstream churches can play in mitigating the climate change crisis in the Pacific and their role in facilitating climate induced migration. It builds on earlier work by the author (Cass, 2018; 2020) with a focus on Fiji, Tonga and Papua New Guinea. Both Catholic and Protestant churches share a concern for the future of the planet based on the principles of economic, social and climate justice, which complement moral and ecumenical imperatives. The article examines what message the churches convey through the media and the theology that underlines them.

**Keywords:** Bougainville, churches, climate change, Fiji, migration, Pacific, Papua New Guinea, Pope Francis, Tonga

PHILIP CASS

*Editor, Pacific Journalism Review*

We are no longer in need of scientific wisdom to prove beyond doubt, to each and every one of us, that the Climate Change is real. It is true and real and above all it is already destroying our homes.—*Anglican Bishop of Vanua Levu and Taveuni, Apimeleki Qiliho*

Creation is a gift, but at the same time it is a responsibility that God has given us to take care of.—*Catholic Archbishop of Suva, Peter Loy Chong*

## Introduction

THE CATHOLIC Archbishop of Suva, Peter Loy Chong, was once asked about climate change by a journalist: ‘Some people still find it difficult to understand what is the role of the Church in this sphere. Is it not rather an economic and political problem?’

To which he replied: ‘It is not simply a matter of something external, of economy or politics. It is a question of respect for God and his creation and of alleviating the pain of those who suffer’ (Lozano, 2018).

Across the Pacific Christianity remains the dominant religion and is embedded into every domain. Churches are regarded as more trustworthy and reliable than the government in many countries and command a respect not always common in some parts of the West. Christianity in the Pacific has been described as ‘the one set of ideas that is both widely shared and highly valued by the majority of citizens of each state’. (Mitchell & Grills, 2017) This article focuses on the views and actions of the three mainstream churches in the Pacific, which is to say the Catholics, Anglicans and Methodists (and the larger comity of the World Council of Churches), all of which, whatever their historical and theological differences, share a strong social justice perspective.

As Reverend James Bhagwan, the secretary of communication for the Methodist Church in Fiji, put it: ‘The Methodist Church is the largest and oldest faith community in Fiji. When the Church speaks, the people do pay attention’. Bhagwan said that churches had another advantage: They spoke in a way the people understood. ‘Non-governmental organisations and government have their own language. The people tend to speak in more spiritual language’ (Wheeling, 2017).

An argument might be raised about whether the stance on mainstream churches on climate change emerges from theology or whether the theology is shaped by social, economic and political interests, but that is, perhaps, a matter for a separate article. What seems certain is that the pronouncements and actions of the churches on climate change have political implications. However, some scholars like Luetz and Nunn (2020) have argued that the influence of spirituality on climate change decisions has been too often ignored and needs to be acknowledged.

White (2019) has argued that the role of Christianity in climate change in the Pacific has been greatly under-examined by academics, while he himself reports with some perception on the role of Christian symbolism and traditional Fijian practices in helping to make the necessary relocation of a village less traumatic. He also makes the important distinction between the mainstream churches in the Pacific and the more recently arrived fundamentalist American sects, which often proselytise and act from an End Times perspective (White, 2019).

The mainstream churches have taken well-publicised social justice-based stands on climate change and migration, such as Pope Francis’s ‘Don’t be afraid!’ campaign (Associated Press, 2017) and the World Council of Churches’ Otin Tai declaration (WCC, 2004; Pope, 2018) which declares:

We . . . affirm our commitment to care for the earth as our response to God’s love for creation;  
 Declare as forcefully as we can the urgency of the threat of human-induced climate change to the lives, livelihoods, societies, cultures and eco-systems of the Pacific Islands;

Dedicate ourselves to engaging our churches in education and action on climate change;

Commit ourselves to ecumenical collaboration among our churches and with other religious and secular bodies in the Pacific.

It is clear that there can be no such thing as ‘Catholic climate change’ or ‘Anglican climate change’ or ‘Methodist climate change’. This would be an absurdity. Climate change is, by default, an ecumenical issue.

It has to be kept in mind that while concepts like social justice are just as understandable and acceptable in a secular as much as a religious context, the churches are not just super-NGOs with a vaguely spiritual flavour; their commitment to meeting the challenge of climate change stems from a profoundly religious foundation and a common conception of justice (Phan, 2014). Kempf (2009) argues that:

. . . . there can perhaps be heard, in these appeals by the ‘weak’ to the humanity and decency of ‘the great’, a distant echo of the Christian injunction to help the poor and downtrodden of the earth. . . the Christian churches in the Pacific are . . . playing an important role in highlighting how climate change will impact negatively on those living in the respective island states. At the heart of the lobby work done by the Christian churches is the ever-more-urgent issue of displacement and resettlement, especially in the case of those Pacific island states that will be most strongly exposed to climate change.

Pope Francis’s encyclical, *Laudato Si*, has been shared across ecumenical lines and this has been cited as inspiring political co-operation leading up to pivotal international agreements during the 2015 climate change summit in Paris and ‘a coup for global discourse and action’ (Pope Francis, 2015; Burke, 2018; Bausch, 2016).

According to Pabst (2016), Pope Francis argues in *Laudato Si* for

the importance of natural law and a divinely created cosmic order that are not reducible to human will, but instead require careful judgement and prudence. We need to be wary of claims about measureless acquisition and endless growth in a finite world in which humankind transgresses all manner of physical and moral boundaries at its own peril.

Pabst (2016) goes on to cite former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams’ reading of *Laudato Si*, which argues that the materialism that characterises the dominant modern ideologies is in fact deeply anti-material and destructive of nature:

The plain thereness of the physical world we inhabit tells us from our first emergence into consciousness that our will is not the foundation

of everything—and so its proper working is essentially about creative adjustment to an agenda set not by our fantasy, but by the qualities and complexities of what we encounter. The material world tells us that to be human is to be in dialogue with what is other: what is physically other, what is humanly other in the solid three-dimensionality of other persons, ultimately what is divinely other.

Elsewhere in the Pacific, churches have incorporated existing beliefs into the environmental message. In New Zealand Māori spirituality has been woven into the wider Christian discourse, not just in the sense of *kaitianga* (guardianship), but in *manaakitanga* (welcoming).

In September 2020 Cardinal Soane Mafi of Tonga told Catholics gathered for a mass to mark the start of a week dedicated to climate change that Mother Nature was crying because of the harm being done to creation.

‘Her tears kept on dropping like a mother,’ Cardinal Mafi said. (Fangongo, 2020)

### **The current situation**

That the situation in the Pacific is grave does not need to be repeated. In March 2018, New Zealand’s Royal Society Te Apārangi warned that even if all the country commitments from the 2015 Paris Agreement were met, the latest data showed that by the end of the 21st century the global climate was likely to be operating at 3°C above pre-industrial levels. This is substantially higher than the Paris target of less than 2°C (Royal Society, 2018).

People who live on the coast in Oceania are on the front line of climate change induced sea level rise. Average sea level rises globally have risen about 20 centimetres since 1990 and expected to rise by up to another 30 centimetres by 2050. King tides and storm surges superimposed on rising seas are therefore happening more frequently and more powerfully. People living on small islands or low lying land near the coast are like ‘an early warning system’ to others of the threat of long-term sea level rise, the canary in the coal mine. (Caritas, 2018)

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted just how vulnerable the small islands states of the Pacific are. There has been real concern that the COVID-19 pandemic has been so overwhelming that climate change has been pushed into the background. Some see parallels with the slow action on climate change to the slow and chaotic handling of the pandemic in some countries. Chief Executive Officer of Samoa’s Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Ulu Bismarck Crawley, said the island state’s vulnerability was exacerbated when the issue was not dealt with immediately and resources were limited (Pacific Climate Change Portal, 2020).



The Methodist church in New Zealand has called for COVID-19 recovery projects to be linked to global warming (Methodist Church in New Zealand, 2020).

Climate change is already affecting many countries. In Fiji, parts of the country's main island will disappear because of rising sea levels. People living in 45 coastal villages are in line to be relocated because of rising sea level. Four communities have already been moved and others have asked for government help in relocating. Villages already moved include one village in the province of Bua, which has been relocated to Yadua and there were plans to move the village of Tavea (O Flaherty & Pontifex, 2018; Cooke, 2020).

Speaking in August 2018, Catholic Archbishop Chong warned that it was now 'a matter of survival' to help people affected by climate change. In an interview with Aid to the Church in Need, he said: 'We can see it with our own eyes—the ocean levels are increasing each year, Viti Levu is disappearing' (Lozano, 2018).

Before, on our island, everyone tried to build their homes near the water. It was seen as a sign of development. The people living close to the sea considered themselves more civilized than the people from the mountains. My grandfather himself built his house just 50 meters away from the sea. The air was good, and it was easy to fish. But now, many houses have to be rebuilt closer to the hills, because the sea is approaching dangerously. (Lozano, 2018)

The Archbishop told the International Catholic Migration Commission that relocating coastal villages involved cultural disruption. If people had a choice they would not move because it meant leaving ancestral burial grounds and culture (International Catholic Migration Commission, 2020).

Elsewhere in the Pacific, people are already on the move from the Carteret Islands to Bougainville in Papua New Guinea. In the Carterets, the land has become too salty for agriculture due to sea rise, making it difficult for people to support themselves. In 2006, Islanders formed a group called Tulele Peisa, which means 'sailing the waves on our own', to formulate plans to move more than half the population to Bougainville by 2020. Caritas, the Catholic church's international aid and development body, has helped about 20 families, consisting of 85 people, to move to a resettlement area at Tinputz on Bougainville, but even there they are facing seashore erosion. This has led to some of them moving even further inland. Tulele Peisa's Ursula Rakova has been critical of what she says is a lack of support from the autonomous Bougainville government (Caritas, 2018; Rakova, 2014; Pope, 2018; RNZ, 2020)

In Tonga, the population has also suffered from the effect of severe weather. In 2018, Cyclone Gita, a category five storm, devastated the kingdom after causing damage in Fiji and Samoa. Caritas was involved in building new homes and providing shelter. Caritas and the Tonga National Youth Congress also distributed

water bottles to 124 households. In Catholic parishes 20 litre water bottles were distributed and water tanks installed (Cass, 2018b).

Gita hit Tonga with winds of up to 200kph. It has been estimated about 5700 people sought shelter in evacuation centres. According to UNICEF, about 80,000 people in Tonga, including 32,000 children, were at risk from Cyclone Gita. Damage was widespread with severe crop damage and many houses destroyed. As part of the recovery process 515 food packs were distributed with the help of the Seventh Day Adventist church to elderly and vulnerable people (Latu 2018; Cass, 2018a). Tonga has continued to suffer from cyclones of increased severity, with Cyclone Harold causing devastation in early 2020 (Al Jazeera, 2020).

### **Beyond morality**

One of the churches' more significant roles is to promote the idea that the present crisis is something that lies beyond morality or ethical behaviour. As Professor Charles Reid of the University of St. Thomas argues: 'While climate change is certainly a moral issue, it is something much larger and more significant than that. It is a threat to the common good'. The common good, he argues, is an Aristotelian concept which says that it is the community's duty to create and maintain the conditions which ensure the community's members lead a good life by addressing those issues which affect the lives of everybody (Reid, 2016). This, Reid argued, was at the basis of Pope Francis's *Laudato Si*, an appeal to the common good of all mankind.

Pope Francis is the latest of a line of pontiffs to call on the world to address a range of crises, a process that has been accompanied by the development of the church's teachings on social justice which guide its work and thinking in many areas (Phan, 2014).

The concept of the common good is one of the key components of social justice teaching. Chief of these in relation to climate change are subsidiarity, which requires that those most affected by change should be able to contribute to decision making; stewardship, people's role as guardians of the earth; solidarity, 'recognising others as our brothers and sisters and actively working for their good' and the preferential option for the poor and the most vulnerable (Caritas, n.d.).

The idea of the common good and the concept of justice are echoed in other churches and in statements in support of the right of those affected by climate change. At a meeting of the World Council of Churches Working Group on Care for Creation and Climate Justice in Jamaica, Rathgeber (2011) argued:

The concept of fairness contends that there is a fundamental right to a dignified existence and a right to have access to the resources that sustain this existence. The concept of 'justice' is considered . . . as a critical principle, as climate change is a problem for everyone while the responsibilities are distributed unevenly. 'Justice' in this context means that no one has

more right to use a common global asset as e.g. climate than anyone else. 'Justice' also means that people and countries who are affected by poverty and marginalisation should not only be treated differently with respect to their contribution to climate protection, but should also be given additional development support.

In New Zealand, Māori spirituality and Pacific culture has had a strong influence on the expression of several churches. In May 2016, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of New Zealand released a statement on the Day of Prayer for Refugees and Migrants: 'How well are we as a country offering *manaakitanga*—welcome and hospitality—to those recently arriving to our shores?' (New Zealand Catholic Bishops' Conference, 2016)

The Methodist Church of Aotearoa New Zealand's statement on climate change says: 'We affirm a deep regard for the diversity of all forms of life, and refresh our guardianship responsibilities for *Papatuanuku* earth as our common home'. It continues:

As a church in Aotearoa we are in solidarity with the Pacific region and in particular with Churches of the region. Our contributions to climate justice are based on Aotearoa as a Pacific nation.

Our church's faith based values are unique. Our approach to climate justice then comes from love as well as just moral obligation.

In this land we will ensure that Māori cultural values are embedded into climate justice decisions and activities that include concepts of *kaitiakitanga* guardianship and *whakapapa* kinship relations.

Samoaan, Tongan, Fijian, and Rotuman values also enhance our mission and commitment to climate justice, through concepts such as *faaalooalo* respect and *sootaga* quality of relational life. (Methodist Church, 2018)

In line with broader developments among the different Christian churches, a strong sense of ecumenism is evident in many statements on climate change. Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople issued a statement urging people to be respectful and responsible toward creation. (Glatz, 2017) The Archbishop of Constantinople, H.A.H. Bartholomew, has referred to the 'irreparable distortion' of the relationship between humanity and the environment and condemned the 'illogical and selfish use of creation by a few' (Bartholomew, 2014 ix-x).

The Methodist church in Aotearoa New Zealand has stated:

Climate Change and inequality represent the principal challenges facing humanity in our day...We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one social and environmental crisis....to hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. (Methodist Church, 2018)

As a natural corollary of their part in promoting justice and a moral, ethical and spiritual approach to the danger of climate change and migration, church leaders have also been engaged in publicly proclaiming the position of the churches on these matters.

The churches have a long history of involvement with the media in the Pacific. Indeed in almost every Pacific country it was Christian missions who first put local languages into written form and printed the Bible in indigenous tongues before, very soon afterwards, producing those countries' first newspapers.

The churches remain involved in a range of media, from newspapers to radio stations and through international co-operation and co-ordination through bodies like the World Association for Christian Communication. In some cases they have dealt with climate change directly through church-owned publications such as Papua New Guinea's Tok Pisin weekly *Wantok* (Cass, 2020) or they may use secular media to promote their views. They have also been identified by secular organisations and political bodies as being organs with an enormous role to play in the climate change crisis, especially in helping to preserve indigenous cultures and traditions (Cass, 2018).

While Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew may capture the attention of a global audience, regional leaders have also spoken firmly through the media and, in an example of solidarity, given witness to the realities of climate change and its dangers. In nations where Christian leaders, from village pastors to bishops, are powerful community leaders, they exercise influence through the media as well as from the pulpit.

After his elevation as the first Cardinal of Tonga, Reid declared that Cardinal Soane Patita Mafi had 'clearly been given a responsibility to the world: to stand at the front line of looming climate catastrophe and carry the message of a world at risk to all of humanity' (Reid, 2016).

In an interview with the Jesuit magazine *America*, Mafi spoke about the 'permanent vulnerability' low lying Pacific islands such as Tonga faced from global warming (McDermott, 2015). Elsewhere he has spoken about the key role the churches play in Tongan society and local communities.

Our local Caritas Tonga in partnership with Caritas International has been initiating and encouraging community projects in villages and parishes that are part of these efforts against climate change. Such initiatives, for example, include planting trees along shorelines as measures of soil protection and windscreens protecting buildings'. (Grantham, 2018)

Like Fiji, the kingdom is predominantly Wesleyan, with smaller Catholic and Anglican congregations. The Mormons have a growing influence, even in the royal family. While he was in Rome in 2015 at the time of Cardinal Mafi's

elevation, King Tupou VI spoke with Pope Francis about climate change, the first time, according to some sources, that the Pope had explicitly addressed the climate concerns of small island states.

The Cardinal has described Pacific island nations as the victims of climate change. He said Island nations had to work together to present a strong collective voice telling first world countries to stop carbon gas emissions. Cardinal Mafi said nobody could deal with the crisis of global warming alone:

The crisis of climate change is a crisis of our common home—mother earth—a crisis of humanity. We church leaders must first really understand and be convinced of climate change and its urgent consequences that affect our people. This is a task for all. (Mafi, 2019)

Churches had to engage with stakeholders and other players who could contribute to solutions to reducing risks, saving lives, rebuilding communities and safeguarding the full dignity of the human person. Cardinal Mafi said church leaders should take a stand and work closely together in building a spirit of subsidiarity and stewardship with their people.

Church leaders like me have an important role to play in such critical situations. It is an integral part of our vocation to promote the unity of the human family and to protect human dignity, particularly in moments where the weak and most vulnerable, (the ‘poor’), are at great risk. Church leaders need to be always aware of their divine mandate that involves this specific ‘preferential option for the poor’. Church leaders should be working together under this divine imperative so they can effectively give a global voice to the voiceless. They are called to accompany people in their misery experiences from climate change where in many cases in some Pacific island nations it [has] led to forced displacement and migration. (Mafi, 2019)

There are two ecumenical bodies in Tonga; the Tonga National Council of Churches where the three mainline churches—Wesleyan, Anglican and Catholic come together. The other body is the Tonga National Forum of Church Leaders, which consists of all churches in Tonga, including the Mormons.

Cardinal Mafi said government agencies, NGOs and other civil societies used the two fora to meet with Church leaders. They knew its potential for working out strategies that could effectively respond to humanitarian crises such as climate change and forced displacement and migration.

Cardinal Mafi’s concerns have been echoed by the Anglican Archbishop of Polynesia, Dr Winston Halapua, who said the areas that he walked and fished as a boy with his father on the island of Pangaimotu in Tonga had disappeared.

The rising sea level speaks loudly for action. For some of us from Polynesia the truth is as plain as writing on the wall. Our land and our livelihood are drowning and others refuse to see it. How can we tell our grandchildren the home they were to inherit has been destroyed? There is no justice in that so we are fighting rather than drowning'. (Diocesan News, 2015)

In September 2006, the New Zealand Catholic Bishops' Conference issued a statement on environmental issues, which said, in part:

For the peoples of the Pacific, climate change is already among the most urgent threats facing them. Rising temperatures and sea levels, and the greater intensity of storms and natural disasters, are already affecting the food and water supply for people on low-lying islands in different parts of the Pacific. Long before these [Pacific] islands disappear into the sea, life on many Pacific Islands will become untenable. It is predicted that in the Pacific alone, there may be a million environmental refugees before the end of this century. (New Zealand Catholic Bishops' Conference, 2006)

In April 2018, the Bishop of Auckland, Bishop Patrick Dunn, who is president of the New Zealand Catholic Bishops' Conference, signed a call by faith leaders from across the Commonwealth calling for governments to take urgent action on climate change and to make every effort to keep the increase in global temperatures below 1.5 degrees. The letter to Commonwealth leaders said:

Not even the remotest corner of the Commonwealth remains unaffected or unthreatened by the impacts of climate change. Commonwealth citizens, especially the poorest, struggle to thrive amidst our changing climate.... In the Pacific, rising sea levels threaten the existence of whole countries. (Bowling, 2018)

One of the most vocal clerical voices on climate change in the Pacific has been Archbishop Peter Loy Chong of Suva. He has made it clear that he sees the issue not just in secular terms, but as a matter of the most profound faith. In January 2019, Archbishop Chong said churches in the Pacific had to commit themselves fully to the environment and combating climate change. He told Radio New Zealand:

For us in the small islands, this is a big issue . . . The churches really need to take this on. That the voice of the churches, not only the churches but the grassroots communities, that means the island people. We need to empower these voices so that these voices become recognised in the international community. (Radio New Zealand, 2019)



Speaking after the third anniversary of *Laudato Si*, which calls for an ‘ecological conversion,’ Archbishop Chong said: ‘Ecological conversion doesn’t happen in isolation. The conversion also has to be something internal in the heart of each individual. Creation is a gift, but at the same time it is a responsibility that God has given us to take care of’ (O Flaherty & Pontifex, 2018).

As a senior church leader with profound pastoral responsibilities, the crisis is also a personal one for the Archbishop:

How am I to console, to accompany the suffering that I see in my people? Their cries, their pain makes me think of the psalms of the Old Testament and of how they call on God to hear the cry of his people. For example in Psalm 12: 13, where we pray, ‘How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?’ Our faith teaches us to transform our suffering and anguish into prayer, into pleas that God may hear the cry of my people. (Lozano, 2018)

Whether participating in concrete action, or in promoting issues surrounding climate change-induced migration to their congregations, the churches in the Pacific draw on deep religious traditions for guidance and to formulate responses. Advocating for action to stop global warming, helping climate change migrants move to new homes or helping communities be more resilient are, for the churches, not just political or economic actions, but profound questions of justice and deeply held expressions of faith.

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# 6. Injustice versus insecurity

## Climate-induced displacement in the Fijian and New Zealand public discourses

**Abstract:** Debate surrounding climate-induced displacement has attracted considerable critical attention in recent years. This debate has engendered diverse perspectives including the North-South divide, solidarity with affected people and climate justice. In this study, the authors consider how various policy advocates have attempted to influence public discourses about climate displacement in Oceania. Using Ulrich Beck's concept of risk, we analyse discourse in policy documents and in Fijian and New Zealand newspaper articles. Our investigation found that climate action related to addressing the adaptation and insecurity of the affected people were prominent in the Fijian discourse. However, in the New Zealand discourse, action addressing climate displacement was less prevalent, but the displacement as a threat to the country's national security was prominent. In this article, the authors analyse potential reasons underpinning these patterns of discourses.

**Keywords:** climate action, climate displacement, climate inaction, climate justice, critical discourse analysis, Fiji, New Zealand, public discourse, risk communication

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### Introduction

RECENT RULINGS in Kiribati resident Ioane Teitiota's climate migration case found in favour of the basic human right to life and protection from the threat of climate change. Despite the fact that New Zealand rejected Teitiota's application for refugee status in 2015, the country's Court of Appeal recognised the fundamental right of affected people to migrate to another country. A more recent ruling by the United Nations Human Rights Commission on this subject stated that 'countries may not deport individuals who face climate change-induced conditions that violate the[ir] right to life' (UNHRC, 2020). Teitiota's New Zealand claim—and his appeal to the UNHRC—drew public attention to the plight of Pacific nations already affected by climate-induced displacement (Kimura, 2018). Some critics warned that climate displacement

is not just a one-off phenomenon. Rather, it is an ‘unfolding crisis’ complicated by scarce land availability, river erosion, storm surge and the intrusion of salt water into fresh water (Castles, 2003; McAdam, 2015). Regions with lengthy coastlines have already been exposed to climate-induced risks including sea level rise, ocean acidification, drought and floods. Delegates attending the UN Conference of Parties (COPs) and officials of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) have brought the issue of climate displacement to the forefront of climate policy debate. The UN Conference of Parties in Madrid in December, 2019 (COP25) emphasised the link between oceans and climate change (Pierre-Nathoniél, 2019).

In the context of the potentially devastating consequences of climate change and emerging international policy initiatives, we explore how policy advocates, including politicians, journalists, experts, activists and NGO officials have attempted to influence public discourse about climate displacement. Recognising that the mainstream media act as a primary conduit for the processes of policy formulation (Voltmer & Koch-Baumgarten, 2010), we have examined selected Fijian and New Zealand newspaper articles and policy documents to see how various advocates engaged in public debates surrounding climate displacement. These countries, which represent the Global South and North, have played critical roles in tackling displacement. In 2018, both countries endorsed the Global Compact for Migration, an initiative that facilitated the formulation of an international migration policy with links to climate change. Due to its vulnerability to a range of rapidly-approaching climate factors, such as salinity, tropical cyclones and the erosion of shorelines (Hermann & Kempf, 2017; World Bank, 2013), Fiji is at the forefront of climate displacement discussion. The small island nation is remarkable for some recently-introduced policy initiatives, such as the Suva Expert Dialogue on Loss and Damage in COP23. New Zealand is also engaged in climate displacement debate, particularly subsequent to its rejection of Ioane Teitiota’s refugee claim.

### **Climate-induced Displacement: Global North and South**

Climate-induced displacement has engendered divergent perspectives including the North-South divide, solidarity with the affected people and climate justice (Bettini, 2013). Viewed from this perspective, climate displacement reflects policy debate in migrant destination countries, such as Australia and New Zealand and reaction to the looming challenges to survival from originating countries, for example, Fiji and Kiribati.

Few studies have explicitly focused on media narratives related to climate change and the policy implications of these narratives. According to these studies, Australia and New Zealand view the effects of climate change through the prism of South Pacific islands (e.g., Tuvalu, Kiribati). Accordingly, they have



listed security threats and adaptation challenges as priority areas in their policy discussions (Farbotko, 2018). Within this scenario, the South has become a moral concern for the North. The media frequently label low lying Pacific islands such as Funafuti in Tuvalu and the Carteret Islands in Papua New Guinea as ‘disappearing islands.’ This narrative, which describes inhabitants of these islands as potential ‘climate refugees’, is heavily contested in the South (Farbotko, 2018).

Social science and media studies scholars propose two strands of argument around climate justice and climate change. While some critics have identified the source of climate injustice in media content and meaning-making processes (e.g., Farbotko, 2010; Hoeg & Tulloch, 2019), others have directly intervened in issues of injustice identified by the media. On occasion, their proposed recommendations for mitigation have broad policy implications (Pham & Nash, 2017; Cass, 2018; Robie & Chand 2018). While each strand has value in its own right, it is nonetheless necessary to recognise the interconnectivity between the media meaning-making process and the social issues about which meaning is reached. In this study of discourse, we consider it necessary to examine both media meaning-making and the fundamental points of the issue involved, particularly in view of the need for an interdisciplinary approach to journalism scholarship (Nash, 2016; Zaman & Das, 2020). In the process, we have drawn on Ulrich Beck’s concept of risk and employed Fairclough and van Dijk’s Critical Discourse Analysis in our attempt to understand the ‘relations of definition’ underpinning the journalistic discourses surrounding climate displacement. In Beck’s view:

... Risks are essentially man-made, incalculable, uninsurable threats and catastrophes which are *anticipated* but often remain invisible and, therefore, depend on how they become defined and contested in ‘knowledge.’ (Beck, 2010, p.261; italics in original)

The term ‘relations of definition’ refers to the ‘matrix of ideas, interest, epistemologies, and different rationality claims (scientific, social, legal, etc.) that compete and contend within the field of risk and ecological interdependency crises’ (Cottle, 2008, p.78). The public discourses surrounding these categories that constitute ‘relations of definition’ ultimately influence what can and should be said about threats and hazards attributable to climate displacements (Cottle, 2010). The debate surrounding climate displacement is complex because it encompasses looming crises in both scientific and socio-political contexts and raises serious moral and political questions. When analysing this complex debate, it is important to understand how power relations in public communication are exercised and negotiated.

We set out to explore qualitatively how different discourses had been produced and challenged in public discussions. We also explored how this production

of knowledge or challenge to this production either opened up opportunities for various policy advocates or constrained them in their deliberations. Our broad concern was climate justice; in other words, whether or not debate surrounding climate governance or climate policy formulation was geared towards the protection of human welfare against climate impacts (Klinsky et al., 2017).

### **Method of data collection**

To analyse public discourses in Fiji and New Zealand, we decided to study quality newspapers (Schmidt & Schäfer, 2015) due to their continued relevance to policy debates and selected *The Fiji Times*, *The Fiji Sun*, *The New Zealand Herald* and *The Dominion Post*. The selection was based on the largest circulation figures in the two countries (NZ Audit Bureau of Circulation, n.d.; Tarte, 2014). These publications were assumed to exert a significant level of influence on the two countries' decision makers and policy priorities. We also assumed that newspapers were still a key site of contestation among politicians, businesses, civil society representatives and others.

Several databases were searched using the terms 'climate refugees,' 'climate migration,' 'climate migrants' and 'climate change migration.' We used Newsbank for *The Fiji Times*, *The Fiji Sun*'s web archive and Factiva for the two New Zealand publications. Variation in the search platform was due to the varied availability of the respective newspaper content. The time frame was from 2009 to 2019 to cover COP15 (Copenhagen) through to COP25 (Madrid). A total of 212 articles (165 from Fiji and 47 from New Zealand) were returned in the initial search. This was followed by a focused search of articles that dealt with climate displacement in detail, based on purposive sampling (Seale, 2012) which allowed us to select articles on the basis of their significance to the research topic. The purpose was to select articles that had focused on the issue of climate-induced displacement and not just mentioned it. For the purpose of this exercise, one of us read each article thoroughly with particular focus on headlines and lead paragraphs, article length, the section in which it appeared (if available), the numbers and types of news sources used, and the overall nature of each article (e.g., analysis, investigative report, or informed commentary). We narrowed the sample size to 22 articles (11 each from Fiji and New Zealand). They were then subjected to detailed discourse analysis based on three divergent discursive categories: climate change action, climate change inaction, and climate change insecurity. These categories were identified following literature relevant to climate change, displacement and migration (Hajer, 1993; Vollmer, 2017). The sample size was deemed sufficient because the study's focus of qualitative analysis was not an article, but ideas expressed in the article. The longest article was 3855 words and the shortest 135 words; giving an average length of 605 words.

## Findings

Public discourses surrounding climate displacement occurs in the context of wider discussions of climate change. As some critics have noted, climate change discussions in the South Pacific media generally align with the scientific consensus (Hopkins et al., 2015; Chand, 2017). However, in some media the issue is being portrayed as a matter of political contestation over the right approach to deal with the perceived impending environmental threat. The discourse in Fiji was about bearing the brunt of climate change and struggling against ‘carbon colonialism’ (Robie, 2014; Robie & Chand 2017). Migration triggered by climate change was deemed one of the consequences of it. New Zealand newspapers rarely addressed the Pacific’s woes (Nash, 2015). Instead, they seemed preoccupied with defining the ‘visibility’ (Beck, 2016) of the potentially catastrophic effects of climate change in the South Pacific. The three discourse categories of action, inaction and insecurity were represented in the newspapers in different ways. For example, whereas New Zealand articles focused predominantly on climate inaction and insecurity, in Fiji, insecurity and climate action or adaptation appeared dominant.

## New Zealand

### *Climate inaction*

Inaction related to climate-induced displacement can be explained through the conscious exercise of power by key actors. According to Hajer (1993), powerful interests care mainly about national interests in addressing the impacts of climate change. They ignore or delay any preventative action that does not serve this interest. In the New Zealand discourse, this lack of action was evident in various expert reports and documents related to policy issues (Wesselbaum & Aburn, 2019; Hooton, 2018; Hall, 2019). This inaction was also perceptible in public discussions of climate catastrophes such as Cyclone Winston in Fiji in 2016 and bushfires in Australia in 2019-2000. Commentators frequently demanded that New Zealand ‘be ready’ to tackle their effects (Azhar, 2017).

Media representations of climate change in New Zealand have been significantly different from those of other OECD countries. Yet, somewhat similarly, New Zealand public discourse on climate-induced displacement has been politically contested (Bell, 1994; Hopkins et al., 2015). This was manifested in the arguments surrounding a perceived lack of adequate action by the government. In the articles selected from New Zealand, we observed that a range of policy advocates, including activists and leaders of parties like the Greens, expressed their exasperation regarding the government’s slow response to climate migration. Lawless (2014) wrote:

The first climate refugees from Kiribati, Tuvalu and Tokelau are now landing on our shores. The atoll nations will come first as the sea infiltrates their freshwater, making traditional agriculture impossible. A king tide already swamps villages. Farcically, a New Zealand judge told them to ‘drink bottled water’, as if that was a cure for their ills.

This excerpt clearly illuminates inaction attributable to a lack of articulation by both mainstream political coalitions of a long-term vision to tackle the threat of frequent natural disasters. However, it is worth noting that the newspapers also used a broad spectrum of other policy advocates including activists and experts in economy, psychology and geo-science to establish the need for the government to take action. Articles based on these sources highlighted the potential risk of climate change driving people out of their countries of origin and moving to receiving nations (Morton, 2017a). Morton (2019) raised the issue of a potential challenge to New Zealand’s mental health services, saying service providers would have to deal with any psychological effects experienced by migrants. Dr Jemaima Tiatia-Seath from the School of Māori Studies and Pacific Studies at the University of Auckland said Pacific peoples forced to relocate would likely face mental health challenges because of cultural loss and the stress of climate-induced migration (Morton, 2019). However, others disagree. Morton (2017b) quotes the University of Plymouth’s Professor Gerd Masselink as saying:

‘Islands may be resilient to rising sea level ... islands did move and change, but the direction of global debate was not allowing their populations to adapt and plan for the future using this knowledge and understanding.’

Although Masselink identified the global debate as a problem, our findings indicate that it was the national debate that created impediments to the adaptation efforts of the affected peoples. For example, the political notion of ‘more refugee intake’ (Davison, 2017), once proposed by New Zealand’s Green Party member and Climate Change Minister James Shaw, received a ‘cool response’ (Manch, 2018) from both sides of politics on the grounds that the issue of refugee intake was complex. Referring to the Niue Declaration on Climate Change (2008), the Green’s immigration spokesperson Golriz Ghahraman said:

Tuvaluans want to be Tuvaluan... self-determination for Pacific communities, which warranted a collective solution rather than an individualised visa approach. (Manch, 2018)

However, the collective solution did not receive any traction in the articles under scrutiny. Rather, we observed that different policy actors brought very different dimensions to the debate; for example, questioning the prediction regarding

sea level rise (Morton, 2017b) and negating any potential devastating impact of the rise on the Pacific micro-states. Central to the climate inaction discourse was a broadly-held perception that the New Zealand government needed to do more. This accentuated recent political responses regarding collective solutions including demands for ensuring the self-determination of Pacific communities and the UN's in-principle recognition of climate refugees. These issues would collectively mark a new era in the politics of climate displacement.

### *Climate insecurity*

Experts and politicians alike have alerted us to the likelihood of deteriorating human and environmental security situations, and the increasing possibilities of harm due to the severe consequences of climate change (Ransan-Cooper et al., 2015). The fifth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2014) discussed a similar threat to human security.

An important document in New Zealand's public discussion of the impact of climate change was a Ministry of Defence report *The climate crisis: Defence readiness and responsibilities* (Vance, 2018). The report centred on the security situations in New Zealand and the South Pacific, stating that regional insecurity was underpinned by the effects of global warming, conflict and disaster (Vance, 2018). The threat was discussed in public documents and newspaper articles written by academic security experts, media commentators and politicians. Defence Minister Ron Mark was quoted as saying: 'The effects of climate change will challenge NZ Defence, in terms of responding to more frequent and more intense [climate] events in our region' (Walls, 2018). *The Massey Report*, a document produced by a group of diplomats, defence and security experts reflected a similarly dystopian view of the future:

The human security implications of climate change could lead to insecurity as a consequence of displacement, the breakdown of traditional power structures, and the placing of governments and system under duress. It puts access to food, water, and land as the top three 'climate stressors' that could lead to security problems. (Vance, 2018)

They discussed New Zealand's defence capability, saying: 'We don't really have the right toys, the right kit to respond in the same way as Australia and the US' (Vance, 2018). Almost invisible in this discussion was the nature of conflict that could emerge from a lack of resources. The difference in conflict is important because 'a quarrel for a loaf of bread is not the same as an armed conflict [between] opposing states' (Bettini, 2013, p.16). The defence report, which drew from a number of Pacific declarations, including the Boe Declaration and the Niue Declaration, emphatically stated that 'climate change presents the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and well-being of the Pacific

people' (Ministry of Defence, 2018, p. 4). However, the report pays little attention to policies crucial to the well-being of the Pacific peoples. The newspaper articles we examined demonstrated the imperatives of a strong and combative New Zealand using its armed forces to tackle a chaotic situation.

The crucial point is the way in which the notion of climate insecurity was justified by using two complementary strategies. On the one hand, it was aligned with policy arguments that supported the need for New Zealand to re-align its defence policy from a pacifist to a combat ready position. It would be done without raising any question of the potential consequences of such a shift. A case in point here was the discussion about the granting of experimental visas to affected Pacific islanders instead of considering a climate change visa, despite New Zealand's commitment to international climate governance frameworks. These commitments include endorsing the Global Compact for Migration and in-principle agreement to granting climate visas under the climate change plan. On the other hand, the securitisation notion showed respect for Pacific Islanders' desire to stay in their own islands in the wake of climate consequences.

The debate surrounding climate-induced displacement in New Zealand was defined by a contestation between climate inaction and a more dominant climate insecurity discourse. In inaction discourse, activists, experts and leaders of small political parties who were 'outside and beyond representative institutions of political systems of nation-states' (Bulkeley, 2001, p. 433), raised politically important questions about New Zealand's responsibility to addressing climate displacement. However, this perspective was eclipsed in the insecurity discourse by an overwhelming concern for New Zealand's national security in the wake of fast approaching climate effects in the region. The security concern was primarily defined by experts, and by politicians who were in a political realm demarcated by the traditional state institutions of accountability and control (Beck, 1999, p. 39).

## **Fiji**

### *Climate insecurity*

In the articles from Fiji, journalists seemed to have employed two strategies. Firstly, they highlighted the environmental vulnerabilities of the small island nations such as Tuvalu and Kiribati. Secondly, they pointed to the unpreparedness of New Zealand and Australia to tackle climate challenge by promoting critical voices that expressed outrage regarding the continued effects of climate change. In the process, they accused the Global North of perpetuating climate apartheid, or climate attack on the South. In the vulnerability articles, debate centred on the island nations' insecurity was evident from 2009. The finger-pointing articles became predominant from 2014 on following Kiribati's purchase of a 5500 acre Anglican estate in Fiji for future rehabilitation. The



Fijian newspapers emphasised the vulnerability of neighbouring Kiribati and Tuvalu, while simultaneously urging everyone to ensure international human rights. These publications highlighted the sentiment ‘Fiji is ready to help’ as they reported that people from 45 islands had already experienced the dire situation of having ‘Nowhere to run’ (Panapasa, 2009). The articles also expressed continued support for the island nations’ aspiration to ‘migration with dignity.’

A close reading of the articles showed that climate insecurity was manifested in such a way that highlighted the vulnerability of neighbouring island micro-states or atoll nations, for example Kiribati or Tuvalu, but not that of Fiji. In these articles, ‘threat to survival’ (Burese, 2012) became apparent because there was ‘no protection for displaced persons’ (*Fiji Times*, 2016).

In the debate, the themes of insecurity or uncertainty emerged from ‘daily facts’ in the South rather than the ‘future deliberations’ of the North. Currently observable environmental conditions, together with the lived experiences of the people in the South, made their insecurity and/or uncertain futures clear. Compared with the North’s emphasis on what will happen in the future, the South’s perspective is underpinned by a strong sense of environmental inequality between the two. Their deliberations were dominated by a range of policy advocates including officials from international non-government organisations and church groups, who author op-ed pieces or opinion columns. Because these advocates wrote their own articles, their reflections were detailed in a less mediated fashion. In the articles from Fiji, we observed a significant absence of the impact of relocation on the affected peoples. However, a UNICEF report, ‘Climate Change Impacts on Children in the Pacific: Kiribati and Vanuatu,’ alerted readers to the dangers of relocation, especially for children. The report stated that the relocation of population to so-called ‘safer islands’ would result in intense overcrowding. For children, this could result in anxiety, loss of culture and identity (Nabilivalu, 2012).

The issues of anxiety and overcrowding also resonated in a statement by John Anderson, an Australian resident living in Kiribati, who said: ‘All it takes is one wave’ to wash away the island. Its highest point is just three meters above the sea level (Goldberg, 2013). Similarly, George Fraser, the Australian High Commissioner to Kiribati, stressed Kiribati’s insurmountable challenge:

On the one hand, it is President Tong’s duty to attract investment and aid.  
On the other hand, he must also plan for his country’s eventual evacuation.  
It’s difficult to attract investment.

Fraser’s comment demonstrated the degree to which Australia, a Global North country, had abdicated its responsibility regarding international human rights; the diplomat only highlighted critical circumstances for Kiribati, but over-

looked any part Australia might play to mitigate the problem. The author of the article used this quote without questioning Australia's role in Kiribati's plight. However, the people of Kiribati viewed their vulnerability differently; for them, the important issue was not an impending evacuation, but rather their belonging to the land. This was highlighted by former Kiribati President Anote Tong who said:

But ... our people like it here. We will lose our homeland unless the ocean stops rising. It's very simple. We want to stay home. This is where the spirits live. This is where we're from. This is not caused by us. This is caused by you. (Goldberg, 2103)

These excerpts clearly depict a sense of strong inequality due to an uneven distribution of the impacts of climate change (Klinsky et al., 2017). These effects expose an existential threat to the people of Kiribati despite their aspiration to remain resilient. They considered themselves abandoned by the North, i.e., by those mainly responsible for Kiribati's perilous situation due to their high rates of emissions. The dominance of various policy advocates in public debates resulted in Kiribati's President receiving a mere mention and the Australian High Commissioner not being subjected to any interrogation regarding his country's responsibilities. The newspapers in Fiji appeared to depict insecurity as a mere physical processes rather than as a political question (Bravo, 2009). As a result, it was left to the dominant voices quoted in newspaper articles to address the risks implicit in climate-induced displacement. The frequent usage of these voices that tackle the potential challenges and risks on behalf of the South Pacific nations may be interpreted as a declaration of urgency for climate action.

### *Climate action*

The discourse of climate action as a political aspiration for Fiji was dominated by the following aspects. Firstly, the articles demonstrated Fiji's ambition to mobilise political action to mitigate climate change driven insecurity. Secondly, Australia and New Zealand have expressed willingness to assist with critical issues such as displacement and relocation. Beck (2016) emphasised that action was about reflection, status and perceptions held by actors. This was evident in the Fijian discourses which highlighted Australia's seemingly lackadaisical approach to climate change, with headlines reading 'Pay up' (Qounadovu, 2015) or 'Climate change is no "laughing matter"' (*Fiji Times*, 2019). Another article quoted the Vanuatu Foreign Minister as stating in the Boe Declaration on regional security that Australia's authority in the Pacific was 'eroded by its refusal to address climate change' (*Fiji Times*, 2018a).

As well as newspaper articles, the political rhetoric was also evident in some official policy documents, including Fiji's Relocation Guidelines, drafted in

2013 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Displacement Guidelines prepared in 2019 by the Ministry of Economy following Fiji's endorsement of the Global Compact for Migration and the IPCC report (2018). The Displacement Guidelines stated that one of its aims was '[T]o reduce the vulnerabilities associated with displacement and consider durable solutions to prevent and minimize the drivers of displacement in affected communities in Fiji' (Ministry of Economy, 2019, p. 5).

Fiji's aspirations were clearly evident in headlines stating 'Fiji to rescue neighbours' (*Fiji Times*, 2009) or 'Fiji ready to help' (Naleba, 2015). These stories highlighted the Pacific island nations' aspiration for 'migration with dignity' (Panapasa, 2015) and actively supported their claim that the people who had been displaced due to environmental reasons were not refugees. The notion of 'migration with dignity' exposed a not always subtle tension. Concern about mass evacuation from Kiribati to Fiji was widely expressed. One of the articles referred to it as the 'weirdest business deal of the week' (Guilford, 2014).

Action discourse included the relative invisibility of a number of issues including post-relocation tension and technological solutions to reclaiming sinking lands. The last solution was an aspiration of some Pacific island leaders. The land reclamation issue was covered in some articles: 'To build climate resilience, the remote nation has consulted foreign governments and companies on land reclamation technology as well as the idea of external floating accommodation' (*Fiji Times*, 2018b). However, the risk associated with the relocation of communities, which had been emphasised by some non-governmental organisations and cultural geographers, received scant attention in discussions centred on displacement policies.

## **Conclusion**

Within the media-policy nexus, Global North and South public discourses were dominated by critical policy discussions with a visible prominence of the realm of politics. The top-down approach exercised by the established institutions left little or no room for exploration of bottom-up perspectives evinced by affected communities. These climate displacement discourses reinforced the views of critics who claimed that while the media emphasised the abstract issue, it failed to focus on any one affected individual, such as a displaced person. Some critics, who termed this omission a 'collective problematisation' or 'deagentalisation' (Farbotko, 2010; Hoeg & Tulloch, 2019), claimed that the problem was presented as broad and collective, obscuring the relevance of or consequences for individuals. This invisibility of affected persons is likely to perpetuate a certain direction for policy debates (Russell et al., 2016) related to critical climate displacement issues, such as the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage and ignores significant questions pertinent to the affected

communities. Our findings suggest that affected people's perspectives received scant attention, particularly in the New Zealand discourse. This absence may be explained by the fact that the issue of displacement is often politicised and dominated by powerful vested interests. The latter prefer an abstract and broad policy focus that eschews any human angle (Cass, 2018) that has the potential to trigger a humanitarian public response to the subject of displaced people from neighbouring island nations.

However, the disregard of the affected Islanders' perspectives may indicate the challenges journalists face when attempting to tell the story of climate displacement. Although Fiji is among the countries affected by climate change, its journalists have chosen to overlook to some degree the issue of climate displacement. This may have been due, as Robie argues, to the 'sole replication of Western news values' (Robie, 2019, p. 4). Fijian journalists have preferred abstract policy matters over lived human experiences and the Fourth Estate model over the 'fifth estate' which is considered a 'counter balance to all other forms of power including news media' (Robie, 2019, p. 4). However, sometimes pragmatic problems such as deadline pressures, cost and staffing shortages could make it difficult to interview human subjects at different locations, compared with churning out government policy or position statements.

In accordance with Beck's definition, the Fijian narrative demonstrated that the displacement experienced by the islands' inhabitants was, in fact, a man-made anticipated risk which could be mitigated by the deliberate actions of those responsible for triggering the chain of climate impacts. In the Fijian discourse, Australia and New Zealand have been sluggish in action and irresponsible in behaviour when it came to tackling climate change. In the New Zealand discourse, the risk of displacement was real, but invisible. In this discourse, it was defined as a spatially distanced uncertainty, a matter of adaptation by both the islanders and government policy makers in New Zealand. To best serve New Zealand's national interest, the issue should be treated as a security matter with the implications tackled accordingly.

In this scenario, the wielding of power was manifested in the Fijian accusation of the 'irresponsible' parties, and in the New Zealand calculation of climate-induced displacement as a security concern.

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## Science Writing and Climate Change

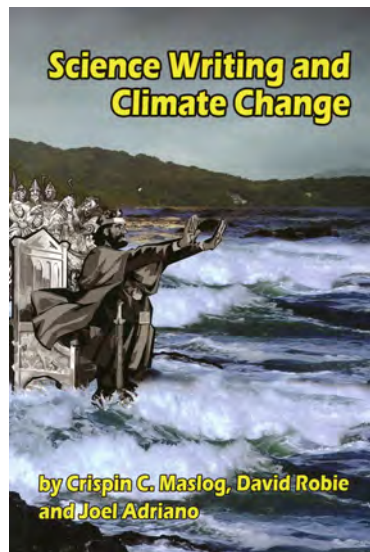
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# 7. Media representation of environmental issues in Malaysia

## Newspapers and environment non-government organisation newsletters

**Abstract:** This research investigates the types of environmental issues represented in Malaysian newspapers and Environmental Non-Government Organisation (ENGO) newsletters and examines the factors in the selection of stories by both social actors. A quantitative content analysis was conducted on 2050 environmental articles in *The Star* and *Utusan Malaysia* newspapers, together with the World Wide Fund for Nature's (WWF) and Malaysian Nature Society's (MNS) newsletters from 2012-2014. A total of 13 people from *The Star* and *Utusan Malaysia*, and 11 from the WWF and MNS were chosen for in-depth interview sessions. The study showed that the methods of choosing environmental information for newspapers and newsletters were slightly different. The ENGOs gave more attention to environmental effort topics like sustainable living while the media focused on more environmental problems like floods. The study also found that the Malaysian media and ENGOs shared some criteria for selecting environmental issues, especially proximity, timeliness and impact.

**Keywords:** ENGOs, environment, environmental journalism, journalism, Malaysia, media, newsletters, newspapers, news values, representation

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### Introduction

**I**N GENERAL, the word representation can be understood as an effort or action of portraying, depicting or describing visual or digital information by producers or senders to receivers. Fürsich (2010) argued that representation is associated with the social construction of reality, where the media constructs reality in readers' minds, in line with Hannigan's (2006) explanation of the social

construction of reality. Media representations have a great influence on public perceptions, attitudes and beliefs (Lyons, 2000; Marlina & Shakila, 2016). Media representation is known to be a powerful tool in translating science and policy information to the public (Teravainen, 2014). It is not therefore surprising that public opinion about certain environmental issues like climate change corresponds with the information represented by the media (Peters & Heinrichs, 2008).

Media representations of environmental issues can take place within many arenas, scientific, political and social (Boykoff, 2009). A study of media representation can allow us to understand more deeply why certain environmental issues are able to grab the public's attention while other issues disappear from the media and public attention (Hansen, 2011). However, misrepresentations of environmental information especially in the media can occur, which contributes to the confusion among the public (Cho, 2010).

Environmental issues representation in newspapers depends on the choices of the journalists (Massey & Ramanathan, 2001) and news editors (Young & Dugas, 2011) through the agenda setting process which decides which kinds of issue they regard as being important to present to the public (Elmasry, 2012; Hannabuss, 1995). In other words, the belief and values of journalists can significantly influence the types of news that are represented in the newspaper (Taiwo & Igwebuike, 2015). This study looks to fill this research gap and analyse how this compares with media representation of such issues.

### **Representation of environmental issues by the media and ENGOs**

Caple and Bednarek (2015) listed 10 specific news values commonly used by the media in the process of selecting certain topics for coverage including negativity (the negative aspect of the event), timeliness (a recent event), proximity (geography of the event), superlativeness (scale of the event), eliteness (involving a high-ranking individual or organisation), impact (significance of the event based on the consequences), novelty (newness), personalisation (issues with a human face), consonance (a stereotypical event) and aesthetic appeal (interesting or not) (p. 5).

Using the proximity news values, some of the environmental issues represented in the media were based on the current environmental problems occurring in certain places or countries close to the local people. Various studies have shown that environmental news has been reported according to the environmental condition of the country. Kostarella, Theodosiadou and Tsantopoulos (2013), for instance, found that the Greek media represented the greenhouse effect and recycling as the two most popular issues rather than other environmental issues like air pollution, flooding, etc. According to them, this could be due to the recycling programme and campaigns highlighted by the government and through citizen participation events, while greenhouse effect issues have become more visible in

the media since the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 and the Copenhagen Conference of 2010. On the other hand, if we look at the timeliness news value, for example, the type of environmental news represented in the media is also related to the influence of the 'current' environmental issues or debates happening on a global scale such as climate change, global warming and loss of biodiversity.

Kuha (2009) in research about global warming and climate change coverage in UK and US newspapers found that the coverage of climate change issues in newspapers increased, especially among the UK's newspapers, after the UN Climate Change Conference in December 2007 in Bali. Siti Suriani, Liana and Lee (2013) also found that news values such as the interest element, a recent matter discussed by the public (timeliness) and proximity (geographical location) were used as the main criteria for news selection among Malaysian media. However, other factors such as the editors' decision, journalists' experience, readers' interest and the location of the particular news outlet also accounted for news selection in Malaysia (Siti Suriani, Liana & Lee, 2013).

In contrast to the media, it is important to understand that different ENGOs will have different representations of environmental issues in their newsletters, depending on the mission and the goals of each ENGO and, most importantly, the environmental concern championed by the ENGO. Therefore, it is important to discuss the type of environmental issues considered by the ENGOs that usually appear in their newsletters. Firstly, the type of environmental issues considered by the ENGOs depends on the period or era when the ENGO was established. Taking the United States as an example, it has been noted that in the first era, ENGOs like The Sierra Club, which was established in the 1800s, were more focused on the issues of conservation and preservation of the aesthetic environment from the effects of urbanisation and industrialisation. In the second era, modern ENGOs looked into the issues of protection and management of the natural environment (Silveira, 2001). The modern US ENGOs, which were established in the late 1960s and early 1970s, had more concern for natural resources, wildlife, pollution and the quality of life (Johnson, 2008).

A particular ENGO could take on one or more types of environmental issues. For example Greenpeace America, which is the largest and wealthiest ENGO in the US (Shaiko, 1993), has devoted itself to four major environmental issues: the preservation of ancient forests, ocean protection, global warming and the removal of nuclear weapons. Like Greenpeace, for Malaysian ENGOs, the types of environmental topics covered are varied, based on each organisation's background, objectives and interests (Smeltzer, 2008; Rohani et al., 2010). Taking the oldest ENGO, MNS for example, in relation to its mission to protect Malaysia's heritage, this ENGO has put great emphasis on several issues, including rivers, the sea, wildlife, forests, the highlands and air.

The types of environmental issues concerning ENGOs are related to the current

issues happening in certain countries or on a global scale, similar to the media's timeliness news value. According to Hilton et al. (2012), in the 2000s, due to the problem of climate change, many UK ENGOs like the National Trust and Friends of the Earth (FOE), showed their concern for fighting climate change, including an effort to make a large coalition (Stop Climate Chaos, p. 54). Gough and Shackley (2001) found that there are 18 predominant ENGOs engaging in the climate change debate, including Greenpeace, WWF, FOE and Ozone Action America. Climate change clearly dominates the focus of European, UK and US ENGOs.

The types of environmental issues represented in the media are mostly based on their news value. It is different for ENGOs, which usually publish environmental information in their newsletters that concerns their organisation. However, as with the media's timeliness news values, some ENGOs also give attention to recent environmental issues at the local and global scale. Thus, we can expect WWF, for example, to publish about nuclear energy in their newsletters if the issue has recently been highlighted in a global debate.

### **Methodology**

The first aim of this research is to discover the types of environmental issues represented by the media and ENGOs in their newspapers and newsletters. To achieve this aim, two methods were employed. First, the quantitative content analysis was done on media newspapers and ENGOs newsletters. A total of 2050 samples from *The Star* and *Utusan Malaysia* newspapers and WWF and MNS newsletters was selected for quantitative content analysis. All the samples from the newspapers and newsletters were manually gathered and evaluated individually (Djerf-Pierre, 2012). The samples of newspapers and ENGOs' newsletters were taken from a three-year period: 2012-2014. The rationale for selecting this timeframe was to fill a gap in the current research. Until recently, there has only been limited research on the representation of environmental issues in Malaysian newspapers and newsletters. The other motivation for selecting the years of 2012–2014 for this study was the fact that notable environmental events occurred within these three years in Malaysia like the most serious atmospheric haze in Malaysian history which occurred on 21 June 2013 and 15 March 2014.

It is important to note that the creation of coding categories for the types of environmental issues occurred via adaptation from previous local and foreign studies (Sjøvaag & Stavelin, 2012) on environmental coverage in the media and adjusted according to the results of the inter-coder reliability test by two coders. For the types of environmental information, 28 variables were adopted from other studies conducted on environmental coverage in the media such as Mariah, Raihanah and Md. Salleh (2004) and Nik Norma (2007) in the Malaysian context, along with Kostarella, Theodosiadou and Tsantopoulos (2013) in the



foreign context. However, after completing the pilot test, we found new variables of environmental information that had not been mentioned by prior researchers but had been included in the newspapers and ENGOS' newsletters such as cloud seeding, drought, lightning, urban greening and clogged drains, which were added to the coding sheet.

In-depth interviews with 24 interviewees from *The Star* and *Utusan Malaysia* and 11 from the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) were conducted to assess their views on the types of environmental issues represented in the newspapers and ENGOS newsletters. This was cross-checked against the result of quantitative content analysis. In-depth interviews were also conducted to achieve the second aim of the study, which was to analyse the factors in the selection of environmental information by the Malaysian media and ENGOS.

*The Star* and *Utusan Malaysia* had the highest circulation during the period under review. From July to December 2012, *The Star* had a circulation of 288,916 copies, while *Utusan Malaysia* had a circulation of 178,211 copies per day (Audit Bureau of Circulation Malaysia, 2012).

The ENGO interviewees were selected from WWF and MNS because these ENGOS have been recognised as among the most active in Malaysia in research, education and conservation efforts (Rusli & Sheikh, 2005). All the interviewees were labelled with identification codes. The average interview lasted about 30 to 40 minutes, depending on the willingness and ability of the interviewees to discuss the topics. The in-depth interview data was subject to analysis using qualitative content analysis.

## **Results and discussions**

The results of a quantitative content analysis of newspapers and ENGOS' newsletters showed that a total of 1143 environmental articles were found in *The Star's* newspaper and 591 environmental articles appeared in *Utusan Malaysia's* newspaper. A total of 150 environmental articles were found in WWF's newsletter and 166 environmental articles in MNS's newsletter. The quantitative content analysis showed that there were 64 environmental topics within the 2050 environmental articles collected from *The Star* and *Utusan Malaysia's* newspapers and WWF and MNS's newsletters across the investigation period from 2012 to 2014.

Table 1 shows that of the four organisations, *The Star* presented the greatest variety of environmental issues in their newspapers (63 environmental issues (98.43 percent) out of the total of 64 environmental issues), followed by *Utusan Malaysia* with 56 environmental issues (87.5 percent), MNS with 23 environmental issues (35.93 percent) in their newsletter and WWF with only 18 environmental issues (28.12 percent).

The issues of environmental management (5.86 percent), floods (6.73 percent) and wildlife (7.08 percent) were the three most published issues in *The Star* newspaper. For *Utusan Malaysia*, the issues of floods (18.27 percent), water crises (7.44 percent) and wildlife (6.09 percent) are the most frequently published. For WWF, the issues of wildlife (24.66 percent), marine protection and conservation (21.33 percent), and sustainable living (19.33 percent) were the three most frequently presented in their newsletters. For MNS, the issues of eco-tourism (16.86 percent), sustainable living (20.48 percent) and wildlife (13.25 percent) appeared the most in their newsletters. Floods were the most popular environmental issues for *The Star* and *Utusan Malaysia* while wildlife and sustainable living were the most popular environmental topics among WWF and MNS. Wildlife was recorded as the most published issue by all four organisations.

The results of the qualitative analysis revealed that the Malaysian media gave more coverage to environmental problems such as deforestation and pollution, instead of environmental efforts like environmental conservation and education. However, this is not a surprise, as some media interviewees and ENGO interviewees referred to what they saw as the Malaysian media's 'bad news is good news' culture that has created the tendency of Malaysian media to pick environmental problems over environmental efforts. EJ8 from *Utusan Malaysia* commented that:

To my knowledge, since I worked as a journalist, most of us gave attention to the negative impact on the environment. (ID EJ8)

The media in general have paid more attention to the coverage of environmental problems, as these are more dramatic compared with environmental efforts, which are often a little dry and less attention-grabbing. Indeed, journalists are sometimes stuck in the conflict between serving society with environmental information that is heavy and less interesting such as climate change and pursuing a story that is snappy and has an eye-catching headline (Gavin, Leonard-Milsom & Montgomery, 2011). In fact, the public is more attracted to dramatic information (Robinson & Levy, 1986) and the media, as profit-driven organisations, end up with more negative stories than positive ones (Faridah et al., 2011) in order to attract the readers (Leckner, 2012).

Consistent with the results of the quantitative content analysis of both the WWF and MNS's newsletters, which found wildlife to be among the top three issues in both newsletters, most of the ENGO interviewees mentioned the loss of biodiversity, including the loss of wildlife such as tapirs, tigers, elephants, rhinos and orangutans. This is because wildlife protection and conservation is part of WWF and MNS's mission. WWF, in its mission statement, clearly states that its aims are to stop natural degradation and to save the planet through conservation activities. Meanwhile, MNS indicated its target of promoting the conservation

**Table 1: Types of environmental issues in Malaysia**

Topic	<i>The Star</i> (N)	<i>Utusan Malaysia</i> (N)	WWF (N)	MNS (N)
Agriculture	26	24	1	3
Air pollution	11	2	-	-
Biomass	4	2	-	-
Carbon emissions	8	1	-	-
Chemical pollution	3	1	-	-
Climate change	18	3	-	1
Clogged drains	8	2	-	-
Cloud seeding	3	1	-	-
Dams	3	5	-	1
Deforestation	23	17	-	1
Development impact	23	6	-	3
Droughts	5	-	-	-
Earthquakes	22	17	-	-
Earth hour	10	2	6	-
Eco-tourism	17	11	1	28
El Niño	6	5	-	-
Endangered plants	2	1	1	-
Energy	40	7	1	1
Environmental management	67	23	-	6
Environmental policies or laws	7	1	-	-
Equinox	1	-	-	-
Fisheries	10	-	2	-
Flash floods	15	15	-	-
Floods	77	108	-	-
Forest fires	10	5	-	-
Forest protection	11	4	8	12
Global warming	1	-	-	-
Haze	16	14	-	1
Hill development	10	-	-	-
Landslides	30	12	-	-
Land conservation	10	3	3	3
Lightning	2	1	-	-
Marine education	5	-	9	1
Marine life	23	13	6	-
Marine protection and conservation	43	14	32	10
Mining	11	2	-	-

Topic	<i>The Star</i> (N)	<i>Utusan Malaysia</i> (N)	WWF (N)	MNS (N)
National parks	9	-	1	-
Nuclear reactors	21	14	-	-
Oil spills	6	2	-	-
Open burning	6	2	-	-
Rainfall	19	7	-	-
Rear earth (Lynas)	12	11	-	-
Recycling	15	1	-	21
Snow	13	9	-	-
Soil movement	3	2	-	-
Storms	32	17	-	-
Sustainable living	65	7	29	34
Tourism	42	16	3	10
Transportation	12	8	-	-
Tsunami	2	9	-	-
Typhoons	28	13	-	-
Underwater tunnels	-	3	-	-
Urban greening	11	3	-	-
Volcanoes	8	8	-	-
Waste disposal	22	17	-	1
Waste management	27	15	-	1
Water conservation	13	6	3	2
Water crises	51	44	-	-
Water rationing	11	3	-	1
Water resources	21	10	2	-
Water pollution	23	4	-	1
Waves	3	2	-	-
Wetlands	6	-	5	2
Wildlife	81	36	37	22

of Malaysia's natural heritage. Thus, the loss of wildlife, especially flagship species like the tiger, orangutan and rhino, always catch the WWF and MNS's attention and are discussed in their newsletters. One interviewee from WWF for instance said this was because 'our mission is to maintain the Malaysian national heritage' (ID EN9).

On the other hand, a comparison of the results of the quantitative content analysis among the Malaysian newspapers and ENGOS' newsletters clearly showed that ENGOS had more representation of environmental effort issues than environmental problems. Two of the most visible environmental effort issues

in WWF's newsletters were sustainable living and marine protection and conservation, while the most frequent topics in MNS's newsletter were sustainable living and eco-tourism. Only *The Star* had one environmental effort issue (environmental management) as one of their most frequent issues, besides wildlife and floods. In fact, the top three environmental topics in *Utusan Malaysia* were environmental problems, including flood, wildlife and water crises. Importantly, although both the Malaysian media and ENGOS shared a similar aim of informing and educating society about the environment, the types of environmental issues represented by them were distinctive.

Moreover, the results of the qualitative interview also revealed that there were several factors influenced the selection of environmental issues for publication. For most of the media interviewees, news values were the most important factor used to determine whether an environmental issue was suitable for publication or not, just like other stories, such as politics and economics. It is almost impossible for newspapers to place all the stories or events that happen every day in one newspaper that has limited available space (Chang et al., 2012; Schäfer, Ivanova & Schmidt, 2014); thus news values (also known as newsworthiness or news criteria) are used by journalists or editors as a criteria or principles for deciding which stories are worthy of publication (Bednarek & Caple, 2015) and which events should be excluded (O'Neill & Harcup, 2009). Some media interviewees (EJ4, EJ5 and EJ11) confirmed that they would definitely pick up stories they considered to have high news values. News values are usually associated with media and journalism, but this study found that news values were used by the ENGOS as well when selecting which environmental issues to insert or ignore for their newsletters.

Of the three news values—timeliness, impact, and proximity—timeliness was the most discussed by the majority of the interviewees. Timeliness refers to the relevance of certain issues or events based on time: whether it has occurred recently, is still ongoing or is upcoming (Caple & Bednarek, 2015). In line with Caple and Bednarek's explanation of timeliness, some media and ENGO interviewees used words like 'current' (ID EJ2, EJ9, EJ10), 'new' (ID EJ2), 'latest' (ID EJ11, EN10) and 'recent' (ID EN3) to explain the importance of choosing timely environmental information for their publications. EJ7 cited the example of the death of pygmy elephants and people dying due to river pollution as environmental issues with high impact news value that were selected for coverage.

Usually it involves tragedy, like river pollution... After... People died...  
We would be able to make it big. (ID EJ7)

On one hand, spatial proximity, generally understood as the distance of events or issues from the audience (Bendix & Liebler, 1999; Jorge, 2008), was a value used by both the Malaysian media and ENGOS in selecting the environmental

issues for publication. Proximity is often associated with local events or issues that happen near the audience (Johnstone & Mando, 2015), which make the audiences close and part of the stories. Some interviewees like EJ3 from *The Star* gave the example of how certain environmental issues like droughts were certainly selected for publication as they were common environmental problems affecting Malaysians.

You know, it is an issue they see every day when they are driving along the highway; you know, they see all the trees being cut off and, you know, stuff like pollution and droughts—it is stuff they experienced. (ID EJ3).

Despite the value of environmental information, it appears that the readers' interests can also influence the process of selecting environmental information for publication. Some interviewees revealed the need to match the readers' interest in certain environmental issues, as they are the ones who are going to read the newspapers or newsletters. EJ7 from *Utusan Malaysia*, said the media could not be self-indulgent, but must write about issues that catered to the readers' interests or else the circulation would drop and this could even lead to the risk of bankruptcy.

As a final remark, the qualitative interviews also suggest that the background of the media and ENGOS could be another factor contributing to the selection of certain environmental issues for publication. Most *Utusan Malaysia* interviewees said their news organisation focused on four national agenda items: Islam, the King, Malay and the Malaysian constitution. These, in turn, had to an extent influenced the types of environmental issues presented in their newspapers. On a similar note, WWF and MNS's interviewees also said their respective organisations' vision and mission as well as the issues they championed also influenced the type of environmental issues portrayed in their newsletters:

Of course, our mission is to stop the degradation of the planet, the natural environment and we want to build a future where humans live in harmony with nature. (ID EN1)

## Conclusion

This study has shown that the Malaysian media and ENGOS had a different focus on environmental issues in their newspapers and newsletters. The Malaysian media were more interested in issues of environmental problems, while ENGOS were more focused on issues of environmental efforts. In addition, the study also found that the media and the ENGOS used timeliness, proximity and impact as the key criteria in the selection of environmental information for publication. Other relevant factors that influenced the selection of environmental information for publication, such as the background of the publishers, have



rarely been discussed by previous researchers. The study shows that the Malaysian media had made little progress in their environmental news reporting and, at the time of the investigation, was still tied to the tradition of bad news as good news. Fewer than five percent of all the environmental articles in this study received coverage on the front page.

This study was limited to the environmental information available in the printed version of Malaysian newspapers and ENGOS' newsletters. Considering the power of social media and websites in the rapid delivery of environmental information without geographical boundaries, it is suggested that future researchers analyse environmental information on the social media sites of the Malaysian media and ENGOS such as their Facebook or Twitter accounts as well as on their official websites. Jauhariatul and Jamilah (2011) for instance, found that MNS and other ENGOS like the Socio-Economic and Environmental Research Institute also preferred to communicate environmental messages associated with their organisation's mission and vision via Facebook.

Although the functions of social media, websites and traditional media are clearly different, it would be useful to compare and explain their functional differences and similarities. Further work could focus on the gap between the representations of environmental information on print, as represented by the results of this study with those on social media and websites.

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# Gentle sounds, distant roar

## A watershed year for journalism as research

**Abstract:** The Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classification (ANZSRC) 2020 decision on disciplinary categories has profound implications for journalism as a research discipline. Journalism Practice and Professional Writing retain their six digit Field of Research (FoR) code within the Creative Arts and Writing Division, a new six digit FoR of Journalism Studies has been created in the Division of Language, Communication and Culture, and three new FoR codes of Literature, Journalism and Professional Writing have been created for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Māori and Pacific Peoples within the new Indigenous Studies Division. This categorisation confirms Journalism as a sovereign and independent discipline distinct from Communication and Media Studies, which has been in bitter contention for more than two decades. The ANZSRC confirmed its 2008 policy that the sole and definitive criterion for categorisation was methodology. This article explores the welcome ramifications of this decision for Journalism within Australasian university-based journalism and charts some of the issues ahead for journalism academics as they embark on the long overdue and fraught path to disciplinary self-recognition as an equal among the humanities and social sciences.

**Keywords:** ANZSRC, Australia, Australian Research Council, communication, field of research, FoR codes, *Frontline*, journalism practice, journalism research, media studies, New Zealand, PBRF, research disciplines

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FOR Journalism as a field of research within the Australian and New Zealand academy, 2020 was a watershed year, with forceful implications for teaching and research in the discipline. In July the Australian and New Zealand governments published the conclusions of their 2019-2020 review of the Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classification (ANZSRC) (ABS et al., 2020). It was conducted on their behalf jointly by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the Australian Research Council (ARC), Stats NZ/ Tauranga Aotearoa and the New Zealand Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE). It confirmed the continuing status of methodology as

the sole criterion for the definition and categorisation of disciplines. We might expect that the new classification will be in force for a decade or more since the previous version was operative from 2008. It poses considerable opportunities and challenges for Journalism.

There are 23 broad disciplines recognised by the 2020 ANZSRC, within each of which there are three hierarchical levels of Division (with a two digit identifier), Groups (four digits) and Fields (six digits).

Each Division is based on a broad discipline. Groups within each Division are those which share the same broad methodology, techniques and/or perspective as others in the Division. Each Group is a collection of related Fields. (ABS et al., 2020, p. 7)

The headline outcomes for Journalism were:

1. Journalism Practice, i.e. journalism as a research practice, retained its 2008 location allied with Professional Writing in the Division of Creative Arts and Writing.
2. A field of Journalism Studies has been created under Communication and Media Studies within the Division of Language, Communication and Culture.
3. Three new fields of journalism (allied with literature and professional writing in each instance) were created within the new Division of Indigenous Studies, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Māori and Pacific Peoples Studies respectively.

There was some informal discussion when the new classification was first announced that the split between Journalism Practice in the new 3603 Group (formerly the 1903 Group) and Journalism Studies in the new 4701 Group (formerly 2001) had resulted in the separation of practice and theory in journalism. This suggestion is founded on a proposition that journalism practice uses atheoretical craft-based methods and is dependent on Communication Studies for theorisation and analysis. This particular perspective has a history dating back over 20 years in the Australian context, to shortly after the 1993 classification was published. It was pushed strongly by some communication and cultural studies scholars and some journalism educators in the so-called ‘Media Wars’ of the mid-to-late 1990s (see Hartley, 1996; Bacon, 1997; Windschuttle, Breen & Bacon, 1998 for an introduction) and ever since. It reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the ANZSRC system, not to mention the methodological basis of journalism.

The ANZSRC does not recognise craft activity as constituting a field of research. The sole criterion for allocation of a Field of Research (FoR) code is methodology: ‘FoR is a classification for research activity according to the



*methodology* used in the research’ (ABS et al., 2020, p. 5, emphasis in original). A research activity does not get assigned a FoR code without recognition of its own distinctive methodological capacity for productive research and reflexive analysis. Journalism Practice academic researchers are expected to be able to expound, explore and defend the methodological aspects of their practice in ways that are specific to Journalism. They cannot delegate their theoretical responsibilities to other disciplines, and most especially not to disciplines that are based in other Divisions, e.g. Communications. They should be able to identify and explore their commonalities and differences with the other disciplines in their own Group and Division, which for Journalism includes the visual and performing arts, creative and professional writing, screen and digital media and indeed music, in theory and practice. Heady stuff, and light years away from atheoretical, craft-based activity.

Further, the classification categories have been designed according to the principle of Mutual Exclusivity:

Classification categories should be unambiguous, with each unit of research fitting into one category of each component of the classification, without categories overlapping each other. Despite the level of significant change to ANZSRC 2020, extensive efforts have been made to ensure the classification upholds the rule of mutual exclusivity. (ABS et al., 2020, p. 7)

In other words, research practice in Journalism and in Communication and Media Studies are broadly mutually exclusive in the eyes of the ANZSRC, and therefore in the eyes of the ARC, the ERA and New Zealand’s MBIE and Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF). Journalism as a research practice (FoR 360203) is definitively not a subset of Language, Communication and Culture (47). Certainly, Communications Studies can conduct research *about* Journalism—that is the *raison d’être* of the new 470105 FoR—just as journalism can conduct research *about* communications and cultural industries, products and practices, but each will do so according to their distinctive methodological imperatives, and they are certainly not to be confused with each other.

The same principle of mutual exclusivity applies to the inclusion of journalism within the new Division of Indigenous Studies, which effectively is a proposition that Indigenous journalism practice is methodologically different from non-Indigenous journalism practice. That is a proposition with profound and far-reaching implications for the self-image of classic liberal journalism and its core concept of selfless objectivity. It is also worth noting that just because Journalism Studies is so prominent within Language Communication and Culture (47) that it merits its own six digit code does not mean that journalism as a research object can’t be studied by other disciplines, for example History (43), Human Society (44) and Education (39), not to mention Creative Arts and

Writing (36) and Indigenous Studies (45) where journalism practice is specifically nominated.

The 2020 review was the fourth in a series dating from 1993, four years after the 1989 Dawkins reforms to higher education in Australia removed the binary distinction between research and non-research higher education institutions. The post-Dawkins unified system brought journalism, taught largely in the previously non-research sector of Institutes of Technology and Colleges of Advanced Education, into a world where research was a core requirement and not just a desirable add-on to the core task of teaching. The 1993 classification was conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It was explicitly aligned with OECD precedents and was a taxonomic recognition of existing patterns of institutional organisation: ‘The classification is based primarily on recognised academic disciplines and evolving areas of study’ (ABS ASRC, 1993, p. 2).

In the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences, the Subdivision of Media and Communication Studies included 11401 Media Studies, 11402 Journalism and 11403 Library and Information Studies. 120400 Arts, comprising Music, Fine Arts and Drama, was a separate Subdivision, as was 120100 Language and Literature. Five year later, a new classification was issued by the ABS. Again, it followed OECD precedents and recognised existing institutional structures, but added a further specification that it was ‘the **nature** of the R&D’ that was being examined (ABS ASRC, 1998, p. 2, emphasis in original), without specifying how ‘nature’ was to be identified. Journalism, Librarianship and Curatorial Studies were grouped together in the 400000 Division, the Arts in 410000 and Language and Culture in 420000. Within 400000, Journalism, Technical Writing and Professional Creative Writing were each given their own six digit numbers alongside Communication and Media Studies.

In 2008, Statistics New Zealand Tatauranga Aotearoa combined with the ABS to issue the ANZSRC. Again, it was designed to facilitate national and international comparability. In a move to ‘to improve and strengthen the conceptual basis and framework that existed with ASRC 1998 .... by rigorously applying a uniform concept across the classification’, the undefined term ‘nature’ was replaced by *methodology* (ABS ANZSRC, 2008, pp. 2-3, italics in original). As a consequence, Journalism was split off from Communication and Media Studies, and became the four digit 1903 Group Journalism and Professional Writing within the two digit 19 Division of Studies in Creative Arts and Writing. Communication and Media Studies joined with Language and Culture to become the new 20 Division of Language, Communication and Culture.

A couple of points are worthy of note about the 2020 ANZSRC classification in light of this brief historical overview. Firstly, having emerged in 2008, methodology remains unchallenged as the sole criterion for classification and it is very difficult to see that changing in the future: what is more fundamental

to the nature and quality of research than methodology? Secondly, over four reviews across 27 years, Journalism as a research practice has retreated from being part of the headline nomenclature at the two digit Division level to sharing a six digit Field with Professional Writing. It flags a scathing assessment of the field's performance in developing a research culture and outputs since the 1989 accession to research university status of the institutions wherein it has predominantly been offered.

The failure of Journalism to recognise itself as an independent and sovereign field of academic research practice has its own complex history. Firstly, Australia and New Zealand are not alone, for a start. The UK and Europe, and many countries that follow them, largely persist in a binary classification of research and non-research institutions and consign journalism to non-research status. The actual teachers of journalism are often casual or contract practitioner staff who are excluded from assessments of research performance. In the US, while Columbia University, UC Berkeley and some State Universities have strong reputations in journalism education and production, the Jeffersonian anti-elitist traditions in their national Constitution and history of the press have militated against any claims for academic expertise or 'ivory tower' knowledge that might limit popular access. That said, it is in the US that universities have worked together most effectively with independent funding bodies and non-government organisations to foster high quality investigative research by journalists (Birnbauer, 2019). In the Australian situation, it could be said that the 1989 Dawkins reforms offered journalism academics an unprecedented opportunity to assume international leadership in developing this field at the university level. To date, that opportunity has largely not been recognised or taken up, with isolated individual exceptions.

Secondly, since the late 1990s up until the present, Australian Communications scholars, with a chorus of support from UK colleagues, have assertively argued that journalism is a subset of communications scholarship, and have waged a strong campaign within and across universities to have such subservient status entrenched in departmental structures, curricula, research degree programmes and research grant categories. That conflict first entered the Australian research literature with the Media Wars in the 1990s: the false binary terms of scholarly vs craft definitions were constituted *ab initio*, which was precisely what needed to be challenged (Bacon 2006). I have been a protagonist in that conflict, and have not the slightest desire to revisit it, firstly because the referee has blown the whistle in ANZSRC 2020 and so the fight is over; and secondly, because to ignore the referee and continue a faux conflict can only be a destructive distraction from the challenge that confronts journalists in the Australasian academy.

In the silence among journalism and communication academics since the decision was announced we can hear the gentle sound of dust settling on old conflicts, and the distant roar of looming turbulence on the Oceania horizon.

Future scholars in the archaeology of the discipline will find relics of the conflict in the pages of this journal, *Australian Journalism Review*, the submissions to the 2020 ANZSRC Review and *What is Journalism? The Art and Politics of a Rupture* (Nash, 2016). In the meantime, the ARC and the PBRF are waiting, perhaps less than patiently, for academic journalists to recognise their place and standing in the research field and get on with the job.

In what remains of this article I want to briefly discuss a few issues to be confronted on the road ahead. Firstly, the definitive issue is methodology. Journalists are no stranger to questions of method. The objective of journalistic inquiry is to make and publish truth claims about some aspect of the world at a given place and time. The claims are generally meant to be verifiable, and able to withstand interrogation and scrutiny. This automatically means that the methods used to discover information and verify the truth claims are also open to interrogation and scrutiny—how do we know what we claim to know?—which in turn necessarily involves questions of methodology: how adequate to the task of establishing and then defending the truth claims were the methods used to gather and analyse the evidence?

So right from the very initiation of a journalistic inquiry, methodological issues arise. The answer to ‘what is the story?’ is the answer to ‘what is the research question?’ The standard what, where, when, who, how and why questions of journalistic inquiry immediately demand a set of methods to get answers. Good journalists are extremely practised at discussing and defending their methods whether it be to the chief-of-staff to whom they are pitching their story, their critics and opponents in post-publication controversy, and occasionally in a court of law in defamation proceedings. Gaye Tuchman laid all this out in *Making News* over 40 years ago and she was one of the very first to label journalism as a ‘theoretic activity’ (Tuchman, 1978, p. 82, 204). Methodology requires the elaboration and justification of the reasons why the methods used were appropriate to the task of answering the research question. Or put more prosaically: how do you know what you claim to know? And why are those methods adequate to the task?

Journalism does not need to reinvent the wheel on the question of theorising methodology. A lot of other disciplines have been there before us. ‘What’ requires an empirical method (typically the standard social research methods of observation, witness testimony, document discovery and examination, interview, etc; though also increasingly quantitative methods in data analysis). ‘Where’ is a question of spatiality, and therefore invokes geography. ‘When’ is a matter of temporality, and therefore invokes history. ‘Who’ is a matter of sociology and sometimes psychology. ‘How’ and ‘why’ were described by James Carey as ‘the dark continent of American journalism’ (Carey, 1997): they go straight to the heart of interpretation by the audience, and are usually contested and obscured in political struggle over the production of meaning. Necessarily ‘how’ and ‘why’

involve interdisciplinarity: one cannot explain an event in political reporting without understanding politics, and the same goes for sports, arts, economics, war and all other genres of reporting. I have discussed these matters in detail elsewhere (Nash 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017).

Secondly, it is essential that journalism teaching move beyond coursework at undergraduate and postgraduate level to embrace postgraduate research degrees specific to their own discipline and not as a subset of other disciplines. This is not a repudiation of interdisciplinarity, but an assertion of responsibility and sovereignty for the discipline with which we have been entrusted by the AN-ZSRC. I suggest that journalism academic researchers will move ahead in leaps and bounds on the issues in journalism methodology once they start addressing the question with research students (Nash, 2014). Interdisciplinarity will be an excellent venue for identifying the confluences and conflicts in methodology with other disciplines and exploring the specific characteristics, challenges and contribution of journalism.

Thirdly, in their own institutional contexts and at the national level of the ARC and PBRF, journalism academics are going to have to reach out to colleagues in the 36 Division of Creative Arts and Writing. That Division is where decisions on research funding for Journalism will be made, and also the periodic evaluations of quality in research outputs will be made. Journalists will have to make sure that within their own institutions they have representation on the appropriate bodies, and not go cap in hand to other disciplines as currently, to seek to justify themselves in foreign terms. The politics of this at the ARC and PBRF levels should not be so difficult; after all, those bodies have been waiting since 2008 for Journalism to recognise itself; they will probably sigh with relief.

Within individual institutions, it will be a very different story because money and power are involved. It is quite possible that the older established research institutions will turn away from journalism research practice, because for them historically journalism was always an addendum to a pre-existing communications studies programme, and the competitive research strength lies with the latter. At the newer universities, or where journalism has a strong educational history, the balance and comparative advantage will vary. At all universities, in the current climate of dependence on outside commercial organisations for collaborative research funding and with governments often hostile to critical journalism, there will be apprehension at senior levels about what threat independent journalism might pose to corporate well-being. Either way, it will be essential for journalists seeking research grants to approach their own disciplinary bodies, to make sure they have their own representatives on those bodies, to engage independently with the funding and quality evaluation processes, and to organise collectively to defend their common professional interests and academic integrity.

Fourthly, all of the above and particularly the need for interdisciplinary

understanding will precipitate a need for curriculum review and change away from the current Communications dependent mode. This again will be hard-fought because of the funding implications for disciplines, and because many senior Journalism academics have dual appointments in Journalism and Communications. As a process it will probably need to follow rather than precede steps addressing the research profile, and therefore does not need further discussion in this article. There is already and extensive literature on this topic internationally (see Bacon, 1997, 2006, 2011; Robie, 2019; Robie & Marbrook, 2020 for an indication in the Australasian context).

Fifthly, there are the profound intellectual and professional consequences of the establishment of the new 45 Indigenous Studies Division, including its three FoR codes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (450109), Māori (450713) and Pacific Peoples (451311) Literature, Journalism and Professional Writing respectively. Many Indigenous fields had previously been aggregated in the ANZSRC 2008 classification, but not given the status of Division on that occasion. The new status will precipitate major changes in funding, quality evaluation, research outcomes and coursework curriculum for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Journalism. It is not for me to initiate that discussion, but simply to emphasise that it is upon us and is important. There is a literature on decolonising methodologies (e.g. Smith 2012; Archibald et al., 2019) that those journalism academics not familiar with it would do well to engage with, in anticipation of the changes poised to sweep through the field. More broadly, we can note that social, economic and political life in Australasia and the Pacific is still profoundly structured by colonial and neo-colonial relations; Oceanian countries are at the forefront of contemporary ecological crises; and that, bordering East Asia and the Americas, Oceania including Australasia is centre stage in the big geopolitical contests of the 21st century. Journalism in the 45 Division of Indigenous Studies may roar into huge significance internationally in these looming crises.

In conclusion, it is worth noting the longterm leadership role this journal has played, under the founding editor and director of the Pacific Media Centre at AUT, Professor David Robie, working with production designer Del Abcede. Robie and *Pacific Journalism Review* have long been a champion of the role of university-based journalism that the ANZSRC has recognised and mandated in its 2020 classification (eg Robie, 2015). Its prominent emphasis on Māori and Pasifika journalism, not just in terms of scholarly production but also through supporting journalists in the thick of professional, political and economic challenges, has been exemplary of the efforts that others will now need to emulate and develop. Likewise, the establishment of the *Frontline* section featuring and analysing journalism as research under the foundation leadership of Professor Wendy Bacon from the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS), another leading institution in the development of journalism as research, was a trailblazing innovation.



In this tradition, a group of colleagues associated with *Pacific Journalism Review* propose to conduct an invited seminar in the first half of 2021 addressing the challenges and opportunities that flow from the ANZSRC 2020 classification. Hopefully in these COVID-19 times it will be a face-to-face and not a virtual seminar. The plan is for a selected collection of contributions to be refined and published as a book. Everyone interested in contributing to this project is welcome to contact the author at the email below.

Finally, it is worth re-iterating that right from 1993 when the ABS first issued its research classification including journalism, and notably from 2008 when the ANZSRC stipulated methodology as the sole criterion for inclusion and classification, Australasian journalism has been served with an invitation to world leadership in the role of journalism within universities. The ANZSRC 2020 classification reiterates that the invitation is still open, and indeed that it is shaping up as a pressing demand. Let us collectively rise to the occasion.

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# Jill Emberson: A lifetime of bearing witness to empower others

**Abstract:** Jill Emberson, an award-winning Australian journalist of Tongan heritage died in 2019. She achieved national attention for her campaign to provide a voice for all women suffering from ovarian cancer and for more and fairer funding for ovarian cancer research. Through an analysis of her programmes and interviews with colleagues, this article focuses on Emberson's journalism from daily news coverage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protests in 1982 for public radio to her *Meet the Mob* podcast series in 2014. It focuses on her significant radio documentaries on women in the Pacific for the ABCs' feminist *Coming Out Show* (1986) and *Ties that Bind*, which was about Tonga, including the Tongan diaspora in Australia (2009). It argues that Emberson's own journey to discover her cultural identity shaped her as a reflective journalist whose work was underpinned by a concern for social justice, marginalised communities, the impacts of colonisation and gender discrimination.

**Keywords:** ABC, Australia, cancer, ethnicity, feminism, Fiji women, *Frontline*, gender, Journalism education, Kanaky, New Caledonia, Pacific, public radio, radio documentary, Tonga

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JILL EMBERSON was an Australian journalist of Tongan heritage who died in 2019 aged 60. Before she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 2016, Emberson was the host of *Mornings* on ABC Radio in Newcastle. Her courageous approach to her diagnosis reflected her approach to journalism throughout her career. She explored her own journey as a cancer patient through a podcast, *Still Jill* (Emberson, 2018a), campaigned to give women diagnosed with ovarian cancer a voice and raised money for research. She was Newcastle Citizen of the Year in 2018 and was posthumously awarded an Order of Australia.

Over a period spanning 35 years, Emberson made a significant contribution to journalism, particularly about the Pacific region, and with issues relevant to Indigenous Australians and to women. She explored the relationship between

ethnicity and gender, the impact of colonisation and marginalisation on Indigenous peoples, discrimination against women and the voicelessness of minority communities. Her practice was integrally linked to her own personal journey, responding to the shifting social and political context in which she worked and her audiences lived.

The significance of Emberson's contribution is that she went to where peoples' lives were actually lived, in their own social and geographic places. For her, journalism was about empowering others to bring their own witness to bear, rather than fitting them into pre-existing narratives. By recognising and responding to the significance of her own Tongan heritage, she was an early trailblazer in Australian journalism for reporting about and to the Pacific, especially women of the Pacific.



NIC MACLELLAN

**Figure 1: Jill Emberson (right) with Hiti Tau (Time to Act) activist Vaihere Bordes at the 1995 Pacific Islands Association of Non-Government Organisations (PIANGO) conference in Moorea, French Polynesia.**

### **Early years**

Emberson's mother, Elizabeth Moore, is an Australian from an Irish Catholic background, and her father, Oscar Emberson, is a Tongan dentist who has spent many years of his life in both Fiji and Australia. After her parents separated, Emberson lived with her mother, sister, brother and maternal grandparents in Homebush in Sydney's West. Interviewed in 2018, Emberson said it was tough for her mother. The White Australia policy was still alive and there was no Federal government support for single women with children: 'There were notions of

shame and embarrassment about being a sole parent, a single mum with brown skin children' (Fidler & Kanowski, 2018).

She attended Santa Sabina College, a Catholic school run by Dominican nuns who encouraged young female students to pursue higher education. This was the period of Vatican II, with its more progressive social justice approach to Catholicism. The reformist Whitlam Labor government was in power between 1972 and 1975. It was the time of protest movements for women's rights, Indigenous rights and gay rights (Attard, 2020; Rice, 2020).

In her daily life, Emberson experienced racism. In 2018, she told the ABC journalist Richard Fidler, 'I didn't pick up on that till I went to school. And I remember distinctly when Streets introduced a licorice chocolate paddle pop ... and a girl at school came up, and put it out next to my skin and said, "Jill, look at that. The same colour as your skin".... It was very visceral. I remember as a kid in the bath getting the pumice stone and trying to pumice my skin off as it was too dark .... I didn't know why mine was this colour because we didn't talk much about this father figure of mine. I didn't meet him till I was about 13 years old' (Fidler & Kanowski, 2018).

When she did meet him, she was drawn to find out more about her father's culture. 'There's a humility about my dad that made me as an older teenager want to go and discover more ... which led me to travel extensively and start learning and studying. And when I went to uni, to make radio programmes about the Pacific Islands, because that was his heritage, and that was something I felt was missing in my case. I didn't understand why I looked the way I did' (Fidler & Kanowski, 2018).

### **Journalism beginnings**

A decisive point in Emberson's life came in 1979 when she enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts (Communications) at the then New South Wales Institute of Technology (NSWIT), now University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). The course broke new ground in humanities education by linking practice in media and journalism with critical media, social and political studies (Bacon, 1997; Curthoys, 1995). Emberson and a friend Amanda Collinge met and moved into a shared house in the inner Sydney suburb of Redfern where they lived for three years, developing close connections with the local Aboriginal community and land rights activists (Collinge, 2020a).

Emberson enrolled in a radio major and became a volunteer at local public radio station 2SER-FM, working on a range of programmes during her course. 'There was a very close connection between the students and the lecturers and the running of the radio station, that's literally where we got all our practical experience within the first year of doing the degree, making radio programmes, presenting, learning how to edit, being part of a real life radio station was just

absolutely invaluable experience' (Collinge, 2020b).

Fellow student and close friend Geoff Adlide remembers the course as 'very feminist' and 'theoretically radicalising': 'It was mind-blowing, academic politics and sociology, semiotics, theory and practice. I was studying radio production, so was Jill Emberson, and Chris Nash was teaching it. There were community groups such as Gay Waves that we helped on the technical side ... and a Palestinian programme' (Adlide, 2020).

After graduating, Emberson was employed as a producer at 2SER. In a profile for *Listening Post*, Emberson described herself as 'having close ties to the black community' and an interest in Pacific history. She wanted to start an Aboriginal show run by Aboriginal people as she was concerned that there was only one hour on Sydney radio (2EA) where Aboriginal communities could hear their own music and their own language (Madsen, 1982).

In 1982, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people planned to get the attention of visiting international media at the Commonwealth Games in Brisbane for their battles for land rights, control of Indigenous affairs and against injustice in the legal system. Premier Joh Bjelke-Peterson declared a State of Emergency. Street marches were illegal, which led to the arrest of more than 100 protesters (*Deadly Story*, n.d.).

2SER reporters saw it as their role to report on protests in a way that ensured that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community's message was not trivialised by the mainstream media. *Listening Post* reported that mainstream media tried to block the accreditation of public radio journalists but eventually Emberson and two other reporters were accredited. Collinge, who also covered the protests, remembers that they saw themselves as activists as well as reporters (Collinge, 2020b). Emberson filed nine reports a day and worked 'non-stop'. She told *Listening Post* that the 'real issues were not being addressed by the Australian press'. She reported on the daily meetings at Musgrave Park (where land rights activists camped in Brisbane) where activists would discuss their tactics for the next day. Whenever Aboriginal people from the reserves got up to speak about life on the reserves, Emberson said that 'the press just left'. They weren't interested in the routine life of Aboriginal people (Peers, 1982).

### **Discovering the Pacific**

In 1981, while still a student, Emberson made her first trip to the Pacific. She and Collinge travelled to Fiji to make their first documentary called *Women in the Pacific*. In 1985, by then working at the ABC's youth station 2JJJ-FM, she and friend Geoff Adlide travelled for three months through Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and Kanaky New Caledonia where a civil war was unfolding with roadblocks and curfews. The Kanak independence flag flew over parts of the country. (Robie, 2019). The two young journalists met freelance journalist Helen Fraser, the only



Australian journalist in Nouméa with access to the Kanak independence movement. She introduced them to Kanak leaders and slipped them into French military briefings, known as the ‘5 o’clock follies’. Fraser remembered being struck by Emberson’s ‘incredible curiosity’. She ‘cared about the injustice that Kanaks couldn’t get independence like everybody else had in the 1960s and 1970s’. But there was also a ‘personal desire to learn about what made her by getting to know the Pacific, particularly Tonga’. Fraser compared her attitude to that of some other Australian journalists: ‘Basically they’d just sit there in Nouméa, take the handouts from the French, take what the military said, not go exploring, not go into risky areas’ (Fraser, 2020).

Emberson and Adlide were in the office of Oscar Temaru, the leader of the Tahitian independence movement and then the Mayor of Faa’a, in July 1985 when news came through that the Greenpeace boat *Rainbow Warrior* had been bombed in Auckland Harbour (Adlide, 2020; Robie, 1985). The *Rainbow Warrior* was on its way to Tahiti to pick up Temaru and take him to the French nuclear test site at Moruroa atoll where they were going to try to stop the next batch of tests.

In Tonga, Emberson met her grandmother Matilda Emberson for the first time. As the eldest daughter in her family or the ‘*Fahu*, Matilda was a powerful woman in the hierarchical Polynesian society of Tonga. She was the daughter of Anga’aefonu Lavulo whose father Fatai Lavulo was the Government Counsellor of Ha’apai. The family was close to the Royal family of Tonga (Emberson, M., communications with authors 2020). Adlide describes her as a ‘feisty [and] powerful woman who made things happen’. Emberson became part of her extended paternal family, attending Matilda’s 80th birthday celebration in Tonga in 1986, and her funeral in March 1987.

Emberson’s visit to Tonga influenced her identity as a journalist. Adlide reflected that although already ‘strong and skilled’, if she had ‘stayed in Sydney and not engaged with the Pacific then she wouldn’t have had that Pacific identity’. He believes that her UTS education and her experiences in the Pacific helped her develop an approach to journalism where ‘you think I’m not just here to tell a story that I can gather and broadcast, I’m also wanting to empower’ (Adlide 2020). Her political commitments around Indigenous rights and social justice were strengthened.

Emberson and Adlide became involved in the Committee for Kanak Independence in Sydney and helped arrange visits from Kanak journalists to the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) in Alice Springs. They assisted Kanak Radio Djiido, which was established as a voice for the independence movement to counterbalance local French colonialist media.

### **Emberson joins the ABC**

While public radio was blossoming in Australia, big changes were also afoot at

the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). In 1975, youth station 2JJ was established, to become 2JJJ-FM in 1981. Also in 1975, the Australian Women's Broadcasting Cooperative (AWBC), formed by women working inside the ABC, launched a weekly feminist show called *The Coming Out, Ready or Not Show*. Emberson was to play a role in both these developments.

In 1983, Emberson began working at Triple J. Amanda Collinge worked at the station during the same period, and remembers that 2JJJ was groundbreaking, a music radio station for young people and very progressive politics. It was a very exciting place to work and 'pretty much run as a collective [and] an alternative. But it was white' (Collinge, 2020). Emberson was the only person working at the station whose heritage was not European. Together Emberson and Collinge lobbied for the first Indigenous cadet at the station. They also established an exchange programme for Kanak journalists.

With a strong voice and media presence, Emberson was recruited to co-present the morning show with music broadcaster Stuart Matchett (Jenke, 2018). She did the political interviews, including with Kanak leaders whom she had met during her visits to Kanaky New Caledonia.

These were also the years of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Triple J journalists including Emberson got involved in public health safe sex campaigns. 'We worked with the needle exchange people up in Kings Cross .... Frank, open, honest talk about safe sex, condoms, homosexual sex, dental dams, anal sex and going to prostitutes, sharing needles and taking heroin, safely opened up that whole area of sort of underground activity that goes on that people pretend doesn't go on, because we had to talk about it to make it safer' (Collinge, 2020).

### ***Coming Out, Ready or Not Show*—feminism—voices of Pacific women**

By 1985, the *Coming Out Show* had been on the air for ten years but the content had mostly presented the perspectives of white women. 'Re-defining feminism was a constant demand of Third World women's groups around the world during the 1980's .... the most provocative of these ideas was the Third World challenge to the Western feminist reform agenda. In the media world, this challenge took the form of a demand by Third World women for self-representation. They wanted the right to speak directly about their experiences rather than being spoken about by someone else, no matter how sympathetic they might be' (Emberson & O'Donnell, 1995).

In 1986, AWBC coordinator Jemima Garrett decided that it was time for Australian women to hear about women in their immediate region, the South Pacific. Garrett, who went on to become Radio Australia's South Pacific correspondent, chose Emberson as the reporter for the series *Paradise Past/Paradise Present*.

'There's never been a programme on Pacific women, what they saw as important in their own voice, and the issues confronting their new countries and

facing them in their daily lives, that's why we decided to do a series on Pacific women, and I did know that Jill was around and just how lively, and fearless and innovative and fun her material for Triple J was' (Garrett, 2020). There were three parts to the series, each of 45 minutes duration.

Mixing script, interviews and actuality with archival news reports to give context, Emberson addressed the economic, gender and educational barriers that shaped the lives of women and the threats they faced from domestic violence and rape. Her interviewing style was relaxed, conversational and sometimes, humorous. Non-English speakers were broadcast by running 10 to 20 seconds of local language, then using a translator's voice with the local language continuing underneath the translation.

Part One of the series dealt with the daily lives and concerns of a diverse range of women in rural villages and urban settings in Fiji and Tonga. In Londoni, a village 50 kilometres from Suva, 16 households are scattered around a clearing with a communal laundry and kitchen. Vini Vokalaw is the wife of the village headman:

There are the same money problems as when I was young [but] now times are harder. When I'm home, I carry out our family laundry or sometimes I weave nets for our family. Sometimes when I need money, I go out fishing for prawns, up in the hills catch a few prawns and sell them for two dollars so I can buy some soap for my laundry needs. The catches are very small because we do it every day...and the fish is getting smaller, and smaller and smaller. For me when fishing becomes impossible, we go without it, for others we go to the shop and buy tinned fish every day. (*Paradise Past/ Paradise Present: Pt 1*)

Emberson then interviews several young Fijian women who have left rural villages and gone to the capital Suva to work. Job opportunities are limited, so some turn to sex work. Young women earn more on the streets than working a 40-hour week in a factory, but sex workers face violence from drunken men and family disapproval.

A young woman recently moved to Suva says:

If you come in the night, you can see 40 to 50 girls going around the streets, they never find any job, nothing here to help them out, there's no job, no good houses to stay ... They go to the men, ... give them ten dollars, they go with another one ... It's a rule you can't muck in the town like this after night [midnight], some people talk to you and kill you, they beat you. ... they can kill you. It's happened to many of them in Suva, they get killed, the boys get drunk, and they got killed.... (*Paradise Past/ Paradise Present: Pt 1*)

In the rural areas, women dig on farms for ginger, one of the few exports. In the city, they chop up 70 or 80 kilos of ginger each day. A woman talks about cutting ginger into bite sized pieces for 8 hours a day, with only a 15 minute break. She has been working for six years, but can't afford to take a holiday. There are no other jobs.

The story then moves to Tonga, the only surviving monarchy in the Pacific with a rigid social hierarchy. Emberson's grandmother Matilda is not only part of a noble family, but she is also the eldest daughter in her family or the '*Fahu*', which gives her special privileges. Sounds of mallets beating tapa cloth can be heard in the background. Tapa (made from beaten bark) plays an important role in Tongan practices around birth, marriage and death. Matilda receives a steady flow of tapa and food gifts from her servants. When Emberson asks why this happens, she simply answers that it is because she is the '*Fahu*: 'I am the chief.' Matilda also has a small but lucrative business which she opened in Suva and has sent the children in her large family out of Tonga to be educated.

Emberson wrote: 'The interview with my Tongan grandmother, Matilda Emberson had a profound effect on my own self-identity and the voice I was speaking with in making these programmes. Being of the region and not a passive observer' (Emberson & O'Donnell, 1995).

While impressed by her grandmother, Emberson did not shy away from pointing out the impact of privilege and inequality on ordinary Tongans.

A Catholic nun, Sister Mali Tua Fuha, takes Emberson to meet two village women who talk about how women of all ages participate in the work of the village. Everyone is helping build a new church. They work hard to pay school fees so that their children may be able to go to Australia.

Emberson: 'Won't you miss them if they go to Australia?'

Woman: 'We will miss them but we never want our children to be in the situation that we are going now because when you hear us going fishing, the sea is going up to our neck a whole lot of nights ... we get sick at night because of staying in the cold. Then in the morning we have to get up and continue the work for the family.' (*Paradise Past/Paradise Present*: Pt 1)

The second programme is about women in the Pacific organising to improve their lives.

Emberson visits a Ni-Vanuatu village where women are overcoming the resistance of men to them organising to own a truck, and Vila women talk about taking their own products to market in a way that was not possible in colonial times. She then introduces the more radical fledgling women's movement in Fiji where Shamima Ali explains that a new women's group will 'stand up and fight for women's rights because we felt that women in this country didn't get a fair deal'. The group is pushing for an equal pay act and want reforms in the

way police handle the serious issue of domestic violence. The programme ends on a cautionary note from Hilda Lini, daughter of Vanuatu's founding prime minister Father Walter Lini, who works at the Women's Resource Bureau at the South Pacific Commission in Nouméa. She argues that women are mostly concerned with immediate needs of water, food and education for their children. She acknowledges that younger, more educated women will speak up if their rights are undermined.

If the message of the second programme was that 'women's lives are changing but slowly', the third programme is about the urgency of the political struggle for independence in Kanaky New Caledonia, including the role of feminism in the Kanak independence struggle. Emberson explains: 'Under the traditional land tenure system, Kanak land was inalienable and within two years of the French arrival 130 years ago, Kanaks lost nine-tenths of their best land and were pushed up into the mountains and onto infertile soil' (*Paradise Past/Paradise Present*: Pt 3). In the 1980s, the escalating struggle for Kanak independence includes a Kanak campaign of rural disruption with roadblocks and occupations.

Emberson introduces Déwé Gorodey, one of the original feminist Kanak activists. Gorodey, who went on to become a significant Kanak poet and politician, had represented the Kanak independence movement overseas but she returned in 1981 to live with her tribe and teach outside of Nouméa. University educated in France and founder of the Kanak Popular Schools, she worked with Susanna Ounei, another feminist and activist from the *Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste* (FLNKS). Ounei was a member of Groupe de femmes kanak exploitées en lutte (GFKEI—Group of Exploited Kanak Women who are Fighting), a founding group in the FLNKS (Quade, 2016). These more radical women's groups were involved in direct action.

The audience hears that for the first time, Kanak women are publicly challenging the Kanak custom which says women shouldn't speak publicly in front of men. Gorodey explains, 'For the first time ever, a women's section has been formed in the FLNKS. The women raise money in the villages and tribes for the cooperatives and the popular schools, they sew, weave and cook for income generating activities and hold political discussions' (*Paradise Past/Paradise Present*: Pt 3).

Emberson acknowledged that friends and family helped her get access to villages but had also been invaluable in understanding 'the intricacies of custom that had to be observed just about everywhere. [Women activists] had gone out of their way to make me welcome and talk about their lives in a French colony and how they were organising as women for independence' (Emberson & O'Donnell, 1995). 'I sent tape copies back, had them translated and rebroadcast on Radio Australia, and eventually used them in regional training workshops. They became quite a valuable resource, not just an observation' (Emberson &

O'Donnell, 1995). (Emberson brought the interviews with feminist leaders to a wider audience when she published transcripts in the socialist-feminist magazine *Scarlet Woman*) (Emberson, 1987).

Together, the three parts of *Paradise Past/Paradise Present* presented a complex historical snapshot that defied stereotypes of the situation of Pacific women in 1986.

During this period, Emberson also worked as a presenter on the ABC Science Show *Quantum*.

### **The Pacific Women's Resource Bureau (SPC)**

In 1990, Emberson moved out of journalism to work as the communications officer at the Pacific Women's Resource Bureau at the South Pacific Commission (now the Secretariat of the Pacific Community). Here she was able to work alongside Pacific women as they tackled issues raised in the *Coming Out Show* programmes (South Pacific Commission, 1995). She remained there until 1993, running a resource library, producing a quarterly newsletter and organising workshops to build communications skills amongst women at grassroot level. (*Women's News*, 1992-1995.) The newsletter covered issues such as domestic violence, HIV/AIDS, employment, fishing rights, and International Women's Day events and marches. Under Emberson's editorship, the newsletter turned into a magazine, contributions from women around the region grew and circulation rose from 900 to 2500. She also contributed a chapter on women in the media in the Pacific Island nations and New Zealand for an international resource book on women and globalisation of media (Emberson, 1994).

After she left SPC in 1993, Emberson worked as the communications manager for Greenpeace in Sydney. She then worked in corporate communications for seven years before returning to journalism and the ABC, initially as a freelancer. Her first major project was a documentary for Radio National.

### ***Ties that Bind***

Emberson successfully proposed an hour-long radio documentary exploring her cultural roots in the Pacific to the then Radio National program 360 documentaries. The coronation of a new king in Tonga offered rich possibilities. The political context in Tonga had changed: pressure for democratic reform had increased since Emberson recorded her interviews for the *Coming Out Show* in 1985. In 2006, riots in Tonga were reported in the Australian media. Not only would Emberson be able to reconnect with members of her own family but she could also observe the interactions among Tongans, including a contingent of 5000 from all over the world. (There were then 100,000 Tongans in the diaspora, including 8000 in Australia.)

In *Ties that Bind* Emberson directly addressed the contradictions and



dilemmas experienced by the Tongan diaspora, including her own. It was more than 25 years since she had first visited Tonga and met her extended family. Now she told stories that very much located her in her own family and as part of the diaspora community.

A few years ago, my father phoned me from Canberra to ask me to take on the role of the 'Fahu at the funeral of a Tongan relative in Sydney. I didn't know the relative and I only vaguely remembered the meaning of 'Fahu ... Traditionally every Tongan family has one.

The Fahu and her children, especially the girls, have certain responsibilities and in return they get the best of everything: the head of the fish, the best cut of meat, the best tapa. Her brothers and uncles keep a respectable distance. They look up to her.

So Emberson and her sister, Judy-Ann, found themselves at the funeral as the most highly ranked females.

So there we were, a couple of Aussie women with ever-so-vague Polynesian features presiding over the funeral of someone we didn't know.... Senior reps of our shared family line. We didn't even grow up in this family. Our parents divorced and we didn't meet our father until we were teenagers. And he had spent most of his life in Fiji.

At the funeral, Emberson was given ceremonial mats which eventually ended up in her garage. Later a relative explores the mats in the garage with her and explains their cultural significance. Emberson acknowledged in the programme that she should take more care of them.

She interviewed a range of people who have different attitudes to the monarchy. She sat uncomfortably in the sun for hours during the coronation ceremony because custom does not allow standing, and conducted a whispered interview with a Tongan man who worked for a global marketing firm but remained firmly in support of the monarchy. But she also interviewed others who did not support the monarchy but felt uncomfortable in speaking out for fear of upsetting family members.

In Sydney, Emberson explored the many problems facing the Tongan Australian community including the high rates of imprisonment, financial pressures on Tongan families to contribute to the building of a new church that replicates the one built for the coronation in Tonga, and positive and negative aspects of the emphasis on sporting role models.

She challenged Australian media stereotypes that were present in a popular ABC-TV series called *Summer Heights* that had a Tongan character who was 'dumb'; she asked Tongan male school students what they felt about how their community was portrayed.

Boy: ‘We didn’t really laugh at ourselves, but we were laughing at him. We looked at it like it’s a joke, but when it comes to reality it is actually like a problem. We get hidings from our parents. We would never talk to our fathers like that, ever or else we will be somewhere... it is not funny to us. It is funny but not funny to the parents cos they know what happens if that happens.

Emberson didn’t try to resolve all these contradictions into a simple narrative or to come down with simple solutions. Instead, she allowed the listener to sit with the complexity and uncertainties.

She concluded the documentary with questions for Tongans, herself and her audience.

Is it possible in Australia in 2009 to truly honour the ties that bind and also flourish and succeed not just as footballers but also as doctors, musicians and marketers.

It’s a journey of constant negotiation as families move back and forth between Australia and Tonga, between the old cultural ties and the new demands that require an individual response. It’s a juggle between aspiration and obligation and it’s not easy.

The ties that bind me to Tonga are traced through the complex networks that go back to my grandmother and great grandmother in a family that I didn’t even grow up with. I can hang the sign of my Tongan heritage on my apartment walls, mats and Tapa as art. I can use them to participate when called upon, or I can excuse myself from calling up my Tongan heritage when it doesn’t suit me, or I can tie them all up in bundles in the garage and walk away—for now anyway.

### **Newcastle—regional radio**

In 2009, Emberson moved to Newcastle to become the presenter of the ABC Newcastle *Mornings* Show. When asked by *Newcastle Herald* what drew her back to radio, she replied, ‘Being part of people’s daily lives, providing information they rely on and being immediate.’ Her imagined listeners were ‘a handful of ... [people] all sitting on a lounge. There’s an oldie and a youngie and a mum popping up and down, listening when she’s got a chance. Radio’s like that, it comes in and out of our daily lives.’ (Jameson, 2009.). Journalism academic and friend Monica Attard remembers Emberson’s attitude to the job as exemplifying her approach. ‘Jill was ..., a deeply curious journalist who would look around her and think that doesn’t look right, that doesn’t feel right, that’s not fair, then she’d pick it up and tear it apart and end up doing something on it journalistically’ (Attard, 2020).

Lucia Hill was Emberson’s producer and later manager at ABC Newcastle. ‘She was never afraid to ask the tough questions and she would continue to ask

them. Politicians who can be a bit slippery and evasive, she'd just keep asking the questions, she really was absolutely without fear or favour' (Hill, 2020).

Hill remembers Emberson changed ABC Newcastle. 'We certainly didn't have the diversity of voices in the Hunter, refugee, Indigenous voices, and the socio economic diversity before Jill was with us' (Hill, 2020).

In 2011, Emberson's reports on appalling living and housing conditions of refugees prompted a Federal government audit and major recommendations for change. The series won the ABC Local Radio Award for Outstanding Coverage of a Local Story.

Along with colleagues Lucia Hill and Ben Millington, Emberson took ABC Newcastle beyond conventional morning radio when they produced the series *Hooked On Heroin* in 2012 (Emberson, Millington & Hill, 2012.) The context for the documentary was a national debate about the costs of criminalisation of drugs (Norrie, 2012).

*Hooked on Heroin* is a strong example of investigative journalism driven by a desire for reform (Protest et al., 1991). A social problem is established and its consequences for the community explored; the interviewer enables those directly involved to explain the situation through concrete details of their experience, finally those in power are held responsible through questioning and solutions are proposed.

The series explores the failed drug policy in the local context. The Hunter region's two-year wait for methadone is well below the national standard and very low by international standards. In the capital city Sydney, the wait is only two weeks. People who cannot get methadone, turn to heroin. 'We are losing 400 people a year.' People are being 'hidden and silenced'. Listeners are on a journey to break the silence.

Emberson's interviewing technique encourages people to describe the concrete details of living with addiction. A local pharmacist invites Emberson to visit her workplace to observe work in the trenches. She says there is a black market in the Hunter.

Radio headlines from archives remind the audience of the cost of crime. Emberson puts herself in the shoes of the listener interpreting those headlines. 'I don't usually relate them to the methadone waiting list in the Hunter but now I am starting to.' For every one hundred people on methadone, there are 12 fewer robberies and 57 less 'break and enters'.

The pharmacist reminds listeners that treatment costs a 'lousy \$5 a day' compared to '\$96,000 [a year] to keep people in prison, it's just not economical'.

'Imagine ... getting released, being cut off treatment and being told you have to wait two years to get back on methadone.' 'What's that like?' asks Emberson. A community worker on the ground replies, 'If you come out to Newcastle, and you don't get methadone then you have to go back to jail ... it is criminal really.'

Emberson switched to prisoners returning home to a ‘family like yours... ultimately this is all about families’. A father tells the story of his daughter, a person who was ‘doing quite well’, but relapses into addiction. He paints a picture of his daughter trying to detox at home spending the weekend ‘wrapped up in a blanket with a heater fan on her back, watching movies’ to get well enough to go to work on Monday. His daughter eventually gets access to methadone but now the wait is two years. The government is effectively condoning illicit heroin use.

After identifying who is responsible for the problem Emberson wants to ask questions about what can be done to fix it. The local police are not available. The lack of certainty and clarity of those in power compares with the immediacy and clarity of the experience of sources on the ground. When Emberson takes her questions to the NSW Minister for Health Jillian Skinner, she deflects back onto weaknesses in regional health management. ‘We can’t keep just providing money,’ she says. For listeners expecting the government to provide solutions, Skinner’s answers seem insufficient and defensive.

*Hooked on Heroin* won a Prodi award for Radio News and Current Affairs in 2012 and was a finalist in the Walkley Awards for Excellence in Journalism. The judges found the series ‘added to community pressure for change which ultimately saw the NSW government provide additional funding to reduce the waiting list down to two weeks’.

### ***Meet the Mob***

Emberson’s life-long commitment to Indigenous issues continued to inspire her journalism in Newcastle. In 2012, she partnered with the local Indigenous community to produce *Meet the Mob*, a podcast of a hundred interviews with Indigenous and Torres Strait Islanders from the Hunter region. In a piece written for a live broadcast from the Wollotuka Institute at the University of Newcastle in 2016, Emberson reflected on the series.

When I moved to Newcastle in 2009, someone told me there weren’t many Aboriginal people here. How wrong they were! Outside of western Sydney, the Hunter has the second biggest population of Aboriginal people in New South Wales But where were they? And why did we barely know them at ABC Newcastle?

On Australia Day in 2012, a land rights protest outside Parliament House in Canberra sparked national outrage when Prime Minister Julia Gillard was dragged to safety, losing her shoe on the way. The issue was still running hot the following Monday morning, so we opened the phone lines. Of the many calls, one came from Sean Gordon who had been at the Canberra protest and challenged both the security and media responses. An advocate for Indigenous economic independence, Sean made reference to his land council, Darkinjung, being the biggest private land developer on the central coast. I had no idea. Nor did our listeners. (Emberson, 2016)

*Meet the Mob* was born. Emberson contacted council CEOs, authors, artists and footy players. She arranged to meet guests in shopping centres, cafes, at the beach, at home and at work. At first it was difficult ‘but as the connections deepened the names rolled in’.

I laughed and I wept as story after story very quickly wound its way back to the history of Australian colonisation. There were lots of direct personal experiences of the Stolen Generation and of moving house multiple times for fear of children being taken. And many stories of poor health: deafness from middle ear infection; kidney disease; diabetes. And tension around skin colour: of being too black or not black enough. Of course, there’s stacks of uplifting stories: first-in-family HSCs, first-in-family university degrees; small business founders; actors; artists; footy players.’ (Emberson, 2016)

In 2014, the series became a podcast and by 2016, 50,000 people had downloaded it. *Meet the Mob Up Late* competition was created to bring listeners and guests together in a live evening show.

Emberson’s experience of the complexities of discovering her own cultural identity is reflected in the *Meet the Mob* interviews. For example, she meets young Wiradjuri woman, Elliana Lawford who is a cadet at the ABC Newcastle. The ‘Lawford mob’ is from near Orange but ‘Ell’ has lived most of her life on Awabakal land in the Hunter. Her Aboriginal father grew up with a knowledge of his family’s traditional way of life that he has shared with his children through month long bush camping trips. Her own life has been influenced by having ‘white skin’ meaning that many did not recognise her as Indigenous. She describes her journey to find her own strength and confidence in her culture. ‘We have such a big history, it’s an everlasting pit of knowledge. ... The more I know about my culture the more I think I know who I am. And I know that I belong.’ Towards the end of the interview, Emberson observes: ‘Ellie you’re very quietly diplomatic and confident.’ In part, Ellie answers, ‘You would be surprised how many different layers of people there are in the Aboriginal community. The journey of finding who you are is such a long journey and for each individual you will find them at different stages of their journey.’ Emberson ends: ‘She is not at the end of her journey.’

Another of Emberson’s interviews was with Judge Matthew Myers, the first Aboriginal judge appointed to the Federal Court in 2011. She draws out how the judge’s personal experiences influence his understanding of inequity in the legal system and why it matters that there are Aboriginal judges. As a child, he had seen first-hand what living conditions were in Redfern and wanted to change them. After graduating in law in 1997, Myers moved to the Central Coast and worked in private practice and Aboriginal community law and health centres.

‘Have your family origins been an important part of your life and who you

are today?’ Myers replies that it does influence his awareness of impact of the law on the socially disadvantaged. Emberson then asks, ‘Is that because you see it and feel it in people around you, rather than just an academic concept or a news headline?’ Myers answers: ‘Well you do because you actually experience it, you’ve actually seen the effects of it, and you’ve got a real understanding of what it means to them, parents who have had their kids removed and things like that.’

Myers tells her, ‘There’s still a massive under-representation of Aboriginal people as lawyers, and an over-representation of Aboriginal people coming into contact with the law. So, if you look at incarceration rates, they are disproportionately high, if you look at the number of Aboriginal children being taken into care and care proceedings by the Department of Family and Community Services in NSW is extraordinarily high’ (Emberson, 2013).

Another interview is with Matty Morgan. Morgan who identifies as Gay has worked with the Gay Mardi Gras, and for the Federal Health Department. He helped his uncle write a Gamilarol language program, which is the language of NSW’s second largest Aboriginal community. He believes that language empowers you and keeps you grounded. He left Federal Health in August 2007 because he strongly opposed the Howard Coalition’s Federal Intervention into Aboriginal Affairs, a very contentious policy which followed the *Little Children Are Sacred* report (2007). The report focused on the outcome of an inquiry into sexual abuse of children in the Northern Territory. (Northern Territory Government, 2007) Morgan tells Emberson: ‘I said, I’m not going to be an Aboriginal person instigating what’s happening in the Northern Territory with their own kids and mob.’

‘You felt that strongly about it?’ asks Emberson. ‘How could you send army trucks into a small remote community, and just start screening people because you assume they’ve all been sexually abused. I’m here for my community, and my mob.’

### **Last journey—*Still Jill***

Forty-five percent of women diagnosed with ovarian cancer are dead within 5 years of diagnosis. When Emberson received her own devastating ovarian cancer diagnosis, her courageous approach reflected her approach throughout her career.

As she told ABC radio, ‘I guess once I met other women with this disease I realised that there was a desperate need for this story to be known. A desperate need to kind of catch up with the awareness and success, better outcomes of our bigger sister disease and that’s breast cancer.’

I need to be a voice ...With ovarian cancer, women like me literally don’t live long enough to form the army of advocates our breast cancer sisters have done so successfully. (Collinge, 2019)



Once again, as she had done before, Emberson linked her own personal journey with the bigger picture. Through an award winning podcast *Still Jill*, Emberson traced her painful journey and the parlous state of ovarian cancer funding and awareness (2018a).

Emberson used her journalistic and communication skills to persuade Health Minister Greg Hunt for 'funding fairness' for ovarian cancer. She created the group 'Pink Meets Teal' and mobilised breast and ovarian cancer sufferers to work together. She seized every opportunity speaking with Federal politicians and at awareness raising events, directing donations to the Hunter Medical Research Institute (HMRI) where Associate Professor Nikola Bowden is one of the leaders of research in the field. Until the end, her voice was heard on ABC's *Australian Story*, local radio and in the *Women's Weekly*. She addressed the National Press Club in June 2018 (Emberson, 2018b).

Funding was increased but it was not enough. Two days before her death, she dictated a letter to Health Minister Greg Hunt asking for an annual allocation of \$20 million for Ovarian Cancer Research. In February 2020, Minister Greg Hunt declined Emberson's request on ABC News despite ovarian cancer receiving four times less funding than breast cancer. Anne Kempton, the co-founder of advocacy group Pink Meets Teal: 'to put it in context, that \$20 million is actually \$4 million over 5 years'. On this year's International Women's Day, Kempton made a call: 'We need to be given \$50 million every year so that something can be done for these thousand women who die every year like Jill, and they don't need to' (ABC News, March 8, 2020).

## **Conclusion**

The issues that Emberson tackled in her journalism remain current today. Although progress has been made, women are still underrepresented in the media in Australia and in the Pacific (Bacon, 2013; Valencia-Forrester, 2020). They still have not achieved equality in many fields. First Nations communities in Australia still struggle to have their issues fairly covered and their own media properly resourced. The coverage of Pacific issues in Australia remains poor and has even deteriorated (Newton-Cain, 2019). Struggles for independence in Kanaky New Caledonia and West Papua continue.

Emberson's work provides a model of how a journalist working from a strong intellectual framework can go out into the field to gather evidence to tell powerful stories. As the first woman of colour at 2JJJ and Australian radio journalist to document the lives of Pacific women in the 1980s for Australian audiences, she was a pioneer of women in the media.

Her own early experiences with racism and her recognition of her personal identity as an Australian of Tongan heritage meant that she was sensitive to the experience of others. It strengthened her commitment to unpack the impact of

colonisation on Indigenous peoples of the Pacific and Australia. A clear love for people and a sense of humour combined with simple direct questions allowed those she interviewed to relax and tell their stories. On the other hand, she did not take a step backwards when interviewing those in power as was demonstrated by the hard-hitting *Hooked on Heroin* series.

She was influenced by feminist ideas and a strong understanding of the connection between ‘the personal’ and the broader political and social context. She was reflective in the way that she revealed her own position as a reporter and the contradictions in the lives of those she interviewed, as well as her own life. In her documentaries she aimed to lay out the complexity of positions rather than neatly resolve them.

However, the significance of Emberson’s position does not simply lie in her skills as a reporter and storyteller. She believed strongly that for democracy to flourish, communities, grassroots everywhere had to be empowered to communicate and that this was part of decolonisation. For her feminism had to be part of the process of working towards independence and sustainability. Her work at the Pacific Women’s Resource Bureau and *Meet the Mob* are strong examples of that.

From her early days as a reporter of Aboriginal protests at the 1982 Commonwealth Games to the last episode of *Still Jill*, she understood that part of her job as a journalist was enabling others to have a voice.

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# The nexus of political documentary and alternative journalism

## Addressing the social world

**Abstract:** This article is a critical commentary of how political documentary embodies the traits and functions of alternative journalism. I explore this notion through *Obrero* ('worker') my independent documentary project about the labour migration of Filipino workers to Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand, after the earthquake in 2011. This article maps out the points at where the theories and practices of alternative media and documentary intersect. Analysing political documentary as a format of alternative journalism has links to the long tradition of film and video production as a tool for social critique. As a form of practice-based research, *Obrero* falls under the rubric of alternative journalism—able to represent the politically marginal sectors of the polity and report on issues underreported in the mainstream press. This article concludes that a distribution plan that is responsive to fragmenting audiences works best when alternative journalism no longer targets a niche but transborder audiences.

**Keywords:** alternative journalism, Christchurch rebuild, documentary, Frontline, journalism as research, labour migration, New Zealand, Philippines, political documentary

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### Introduction

THE PRACTICES of documentary and journalism are largely intertwined to 'the same ethos and commitments to truth-telling, sense-making, and explaining' (Uricchio et al., 2014, p. 10). Both practices emphasise their obligation to reveal, understand, represent, and address the social and historical world. Although difficult at times to delineate the distinctions between the two subfields, those who distinguish documentary from journalism do so on the basis that it is different in content, style, and format to mainstream journalism. As Dan Krauss has argued: 'The contract with the audience when you are a journalistic organisation is very different from the contract you have with your

audience at a theatre showing an independent film' (Kelth, 2015, 'Understand the contract' section, para 1).

Links have been made however between documentary and investigative journalism. At a Sundance forum in 2015, political filmmakers contemplated on how their film practices mesh with investigative reporting. Laura Poitras calls her practice 'journalism plus' and identifies herself as a visual journalist, Alex Gibney reflects that his practice is filmmaking with 'journalistic baggage', and Marc Silver argues there is a 'journalistic layer' in documentary production (Das, 2015; White, 2015). There is a compelling reason why political documentary makers assume the journalist hat. As the media has shifted towards tabloidisation, some argue the documentary makers are assuming journalism's watchdog role, probing political issues (Goldson, 2015). This argument emphasises the important role that the documentary can play in the reportage of social dilemma or in holding those powerful to account. Drawing on these academic and industry insights, I sketch out the points at where the theories and practices of alternative journalism and documentary intersect. I then reflect on documentary's status as research and its capacity to add new knowledge about a socio-political issue.

### **Case study overview**

This article is based on my independent documentary titled *Obrero* ('worker') that tells the story of Filipino rebuild workers migrating to Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand, following the devastating magnitude 6.3 earthquake in 2011. Christchurch is a compelling setting for a documentary. First, the huge rebuilding demand led to the historical movement of workers from overseas to the city. And second, Christchurch is undergoing a dramatic wholesale construction following the disaster. All these reasons make the city a suitable backdrop for a migration documentary. Apart from that, the entry of Filipino workers to Christchurch can be considered a significant moment in the bilateral relationship between the Philippines and New Zealand.

Due to the need to reconstruct, New Zealand relaxed its immigration policies and sought construction workers overseas. Some of the migration policies have been overridden by New Zealand's demand for foreign labourers, especially in Christchurch. In the beginning of the rebuild phase, New Zealand employers turned to its traditional source countries such as Ireland and the United Kingdom to recruit the much-needed workforce. Filipino rebuild workers started arriving in the city beginning 2013, a majority of them are former contract workers in the Middle East and other parts of Asia. The presence of Filipinos in Christchurch has been reported in numerous media platforms, which have covered issues such as exploitation, housing problems and exorbitant recruitment fees (McClure & Meier, 2015; Morrah, 2016). The peak of the rebuild was between 2014 to 2016 and it was during this period that cases of worker exploitation were first reported



in the media. The documentary aims to contextualise the culture of labour migration in the Philippines by featuring Filipino builders in Christchurch as a case study and the Christchurch disaster as a backdrop to its narrative. It also explains the effects of unethical recruitment systems on Filipino workers.

*Obrero* targets an audience from the Philippines which I engage with the experiences of Filipino workers in Christchurch. The New Zealand audience are also targeted because of their high interests in the rebuild and the volatile debates around immigration issues in the country. By the time I released the documentary in 2018, the media gaze had shifted, and so the documentary served as a timely follow up.

The film was accepted In Competition at the 13th Documentary Edge Film Festival and it was shortlisted as a finalist for the Best New Zealand Short Documentary category. It was shown to audiences in Auckland and Wellington, and was included in the DocEdge's Docs4Schools programme. A few months after the New Zealand premiere, *Obrero* was also invited for screening at the Cinematografo International Film Festival in San Francisco, USA. Film festivals can be categorised as 'spaces of contestation and dissent, where the cultural politics of radical, progressive political documentaries are given space to spill over into the festival space' (Winton, 2013, p. 48). *Obrero's* festival selection allotted the documentary a form of legitimacy, given the project is independent in scope.

Two months after the film's festival screening, I released an interactive documentary (i-doc) version of *Obrero* (see obrerofilm.com). As a new home for original documentary content, the web offers several advantages to makers and users. For instance, it has ample space for context and detail. It can also handle, mix, remix, and hyperlink fragments of media, including those existing outside the



Figure 1: *Obrero's* film poster—[obrerofilm.com](http://obrerofilm.com)

i-doc's interface. The approach I observed is similar in principle to current affairs documentaries on television that contextualise a hot button issue and multimedia journalism packages online that expand and represent a topic using different media.

### **The documentarist as journalist**

There are numerous intersecting points between journalism's watchdog function and documentary's nature of political representation. Documentary has been well understood as a form of 'journalistic inquiry and exposition' sorting out evidences and testimonies as elements of its visual reportage (Corner, 2002, p. 259). Erik Barnouw (1974) also labelled early documentary makers as 'reporters' referring primarily to the works of Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov. Vertov had given 'the reporter-as-documentarist a moment at the center of cinema' (Barnouw, 1974, p. 66).

Journalism has been associated with the four elements: 'reporting, judging, a public voice, and the here and now' (cited in Nash, 2016a, p. 12). These elements, according to Nash (2016a), suggest that journalism addresses the 'real world', the present and the public interest (p. 13). Like documentary, journalism also has truth claims that can intersect largely with the affairs of the humanities and social sciences. A recent case study also highlighted journalism as an act of translation, not only between disciplines but also ensuring that underreported issues become context aware (Lopez, 2020).

Documentary's relationship to journalism is even more important to contemplate 'at a time when documentary seems to have taken over some of journalism's traditional terrain and found success doing so' (Craft, 2018, p. 415). Yet their routines and practices also vary. Journalism's preoccupation with objectivity is often rooted to the influence of social responsibility theory that demands journalists to observe impartiality through 'informed reportage and diverse views' (Ward, 2008, p. 140). This objective stance differentiates journalism from documentary's political and radical perspective (see Craft, 2018). Because of this, documentary makers are frequently criticised for 'transgressing norms of perceived objectivity' often expected of conventional mainstream journalism (Prager, 2015, p. 35).

In terms of form, moving pictures began meshing with journalism when newsreels attained a popular status as genre at the beginning of the 20th century. Defined as 'a single film reel of topical news items' (McKernan, 2008, p. 1), the term newsreel can be applied to any motion picture footage of news and current events shown in cinemas as part of a programme. Scholars often situate newsreels at the intersecting point between the 'idea of news and that of documentary' (Corner, 2018, p. vi). Newsreels, since their inception, were treated as secondary to feature films, but proved useful for publicity and prestige of the production companies (Chambers et al., 2018). But not all newsreels were commercially

distributed. Scant representation of social issues in mainstream media through newsreels pushed some filmmakers to set up their own distribution networks screening alternative newsreels projecting proletarian subjects (Pizzichini, 2003). By the 1960s, newsreel collectives revived an ‘alternative form of reportage’ by showcasing alternative videos that highlighted news angles not covered by mainstream press (Nichols, 1973, p. 7). This logic of giving voice to the under-represented is the same principle behind the practice of alternative journalism.

### **Defining alternative journalism**

The term ‘alternative’ journalism has different connotations depending on the form, content, and ideology that are highlighted and depending on the ‘political and social environment in which it operates’ (Forde, 2015, p. 294). Most scholars situate alternative journalism under the broader umbrella of alternative media. John Downing (2001) explores alternative media’s links to radicalism and defined it as ‘generally small-scale and in many different forms, that express an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives’ (p. v). This notion of being in opposition to dominant media structures appears consistently in succeeding research and case studies that depict journalism as research (e.g. Atton & Hamilton, 2008; Robie, 2016). Alternative journalism arises out of discontent with dominant media practices, challenging professionalisation and reliance on elite sources in favor of a journalism giving voice to the marginalised and underrepresented. Offers a historical overview, consideration of political and economic factors, case studies (with a particular focus on those who produce alternative journalism).

Studies on alternative journalism, however, typically address instances of amateur style reporting, citizen journalism, community journalism, alternative online news and social movement, and the convergence of alternative and mainstream journalism online (Atton, 2009a; Forde, 2015; Kenix, 2013). Similar to advocacy journalism (Janowitz, 1975; Thomas, 2018), alternative journalists emphasise the perspective of ordinary people and provide insights from non-traditional sources rather than deploying an objective lens and a hierarchy of sources used in professionalised journalism (Atton, 2009b), or simply put ‘self-perceived corrective’ of the mainstream media (Holt, Figenschou, & Frischlich, 2019, p. 862). They represent the political by intending: ‘to give a voice to the voiceless, to fill the gaps left by the mainstream, to empower ordinary people to participate in democracy, and in many instances, to educate people with information they cannot access elsewhere’ (Forde, 2011, p. 45).

### ***When is documentary alternative?***

Political documentary has been historically labelled under the rubric of alternative or radical media. Radical media is often characterised by its inherent

potential to echo a political point of view, contesting those in power. It is a unique attitude that separates documentary from newsreels and other forms of actualities (Nichols, 2001). This notion of radical filmmaking ‘coupled to social purpose lend distinction to documentary as an art form capable of envisioning a transformed world’ (Nichols, 2001, p. 608). Barsam (1973) argues that documentary is a special form of rhetorical expression and is a ‘film with a message’ (p. 4). This message is what is lacking in travelogues, educational films and newsreels.

Although documentary is alternative in many ways to the dominant commercial film culture, there is also a ‘tradition of independence’ within the documentary tradition (Chapman, 2015, p. 216). These documentary makers often work as ‘independents’ or those producing work outside the mainstream or dominant studio-based system. They are typically low-budget and community-supported, are often ‘viewed as aligned to left-wing politics, partly due to practical links between documentary activism, demands for access and alternative media outlets’ (Geiger, 2011, p. 189). As a format of alternative journalism, documentary is valuable for its capacity to ‘create new spaces or alternative voices that provide the focus both for specific community interests’ (Silverstone, 1999, p. 103).

Documentaries that exist at the interstices of mainstream production and distribution can easily fall under the common typologies of alternative journalism. Independently produced documentaries, for instance, could also be positioned in opposition to the mainstream, produced through collective efforts and participation of community members. Similarly, documentaries that embody the traits of alternative journalism could well qualify as civil society media and function as rhizomatic media that links activist groups and movements (Bailey et al., 2008). Recent scholarship also explores a wave of independent documentary makers operating outside the influence of the mainstream linked to an environment of protest cultures where they can exercise creativity, experimentations, and innovation in film practice (Mutibwa, 2019).

### **Creative practice as research**

Journalist-researchers take advantage of reflexivity as a unique feature of practice-related inquiry (Niblock, 2007). This approach nurtures critical practitioners who can fully comprehend the context and implications of their journalism (Niblock, 2007, p. 22). As Jarvis (1999) once noted, practitioners reflexively analysing their own practice can offer a thick description of their experience by combining their experiential knowledge with theory. In social sciences, this reflexive turn argues for the role of the researcher as part of the subject or world in question, and includes two characteristics: ‘careful interpretation and reflection’ (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000, p. 5).

In the academy, it is typical to use film either as ‘a site for systematically

gathering reflections on the process of doing/making' or a 'result of research and therefore performs the research findings' (Batty & Kerrigan, 2018, p. 7). Similarly, I position *Obrero* within two interrelated layers of practice-related analysis. On the one hand, I treat my journalism as research capable of producing new knowledge on the conditions and context of Filipino workers in Christchurch. I employed observational cinema as practical ethnography and combined it with journalistic methodologies such as interviews, both informal (off-camera) and formal (on-camera), and using unstructured and semi-structured styles. As a practitioner who treats journalism practice as academic research, my production process also involves a critical reading of related literature. This can influence how the work is produced, including how the reportage expresses the academic discourses related to the topic under study. On the other hand, I also reflect not just about the topic of my journalism but also the discursive practice involved in the production of *Obrero*, which by itself is also a 'mode of research' (Wayne, 2008). Through production commentary, I reinscribe the relationship between documentary film and alternative journalism underlining in my exegesis the strategic choices involved in my creative practice. This analytical framework is informed by a burgeoning literature that supports and advocates the greater recognition of journalism practice as research in the academy (Bacon, 2012; Goldson, 2020; Nash, 2013, 2016b; Robie, 2015, 2016).

### **Depicting labour migration through film**

*Obrero* depicts labour migration as a highly politicised activity. The addition of the word 'labour' in labour migration extends and alters its connotation and emphasises the employment-seeking motives of the migrant. While it may sound simple and straightforward, the concept of foreign worker is more complex due to the interplay of actors and its political structures (Bartram, 2005). Labour migration is inherent in countries in Asia and the Pacific. They contribute enormously to economic development in their source countries, for instance, through remittances and upgraded skills upon return (ILO, n.d.).

Despite an increasing number of Filipinos in New Zealand, the country remains a relatively new destination for Filipino workers. America, Middle East, and some parts of Asia have been typically favoured by those looking for overseas work opportunities (Martin et al., 2006). In Southeast Asia, the Philippines is considered a model country for the strategic exportation of labour force to developed states (Rodriguez, 2010). This is the reason why the notions of migrant and migration are both 'socially produced' and 'politically constructed and contested' (Tyner, 2004, p. 140). This is evident through the establishment of the called 'state migratory apparatus' in the Philippines, which has transformed labour migration as highly politicised state activity (p. 27). Rodriguez (2010) used the term 'labor brokerage' to encapsulate the 'institutional and discursive





**Figure 2: Filipino workers leaving a construction site in Christchurch CBD.**

practices through which the Philippine state mobilises its citizens and sends them abroad to work for employers throughout the world' (p. x). It could be argued, therefore, that the presence of state apparatuses (e.g. government-run employment administration) mentioned above reflects the stronger position of the Philippine government to institutionalise the export of labour (Tyner, 2004).

*Obrero* represents the point of view of migrants from a developing country whose decision to migrate is related overwhelmingly to the search for economic betterment. At the core of *Obrero's* reportage is the issue of an unethical migrant worker recruitment system, marked by the excessive amounts of placement fees charged by recruitment agencies in the Philippines. As the documentary outlines, workers moving to New Zealand can spend an entire year simply recovering from their debts. The issue was first reported by local newspapers in Christchurch and was then picked up by other mainstream news media outlets in New Zealand. This exposure triggered the renewal of a memorandum of agreement between the governments of New Zealand and the Philippines which calls for a strict implementation of the no-placement fee policy and prevention of illegal recruitment, among other regulations.<sup>1</sup> But as the film reveals, cases of workers charged recruitment fees continue unabated despite the government intervention. Recruiters in the Philippines evaded the regulations by requiring Filipino migrants to sign a waiver document that certified that no fees were collected. Some recruitment agencies followed the reformed policy, but others persisted in charging arriving workers in Christchurch and Auckland. Although focused on this one aspect of exploitation, the documentary shows there is little monitoring and regulation of private recruitment entities in the source country. Through the film, I argue that the social phenomenon of foreign rebuild workers in New Zealand, their conditions and contexts, are political in nature driven by agencies and actors that shape the policies both in sending and in receiving countries.



*Obrero* was positioned as a form of investigative documentary that exposes the corruption in the labour migration business in the Philippines. Although it recounts the implications of an unethical recruitment system, the story also highlights the agency, collective action, and protest of Filipino workers in Christchurch. The film commenced its exposition with a cause and effect structure—the earthquake in Christchurch serves as a triggering event. The argument of the film was simple: a devastating earthquake triggered a wholesale reconstruction in New Zealand. Workers were needed, and those from the Philippines were the largest migrant workers group. The conditions they experienced led them to protest against overcharging of placement fees. This narrative strategy is also used in mainstream television documentary, such as emphasising causal agency as a particular narrative arc that indicates the principle of why the subject matter occurred (Wayne, 1997, p. 152). In the case of *Obrero*, however, the ‘cause and effect’ structure is more embedded in the historical context of the Filipino workers. In the opening scene, I show brief intertitles over a moving POV (point of view) shot of an airport baggage carousel:

10 million Filipinos work overseas sending \$2 billion home each month.

The workers were mostly based in the Middle East and Asia not New Zealand... until a deadly disaster struck. (Opening sequence, *Obrero*)

The documentary was released during a time of persistent media coverage of worker issues in New Zealand. Different news outlets report on several fragments of stories, featuring interviews with workers, officials, experts, and activist groups. In other words, the audiences have consumed a swath of information regarding the issue of the rebuild and its workforce. My choice of using causation as a storytelling device then allows the audience to pause and reflect and ultimately to process a complex narrative.

The well-being of the workers themselves, distanced as they are from their families and community, is another aspect of *Obrero*’s depiction of labour migration. It provides a picture of the social consequences of Filipino parents’ sustained separation from their families. While the ‘OFW as hero’ is evidently the most prevalent dictum of the government and the general public, recently debates have begun to probe the long-term benefits of this economic mindset (Tigno, 2015). OFW stands for overseas Filipino workers, a term used to refer to the citizens of the Philippines working abroad. A particular challenge in this project is that I need to tell a story while revealing an investigation without compromising context and history. The balance is crucial and deserves attention throughout the production process.

The social concept of *sapalaran* (‘to take chances’) was a theme that appeared in many of the recorded interviews with the workers. They argue that their chances of getting a well-paid job are better overseas. They understand that migration entails risk-taking and that entering into a risky agreement is their

only viable option if they wish to continue the process. Taking risk is naturally engrained in Filipino psychology. The notion of *bahala na* is the closest cultural value that embodies how Filipinos perceive the risks involved in working overseas. *Bahala na* has no English translation, but it connotes the trait of ‘determination and risk-taking’ (Lagmay, cited in Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000, p. 55). This risk-taking attitude, together with their lack of awareness of New Zealand as a work destination, contributes to Filipino workers’ vulnerability while in the host country. As I emphasise in the conclusion of *Obrero’s* i-doc, unethical recruitment and the draining of financial resources produce a ripple effect—workers keep mum despite experiencing further exploitation in the host country. For example, the long bureaucratic red tape involved in the actual hearings of complaints against recruiters in the Philippines dissuade workers from filing formal complaints. The documentary film as a format of journalism can effectively capture these intricacies and can contextualise the narrative while observing its commitment to truth-telling.

### **Mainstream versus alternative practices**

Because of my prior journalism experience researching and producing labour migration stories in the Philippines, and also as a member of the same ethnic community, I have developed an abiding interest in the affairs of the OFWs. *Obrero’s* conception was not a by-product of my academic work. I have always had a desire to create a documentary that can capture the realities of labour migration in New Zealand. I first introduced the story to my colleagues at *I-Witness*, a documentary programme I was directing for a Filipino broadcast station GMA Network. But location for us was a barrier and funding available for overseas filming was also very limited.

In producing the film, I drew and departed from my technical and editorial training in mainstream journalism. For instance, the effective messaging style of current affairs television largely influenced how I produced my work. I also adopted the principle of parallelism, an editing style that is often applied to long form broadcast journalism. I alternated the stories of two Filipino workers depicting both their individual and collective stories as migrants in Christchurch. The analysis is interwoven and dispersed in the bigger narrative to ensure that the emotional elements of the story are distributed evenly, enticing the audience to remain focused and engaged throughout the film. I also wore the typical attitude inherent in mainstream television documentaries. I ensured a fluid presentation of the narrative, persuaded the audience about the credibility of the arguments, and used compelling visuals and music scoring to sustain audience retention. These are typical considerations of commercial broadcast journalism considering competition is fierce in the industry.

However, the production methodology I observed in this film is distinct

from my prior experience in television and from what I would have produced. The style of my film production was influenced by many variables—like my subjects, I am a Filipino, we thus share a language and the same basic perception of reality as fellow migrants in New Zealand. Therefore, most interaction in the film is spontaneous, which distinguishes *Obrero* from other forms of actualities such as news reporting that explore similar subject matter. Unlike an episodic documentary that is restricted to a particular length and timeslot, independent journalism is less constrained. Furthermore, compared to my prior experience in mainstream journalism, the working relationship I established with the Filipino workers is also more symbiotic. I cooperated with the workers instead of treating them as mere subjects of the documentary. I also bypassed the typical (public relations) gatekeepers that connect the community and mainstream journalists. Instead I immersed myself in the community of workers thus gathering narratives directly from the subjects of the film.

### **Analysing *Obrero* as alternative journalism**

Drawing on existing body of work on alternative journalism (Atton & Hamilton, 2008; Forde, 2011; Harcup, 2005), I assert that *Obrero* as a political documentary meshes with alternative journalism founded on three main features: the reportage of social issue, the independent stance of the filmmaker, and the participants in the documentary. First, the social issues I represented were covered although not fully explained by New Zealand journalists, and also less visible in media channels in the Philippines. Although labour migration is reported as a legitimate topic of news, the extremely fast cycle of journalism could compromise the reportage of community issues in favour of news topics that are immediate and of national interest. In other words, I position *Obrero*'s reportage of worker issues in opposition to the typical news agenda of the mainstream media (Downing, 2001; Harcup, 2005). This practice is consistent with early arguments that associate alternative journalism to 'social responsibility, replacing an ideology of "objectivity" with overt advocacy and oppositional practices' (Atton, 2003, p. 267). Through my interviews and fieldwork, I explain in the film the key phases of transnational recruitment from the Philippines to New Zealand that are most prone to abuse. In the film, I depict how workers fight to end the overcharging and even illegal charging of fees through lodging a formal complaint. The film also reveals the negative sentiment it produced among Filipino workers. *Obrero* then provides my audience an alternative social reality about the conditions of workers in Christchurch.

Second, my creative decisions as a filmmaker are informed by the sensibility of independent media production. Although it sounds simplistic, this independence serves as a particular strength of *Obrero*'s production as I remain free from any newsroom routine, policies, and politics or obligation from film funders. As a single-authored documentary, I exercised greater liberty in experimenting on

moving image as a mediated format of truth-telling. I produced professional and high definition quality content using a consumer-sized camera and also bypassed several access restrictions often encountered by a large film and television crew. Being independent production also liberates the project from the constraints and pressures of professional journalism. Although single-authored film production is not a sustainable model of journalism (Zafra, 2018) it remains a possibility given that the scarcity of resources pushes many independent journalists to fulfil both reportorial and technical tasks. Practitioners transitioning from mainstream to independent will certainly feel their big departure from the resources, mechanism, and prestige of big media outlets. But universities that welcome creative practice as a legitimate format of knowledge production may fill this gap and offer a sustainable venue for alternative journalism to flourish (Goldson, 2020; Nash, 2016b; Robie, 2015).

And finally, the documentary provides insights from non-traditional sources rather than deploying the hierarchy of sources used in ‘professionalised’ journalism (Atton, 2009b). It is akin to the principles of citizen journalism, emphasising the perspective of ordinary people. No longer under my tutelage as an author or filmmaker, the rebuild workers are co-creators in the production process as they contribute not only their stories but also their recorded moments of protests and personal narratives often captured through their mobile phones. For example, my subjects contributed a cell phone footage of the Filipino Labour Attaché addressing the workers who protested against excessive recruitment fees. Apart from occasional interviews with migrant advocates, the project focuses fully on the experiences of workers. Throughout the documentary, the interviews with the workers aid the narration instead of a voice-over. This gesture moves the film beyond the limits of expository mode of documentary—and is effective in sharing the authorship with the Filipino workers. The process of cooperating with the Filipino workers’ collective in Christchurch is another aspect of prioritising them as sources of information. Their political objectives gelled with the perspectives of the documentary, and in many ways, moderated the ethical concerns often attached to alternative journalism. As an insider and member of the same ethnic community, I also have a better understanding of the context of their situation. A common disposition along this critique is that insiders as storytellers do it ‘from a position of knowing, of affinity, of wielding insider knowledge’ (Sikand, 2015, p. 45).

In summary, the nexus of political documentary and alternative journalism is examined in this article both as a process and a product (Atton, 2002). As a process, this article tackles how the principles of representing reality adhere to the ethos and sensibility of documentary and alternative media. The film eschews the sourcing hierarchy in professional journalism, uses the advantage of a backpack filmmaker as eyewitness, and shines a spotlight on social issues that are less visible in the workers’ origin of country. Analysing the intersection of their

values is a heuristic process that enables journalists and filmmakers to interrogate and learn from each other (Beliveau, 2012). But *Obrero* is also a product of fieldwork and its ability to depict social reality using lens-based techniques means it falls under the category of research. While the broader literature on alternative journalism focuses on organisational features of alternative media and several case studies of community press, activist networks and citizen journalism, the present study expands its application to low-budget and single-authored journalistic documentaries.

## Conclusion

The focus of this article on analysing documentary as a format of journalism has links to the long tradition of film and video production as a tool for social critique. Depicting labour migration as a topic of *Obrero* and as a social phenomenon is even more important given the tangible and increasing impact of globalisation and neoliberalism in developing economies. However, my experience as a filmmaker shows that it is not enough for journalistic documentary to simply oppose the dominant format or the rhetoric of the mainstream media, but also to reimagine traditional modes of production, distribution, and reception. To do this, documentary makers assuming the journalist hat must span the boundaries of conventional film and explore alternative communicative and participatory platforms to invite and sustain audience interactivity. Just like how legacy journalistic organisations distribute content across digital media platforms, political documentary as alternative media also has the potential to be refashioned for different audiences. It can learn from the successes and failures of their mainstream counterparts (Kenix, 2011).

For instance, I engage with international audience through a web documentary version of *Obrero*. As a webdoc, I shifted my practice away from shovelware routine of early online journalism, wherein a website serves as a repository only for traditional media content (Boczkowski, 2004). Some Filipino workers felt more comfortable to offer their knowledge off-camera rather than through formal interview techniques of documentary and broadcast journalism. These findings are at times difficult to integrate into the film's narrative, but suitable when I repurposed the film as an interactive documentary. Using a web platform, I reported on several 'hot button' issues, minimally tackled in the film variant of *Obrero* (30 minutes). Some of these fragments include several explanations to issues reported by the mainstream press, visualisation on the changing immigration policies in New Zealand, story maps, and profiles of the worker community. An i-doc, therefore, is an opportunity to translate field work data into visualisation that captures the bigger context of the issue.

Apart from i-doc, I also expanded the reportage into miniscule journalistic content on Facebook to reach audiences in the Philippines, an instance of social

network documentary (Zafra, in press).(2) Although Facebook is highly effective to reach audiences across borders, filmmakers still need to be cognisant of its algorithmic restrictions given it is a highly commercial networked environment. I argue that a distribution plan that is responsive to fragmenting audiences works best when alternative media no longer targets a niche but transborder audiences. This is especially true for filmmakers who want complete editorial and artistic independence, resist any obligation from funding bodies, and rely mostly on crowdfunding and contributions from concerned individuals.

In developing countries where the constant threats to democracy have consistently undermined the Fourth Estate functions of journalism, the production of political documentaries as alternative media could fuel public discussion and debate. Documentary can effectively represent socio-political issues. Its rhetorical strategies can also address audiences that transcend national boundaries, language, and cultures. As this *Frontline* article explicates, political documentary can easily blend with alternative journalism as both forms of media practice are deep-rooted in their social purpose, capable of depicting and mirroring social realities, but desirous of transforming them.

## Notes

1. The labour cooperation agreement, Arrangement on the Principles and Controls on the Recruitment and Protection of Filipino workers in New Zealand, was signed in September 2015.
2. See [www.facebook.com/Obrero](http://www.facebook.com/Obrero) [Documentary].

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# The sociology of a pandemic

## Countering a COVID ‘disinfodemic’ with a campus media initiative

**Abstract:** Parallel with the global spread of the novel coronavirus pandemic, a dangerous ‘disinfodemic’ has been infecting the flow of information worldwide. Communication and media outlets have faced a new challenge with not only being responsible for reportage and analysis of a fast-moving public health emergency—the biggest this century, but forced to sift through the mass circulation of falsehoods that have spread as rapidly as the virus. Concerned about the risks for both health and public responses to disinformation, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres identified the ‘new enemy’ as a ‘growing surge of disinformation’. The UN launched a COVID-19 Communications for Solidarity Initiative to rapidly inform people about facts and science and to ‘promote and inspire acts of humanity’ globally. Also alarmed by the growing disinformation trend, the World Health Organisation warned that the ‘same enemy’ also involved ‘an increase in stigma, hate speech and hate crimes’ over the pandemic. Aotearoa New Zealand is one of the few countries in the world whose strategy of COVID elimination has been a sustained approach to ‘keep the virus out, find it and stamp it out’. Evoking a theme of ‘our team of five million’ and national kindness, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has led a remarkable campaign blending decisive action and transparency. As at October 25, the country has had only 22 deaths from the first wave of the pandemic and with a second wave cluster in August three further deaths and a combined total of 1935 cases with 260 having been contained in quarantine or managed isolation at the border. In this context, this article critically examines a four-month ‘Coronavirus Plus’ initiative conducted by the Pacific Media Centre at a communication programme in one of the New Zealand’s universities in response to the pandemic, deploying the *Asia Pacific Report* website, [asiapacificreport.nz](http://asiapacificreport.nz).

**Keywords:** case studies, coronavirus, COVID-19, disinformation, *Frontline*, health journalism, journalism as research, journalism education, New Zealand, pandemic, truth-telling

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TWO WEEKS into Aotearoa/New Zealand’s COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic lockdown in April 2020, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) warned that false information

campaigns about the coronavirus pandemic were a ‘grave danger’ to many people’s lives around the world (UNESCO, 2020). This followed a warning in mid-February by the World Health Organisation (WHO) Secretary-General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who declared at a gathering of foreign policy and security experts in Munich, Germany, that ‘we’re not just fighting an epidemic; we’re fighting an infodemic’. He added that the fake news ‘spreads faster and more easily than this virus’ (UN tackles ‘infodemic’, 2020). Concerned about the risks for both health and public responses to disinformation, UN Secretary-General António Guterres identified the ‘new enemy’ as a ‘growing surge of disinformation’. The UN launched a COVID-19 Communications for Solidarity Initiative through ‘digital first responders’ to rapidly inform people about facts and science and to ‘promote and inspire acts of humanity’ globally (UN launches new initiative, 2020).

The term ‘disinfodemic’ was adopted by the authors of a policy brief (Posetti & Bontcheva, 2020) for UNESCO to describe the ‘falsehoods fuelling the pandemic’ and its impacts because of the ‘huge viral load of potentially deadly disinformation’ that had been described by Guterres as ‘a poison’ and humanity’s other ‘enemy’ in this crisis.

### **Background and context**

Hoax stories and conspiracy theories have proliferated online and have continued to do so. The ‘disinfodemic’ has led people infected by the virus to try unproven treatments and false cures that were dangerous, according to UNESCO. An example of this risky disinformation came from US President Donald Trump (one of many that he peddled before losing a tightly fought election on November 3)—he was lambasted by the medical fraternity after suggesting research into whether the coronavirus might be treated by injecting disinfectant into the body (Coronavirus: Outcry, 2020). Disinfectants are hazardous substances. Trump also appeared to propose irradiating patients’ bodies with UV light, a notion rejected by a doctor at the media briefing. Guy Berger, UNESCO’s director for freedom of expression and media development, told the UN’s self-reporting news agency:

There seems to be barely an area left untouched by disinformation in relation to the COVID-19 crisis, ranging from the origin of the coronavirus through to unproven prevention and ‘cures’ and encompassing responses by governments, companies, celebrities and others. (During this coronavirus pandemic, 2020)

From a human rights perspective, and this is one that influences the Pacific Media Centre and its projects such as the ‘Coronavirus Plus’ coverage cluster, critically important is the notion that it is ‘everybody’s right to seek, receive and impart information’ (Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Article 19,

1948). And that this information is truthful and trustworthy. UNESCO and its partners work to protect and strengthen this right and build ‘knowledge societies’ in a range of ways, including:

- Countering the contamination of disinformation,
- Supporting independent, quality journalism,
- Empowering global citizens with media and information literacy, and
- Assisting member states in meeting international standards on freedom of expression.

According to a UNESCO policy brief, four lines of action are essential for the right to health, which is one of the economic, social and cultural rights recognised by the international community (Posetti & Bontcheva, 2020). They are all essential if humanity is to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.10 on ‘public access to information and fundamental freedoms’. This SDG target helps power other SDGs, especially SDG 3 on ‘good health and well-being’ which is so critical in these times.

The policy brief offers two typologies for understanding the disinfodemic: Firstly, it identifies nine key themes and four main format types associated with disinformation about COVID-19 and its impacts. The themes range from false information about the origins, spread, infection and mortality rates, through to symptoms and treatments, and include content designed to defraud, along with political attacks on journalists and misrepresentation of credible independent journalism as ‘fake news’ (Posetti & Bontcheva, 2020). The formats used to disseminate pandemic-related disinformation include: highly emotive narrative constructs and memes; fabricated, fraudulently altered, or decontextualised images and videos; bogus websites, data sets and sources; and disinformation infiltrators and orchestrated campaigns.

The second typology, according to Posetti & Bontcheva (2020), outlines 10 types of responses to the disinfodemic, which are grouped under four umbrella categories:

- Monitoring, fact-checking, and investigative responses aimed at identifying, debunking, and exposing COVID-19 disinformation;
- governance-based responses, which include law and policy, and state-based counter-disinfodemic responses;
- Curation, technological, and economic responses, which pertain to the policies and practices of institutions mediating content;
- Normative and ethical; educational; empowerment and credibility labelling responses—all of which are aimed at the audiences targeted by disinformation agents, with citizens and journalists being a particular focus.

The purpose of this article is to provide a framework and analysis of the context, rationale and pedagogy of a project initiated by the Pacific Media Centre



at Auckland University of Technology to cover the pandemic and its impact in New Zealand and Pacific microstates between the date when Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern declared a national lockdown, on 25 March 2020, and when it was finally lifted on June 8 after phasing through four levels of restrictions. While the microstates sought to keep the coronavirus out of their vulnerable countries, a cornerstone of the Ardern government policy was to prevent New Zealand ‘inadvertently being the source of an outbreak in the Pacific’ (Hopgood, 2020). Early in May, *The Lancet* declared that New Zealand’s ‘aggressive’ approach had ‘eliminated’ COVID-19 (Cousins, 2020). That statement proved too premature.

### **The pandemic and New Zealand’s response**

After going for 102 days without recording any case of COVID-19 community transmission, New Zealand became locked for a second time in a campaign to methodically stamp out the coronavirus in what has been branded by some as COVID ‘Lockdown 2.0’ (Johnson, 2020b). An impending general election was postponed by a month from September 19 to October 17 because of a sudden outbreak involving a Pasifika ‘index’ family of four people with an unresolved source, not necessarily a border breach. The country anxiously awaited the outcome of this unexpected single cluster that had grown to 149 people after a period of complacency had set in after the earlier success at containing (and apparently eliminating) the virus.

As of September 1, the country had a total number of 1757 confirmed and probable cases of COVID-19, 149 from the community outbreak, and 35 imported cases from managed isolation (MIQ) facilities, with seven people in hospital. There were three further deaths, taking the total to 25. (By October 25, the infections total overall had climbed slightly to 1935 and nobody was in hospital). While the leadership of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has been praised internationally for having one of the finest records in coping with COVID, she has also enjoyed the most popularity of any New Zealand prime minister due to her qualities of effective communication, trustworthiness and empathy. These qualities and the disarray of the opposition National with three leaders in less than three months swept the Labour party to outright victory in the election, an unprecedented result since New Zealand adopted a Mixed Member (MMP) proportional election system in 1996 (Banbury, 2020). As Martyn Bradbury put it, writing for *The Daily Blog*, if the average New Zealand voter was asked to name one Labour Party policy, they would probably reply: ‘Jacinda saved New Zealand’. (Bradbury, 2020).

While many of the international plaudits have been enthusiastic and generous about Ardern’s handling of the COVID crisis—ranging from ‘master class’ (*New York Times*), to ‘squashing the curve’ and a decisive ‘voice of reason’ (TV

presenter Whoopi Goldberg)—several analysts and commentators have been less kind about New Zealand’s news media, one describing their ‘machinations’ as ‘leav[ing] much to be desired’ (Forrester, 2020). According to Al Jazeera English contributor Glen Johnson (2020a):

Taken over time, New Zealand’s reporters have appeared focused on managing perceptions, berating and cajoling a fearful public on numerous fronts. In doing so, and from the earliest stages of a four-level alert system, public health concerns have been eclipsed by a clamouring commentariat, all seeking to score political points and undermine the government’s health-first priorities.

A case can be made that the nation’s media, laundering many of the opposition’s attack lines and big business talking points, have repeatedly endangered public health.

With multiple clusters across the country in April—a high school in Auckland, a wedding in the deep south, a bar in the tourist hub of Matamata—the government heeded the advice of leading epidemiologists. The Ardern-led government, a coalition at that time of Labour, New Zealand First and the Greens, opted for an elimination strategy. This meant a sustained approach to ‘keep COVID-19 out of the country—find it and stamp it out’ (COVID-19: Elimination strategy, 2020). This was done by controlling entry at the border; disease surveillance; physical distancing and hygiene measures; testing for and tracing all potential cases; isolating them and their close contacts; and broader public health controls, depending on the alert level.

### **Internews: Information saves lives**

Internews is a news and current affairs network of more than 750 active partners—including the Pacific Media Centre—‘across five regions, in more than 120 countries, for nearly 40 years in more than 100 languages’ (Internews’ Strategic Approach, 2020). It launched a five-year strategy in February 2020 just a few weeks before the COVID-19 pandemic ‘profoundly altered the entire world’. The strategy document was updated in April and has since become more relevant than ever, argues the agency.

COVID has amplified and escalated all of the challenges that we face in our mission to build healthy information environments around the world. The solutions and strengths we bring to this work are as needed as ever. The COVID-19 pandemic is rapidly transforming the information and media systems of every society it touches. The WHO situation report (WHO Situation Report 13, 2020) described the ‘infodemic’ surrounding the outbreak as ‘an over-abundance of information—some accurate and some not—that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it’. (Internews, 2020, p. 1)

The Internews COVID-19 response is ‘rooted in the knowledge that information can literally save lives’. The agency argues that journalists, civil society leaders and other communicators have been working hard to serve as essential intermediaries between governments, public health experts and the public to help ‘stem the infodemic’. Nevertheless, the agency deplores the fact that many governments are ‘making this difficult, misleading the public, detaining and arresting those who seek to hold power to account, concealing information, and using the crisis as a justification to suspend human rights, elections, and checks on their power’ (Internews, 2020, p. 2). This critique has been shared by a number of media freedom watchdogs, advocates and journalists who have warned against a ‘creeping authoritarianism’ (Cooper, 2020; Nolan, 2020; Robie, 2020a; RSF, 2020a, 2020b).

According to Internews, the ‘biggest story in the world is devastating the news media, as collapsing economies are causing a collapse in the news business, just when we need it the most’ (Internews, 2020, p. 3). The Internews approach, as adopted by the Pacific Media Centre in parallel with its *Talanoa* journalism model (Robie, 2019; Robie & Marbrook, 2020) in its Pacific COVID and environmental journalism involves five core elements: 1. Good, accurate, evidence-based information; 2. That everyone can access safely; 3. That consumers know how to critically assess; 4. that is valued by communities and sustained by business models that work; and 5. Where governments and businesses are accountable for keeping it that way (Internews, 2020, pp. 2-3). These are the challenges as outlined by Internews:

*People need clear, evidence-based information they can understand and act upon to stay safe.* Too often, governments and public health officials give conflicting, confusing, or incomplete guidance. People want to know if it is safe to go to work, if they can send their children to school, where food supplies are available and what to do if they’re showing symptoms. People need ‘News You Can Use’—news from local sources in their own languages (including Pacific languages) to help understand what this epidemic means for them, their families and their immediate communities.

*Misinformation and disinformation are flooding all information environments.* The spread of COVID-19 and the risks it poses to communities is compounded by the lack of accurate and up-to-date information amid a proliferation of rumours, myths and misinformation that exacerbate fear, panic, stigma, and mistrust, contributing to further mistrust of the health system and health workers, to mistrust of all information surrounding the outbreak, and to mistrust of preventative behaviours that can save lives. There is evidence that malign actors are purposefully sowing disinformation. People’s distrust in corrupt or unaccountable governments helps misinformation and rumours to spread wildly.

*Authoritarians exploit fear to silence dissent and accountability:* There has been a dramatic increase in crackdowns against freedom of expression in the face

of COVID-19, often under the guise of combatting misinformation and rumours. Civic space has been rapidly closing around the world and the online space in particular is under assault, with governments censoring information online; rapidly expanding surveillance technologies and policies under the guise of contact-tracing; and exploiting confusion to achieve geopolitical gains. Multiple actors, from governments to hospitals and civil society organisations, are falling victim to digital attacks such as malware, ransomware, and phishing attacks.

Monitoring of these developments can be achieved through some COVID-19 trackers: International Center for not-for-profit Law (ICNL) (<https://www.icnl.org/covid19tracker/>), Privacy International (<https://privacyinternational.org/examples/tracking-global-response-covid-19>), and Reporters Without Borders #Tracker\_19 (<https://rsf.org/en/tracker19-Coronavirus-Covid19>).

*Activists face compounded security risks:* While repressive regimes have been increasingly cracking down on information providers over the past decade, COVID-19 is adding to these risks. Journalists work in an environment of fear as they cover COVID-19 without adequate safety protection gear and in the midst of intimidation from authorities and gangs. From Haiti to Iran, journalists have faced being barred from practising journalism, suspended from social media, assaulted by the public, attacked by police and even family members of journalists have faced reprisals.

*The media market is collapsing:* The biggest story in the world is devastating the news media, as collapsing economies are causing a collapse in the news business, just when we need it most. COVID-19 has been called an ‘extinction event’ for local news, as advertising disappears and media around the world are shuttering. Even successful national news outlets are feeling the pinch from reduced advertising revenue, such as the collapse of the German-owned Bauer Magazines New Zealand within two weeks of the start of lockdown (Krishnamurthi, 2020a). The pain at the local level, however, is extreme. Local advertising—the last thin lifeline for many local outlets—has been cut in half overnight. And it is the local news outlets which provide the most contextually important information for local communities

### **Project journalism and Bearing Witness**

As an enabler of postgraduate project journalism over the past 14 years in the Asia-Pacific region, as exemplified in the *Pacific Journalism Review's* Frontline section (Bacon 2011, 2012; Nash, 2014; Mason, 2014), the Pacific Media Centre developed a plan in 2016 for an annual two-week intensive climate change field trip for two postgraduate student/graduate journalists to gain firsthand experience of reporting on climate change issues in Fiji (Robie & Chand, 2017; Robie, 2018; Robie & Marbrook, 2020). This was conducted within the framework of a postgraduate International Journalism Project course. Fiji was selected as the

## Figure 1: Strategic COVID journalism

The Internews approach to addressing COVID-19 is deeply rooted in our new strategy, which calls for building the five elements of a healthy information environment. These are:



1. Good, accurate, evidence-based information;
2. That everyone can access safely;
3. That consumers know how to critically assess;
4. That is valued by communities and sustained by business models that work; and
5. Where governments and businesses are accountable for keeping it that way.

Source: Internews' Strategic Approach to COVID-19

base for the climate project for logistical and media resource reasons, given that the centre already had a long-established relationship with the USP regional Pacific journalism programme with available accommodation on the Laucala Bay campus close to the university's centre for environmental research. Also, USP is currently engaged in a major Pacific-wide climate change baseline media research project (Hutt, 2017; Singh, 2017) and there was a synergy between these two initiatives.

Another partner at USP was the Pacific Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development (PaCE-SD), which was established as a centre of excellence in 1999 for 'environmental education, research and community engagement' in the Pacific region (About us, n.d.). The director, Professor Elisabeth Holland, has led the centre in carrying out environmental and climate change research to 'empower [Pacific] people with the adequate knowledge to be able to adapt to the impacts of climate change and to also pursue sustainable development' (Holland, 2020, Robie, 2017).

The PMC project adopted the name 'Bearing Witness', drawing on the Quaker tradition of taking action over 'truth' based on conscience and being present at the sites of injustice. This seemed highly appropriate given that the field trip was seeking to provide an alternative framing of climate change journalism in terms of resilience and human rights. An inspiring example of this 'bearing witness' frame for climate change media action is the Collectif Argos (2010) photojournalism portfolio on climate refugees; many of the images were portrayed in their book with the same title. As Robie and Marbrook (2020, p. 5) outlined the evolution of the project, the aim was to 'expand the possibilities of the story itself but also the creative approaches to the way the story is told'.

This witness project has continued for three years in the region. However, in 2020 it was replaced by the Pacific Media Watch Coronavirus Plus Project in March until May, and followed by an Internews Earth Journalism Network (EJN) Climate and Covid-19 Pacific Project between June and December, which built on the earlier PMW project. *Pacific Media Watch* is an independent Pacific media freedom monitor founded at the University of Papua New Guinea in 1996 and now coordinated and organised by the Pacific Media Centre in association with the Paris-based Reporters Without Borders watchdog. It has developed a strategy to ‘challenge issues of ethics, media freedom, industry ownership, cross-cultural diversity and media plurality’ (Robie, 2014a, p. 221). It has been involved in reporting *coups d’etat*, civil conflict, social justice and media independence. The service has been an important catalyst for postgraduate student journalists, media educators, citizen journalists and critical journalists ‘collaborating in a broader trajectory of Pacific protest’ (Craddock, 2013).

The project is guided by the principles of ‘reflective practice’, a process whereby journalists (including student journalists), as media practitioners, continually engage in finding better and more constructive ways to inform their audience. Essentially, this means taking time off their daily deadline work to ‘reflect on their practice, recapture their experience at the coalface of investigative reporting’, and strategise for better ways to engage with the audience. According to Loo (2013), the reflective process involves:

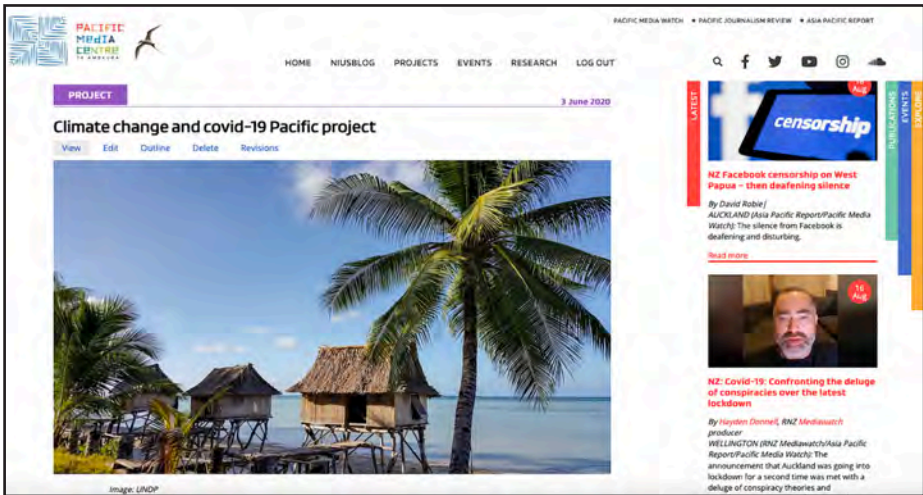
1. Self-evaluation of the journalists’ motivation and attitude towards their profession;
2. Reflecting on their ‘professional’ journalistic values in cross-cultural contexts;
3. Developing awareness of their journalistic functions in their respective society;
4. Challenging the journalists’ dominant news values with alternative criteria; and
5. Applying media concepts and principles to economic, political and social realities. (Loo, 2013, p. 95-96)

The reflective process is also a strong feature of *talanoa* journalism, a model that seeks to integrate the ‘custom’ factor into media with the Pacific tradition of holistic debate as argued in papers by Robie (2013, 2014b, p. 333, 2019; Robie and Marbrook, 2020). The *talanoa* model makes the case for a more *grassroots* approach to sources and emphasises community empowerment and community ethics with recognition of Indigenous, diversity and *kastom* values.

### **The Coronavirus-Plus Project and discussion**

While the Pacific Media Centre did not embark on a project with the Internews’ Asia-Pacific affiliate, Earth Journalism Network, until June 2020, the Internews





**Figure 2: The Climate Change and Covid-19 Project after New Zealand's Lock-down 1.0.**

Source: Pacific Media Centre

guidelines had already been adopted for the earlier 10-week project under the *Pacific Media Watch* umbrella (Robie, 2020b—between March 19 and May 31.) During that period, the project published 268 articles (65 in March, 120 in April and 80 in May) about the coronavirus involving analysis, news, health, science, media, political and social issues on the centre's news website *Asia Pacific Report* and in the centre's weekly *Southern Cross* radio programme broadcast in partnership with Radio 95bFM at the neighbouring University of Auckland.

The editorial team comprised part-time *Pacific Media Watch* contributing editor Sri Krishnamurthi, an experienced news agency journalist who had graduated with a Postgraduate Diploma in Communication Studies (Digital Media) in 2019 and was preparing for doctoral studies; PMW convener Professor David Robie (who is also director of the PMC); supported by collaborations with RNZ Pacific, the University of the South Pacific journalism programme in Fiji, the University of Santo Tomas in the Philippines, and a network of independent journalists and academics. The core team worked from home offices under restrictions due to vulnerable age and compromised immune system categories. For communications, they used a MS Teams set up for the project along with Zoom, Skype and FB messenger video and chat feeds for interviews around the Pacific. Their portfolio (which is continuing publication) is available at: <https://asiapacificreport.nz/category/health-and-fitness/coronavirus>. The following questions were put to Sri Krishnamurthi, who was the primary journalist for both phase one (Coronavirus-Plus) and phase two (EJN) of the project and who had been recruited by the *Pacific Media Watch* project at AUT three weeks prior to the April lockdown and was still 'settling in' when New Zealand closed its borders.

*1. What was your role in this new Aotearoa New Zealand and Pacific mediascape amid a global pandemic?*

**SK:** The project was put together just before New Zealand's COVID emergency Lockdown 1.0 began and it needed to be done in order to accurately inform the public. Both David Robie and I undertook the task when we understood the enormous gravity of the situation. As both of us have had experience of working in challenging and often distressing moments in history, we knew what we had to do. My role changed from instead of just simply being a reporter; I had to also rely on the skills I had learnt as an agency reporter [for the national news agency NZ Press Association, which closed in 2011 (Stone, 2011)]—speed and use of quick and critical thinking were essential tools that were applied. With our *Southern Cross* radio programme, we did that remotely using Cleanfeed [a multitracked, multiparty, browser-based audio recording software] and filed for *PMW* as many other journalists world-wide were doing in the digital age with multimedia packages. Again the expectation was for accuracy and timeliness at a moment when social media was awash with misinformation amid the 'disinfectodemic'. It was incumbent on *PMW* to disseminate only the truth. The prioritisation of this changed from covering a limited number of academic or 'soft' and background articles to hard news coverage of the pandemic and stories relating to the Pacific health crises, and failures of Pacific economies—the impacts of this and what various governments were doing in an attempt to both control the pandemic and to also seize the opportunity to gain more control of their people.

*2. What was Pacific Media Watch's objective and what were your expectations for this challenge?*

**SK:** Working from home brought its own problems, but nevertheless being a journalist I saw it as our duty to keep up with the *Pacific Media Watch's* objectives of providing accurate information to the Pacific. The problems I speak of were technological, psychological, and social—at times my technology didn't work, due to not knowing how to use some parts of it. Psychologically I found time-keeping difficult, often due to not having the motivation of working in the office and socially I often felt isolated. But for the work at hand that needed to be done, I quite easily could have fallen apart. Such are the vagaries of not having experienced a lockdown before. Each of my colleagues had various issues to deal with. I interviewed a number of Pacific journalists in New Zealand—some who had children who continuously disturbed them while they were trying to work, others worked on alternate days. One in particular [Television New Zealand's Pacific correspondent Barbara Dreaver] went out in full PPE gear and maintained a 2 metre distance while fearing she might catch the virus. Another journalist, a single man, got very bored when he wasn't working on the alternate day.

3. Given that this was a university journalism initiative with limited resources, what was the difference with other news media covering the lockdown crisis?

**SK:** I saw the *Pacific Media Watch* as a challenge. This required a new way of working and being innovative to keep the Pacific, the university and subscribers informed, unlike with the misinformation that proliferated on social media. We had to beat that and we did. It required being innovative with how we reached our colleagues in the Pacific and posing them a set of questions via email, using Facebook messenger, or if all failed ringing them and recording their answers, I found I also had to be very mindful of the questions I posed them for fear of getting our contacts in trouble with their authorities.

4. At the time of the lockdown being declared on March 19, the World Health Organisation (WHO) was already warning about the dangers of a 'disinfodemic' and an avalanche of 'fake news' and medical misinformation. How did you and PMW deal with this?

**SK:** It required a lot of new responsibilities and we managed this with a team of just two people, compared with the major media companies with large teams of journalists. I felt very proud to have worked on this project and we managed it very well. Large media companies have a lot more resources but the disappointing aspect was that they were only concentrating on New Zealand and that

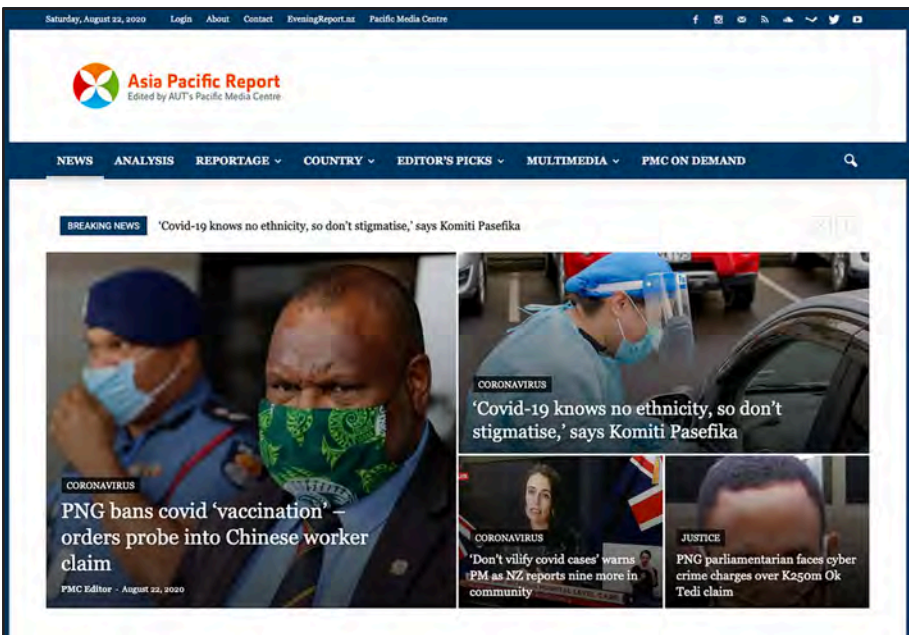


Figure 3: Face masks, bans, cyber crime and vilification ... all in a day's news on Asia Pacific Report.

insularity meant they largely ignored their Pacific neighbours. That insularity doesn't bode well for the Pacific in the future.

5. *You also contributed a regular Pacific Pandemic Diary, what were the highlights of this Lockdown 1.0 period for you?*

**SK:** We sourced accurate information from a multitude of sources like our *Pacific Media Watch* wires; Radio New Zealand; from a number of correspondents around the Pacific, such as Scott Quade in Papua New Guinea; FBC News in Fiji and the student journalists of *Wansolwara* [University of the South Pacific journalism programme's student journalism newspaper]; Barbara Dreaver at TVNZ; and by following up our contacts such as Australian-based correspondents and analysts, including Dr Tess Newton-Cain, Sue Ahearn [retired former head of news at the ABC] as well as [former media director at the *Vanuatu Daily Post*] Dan McGarry and [photojournalist] Ben Bohane, who are based in Vanuatu.

6. *What were the some of the highlights of this Lockdown 1.0 period for you?*

**SK:** Highlights of the Pacific Pandemic Diary were the slow authoritarian creep right across the Pacific from governments that used COVID-19 as a reason/excuse for applying draconian rules which to mind was first recognised and written about by David Robie (2020), in one of his contributions to the Diary. Recognising this, I also wrote a follow-up on governments around the Pacific using COVID-19 to put in laws that impinged on democratic rights. I was also pleasantly surprised by the resurgence of birdlife in Auckland city and wrote an article about that (see Krishnamurthi, 2020b, and Part 2) as well as lauding the decision made by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern to 'go hard, go early' for the team of five million.

7. *Since then, you have been involved in the PMC's new challenge, the EJN [Internews] Climate and Covid-19 Pacific Project that began in June. How do you see where the priorities may have changed?*

**SK:** The priorities have definitely changed. People, rightfully, are concerned primarily about COVID as seen by the work and worries expressed by photojournalists right across the Pacific in a 12-week course held by Vanuatu-based photographer and videographer Ben Bohane (VII Pacific, 2020). Their diversity of work has been impressive, such as portraying people wearing masks or being temperature tested, a young woman washing her hands outside from a plastic drum of water, wondering what the photojournalist was doing, the flag system used on lamp posts to tell what territory you were travelling through with 'red' being COVID-19 as vehicles moved through, or a particularly poignant one of a photographer cutting the umbilical cord of his new-born child ... all during the time of COVID. But that is not to say climate change has disappeared

from people's minds. It might have taken a backseat for the moment but the reality of how COVID has slowed climate change initiatives in the Pacific is apparent (Krishnamurthi, 2020c). Nonetheless, the *PMW* project—and the EJN Climate and Covid Project that follows highlight this importance because of the threat it poses to the Pacific,

*8. Now that New Zealand is in the middle of Lockdown 2.0 (in Auckland at the time of writing) in the lead-up to the General Election on October 17, press gallery journalists are being increasingly criticised for 'lack of solidarity' with the Ardern government's public health priorities and strategy for New Zealand. Any reflections about this?*

**SK:** At times, there were media commentators like conservative NewstalkZB broadcaster Mike Hosking [Government has overcooked the lockdown, 2020] who were calling for an easing of lockdowns, and then saying [the government] should be harder, so you did get a feeling he was neither here nor there. As for the press gallery, by the very nature of being there journalists are privileged and conflict is the name of the game, as is [challenging] the standing government. The beltway plays by its own rules and hence people didn't always get the feeling that they understood what the Prime Minister and the Director-General of Health, Dr Ashley Bloomfield, were trying to do. Instead they sought holes in their strategy—some of it justified, like over the distribution of PPE equipment—but repeatedly asking the same questions and lack of understanding showed up the gallery journalists as being very hollow.

*9. What did the PMW achieve or contribute from your perspective as contributing editor given that you had made a short documentary about the project last year when you interviewed former editors and journalists (Krishnamurthi, 2019)?*

**SK:** It gained an enormous international profile and was excellent in terms of working with a team of two, using technology to stay in touch. I believe the *PMW* project earned even more exposure than it already had as a highly respected website of accurate information keeping the Pacific, in particular, well informed. As contributing editor I felt it was a privilege to work alongside David through some very difficult days during the pandemic. And the fact that we kept the *PMW* going when other news media around us, such as Bauer (Krishnamurthi, 2020b), were failing showed a tenacity that was unique and a true commitment to providing the Pacific with a rare quality of information.

*10. Your final reflection?*

**SK:** The value of *Pacific Media Watch* and its benefit for university students who do an internship with the project simply cannot be underestimated. The value of the *PMW* is clearly illustrated in the documentary *Pacific Media Watch—The*



*genesis* (Krishnamurthi, 2019) that covers the military coups in Fiji, the heinous treatment of the people of West Papua and media freedom issues in the Pacific, as do also the Bearing Witness and EJN projects on climate change and COVID. They are vital to be continued.

## Conclusion

The Pacific Media Centre adapted early in its response to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. Recognising the rapidly expanding global nature of the crisis, the centre laid the groundwork and prepared to embark on its Coronavirus Plus Project in early March, more than two weeks before New Zealand went into its first national lockdown on March 25, including the closure of university campuses. The PMC deployed its *Pacific Media Watch* Coronavirus Plus project with the small team working from home and using various sharing software programmes to communicate and to continue publishing on *Asia Pacific Report*.

It was critically important to provide basic information on how to survive and persevere during this pandemic and to counter the ‘disinfodemic’. Using a long established network of media partnerships and collaborations along with contributing student journalists from Aotearoa New Zealand, Fiji and the Philippines, the project was able to establish a credible and innovative news coverage. Eventually early fears in New Zealand that foreign political consultants and fringe parties would turn Facebook followers and fake news into votes in the October general election as in Australia, France, United Kingdom, and the United States proved unfounded. As RNZ *Mediawatch* concluded, ‘the major parties mostly ran a clean game online too’ (Peacock, 2020).

[Musician] Billy Te Kahika Jr seized on COVID-19 [foreign-fed] misinformation and conspiracy theories in his bid to build support for his new political movement - later joined by former Botany MP Jami-Lee Ross and his Advance NZ party. Just two days from the end of polling Facebook removed Advance NZ’s page for ‘repeated’ violations of its misinformation policy. (Molyneaux, 2020)

However, researchers have warned that while the ‘disinformation’ party had only converted a fraction of their Facebook following, more social media influence could be expected in future elections (Election 2020, 2020). With such a complex information mediascape where the pervasive and relentless nature of the COVID-19 virus severely hampered face-to-face interaction, Internews (2020) among other agencies argued that it was important for local media to ‘communicate with communities, providing timely, accurate and trustworthy information’. The Pacific Media Centre and *Asia Pacific Report* capitalised on its deep media connections in the Asia-Pacific region to offer a unique and valuable service.



It is likely that global communities will face the COVID pandemic for many months, perhaps years, to come. The reflexive project journalism model deployed by the Pacific Media Centre is well placed for a group of enterprising postgraduate students to develop information and media solutions. This model is especially effective for coping with long-term development and humanitarian challenges linked to critical issues such as climate change, environmental disasters, natural disasters and public health epidemics.

### Resources

Coronavirus Plus project on *Southern Cross* radio at 95bFM:<https://soundcloud.com/user-688507213>

*Pacific Media Watch* Coronavirus Plus project on *Asia Pacific Report*:<https://asiapacificreport.nz/category/health-and-fitness/coronavirus/>

EJN Climate and Covid Pacific project on *Asia Pacific Report*: <https://asiapacificreport.nz/category/climate/climate-covid-project/>

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**Part 2: PANDEMIC DIARY CORONAVIRUS UPDATES – DAY 26**

<https://asiapacificreport.nz/2020/04/20/stop-listen-papatuanuku-the-earth-mother-is-breathing/>

# ‘Stop, listen, Papatūānuku, the earth mother, is breathing’

By Sri Krishnamurthi, 20 April 2020



**Figure 5: The Papatūānuku is Breathing video.**

**P**apatūānuku – earth mother is breathing, The mere suggestion that you can see and hear tūi and kererū in Auckland was once a myth... but no longer as COVID-19 keeps the traffic at bay.

Even in Auckland you can now hear birds as clear as daylight as the air clears over New Zealand’s biggest city, reputed to be the largest Polynesian city in the world.

The tūi, with a distinctive white throat tuft, is usually very vocal, with a complicated mix of tuneful notes interspersed with coughs, grunts, and wheezes. In flight, their bodies slant with the head higher than the tail, and their noisy whirring flight is interspersed with short glides.

And the kererū, or wood pigeon, is a large bird with iridescent green and bronze feathers on its head and a smart white vest. The noisy beat of its wings is a distinctive sound in our forest.

You don’t hear them normally in urban New Zealand, but the air has been



so clean that they are back, and many people have commented on hearing the birds chirping in their gardens.

That is because our earth mother, Papatūānuku, is breathing.

### **Celebrating silence**

A video that celebrates the silence of our biggest city in the Covid-19 lockdown has become the biggest ever global hit on the Visit Auckland YouTube channel – 218,940 view at last count.

Papatūānuku is breathing, narrated by 11-year-old Manawanui Maniapoto Mills, pans across Auckland's natural landscapes as human activity almost stops during the lockdown.

“Stop, listen, Papatūānuku, the earth mother, is breathing, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland is still,” it begins.

“Out tūī, our kererū, now need not fight with the daily hum of our busy lifestyles.”

And at the end: “Dream, plan, and when the time is right, we welcome you, but for now listen, Papatūānuku is breathing.”

Auckland Tourism, Events and Economic Development (Ateed) destination general manager Steve Armitage says the video's message was “designed to be simple: this is a time of rest; take a moment to appreciate the stillness and the beauty of our region”.

“We hope the video is encouraging for Kiwis entering their third week of lockdown,” he added.

Within just days of its release on social media, the video has amassed more than half a million views and generated the most engagement for ATEED.

It has been viewed by not only New Zealanders, but by people in Australia, the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada.

### **Translated into French, Spanish**

It has even been translated into French and Spanish by “inspired viewers”.

It is a haunting video that shows the best of New Zealand.

More than 40,000 Pacific people in New Zealand have benefitted from the government's COVID-19 support packages.

The Pasifika Medical Association through Pasifika Futures- the Whanau Ora commissioning agency for Pacific families – said nearly 7500 packages had been delivered to families since the lockdown was announced on March 23.

Data to determine if community transmission of COVID-19 is occurring in New Zealand will be a big factor in tomorrow's decision on whether to extend the level 4 lockdown, reports RNZ News.

At a media briefing, Director-General of Health Dr Ashley Bloomfield reported nine new cases of COVID-19 in New Zealand. All were linked to existing cases.

There were now 18 people in hospital, including three in intensive care, with two in a critical condition and 1098 cases, while more than 4000 tests were processed in laboratories yesterday. Dr Bloomfield also confirmed a death that occurred in Invercargill last week was a Covid-19-related death, taking the total to 12.



### 17 cases in Fiji

Fiji going into the weekend had 17 cases. A 21-year-old who had been a travelling companion of a man who visited India to go to a religious festival who flagrantly disregarded all self-isolation rules has now infected several people.

Also going into the weekend, Papua New Guinea, which is ill-prepared for the Covid-19 pandemic, had prime minister James Marape confirm they had five new cases taking the total to seven.

Guam had 135 cases and five deaths going into the weekend and the sailors off the *USS Theodore Roosevelt* had 615 positive cases.

Northern Marianas has 13 cases and two deaths, Tahiti has 55 cases and New Caledonia is still at 18.

In all going into the weekend there were 250 cases in the Pacific with seven deaths around the Pacific.

Meanwhile, Reporters without Borders (RSF) is alarmed to learn that Indonesia's police have been ordered to combat not only disinformation about the coronavirus pandemic but also criticism of the president and government.



### NZ lockdown – day 25: Nine new cases – community spread key to lockdown

By RNZ News Data to determine if community transmission of Covid-19 is occurring in New Zealand will be a big factor in tomorrow's decision on whether to extend the level 4 lockdown. At a media briefing this afternoon, Director-General of Health Dr Ashley Bloomfield reported nine new cases of Covid-19 in New Zealand. All ...  
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 Asia Pacific Report



Figure 5: A snapshot of an *Asia Pacific Report* COVID community transmission update.



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# Reporting Black Lives Matters

## Deaths in custody journalism in Australia

**Abstract:** George Floyd's death at the knee of USA police sparked protests and renewed reporting of Indigenous deaths in custody in Australia. As the 30th anniversary of the release of the final report of the Australian Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody approaches, it is timely to update Wendy Bacon's 2005 research on deaths in custody journalism. While most deaths in custody continue to pass in judicial and media silence, this article, written from a white journalism academic's perspective, includes instances of in-depth reporting since 2005, journalism that meets the Royal Commission's observation that journalism can contribute to justice for Aboriginal people when it places deaths in custody in their social and moral contexts. It also includes mini-case study of the news coverage of Mr Ward's 2008 death, which demonstrates the relationship between governmental or judicial processes and announcements and patterns of coverage. It also notes the effect that First Nations journalists are having on the prevalence, perspectives and depth of deaths in custody journalism. Information and resources are provided for journalists and journalism students to more effectively report Indigenous deaths in custody, include Indigenous voices in their stories, and to better understand trauma and take care of themselves, their sources and their communities.

Keywords: Australia, Black Lives Matter, deaths in custody, deaths in custody journalism, deaths in custody reporting resources, Indigenous, investigative journalism, Mr Ward, Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody

BONITA MASON

*University of South Australia, Adelaide*

*'Oh shit, she's dead.'*

THESE were the words spoken when a prison clinic nurse eventually entered the cell of an Indigenous prisoner and found her lifeless. Janet Beetson, 30, who had become sicker and weaker over five days, was admitted to the medical annexe of Mulawa Women's Prison the night before she died.

She took a week to die of treatable infective heart disease in the western Sydney prison in June 1994.

June 1994 is a long time ago on the calendar, but not long enough for effective policy, or governmental and institutional action, to alter the conditions that result in Australian Indigenous people dying preventable deaths in custody. Not long enough to hear.

George Floyd, 46, has become a household name in the United States and globally. Many of us have grieved with his family and community, and have recognised the injustice in the conditions that led to his death at the hands of police officers—the one who knelt on his neck for almost nine minutes and, importantly, the others who stood by.

According to international online activist organisation Avaaz (Baillie, 2020), during those final minutes of his life, George Floyd said: ‘I didn’t do nothing serious, man’; repeated a variation of ‘I can’t breathe’ seven times; said ‘Please’, ‘Please somebody’, ‘Please man’ 13 times; ‘Mamma’ twice; ‘I’m through’ twice, and ‘They’re gonna kill me’ three times. He asked for water and, more than three-quarters of the way through his ordeal, said, ‘Don’t kill me’. His final words were, ‘Please, I can’t breathe’.

George Floyd fell silent, the pleas stopped, and he died. The police officers could not hear him, any more than they could heed the onlookers and witnesses pleading with them to get off his neck so he could breathe, so he could live.

Black Lives Matter protests erupted across the US, and buildings burned. African Americans, Indigenous peoples and their supporters have had enough of living with racism (Jones, 2020): the discrimination, disproportionate and lethal force, and the everyday possibility that the consequences of racism could be fatal. As in the US, in Australia these deaths and a multitude of humiliations happen, and have done since the date of settlement.

The catch-cries ‘Black Lives Matter’ and ‘I can’t breathe’ ring out through the face masks, worn against COVID-19, at the Adelaide Black Lives Matter rally on 6 June 2020. Dughutti man David Dungay, 26, who died, also calling for breath in late-2015, has a strong presence at the rally. The Long Bay jail prison guards in his case, as hard of hearing as the Minneapolis police officers who killed George Floyd, dismissed his repeated cries of ‘I can’t breathe’ as they held him face down on a prison cell bed. One of the poorly trained guards repeatedly tells David that he can breathe (AAP, 2018): ‘If you can talk, you can breathe,’ he says. David screams, says he can’t, begins panting. ‘If you’re talking, you’re breathing,’ the guard repeats, like he wants to win an argument. Fewer than 50 seconds later, David Dungay’s heart stops beating.

The Adelaide rally attracts up to 6000 protestors and supporters (Wedding, 2020). It is one of many around Australia which, together, attract tens of thousands of people. It feels like change, but is it?

The story has been at or near the top of the news bulletin for weeks, an unusual prominence for a story concerning Indigenous people. By now most of us have heard of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. We know that we are approaching 30 years, and 450 Indigenous deaths in custody, since the Royal Commission reported in 1991. We are hearing the names of David Dungay and others who have died in custody, like Tanya Day and Ms Dhu. We are thinking about and protesting these continuing deaths in numbers we never have before. We are talking about the increasing Indigenous imprisonment rates—the highest imprisonment rates in the world (Anthony, 2017)—with renewed vigour.

We are also reminded that no one has ever been convicted of any crime for any of these deaths or for any of the 99 deaths investigated by the Royal Commission, the lives lost in police or prison custody between 1980 and 1989. Some of us have reported a widely repeated belief that no-one has ever been charged, but this is not true—a reminder not to run with what is in the air and seems right without checking.

Five police officers were charged with manslaughter and acquitted in the case of 16-year-old John Pat, who died of his injuries after contact with police in Roebourne in 1983. Senior Sergeant Chris Hurley was also charged with manslaughter for the death of Mulrunji Doomadgee on Palm Island in 2004, also acquitted. The only person to serve jail time over this death was Palm Island community leader Lex Wotton, who was convicted for inciting a riot when Palm Island protestors set fire to the police station where Doomadgee died.

Apart from these instances—until the recent murder charges against two police officers: one who shot Kumanjai Walker, 19, at his home in Yuendumu (Vivian & Roberts, 2019); the other who shot Joyce Oates, 29, outside her Geraldton home (Wahlquist, 2020)—there has been judicial silence.

This judicial silence has too often been matched by media silence. In her podcast *Black Witness, White Witness*, Darumbal and South Sea Islander journalist Amy McQuire (2020a) refers to an Australian apathy in response to police and prison brutality, and to deaths in custody. She says we do not repeat the name of the person who has died until their name is burned into the national consciousness (like George Floyd's); that, 'When Aboriginal people die in custody there is a national silence'. In 2005, investigative journalist and academic Wendy Bacon described the lack of deaths in custody reporting as an 'ethical failure' (p. 17). On the importance of this, she wrote: 'If the mainstream media fails to report on events which discriminate against or disadvantage particular groups, these groups will find it difficult to have their claims recognised, let alone acted upon' (2005, p. 19).

For now, journalists and the media have again taken up the story, as some journalists did in the 1980s, in the lead-up to the hard-won establishment of the Royal Commission, and in the wake of the release of the Royal Commission's 1991 report.

This article updates Bacon's (2005) research into deaths in custody reporting from 1995 to 2005, and surveys key instances of deaths in custody reporting since. Just as knowing something of the consequences of colonisation for Australia's first peoples is important for understanding the present-day circumstances of racism and inequality, knowing something about journalism's record on deaths in custody reporting may help journalists to counter the silences. This article therefore offers a resource for academics, students and journalists who want to understand more about deaths in custody reporting in Australia; and to tell stories about such deaths, the systems and circumstances that led (and continue to lead) to the often preventable deaths, and the effects on the families of people who die in custody, on their communities, and on all of us. It is offered by a white Australian journalism academic who first researched and wrote on Aboriginal deaths in custody in 1995, has worked in the Kimberley region of Western Australia and elsewhere with Indigenous organisations, and co-developed a collaborative Aboriginal Community Engagement cross-disciplinary and journalism project with local Indigenous community groups on Whadjuk country (the Perth area)—and who continues to work to understand what it means to be a white person in settler Australia.

### **Deaths in custody journalism—a recent history**

This brief history begins in the 1980s, the time leading up to the Hawke Federal Government's 1987 announcement of a royal commission to inquire into Aboriginal deaths in custody. It begins with freelance journalist Jan Mayman's reporting on the death of John Pat, a Roebourne teenager from the north-west of Western Australia. Mayman, an independent journalist from Western Australia, was a significant media 'protagonist' (Johnston, 1991) in the lead-up to the establishment of the Royal Commission. Mayman's stories on John Pat's death in police custody, published in Melbourne's *The Age* newspaper, helped to put Aboriginal deaths in custody on the media agenda.

Mayman's stories described conditions—physical and relational—in the north-west WA town of Roebourne, and the state and mood of a colonised and displaced people who had lost one of their young men in violent and traumatic circumstances. It provided a clear picture of some of the effects of racism and inequality on a town and a people. 'A town with two names and two laws' (Mayman, 1983, p. 11) won Mayman Australia's top journalism award in 1984, the Gold Walkley. Bacon describes Mayman's reporting as a 'significant media breakthrough' (2005, p. 23) in the coverage of Aboriginal deaths in custody in the pre-Royal Commission period. In Royal Commissioner Elliott Johnston's words, her work placed John Pat's death in its 'broader social and moral context' (1991, 12.6.2).

Despite the recognition for journalistic excellence, Mayman has spoken of



the difficulty as a freelance journalist of getting her stories published before John Pat's death. She also noted that then *Age* editor Michael Smith trusted her as a journalist, and that his support was critical. Without it, in the form of airfares and assistance with other reporting-associated costs, she would not have been able to tell the John Pat stories (personal communications, September 16, 2010; November 25, 2012). Her position as a freelance journalist and the moral and financial support from the editor allowed her to produce award-winning work.

At the time of Mayman's *Age* stories, Aboriginal people and their supporters had been calling for an end to the high rates of Indigenous imprisonment (Cunneen & McDonald, 1997) and were protesting the consequently high numbers of Aboriginal people dying in prison or police custody. After the five police officers associated with John Pat's death were acquitted of manslaughter (King, 1990, p. 2), Aboriginal activists formed the Committee to Defend Black Rights. This group mounted a national campaign to raise community awareness about the numbers of Aboriginal people dying in police lock-ups and prison cells and to call for a royal commission (Bacon, et al., 1995, p. 20). The mainstream media took up the story, including an ABC TV *Four Corners* programme presented by David Marr (1985). Mayman also worked on the programme. This deaths in custody story won a Walkley award in 1986.

Then, over a six-week period in 1987, seven young Aboriginal men died in custody. Calls for a royal commission intensified and Aboriginal people addressed the United Nations in Geneva. The Australian government was still resisting the calls to appoint a royal commission. In response, the Committee to Defend Black Rights began planning a campaign to expose Australia's human rights record to the world during the following year's bicentennial celebrations (Bacon 2005, p. 23). In October 1987, the Australian government announced it would open a royal commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody (Bacon, et al., 1995, p. 20).

As Royal Commissioner Johnston noted, media reporting had contributed to the possibility of improved justice for Aboriginal people.

By its coverage of the issues, from the death of John Pat to that of Lloyd Boney, by placing them in their broader social and moral context, and by its presentation of the campaign of the Committee to Defend Black Rights, the media has acted as one of the protagonists in the process of achieving greater justice for Aboriginal people that is the goal of this Commission. (1991, pp. 184-5)

The Royal Commission's Final Report was signed by Commissioner Elliott Johnston on 15 April 1991 (Nagle & Summerrell, 2002). The release of the Royal Commission's report was a black-lives-just-might-matter moment in Australia. Here was 'the most comprehensive review of the needs and opportunities for change ever produced' (Cunneen & McDonald, 1997). It was a far-

reaching blueprint for reducing inequality and disadvantage, including reduced deaths in custody and apprehension and imprisonment rates, and for recasting relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians through a reconciliation process (see Korff, 2020).

The kind of reporting described by Johnston—that which placed the stories and issues in their broader contexts—greeted the release of the Royal Commission’s final report. It was another important moment in deaths in custody journalism. As Wendy Bacon writes: ‘Few Australian Royal Commissions have attracted stronger, more passionate media attention than the 1991 Final Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody’ (2005, p. 20). The nature of this media coverage was important.

The coverage was a symbolic victory for the groups that had fought to have the issue of Aboriginal deaths in custody placed on the national political agenda. The prominence and visual presentation of the reports, appeals to ‘nation’ and the collective conscience, and explicit labelling of the conditions of Aboriginal Australians as oppressive and discriminatory combined to convey a powerful message ... that the nation was moving forward systematically to correct past wrongs. (Bacon, 2005, p. 20-1)

Indigenous points of view were heard as part of the stories, and Aboriginal deaths in custody became an important story in the sense that it was worth sustained coverage. But this kind of reporting soon fell away. In Western Australia, for example: ‘Between May [in 1991, when the royal commission’s report was released] and August, Aboriginal news moved, for the most part, from being a series of issues to do with human welfare, social reform and social justice to being a matter of public safety, social panic and penal “justice”’ (Mickler & McHoul 1998, p. 136). A reversion to law and community order themes, an enduring default in Indigenous affairs journalism (Kerr & Cox, 2013), helped to create the conditions for the enactment of the harshest juvenile justice legislation in Australia (Mickler, 1992, p. 44), where juvenile offenders faced more severe sentences than adults for the same crimes (Wilkie, cited in Mickler & McHoul, 1998, p. 122).

Across Australia, Indigenous imprisonment rates and deaths in custody tolls continued to rise. In Sydney, the late Wiradjuri human rights and deaths in custody campaigner Ray Jackson spoke of a trio of charges known as the ‘trifecta’ (see Anthony, 2013, p. 50), or the ‘ham, cheese and tomato’—offensive language, resisting arrest and assaulting a police officer (personal communication, c1995)—scooping ever more young Indigenous people into the criminal justice system. But, as *The Sydney Morning Herald* said at the time, ‘the story was over’ (quoted in Bacon, 2005, p. 28).

In 1993, Barbie McKee, in an Australian Centre for Independent Journalism

*Voices* project, wrote that two years after the Royal Commission reported, the recommendations were absent from the media, that: ‘The salient and urgent message seems to have moved from the realm of social justice into a bureaucratic, legal and administrative roundabout’ (McKee, quoted in Bacon, 2005, p. 28). The story, when it appeared at all, became about government implementation of the Royal Commission’s recommendations in response to periodic monitoring reports from the Australian Institute of Criminology.

The year Janet Beetson died in Mulawa, 1994, was a record year for the number of Indigenous people who died in Australian prisons, higher than in any year examined by the Royal Commission. This was three years after the commission made its 339 recommendations, 179 of which concerned the criminal justice and coronial systems (Dodson 1996a, p. ix), including the duty of care owed to detained persons; and after \$400 million had been allocated for a five-year programme of implementation (Bacon, et al., 1995, p. 19). The following year, even more people died in Australian prisons, many of them because of ill health (Mason, 2006, p. 5). Fourteen Indigenous people died in prison or police custody in 1994. In 1995, of 22 Indigenous deaths in custody, 18 occurred in prison (Lyneham, et al., 2010, pp. 12, 35).

In response to regular deaths in custody monitoring reports produced by the Australian Institute of Criminology, governments routinely announced their implementation of the Royal Commission’s recommendations. But, instead of interrogating those claims in the face of the record and still-increasing levels of deaths in custody, corporate media journalists routinely reported these government claims as if they were true (Bacon & Mason, 1995).

Over 12-months, three women died in Mulawa women’s prison. Prisoners had been writing to *The Sydney Morning Herald* for three months, complaining about conditions in the jail, including the inadequate health services and Janet Beetson’s preventable death. Journalist Paola Totaro wrote the story, reporting the prisoners’ complaints as allegations that she referred to the NSW Ombudsman. The Ombudsman investigated and produced a report that was published after the 1997 publication in *HQ* of the story about Janet Beetson’s death (Mason, 1997). This story reported what happened to Janet from the perspective of her family, and the prisoners and prison officers who were trying to get her treatment and keep her safe. It also won two national journalism awards, including a Walkley. Janet Beetson’s family were happy with the story, and Mulawa prisoners wrote to the magazine saying they felt it told the truth about their circumstances and what happened to Janet. But in terms of government policy and action—effective implementation of the Royal Commission’s recommendations—it caused hardly a ripple.

Bacon’s 2005 review of the Australian media coverage of deaths in custody concluded that between 1996 and 2005: ‘Most Australians ... received almost

no information about deaths in custody since the Royal Commission' (Bacon, 2005, p. 31). There were specific instances of in-depth reporting, including the Janet Beetson story, a *Four Corners* programme (about the death of Eddie Russell), several *7.30 Report* stories and a *Message Stick* programme (paying tribute to the mother of Eddie Murray). These rare stories about an individual person who died, or of someone, Lelia Murray, who sought justice for people who had died in custody, were linked to the Royal Commission and the implementation, or not, of its recommendations, but: 'They appeared to have little or no impact on the daily news agenda' (Bacon, 2005, p. 32).

Australian writer Chloe Hooper records something similar in her 2008 book about 36-year-old Ganggalidda-Wanyi man Mulrunji Doomadgee's 2004 death in custody on Palm Island. As she waited at the airport on the first morning of the inquest into Doomadgee's death, and small aeroplanes brought lawyers and journalists to Palm Island, she asked an Aboriginal man who was waiting to fly out what he thought would happen. His reply: 'The same as usual: nothing' (2008, p. 88). Hooper also won a Walkley award for one of two 2006 stories in *The Monthly* about Mulrunji Doomadgee's death.

Senior journalist for *The Australian* Tony Koch's reporting was also important in keeping Doomadgee's story in the public eye (Waller, 2013), and in providing an independent perspective on what became a big story when Palm Island locals did something that a predominantly white, mainstream media in Australia and the US refer to as rioting. As the journalists flew in, Koch made sure he was not going to be captured by the local version of authoritative, official sources. While other journalists were embedded with police (Hooper, 2008), Koch told a Federal Court hearing, 'he and a photographer flew to the island on a helicopter so they would not be met by police and could stay with a well-respected local family' (AAP, 2015). He protected the independence of his journalism from any attempts at influence or pressure from police.

### **A short case study: the death in custody of Mr Ward**

While most deaths in custody pass in silence, every now and then a particular Indigenous death in custody breaks through. Along with some of the names already mentioned, the death of 46-year-old elder Ian Ward (commonly known as 'Mr Ward') is a clear example. He died of heat stroke in a metal cell in the back of a prisoner transport van while being transported 360km through the Western Australian desert in searing heat.

Mr Ward, a respected Ngaanyatjarra community leader, was arrested for drink-driving in Laverton on Australia Day, 2008. He was detained in custody by an untrained Justice of the Peace who did not know what the JP handbook said about bail (Hope, 2009, pp. 50-52), and was transported the four hours west to Kalgoorlie the next day, as the temperature outside reached 42 degrees. Mr Ward

was locked inside the cell (or pod) behind the cabin of the prisoner transport van; its air-conditioning was not working, there was no air ventilation, and its interior surface reached 56 degrees. He collapsed onto the metal floor, received a large burn on his abdomen that removed his skin, and arrived in Kalgoorlie dead (Hope, 2009).

Mr Ward's appalling and needless death attracted what was still unusual attention for a death in custody. The manner of his death, his inhumane treatment, the apparent systemic failures, the privatisation of prison services and strong findings by the WA Coroner combined to make Mr Ward's death not only an outrage of institutional racism but newsworthy. The Coroner (Hope, 2009, p. 123) hearing the case said in his inquest findings:

A question which is raised by the case is how a society which would like to think of itself as being civilised, could allow a human being to be transported in such circumstances.

A further question arises as to how a government department, in this case the Department of Corrective Services, could have ever allowed such a situation to arise, particularly when that department owned the prisoner transportation fleet including the vehicle in question.

It has not been possible at this inquest to find adequate responses to these questions.

A Factiva news database search across selected print and online publications yielded 101 stories related to Mr Ward's death between 30 January 2008 and 1 July 2015. These stories were concentrated around particular events and official processes. From Mr Ward's death until the coronial inquest began in March 2009, a scant five news stories touched on the circumstances of the death, a police investigation, and calls to overhaul prisoner transport (three in the *West Australian*, two in *The Australian*).

The 2009 inquest, and related rallies by the family and community activists, prompted more coverage (41 stories: 35 in the *West Australian*, three in Perth's *Sunday Times*, and one each in *The Australian*, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and the *Age*). Following the June 2009 release of the coroner's findings, Liz Jackson presented a *Four Corners* programme that provided an in-depth look at who Mr Ward was, what happened to him and who and/or what were responsible.

A relatively high number of stories continued in 2010, as the second anniversary of Mr Ward's death passed, and the WA Government delayed making an ex-gratia compensation payment to the family. Other deaths in custody and protests were reported, as was the belated inquiry into the prisoner transport system and its continuing faults.

In June, the Director of Public Prosecutions announced that there would be no prosecutions over Mr Ward's death, and in July the WA Government made

a \$3.2 million payment to the family. The state occupational health and safety agency, WorkSafe, then began an inquiry into Mr Ward's death. Stories continued to appear, mostly in the *West Australian* (27 of 34 stories in 2010), including in response to family and activist statements, and the WA Government's planned updating of the prisoner transport fleet.

The stories continued in 2011 because WorkSafe announced charges against Corrective Services, G4S (the private prisoner transport company) and the two guards (Department of Commerce, 2011), all of whom eventually pleaded guilty. These events accounted for most of the year's stories: eight in the *West Australian*, and one each in *The Australian*, *Adelaide Advertiser* and *the Northern Territory News*. An additional four stories (three in the *West Australian*, one in *The Australian*) were about the renewal of the prisoner transport contract.

A further four stories in 2011 (three in the *West Australian*, one in *The Australian*) covered matters relating to justice, and the October filing of a writ by Mr Ward's family. Nothing further turned up until August 2014 (a short feature on a novel which touched on Mr Ward's death). The final story appeared in mid-2015 about an out-of-court settlement reached between the family and G4S. Both stories appeared in the *West Australian*. There has been nothing in any of the publications captured by the Factiva search since.

These tallies do not include news stories that may have appeared through the ABC or SBS websites and broadcast channels, commercial broadcasters, or community media (see Forde & Anderson, 2015), but they do give an indication of the frequency of Mr Ward-related stories, the mostly process-focussed events that prompted them, and the patterns of coverage.

## 2011

2011 was the 20th anniversary of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody's final report, and more in-depth stories appeared: about deaths in custody, the Royal Commission, the lack of implementation of its recommendations—especially around Indigenous people's contact with the criminal justice system and increasing imprisonment rates—and the consequences of that lack of implementation.

An ABC *Law Report* by Erica Vowles highlighted the January 2011 death at the Kalgoorlie Police Station of Mr Phillips, who had assault wounds, disabilities and was in ill-health. As in the Janet Beetson case, a fellow prisoner called for an officer to help Phillips and seek medical treatment. Vowles asks Phillips's sister, Adele Phillips, if she and her family thought things had improved over the previous 20 years. "No. Not yet. Not at all. We've seen no changes, but we want to ... bring changes to the system, you know. We don't want another death in custody out here again" (2011). The programme discussed the problem of the increasing Indigenous incarceration rates, in the face of the central Royal Commission



finding that Indigenous people die in custody in high numbers because they are in custody in high numbers.

Another 20th anniversary media report, by Jane Hammond writing in *The West Australian*, returned to the 1983 death of John Pat in the Roebourne lock-up. After an encounter with the five police officers later acquitted for manslaughter, he had head injuries, a torn aorta and two broken ribs (Grabosky, 1989). Hammond's (2011) story highlights examples of deaths in custody that could have been avoided had the Royal Commission's recommendations been implemented, such as those concerning arrest as a last resort for minor offences. Her story also focused on Indigenous imprisonment rates as critical to the incidence of deaths in custody.

A further notable example of anniversary coverage was freelance journalist and Australian Centre for Independent Journalism associate Inga Ting's series of 11 in-depth stories in *Crikey*. Her stories asked why, 20 years on, 'inmates are still dying as a result of the same practices the Commission sought to eliminate' (2011). Ting covered the death of a prisoner who, like Janet Beetson, died because no one checked her medical files. She covered the deaths of inmates who committed suicide within days of being assessed as no longer at risk; and of those who hanged themselves in so-called 'safe', monitored prison cells. She chronicled the kind of carelessness, negligence, bureaucratic incompetence and policy failures that led to Janet Beetson's death 17 years earlier. And she raised the serious questions and concerns expressed by coroners about 'the integrity, accountability and independence of death in custody investigations' (Ting, 2011).

### **Since 2011**

Imprisonment rates continued to rise, deaths in custody continued to occur and most continued to pass unnoticed, but another WA case, again sharing many similarities with Janet Beetson's case 20 years earlier, made the headlines. In August 2014, Ms Dhu, a 22-year-old Yamatji woman, was arrested and detained in a South Hedland lock-up for unpaid fines. She died two days later, and after two hospital visits, of septicaemia from broken ribs. Her treatment at the hands of police was found to be 'unprofessional and inhumane' by the WA Coroner (Fogliani, 2015). She was also failed by the health workers in the north-west town, except during the third hospital visit when she went into cardiac arrest and nurses and doctors worked for almost an hour in an attempt to resuscitate her. Her death and the possibility of justice for her was kept on the agenda by the WA First Nations Deaths in Custody Watch Committee working with Ms Dhu's family, in particular her grandmother Carole Roe and her uncle Shaun Harris. But while the protest rallies were consistent, they were small.

By the time of Ms Dhu's death, an Australian edition of *The Guardian* had arrived online. This publication, and journalist Calla Wahlquist who consistently reported from the 2015/2016 inquest into Ms Dhu's death, has made a difference

to deaths-in-custody reporting. *The Guardian* consistently documents and reports on deaths in custody, including through *Deaths Inside* (2020), a data base of Indigenous deaths in custody since 2008. This innovative social justice journalism project won a Walkley Award.

### **Is this a moment of change?**

It took an event in the US to spark the Indigenous lives matter response in Australia. A recent analysis of a survey of 11,099 people (Shirodkar, 2019) found 75 percent of Australians have ‘an implicit or unconscious bias against Indigenous Australians’ (p. 25). This bias is in our colonial history, our institutions and systems, our media and our relationships with each other.

As journalists, we can and must report the chain of events that have led to yet another black death at the hands of the state. We can report the facts—Indigenous adult and youth apprehension and imprisonment rates, Indigenous youth and adult suicide rates, coronial inquest findings. We can interview witnesses, family members, and representatives, police and prison officers, experts and report what they and other commentators say about the facts, consequences and causes of those deaths. With more time and perhaps resources, we can investigate and discern the patterns that emerge from the repeated deaths, the similar facts and common factors (Davidson, 2020), the same systemic failures, the ongoing evidence of institutional racism. We can describe and record these things for history, and this is vital work.

Through our journalism we can also help to humanise the person who died, perhaps bring some comfort to the family—from being heard and included in the realm of things that matter.

But how do we understand and explain the deafness, the lack of response to the pleas of Indigenous people, exemplified in the 2017 dismissal of the Uluru Statement from the Heart? At the height of protest and community debate about how police treat Indigenous people, a Sydney police officer is filmed knocking an unresisting Indigenous teenager off his feet and planting him face down on the ground. How do we explain this, and the fact that our journalism, for death after death, coronial inquest after coronial inquest, achieves so little of the change in systems, institutions and policies that would help to prevent the state from failing to care for and killing so many Indigenous people?

I can’t know what the Mulawa prison nurse meant by, ‘Oh shit, she’s dead’, when she entered Janet Beetson’s cell in 1994, but I doubt at that moment she was thinking about Janet’s humanity and her loss to her loved ones. It was more likely an institutionally conditioned defensive response to a mess, an embarrassment and, as one of the witnesses said at Janet’s inquest, something to be kept in-house, covered up. We should listen to the calls for truth telling (Jenkins, 2020), by Mick Dodson and others, as a way to dismantle white privilege and the

discrimination and domination of Australia's first peoples. Such listening provides an opportunity for journalists to improve our understanding and our reporting.

Amy McQuire, writing from a first nations' perspective for *The Guardian* and *The Saturday Paper* (formerly for *Tracker* and *New Matilda*), is among Indigenous journalists also changing the deaths in custody reporting landscape. During the Black Lives Matter protests, she wrote (2020b) about emerging news of the death of a 40-year-old Indigenous man in a WA prison. She noted that few details had emerged about his death, and that 'the absence of information has led to an absence of attention, even with the eyes of the country keenly on the issue of black deaths in custody'. A lack of information seems to be less of an impediment to reporting in other areas of journalism. In political reporting, information vacuums are swiftly translated into endless speculation when a parliamentary leadership spill could be on. A story with few facts, just the drip of backgrounding, can go on for weeks. Imagine some of that tenacity and persistence, the repeated questioning, finding its way into reporting on justice for Indigenous people.

As journalists, we can keep asking questions, even when information is withheld by authorities and report that if nothing else.

### **More suggestions and resources**

Another suggestion comes from the *Saturday Paper*'s Osman Faruqi (2020), to not be distracted from questions about imprisonment rates, injustice and premature and unnecessary deaths by debates about statues and 'cancel culture'. We can also be alert to our political leaders' language and what it says about their priorities. When do leaders use vague, emotionless language and when do they take care to be specific? Journalist Sean Kelly draws (2020) the contrast between the PM talking about deaths in custody—'the problems we have in this area' and 'these issues'—and, when talking about a death from coronavirus, 'the absolute agony of not being able to say goodbye to a loved one'.

Many non-Indigenous journalists and journalism students do not tell stories concerning Indigenous people because they do not know where to start and are worried they will cause further harm or offence (Mason, et al., 2016). Don't be. In my experience, Indigenous people are used to well-meaning white people making mistakes. Be yourself, show respect and listen. Include Indigenous people as sources in stories on a range of topics. There are too few specialist Indigenous affairs journalists in Australia, but those we do have know that taking time to build trust and relationships with Indigenous people is critical (Waller, 2013).

Some Indigenous people prefer to be contacted through their organisations, such as cultural and art centres, health services, land councils and land and sea ranger services, and justice and prisoner groups. There are many Indigenous media organisations all over Australia, all a good source of story ideas, content and contacts.

Keep your independence from authorities who are adept at obscuring the facts, until you already have a solid idea of what the story is from the people affected.

All of us can listen to and take the lead from Indigenous journalists, for whom this 'story' is personal, but who often also struggle to be heard. Yorta Yorta and Dja Dja Wurrung journalist Bridget Brennan was among journalists and others suggesting to the ABC's *Insiders* programme that it include an Indigenous voice, especially when discussing the concerns of Indigenous people. Brennan appeared on the programme on 14 June 2020. Follow her, Amy McQuire, IndigenousX, Stan Grant and others on Twitter.

There are also positive stories to be told (Thomson, et al, 2016), such as the one on *Background Briefing* (Brennan, et al, 2020) about a justice reinvestment, Indigenous community-police program in Bourke, NSW, which reduced juvenile arrests and imprisonment from about 50 young people per year to three or four.

There are Indigenous reporting and filming protocols and guides, such as the ABC's (<https://edpols.abc.net.au/guidance/abc-indigenous-content/>) and SBS's ([http://media.sbs.com.au/home/upload\\_media/site\\_20\\_rand\\_1000072370\\_the\\_greater\\_perspective\\_sbs.pdf](http://media.sbs.com.au/home/upload_media/site_20_rand_1000072370_the_greater_perspective_sbs.pdf)). There is NITV (<https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/>).

## Final thoughts

More broadly, at a time when we need to look more deeply at what it means to be human—what we hear, recognise and prioritise; how we think and act—the Australian government announces it will cost a lot more to study the humanities. Journalism, a humanities subject, is a set of relationships, whether for the scoop or with our sources. As we look more deeply, to tell deaths in custody stories as completely as possible, journalists need better relationships with Indigenous people and sources, but also with philosophers, sociologists and other humanities graduates who can help us look more deeply into our own souls, our possibilities, and our limitations and blind spots. They can help us seek and tell a fuller truth.

Reporting on deaths in custody, and much of the discrimination and trauma that touches Indigenous lives, can be distressing. Take care of yourselves (<https://dartcenter.org/content/self-care-tips-for-news-media-personnel-exposed-to-traumatic-events>), and your sources and communities (<https://dartcenter.org/> – see other resources). Imagine how this could be for an Indigenous journalist for whom this is personal, 'a matter of life or death' (Dodson, 1996b).

Former ABC journalist and Muruwari/Gomeri man Allan Clarke (2020) says he spent most of his time as a journalist reporting stories concerning Indigenous people, and most of them seeking justice. Last year, he stepped away after a break-down.

To be honest, I just couldn't keep reporting on all the injustice levelled at my community and that's because I am also part of that community and these things are happening to my family.

The final blow came at the end of reporting for six years on the unsolved murder of Gomeri teenager Mark Haines. The exhaustion of trying to get some justice for Mark's family and trying to convince the public, as well as the police, that his life mattered ate away at me until I had nothing left to give.

He says it is not just the justice system that devastates Indigenous people:

Our media are also complicit, they pander to the mentality that I am lesser; that my people are somehow lesser. White journalists who step off the ledge to dip their toes into the raging pool of racial turmoil can produce award-winning work and win kudos from 'woke' colleagues. But in the end, they go home. My mob pay the price. Our pain and suffering is often their career gain. Rarely are deaths in custody presented in context; rarely is our culture presented in context; rarely is our history presented in context.

I have been one of those journalists dipping my feet 'into the raging pool of racial turmoil', and have won kudos for it, as have some of the journalists mentioned in this article. But, like the journalism that helped create the conditions for the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, we can present individual deaths in custody in context, present the hundreds of First Nations cultures and histories in context and in as much of their fullness as we are capable.

During this Black Lives Matter moment, fuller, more contextual journalism—much of it from Indigenous journalists—has been appearing, and stories concerning Indigenous people have been more regular and higher in news and current affairs programmes, at least for our national broadcaster. But, for how long will this 'story' maintain its currency and prominence? Until Indigenous imprisonment rates become proportional to population levels and preventable deaths in custody no longer occur?

On the 20th anniversary of the handing down of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody's report, Hammond reported the words of Mavis Pat, John Pat's still-grieving mother. In her statement to the Royal Commission Mavis Pat said: 'I don't know what's going to come out of the royal commission but I hope it makes everything alright for Aboriginal people' (cited in Hammond, 2011, p. 52).

Next year marks 30 years since the Royal Commission released its report and Australia pledged to reduce deaths in custody and the social, economic and judicial conditions that lead to them. But, as Allan Clarke concluded in his 2020 article, the story so far is much the same:

Australia, we can do better and we must do better.

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# The political affordances of the ‘coconut wireless’

## Rotumans on social media in the 2018 Fiji elections

**Abstract:** As a unique group of people, Rotumans make up less than two percent of Fiji’s population, and as a minority Indigenous ethnic group in Fiji, they have remained relatively hidden and silent in political affairs. Outmigration from the island has led to more than 80 percent of Rotumans residing outside of Rotuma. In recent times, the Rotuman diaspora has heavily relied on the use of ICTs and new media technologies as crucial tools for the reinvigoration of Rotuma’s culture. This in itself poses an intriguing paradox as internet connectivity on Rotuma is quite limited. However, social media platforms have been increasingly used by Rotumans outside of Rotuma, and have enabled increased connectivity and greater dissemination of information among the Rotuman diaspora. Recently, the primary purpose of such social media groups has evolved from merely being a tool for rekindling familial ties, to being a platform for political discourse on Rotuman issues. In essence, despite the scattered nature of the Rotuman population, digital technologies are offering Rotumans the affordance of being able to inform and educate themselves and their networks on political issues of Rotuman interest. By employing ethnography and netnography principles and through in-person and online engagement with Rotumans within and outside of Rotuma, this article examines the affordances that digital technologies offer Rotumans concerning national political discourse. This is carried out with a specific focus on the 2018 general elections in Fiji.

**Keywords:** Fiji, digital affordances, digital diaspora, digital divide, elections, ethnography, freedom of expression, Indigenous, Rotuma, social media

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## Introduction

**R**OTUMA is an island that is part of the Republic of Fiji, and Rotumans are a minority Indigenous ethnic group with a unique culture and history. As a minority Indigenous people, Rotuman issues and concerns have typically been subsumed within the greater realm of national-level political issues and turbulences in Fiji. Such political turbulence has only served to exacerbate existing societal divisions. Particularly as after the 2006 coup, there followed eight years of authoritarian rule before another general election took place in Fiji (Kant, 2017). This turbulence has had an impact on the political representation and participation of Rotumans.

For ethnic minorities around the world, internet platforms offer a means for the (re)production of identity from a community level (Khalidi, 1997; Mpofu, 2013). Despite the digital divide, the global disparity in access to digital media between 'haves' and 'have-nots', this means that the internet and social media offer possibilities of greater connectivity amongst Rotumans, thus amplifying their voices into the political sphere. Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right, as well as a vital component of democracy. The ability of citizens to freely express themselves is also intricately linked to the notion of development. The idea that media represents a space where cultural communities (especially Indigenous peoples) can engage in identity contestation and, as a result, identity and culture-based mobilisation and political action is not new. Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi (1994) linked culture, identity, and communication to protest and resistance. They argued that community-led media could provide spaces to articulate and disseminate alternative identities from those presented in mainstream media. For ethnic minorities (such as Rotumans), their ability to raise issues of concern can be drowned out (intentionally or unintentionally) by more dominant groups. This is an issue of particular concern in the context of elections, where ethnic minorities can run the risk of having their specific issues subsumed into the larger polity. Moser (2008, p. 1) argues that achieving broad representation of ethnic groups has key ramifications for the quality of democracy in countries, particularly those that are emerging from long periods of authoritarian rule.

The advent of information and communication technologies (ICTs), and the subsequent development of social media platforms, has offered great potential for the enhancement of freedom of expression (Mpofu, 2013). Functionally, social media platforms are designed to enable ease of communication between individuals and groups. Thus, social media plays a pivotal role in political and civic engagement due to its structural and functional properties as they act to create a more inclusive and accessible political process by engaging both conventional political actors and less prominent actors to create, maintain, or expand networks (Valenzuela, Arriagada, & Scherman, 2014).

Constant global trends of decreasing costs of technology have meant that even in areas without internet coverage, smartphones have become ubiquitous in Rotuman households. Typical trends include families sharing the smartphones they possess so that individual family members can, for example, take turns to ‘*na malu se Facebook ta*’ (put photos on Facebook). In common parlance, the word Facebook is now synonymous with contacting family members, with phrases such as ‘*nam fone ta la gou la po la Facebook ma...*’ (‘give me the phone so that I can Facebook with [family member]’) being commonly heard. As a result, Facebook has become a viable platform for Rotumans to maintain and rekindle connections with kin. Titifanue, Varea, Varea, Kant, and Finau (2018, p. 40) found that social media offers Rotumans the ability to reconnect and maintain familial ties that could not be easily done in the past.

In the context of communications research, Evans, Pearce, Vitak, and Treem (2016, p. 36) define affordances as ‘the multifaceted relational structure between an object/technology and the user that enables or constrains potential behavioural outcomes in a particular context’. Evans et al. (2016, p. 39-40) also developed a framework to map out the role of affordances in communications research. For a phenomenon to qualify as an affordance, it must first not be an object or feature of an object; a specific feature of an object is not necessarily an affordance, rather it is what the feature allows users to do. For example, a smartphone camera is a feature while its affordance is allowing users to capture images and videos. Secondly, affordance must not be an outcome; for instance, posting a social media story of a protest is not an affordance, rather the affordance is the increased visibility that social media offers. Lastly, affordance should have variability; individuals use features differently and for differing outcomes. Thus, a social media site can be used for activism, or it can be used solely for social purposes.

‘Coconut wireless’ is a Pacific euphemism for news that is disseminated through informal channels, such as an informal conversation between two people. It particularly refers to rumour-like information and witticism to describe how the news may seem to spread at a rate that equals or exceeds modern communication mediums. In the Rotuman context, Inia (1998, p. 233) describes the coconut wireless as a means to spread news fast (p. 13). She further goes on to describe the coconut wireless as ‘infamous, and a potential producer of malicious gossip’ (p. 233). In essence, how information may be conveyed, and transformed between people through conversations or online multimedia platforms could influence the information itself.

To contextualise this concept, only half of Rotuma receives mobile network connectivity, though depending on the proximity of an area to the telecommunications tower, individuals may have access to both internet, calling and texting services, or solely to calling and messaging. However, in a particular district that lies outside of the zone of mobile network coverage, there is a single coconut tree where the mobile



network signal can be received. So, a person who resides in this area of Rotuma, and has a mobile phone, may be in touch with information on the internet or through phone calls. When such information is then passed on through conversations with others residing in the same area, this information may change or a new version of the information may form through the 'coconut wireless'. Herein, the term 'digital coconut wireless' is referred to as online information, concerning Fiji and Rotuman affairs, that is spread at an inexorable pace through social media platform such as forums or groups, whether verified or not.

To understand and unpack the influence of the digital coconut wireless, this article analyses the use of social media as a political tool for the indigenous group of Rotumans. The article further examines the affordances that digital technologies offer in relation to (re)invigorating cultural identity, and contributing to national political discourse, with a specific focus on the 2018 general elections in Fiji. The article seeks to demonstrate the applicability of the affordances theory, and showcase how it is demonstrated in the political use of social media by Rotumans. The article seeks to determine how increased access to digital technologies has enabled the creation of a Rotuman public sphere that transcends the online and offline realms.

## **Methods**

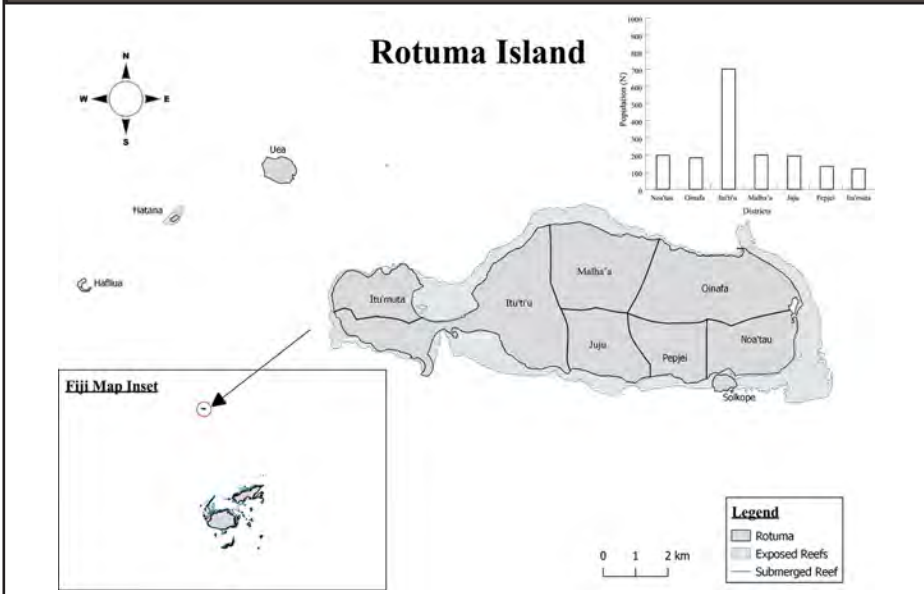
The ethnographic (Genzuk, 2003) and netnographic (Kozinets, 2010) research methods were deployed with a combination of closed and open questions in a questionnaire co-designed by researchers. Interviews were conducted in 2018 with Rotumans who resided on mainland Fiji (Viti Levu) and those residing on the island of Rotuma, through focus groups and speaking with individuals. A total of 40 Rotumans were interviewed across two geographical areas (20 participants from Rotuma Island and 20 participants from the Western Division of Viti Levu). Participants were also drawn from a wide age group ranging from 19 to 75 years old. Oral and written consent for each interview was recorded and each interview lasted an average of 45 minutes to an hour long.

## **Rotuman political status: Political representation and constitutional status**

Rotuma (Figure 1) was ceded to the United Kingdom in 1881 and, for administrative purposes, was politically merged with the Fiji colony (Clark, 2005). An ethnically distinct group from the mainland indigenous Fijians, Rotumans' ethnic classification is a contentious issue but are generally categorised as Polynesians due to marked similarities in language, culture and physical appearance (Biggs, 1965).

As of the 2017 Fiji Census, the island of Rotuma has a population of 1,594 (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Most Rotumans live outside of the island (Figure 2), with 8333 Rotumans living on the mainland Fiji Islands as of the Fiji 2007

**Figure 1: Map of Rotuma, Fiji**



Note: Map of Rotuma, Fiji (including population by districts based on records provided by the Rotuma Hospital in 2014 and which was categorised via subdivision demographic census). The map was produced with QGIS (QGIS Development Team, 2019) by Rufino Varea; maritime boundaries from Flanders Marine Institute (2018).

Census (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2007)<sup>1</sup>.

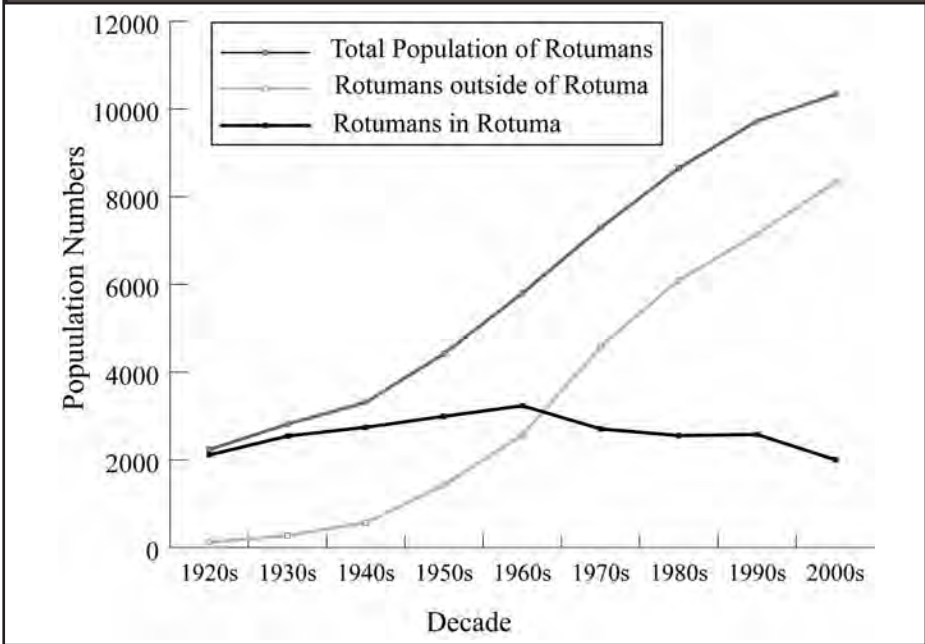
Achieving a broad representation of different ethnic groups has important implications for the stability and quality of democracy, particularly in polities just emerging out of long periods of authoritarian rule. (Moser, 2008, p. 273)

As a minority Indigenous group, the ability of Rotumans to garner representation at the national level has been highly dependent upon the provisions made by Fiji's Constitutions. Since Fiji's independence in 1970, Fiji has had four constitutions. Each of these constitutions has made a profound impact on the ability of Rotumans to have a representative at the parliamentary level.

Since the process of decolonisation began in Fiji in the 1960s, debates around constitutional design have witnessed contentious debates around having an integrated, non-racial state, based on individual rights and those who favour a political order based on ethnic communities; civic and ethnic nationalisms (Kant, 2017). Rotumans chose to remain as part of Fiji.

Rotumans are recognised simultaneously as Indigenous, though different from Indigenous Fijians and their 'uniqueness' has been emphasised at multiple legal and policy echelons (Irava, 1991). Such recognition is exemplified by preamble provisions in the four constitutions of Fiji indicating the importance of

**Figure 2: Total population of Rotumans, 2020**



Note: Total population of Rotumans, including the number of Rotumans who live in and outside of Rotuma.

Rotuma as part of the broader political landscape in Fiji. Despite this, Rotuman involvement in national decision-making (especially policy decisions affecting Rotuma) has been severely restricted by their geographic isolation, and lack of substantive provisions that afford them a seat at the decision-making table. For the Rotuman community, questions relating to the representation of the community in the Fijian parliament is linked to broader questions about the status of Rotuman people within the Fijian nation-state (Anderson, 2007, p. 186).

### *The 1970 Constitution*

After an intense series of closed-door negotiations in 1969 and 1970 between the leaders of the two major ethnic groups (the Indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians), the 1970 Independence Constitution, was a compromise, whereby the indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians were allocated the same number of parliamentary seats for an in-depth analysis of the provisions of the 1970 Constitution, see Ghai and Cottrell (2008). To appease Indigenous Fijian concerns, who feared political domination by Indo-Fijians and loss of land and political rights, there was agreement that the Senate would provide greater Indigenous Fijian representation with veto powers over legislation affecting indigenous Fijian interests (Vasil, 1972, p. 28).

During these independence negotiations, Rotuman chiefs expressed the view that Rotuma should not be treated as a colony of Fiji but should be a federal

part of the new nation consisting of Fiji and Rotuma (Howard & Rensel, 2007, p. 343). They specifically requested a provision in the Constitution for a seat in the House of Representatives allocated to an elected representative of Rotuma arguing that Rotumans were not an immigrant race and thus deserving of special consideration (Howard & Rensel, 2007, p. 339).

For election to the House of Representatives, Rotumans were grouped in a communal roll with Indigenous Fijians.<sup>2</sup> However, Rotuma was given one Senate seat (out of twenty-two); to be nominated by the Council of Rotuma.<sup>3</sup> The colonial ordinances governing Rotuma, namely the *Rotuma Ordinance* and *Rotuma Land Ordinance* became entrenched provisions of the 1970 Fiji independence Constitution, requiring extraordinary processes for amending these ordinances (Acts).<sup>4</sup>

### *The 1990 Constitution*

In May 1987, a military coup took place in Fiji, resulting in the abrogation of the 1970 constitution. A new 1990 Constitution was promulgated to ensure indigenous Fijian political dominance (Kant, 2018, p. 65). Rotumans were removed from the indigenous Fijian communal roll and placed on a separate roll with an allocation of a single Rotuman communal seat in the House of Representatives. The provision for a senator nominated by the Rotuma Council was retained. Also retained were the constitutional entrenchment of the *Rotuma Acts*.

### *The 1997 Constitution*

By the mid-1990s, there were moves to review the 1990 constitution for a more multicultural constitution that would be acceptable in Fiji and internationally. During this time, a constitutional commission was created, and a group of Rotumans made a submission on behalf of the Rotuma Council. They requested that Rotumans be awarded two representatives in the lower house, two representatives in the Senate, and the creation of a Ministry for Rotuman Affairs (Howard & Rensel, 2007, p. 359). However, the resulting 1997 Constitution retained the provision of one Rotuman communal seat in the House of Representatives, one Rotuma Senator and the constitutional entrenchment of the *Rotuman Acts*.

### *The 2013 Constitution*

The 2006 coup attempted to transform the country in the opposite direction to the earlier ethno-nationalist inspired coups. The post-coup regime promised a new Constitution with an objective of ‘civic nation-building’ to nurture a sense of common citizenship, going beyond narrow ethnic allegiances (Kant, 2017). The post-coup regime advocated for the elimination of voting in terms of ‘racial classifications’, and its replacement with a system whereby ‘each voter should vote for a candidate of his/her choice in a common roll, with each vote having equal value’ (Kant & Rakuita, 2014).

Fiji’s 2013 Constitution makes preamble references to the Indigenous Fijians

and Rotumans as the first inhabitants of Fiji, recognising their lands, unique culture, customs traditions and language (Fiji 2013 Constitution). A 50 multi-member single national constituency was established, meaning that parties and candidates must compete to garner votes all around the country as opposed to their individual constituencies. In addition, political parties and independent candidates must attain a 5 percent threshold of total votes cast to qualify for Parliament.

The recognition of Indigenous Fijian and Rotuman customary land ownership in the Constitution was intended to appease suspicions stirred up by ethno-nationalists over most of Fiji's independent history. It is strengthened by Article 28, which confirms that Indigenous Fijian, Rotuman and Banaban land rights are inalienable. However, the provisions for previous constitutionally entrenched specific legislative provisions in the 1970, 1990 and 1997 Constitutions were done away with.

Legislative representation carries powerful symbolic power for ethnic minorities and often becomes an end in itself even when minorities have little or no chance of participating in the governing coalition. (Moser, 2008, p. 273)

The electoral provisions of the 2013 constitution also have potential ramifications for minority groups. In the Rotuman context, for instance, section 53(1) of Fiji's 2013 Constitution states: 'The election of members of Parliament is by a multi-member open list system of proportional representation, under which each voter has one vote, with each vote being of equal value, in a single national electoral roll comprising all the registered voters.' In the 2018 elections, a total of 458,532 votes were cast (FijiVillage, 2018). This means that to qualify for Parliament, political parties and independent candidates would need to attain approximately 22,926 of total votes to meet the 5 percent threshold to qualify for Parliament. This does not augur well for minority communities such as the Rotuman population as (theoretically) it could mean that if in future, all Rotumans chose to vote for an independent candidate or Rotuman political party, the number of votes cast by Rotumans would still not garner the number of votes required for the candidate/party to qualify for Parliament. In such a political environment, the validity of the mantra of 'one person, one vote, one value' can be questioned when applied to the context of minority populations in Fiji.

Common political discourse tends to overlook the fact that Rotumans are a unique Indigenous ethnic group with a culture, language, and land tenure system that is vastly different from Indigenous Fijians. Consequently, political deliberations on issues such as Indigenous rights tend to subsume Rotuman concerns into the broader spectrum of Indigenous Fijian affairs. In this political context, Rotumans, as a minority Indigenous ethnic group in Fiji, have remained relatively hidden and silent during the political turmoil. As noted by Howard (1970), Rotumans have always adopted a 'don't rock the boat' approach.

## Elections and political representation of Rotumans

Even though a number of notable Rotumans have been high achievers academically and professionally, the broader Rotuman community is sometimes overlooked in political decision-making. According to Anderson (2007, pp. 186-187), this political marginalisation can be seen in some key government policy documents (such as the previous affirmative action program for advancement in the economic status of Indigenous Fijians from 2000-2006); in generalisations about the economic and other status of the community (ensuring that social and economic reality for many members is not addressed); in the dismissal of the legitimate political concerns voiced by some members of the community; and in the way in which the island is treated as akin to other outer islands despite its 'special status' (the difficulty in delivering goods and services, the lack of development, the expense and difficulty in travel all indicative of the latter). It is these issues of the status of Rotuma within Fiji and effective representation (for the community as a whole and as individuals), which are arguably at the crux of many Rotuman political arguments. These issues are usually invisible in the traditional media in Fiji.

Provision of special representation with a Rotuman communal seat in the 1990 and 1997 Constitutions had the effect of highlighting, albeit not prominently, Rotuman political, cultural and socio-economic issues as candidates for elections tailored manifestos for the Rotuma Communal constituency and in candidates' election campaigning (Anderson, 2007, p. 191).

With the 2013 Constitution removing communal representation, Rotuman voters have effectively been marginalised. In 2018 only two political party manifestos mentioned Rotuma. In 2014, two candidates of Rotuman ethnicity ran for the 2014 elections. These were Jioje Konousi Konrote (the current President of Fiji) and Rosarine Pasepa Lagi, who respectively ran for the FijiFirst Party (hereafter 'FijiFirst') and Fiji Labour Party (FLP). Rotuma Island, whose issues had for so long been subsumed in the broader national level discourse, had multiple developmental projects allocated—reported as being widely welcomed. In an interview with FBC News, Major-General Jioje Konrote, the then advisor to the Rotuma Island Council, stated: 'Never in the history of our little island so much has been done by any government' (Coka, 2014b). In 2014 alone, announcements were made regarding the following activities;

1. A renewable energy project which encompassed the islands of Kadavu, Rotuma and Lakeba (Fiji Village, 2014)
2. The upcoming completion of the dredging of the Oinafa jetty to improve shipping services (*The Fiji Times*, 2014)
3. Allocation of excavators to improve and upgrade roads on Rotuma (Nasiko, 2015; The Fijian Government, 2014b)
4. The waiving of half a million dollars in unpaid water bills on the island



- of Rotuma (Coka, 2014c)
5. The upcoming commencement of the construction of a new hospital (The Fijian Government, 2014a)
  6. Government looking at the allocation of FJD\$15 million for an upgrade of the Rotuma airport (Coka, 2014a)
  7. Dialogue between Fiji and Tuvalu government officials to facilitate trade between Rotuma and Tuvalu (Coka, 2014d; *Fiji Sun*, 2014)

During the 2014 elections, members of the ruling government ran under the FijiFirst banner and garnered the majority of votes on the island. The party gained 84.1 percent of votes, the majority for Jioje Konusi Konrote (537 votes), and the party leader Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama (177 votes). Rosarine Lagi of the FLP only garnered a total of 47 votes. FijiFirst demonstrated very high popularity on Rotuma, but upcoming events in 2015 were to change this.

In 2015, the Fiji Parliament tabled two bills relating to Rotuma and these were respectively the '*Rotuma Bill of 2015*' [Bill no. 6 of 2015] and the '*Rotuma Lands Bill 2015*' [Bill no. 7 of 2015]. The bills were met with concern by the Rotuman community and led Rotumans to become more politically vocal (Titifanue et al., 2018).

Rotuman concerns surrounding the bills were centred on various provisions of the bills that differed from the current *Rotuma Acts*. A prominent Rotuman medical practitioner stated in an interview that opposition to the Bills was not to detract from national unity but that it was a matter of 'identity' (Chand, 2017). One of the critical points of contention was the proposed change to the legal definition of Rotuma. In the current *Rotuma Act* [Cap 122] (Government of Fiji, 1927—amended in 1958), Rotuma is defined as;

... the island of Rotuma and its dependencies, that is to say, all islands, rocks, reefs and fisheries lying between the twelfth degree and the fifteenth degree of south latitude and between the one hundred and seventy-fifth degree and the one hundred and eightieth degree of east longitude from the meridian of Greenwich.

In contrast, the current proposed '*Rotuma Bill*' redefines Rotuma by simply referring to the 'islands of Rotuma'. The area of Rotuma is significantly reduced with its altered definition under the *Rotuma Bill*. Apart from this provision, there are other changes in the proposed bills that have the potential to profoundly affect Rotuma land tenure, and administration (*The Fiji Times*, 2017; Titifanue et al., 2018). Due to the controversy surrounding the bills, many Rotumans opposed them, with 85 percent of all voters on Rotuma Island signing a petition calling for the withdrawal of the Bills (*The Fiji Times*, 2017). As a result, during the 2018 elections, the proposed bills were an ever-looming presence. The 2013

constitution removed provisions that entrenched the Rotuma Acts within the constitution. Consequently, the bills could be passed through a simple majority vote in Parliament (Sackett, Kant, & Titifanue, 2018).

For Rotumans, the bills became a point of contention before the 2018 elections, but specific issues became glossed over, with the majority of political parties not focusing on Rotuma. Only FijiFirst and the National Federation Party (NFP) each mentioned a single matter/issue they would seek to address in their manifestos pertaining to Rotumans.

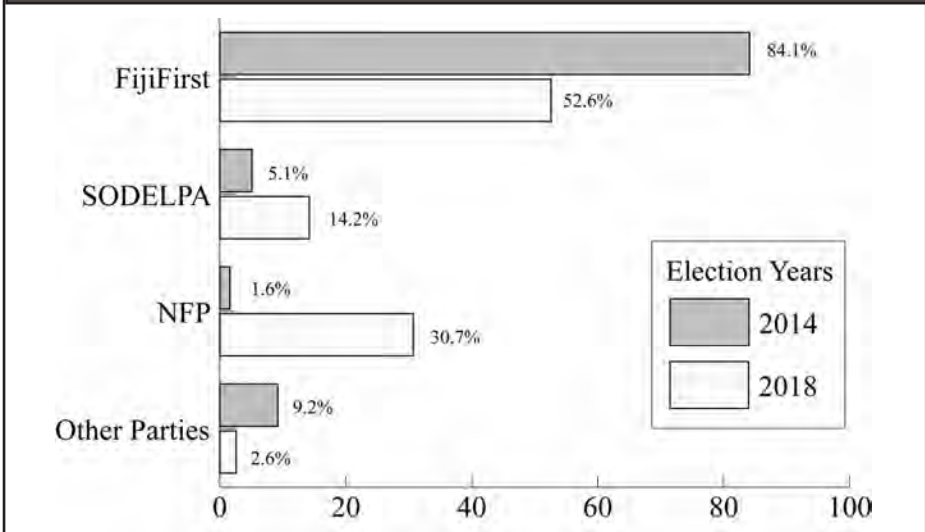
In the case of the FijiFirst Party (2018), their manifesto stated that they upheld ‘the special place of our iTaukei and Rotuman people, their ownership of their lands and their unique culture, traditions, language and customs’ (p. 51). The manifesto further stated that the party would work to ‘further increase digital TV terrestrial coverage in Rotuma, Kadavu, Ovalau, Koro and Vanuabalavu’ (p. 58). The NFP, on the other hand, made a specific focus upon the *Rotuma Bills* and stated that the party would work to ‘repeal the *Rotuma Land Bill*’ (National Federation Party, 2018, p. 11) Notably, while the NFP manifesto stated that the party would work to repeal one of the *Rotuman Bills* (the *Rotuma Land Bill*), no mention is made of the *Rotuma Bill*.

Rosarine Lagi, a Rotuman lawyer, took a centre stage role in Rotuman opposition to the bills, informing the public of updates about them.<sup>5</sup> She employed social media to post regular updates on the status of the bills and their ramifications, which helped her garner support. In 2018, she again stood for election as an NFP candidate. During a campaign meeting, she spoke about her work in coordinating opposition to the Rotuma bills.

In between the 2014 and 2018 elections, Rotuma continued to receive developmental assistance and projects. The major promises made by FijiFirst before the 2014 elections to the Rotuman people were kept. Work commenced on the airport upgrade and hospital construction that had been announced in the build-up to the 2014 elections. On October 29, the airport which had undergone a runway upgrade worth F\$12.8 million was opened by the Prime Minister of Fiji (*Fiji Sun*, 2018). At the same time, work continued on the construction of a new hospital for Rotuma (the total cost of the construction is estimated to be F\$8.3 million) (Bolatiki, 2018). However, the election results revealed erosion in the popularity of the FijiFirst Party.

Much of Fiji followed a trend of the vote being split between the FijiFirst and SODELPA parties. Voting trends on Rotuma differed, with the majority of votes being divided between the FijiFirst and NFP, with the two parties gaining 370 and 216 votes respectively—Rosarine Lagi getting 206 of the latter. Overall, the 2018 elections revealed a gradual fall in the former dominance of FijiFirst, with opposition parties greatly improving their standing in Rotuma (Figure 3).<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 3: Total votes won by major parties in 2014, 2018**



Note: Total votes (%) garnered by the major political parties in the 2014 and 2018 national general elections on the island of Rotuma.

### **Political Rotuman social media: Affordances for elections?**

Rotuma's geographic isolation and irregular government transportation services to Rotuma have meant that mass media such as newspapers are not readily accessible on the island. The geographic isolation has also meant that access to radio and television stations is difficult, and typically only possible for residents with access to satellite dishes. An example highlighting Rotuma's remoteness and the consequent difficulties in accessing mass media is an interview with a participant who recounted a story of her late husband and his prized transistor radio:

'Konousi (Pseudonym) had an old transistor [radio] that he looked after very well, in the evenings he would tune it to see if he can catch [a radio station signal]. Sometimes he would get the Tuvalu music [connect to Tuvaluan radio stations], very few times he would get Fiji [radio stations]'. (Interview in Rotuma, 2018)

In the present day, the majority of households interviewed in Rotuma now own a mobile phone. In many cases, houses would have owned both a Digicel network mobile phone, and a Telecom Fiji Limited 'Easy Tel' wireless phone. The 'Easy Tel' handset could be charged and taken around the island for calls, while the Digicel mobile phone could be used to call, text, and access the internet if one were in an area with Digicel network access.

The ability of Rotumans to use such telecommunications services has allowed them the affordance of having access to other Rotuman networks. In essence, before the advent of the internet and mobile telecommunications, Rotuman

networks were typically limited to their family and community, as well as any updates brought in via arriving ships and planes. Mobile technology affords increased networking possibilities. This has led to Rotumans on Rotuma being able to become more closely connected with the Rotuman diaspora.

This affordance has expanded information horizons for Rotumans in Rotuma. Participants in Rotuma stated that with their smartphones, they could get exposure to a variety of news ranging from what was happening in sports, to how the government was behaving.

‘It’s very important I keep up to date. My kids in Fiji update me when we talk [on the phone] ... Sometimes it’s just about who’s getting married and all that. Other times, they update me on what’s happening in the government, the [rugby] sevens.’ (Vamarasi, 2018 [Pseudonym])

‘Bainimarama came; I was one of those people who asked him whether it is possible to have Vodafone or Digicel... If there was more connectivity on this side [of the island] I would use the internet more.... It’s very good for me to know what’s happening.’ (Aliti, 2018 [Pseudonym]) (Interviews in Rotuma, 2018)

Rotumans of the diaspora have also been active in using the affordances of mobile technologies to keep their families in Rotuma informed. Their families in Rotuma have also used creative means to mitigate the issue of limited mobile phone connectivity; as Rosarina (pseudonym) stated in a 2018 focus group in Nadi;

‘Mom and dad stay in Juju, so it’s just on the edge of the Digicel [signal range]. So the phone doesn’t catch [network] in the house. But there’s a coconut tree at the back where it catches. So they put the phone in a bag and hang it there. We will text them and tell them when we will call. So they can see the text and be ready at the time when we will call.’ (Interview in Western Division, Viti Levu (2018))

The flow of information is two streamed, with Rotumans on Rotuma providing updates to Rotumans on mainland Fiji. As focus group participants noted;

It [social media] keeps me in touch with family. Also, the updates, who’s alive, who’s dying. Like you get a shock, you find out this is happening, all on social media. [Interjection by another participant]; Yeah, you can see who is graduating, who is studying further and all that. (Focus Group, 2018)

In areas with strong connectivity to mobile and internet networks, or which are close to an area of strong internet connectivity, Rotumans used a mixture of SMS messaging and social media chats to stay connected and also reduce communications costs. As Rigamoto (pseudonym) stated in a focus group:

‘I text [SMS] my sister the time to be at the school ground [Malha’a High School]. Over there [school ground], the internet catches. So she tops up her data plan and will go to the ground. That way we can chat as long as we want on the data plan and it’s cheaper than always texting [SMS].’ (Interview in Rotuma, 2018)

Overall, the advent of mobile networks in Rotuma has resulted in a reduction in the cost of communications. This further facilitates the affordance of Rotumans broadening their networks, as the cost of communication becomes a less cumbersome burden. The Digicel network also offers promotional features such as free mobile internet data and talk time. This increases the ease by which Rotumans can communicate. As articulated by a Fiji based focus group participant (2018):

‘I send mom and dad money. Before, it was really expensive to call, but now, they live in Itu’muta, which is so close to the tower. So they get their weekly plan, and its unlimited calls. So now we can always update each other.’ (Isimeli, 2018 [Pseudonym]) (Interview in Western Division, Viti Levu, 2018)

Being politically integrated with Fiji has meant that vital administrative decisions relating to Rotuma are typically made outside of Rotuma, with Rotumans only knowing such matters when they have come to pass. Mobile technologies and social media offer the function of real-time news updates. This has allowed them the affordance of being able to have greater access to Rotuma related content based online.

A key example of this was the advent of the Rotuma bills. The function of connectivity offered by mobile technologies led to Facebook forums becoming a focal point for political discussions relating to the bills. Out of all the Rotuma related pages and groups, ‘Rotumans on Facebook’ is the largest. The group was initially created in the year 2008 by Betty and Sefeti Walker who are based in Australia. As of July 2020, the Facebook group ‘Rotumans on Facebook’ has amassed an impressive 13,000 members. Given that the total Rotuman population in Fiji as of the 2007 census is only 10,335 (and may be much higher today), this would constitute a substantial number of Rotumans within and without Rotuma.

When the Rotuma bills were tabled, Rotumans employed social media to immediately disseminate copies of the bills and carry out discussions on the merits and demerits of the bills. In this case, the mass communications function of social media afforded Rotumans an opportunity to easily share and access Rotuma related content.

Focus group and interview participants alluded to how social media had allowed for the Rotumans to disseminate information relating to the bills. The mass communications feature of social media also afforded Rotumans the opportunity to organise their protests over the bills;

‘When the bills came out, I found out through my friends [on Facebook]. I’m cousins with .... [Rotuman Lawyer] so they were asking if I can see if she knows anything about them.’ (Jiare, 2018 [Pseudonym])

‘I was checking the group every day [Rotumans on Facebook]. I don’t know about the law but good thing we have educated people [referring to Rotumans of the diaspora] there what can tell us what it all means.’ (Marseu, 2018 [Pseudonym]) (Interviews in Rotuma, 2018)

Other interview participants were also individuals who had taken an active role in being the disseminators of information on Facebook. One interviewee spoke on how he had used Facebook to make sure all is *kaianaga* (relative) were kept informed:

‘I’m an IT person. So I use the technology to help my people. I would post all the time when there’s updates from Rosie [Rosie Lagi, the Rotuman lawyer who ran for elections in 2018] ... I also make sure I message and call my family at home [Rotuma].’ (Munivai, 2018, [Pseudonym]). (Interview in Western Division, Viti Levu, (2018)

Social media and the internet have the propensity to act as public spheres. In the case of Rotuma, the research observes that social media has helped facilitate both a virtual and physical public sphere.

Through the course of the research (and from previous visits by the researchers to Rotuma), multiple instances were noted of Rotumans gathering in areas with stable network connections to check social media. During such impromptu gatherings, conversations amongst those physically present tended to revolve around sharing what they had viewed or learnt online. Conversations ranged from the photos from a recent wedding, to updates on the Rotumans on a Facebook page pertaining to shipping issues.

### **Digital elections education: Mobile technologies affording elections awareness**

As mentioned, the electoral provisions of the 2013 constitution pose a challenge for minority groups who may wish to for representation in parliament. Anderson (2007) notes that political discourse in Fiji tends to focus upon ‘major players’, and that Party manifestos tend to focus on majority communities. Anderson (2007, p. 185) further notes that media attention focusses upon issues affecting dominant communities ‘centralised around the capital, or at least the main islands of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu’ (p. 185). In this context, Rotuma specific issues are often drowned out in both political discourses, and the mainstream media. This trend seemed to continue during the 2018 elections build-up, with much of the political campaigning, and media discourse tending to neglect Rotuma. A telling example of this is the fact that of the six parties that contested Fijis 2018 elections, only two parties (NFP and Fiji First) made any



reference to Rotuma in their manifestos. Furthermore, of the 235 candidates in the 2018 elections, only one candidate (Rosarine Lagi) ran on a platform that specifically targeted the Rotuman issues and the Rotuman electorate.

Rotuman issues have thus been subsumed within the broader spectrum of national-level political discourse. Additionally, with a lack of coverage of Rotuman issues during elections, Rotumans on Rotuma do suffer from an inadequacy of information. Individuals interviewed felt that this lack of access to information was a key issue Rotumans faced. This is encapsulated by a focus group participant who when asked what she felt was a current problem faced by Rotumans noted:

... 'I mean not being informed about what's happening. Like not enough information ... people don't have enough media, or enough people updating them. Now we depend on Rosie [Lagi] when she goes. The other part is social [media]. [Interviewer]: So would you typically look to Facebook for these updates, like from Rosie? Like for updates regarding news from Rotuma and political [News]. Participant: Yes, and then I think of Rotuma you know, those that don't have access to Facebook. (Focus Group Participant, 2018)

Interviewees and focus group participants also acknowledged the fact that Rotuma was on the wrong side of the digital divide. However, many did feel that social media did have a role in informing Rotumans on Rotuma. Whereby social media platforms can provide a means for Rotumans to educate each other on general, and election-related issues. The information-sharing function of social media can potentially alleviate the issue of a lack of election-related information that Rotumans face. As a focus group participant noted;

'It can [help] with the young ones on it [Facebook]. Because the young ones are you know, more into it ... So they would be the ones who we be oh ok, this is this, you know. Telling their elders... But I think if there was a better connection it would be open to more Rotumans.' (Fatiaki, 2018 [Pseudonym])

Rotuman youth have also stated that they would like to vote for individuals who could provide a focus on Rotuma. As Taito (pseudonym), a Viti Levu based focus group participant noted: 'Mainly, we are voting for the people, or the party, that can do more for the island [Rotuma]' (Focus Group, 2018).

Facebook offers the functionality of open and real-time discourse among Facebook users. This can provide the affordance of open and transparent debate among Rotumans. Despite this, there is at times an age dynamic that materialises during social media discussions among Rotumans. A youth focus group participant noted that while they would follow the discussions on the Rotumans on Facebook page, they would not themselves comment and post, as they felt

it opened themselves up to criticism from *'the elders'*.

During the build-up to Fiji's 2018 elections, Rotuma focused groups on social media were used to disseminate information related to elections. Some posts promoted and endorsed a Rotuman candidate. As aforementioned, NFP candidate Rosarine Lagi played a key role in raising awareness on the negative ramifications of the Rotuma bills. There were numerous posts in Rotuma specific Facebook groups that called on Rotumans to vote for her based on her leading role in opposing the bills (Figure 4). In addition, Rotumans on Rotuma used social media to provide updates of electoral preparations on the island of Rotuma.

Being Rotumans themselves, and being part of the Rotuman online community, the researchers noted numerous instances of Rotumans employing social media to provide election-related updates. In the build-up to Fiji's November 2018 elections, Facebook groups such as Rotumans on Facebook, and Rotumans for Rotuma became hotbeds for political discourse. Online conversations ranged from the promotion of various parties and candidates to means by which Rotuma specific issues could be raised at the parliamentary level.

## Conclusion

Social media offers a vast array of functions and affordances for Rotumans. With the majority of Rotumans residing outside of Rotuma, Rotumans have harnessed social media to maintain connections with the diaspora. Through social media, Rotumans can harness familial and community networks to stay informed on Rotuma related issues. Being a minority ethnic Indigenous group, social media offer a potential avenue for Rotumans to raise issues that impact them. With the changes to Fijis electoral system having profound ramifications for Rotuman political representation, social media also offers a means for Rotumans to communicate and disseminate political information. With social media facilitating improved connectivity between Rotumans, it has offered the affordance of expanded networks.



**Figure 4: Facebook post in support of a Rotuman political candidate on 8 October 2018.**

However, while social media has offered increased visibility, and ease of communication, the digital divide between Rotumans within and without Rotuma has hindered the efficacy of social media affordances. While Rotumans on Rotuma can employ social media to increase visibility for the issues they face, this is often dependent upon the efficacy of the mobile networks. Despite these hindrances, Rotumans have acted creatively to try and gain maximum benefit from the functions of mobile communication and social media. Those who have access to mobile and internet networks on Rotuma act as a conduit of data for those without mobile network access. In this sense, Rotuman usage of social media can be seen to characterise a contemporary ‘coconut wireless’.

## Notes

1. Data from the Fiji 2007 census is used rather than the 2017 census data, due to the 2007 census being the last time where ethnicity specific data was collected.
2. Seats in the lower house were communally allocated, maintaining parity among Indigenous and Indo-Fijians with 22 seats each and 8 seats for General Electors. Of the 52 seats, 27 were communal reserved seats (12 each for Indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijians and 3 for General Electors) while 25 seats were national seats, to be elected cross-nationally (10 seats each for Indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians and 5 for General electors) (Fiji Government 1970). The introduction of national, cross-voting seats was an attempted compromise between the Indigenous Fijian desires for communal representation based on communal rolls and the Indo-Fijian commitment to a ‘common roll’ (Ghai & Cottrell, 2008, p. 292).
3. The Council of Rotuma consists of all district chiefs and their appointed subchief to the council, including the Chief Medical Officer, and the District Officer on the Island.
4. Any amendments to the two Acts relating to Rotuma could not be made without the supporting votes of 6 out of the 8 members of the Senate nominated by the Council of Chiefs.
5. Rosarine Lagi is the same individual who ran in the 2014 elections as a Fiji Labour Party candidate.
6. Due to the lack of exit polling in Fiji, it is exceedingly difficult to assess how Rotumans on mainland Fiji voted.

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# Under the shadow of the state

## Media framing of attacks on West Papuan students on Indonesian online media

**Abstract:** The attack on the West Papua student dormitory in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia, on 16 August 2019 by the Islamic Defender Fronts (FPI), Communication Forum for Retired Children of the Indonesian Military/Police (FKPPI) and Pancasila Youth (PP) sharpened Indonesia's crisis with West Papua. The baldly racist attack then ignited repression, as well as demonstrations from West Papuans in various cities. In such a crisis, Indonesian online media does not provide proportional voices from West Papuan society. That adds to a record of how bad the practice of journalism related to West Papua so far appears to be. This study conducted a quantitative framing analysis, examining the number of reports, use of resource persons and the use of framing of crisis in the news, on six Indonesian online media: okezone.com, detik.com, kompas.com, tribunnews.com, cnnindonesia.com and tirto.id in the period of August 16-31, 2019. From the 2,471 news reports, it can be seen that most of the main news sources used by the media are from the government and the apparatus and police. West Papuan society received only scant coverage compared with the range of news of the attacks on West Papua student dormitories and their effects. The dominant crisis frames that appear in the news are the frame of attribution of responsibility and frame of conflict. The frame of human interest, frame of morality and frame of economic take the bottom three positions.

**Keywords:** case studies, conflict reporting, crisis journalism, framing, Indonesia, online media, West Papua

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### Introduction

**A**TACKS on the West Papua student dormitory in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia, on 16 August 2019 involved groups of people who were partially identified using the Islamic Defender Fronts (FPI) insignia, with the Communication Forum for Retired Children of the Indonesian Military/Police (FKPPI) and Pancasila Youth (PP) and the rest wearing ordinary clothes. The at-

tacks triggered a conflict not only ‘vertically’ but also ‘horizontally’ in various regions (CNNIndonesia, 2019; *Republika*, 2019). The conflict was marked by racism with some of the attackers calling the West Papuans ‘dogs’, ‘pigs’ and ‘monkeys’ and making death threats (Sandikin, 2019). This was compounded by repression by the state police apparatus of the Indonesian People’s Front for West Papua (FRI-WP) during a demonstration in Ternate, North Maluku, on 15 August 2019 (CNNIndonesia, 2019b). That was as well as an attack on West Papuan students in Malang, East Java, when the (West) Papua Student Alliance, carried out peaceful action to protest against the New York Agreement between the government of Indonesia and the Netherlands on 15 August 1962 related to the transition of power in West Papua (Perwitasari, 2019). The crisis escalated and there were frequent clashes in Manokwari, Merauke, Nabire, Yahukimo, Biak and elsewhere. Officials aggravated the situation by using repressive actions and the government even slowed down internet access in Sorong. The Ministry of Communication and Information also closed social media accounts that they claimed were ‘provoking’ the situation (Abdi, 2019b). This series of actions and imposition of conditions deepened the wounds of prolonged colonialism by Indonesia against West Papua (Anderson, 2015; Supriatma, 2013). But ironically in a crisis like this, Indonesian mass media would again not take sides with West Papua. As in previous cases, the Indonesian mass media tends to confuse the situation (Remotivi.id, 2014).

In the escalation of the West Papua student dormitory case, many news media in Indonesia reported the crisis with weak verification, and dragged the issue into disinformation narratives (Firman, 2019). detik.com, as an online media outlet with the most audience in Indonesia, even reinforced stigma against the students by giving attributions like ‘stubborn’ to the title of the article -- before they changed it because of a reprimand from the Independent Journalists Alliance (AJI) (Manan, 2019). Some other media participated in facilitating expressions of hatred and discriminatory calls against West Papuans. The biggest problem would be that these media do not report much of the conflict in terms of the perspective of students or West Papuans. The media tend to use a single narrative, which is taken from the perspective of the Indonesian government, using only news sources that come from the police or other government authorities. The principle of balance to cover both sides let alone showing the truth, as the foundation of journalism ethics, is not a priority and is ignored (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014).

### **The crisis of Papua in frame**

News about West Papua has always been disproportionate in both Indonesian and international media (Firman, 2019; Tapsell, 2015; Robie, 2013; Utomo, 2015). Understanding it cannot be separated from the internal political conditions related to West Papua as a geographical area, as well as ethnic groups

and long-term colonialism, accompanied by violence exercised by Indonesia (Lawson, 2017; Elmslie & Webb-Gannon, 2013; Kirsch, 2010; King, 2004). Systematic exploitation of natural resources, destruction of West Papua's resources and plants, compulsory labour (often without compensation), transmigration schemes, and forced relocation have caused widespread environmental damage to the region, ruining traditional subsistence practices, causing disease, malnutrition, and widespread mortality among West Papuans (Brusndige et al., 2004). Inherently, claims that West Papuans are an ethnic population who are often committing violence or that conflict is the norm for West Papua people are used as a justification for the implementation of provincial militarisation and violence (Kirsch, 2010).

All of this is aggravated by government approval of restrictions on foreign and national mass media reporting about West Papua (Leadbeater, 2008). Reporting in the West Papua region in recent decades has been a risky job (Perrottet & Robie, 2011). There was a distance between West Papuans and not only non-Papuan Indonesians, but also the media which were mostly centralised in Jakarta (Tapsell, 2017; Tapsell, 2015). Such distancing made the West Papuan 'Indonesianisation' project that was tried for many years seem half-hearted (Gietzelt, 1989).

West Papua is a 'blind spot' for the media, especially for foreign journalists (Robie, 2020; Perrottet & Robie, 2011; Leadbeater, 2008). In what really started with a conflict of interest around the natural resources owned by West Papua, copper and gold, the government did not want foreign or local journalists to expose the crisis there (Robie, 2012; Robie, 2008; Leith, 2003). Indonesia even banned foreign journalists and media workers from entering West Papua. Only a few journalists managed to enter West Papua, most of them not going through official channels (Robie, 2013). As one diplomat said in Jakarta, 'even Jesus Christ could not get permission to go to West Papua' (West Papua, 2015).

When Indonesian President Joko Widodo on 25 May 2015 stated that he would allow journalists to enter West Papua, a maze-like process was needed to gain access to West Papua (Blades, 2016). Research conducted by AJI shows that only 15 foreign journalists, including two New Zealand radio television crews, were allowed to go to West Papua (Saputri, 2019). Most of them encountered serious obstacles or actual harassment and detention (Chivers, 2017f; Wanimbo, 2017). Local independent journalists who reside in West Papua or become correspondents routinely receive threats from the authorities (Blades, 2016). The military 'secretly, and broadly, is involved in domestic security operations' in West Papua, including closely monitoring the journalists (Supriatma, 2013)

West Papua operates in a subnational authoritarian environment whereby local journalists do not have the freedom to report the news like journalists in other regions in Indonesia. The main factors influencing the mainstream news content

in the region are the security forces and the central government and local government (Tapsell, 2015). Local and foreign journalists see the military as a major threat to their well-being so that freedom of expression in the region narrows and the existence of Special Autonomy funds causes news to be shaped not by what affects West Papuans, but by what is considered relevant by the government. The reluctance of national governments to allow a free media environment can be explained by fears that it would give voice to pro-independence ‘separatists’, and Indonesia’s ‘sovereignty’ over the region would be regularly questioned in local and international media (Blades, 2018; Macleod, 2016; Tapsell, 2015). The repression carried out by the Indonesian government means news framing related to West Papua is never balanced.

Limited studies of West Papua, and even fewer discussions on how the West Papua crisis is framed by the Indonesian mass media, so far has focused on the structural problems and socio-cultural aspects of journalism practice in West Papua. By using a framing analysis, we can read the sentiments of Indonesian national media regarding the West Papua issue. In the context of this study, we can determine how online media in Indonesia framed the case of the attack on West Papua student dormitories in Surabaya and various post-attack incidents.

Framing itself is a theory in media analysis which has been widely applied to news related to politics (Iyengar, 1990a; Iyengar, 1990b; Iyengar, 1991; De Vreese, 2004; Becker & Scheufele, 2011), disasters (Entman, 1991; Merry, 2015; Haider-Markel, Delehanty, & Beverlin, 2007), racism and sexism (Poindexter, Smith, & Heider, 2003; Ben-Porath & Shaker, 2010) and terrorism (Norris, Kern, & Just, 2003; Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2008). The study of how Indonesian media framed the attack on the West Papua dormitory in Surabaya and events in various post-attack areas will contribute to the deepening of understanding, to what extent the structural and sociocultural dimensions can mediate messages in Indonesian online media related to the West Papua issue (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014).

There are two approaches in framing analysis: qualitative and quantitative (Weaver, 2007). Qualitative analysis itself is divided into two: first, by using hermeneutic-qualitative, and second, systematic techniques (D’Angelo & Kuypers, 2016). Hermeneutic-qualitative procedure itself has weaknesses because many of its studies are arbitrary and unsystematic (Tankard, 2001). A qualitative approach using systematic techniques as exemplified by Dijk (2011) and Pan and Kosicki (1993), analysing in detail, syntactical, thematic, rhetorical, and script structures collided with their limitations in analysing large amounts of data.

Another approach is quantitative which is divided into holistic techniques and device oriented techniques (D’Angelo & Kuypers, 2016). Device oriented techniques will rely on indicators or frame elements consisting of words (Entman, 1991) or argument structure (McComas & Shanahan, 1999). This study will use a quantitative approach with holistic techniques, in which analysis of

media frame coding will refer to the previous studies (Nisbet, Hart, Myers, & Ellithorpe, 2013). This study will refer to the frames of crisis previously described in the An and Gower (2009) study. In crisis situations such as the attack on the West Papua dormitory and various post-attack incidents, the public will seek information about the crisis and try to evaluate the event and find who is most responsible for the crisis (An & Gower, 1993).

Analysing the news of the attack on the West Papua dormitory and various post-attack incidents, we can see how the Indonesian media choose what they show, and what they remove from the story, as well as who they use as sources in their news, and who or what they do not show (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). This study, using quantitative framing analysis, will examine framing conducted by six national online media which are dominant in Indonesia and have the most audience: okezone.com, detik.com, kompas.com, tribunews.com, cnnindonesia.com and tirto.id. Below are the research questions in this study:

- a. How many news items related to the attack on the West Papua dormitory and its escalation?
- b. Who are the sources of news in the media regarding the attack on the West Papua dormitory and its escalation?
- c. What is the crisis frame that is used in the news regarding the attack on the West Papua dormitory and its escalation?

## **Methodology**

This study uses a quantitative framing approach with holistic techniques, with the following variables:

### *Operational variables*

#### *News sources*

Framing is the result of how news sources frame an issue where journalists and news organisations adapt to the frame, renegotiate it, or reframe it based on logic and from the genre of news that will be displayed (De Vreese, 2004)

In this study, the examination establishes the proportion of reportage that comes from various government agencies as news sources, in the news related to the attack on the West Papua dormitory and various escalating events, after the attack.

#### *Crisis frame*

An and Gower (2009) show what frames are contained in the news, and used by newspapers, in news from national media about crisis communication throughout 2006. Previously, some literature had discussed the usual frames used in the news. Neuman, Just and Crigler (1992) discuss comprehensively several types of frames that are dominantly used in newspaper news in the United States: conflict, economic consequences, human impact and mortality. Semetko and Valkenburg

(2000) research identified five dominant news frames: attribution of responsibility, conflict, economic consequences, human interest, in five types of national newspapers and television news during the Dutch presidency of the European Council in 1997. Meanwhile, an An and Gower (2009) study adopted five frames that had previously been identified by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000).

This study will examine the use of a dominant frame in reporting on the West Papua dormitory attack and subsequent incidents, and how the use of these frames may have influenced the news audience. Crisis frame categorisation will use typology frames that are also used by An and Gower (2009) to analyse crises.

#### *Frame of human interest*

This frame focuses on the face and emotional side of human beings towards an event, issue and problem (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). In a crisis situation, this frame considers psychological influence on humans, which directs the reader or audience to show various negative behaviors in a crisis (Padin, 2005). Cho and Gower (2006) show that with this frame, the emotional response of the reader is affected, which influences how the reader determines who is guilty and responsible in a crisis situation.

#### *Frame of conflict*

This frame is used to show conflict and disagreement between individuals, groups or organisations. Neuman et al. (1992) show that conflict is often used by US news media. Based on the study of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), this frame is the second most used in news.

#### *Frame of morality*

This frame places events, problems or issues within the scope of moral, social prescription, and religious teachings. Neuman et al. (1992) show that moral frames are generally used by journalists indirectly through quotations or inferences, rather than directly because of the various objectivities attached to journalism activities.

#### *Frame of economy*

This frame reports an event, problem or issue related to its economic consequences on an individual, group, organisation or country. Neuman et al. (1992) identify it as a general framework in news. The large impact of an event is an important news value, and economic consequences are often considered large (Graber & Dunaway, 2018).

#### *Frame of attribution of responsibility*

This frame is defined as ‘a way to connect responsibility for finding solutions or solving problems, both to the government or to individuals or groups’ (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) identified that this frame is the most commonly used in serious newspapers.



The existence of each frame in the news will be measured on a nominal scale of 1 (any) or 0 (none).

### **Population: Corpus of News**

Corpus of news which becomes the population of this research is all news related to the attack on West Papua student dormitories in Surabaya and riot as the effect of attacks, in six Indonesian online media: okezone.com, detik.com, kompas.com, tribunnews.com, cnnindonesia.com and tirto.id from August 16-31, 2019 totalled 2,417 news items.

The data collection process is done by two methods: using the *octoparse* application and manually, by following each time-based report made when the conflict was still ongoing. After that, the two results will be synchronised to reduce the risk of omitting news coverage not summarised.

### **Coding procedures**

In performing a reliability test, the researcher used two intercoders (with the person who did the coding to determine reliability of the test results). Each coder coded all articles independently.

Two intercoders, with a sample of 5% of the entire unit of analysis ( $n = 2471$ ), i.e. 124 (with rounding) performed reliability tests. Research reliability test analysis used Krippendorff's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) process because of its more flexible characteristic. Krippendorff's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) can account for chance agreement, different levels of coding (i.e. nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio), multiple coding categories, different sample sizes, and missing data (Klaus. Krippendorff, 2005). The minimum limit of Krippendorff's alpha to be said to be reliable is 0.7000 in  $q = 0.0125$ . (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007; Krippendorff, 2011)

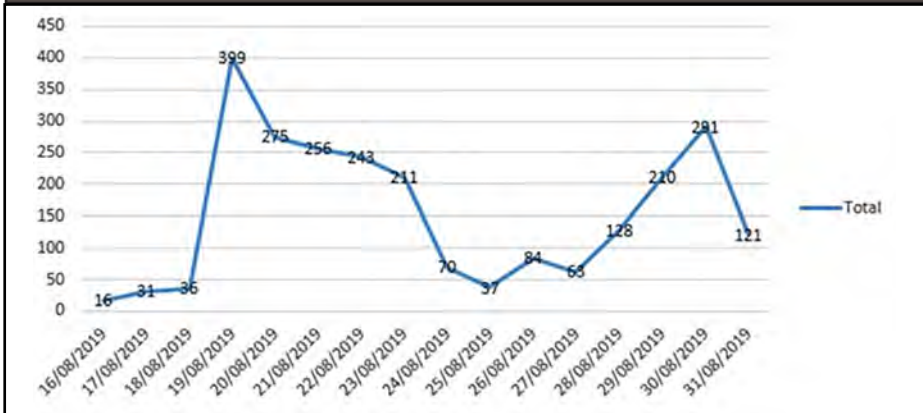
The reliability calculation using the SPSS application program version 25, shows the Krippendorff's alpha for the Crisis Frames variable is 0.7835. Based on the results of the reliability test, it can be concluded the coding process of this study is reliable.

### **Discussion**

#### *Post-event news in online media*

On the first day the West Papua Student dormitory in Surabaya (16/8) was visited by the Indonesian military TNI, followed by the Satpol PP municipal police and Community Organisations, accompanied by a curse: 'Hey dogs, pigs, monkeys, do come out. If you dare, face us in the front.' The news coverage of that event is very minimal (Abdi, 2019a). There were only 16 reports on the first day of the attack which was accompanied by stone throwing and siege. Even when 42 people who remained in the West Papua dormitory the next day were arrested by the police (17/8), there was still very little news reporting. For two

**Graph 1: Papuan dormitory attack news items**



Note: The number of news items related to the attack on the Papuan dormitory in Indonesian online media, 2019.

consecutive days, on August 17, there were only 31 reports related to the attack on the West Papuan dormitory, and on August 18 it only increased to 36 reports (Graph 1).

The day before (15/8) there was an attack on West Papuan students in Malang when the West Papua Student Alliance held a peaceful action to denounce the signing of the New York Agreement. The New York Agreement is an agreement signed by the Netherlands and Indonesia in 1962, regarding the administration of what was then Dutch New Guinea and allowing Indonesian occupation and administration of the territory. The implementation of the New York Agreement completed the early Indonesian nationalist goal of what Sukarno (first Indonesia President) called a ‘Republic of Indonesia from Sabang to Merauke’ (Adam & Anwar, 2005).

As a result of the attack, 23 West Papuan students were injured, but on that day there were no media dedicated to reporting the incident. The attack in Malang only appeared a few days later as a part of the narrative chronology of the attack on West Papuan students and the ensuing chaos in Sorong, Manokwari and Fakfak (West Papua).

News rose on 19 August 2019 when protests were held in various areas in West Papua: Manokwari, Sorong and Fakfak. Tense situations as a result of the protests due to racism and persecution had many roads in Manokwari blocked and even the provincial building of the Democratic Party (DPRD) was set on fire. A riot also occurred in Sorong where Domine Eduard Osok Airport was targeted by the masses, pelting the facilities at the airport, while in Fak-Fak, mobs burned stalls at the Fakfak Market and blocked the road to get there.

This was compounded by attacks on a West Papua student dormitory in Makassar, which was visited by around 20 people who were suspected of being members of community organisations. The attack was carried out by using stones

and arrows. The action was then ended with the presence of the South Sulawesi Police Chief and the South Sulawesi Governor who guaranteed the safety of West Papuan students (Bernie, 2019).

The riot that had not subsided for several days in West Papua became highlighted by the media. On August 19, it peaked as news related to the attack and the effects of the attack on the West Papua student dormitory, with 399 news items per day. Recorded on August 19-23, news related to the attack on the Surabaya West Papua dormitories and the effects of the attacks, were always above 200 news items per day overall across the online media.

After August 23, news about the protests related to West Papuans slowly declined and climbed again starting from August 28 with 128 reports, August 29 with 210 reports and the peak was on August 30 with 291 reports. This was caused by a shooting in Waghete II, Tigi, Deiyai, West Papua on Wednesday (28/8) which then sparked anger among society. The accumulation of anger caused many demonstrations involving thousands to take place in the city of Jayapura for three days (August 29-31, 2019). The demonstrations led to the destruction of buildings at a number of points, one them being the office of the Papua People's Assembly (MRP).

detik.com was the most dominant online media outlet reporting information about the attack on the West Papua Student dormitory in Surabaya, East Java on 16 August 2019 by groups of people who were partially identified using the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), Pemuda Pancasila (PP) logos, and casual clothing. It covered various situations and conditions after the attack. detik.com produced 613 news reports, followed by *kompas.com* with 575 news, *tribunnews.com* with 431 news, *cnnindonesia.com* with 401 news, then *tirto.id* with 234 news and *okezone.com* with 217 news.

All online media provided a large portion of straight news, and only 29 out of 2,471 (<1 percent) of all reports were feature articles (Graph 1). *tirto.id* was the online media with the highest number of features at the same time, where 8 out of 234 reports (3.5 percent) were dedicated to narrative depiction. *cnnindonesia.com* is the media outlet with the least number of features: one feature from 401 items (0.2 percent).

News related to the attack and the aftermath had many failings. Information would become partial, journalism principles such as balance and covering both sides did not become the basis of the news. Things that mattered were speed and quantity, putting aside ethical elements in journalism. This was also manifested in the choice of news sources.

### **News sources used in the attack on the West Papua student dormitory**

In total, there were 3,100 news sources in 2,471 reports, where the average number of informants was 1.25 news sources per report. Based on this average, the

**Table 1: Papuan dormitory attack news item categories**

Online Media	News Form	
	Straight News	Feature News
okezone.com	212	5
tribunnews.com	424	7
detik.com	610	3
cnnindonesia.com	400	1
kompas.com	570	5
tirto.id	226	8
Total	2442	29

Note: The category of news forms related to the attack on the Papuan dormitory in Indonesian online media

majority of news stories only had one source (Table 1). This showed the majority of news would not be balanced over the quantity of news sources in each report.

The majority of the news sources came from state apparatuses: Government and Apparatus / Politicians. 1,191 speakers came from government elements: President, Ministers, Regional Heads, Deputy Regional Heads, Office Heads, etc. Also, 879 speakers came from the police apparatus. The average government or apparatus presence as a news source was 0.83 times an item ( $n = 2,471$ ), or in other words, there was almost always a government or apparatus voice in every news report related to the attack on the West Papua student dormitory.

Against that, there were only 294 news sources from the West Papuan community (Table 2), or about 0.12 times per report ( $n = 2,471$ ). For every 10 news reports, only one story presented speakers from the West Papuan community. There were 42 representation of news sources who were part of those who supported 'separatism'/independence in West Papua or were associated with the Free Papua Organisation (OPM). The number of news sources coming from the West Papuan community and those who wanted West Papua to be independent was 336 resource representatives, or 0.14 times per report ( $n = 2,471$ ). This shows that the media in Indonesia, according to the data produced in this study, did not place victims or those who had West Papuan ethnic identity as major voices in the overall news.

Academic narratives only provided minimal reporting about the attack on the West Papua student dormitory attacks. Only 80 news sources from academic circles in the 2471 reports (0.03) were available. This finding showed that the issue of West Papua was 'minimal' from an academic perspective (whether science or humanities). The situation worsened where the Indonesian government imposed strict limits on academics, especially those from outside Indonesia, seeking to conduct research in West Papua. West Papua has become quite impervious to academic discourse, not only in scientific publication papers, but also in journalism.

**Table 2: News sources in the Papuan dormitory attack**

News Source	okezone.com	tribunnews.com	detik.com	cnnindonesia.com	kompas.com	tirto.id	Total
Government	95	232	315	172	258	119	1191
Apparatus/Police	56	170	235	131	218	69	879
NGO/Activists	38	75	66	96	87	83	445
West Papuan community	22	47	55	50	79	41	294
Academics	9	15	14	12	11	19	80
Media/Press	6	14	2	17	34	4	77
Indonesian Political Party	6	15	13	17	9	6	66
Separatist	2	3	9	18	4	7	23
Assailant	0	4	2	8	5	4	23
Celebrity	1	4	6	4	4	2	21
Total	235	575	715	518	706	351	3100

Note: The number of news sources of the news related to the attack on the Papuan dormitory in Indonesian online media, August 2019.

The perpetrators of the attack became a news source 23 times—from Islamic Defender Fronts (FPI), Communication Forum for Retired Children of the Indonesian Military/Police (FKPPI) and Pancasila Youth (PP). Only okezone.com did not put the perpetrators of the attack as a news source at all.

Online media in Indonesia, which on other issues has a tendency to trivialise (e.g. interview celebrities), even about reporting with a nuance of violence, do not do so in reporting news of the West Papua student dormitory. Online media in Indonesia often makes celebrities their sources for comment on current popular issues (Adiprasetyo, 2019; Adiprasetyo & Wibowo, 2019). In the reporting of the attack on West Papua’s student dormitory, there were only 21 representations from celebrities.

detik.com (315) is the media outlet that most makes the government a news source, with Kompas.com (258) and tribunnews.com (232) making second and third place, followed by cnnindonesia.com, tirto.id and okezone.com. In the consecutive percentage, detik.com (44.06 percent) is the online media most displaying representation from the government as news source, okezone.com (40.43 percent), and tribunnews.com (40.35 percent) provide a portion of more than 40 percent of total news sources with government representation as the news source; followed by Kompas.com (36.54 percent), tirto.id (34.00 percent) and cnnindonesia.com (33.27 percent).

detik.com (235) places the representation of the apparatus/police as a news source, more than any other media. Kompas.com (218) took second place, followed by tribunnews.com (170), cnnindonesia.com (131), tirto.id (69) and okezone.com

(56). In terms of percentage, detik.com (32.87 percent) still ranked first, followed by kompas.com (30.88 percent), tribunews.com (29.57 percent), cnnindonesia.com (25.29 percent), okezone.com (23.83 percent) and tirto.id (19.66 percent).

The dominance of the state's narratives is very strong in news related to the West Papua issue. This is indicated by the domination of government and apparatus representation in news about the case of the West Papua student dormitory attack. If accumulated, detik.com put the government and apparatus/police at 76.93 percent of the news, followed by tribunews.com (69.92 percent), kompas.com (67.62 percent), okezone.com 64.26 (percent). Only two media outlets gave government and apparatus representation below 60 percent: cnnindonesia.com with 58.49 percent and tirto.id by 53.56 percent.

cnnindonesia.com and tirto.id, which in percentage terms had the least representation of government and apparatus, place the largest representation of NGOs and activists among others. tirto.id allocated 22.79 percent of its news sources for NGOs and activists, while cnnindonesia.com allocated 17.18 percent; followed by okezone.com (16.17 percent), tribunews.com (12.35 percent), kompas.com (11.19 percent) and detik.com (8.9 percent) with the least percentage.

tirto.id is a media outlet which in percentage gives space for academics, the largest in its news. tirto.id put 5.41 percent of the news source from academics, in second place was okezone.com, 3.83 percent. Other media only placed academics under 3 percent of the total coverage: tribunews.com (2.61 percent), cnnindonesia.com (2.32 percent), detik.com (1.96 percent) and kompas.com (1.56 percent).

Only two media services put the representation of the West Papua community at more than 10 percent of their total news source: tirto.id (11.68 percent) and kompas.com (11.19 percent). Other online media put the representation of the West Papuan community at less than 10 percent of their total news sourcing: cnnindonesia.com (9.65 percent), okezone.com (9.36 percent), tribunews.com (8.17 percent) and detik.com (7.69 percent).

Every online media provided space for the Free Papua Organisation (OPM), a pro-independence group fighting for a 'free' West Papua, although it is small. cnnindonesia.com provides 3.47 percent of news sources coming from separatist groups, followed by tirto.id (1.99 percent), detik.com (1.26 percent), okezone.com (0.85 percent), kompas.com (0.57 percent) and tribunews.com (0.52 percent).

### **Crisis frame**

Public perception is very dependent on what information or features stand out in their environment (Poindexter et al., 2003). By aligning the data and narrative that is included and what is removed from the narrative of an event, news media frame their own story of the event (S; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). The media creates questions in public interpretations of the story (Hallahan, 1999). The



**Table 3: Papuan dormitory attack news crisis frame**

Types of crisis frame	Total	Percentage
Human interest	156	6.31
Conflict	858	34.72
Morality	94	3.80
Economic	103	4.16
Attribution of responsibility	1260	50.99
Total	2471	100

Note: The crisis frame of the news related to the attack on the Papuan dormitory in Indonesian online media.

following are the most dominant instances, in framing of crises, in the reporting of the West Papua dormitory attack and various post-assault events.

In the case of news related to the attack on the West Papua dormitory (Table 3), the attribution of responsibility became the most dominant framing of reporting, and took first place with 1,260 (50.99 percent), followed by a frame of conflict with 858 (34.72 percent), frame of human interest with 156 (6.31 percent), frame of economic with 103 (4.16 percent) and frame of morality with 94 (3.80 percent). The findings of this study are somewhat different from previous studies—the study of An and Gower (2009) and Semetko & Valkenburg (2000)—in that conflict framing is usually dominated by two things: frame of attribution of responsibility and frame of economic, then followed by frame of conflict, human interest and morality.

tirto.id is the only media that provides a portion to the frame of morality of more than ten percent, which is 11.97 percent of the total news (Table 4). This number is far above other outlets, and even doubled compared to second place cnnindonesia.com (4.99 percent). tribunnews.com is an online media service which in percentage gives the biggest portion to the frame of human interest, which is 10.90 percent, above the second place, kompas.com, 8.35 percent. Only detik.com gives a portion of more than five percent for the frame of economic (6.20 percent), the rest giving a portion of under five percent. As for the frame of conflict, cnnindonesia.com is the media that gives the biggest portion 46.38 percent, followed by detik.com (36.87 percent). Attribution of responsibility is the most dominant frame used by all media. However, cnnindonesia.com is the only medium that provides space for a frame of responsibility of under 40 percent, which is 38.90 percent. The most dominant medium in using the frame of attribution of responsibility is okezone.com with (63.59 percent).

## Conclusion

Based on daily news data, it can be concluded that the news related to the attack on the West Papua student dormitory and its effect increases decisively when

**Table 4: The Papuan dormitory attack crisis frames**

Types of crisis frame	okezone.com	tribun-news.com	detik.com	cnnindonesia.com	kompas.com	tirto.id	Total
Human interest	1.84	10.90	2.77	5.49	8.35	7.69	6.31
Conflict	30.41	27.15	36.87	46.38	34.78	26.92	34.72
Morality	0.00	4.41	0.16	4.99	4.52	11.97	3.80
Economic	4.15	2.78	6.20	4.24	4.17	1.28	4.17
Attribution of responsibility	63.59	54.76	54.00	38.90	48.17	52.14	50.99
Percentage	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: The proportion of crisis frames of the news related to the attack on the Papuan dormitory in Indonesian online media.

West Papuans protest and the situation leads to riots. Whereas in the early days of the attack on the dormitory, the curve did not climb. After the rioting ended, data for the period August 24-27 showed that coverage did not exceed 90 daily news items per day.

A register of news sources from the government and apparatus/police showed that the narrative of Indonesia's state apparatuses was very strong in reporting related attacks on the West Papua student dormitory, and far outperformed the narratives of elements of West Papuan society. This makes the narrative related to legal and political demands regarding the attack on West Papua's dormitory, only occupy a secondary position, rather than the narrative of security by the state. tirto.id is the media that places the most representations of elements of West Papuan society and victims of attack, which is 22.79 percent of the news sources coming from NGOs and activists who are opposition to the state, and elements of West Papuan society itself as much as 11.68 percent.

When reporting on a crisis, the media tends to point responsibility for the crisis to one party or the other (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). In particular, that happens within the scope of a crisis that can be prevented, such as mistakes where the crisis can occur, notably mistakes that trigger the crisis itself. In this context, the news media will tend to focus on a frame of attribution of responsibility in a crisis, where it is assumed that there is strong and intentional control on the part of the actor.

The frame of conflict is the second type of framing that is most commonly used in reporting attacks on the West Papua student dormitory. This is in line with the study of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) that found the frame of conflict is the second framework most often used in crisis-related reporting. This frame identifies representations where the media seek to show contestation at various levels of groups, communities, ethnicities and even countries.

On the issue of attacks on West Papuan students and their effects, the protests and riots, the layer of discourse related to its economy ranks fifth in the crisis

frame. Even though in reality, there is a very significant economic imbalance between West Papua and other regions in Indonesia, especially Java (where the capital and central development are located); restrictions on media access and restrictions on news related to economic issues in West Papua make the economic frame become less prominent in this case, of violence and racism. That might well apply to any news framing in West Papua.

The frame of human interest and frame of morality are not often used in reporting about the attack on the West Papua student dormitory overall. The frame of human interest is used in news narration about victims and those affected. Whereas, the frame of morality is used more often in preventable crises, which assumes a high level of control and intentionality. If the media emphasises the moral and ethical aspects of a crisis, that tends to affect the moral assessment of the community against various parties. In the case of the attack on the West Papua student dormitory and its effects, such coverage partly led to the formation of a bad public moral perception of the government, mass organisations and officials (TNI and police). However, media attention related to the protests of West Papuans, leading to riots in several areas in West Papua, have contributed to the formation of a bad moral perception of the Indonesian people as a whole towards West Papuans.

This framing study has identified characteristics of the coverage of the West Papuan dormitory issue by leading online media outlets in Indonesia, which are overall prejudicial to West Papuan interests. News of the attacks on the dormitory by groups hostile to West Papuans, was given low prominence while news of subsequent rioting by West Papuans was given high prominence. Government agencies were prominent in sourcing, while West Papuan sources, or independent sources received much less access. That contributed to an allocation of blame on West Papuans. The coverage focused on conflict as a framing value. It gave little attention to any economic implications of the crisis, neglecting the deployment of a human interest frame that might have focused on victims of the violence. Also, while not notably interested in morality, the coverage would have contributed to bad relations through stimulating a negative view of West Papuans across Indonesia.

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# Coping with change in India's media

## Struggles of English-language journalists in an evolving mediascape

**Abstract:** In recent times, journalism, worldwide, has been undergoing significant changes. Some of the major revolutions have occurred in India, the world's largest democracy. The size and face of Indian news media have seen rapid transformations owing to major economic, technological, and political developments in the country in recent decades. The focus of this research is on how India's English-language media are dealing with the various changes, including digital disruptions and other pressures under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Hindutva' government. The insights are drawn from the experiences and perceptions of a sample of journalists at the forefront of covering major events. Being in the coalface, these journalists are bearing the brunt of the developments, both good and bad. The email interviews reveal that while the English-language media may be a small part of India's vast national media landscape, they are also buffeted by some major developments in the country, and fighting to maintain their independence in the face of some powerful trends and influences in technology, politics, and commerce.

Keywords: democracy, email survey, English-language media, India, journalism practice, journalists, media in society, technology

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### Introduction

**A**S AN integral part of a country's national fabric, the news media sector is confronted by changes in the political system, the legal framework, and in technology. These developments impact on the professional practice of journalism in various ways, with implications for the country and its citizens. This article looks at the impacts of economic changes, technological advancements, and political developments on India's English-language media through the experiences of some seasoned journalists. India's English language

media are a small but important segment of the vast Indian news media landscape. The impacts on the English language news media could provide some cues and clues about developments on media on a larger, national scale.

The aim of the study is to contribute to the understanding of journalism in non-Western societies. As Josephi (2007) and Obijiofor and Hanusch (2011) note, there are different and changing journalistic practices across cultures, which suggest that the notion of a dominant model of journalism is untenable in the 21st century. India, with its rich history and diverse cultural traditions, is the largest democracy in the world, with a media sector to match. If journalism as the Fourth Estate is integral in maintaining the health of a democracy, then it is arguably of utmost importance in India.

This research is based on email interviews with journalists who, as the key stakeholders working at the forefront of news gathering and dissemination, are ideally positioned to experience, observe, and evaluate the seismic changes in the contemporary news media landscape. Changes in journalism practice in this article refer to changes in news reporting practices that occur due to various factors. The three main catalysts of change in Indian media have been the liberalisation of the media sector in the 1990s, followed by rapid technological improvements, and the overarching political developments (Ninan, 2012; Ranganathan, 2014 & 2015; Rao & Wasserman, 2015; Thussu, 2012).

Liberalisation facilitated an increase in the number of media outlets and products, and the diffusion of technology. These greatly increased the availability of and access to a multitude of print publications, news channels such as 24-hour television, and more recently, social media, which fuelled citizen journalism. In politics, the election of Narendra Modi's far-right government changed the national political climate. While economic liberalisation and technological developments paved the way for greater media diversity and accessibility, the political changes constrained free and independent journalism (Chakravartty & Roy, 2015).

Notably, technological changes have not been part of a natural incremental evolution, but a significant 'leap' that has come to be known as the 'digital disruption'. This has significant impacts that both advance and repress journalism. This is evident from this study's interviews with a sample of experienced English-language print, broadcast, and online journalists working for some leading Indian English-language media organisations. The journalists are at the cutting edge of the changes in their national media landscape and the impacts on reporting.

Ordinarily, change is a normal part of the evolutionary process of any media sector in any country. The difference is digitalisation, due to which the transformations are not just global but far quicker and far more profound than before (see Ninan, 2012; Rao & Wasserman, 2015; Thussu, 2012). Sen and Nielsen (2016) note that after initial hiccups, both internet use and digital advertising

has grown quite exponentially in India owing to the diffusion of mobile internet use. Consequently, India boasts the second 'largest number of internet users in the world'.

Given the complexity and diversity of Indian media, it is difficult to investigate all forms of journalism in the country in one study. In their comparative analysis of Indian and South African media, Rao and Wasserman (2015, p. 655) noted that it would be impossible 'to analyze the work being done in the Indian newsrooms of each of its 86,000 newspapers and weekly magazines, and its 300 news channels broadcasting diverse content to the Indian television-viewing audience'. As such, this research focuses on India's English-language media in order to understand some elements of the evolutionary process in the country's media. The English-language media are a relatively small but historically a significant part of the vast Indian media landscape. Sonwalkar (2004, p. 397) points out that 'English was the language of the colonial rulers and continues to be the language of communication of the government and most influential sections of Indian society'. The English-language media occupies a 'favoured position' in the country's media industry and is regarded as 'influential', 'competitive, pluralistic and not dominated by any single group or ideology' (Sonwalkar, 2004, p. 389). Outside Britain and the United States, 'India is the biggest market for English language publications (Sonwalkar, 2004, p. 397). Some notable English-language newspapers that represent India's quality press are part of this study. They include *The Times of India*, *The Hindu*, the *Hindustan Times*, and the *Indian Express*. These newspapers represent more than 60 percent of the overall circulation of English-language newspapers in India (Sonwalkar, 2004, p. 297).

## **Background**

Currently, India's population stands at 1.2 billion with more than 623 million males and more than 586 million females (Population Census, 2011). This makes India the world's second most populous nation after China (Mody, 2015; Thussu, 2012). The country has a 74 percent literacy rate and as the leading economy in South Asia, boasted a growth rate of between five and six percent per annum since 2003 (Corbridge, 2010; Population Census, 2011).

### *Media liberalisation and technological advances*

Since the liberalisation of the media sector in the early 1990s, both the print and broadcast media have generally thrived in terms of quantity and financially. Whether media are thriving professionally in terms of quality is under debate. Prior to the reforms, Indian television viewers were served by the state-owned public broadcaster, Doordarshan, but now both foreign and local television channels proliferate. These include the Cable News Network (CNN) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), as well as local channels such as Zee TV, NDTV, and Sun TV (Rao, 2009). In all, the number of television channels

ballooned to more than 90, with India now the ‘third largest cable TV-viewing nation in the world, after China and the United States’ (Rao, 2009, p. 478). The expansion of television, particularly English-language satellite television, has been attributed to increases in advertising income, increases in consumption of consumer goods, the growth of the middle class (Mehta, 2008), and the production of entertainment programs such as reality television, lifestyle shows, and the crime genre (Khorana, 2012; Mehta, 2008 & 2014; Neyazi, 2011).

In print, Indian newspapers continue to increase circulation, in contrast to some Western countries where the digital disruption has devastated the print sector (Ninan, 2012; Rao, 2009; Thussu, 2012). The Registrar of Newspapers for India (2016–2017) reports more than 14,000 English-language publications and over 46,000 vernacular language newspapers. The English-language publications have a total circulation of over 56.5 million while Hindi language publications boast a circulation of over 238.9 million (Registrar of Newspapers for India, 2016–2017). Despite their proportionately smaller circulation, India’s mainstream English-language newspapers are still agenda-setting for other media and influencing public opinion, government policies and agenda.

In all, India’s English language newspapers recorded a circulation revenue of almost INRs34 billion (approximately US\$445 million) in the 2019 financial year (Diwanji, 2019). This revenue may not come as a surprise: English is not just the primary language of 256,000 people, but also the second language of 83 million people, and the third language of another 46 million, making it the second most broadly spoken language after Hindi. Comparatively, 528 million people speak Hindi as a first language (Population Census, 2011; Rukmini, 2019).

India had 560 million internet users as at 31 January 2020—a penetration rate of 40.6 percent—compared to a 53.6 per cent penetration rate in Asia as a whole (Internet World Stats, 2020). India had more than 1,127 million mobile-cellular telephone subscribers in 2016, with 85.17 mobile-cellular telephone subscriptions per 100 inhabitants (International Telecommunication Union, 2016). Social media users totalled 258.27 million, an improvement on 168 million users over the previous year (Statista, 2018). YouTube and Facebook are the most popular social media tools, along with WhatsApp. There were 251,000,000 Facebook subscribers as at 31 January 2020—a penetration rate of 18.3 percent (Internet World Stats, 2020).

For all the challenges in the Indian media sector, the country still ranks better in international media freedom indices in comparison to neighbouring countries. In 2020, India ranked 142 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index, lower than 138 in 2018 (Reporters Without Borders, 2020). The drop is attributed to the existence of a sedition law said to encourage self-censorship in a climate of heightened nationalism (Rangnekar, 2018). While press freedom weakened under the Modi government, other

regional countries fared slightly worse. Pakistan was ranked 145 and Bangladesh 151 in the same period. Sri Lanka was ranked higher at 127 (Reporters Without Borders, 2020).

## **Literature review**

By any standards, the Indian media sector is both vast and complicated. Indian journalism has been described as a mixture of Western and local/indigenous styles (Rao, 2009). Following independence in 1947, the Indian media became more democratic and established its own unique journalistic style, including development-oriented focus on news that promoted nation-building, the well-being of citizens, poverty and hunger alleviation, and reduction in illiteracy (Rao, 2009).

### *Journalism before and after economic liberalisation*

Ranganathan (2014) analyses the role that the Indian media played at various times in the country's history: Soon after independence, two national broadcasters, All India Radio and Doordarshan, occupied a dominant position on the airwaves and served as major propaganda tools of the government (Ranganathan, 2014) whereas during the national emergency (1975-1977), privately owned press fulfilled the fourth estate role. Ranganathan (2014) argues that the economic liberalisation of the 1990s was the single major factor that brought unexpected and comprehensive changes to Indian media and politics. The 'move to a social market economy meant a reduction in government control and enhanced privatisation'. The emergence of private satellite television channels surpassed state-controlled radio and television with their entertainment-driven programs (Ranganathan, 2014, p. 25).

Rao (2010) notes how a combination of economic and political factors turned newspapers into a profitable business. These included advertisements, changes in business practices, persuasive and powerful marketing, rising political interest, growing literacy, and improvements in technology. However, post-liberalisation, newspapers started to generate their own income through private businesses. This meant greater emphasis on private business news than political, government or cultural news, including a near-absence of international news. These developments were reflected in India's English-language press, such as *The Times of India*, that led the shift to infotainment.

Whereas the English-language press was infotainment-driven and paid little attention to regional and rural dwellers, the vernacular newspapers filled the gap. They focused on news that appealed to the lower middle classes, as well as regional and rural populations (Rao, 2010). Vernacular newspapers aimed to provide readers with highly valuable news about their locality, their district, and their state. Rao (2010, p. 102) observes that, 'The formula to go local has proven to be extremely successful and has delivered exponential growth, so that today



vernacular newspapers outnumber English-language newspapers.’

With advances in Indian journalism, some gaps have emerged. Ranganathan (2015) states that the Indian media’s fascination for ‘infotainment’ is a consequence of commercialisation that has weakened the ‘watchdog’ role. Moreover, the focus on crime, politics, entertainment, celebrity and business news is reportedly matched by a decreased representation of the poor and marginalised. Rao and Mudgal (2015) note that the leading circulation newspapers devote only a small amount of space to serious problems in the rural parts of the country, such as malnutrition, hunger, and farmer suicides. Furthermore, there is the problem of paid news, whereby media outlets accept money from politicians, celebrities, and businesses, in exchange for positive coverage. Paid news is described as ‘one of the most overt symptoms of media corruption’ in India (Rao, 2016, p. 9). Other diverse elements that affect and afflict the Indian media include caste, class, gender, race, regional diversity, religion, different languages, and the growing impact of alternative media. These trends underscore Rao and Wasserman’s (2015, p. 657) concerns that, ‘journalism practices can undermine democracy if such practices are not attentive to the question of equality’.

### *Conceptual and theoretical frameworks*

This study advances a general understanding of journalism as a public institution, and the challenges to journalism, especially in the face of pronounced and rapid changes. Institutional theories define institutions as ‘social patterns of behaviour identifiable across the organisations that are generally seen within a society to preside over a particular social sphere’ (Cook, 1998, p. 70). Cook argues the news media fulfil the key criteria that are essential to institutions: Journalism’s practices are based on distinctive roles, routines, rules, and procedures that have endured over time and extend across news organisations. The news media are viewed by journalists, as well as by others, as presiding over a given part of social life. Similarly, Sparrow (1999) conceptualises the news media as an institution that stands for a public good and serves as the guardian of a democratic political system.

As an institution, journalism has specific functions and performs specific roles for society (Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, et al., 2009). Journalistic practices are situated within a professional framework of values, rules, and routines. One of the questions examined by Christians et al. (2009) is not only what the role of journalism is in society but also what it ought to be. In their view, changes spawned by technological developments, globalisation, including an interconnected global economy have challenged the nature of journalism and democracy in our contemporary world.

Some scholars acknowledge the pressures that politics and economics exert on journalism (Cook, 1998; Kaplan, 2002; and Ryfe, 2006). Kaplan (2002) argues that journalism is deeply entrenched in political culture, while Ryfe (2006,

p. 139) notes that: ‘Politics is much closer to the daily habits of journalists. In their search for political legitimacy, journalists find themselves in a complicated, uneasy relationship with public officials, and, more broadly, the political culture.’ Sparrow (1999) accepts the impact that political forces have on news production, even though media organisations have merged into large businesses, with economics playing a more dominant and direct role in news production. These theoretical perspectives underline the key elements of this study in understanding the professional practices and everyday challenges of journalists in India’s influential English-language media.

Against this background, how do journalists in India’s English-language media perceive their professional practices and the challenges they face on their job? This study takes the following key questions to the journalists:

- In what ways have technological and political developments affected the work of journalists in terms of professionalism and the overall freedoms of the press?
- To what extent do politics, big business, and media owners influence news content and interfere with editorial decisions?
- How do journalists perceive their role in the context of the changes in their country in the coming years?

## **Methodology**

This study conducted email surveys of English-language journalists across multiple platforms—print, broadcast, and online. Besides being cost and time effective, a great advantage of email-based surveys is the ability to bridge geographical divides (Ilieva et al., 2002; Michaelidou & Dibb, 2006; Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006). The success of email (web) surveys is determined by the reliability of data collected (Coderre & Mathieu, 2004). Towards this end, we engaged the director of a media-training institute in India with strong ties to the industry to help identify and recruit respondents with the right experience and qualifications from the major English-language media organisations.

This qualitative research method aimed to use the journalists’ narrative to understand journalistic practices and everyday challenges they face in the era of new technology, the changing face of political developments, and economic imperatives. We used email surveys because this allows respondents the anonymity that encourages them to be as open and as honest as possible in their reflections and contributions (Michaelidou & Dibb, 2006; Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006). Interviewees were purposively sampled and selected to include editors and journalists with minimum five years or more in the industry. This ensured they have sufficient experience to comment authoritatively on the issues at stake.

### *Interview sample selection*

This deliberate sample selection procedure is also known as ‘snowball’ sampling, whereby a researcher asks key informants to suggest other people who have appropriate knowledge about the research topic (Obijiofor, 2015).

### *Sample size*

Qualitative interview methodologies advocate a sample size that offers deep insights into the key issues under investigation. Patton (2002) and Tongco (2007) emphasise ‘information-rich’ cases relevant to the study, rather than a large sample. For this study, 35 journalists were contacted initially between November 2016 and January 2017, followed by email reminders. Eventually, we received 21 responses from journalists in 19 leading English-language media organisations. This number was considered adequate as it was comparable to previous studies of this nature (see Obijiofor, Murray, & Singh, 2017). The sample size is also affected by available time and the resources at the researchers’ disposal. Of those who responded in this study, 16 were male and five were female, with an average of over 12 years’ experience.

The media organisations the journalists represent include: *The Hindu* (Chennai); *The Economic Times*; *The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi); NDTV India (New Delhi); *Indian Express* (New Delhi); *Business News TV* channel; *Times Now* (Mumbai); *India Legal*; *Reuters India* (Mumbai); *The Times of India* (Mumbai); CNBC Network 18 (Mumbai); *DNA India*; *Sakal Times* (Pune); Rediff.com; *The Telegraph* (Calcutta); Thomson Reuters Foundation, India; *Hotstar* (Mumbai); and Zee Media. This sample not only reflects a fairly strong urban geographic spread in the heartlands of the Indian news media industry, it also captures some of the country’s leading media houses. One newspaper, *The Times of India*, is listed in the 2017 India’s Readership Survey as ‘the world’s largest broadsheet English daily’. Similarly, *The Economic Times* is regarded as ‘India’s largest (and the world’s second largest) financial daily’ (*Times of India*, n.d.).

The data analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six steps of thematic analysis. Once data collection was completed, we read all transcripts multiple times to be fully immersed in the discourse. Thereafter, the responses were individually coded and clustered into themes that were markedly similar and those that were markedly dissimilar. The categorisation enabled us to identify, highlight, analyse, and contextualise the responses in order to arrive at a theoretically informed analysis of the data, based on the experiences and viewpoints of the frontline reporters and editors in our sample.

### **Findings and discussion**

The results are divided into two subsections: the first discusses journalists’ perceptions while the second analyses data on how the journalists are affected by the changes in the Indian media landscape.

### *Journalists' relationships with technology: Significant changes on the job*

The biggest change experienced by the respondents is the movement of news towards online platforms, including increased social media use. This means gathering, producing, and reporting news for a greater variety of channels than before. An online media journalist said: 'The biggest change has been that news organisations of every type now have a presence on the internet and on social media, even if that is not their core focus.' Most journalists said they were active on social media. Even a print journalist with over 40 years' experience said he has to master the basics of the new technology to keep abreast of the changing ways in which news is gathered, disseminated, and consumed. This was necessary to maintain his position in the profession. The journalist noted the importance of sharing news content on social media and the benefits of Twitter and Facebook to reach politicians and other newsmakers far more easily than before. Similar sentiments were shared by a female online journalist. She said:

When I moved to a digital news platform, I started looking at social media, especially Twitter, as a great medium to connect to the rest of the world. I reached out to people in many countries such as the US, Australia, Pakistan and Afghanistan through Twitter.

A television journalist stated that competition has 'quadrupled', thanks to social media: 'It just means that as a TV journalist, you have to be far faster.' These experiences reflect Deuze's (2008, p. 11) observations that technology is increasing 'pressures on journalists, who have to retool and diversify their skillset to produce more work in the same amount of time under ongoing deadline pressures for one or more media'.

One print journalist noted the value of using apps to interact and communicate with sources: 'There are many apps that allow me the anonymity and security I require to talk to sources over a secure line and get information from them without compromising on their identity.' Another journalist said: 'You can now see things like "selfie-interviews" rather than the "old-school" sit-down interviews. This is the new normal. One has to continually innovate'.

However, the problems of the new technology were also highlighted. One broadcast journalist said: 'On many occasions, rumour-mongering becomes a key source of information and the onus of verification becomes that much more cumbersome.' Journalists have to constantly watch social media for breaking news to ensure they do not play second fiddle in a highly competitive news environment. Frequent competition for breaking news leaves little time for journalists to verify news before dissemination. A female journalist said: 'The challenge (now) is to get real stories based on hard facts out to counter populist assumptions.' These comments indicate that while social media and citizen journalism may have

diversified news reporting and distribution, they carry some negative consequences for journalism practice, and make journalists' work to be complicated and risky.

Another downside of social media that has hit journalists hard is trolling. One journalist said: 'I faced a small dose of this when I tried writing to a BJP (ruling Bharatiya Janata Party) politician on Twitter and immediately got trolled by many of his supporters.' Reporters Without Borders (2017) regards trolling as 'hate speech targeting journalists (that) is shared and amplified on social networks, often by troll armies'.

The English-language media journalists' concerns about trolling reflect a broader national problem that underpins the tense relationship between journalists and the Modi government. *The New York Times* editorial of 17 August 2015 criticised the Modi government's moves to restrict Indian television networks from reporting freely, and the right of citizens to access the Internet (*The New York Times*, 2015). The soured relationship is at odds with promises of press freedom that Modi made soon after his re-election in 2018. In a widely quoted speech, Modi said: 'I want this government to be criticised. Criticism makes democracy strong' (cited in Madan, 2019).

Respondents also spoke of public perceptions of sensationalism and declining credibility of journalists who work in the national media. The blame levelled by politicians was picked up by their followers. The respondents felt that this trend also affected the English-language media and left it vulnerable to attacks, both from the public and the political establishment. A female print journalist said: 'There has been a certain attack on the media and its role in society originating from state officials and the public.' This observation resonates with journalists' views in a study on Fiji and Nigeria with regard to an adversarial relationship with their governments and politicians. These state officials used the media's alleged lack of professionalism to propose and impose harsher laws (Obijiofor, Murray, & Singh, 2017). One respondent felt that Indian audiences have little regard or respect for journalists, which matched the government attitude: 'The disdain for the news media in India... has received a stamp of approval from the PM and his government.' Another journalist added that 'once the media as a whole are left without credibility, they lose the faith of the people to act as a watchdog'.

Some journalists felt that journalism has been tainted by the increased amount of false news circulating online. This has compelled journalists to work harder to counter the false reports. A print journalist said:

The internet, as helpful as it is, has also allowed for swift dissemination of false information. There are also many online 'journalistic' outlets that help in propagation of false information which further dents the media's personal credibility.

This statement reflects journalists' concerns about standards in general, including 'paid news', growing competition for news sources and content, and sensational and entertainment-driven news. In some ways, technological transformations have magnified the problem. The huge increase in the size of the media sector and the number of players has intensified competition. An online journalist notes, 'there is more quantity and less quality'. This view is reflected by Ninan (2012) in the analysis of Indian media trends:

...ironically in India you have a situation where competition has led to less rather than more information and news gathering (Ninan, 2012).

The views indicate that generally, the negative impact of technology on India's English-language media and journalists is consistent with evidence presented in various studies (e.g., Stassen, 2010). The findings reflect the negative impacts of technology as reported in a comparative study of changes in journalism in Fiji and Nigeria (Obijiofor, Murray, & Singh, 2017).

#### *Forces against editorial independence*

Besides the impact of technology, political interference, advertiser influence and media owners exerting editorial control were also identified as key areas of concern. A broadcast journalist notes that, 'the control of the owner has only become more pronounced in the last few years. Ever since the new (Modi) government came to power, this trend seems a bit more disturbing and discomforting as an employee'. Another female journalist observed that, 'the current government, while more responsive to media queries and sharing data, is also more likely to lodge complaints/file cases/seek rejoinders to reports that show the government in poor light'.

Along with government interference, some respondents spoke of the prevalence of advertiser influence. Said a print journalist: 'Safeguarding advertiser interest is becoming more and more prevalent.' Another print journalist points out that, 'market forces have become stronger with the marketing department of every media house having better say in the news selection policy'. Another said: 'I have seen stories dropped/chopped to accommodate advertisements on pages.' Even the government was using advertising to influence media organisations, as related by a television journalist:

Politicised interference in editorial content and staffing decisions remain a concern. We have witnessed cases in which this has enabled politicians to block our channels for broadcasting news that adversely affected their interests. National and state governments have used financial means, such as advertising purchases, to reward or punish news outlets for their coverage, which we have witnessed.



Another television journalist observed that, ‘if promoters have some political affiliation then news will be delivered in that manner and real criticism would be avoided’. The study also found a connection between media ownership, media owners’ political or corporate leanings, and editorial content. Many journalists said media ownership compromised objectivity in professional practice. A television journalist mentioned the difficulties experienced by news organisations that are funded by corporations. He said: ‘No media entity can function without adequate financing, equity and support. Therefore, it seems to be quite a double-edged sword.’

A female print journalist described how the diversified business interests of media company owners into other sectors of the economy were impacting journalism: ‘The motive of profits loom large as the organisation has invested in several businesses or has its own business offering, and often this interferes with the business reportage.’ Pressures on journalists are attributed to media owners who view news as a form of profit-oriented business. A print journalist points out that, ‘ever since newspapers became a product like any other brand of soap or toothpaste, the market forces have tightened their clutches over the media’. Another print journalist added that, ‘investments in news media at best are about leveraging influence and buying out possibility of negative coverage’.

These comments support the literature on the growing commercialization of journalism across cultures, including the English-language media in India (Kumar, 2019).

The responses indicate that increased advertising means increased encroachment onto the editorial space, which was once considered sacred and separate from advertising. The journalists were concerned that the lines separating journalism and commercialism were not just becoming blurred but also had been crossed. This is the apparent trend in some other parts of the world. Since Fiji implemented media reforms in the 1990s, the media ownership structure has become increasingly corporatised, with allegations that certain Fijian media are in collaboration with business and the government in exchange for advertising contracts (Robie, 2014; Singh, 2015).

#### *How changes in journalism affect journalists’ performance on the job*

Increased government influence and control over news narratives was also identified as a factor that has affected India’s English-language media journalists in various ways. A female print journalist stated that events and political developments are now more cautiously reported than before’. Another print journalist said the Indian government ‘has tried to send out a message that anything against government would not be tolerated’. Journalists felt that they are often seen by politicians as adversaries and portrayed as anti-government and anti-India. An online journalist said:

The fact that a minister in the current dispensation coined the term ‘press-titutes’ is also an example of the disdain the establishment holds for the press. The government seems to believe that the media must be controlled and brought to heel, to control the narrative.

Journalists also spoke of what they felt was the pushing of the ‘*Hindutva*’ policy by Modi. ‘*Hindutva*’ has been defined as ‘an ideology that states that India is the homeland of the Hindus’ (Ganguly, 2019). While non-Hindu Indians who recognise other beliefs are free to live in the country, they do so at the risk of subjecting themselves to leadership by Hindus. Ganguly (2019) argues the philosophy behind ‘*Hindutva*’ is ‘deeply antithetical to the central tenets of Hinduism’. Respondents stated that those journalists who questioned the policy were trolled by Modi’s ‘*Hindutva*’ supporters. They regarded this trend as a big threat to Indian journalism. Indian columnist Bhushan (2015) describes trolling as ‘organised harassment’ by a ‘digital mob’—an ‘ideological attack’ on those who question Modi’s Hindu nationalist vision.

#### *Journalists’ perceptions of their role in society*

Most respondents felt that the difficult working conditions required journalists to play their watchdog role with even greater commitment. This view is consistent with the findings of a study of 1,800 journalists in 18 countries where increased state pressure on the media saw journalists more determined to uphold the watchdog role, regardless of the local culture or political climate (Hanitzsch et al., 2011). In this survey, a print journalist said: ‘Actually, being a watchdog today is more important than ever. Times are bad and that is where a good journalist comes in to do a great job.’ Another print journalist added that, ‘good, unbiased and rigorous journalism is more important than ever’.

#### *Changes expected in journalism practice in the coming years*

Most journalists said the biggest change they expect in the coming years is the continuing growth and influence of the internet/social media on the profession. A print journalist said that, ‘journalists will have to rethink how to produce their “content” as a lot of it will be consumed on mobile phones’. Another print journalist added that ‘technology will decide content and new applications to seamlessly connect the print to the digital’. A television journalist said that, ‘internet journalism and the new digital media will gradually start to play a more meaningful role, and one positive [of this is] the lack of regulation and relatively fewer restrictions’. These views are in line with Stassen (2010) who found social media will continue to play an important role in the future of journalism.

This survey’s responses indicate that despite some misgivings, India’s English-language traditional media are adopting the technology, which is helping them consolidate their position by, among other things, extending their reach and

influence through an online presence. Journalists in this survey indicated that they expected multi-lingual publications to proliferate more widely in regions throughout the country, partly as a result of mobile phone technology. A print journalist said, ‘the English-language newspapers may see a rise in their print order due to the rise in literacy rate in rural areas’. A broadcast journalist said, ‘Indian users of social media are exploding in numbers, and so is the number of languages they work in. Being a multilingual social media user gives me the perspective of several subcultures, their syntax, sensibilities and approaches.’

## **Conclusion**

Interviews with India’s English-language media sector journalists show that the significant impacts of economic reforms, technological advancements and political changes are taking a toll on journalists and journalism. While media have increased their reach and profitability, journalists are struggling with increased competition, and increased commercial and political pressure, which have added to the stresses of their jobs.

There is evidence of growing interference in editorial matters not just by government, but also by media owners and big business. Technology turned out to be a double-edged sword in that it has broadened the audience base and made interactions easier, while at the same time, increasing workloads and the risk of misinformation. A major concern was trolling, which had made journalists fearful about certain aspects of their reporting, especially in politics. This raises questions about the media’s potency as a watchdog. Are India’s English-language media, which enjoy the status of agenda setters, losing their bite?

Besides the celebrated watchdog role, another unique aspect of Indian media—the focus on development journalism—is also under stress. Commercial imperatives have changed both the content of news and the nature of news delivery, such as the 24/7 news cycle. Concerns surrounding the increased corporatisation of media ownership also surfaced, specifically the trend of media owners diversifying into other businesses by using the media arm to leverage new ventures. As one respondent put it, media owners now see news as a profitable commodity, like a ‘brand of soap’. In a post-digitially disrupted news environment, the question is the full extent to which the English-language media have been affected by the pressures, and whether they still have the resilience to withstand the slings and arrows of their detractors, especially the aggression by Modi supporters.

This study’s focus on mainstream English-language media highlights the need for further research into the other segments of the Indian media. For instance, how are India’s vast vernacular media coping with the profound and rapid changes? In a climate where the national discourse is often based on ethnic, class, caste, political, and religious interests, the pressure of big politics and big business

on the news industry as a whole bears greater scrutiny, especially in India. It is important to conduct regular checks on the health of the Fourth Estate in the world's largest democracy.

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# The ebb and flow of 'eve-teasing' in the news

## Front page coverage of street harassment of women in Bangladesh

**Abstract:** Eve-teasing is a euphemism for street-based sexual harassment, which is a widespread issue across Bangladesh affecting the emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing of Bangladeshi women. The media can play a vital role by covering news and raising awareness of eve-teasing. Historically, the headlines in Bangladesh focused on more overt forms of gender violence—rape, murder, acid attacks—framing eve-teasing as a mere nuisance, a fact of life in the country. How the media portrays eve-teasing in Bangladesh is a subject about which there is currently very little research. This content analysis of the two main national newspapers in Bangladesh assesses how the media reported street-based sexual harassment over the course of a seminal year—2010. It was during this year that the government of Bangladesh enacted the *Family Violence Prevention and Protection Act* in acknowledgement of the prevalence and seriousness of gender violence in the country. Similar acts had been passed by the governments of nearby countries India and Sri Lanka in 2005, and Nepal in 2008 (Fardosh, 2013). This study looks at how Bangladeshi newspapers covered 'eve-teasing' prominently (as front-page news), in a year when it was acknowledged as a serious issue, through the passing of a law by the Bangladeshi government.

**Keywords:** Bangladesh, communication, content analysis, culture, eve-teasing, framing, gender violence, journalism, newspapers, sexual harassment, South Asia studies

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## Introduction

**E**VE-TEASING' is a colloquial euphemism for street-based sexual harassment in societies with links to the Indian subcontinent. Broadly speaking, gender violence is a serious issue across the Asia-Pacific region. For example, Melanesian societies have been described as having 'severe and pervasive' issues with violence against women (Newland, 2015, p.49) while in Fiji, where people of Indian descent make up 40 percent of the population, a survey found entrenched and repeated instances of violence against women and girls (Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, 2013). In Bangladesh—the focus of this study—eve-teasing affects the emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing of Bangladeshi women. It encompasses various instances of gender-based violence such as catcalling, verbal abuse, physical molestation, and assault. Ghosh (2011, p.100) identified eve-teasing as 'an attitude, a mind set, a set of behaviours that is construed as an insult and act of humiliation'. Ghosh (2011, p.100) notes that the term is superficially used by young men: 'The girls consider eve teasing to be something (of a) regular occurrence ... It's fine for those who accept eve teasing lightly, but a majority of the girls are badly affected both physically and psychologically.'

Fairchild (2010, p.192) outlined the broad ranging impacts of street-based harassment on the wellbeing of women, describing women's experiences of stranger harassment to be 'frightening, unpleasant, and disruptive; women frequently described themselves frustrated, disgusted and angered by the experience'. She further argues that street-based sexual harassment correlates with body objectification and fear of rape which is particularly the case when the phenomenon is widespread. 'Being catcalled, stared at, whistled at, and even groped and grabbed are monthly and weekly experiences, and for some women a daily experience' (Fairchild, 2010, p. 192).

Bangladeshi society is currently in a condition of progression from the traditional to the modern. In this transitional flux half of the population of Bangladesh comprises of women seeking employment and opportunities outside their home, contributing to the household income and asserting their economic, educational, and other rights. Within the urban lower, middle, and upper classes, women are moving into a workforce historically dominated by men. As Banks (2013, p.99) explains, in Bangladesh 'women face a complex balance between maintaining their household, employment and marital relationships, and men remain unwilling to accept additional challenges to their authority'. In this context eve-teasing 'can be seen as a symptom of this refusal to accept the societal change in power dynamics occurring as a result of increased female participation in Bangladesh's workforce. It frequently takes place around schools, colleges, and workplaces (Begum, Hossain, & Shahid, 2010). However, in Bangladesh eve-teasing is sometimes seen as a 'less serious' a form

of gender violence compared to, for example, violent physical sexual assault (Talboys et al., 2017). Bangladesh's suicide rate shows a skewed gender ratio, with women below the age of 49 dying by suicide at a rate of 20 per 100,000 people or more than twice the rate of men below the age of 49 according to findings by Bagley, Shahnaz, and Simkhada (2017). Among teenagers, girls in Bangladesh aged 15 to 17 die by suicide at a rate of 14 per 100,000 people—that is, 50 percent higher than boys in the same age bracket. The authors point out that given the stigma associated with suicide in a majority Muslim country like Bangladesh, the suicide rate is likely to be under-reported. They cite a highly patriarchal society, gender violence, forced marriage of girls at a young age, and various cultural (as opposed to religiously mandated) norms as possible reasons for the higher rate of suicide among women and girls in Bangladesh.

Although street based sexual harassment and gender violence more broadly have been documented throughout the Asia-Pacific, the saying 'eve-teasing' is a synonym referring to sexual harassment of women and girls in public surroundings, originating and used exclusively in South Asian societies (Natarajan, 2016). The phrase trivialises the seriousness of the practice, which can range from verbal harassment or lewd remarks directed at women and girls, to inappropriate physical contact and in extreme cases, severe cases of assault and ultimately acting to curb the participation of women in public activities (Kathpalia, Kumai, & Chander, 2019) and prompting women's rights activists to discourage the use of the term (Talboys et al., 2017). While high profile cases of sexual assault in Asian countries have led lawmakers to pass legislation punishing perpetrators, lingering gender inequality (such as differences in the perception of economic and social roles attributed to women and men) and deeply entrenched societal attitudes towards the rights of women and girls have led to difficulties in changing widespread cultural acceptance of eve-teasing (Natarajan, 2016).

The main studies into eve-teasing have focused on the context of specific countries or socio-economic circumstances; and have been conducted within sociological or criminology frameworks. For example, Talboys et al. (2017) conducted a mixed methods study into the prevalence of eve-teasing in nine villages in India's Punjab region. Through focus groups and semi-structured interviews, the researchers found that the residents of these villages viewed eve-teasing as staring, stalking, and inappropriate verbal or physical harassment. Furthermore, participants in the researchers' study saw the consequences of societal acceptance of this behaviour as detrimental to girls and women, could lead to the victims of eve-teasing suffering depression or committing suicide. A second mixed-methods study into eve-teasing focused on the Indian context looked at the experiences of female university students in Chennai. Through focus group discussions with the university students, interviews with law enforcement personnel based near the university campuses, and safety audits of the campus surroundings, Natarajan

(2016) found the students had a broad understanding of what eve-teasing was stemming from experiences with it or hearing about it from other students, and where and why it took place. Meanwhile the same study found, through interviews with local law enforcement, that the victims of eve-teasing were often reluctant to report it to loved ones or to the police, and would withdraw complaints over fear of reprisals from the perpetrators, or fear that the victim's marriage prospects would be harmed if the complaint was made public. The study found that local law enforcement deployed a number of ways to apprehend the perpetrators of eve-teasing such as undercover female officers posing as students on public transport routes out of campuses, or allocating more human resources to the problem (for example increasing the number of police patrolling outside the campuses, or having a minimum of two female police officers stationed near campus entrances).

The effects on the well-being of victims of eve-teasing in another rural part of India form the basis of a study by Kathpalia, Kumai, and Chander (2019). In this research, a survey of 200 women in the Kurukshetra district of Haryana state found that more than half had experienced sexual harassment at public places such as bus stops. The survey participants believed it had impacted on their well-being and self-confidence, increasing their anxiety and diminishing feelings of safety in public places. Suicide ideation was also reported as a consequence of eve-teasing by these rural women and girls. Conversely Misri (2017, p.305) notes how the notion of eve-teasing has also been linked to South Asia's female city dwellers—'the figure of the urban female college student, and occasionally to the female office worker in cities such as Delhi, Calcutta and Bombay'—and to the Biblical connotations of the 'temptress' who caused the fall of men from the heavens, thus drawing parallels between street-based sexual harassment and moral panic over educated, working women infringing on male-dominated public life.

Gender violence has also been noted as a serious issue in Fiji, where a large Indian minority resides. Fiji's rates of violence against women and girls are among the highest globally (Fiji Women's Rights Movement, 2016). Newland (2017) notes that while expressions of gender violence are culturally specific (to Indo-Fijians or Indigenous Fijians) gender violence is actually endemic across Fijian culture, and gender hierarchies underpin women's lives across Fiji's Christian, Hindu, and Muslim societies. While eve-teasing itself has not been the subject of extensive academic study outside of Indian contexts, research has been conducted on gender violence more broadly, in Bangladesh. Noting that in 2000 the United Nations cited Bangladesh as having the worst record of violence against women, Khan (2005) outlines gender violence discourse within a development studies framework. Khan (2005) concluded that the presence of international development organisations in the country have led to attempts to combat Bangladesh's patriarchal attitudes and practices, for example through

the funding of education, health, and microfinance programmes which have enriched and empowered women, but which have also led to push back from traditionalist forces arguing that the place of a woman is in the home. A study by Naved and Persson (2005) looked at factors associated with gender violence against spouses in Bangladesh using a behavioural science framework. Through interviews with more than 3,000 rural and urban Bangladeshi women they found that one of the strongest factors associated with gender violence in households was a history of such abuse from the perpetrator's father against his mother. In addition, communication between spouses, and educational attainment of the husband were also factors.

An exploration by Good (2007) of the reasons for eve-teasing and its persistence (set against longstanding socio-cultural perceptions of women during and after the colonial era) concluded that key periods of the country's history have contributed to the ongoing problem of eve-teasing, including independence and partition. Using historical, cultural studies, and gender studies frameworks, this study found (through interviews) a resignation among some women in India to the way they were treated publicly and a form of internalising their submissive place in Indian society. Good (2007) notes that existing literature on eve-teasing is minimal. There has been little research into its occurrence outside of specific contexts in India and very little research exists which use media studies frameworks to assess how eve-teasing is portrayed by major media outlets in a non-Indian context within the region.

## **Methodology**

The local Bangladesh press paid significant attention to eve-teasing and sexual harassment as the government prepared to introduce the gender violence bill (Khan 2005). Our study uses a content analysis of the front pages of two national newspapers in Bangladesh, in 2010—the year in which the government of Bangladesh enacted the Family Violence Prevention and Protection Act in acknowledgement of the prevalence and seriousness of gender violence in the country. The data source for this study comprises articles from the *Daily ProthomAlo* and the *Daily Jugantor*; these two newspapers are among the newspapers with the highest circulations in Bangladesh in 2010 (*Bangladesh Pratidin* tops, 2014). Although published from the capital Dhaka, the newspapers are distributed throughout the country and cover national and international, as well as local, news. The versions of the newspapers subject to the study were stored in electronic format in a digital archive, as printed (they were not digitised in the sense that a content management system was set up in web form). Content analysis was chosen as the most appropriate method for the study given that the goal of the study was to assess how many times eve-teasing was reported as front page news in major newspapers in Bangladesh in the year following the



passing of an Act designed to clamp down on sexual harassment; this required the type of systematic examination of mass media that content analysis can provide (Mayring, 2004). The sample included articles from the daily editions of the *Daily ProthomAlo* and the *Daily Jugantor* from 1 January to 31 December 2010 and the electronic versions of these papers were searched for the term ‘eve-teasing’ on the front page.

### Findings and discussion

In 2010, a total of 56 news stories from the two newspapers studied covered eve-teasing on the front page, in the context of reporting on the *Family Violence Prevention and Protection Act*. The front page stories on eve-teasing can be broken down per masthead as follows.

**Table 1: Number of ‘eve-teasing’ related stories**

Newspaper	Editions	Total published news
<i>ProthomAlo</i>	365	32
<i>Jugantor</i>	365	24
Total	730	56

The space dedicated to eve-teasing can be described in relation to the entire front page using column centimetres (the standard measurement of the amount of content in print publications)<sup>1</sup> as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Sample news and ‘eve-teasing’ news comparison**

Newspaper	Sample number	Total front-page volume (column centimetres) in a year	Number of ‘eve-teasing’ related stories	‘Eve-teasing’ related news volume (column centimetres) in a year	Percentage
<i>ProthomAlo</i>	365	7254	32	1768	24.37%
<i>Jugantor</i>	365	7234	24	1114	15.4%
Total	730	14488	56	2883	19.89%

In terms of the breakdown of the type of news coverage, hard news was the preferred format (which was to be expected given that most of the coverage was in the context of the country’s lawmakers being in the middle of the process of getting a prominent gender violence related bill passed through the Bangladeshi parliament). Table 3 illustrates the different types of stories on eve-teasing.

In terms of the number of columns devoted to the stories, newsworthiness is signified by the amount of space devoted to a story (Milne, 2018). Column

**Table 3: Different types of stories about 'eve-teasing'**

Newspaper	Sample number	Total front stories related to 'eve-teasing'	Hard news	Hard news follow up	Feature	Investigative reporting	Explainers
<i>ProthomAlo</i>	365	32	22	9	4	9	7
<i>Jugantor</i>	365	24	16	5	4	7	8
Total	730	56	38	14	8	16	15

inches (converted here to column centimetres) have historically been the yardstick for news values—the more space given to a story, the more 'newsworthy' it is. For the *ProthomAlo* and the *Jugantor*, there were no five or six column stories (the largest possible) about eve-teasing on the front page in 2010. The majority of the front-page stories on eve-teasing in the two newspapers were single or double column stories (the size typically allocated to hard news stories). Table 4 captures the column treatment on eve-teasing by both newspapers.

**Table 4: Column treatment of 'eve-teasing' stories**

Newspaper	Sample number	Total front page stories related to 'eve-teasing'	Column treatment				
			Single column stories	Double column stories	Three column stories	Four column stories	Five column stories
<i>ProthomAlo</i>	365	32	13 (40.6%)	12 (37.5%)	5 (15.6%)	2 (6.2%)	x
<i>Jugantor</i>	365	24	11 (45.8%)	7 (29.1%)	4 (16.6%)	2 (8.3%)	x
Total	730	56	24 (42.8%)	19 (33.9%)	9 (16.0%)	4 (7.1%)	x

The relationship between news values and visual imagery is well documented—for example, Pfau et al (2006) found that photographs can elicit a more visceral reaction from audiences or consumers of news while the addition of a photograph implies to the reader that a story is more 'newsworthy' (Zillman, Knobloch & Yu, 2001). Out of the newspaper stories devoted to eve-teasing on the front pages of these two Bangladesh dailies, only a small percentage were illustrated with visuals. Over the course of the year the *ProthomAlo* dedicated photographs to 30 of its front-page articles on eve-teasing adding up to a total of 383.8 column centimetres taken up by pictures. The newspaper's total front-page volume (column centimetres) in a year is 2856—meaning that 5.29 percent of its 'prime real estate' (the front page) was devoted to visual illustrations to accompany the stories of street-based gender violence. Similarly, the *Jugantor*

allocated a picture 22 times over the course of 2010 to front page stories on eve-teasing, equating to 175 column centimetres of space in the newspaper's front page over a year. *The Jugantor's* total front-page volume (column inches) in a year is 2848 meaning that 2.42 percent of its front page was devoted to photographs to illustrate the reporting of street-based gender violence.

Most Bangladeshi newspapers publish black headlines, but practice the use of red, blue or other colours in headlines to emphasise and draw attention to specific news stories. In our sample the overwhelming majority of front page stories about eve-teasing used black headlines suggesting that while these stories were important enough to feature on the front page, the majority were hard news focused reports that the newspapers did not feel their readers' attention should be drawn to specifically. Twenty-seven out of the 32 stories about eve-teasing published on the front page of the *ProthomAlo* in 2010 used black headlines (93.75 percent of the headlines; two stories used a red headline (6.25 percent); three stories used a blue headline (9.37 percent). It was a similar scenario with the *Jugantor* and the 24 front page stories which were about eve-teasing in 2010; the majority (22 stories, or 91.67 percent) used the stock standard black headline while the remaining two stories (8.33 percent) used a blue headline.

Finally, we looked at the monthly distribution of front-page stories about eve-teasing in our sample, in order to investigate how often the newspapers covered these stories (Table 5). The *Family Violence Prevention and Protection Act* was passed by the Bangladeshi parliament in early October of 2010 (Khan, 2017), the year from which our sample was drawn. The analysis shows that stories about eve-teasing peaked in October and November for both dailies, but that no stories about eve-teasing made the front page in January, June and September for both dailies (and that none made the front page in February or March for the *ProthomAlo*, or December for *Jugantor*). This is not to suggest that there were no occurrences of eve-teasing in these months or that the occurrence was less in other months compared to October and November; rather that incidents of eve-teasing would be subject to the attention of major dailies in Bangladesh where the consequences and impact of the story are more newsworthy (such as when physical harm or suicide takes place as a result of the harassment).

In assessing the effectiveness of the *Family Violence Prevention and Protection Act of 2010*, Jahan (2017, p. 401) believes that prior to the enactment of this law the legal framework in Bangladesh had 'failed to provide any effective remedy for victims of domestic violence'. She points to the critical role played by advocacy and civil society groups in ensuring the act was passed and subsequently implemented. Prior to the act being passed, the potential of the media to highlight gender violence was observed by Khan (2005) who notes that beginning in the 1990s, a freer media environment began to flourish in Bangladesh and subsequently the number of media outlets increased along with the rate of reporting

**Table 5: Front page stories on 'eve-teasing' by month**

Months	Front page stories related to 'eye-teasing'	
	<i>ProthomAlo</i>	<i>Jugantor</i>
January	x	x
February	x	1
March	x	2
April	5	3
May	2	2
June	x	x
July	1	1
August	1	3
September	x	x
October	14	6
November	7	62
December	2	x
Total	32	24

on gender violence and sexual assault against women and children. While our analysis shows that only 32 news stories about eve-teasing made the front page of two major dailies in Bangladesh across 2010 when the gender violence act was passed (equating to less than 20 percent of the volume of column centimetres on the two papers' front pages), it indicates that more attention is being paid to this issue in Bangladesh's public sphere compared to previous decades.

We appreciate the strength of content analysis in providing quantitative data for analysis; equally we acknowledge one of its limitations in that the message of the media coverage cannot be investigated in depth by merely measuring column centimetres. When we look at the content of the front-page stories related to eve-teasing from our sample, we can break down the content of the hard news stories that focused on the consequences of the harassment for the victim, as follows:

*Stories reporting on fatalities arising from 'eve-teasing'*

- Six front page stories (two in the *ProthomAlo* and four in *Jugantor*) were about incidents where a victim of eve-teasing was murdered (by the perpetrators of the street-based gender violence)
- Ten front page stories (four in the *ProthomAlo* and six in *Jugantor*) were about incidents where a victim of eve-teasing died by suicide

### *Stories reporting on injuries to victims from 'eve-teasing'*

- Three front page stories (one in the *ProthomAlo* and two in *Jugantor*) were about injuries sustained by victims of street-based gender violence

### *Stories reporting on victims being locked at home after 'eve-teasing'*

- Ten front page stories (six in the *ProthomAlo* and four in *Jugantor*) were about the victims of eve-teasing being locked at home either for their own safety or out of a sense of shame against the family.

These figures make it difficult to ascertain that one paper or the other devoted more space on its front page to the issue. The quantitative findings from our content analysis suggest that in terms of total volume (column centimetres) the *ProthomAlo* seemed to cover street-based gender violence more than the *Jugantor*. Yet when we looked at the qualitative content of the stories, the *Jugantor* mostly covered the issue more from the perspective of the effects on the victims of 'eve-teasing', with more stories (as opposed to column centimetres) than the *ProthomAlo* about the deaths and injuries of the victims.

The quantitative findings in terms of the volume of front page space devoted to eve-teasing across the two mastheads can, however, be viewed in conjunction with our analysis of the monthly occurrence of a front page story on eve-teasing.

- The *ProthomAlo* did not put any stories about eve-teasing on its front page in these months in 2010: January, February, March, June and September.
- For the *Jugantor*, the months in 2010 where stories on 'eve-teasing' did not make the front page were January, June, September and December.

The comparatively larger amount of front-page real estate devoted to the issue in October and November can be attributed to factors such as the *Family Violence Prevention and Protection Act of 2010* being passed by Bangladesh's parliament in early October of that year.

## **Conclusion**

Based on preliminary work on the topic of media coverage of eve-teasing, this article looked at the extremely under-represented study of the reporting of street-based gender violence, outside of India - the South Asian country which has dominated the negligible current literature on eve-teasing. Gender violence is a broad-ranging issue across the Asia-Pacific region, with research into the phenomenon spanning various geographic locations including but not limited to the Indian sub-continent and communities in the Pacific with and without cultural ties to the sub-continent. Within the broad scope of gender violence as a societal problem, street-based gender violence affects India's neighbours, but little research has been conducted on both eve-teasing as well as media cover-

age of eve-teasing, in countries such as Bangladesh. The year chosen for the sample was the same year in which Bangladesh enacted legislative measures to clamp down on eve-teasing and street-based gender violence. With 10 years having passed since the passing of the *Family Violence Prevention and Protection Act*, a natural progression of the preliminary research conducted for this study would look at how front page coverage of street based gender violence has evolved over that period of time. Further study on this issue might also take a qualitative method (for example textual analysis) to assess, for example, whether the impacts of the eve-teasing on the victim contributed to the decision-making by editors of the newspaper about the significance and placement of news stories covering the eve-teasing.

### Note

1. The standard measurement of the amount of content in print publications which use multiple columns per page; a column inch historically referred to the space taken up by a column in width, by an inch in height, which has been adjusted in this article to refer to column centimetres—that is, a column in width, by 2.54cm in height.

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## REVIEWS

LEE DUFFIELD is a Brisbane-based independent researcher.

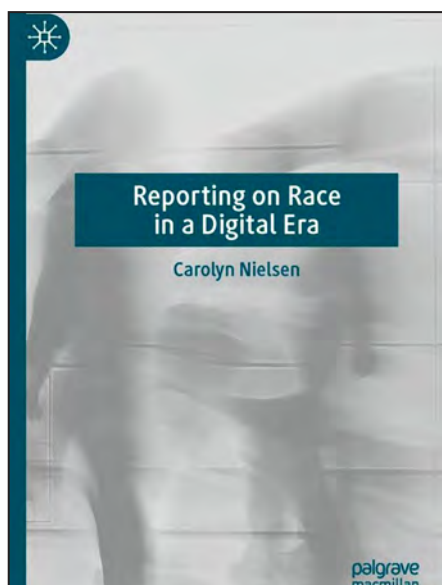
# New paradigms combined with technology could change the way we report on race

*Reporting on Race in a Digital Era*, by Carolyn Nielsen. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. xiii, 236 pages. ISBN 978-3-030-35220-2/ ISBN 978-3-030-35221-9 (eBook)

CAROLYN NIELSEN has proposed a role for journalism in resolving political oppression, offering a case study on the crisis surrounding street killings of African Americans by police.

This United States journalism academic provides a review of prominent work since the 1970s on journalism theory and principles. She gives an historical treatment of news media coverage in race relations and criticises ‘traditional’ journalism—as a central point kicking into the corpse of ‘objectivity’ as a key value. This is late, with objectivity and a moral neutrality, as the adopted trait of journalists, already forsaken.

Journalists have taken up more sophisticated models, formulating goals like reasoned, informational and



fair coverage—perhaps individually using an objectivisation device to assist with that.

Three paradigms are set up for a description of contemporary media operations: Traditional media seen as regulating access, sourcing, agendas; the Interactive Race Beat, working for greater public engagement from the ground up and Journalism 3.0, where technology leads and gives an initiating role to users. The author wants these paradigms to be conceived through a Constructionist approach, and that Critical Race Theory be deployed to explain tragic events in the field.

New media are seen as able to produce a reformed product: better conceptualisation and provision of context, so news can ably handle process, like systemic racial oppression, not only daily events. In one example given, these media demonstrate ‘depth of news analysis, exploration of racism

in those narratives, and the way technology enabled audiences to become part of the news narrative.’

For the case study Nielsen returns to ethnographic methods common in her discipline, conducting semi-structured interviews with seven journalists from media outlets conforming to the respective paradigms. The journalists reflect on their work in terms of influences, whether at individual level, work routines or contact with social institutions. They discuss three issues: ‘post racism’ during the Obama years, when it was thought society might be reforming itself; the 2014 death of Michael Brown Jr, 18, in Ferguson, Missouri and Black Lives Matter.

The interviews support the researcher’s perception that news media are highly engaged with the issue of racial oppression, enabled due to digital tools. Three journalists from *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* refrain from a mantra of objectivity, which is treated as evidence of traditional media being ‘transformed.’ For a bringing-together: ‘Journalists across all three paradigms showed firmly constructionist values regarding objectivity.’

The book lacks a substantial section for synthesis and conclusions that would clinch a main argument. Readers are left to consider possible outcomes of the changes represented. The suggestion in the book that an interventionist or activist media will propel social change, will contribute to ongoing debate on possible effects of media in leading ‘real life’ decision-making.

While covering much ground,

*Reporting on Race* is not a sociological treatment of racial relations; the description and analyses of ‘post racism,’ Ferguson and BLM sufficing to show they have had dramatic impacts on lives and public discourse. While information and communication technology (ICT) is shown to be a determining factor there is insufficient scope to detail its workings; this is not research about the dynamics of digitisation in the new media ecology.

One omission is the adoption by many audience members of cellphone social media as their news source, especially, in the present discussion, the fake news, trolling and racist propaganda abusing the earnest work of journalists as seen by the author. It might warrant consideration as potentially a fourth paradigm.

Nielsen’s proposition, clearly argued and assiduously well documented, runs its two approaches in tandem. Perhaps it helped in an anti-media climate within US scholarship, to embrace some hostility to journalists and deploy somewhat un-substantiable cultural theory, all referenced to burgeoning ICT. Yet with its dedication referring to journalists as ‘part of a noble calling’, the book at its core also relies on the judgment of the journalistic panel.

That method of inquiry, the researcher having served her decade in the craft, assumes some empathy, ‘where reporters who created the coverage are the best source of information,’ to provide insights on ‘underlying values, ideologies or influences not directly observable in their ... coverage’.

*PHILIP CASS is reviews editor of Pacific Journalism Review.*

## Media must build and retain trust

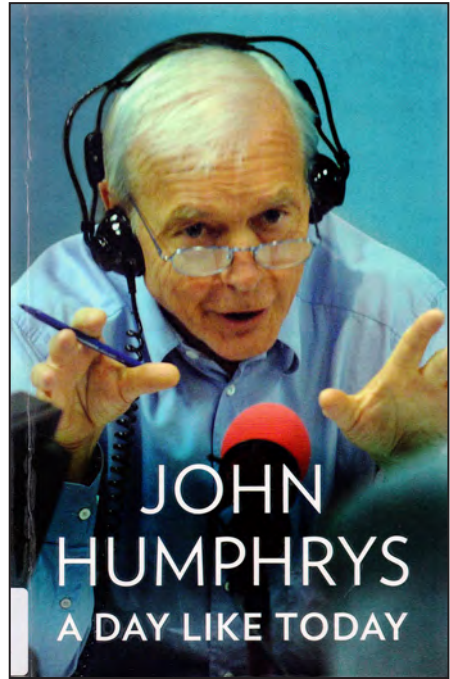
*A Day Like Today*, by John Humphrys. London, UK: William Collins, 2019. 400 pages. ISBN 9780007415595

**J**OHAN HUMPHRYS will be less well known outside the UK than his contemporary from BBC World, John Simpson, but his autobiography is an entertaining and informative recounting of his career and well worth reading.

For more than three decades he presided over BBC Radio 4's flagship early morning current affairs programme, *Today*. Like Jeremy Paxman on BBC2's *Newsnight*, he built a reputation for taking no prisoners in interviews and for having a keen sense of what makes good radio journalism.

His background, however, was in the hardscrabble of the local press in Wales and it was in Wales that he made his name for his coverage of the Aberfan disaster when, in October 1966, a wall of waste that had been dumped on top of a hillside came roaring down the valley and obliterated the mining village, killing 116 children.

Eventually joining BBC television, he became an overseas correspondent, reporting on the horrors of apartheid and the end of white rule in what was then Rhodesia. He also worked in the



US at the height of the Watergate scandal and was lucky to have a tip-off that Nixon was going to announce his resignation, a lead that allowed him to book satellite time for a live feed to London when such things were considered a monstrous extravagance.

Then he and Simpson were offered jobs as news presenters. It was a disaster. Simpson went off to the BBC World service and Humphrys dived at the chance to front *Today*.

There may be a certain romance in his reminiscences of the joys of getting up in the middle of the night so he could be in the studio sounding bright and cheerful at dawn. At least he acknowledges the burden that falls on the overnight editorial team who need to have stories prepared for the presenters.

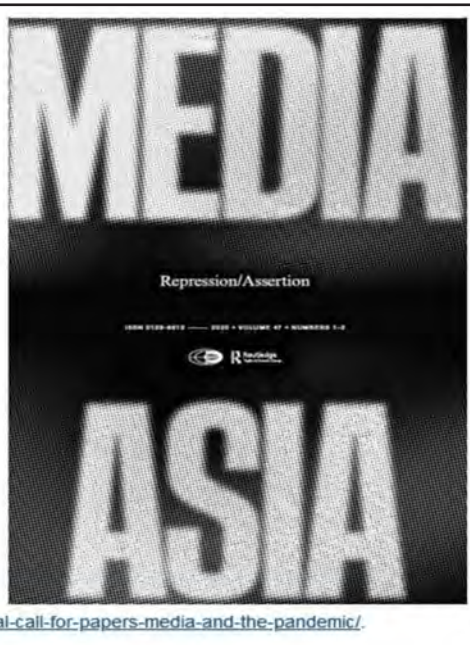
For people outside the UK, Humphrys is probably best known for the story which led to the apparent suicide of Dr David Kelly after another BBC reporter alleged on air that the Blair government had cooked the books in its claims that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction.

Tony Blair was not somebody Humphrys liked and even less so his rottweiler of a press secretary, Alastair Campbell, who constantly attacked the BBC and went into overdrive when *Today* first revealed what today everybody takes for granted—that the leaders of those countries most involved in the invasion of Iraq—the US, the UK and Australia—lied through their teeth to justify what became a military and political catastrophe.

A constant theme underlying

Humphrys' memoir is the need for the public to have a reliable source of information in which they can place their trust. As one would expect, he takes some Parthian shots at the BBC, particularly for its handling of the child abuse scandals, of which Jimmy Saville was the most famous and its part in creating a distrust of the political system which alienates voters and, in the US, helped elect Trump.

In the end, though, he says the BBC's job is to 'build and retain trust. For all its weaknesses and failings, that is what the BBC has been doing for the best part of a century. And if that sounds absurdly simplistic ... so be it. The key is always trying to separate fact from speculation and never to pretend to be privy to some great truth denied to others.'

<p><b>OFF THE PRESS:</b> An international peer reviewed journal bravely confronts a sensitive issue plaguing selected parts of Asia. Published by the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC) and Routledge Taylor &amp; Francis Group, the <i>Media Asia</i> journal released Volume 47 (Numbers 1-2) with the theme "Repression/Assertion." The issue is composed of four refereed articles and three non-refereed commentaries that focus on the realities of repression and intricacies of assertion in Myanmar, Indonesia, Thailand, Greater China (mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan), Pakistan and the Philippines. The full text of the press release may be retrieved from <a href="https://amic.asia/media-asia-analyzes-repression-and-assertion-in-latest-issue/">https://amic.asia/media-asia-analyzes-repression-and-assertion-in-latest-issue/</a>.</p> <p><b>CALL FOR PAPERS:</b> <i>Media Asia</i> issues a special call for papers for media-related research on the COVID-19 pandemic. The full text of the special call for papers may be retrieved from <a href="https://amic.asia/media-asia-special-call-for-papers-media-and-the-pandemic/">https://amic.asia/media-asia-special-call-for-papers-media-and-the-pandemic/</a>.</p>	
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DAVID ROBIE is founding editor of *Pacific Journalism Review*.

## Exposing reality about the mythic 'age of truth'

*Myth of 'Free Media' and Fake News in the Post-truth Era*, by Kalinga Seneviratne. New Delhi, India: Sage. 2020, 348 pages. ISBN 9789353881276

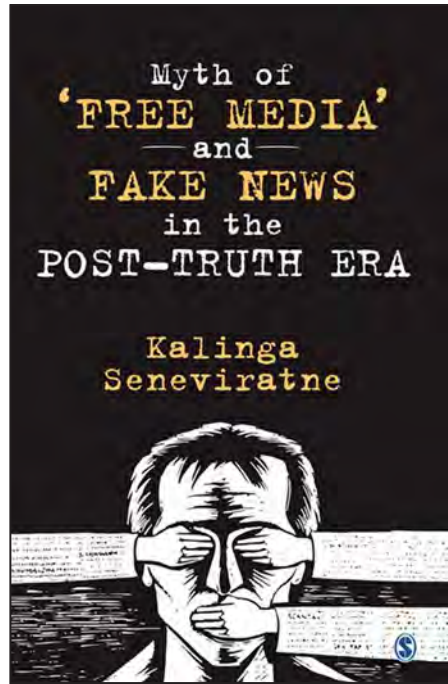
*Mindful Communication for Sustainable Development: Perspectives from Asia*, edited by Kalinga Seneviratne. New Delhi, India: Sage: 2018, 353 pages. ISBN 9789352805518

POST-TRUTH? Was there ever really such a thing as the Golden Age of Truth as trumpeted by the liberal Western press? According to Kalinga Seneviratne in his latest challenging book, quite simply 'no'.

In some countries, such as New Zealand, fake news and the manipulation of half-truths and disinformation has been dismissed as a by-product of the Trump era in the White House and the Brexit debacle.

Writing as early as the end of March 2020, when New Zealand had introduced its initial successful lockdown in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, lawyer and blogger Liz Gordon highlighted British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's 'stressed' look when he contracted the coronavirus, the first national leader to do so.

If I had substituted 'virus' instead of



'stress', I would have been bang on. And jolly good, too—he deserves it for all his jolly posturing and manic handshaking. What do you mean that's a little harsh? Come on—you think so too. Trump needs to get it too. He is so narcissistic that he will only take it seriously when he has experienced it. Get the virus to acknowledge the truth of what is going on. (Gordon, 2020)

The problem is that Trump *did* get it. And he *didn't* acknowledge the seriousness. 'I feel powerful,' he crowed after his 10-day 'illness' as his COVID-19 disinformation continued unabated in denial of the almost eight million cases and more than 216,000 deaths in the US.

In this book, *Myth of 'Free Media'*, Seneviratne stresses that the distrust of mainstream media, especially Western

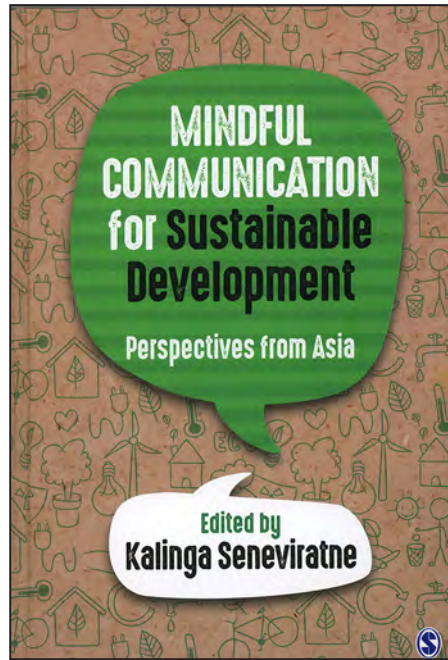


television, the reporting of wars, natural and human-induced disasters and the glaring global gaps between the haves and the have-nots, actually began long before the Trump-Brexit era and with Pope Francis branding the spreading of fake news as a ‘sin.’

While Seneviratne unsurprisingly parallels Herman and Chomsky (1988) and their dismissal of any mythic ‘age of truth’ in their classic propaganda model, he squarely lays the blame for the origins of the current ‘fake news’ notion on the Western media’s reporting of the 2003 Iraq War, especially by mainstream outlets in the US, when Washington and London deployed discredited and false information about Saddam Hussein’s ‘Weapons of Mass Destruction’ to justify the invasion and destruction of a nation. Since then, the lie-fuelled War on Terror has laid a wasteland in several countries such as Afghanistan, Libya and Syria and left virtually nothing positive to show for the devastation.

The disinformation and fake news has continued with the US-led smearing of Iran and the Palestinian cause for peace and justice, when any serious research of the issues demonstrates that the brutal and callous war waged by Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates on the Yemeni people is a far greater threat to Middle East peace.

The list of global lies and hypocrisy goes on. Closer to home we had 24 years of Indonesian colonial occupation of Timor-Leste before the tiny nation finally regained independence in 2002. West Papua currently faces a similar



struggle, shunned and unreported by the New Zealand mainstream media.

Seneviratne, a Sinhalese journalist who was for many years lead researcher for the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC), previously based in Singapore and now in Manila, devotes much of this book to critiquing the subjective coverage of the Sri Lankan civil war in 2009.

Overall, the book is a must for journalists and media educators. However, at the exorbitant prices of \$80 (paperback) or \$108 (hardcover), it is largely out of reach of the average journalist or media academic except through libraries.

SENEVIRATNE’S arguments in favour of a ‘mindful journalism’ were explored in an earlier volume he edited two years ago, *Mindful Communication*

*for Sustainable Development* (2018), a sort of antidote to Western liberal media orthodoxy. Divided into five sections devoted to Philosophical Perspectives, Training for Mindful Thinking, Mindful Communication and Sustainable Development, Applying Traditional Practices, and Mindful Communication and Contemporary Media, this book draws on the combined wisdom of 25 Asian scholars from many global locations.

However, the book also warns of the dangers of ‘practising mindfulness’ in communication—especially in the West—without its ‘spiritual and ethical leanings.’ While the book presents a new paradigm of teaching innovative ideas about teaching in fields such as digital communication, and reporting on economic, environmental, and developmental issues, the focus is on ‘human-centred journalism.’ For myself, I found this approach has many parallels to ‘human rights journalism’ that I have taught for many years, especially in the Pacific.

Some of the chapter titles give good insights into the breadth and scope of this book, such as ‘A Japanese path to mindful communication: understanding the silence of the Japanese,’ ‘Practising mindful communication in a multicultural society: case study of Malaysian news reporting’ and ‘Philippines: Beyond the body count—mindful journalism and the human-centric approach to reporting the drug war.’

Seneviratne ties all these strands together in his concluding chapter where he argues: ‘What Asia needs today is a new journalism for an emerging

Asia that is able to rid Asians of this hangover of cultural imperialism and critically examine and assess itself as well as the outside world, especially the news and information coming from the West’ (p. 338).

What is next on the busy publishing agenda for Seneviratne? He has gathered another group of colleagues, this time to tackle the issue of COVID-19, racism and politicisation. Watch this space for early next year.

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JOHN MINTO is president of the Palestine Solidarity Network Aotearoa (PSNA).

## Lively account of Middle East conflict

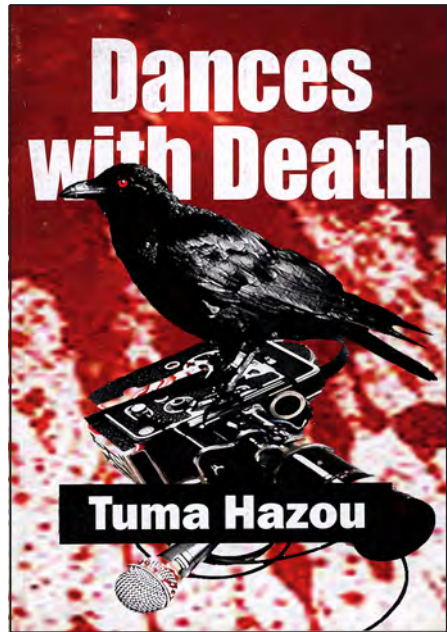
*Dances With Death – Perilous Encounters Reporting on Hostilities in the Turbulent Middle East*, by Tuma Hazou. Auckland, NZ: Tuma Hazou. 2020, 148 pages. ISBN 9780473506056

**D**ANCES *with Death* is an extraordinary personal account of Palestinian journalist Tuma Hazou's experiences in a 40-year journalism career mostly spent reporting from the war-ravaged Middle East.

As a young Palestinian, Tuma accepted a job with the BBC in London and became their youngest announcer at just 22. After a decade he transferred to Jordan and in subsequent years was at the heart of reporting on events in the Middle East.

Tuma traces the Middle East conflict to the infamous Balfour Declaration whereby in 1917, in a single sentence, the British government expressed support for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. He quotes the second part of the sentence in the declaration, which is almost always overlooked:

...it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may



prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

Needless to say the Israeli leadership and their fanatical militias ignored this second part of the sentence and in 1948 ethnically cleansed between 750,000 and one million Palestinians from their homes and land in Palestine and to this day refuse to allow them to return. Against the background of this monumental injustice (referred to as the *Naqba*—catastrophe—by Palestinians), the Middle East conflict has raged, smouldered and raged ever since.

Parts of the book read like a James Bond thriller, such as the bullet that went through the back windscreen, past Tuma and a colleague, and out

through the front windscreen as the car they were in careered away. Air attacks from Israeli Skyhawks in Jordan are vividly described and the terror Tuma and others felt as they scrambled for their lives time and time again.

Throughout the book Tuma recalls his encounters with ordinary people who were the victims of Israeli brutality as well as with many higher profile players in the drama. These include his meeting with Jordan's King Hussein atop a captured Israeli tank in 1968 and his encounters with the courageous and

feisty British Labour MP Margaret McKay who fought to have the truth about the *Naqba* reported around the world.

Several addenda to the book add to the understanding of the conflict, in particular the 1978 US position on the legality of Israeli settlements and a piece from Robert Fisk. *Dances with Death* is a unique, lively, first-hand account of the Middle East conflict told with warmth, compassion and a deep humanity. Tuma and his family live in Auckland, New Zealand.

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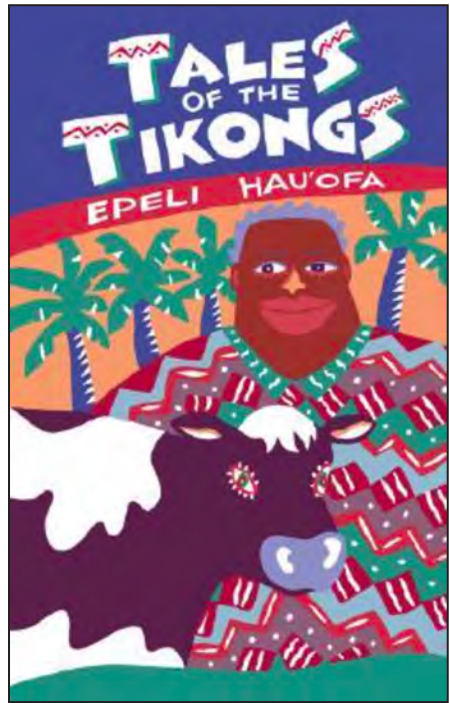
# Reading something as flimsy as a novel

*IN THIS* section of Pacific Journalism Review we ask our regular contributors to pick three books that have played an important part of their academic, professional or writing lives. In this issue, the selection is by veteran Pacific affairs reporter MICHAEL FIELD.

*Tales of the Tikongs*, by Epeli Hau'ofa. Honolulu, US: University of Hawai'i Press. 1994. 104 pages. ISBN 9780824815943.

NON-FICTION is, mostly, my thing. It takes a bit to persuade me to devote precious book time to something as flimsy as a novel. Yet, at the top of my list of influential books is Epeli Hau'ofa's *Tales of the Tikongs*, published in 1994.

The one defence for its inclusion in this list is that it never felt like fiction: it was unerringly accurate when it came to the world of Pacific states and foreign aid. Hau'ofa followed it with

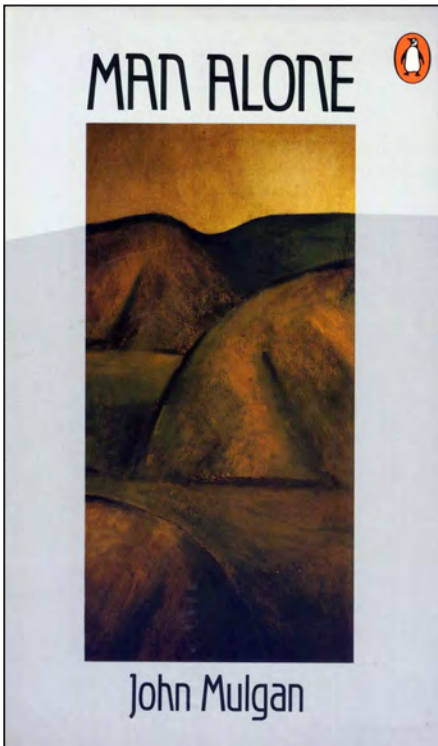


*Kisses in the Nederends* in 1995. Five years later, on the Suva campus at the University of the South Pacific, I asked him why his satire ran to only two volumes. He replied that he had no desire to be the Pacific Salman Rushdie.

Hau'ofa's biggest contribution was *We Are the Ocean*, a striking piece of philosophy on the way Pacific people see themselves. I came back to Hau'ofa

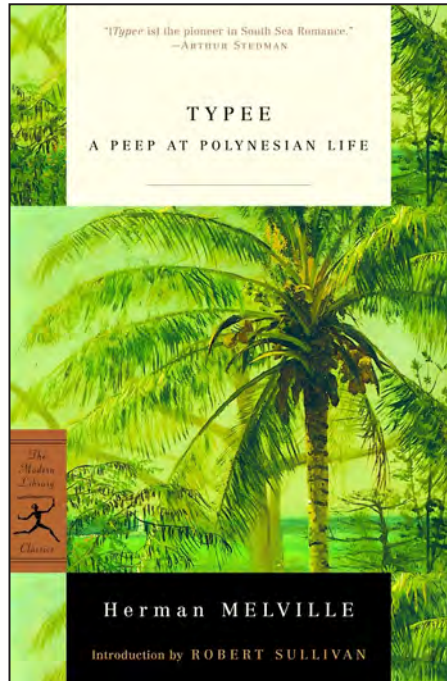
recently, gleefully buying a new copy of *Tikongs*. I had been interviewing ‘Akilisi Pohiva, Tonga’s Prime Minister who only had a few weeks left to live. He spoke of Hau’ofa’s importance to the beginning of the democracy struggle. The two men were not especially close, but had been influenced by each other.

*Man Alone*, by John Mulgan. Auckland, New Zealand: Penguin Random House. 1939/2002. 224 pages. ISBN: 9780143020011.



I REGULARLY read John Mulgan, of *Man Alone*, something of a definition of New Zealand, or the male side of it. I prefer *Report on Experience*. I was lucky to work with his brother and knew of the pain that led to a terrible World War Two and suicide.

*Typee*, by Herman Melville. Auckland, New Zealand: Penguin Random House. 1846/2001. 116 pages. ISBN: 9780375757457.



FOR MY third influential book, I cannot quite decide between *Scoop* by Evelyn Waugh (I was a news agency man most of my career and recognised much) or Herman Melville’s *Typee*.

Of course that work, based in Nuku Hiva, is overshadowed completely by his towering *Moby Dick*. *Typee* produces arguments around its accurate, or otherwise, portrayal of Polynesian culture. I think I’ve read it four or five times and am seduced by it.

So in making the decision, *Scoop* or *Typee*, I’ve imposed a tough criteria: what would get me through my time in a Fiji detention centre?

You coming, Herman?



NOTED

# Fix the system before it's too late

*The Broken Estate: Journalism and Democracy in a Post-Truth World*, by Mel Bunce. Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2019. 224 pages. ISBN 9780947518356

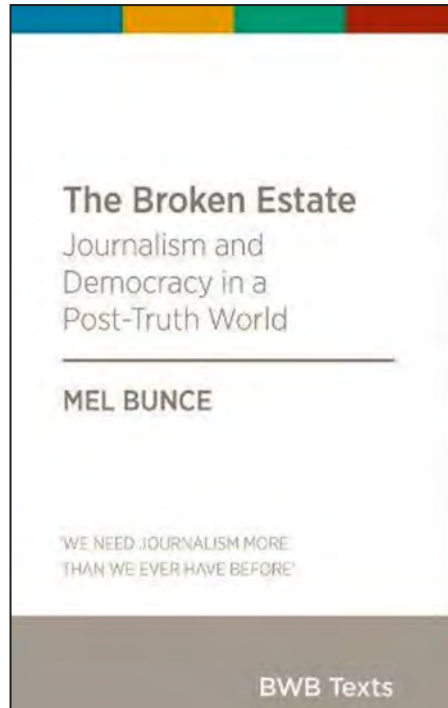
**N**EW ZEALAND has probably the worst television systems of any OECD nation, media ownership so concentrated that there is only one truly independent newspaper left, plummeting readership levels and almost insuperable economic challenges.

And yet, as London-based New Zealand journalist-turned academic Mel Bunce observes, there has never been a time when the country most needed a functioning, independent media system that people could trust.

In this slim, but powerful volume, she outlines what is wrong with New Zealand's media and ways that it might be fixed.

The challenges are huge: Māori and Pasifika remain woefully under-represented in newsrooms, female journalists and commentators face sexual harassment and newspapers chase clickbait while television stations think that the *Kardashians* is a documentary.

Most of the problems the New Zealand media faces seem to have been caused by government neglect, good old Kiwi management (an inability for



managers to see beyond the end of their nose or to think beyond lunchtime) and a disengaged public.

In economic terms, direct government funding is one way forward and Bunce notes that the New Zealand government has started a small pilot project to fund local reporting that would promote democracy through coverage of local courts and council meetings.

Educating the public in how to use the media properly is another priority. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began we have seen how many people prefer to read conspiracy theories rather than cope with reality. As President Trump's every utterance has demonstrated, this is enormously dangerous.

We must, however, be cheered by the fact that despite these calamities,

there is some extremely good journalism being produced here, whether it is long form reporting by people like Nicky Hager, good local affairs coverage by the country's surviving weeklies, the presence of Māori Television and the survival of *Tagata Pasifika*.

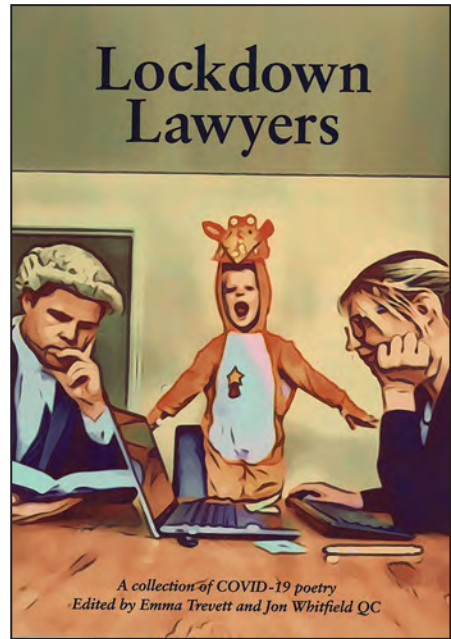
Bunce's analysis of the malaise in the New Zealand media is accurate and the solutions she offers timely. In a time of crisis it is more important than ever to fix New Zealand's media system before it is too late. — PHILIP CASS is reviews editor of *Pacific Journalism Review*.

## Lockdown sanity and survival in the age of Zoom

*Lockdown Lawyers – A Collection of COVID-19 Poetry*, by Emma Trevett and Jon Whitfield QC (eds). London, UK: Legal Action Group, 2020. 96 pages. ISBN 9781913648008

I ACCEPTED the invitation from my son in law (a barrister in London) to contribute to this anthology, with an antipodean poem I had written reflecting on COVID-19 and ANZAC day 'They shall grow. . .' When the anthology, commissioned as a fundraiser for a particularly vulnerable group during the pandemic, came out, I was simultaneously delighted, honoured, enlightened, angered, saddened, and then amused by the whimsy of some of the poems in the collection.

I grew up in an immigrant family in New Zealand and I lived with their English experiences and memories of the blitz in London. So the distance,



and yet closeness, of my daughter and her London family, in the plague-like years revisited of COVID-19, resonated strangely. With my own research focusing on software and global virtual teams, the ubiquity of Zoom and the 'near yet far' ersatz experience of 'connecting' online in a time of uncertainty and anxiety had a poignant aspect.

Particular poems speak to us of these distant connections, such as one from a lawyer's small London flat pining for the luxury of a bookcase to furnish the backdrop of a Zoom meeting. There is also one about a lawyer in (virtual) court having a client defended over Skype, sent down for a first offence and then closing the laptop to forget about it.

To gain a window into the lives of a group of legal aid lawyers and their families in a time of COVID-19 and how

a particular professional group maintained a sense of sanity and survival was truly special. I have a sense that this collection will stand as an enduring testimony of the power of the human spirit against adversity. It also speaks to how interconnected and interdependent we all are and how a group of people quietly caring on the other side of the world can echo so powerfully! – *DR TONY CLEAR is associate professor with the Software Engineering Research Lab at Auckland University of Technology.*



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Please pass this information on to anyone you think might be interested.

Further information:

Dr Chris Nash                      [chris@chrisnash.com.au](mailto:chris@chrisnash.com.au)

Dr David Robie                      [david.robie@aut.ac.nz](mailto:david.robie@aut.ac.nz)



## Notes for contributors

*Pacific Journalism Review*, founded at the University of Papua New Guinea in 1994, is a peer-reviewed journal covering media issues and communication in the South Pacific, Asia-Pacific, Australia and New Zealand. It is now published by the Pacific Media Centre, AUT University, and has links with the University of the South Pacific. While one objective is research into Pacific journalism theory and practice, the journal is also expanding its interest into new areas of research and inquiry that reflect the broader impact of contemporary media practice and education.

A particular focus will be on the cultural politics of the media, including the following issues—new media and social movements, indigenous cultures in the age of globalisation, the politics of tourism and development, the role of the media and the formation of national identity and the cultural influence of New Zealand as a branch of the global economy within the Pacific region. It also has a special interest in environmental and development studies in the media and communication—and vernacular media in the region.

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- *Noted*: 300-350 words.
- *Forum*: Letters, brief commentaries (up to 800 words)

### Submission of papers:

Within the editorial scope of the journal, we invite the submission of original papers, commentaries and reviews. Submissions are reviewed by the editor, or editorial board. Submissions are double blind peer refereed.

### Submissions website

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*Cover: Outgoing US President Donald Trump treated both issues of climate crisis and coronavirus with contempt. Among his many memorable quotes about the global COVID-19 pandemic, he said on 27 February 2020; 'It's going to disappear. One day, it's like a miracle, it will disappear.'*

*Cartoon: © Malcolm Evans 2020*



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