TE KOA KOA
Pacific
Journalism Review

MEDIA CHANGE, ADAPTATION AND CULTURE

EDITED BY PHILIP CASS, KHAIRIAH A. RAHMAN AND DAVID ROBIE

+ Journalism education and 'truth' challenges
+ Holding the line: *Rappler* and the battle for public trust
+ Philippine journalists and press freedom
+ Afghanistan, the Taliban and the liberation narrative
+ Don't 'rock the boat': Industry inertia in Queensland

PLUS

PHOTOESSAY: Kava storytelling *Todd Henry*
FRONTLINE: Disinformation and the NZ Parliament siege

DOUBLE EDITION

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BOOKSHELF

EDITORIAL: Fighting self-delusion and lies

WELCOME to this double edition of *Pacific Journalism Review,* the second to appear as an independent publication. Since we last appeared, a world already groaning under the weight of COVID-19 and climate change has had to endure the added burden of Russia's murderous and unjustified attack on Ukraine. Ukraine has found allies all over the world, not least from those concerned that Russian leader Vladimir Putin, who now apparently thinks of himself as a Tsar, has used the war as an excuse to try to crush even further the few remaining free journalists and artists surviving in his mafia fiefdom.

To say that journalists have lost their lives covering the war goes without saying. Along with their lives have been the last shreds of truth in the Russian media. During the Cold War there used to be a joke based on the names of the two main Soviet newspapers, *Pravda* and *Izvestia,* which ran: 'There is no pravda in *Izvestia*, and no izvestia in *Pravda*.' (There is no truth in news, and no news in truth.)

When it comes to the war in Ukraine, it seems nothing has changed.

Those Russians who want to can still find the truth about what is happening online and, until recently, could see broadcasts from Ukrainian television. Despite this, we repeatedly read stories, or hear from our Russian friends, that their families back in Russia consistently deny that there is a war or blindly parrot the official Kremlin line about biological warfare facilities or claims that Ukraine had been infiltrated by Nazis or secret plans to invade Russia by NATO.

It seems almost surreal to us that anybody could believe such arrant nonsense. And yet this same delusion—this same willingness to be deluded—seems to have spread around the globe. Even as new hearings uncover more and more evidence of Trump's involvement in the attempted overthrow of the US government in January 2021, he still has fanatical followers who believe that he won the last election and a Supreme Court eager to follow his ultra right-wing agenda.

Similarly, there are national leaders in the Pacific who seem to truly want to believe that China really is their friend instead of being an aggressive imperialist power acting the same way the European powers did in the 19th century.

As our ***Frontline*** coverage of the anti-vaccination protests in Wellington makes clear, self-delusion and a willingness to be sucked down the rabbit hole of online conspiracies are also to be found in New Zealand. The protesters in New Zealand's capital were violent, abusive, incoherent, illogical and prone to circulate any nonsense that fitted their convoluted beliefs. Some of them really were wearing tin foil hats. Like the Muscovites freezing in their Soviet-era flats and some Pacific politicians relaxing in their palatial homes in Cairns, they wanted to believe.

Self-delusion must also have been present in the minds of those Filipinos who voted for 'Bongbong' Marcos, apparently willing to believe the lie that his father, President Ferdinand Marcos, was not a thieving, corrupt dictator who crushed dissent, presided over the intimidation of millions of people and the murders of who knows how many.

The truth, we have been told, will set us free. But what if those people whose minds are bound in the chains of conspiracy theories, propaganda and lies, don't want to be free? What if they prefer to cling to their delusions?

The answer is that we—as journalists, academics and citizens—have to make sure that the truth remains available. As journalists and academics we have to continue reporting and researching and making our findings available through the media. As citizens we must keep demanding that accurate, reliable information is available to us.

We continue to do our part in this edition *of Pacific Journalism Review*.

Khairiah A. Rahman introduces our themed articles in the next section, which draws on the focus of the Asian Congress for Media and Communication (ACMC) conference hosted at Auckland University of Technology (AUT) in November 2021. They echo the concerns of all those who cherish freedom of the press and the truth. In what *Asia Pacific Report* editor **David Robie** describes as 'an age of growing hate, intolerance and disinformation', the need to hold the line against distortion and falsehood—what Robie calls 'a disinfodemic'—is even more vital.

This is echoed in '*Rappler*, Facebook, Duterte and the battle for truth and public trust', in which **Glenda M. Gloria** argues that without journalists who will tell it like it is, no matter the consequences, the future will continue to be one of alternate facts and manipulated opinions.

In 'Marcos, martial law and memory: The past is our future in the Philippines', **Sheila S. Coronel** investigates the way Bongbong Marcos tried to rewrite the history of his father's brutal reign and manipulated the media in order to win the Philippine presidency—and succeeded. Although press freedom is enshrined in the 1987 Constitution, **Rachel Khan's** study of the effect of outgoing President Rodrigo Duterte's government's hostility against media produces some disturbing findings.

From Indonesia, **Hermin Indah Wahyuni** and **Andi Awaluddin Fitrah** examine the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic as constructed by online news media outlets. They find that because the online media privileged the political context over health and the economy, they were able to play an optimal role in the crisis.

With a disinformation introduction by David Robie, our ***Frontline*** coverage analyses the siege of Parliament by a coalition of anti-vaxxers and right wing activists. As **Kate Hannah, Sanjana Hattotuwa** and **Kayli Taylor** demonstrate in 'The murmuration of information disorders: Aotearoa New

Zealand, mis- and disinformation ecologies and the Parliament Protest', the online barrage of misinformation and disinformation that supported and influenced the protests reflected not just global links, but also just how fractured the protests were.

Byron Clark argues in 'The NZ media and the occupation of Parliament' that the media must remain vigilant in the aftermath of the protests and investigate the disinformation networks behind the protests. Māori Television videographer **Rituraj Sapkota** reflects on what he describes as 'the unprecedented hate' directed at the media during the three week occupation in 'The NZ Parliament protest: What the cameras in the crowd witnessed'.

Our unthemed section leads off with 'Afghanistan, the Taliban and the liberation narrative: Why it is so vital to be telling our own stories'. Afghanistani broadcaster **Muzhgan Samarqandi** critically examines the reporting around the experience of New Zealand journalist Charlotte Bellis, who became the centre of news attention when she became pregnant and asked the Taliban for sanctuary.

Australian journalist and researcher **Linda Brady** presents a troubling report on conditions facing Queensland journalists in **'**Don't rock the boat': Pervasive precarity and industrial inertia among Queensland journalists'. Journalists are presented as largely divorced from union support, subject to unreasonable pressure from employers and with no seeming guarantee of employment.

In 'Chinese New Zealanders in Aotearoa: Media consumption and political engagement', Waikato University doctoral candidate **Zheng Jiancheng** reports on his research into the Chinese diasporic media in New Zealand.

In the ***Photoessay*** section, photojournalist **Todd Henry** looks at how kava consumption has spread through the Pacific and into the diasporic community in New Zealand. His 'Visual peregrinations in the realm of kava' also examines the way Pasifika women are carving their own space in kava ceremonies.

We follow this with ***Obituaries*** of two important figures in Fiji's university and media circles: Academic **Robbie Robertson** and *Fiji Sun* publisher and editor-in-chief **Peter Lomas**. Robertson wrote extensively about the coups that have plagued Fiji and was well regarded as an advocate of democracy in the Islands. Lomas, on the other hand, was strongly criticised for making the *Sun* a post-2006 military coup government mouthpiece.

We finish with our reviews section. As usual, we have cast our net wide, with volumes on commercial fishing in the Marshall Islands (*Our Ocean's Promise: From aspiration to inspiration: The Marshall Islands Fishing Story*), a beautifully produced collection of letters and recollections of the New Zealand Wars (*Voices from the New Zealand Wars. He Reo nō ngā pakanga o Aotearoa*), family history (*Wars Apart: From Cairo to Christchurch—WWII Letters of Love and Anguish*) and a new guide to Samoan oratory (*Lāuga: Understanding Samoan Oratory*).

Elsewhere, former *New Zealand Herald* editor-in-chief **Gavin Ellis** reviews veteran journalist **Jim Tucker's** memoirs, *Flair and Loathing on the Front Page*,

which charts his career as a prominent journalist and media educator.

Professor **Matthew Ricketson** of Deakin University, who is co-editor of the *Australian Journalism Review,* reviews *The Trial of Julian Assange: A Story of Persecution*. In his assessment of the way Assange has been treated since he provoked the fury of the United States government by revealing its dirty secrets from the Iraqi invasion, Ricketson argues that Assange has been persecuted to warn off any other journalists or researchers trying to uncover the truth about how badly Western countries behave,

Not all our books are new. In our ***Bookshelf*** section *PJR* editor **Philip Cass** talks about the delights to be found in second hand bookshops. With Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II celebrating her Platinum jubilee, he looks at a timely discovery, a record of her visit to the Pacific, Aoteoroa New Zealand and Australia in 1953.

As usual with *PJR,* our scope in this edition has been broad, our selection of articles eclectic and our aim, as always, has been to examine, to analyse and to critique the media and journalism in Asia and the Pacific.

ON the publication front, our independent strategy has been strengthened by the creation of the Asia Pacific Media Network|Te Koakoa Incorporated (APMN), a non-profit organisation. It held its first formal general meeting in July. After 28 years, first at the University of Papua New Guinea, then at the University of the South Pacific and finally at Auckland University of Technology, we hope APMN will make *Pacific Journalism Review* more sustainable and create new opportunities for academic and journalism freedom. We have received many messages of support, among them from Chris Nash, who pioneered the first doctoral programme in journalism at an Australian university, and Wendy Bacon, an investigative journalist and ***Frontline*** editor for *PJR*. They said: 'We are very proud and supportive of what *PJR* has achieved over the years and wish it a long and successful life into the future. *PJR* has always been a Pacific initiative, and we are happy to support its transition to a new organisational home in New Zealand.'

DR PHILIP CASS
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Change, adaptation and culture

Media communication in pandemic times

Commentary: Global lockdowns and border closures during the COVID-19 pandemic have meant that international conferences have taken on a virtual existence for more than two years. Uncertainties surrounding the pandemic and the enormity of its impact became a focal point of academic scrutiny for communication sciences and media research. Themes from the Asian Congress for Media and Communication Conference 2021 (ACMC2021) centred around change, adaptation and culture in pandemic times with 12 streams including democracy and disinformation, media influence and impact and climate change in the Asia-Pacific. This commentary presents an overview of the conference and introduces four of the presentations delivered at the ACMC2021; two keynotes and two paper presentations. The keynotes discussed information challenges such as media freedom, truth, hate rhetoric and climate change while the papers focused on practitioner perceptions and the role of a higher order in securing media freedom and fair representation.

Keywords: ACMC2021, climate change, hate rhetoric, infodemic, information control, Islamophobia, media freedom, media representations, New Zealand, terrorism, truth challenges

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Introduction

MEDIA and communication went into a spiral of the 'new normal' on a global scale when the COVID-19 pandemic caused massive death tolls, forcing governments to impose international border closures. Community transmission of the virus resulted in enforced physical distancing. With widely reduced human interaction, social messaging and media platforms saw a surge in usage and information frenzy with an 80 percent traffic increase on media sites and a 67 percent increase in in-home media consumption (Statista, 2020). With unrelenting COVID viral mutations and transmissions and international travel grounded in Aotearoa New Zealand, the Asian Congress for Media and Communication (ACMC) Conference, which was originally scheduled to be hosted at Auckland University of Technology (AUT) in 2020, was postponed to 2021. In the face of growing uncertainty, ACMC2021 was eventually held online

via the Whova conference app on November 25-27, hosted jointly by AUT's Pacific Media Centre and the ACMC.

The conference theme of Change, Adaptation and Culture: Media and Communication in Pandemic Times covered a broad range of topics about change and adaptation in a pandemic-impacted world. Papers explored the roles of media, government and society in shaping public perception, influencing opinions and ensuring ethical communication practices. Extended abstracts were accepted following a double-blind peer review process. Due to streaming issues in some regions, presentations were pre-recorded to circumvent live transmissions lagging. The scheduled recorded presentations were played during the eight panel sessions. This was followed by the question-and-answer session which was chaired by a moderator.

ACMC2021 was well attended with 130 participants from 10 countries. Overall, there was a strong Māori presence in the conference which gave online visitors the experience of a bicultural Aotearoa. Participants witnessed a recorded mihi presented by Dr Valance Smith from Te Ara Poutama, Faculty of Māori and Indigenous Development at AUT. The conference was officially opened by Professor Felix Tan, acting dean, Faculty of Design and Creative Technologies, who warmly greeted participants in Te Reo Māori in his welcome address. Associate Professor Azman Azwan Azmawati, president of the ACMC, also welcomed participants and expressed her thanks for the ACMC2021 partnership with AUT.

In place of a cultural show, which has a been a tradition for the host university of the ACMC conference, the virtual event featured a song that captured the sights and sounds of New Zealand. The song in Te Reo Māori by Maisey

Figure 1: The COVID reality: Some participants at the ACMC2021 conference.

Rika titled 'Tangaroa Whakamautai', showcased a tribute to Mother Earth and the Lord of the Sea. It was a fitting reminder of climate change issues and the United Nations Sustainability Goals. The visuals showed off New Zealand's lush bush and forest, the rough seas and the smouldering, volcanic landscape of Whakaari (White Island).

The second day of the conference continued with appreciation certificates to participants and a closing address by AUT and ACMC senior representatives, followed by a karakia:

> Look after one another as members of this fraternity
> —the Asian media and communication scholars and practitioners—
> May we grow in good health and understanding
> And treat each other well.
> May we remain authentic and firm in our work
> as we join together and collaborate
> in this mutually supportive role.

ACMC-themed papers

This article highlights four of the presentations delivered at the ACMC 2021 Conference which are published in this edition of *Pacific Journalism Review*; other papers are due to be published as conference proceedings by the *Asian Congress for Media and Communication Journal*. The two keynotes focused on the nature of media content while the two paper presentations analysed perceptions surrounding the media and the role of a higher influence. The paper on the shifting dynamics of Islamophobic media narratives follows this article on page 19 (Rahman, 2022).

Two other articles in this edition also addressed the ACMC2021 conference theme. Dr Sheila S Coronel, Professor at Toni Stabile Centre for Investigative Journalism, Columbia University in New York, wrote about the challenging times and experience as a journalist under martial law during Marcos' presidency. She recounted the myth-making of a great leader who in reality represented 'world-class plunder, torture, and murder—with no acknowledgment, no apology, no repentance, no attempt at restitution' (Coronel, 2022). Coronel celebrated how the press 'took down a dictator' and liberated the country but warned that the return of Marcos Jr to politics could trigger a repeat of history. She called on journalists to report truthfully and uphold what is right.

The second article looked at how online media in Indonesia constructed the reality of COVID-19. Professor Hermin Indah Wahyuni, the director of the Centre for Southeast Asian Social Studies (CESASS) at Universitas Gadjah Mada in Indonesia and the centre's researcher, Andi Awaluddin Fitrah, analysed eight most accessed online media websites for their context, message, and tone. They found that there was a tendency to emphasise the pandemic's political context over the

health and economic contexts. They argued that the media was unable to play an optimal role in representation of issues as more coverage was given to politicians compared to scientists (Wahyuni & Fitrah, 2022).

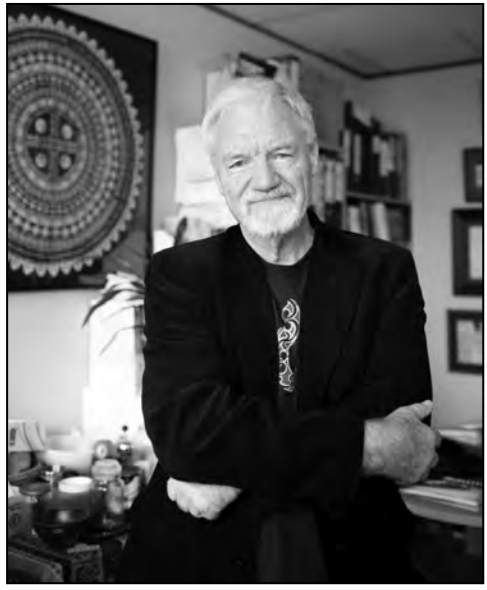

Figure 2: Founding director of the Pacific Media Centre (AUT), Professor David Robie, one of the keynote speakers at ACMC2021.

Journalism education 'truth' challenges in an age of growing hate, intolerance and disinformation

The first keynote was delivered by newly retired professor of journalism and founding director of the Pacific Media Centre at AUT, Professor David Robie. He identified three main issues: coping with the COVID-19 pandemic and health and social justice; an infodemic that has caused a crisis of communication with disinformation and truth challenges in a time of hatred and intolerance; and the disproportionate impact of the global climate emergency in the Asia-Pacific region (Robie, 2022).

Robie highlighted the work of some brave journalists who had persevered despite threats to their own safety, in the cause of truth-telling. He highlighted the work of Maria Ressa, Dmitry Muratov, Carl von Ossietsky and Max Stahl, and stressed the importance of truth in reporting and described their actions as a 'courageous, determined and relentless pursuit of "truth" and justice'.

Robie also addressed the problem of the 'disinfodemic' in pandemic times, where inaccurate and misleading information further fuelled uncertainties, caused growing scepticism and questioning of authoritative sources, which culminated in violent protests and attacks on health workers. He closed his keynote with some strategies for communicators and educators. He cited examples from his own experiences and those of other journalists who ventured into 'project journalism' in pursuit of truthful and meaningful stories. Robie's own strategies included a Pacific approach to maintain 'high standards of journalistic integrity and to foster multi-university collaboration across national boundaries' such as the Pacific Media Watch project in partnership with the University of the South Pacific.

Robie also highlighted how Scott Waide, former deputy news editor of EMTV News, Papua New Guinea's major television network, left his job to focus on telling stories of communities via various platforms, including his blog posts and social

media. In New Zealand, Robie, cited the 'Let's Talanoa' series by Dr Lesina Nakhid-Schuster and Rocky Lavea which shed light on health information. Robie advised communication schools to partner with free press and media taking action that 'made a difference'.

Figure 3: Glenda Gloria, executive editor of *Rappler* in Manila, Philippines, one of the keynote speakers at ACMC2021.

Holding the line—*Rappler*, Facebook, Duterte and the battle for truth and public trust

The second ACMC2021 keynote was delivered by Glenda Gloria, executive editor of *Rappler* in Manila, Philippines (Gloria, 2022). Gloria's media outlet is famous for its chief executive Maria Ressa becoming the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize co-laureate. The award signalled the important role that *Rappler* played in harnessing social media and calling out tech companies to account for their faulty algorithms that value profits over facts. Gloria outlined the dangers faced by journalism today, beginning with challenges to its very existence from repressive laws to death threats. She argued that both journalism and truth were under attack and uncertainty meant that sustainability had become out of reach.

Gloria recounted that when *Rappler* started a decade ago, the vision was 'to use social media for social change' and lamented that 10 years on, fakes and memes set alongside well researched news stories for social media prominence. She discussed how media freedom and journalism that were diminished under President Rodrigo Duterte's administration—through the silencing of opposing online voices—competed with the spreading of half-truths to create a culture of fear and imagined enemies and the cultivation of resentment against the media with derogatory terms such as 'presstitute'.

Despite this and the government's 11 investigations of *Rappler* and its staff, Gloria was hopeful that the crisis presented an opportunity to reaffirm the business ownership structure. She reflected that *Rappler* was the only journalist-owned and journalist-led media company in the country and there was merit in defending that space. However, three days before Duterte left office, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) ordered *Rappler* to close (*Rappler* ordered to shut down, 2022). *Rappler* vowed to contest the order.

Gloria acknowledged how community and technology had been anchors for *Rappler*, with community engagement showing shared values that required transparency and accountability in government. She said that innovation and

storytelling should be community-relevant and actionable to drive business in a meaningful way. With 74 percent of the total Philippines population using Facebook, Gloria acknowledged that the bigger threat against media freedom in her country was 'beyond Duterte'. It was the social media platforms where the work of journalists sits alongside propagandists, where news and fake news share the same space and level of exposure.

Rappler has partnered with Facebook (Meta) since 2016 in a fact-checking collaboration, while exposing their algorithms and policies. She argued that to regain public trust, journalism should regain its rightful space in the public sphere. This must address the issue of algorithms that only served readers information of the kind they had already accessed, including misleading information. She emphasised the value of journalists who fearlessly spoke truth to power, for without them, 'alternate facts' and manipulated opinions would dominate future media space.

Philippine journalists' perceptions on press freedom

The paper 'Philippine journalists' perceptions on press freedom: The impact of international media campaigns' was presented by Rachel Khan, professor of journalism, College of Mass Communication, University of the Philippines (Khan, 2022). Khan analysed 20 semi-structured interviews involving eight editors/news directors and 12 reporters; 11 of them females and nine males. Sixteen were from national media outlets and four were from the community press. In terms of media, two were online, nine were broadcast and nine were print media.

Using qualitative grounded theory, Khan coded the transcribed video-conferencing and online audio-only calls to identify categories and emerging themes that describe journalists' perceptions relating to media freedom in the Philippines. She identified five themes, namely, the chilling effect, red-tagging and harassment, limits to coverage, public support for a free press and global media interventions. The chilling effect concerned fears of government threats and the lack of job security while red-tagging and harassment had to do with personal experiences of harassment by government and trolls. Journalists reported receiving hate messages and threats on their social media pages.

The pandemic also limited the ability of journalists to cover stories. Limited media IDs and mediated press conferences online meant there were selective responses to questions and restricted press freedom. While journalists were grateful for personal messages of support from members of the public, the general view was that public support for a free press was not as strong in 1986, when dictator President Ferdinand Marcos was ousted and the press was highly regarded for playing a role in liberating the country. While there was unanimous approval for global media's support for the local free press, several journalists lamented the lack of foreign funding for media training and activism. Ironically, this source

of funding could cause the government to suspect foreign agenda and the media organisation's independence.

Khan highlighted a marked difference in perceived media freedom based on global support, with *Rappler* rating this highly compared to a journalist who had been red-tagged. She concluded that because foreign media and international coalitions had been selective in their open support, a local outlet that did not have access to such support might not perceive them as supportive. Khan concluded with the view of a media head of a Philippines organisation, De Jesus, who stated that foreign support would create division by giving aid to a single media outlet when it should instead be given to the whole industry.

From foreign influence and the role of an external higher order, the final presentation looks at the power of internal higher orders in society that can shift the narratives of Islamophobia in the media. Khairiah A Rahman, senior lecturer at AUT's School of Communication Studies and a member of the Federation of Islamic Organisations of New Zealand (FIANZ) think tank, presented the paper 'Shifting the dynamics in popular culture on Islamophobic media narratives'.

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Shifting the dynamics in popular culture on Islamophobic narratives

Abstract: Prior to the Christchurch mosque massacres on 15 March 2019, studies on New Zealand media showed that representations of Islam and Muslims were largely negative. Muslims were depicted as terror-prone and a threat to democracy and free speech. This popular media culture of negative framing is not unique to New Zealand as global media studies show a consistent and disproportionately high negative labelling of Islam and Muslims compared with adherents of other faiths. This article focuses on the role of government and media to shift the dynamics in popular culture on Islamophobic media narratives. A critical analysis of the actions of these powerful sectors at the Conference on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism (CTVE) in 2021 show an opportunity to address issues management and cultural competence that could change the way Muslims and Islam are perceived and represented in the media.

Keywords: ACMC2021, auto ethnography, hate rhetoric, institutionalised bias, Islamophobia, media representations, mixed paradigm, New Zealand, popular culture, terrorism, truth challenges

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FOLLOWING the Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) into the mosque attacks, some recommendations were outlined to counter terrorism and address hate rhetoric. My article critically analyses the actions of the government, and to some extent the media, at the Conference on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism (CTVE) in 2021. It takes a semi-autoethnographic and mixed paradigm approach using both Anglo-centric and Islamic theories of communication including notions of popular culture, media representations and cultural competence. Results show significant issues in institutionalised bias which interfered with genuine engagement between the government and the affected community. Recommendations include acknowledgment of issues by the government and media alongside cultural competence and capability training to address intercultural awareness and ethnocentric tendencies. More equitable and meaningful exchanges between media, government and the Muslim community could shift the dynamics in popular culture on Islamophobic media narratives.

Background—The Muslim identity and popular culture of media narratives

Islamophobia is defined as intense dislike for, fear of and prejudice against Islam or Muslims and Islamophobic media narratives refer to news stories that contain hate rhetoric, stereotypes and negative media representations of Islam and Muslims. Media studies show that Western media has a tendency to perpetuate negative stereotypes of Muslims, including publication of false narratives (Rahman & Emadi, 2018). While there are varied interpretations and categories of popular culture, media consistently present Islam and the Muslim identity as vile and monstrous (Pinfari, 2019). This presentation is dangerous and destructive when viewed through the lens of popular culture, defined as everyday experiences within a socio-cultural space where 'narratives, images and activities are popular and meaningful for society' (Fitch & Motion, 2018, p.1).

With meaning heavily embedded in a context of the pervasive and familiar, popular culture is often aligned with dominant ideologies and patriotic rhetoric in support of political agendas. These include the fake American propaganda discourse during conflicts and war initiatives to justify military invasion such as accusing Iraq of having 'weapons of mass destruction' and accusing Iraqi soldiers in Kuwait of killing premature infants, to justify the Gulf War (Oddo, 2018). Islamophobia in the Western media is common with considerable research documenting the media's increasingly harmful role in perpetuating a stereotype of Muslims as 'the other' and Islam as a violent faith (Eid, 2014; Morey et al, 2019; Neiwert et al, 2017; Rahman & Emadi, 2018).

The extent and frequency of framed negative messages about Islam and Muslims play out globally in all forms of media and these perceptions are reinforced on the psyche of a mass audience. There is a constant barrage of films, TV dramas and media stories depicting Muslims and Islam as problematic to democracy and freedom of expression. In popular media culture, the negative framing of Islam and Muslims has been correlated with hate-motivated attacks on innocent people. Research has shown that there is a direct correlation between spikes in attacks on Muslims and the publication of Islamophobic news stories (OnePath Network, 2017). While researching my study of social media news and its impact on the Muslim identity (2020), it was notable that despite improvements in media representations of Muslims in New Zealand after the Christchurch mosque massacres, Muslim women continued to be undervalued in media narratives. Islamophobia is manifested through hate rhetoric and violent attacks on Muslims, their properties, places of worship and on people perceived to be Muslims.

The human cost and harm to social cohesion makes it necessary to address Islamophobic media narratives and recommend a shift in the dynamics of this popular media culture. Overall, there was a marked difference between New Zealand media representations of Islam and Muslims before and after the Christchurch mosque attacks. There was 'a significant shift from the negative othering rhetoric

of international media to an inclusive national approach in the tone of the New Zealand press' (Rahman, 2020, p. 360). The media, government and community leaders were identified as key players in influencing this change—they constituted the dynamics that shifted popular media culture of Muslim representation.

Following the RCI into the mosque attacks, recommendations included finding ways to counter terrorism and address hate rhetoric and to promote social cohesion. The CTVE conference in June 2021 saw the participation of government, media and community leaders. Actions and reactions at the conference were analysed to determine whether there was authentic engagement or tokenism on the part of media and the government. Engagement literature (Johnson & Taylor, 2018) identifies empowerment and co-creation of meanings in relationships as authentic and genuine whereas tokenism shows an element of insincerity, with an appearance of inclusion without meaningful outcomes for the marginalised group. This article recognises the complex nature of government-public intercultural expectations and engagement. Understanding issues can result in more meaningful interactions and desired outcomes, such as improved understanding and more informed depictions of Islam and Muslims in media narratives.

Methodology and theoretical framework

A multi-layered, mixed paradigm approach was applied using the Islamic theory of *ta'will*, dialogic perspectives in Islam and autoethnography as a critical reflective process (Pitard, 2017; Rahman, 2016; Rahman & Emadi, 2018). Integration of Islamic concepts was a vital theoretical initiative as even media studies on Islam show a focus on Anglo-centric theories, promoting Western journalism and ways of understanding (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017).

Briefly, the theory of *ta'will* is concerned with seeking a truthful interpretation of meaning. It involves questioning perceptions which are based on fragmented sensory experiences that can present a limited view of understanding. As interpreter of meaning, the researcher should question the apparent and consider the hidden meanings. In Islamic understanding, dialogue and persuasion are not mutually exclusive. Both are ethical and used to create understanding. Persuasion in Islam is evidence-based and truthful, and not defined by winning the argument.

'Autoethnography' as a critical reflective process required assessing one's own cultural assumptions and beliefs when interpreting data (Pitard, 2017) and encouraged a level of objectivity. Partly autoethnographic, the materials used for this study included personal notes and records of community feedback at the counter terrorism conference. Situating the researcher in both subjective and objective roles gives this study a unique advantage. It presents a holistic view of the issues from the outside looking in as well as the inside looking out.

Findings

The Royal Commission of Inquiry into the terrorist attacks on Christchurch mosques

The RCI was established on 8 April 2019 and submitted its report on 26 November 2020. There were 1,168 submissions, 96 percent from individuals (including researchers and academics) and 4 percent from organisations. The submissions showed clear evidence of personal and observed discrimination and institutionalised bias. Under the summary of submissions (Chapter 5) titled 'What people told us about the national security system and countering-terrorism effort', there were 'repeated references to the activities of extreme right-wing individuals and groups that were being largely ignored by public sector agencies' (Royal Commission of Inquiry Summary of Submissions, 2020, p. 41). One academic noted that

> New Zealand authorities have focused their counter-terrorism resources almost exclusively on Muslim communities in New Zealand. New Zealand authorities appear to have been institutionally blind to terror threats from white nationalist and far right actors and groups, and threats to Muslim communities in particular. (Royal Commission of Inquiry Summary of Submissions, 2020, p. 42)

A community organisation asserted that 'If we are all checked [sic] and vetted equally [at the border], this tragedy could have been avoided' (Royal Commission of Inquiry Summary of Submissions, 2020, p. 35). Under the summary of submissions (Chapter 8) titled 'What people told us about diversity and creating a more inclusive New Zealand', nearly an entire page outlined the media's negative role in enabling hate rhetoric by tarnishing the image of Islam and Muslims through damaging narratives.

> We received some submissions noting concern that social institutions, in particular media and politics, show high levels of Islamophobia. These submitters were concerned about the speed at which social media can disseminate hate speech. We were told that studies on the media demonstrate the majority of stories on Muslim communities and Islam are negative and tend to focus on violence, extremism and terrorism, reinforcing the commonly-held

Figure 1: Programme cover of the New Zealand Hui on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism, 2021.

> view that Muslim communities and individuals are a threat. We were told that the media has condoned the vilification of Muslim communities by failing to provide a counter-narrative. This has resulted in the racism that Muslim individuals experience daily. (Royal Commission of Inquiry Summary of Submissions, 2020, p. 88)

Interestingly, in the final report, there was nothing about how this might be addressed under 'Recommendations to improve social cohesion and New Zealand's response to our increasingly diverse population' (Royal Commission of Inquiry Report, 2020). While the media calls government and political leaders to account, the process of calling media to account is left to marginalised communities. Yet, despite the media's absence in the RCI recommendations, the first New Zealand Conference on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism in June 2021 included a media panel on its first day to discuss the media's role in reporting Muslims. This indicates that there was tacit acknowledgement of the media's part in hate crimes against Muslims. However, the non-inclusion of the media under the RCI recommendations showed an unwillingness to acknowledge a notable part of the problem.

Positive changes require awareness of what needs to change. After the mosque attacks, institutionalised bias and systemic oppression continued to plague Muslims in academia and media (Rahman, 2020; Salahshour & Boamah, 2020). The RCI consulted diverse Muslim community groups and identified ways to address the issues raised by Muslims, including counter terrorism, support for social cohesion, Islamophobia in media narratives, institutionalised bias and hate rhetoric (FIANZ, 2020). There was a genuine effort to include Muslims in discussions where decisions would directly affect the community.

Conference on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism

The government called for the first Conference on 'Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism' (CTVE) titled 'He Whenua Taurikura (A Country at Peace)' in Māori, from 14-16 June 2021. The conference was a closed-door event in that delegates attended by invitation. Although it was live streamed for other interested participants, the streaming links were not well publicised. The conference programme included 'expert panellists' discussing topics on countering terrorism, embracing diversity, addressing the media's role in building cultural understanding, monitoring hate rhetoric on social media and countering terrorism in the digital world.

The conference also included a discussion of the strategic approach for countering terrorism by using the principles of partnership found in Aotearoa New Zealand's founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi and the standards of human rights. While there were many engagement and network opportunities, there were also pronounced instances of marginalisation and silencing of Muslim voices as well as a disregard for the officials on the ground during the terror crisis who could have offered useful perspectives.

1. Marginalisation of trauma victims of the terror attack

Ironically, survivors and trauma victims of the horrific event were marginalised at the conference. The hui was needed because of New Zealand's failure to protect this marginalised group and yet, instead of putting the victim stories at the start of the hui, the victims and their families were relegated to the second day before breakfast. It was disrespectful that victims were given 15 minutes to talk about 'What hate looks like now', followed by a half hour breakfast break and another 15 minutes talk-time after breakfast. This was vastly different from the hour plus of uninterrupted time given to panellists.

2. Silencing of Muslims

The inclusion of a non-specialist in the countering terrorism panel who clearly supported Zionism, a political ideology supporting colonial 'settler groups' who terrorise a marginalised people, was insulting, especially since trauma victims at the hui had lost loved ones because of a hate crime. This hui was not the platform for ideological agendas. The decision was culturally insensitive and tone deaf. For a conference spokesperson to then implicitly chide those who walked out by insisting they should have stayed to be respectful to different perspectives is to further silence a group of Muslims from expressing their disagreement peacefully.

3. Marginalisation of Christchurch's crisis-response leadership

Attendees at the conference highlighted that both the mayor of Christchurch, Lianne Dalziel, and the vice-chancellor of the University of Canterbury, Professor Cheryl de la Rey, were given speaking slots the evening before the conference and were not part of the discourse at the conference itself. Former Police Commissioner Mike Bush, who was at the centre of overseeing the police response and security following the attack, was not included to give his input at this event. He had been vocal about police bias in handling Māori and diversity groups and worked to improve public trust prior to leaving the service (Cheng & Leask, 2020). While criteria for selection of relevant speakers for the hui is unclear, decisions seemed to discount those who were part of Christchurch's crisis-response leadership, especially in internal security and city management.

4. Discounting the Muslim diversity perspective in preference for the dominant view

An invited historian categorised Māori actions in a clash involving Māori and the Crown as 'terrorism'. A Muslim Māori conference participant, who had objected to this with good reason was told that history had varied interpretations of events and that it was 'okay'. Yet, it cannot be 'okay' for a fully functioning democratic society if only the dominant culture view of history is taught at tertiary level while diversity voices continued to be suppressed and unsupported.

5. Lack of acknowledgment and issue management


KHAIRIAH A RAHMAN

Figure 2: The author, Khairiah A Rahman, with Mayor Lianne Dalziel of Christchurch in 2021.

There was only 15 percent of Muslim representation in the panels. During the panel session, the co-ordinator interrupted the Muslim panellist and her talk-time was given to a mainstream media commentator, whose task seemed to be promotion of local media and whose talk-time appeared to be noticeably longer. None of the other panellists' talk was disrupted. This was witnessed by diverse community groups who registered their complaints afterwards. There was also failure by media to acknowledge the effects of misrepresentation of Muslims and Islam. One mainstream media representative disagreed that the media caused harm despite strong evidence of false and questionable news content such as the one on jihadi brides in New Zealand (*Otago Daily Times*, 2016). Another had falsely alleged that Al Noor Mosque trained extremists (Matthewson, 2014). This was originally published in *The Press*, now managed by Stuff.co.nz. The claim was later redacted (Editorial: Passing connections do not radicalise a mosque, 2014) following a complaint from the secretary of FIANZ. Sadly, this was one of the mosques where peaceful worshippers were attacked and massacred on 15 March 2019. The terrorist responsible had targeted the mosque believing 'it had a history of extremism' (FIANZ, 2020, p. 29). Unless media acknowledge the heavy burden of responsible reporting and are more mindful in representation matters, they will have blood on their hands.

Conclusion

Genuine engagement

The famous crisis response to the Christchurch mosque attacks by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, had led the way for compassion and inclusiveness. The speed of her administration when dealing with gun laws, the prompt setting up of the RCI and the organisation of the CTVE conference were notable attempts by the government to address the difficult and complex issues of terrorism and what enables it. Overall, the RCI report (2020) was comprehensive in outlining

laws governing hate rhetoric, security profiling and social cohesion policies and programmes, including the work to be undertaken by the new Ministry of Ethnic Communities. There were also many relevant inputs by expert panellists on the nature of terrorism, hate talk, how diverse marginalised communities could be protected as well as discussions on the roles and responsibilities of traditional and social media. There were also opportunities at breaks and mealtimes to network with other participants and address communal issues.

Tokenism

There were clear elements of tokenism, where decisions relating to the conference lacked insight and sincerity, such as when victims of the mosque attacks and their families were given a tight and disrupted timeline to share their stories compared to the panellists. Additionally, victim stories were scheduled to run before the conference programme on the second day. Neither the mayor of Christchurch nor the police chief who were involved during the immediate response were invited as panellists at the conference.

While the topic of media controversy was mentioned in the executive summary of the RCI report and the submissions by individuals and groups, it was not addressed under recommendations. The media was simply discounted as a contributing factor to disinformation and Islamophobic-based hate attacks.

Issue management and cultural competence

The inclusion of a non-expert counter-terrorism commentator with a political agenda (Zionism) was questionable and insensitive. There was also condescension at times towards diversity views, feelings and opinion. For example, participants at the conference learned that terrorism history taught at higher levels of learning were based on the dominant culture's perspective. There appears to be a lack of issue awareness and cultural competence, the capability to use a range of cognitive, affective, and behavioural skills for appropriate communication with varying cultural groups.

There was no acknowledgement from the media of previous false representations. Nor was there acknowledgement or apology from the government of its lack of action on the reports of abuse raised by the the Islamic Women's Council of New Zealand (IWCNZ) between 2014 and 2018, prior to the Christchurch attack. IWCNZ had reported many incidents of abuse and discrimination to the Ministry of Social Development, the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service, Department of Internal Affairs in Hamilton and the State Services Commissioner but no action was taken. While there was no explicit admission of fault, both the government and media appear to recognise that changes in their respective sectors were needed to improve their treatment of Muslims.

Overall, there was evidence of deep-seated institutionalised bias, discrimination, lack of cultural competence and issue awareness. Clearly, dominant cultural

perspectives shape agendas. Politically motivated actions and culturally insensitive worldviews of those in decision-making positions precluded and oppressed Muslims, normalising their discrimination. Attendees at the Counter Terrorism Conference said how the government should work closely with Māori as host and mediator because Te Tiriti-led understanding was vital. Only those affected by historical violence, marginalisation and discrimination can appreciate the pain of Muslims whose identity has been so exclusively linked to violence and perpetuated by Islamophobic narratives in the media. The consequence of this has been the shaping of public opinion that informed policies which profiled Muslims negatively and exposed Muslims to hate rhetoric and attacks.

Acknowledging the issues would mean the start of true dialogue and genuine engagement. Government and media could do with cultural competence and capability training, to address intercultural awareness, ethnocentric tendencies and develop the practice of meaningful exchanges. These shared strategies could improve communication between Muslim communities and the public sectors of government and the media and ultimately cause a popular culture paradigm shift in the treatment of Muslims, the rhetoric surrounding them and the media narratives about Islam.

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Journalism education 'truth' challenges

An age of growing hate, intolerance and disinformation

Abstract: This keynote commentary at the 2021 Asian Congress for Media and Communication (ACMC) conference with the theme Change, Adaptation and Culture: Media and Communication in Pandemic Times is addressed through a discussion of three main issues: 1. The COVID-19 Pandemic and how it is being coped with; 2. A parallel Infodemic—a crisis of communication, and the surge of 'disinformation' and truth challenges in this 'age of hatred and intolerance'; and 3. The global Climate Emergency and the disproportionate impact this is having on the Asia-Pacific region. Finally the author concludes with an overview of some helpful strategies for communicators and educators from his perspective as a journalist and media academic with a mission.[1]

Keywords: ACMC2021, climate change, COVID-19, disinfodemic, disinformation, fake news, health journalism, investigative journalism, journalism, keynote, New Zealand, pandemic, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, public health, Timor-Leste

DAVID ROBIE
Editor, Asia Pacific Report

FIRST a tribute to two extraordinary and inspirational journalists who have shed light on dark places and given the rest of us hope. We recently celebrated when *Rappler* chief executive and media visionary Maria Ressa, along with Russian editor Dmitry Muratov, were named Nobel Peace Prize laureates for fighting courageously to 'safeguard freedom of expression' (The Nobel Prize, 2021). The Norwegian Nobel Committee described them as 'representatives of all journalists who stand up for this ideal in a world in which democracy and freedom of the press face increasingly adverse conditions'.

Julie Posetti, global director of research at the International Center for Journalists (ICJ), wrote about this achievement in glowing terms in *Foreign Policy*, describing the choice as a 'strategic act' that was a call to action for today's journalists (Posetti, 2021). She highlighted how it had been 85 years since a working journalist had won the Nobel Peace Prize.

Their predecessor was German investigative editor Carl von Ossietsky who was made a laureate in 1936 for his 'burning love for freedom of thought and

SCREENSHOT DAVID ROBIE

Figure 1: A tribute to journalists in relentless pursuit of the truth. Rappler's founding executive editor Maria Ressa (clockwise from top left), Russian editor Dmitry Muratov; Max Stahl of Timor-Leste; and German investigative editor Carl Von Ossietsky, who died in a Nazi concentration camp.

expression' for peace. Ironically, von Ossietsky was languishing in a Nazi concentration camp on a criminal libel charge at the time of the award. His alleged crime? He had exposed the secret rearmament of Germany in breach of the Treaty of Versailles.

For the record, four other Nobel Peace laureates had journalism connections. Élie Ducommun, a Swiss peace activist who worked as a journalist and translator and as founding director of the Bureau international de la paix, jointly won the 1902 award; Alfred Hermann Fried, an Austrian Jewish pacifist and journalist, was a co-winner of the 1911 award; Liu Xiabao, a Chinese writer, blogger and president of the independent China PEN Centre, won the 2010 award (he was jailed four times and died from cancer in 2017); and Tawakkol Karman, a Yemini women's rights activist and co-founder of the group Women Journalists Without Chains, won the 2011 award for her role in the Arab Spring uprisings.

The second tribute is to a courageous journalist and filmmaker who sadly died at the age of 66 from cancer in October 2021 after three decades of contributing to the development of his adopted country in Southeast Asia. Max Stahl of Timor-Leste was celebrated around the world for his shocking film footage of the 1991 Santa Cruz massacre in the capital Dili. The footage was smuggled out to news media and triggered a chain of events leading to Timorese independence (Santa Cruz massacre, n.d.).

Max bravely filmed the military shootings among the cemetery that killed more than 270 innocent and unarmed men, women and children during a peaceful protest. He hid the footage under a headstone and later, at night, he returned to the graveyard to recover the evidence.

British-born Max Stahl returned to East Timor in 1999 and filmed the referendum on the territory's future, the tumultuous events leading to independence in 2002 and Timor-Leste's evolution as an independent nation. His documentary was entitled *In Cold Blood: The Massacre of East Timor* (1992).

His more than 5000 hours of footage formed the hub of the Max Stahl Audiovisual Centre in Timor-Leste-CAMSTL archive, a unique collection of the turbulent history of the world's newest nation at the time. He was decorated with the Order of Timor-Leste, the country's highest honour for a foreigner, and was awarded Timorese citizenship by the National Parliament in 2019 (Robie, 2014a; Sampaio, 2021a, 2021b).

I had the honour and privilege of meeting him—quite by accident—in November 2013 when we crossed paths in Timor's second city of Baucau while I was travelling overland to a Fretilin political conference in a remote town. We travelled together. The following year, we invited him to be our keynote speaker at the 20th anniversary conference of *Pacific Journalism Review* research journal at Auckland University of Technology. He was inspiring and spoke about the painful path towards nationhood and his hopes for the eventual independence of West Papua.

The common thread linking all four of these media communicators—Maria Ressa, Dmitry Muratov, Carl von Ossietsky and Max Stahl—has been their courageous, determined and relentless pursuit of 'truth' and justice. 'The truth'—this supreme goal of journalists in holding power to account is hugely under threat by politicians, demagogues, and charlatans peddling fake news and disinformation.

The COVID-19 pandemic and how we are coping with it

In response to the escalating COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic in mid-February 2020, came a warning by the World Health Organisation Secretary-General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who declared that 'we're not just fighting an epidemic; we're fighting an infodemic'. He added that fake news 'spreads faster and more easily than this virus' (Robie & Krishnamurthi, p. 180; UN tackles 'infodemic', 2020).

In March 2020, in response to the escalating COVID-19 global crisis UN Secretary-General António Guterres identified the 'new enemy' as a 'growing surge of disinformation' (UN tackles 'infodemic', 2020). However, the term 'disinfodemic'—which I much prefer—was adopted by the authors of a policy brief (Posetti & Bontcheva, 2020) for UNESCO to describe the 'falsehoods fuelling the pandemic'.

This disinfodemic has been rapidly leading to upheavals in many countries—including in Aotearoa New Zealand in the weeks before the Asian Communication and Media Congress (ACMC) conference—with protests, civil disobedience and attacks on health officials, medical staff and frontline workers. Such assaults and violent confrontations have taken particular nasty turns in some of our neighbouring microstates of the South Pacific—notably Fiji and Papua New Guinea, the largest countries and biggest economies in the region. Even Australia and now Aotearoa New Zealand are not immune.

Papua New Guinea has a population of nine million with a vast economic disparity between the 84 percent rural population and squatter communities in the urban areas and the elites who benefit from the wealth of extraction industries. Fiji has a population of just under one million. Both countries have been epicentres for the virus in the Pacific.

In October 2021, authorities in PNG were forced to abandon mobile health clinics and teams of health workers carrying out COVID-19 vaccination and awareness programmes because of the increasingly risky attacks against them. The Chief Executive of the Morobe Provincial Health Authority, Dr Kipas Binga, whose area of responsibility includes Papua New Guinea's second-largest city Lae, declared that health services would only be offered in the urban clinics (Mark & Bauai, 2021). He also warned that they might have to stop some services altogether in communities where health staff were being repeatedly harassed. A St John Ambulance crew was attacked by anti-vaxxers who mistakenly believed unprotected ambulance staff were responsible for administering vaccinations (Gware, 2021; Kana, 2021).

As early as July 2021, Papua New Guinean journalists were warning about increasing tensions over misinformation about COVID vaccines and lack of clear communication from health authorities. Port Moresby's Rebecca Kuku, writing in *The Guardian*, cited Caritas aid representative Diane Unagi, saying:

> When messages are not communicated properly it increases the public health risk. People are avoiding being tested because they are worried that they will be locked up when they hear the word 'isolation'. (Kuku, 2021)

Other popular misconceptions, she says, include the belief that COVID-19 only affects people living in cities and towns, and not people living in rural areas. Eighty five percent of PNG's population live in villages and rural areas, some of them extremely remote (World Bank, 2015). However, University of Waikato anthropologist Fraser Macdonald points to an even more basic underlying factor. Millions of Papua New Guineans, he says, are not getting vaccinated against COVID because they are 'terrified of this particular vaccine' (Macdonald, 2021). He argues that this is 'not "vaccine hesitancy", but full-blown opposition, a genuine antipathy'. The key difference is cultural context.

SCREENSHOT DAVID ROBIE

Figure 2: Anti-vaxxer protesters at a rally in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, in July 2021, falsely claiming vaccinations in their country are mandatory.

Macdonald says that in PNG there is a fundamentally different view from the Western notion that 'vaccines are an obvious and intrinsic good'. Instead, for many Papua New Guineans, 'vaccines are a dangerous, unknown and sinister threat' (Macdonald, 2021). Some regard the vaccine as the 'work of Satan'. This is comparable with Papuan New Guineans a few years ago declaring barcodes the 'mark of the Devil', and more recently having the same view over the plan for a national ID identity initiative (About PNG Civil & Identity Registry, n.d.)

Recently, there was a concerted attempt by the PNG Council of Churches, including mainstream faiths such as the Catholic Church, to reduce the so-called 'sinister' beliefs about the vaccine held by many. Sir John Cardinal Ribat, for example, has been portrayed as a COVID-19 champion and he has been at the centre of a 'Love thy Neighbour' advertising campaign with a message of compassion and trust. In one campaign poster, he says: 'If God blesses people with good knowledge, good intent and the wisdom to make a vaccine to control COVID-19, it is a blessing from God for us all' (Sir John Cardinal Ribat, 2021).

Media consultant Bob Howarth, a former publisher of the *PNG Post-Courier* daily newspaper, expresses concern after watching mainstream media and social media coverage of—as he describes it—'the world's most un-vaxxed country, Papua New Guinea' (Howarth, B., personal correspondence, 1 November 2021). Much of his recent consultancy work has involved running Asia-Pacific fact-checking workshops, vital in this age of disinformation and conspiracy theories. He notes:

> The lack of fact-checking expertise both in official government authorities and media generally has become a huge issue. My observation comes from

> experience in February/March 2020 when I flew to Timor-Leste, supported by the UNDP and the very active Timor-Leste Press Council to help run the country's first fact-check training for 38 journalists and NGOs.
>
> Now Timor-Leste has one of the highest press freedom rankings in the region.
>
> *So why, asks Bob Howarth, hasn't the basics of fact-checking become part of journalism training in our universities and colleges?*
>
> My major co-trainer was local journalist Raymundos Oki, who completed weeks of fact-checker training funded by Google in Singapore. The course covered everything from reverse image searches, advanced internet checking to updated ethics and how to do background checks. Now the Timorese continue upgrading training for their thriving print, electronic and online media which is reflected in the fact that Timor-Leste has one of the highest press freedom rankings in the region.
>
> So why hasn't the basics of fact-checking become part of journalism training in our universities and colleges? Going back to Papua New Guinea the government education and communication strategy to handle the spreading COVID outbreak has become a tragic failure. No daily reporting or updates on numbers of cases and deaths plus obvious super-spreader events like protest marches against mandatory vaccination (which applies only to some businesses protecting staff and customers and some government agencies).

Many look enviously at smaller neighbours like Fiji with high vax rates and celebrating opening their border to the vital tourist industry and travel restrictions being eased. What is the short answer: Roll out fact-check training in PNG and other countries facing the same issue of fake news wildfires, says Howarth. 'To use an old cliche: It's not rocket science!' Howarth reported on some of his Timor-Leste experience in *Pacific Journalism Review* (Howarth, 2018).

The tragedy of COVID is very real, as ABC correspondent Natalie Whiting reported in a video story at the height of the crisis (Whiting, 2021). As cases surged across Papua New Guinea, with all major hospitals struggling to cope as the Delta variant spread rapidly, she described the high rates of hesitancy and fear about the vaccines. Local health workers were exhausted and many had been infected, and hospitals had been overcrowded.

'Patients are lying everywhere. The situation is dire,' she reported in the video story (https://youtu.be/fzjdSNOIqdw).

Not content with the disbanded protests in Port Moresby and Lae, the employee union of the National Capital District Commission took out a lawsuit against their employers, challenging the legality of the 'no jab, no job' policy imposed by NCDC under Section 48 of the Constitution *(Freedom of Employment).* Deputy Chief Justice Ambeng Kandakasi called for more details about vaccinated and unvaccinated NCDC employees from the NCDC Workers Association and adjourned the case until November 16 (Moi, 2021).

A parallel 'Disinfodemic'—a crisis of communication

While these developments were disturbing, especially in Papua New Guinea where the John Hopkins University covid-19 tracker (https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html) showed that less than 2 percent of the people were vaccinated against the virus and there were a grossly underreported 34,472 cases and 529 deaths, in New Zealand we were grappling with our own disinformation issues (Papua New Guinea Overview, 2021). Over the previous few weeks, thousands gathered in breach of COVID-19 restrictions and public health measures to protest against lockdowns and vaccination mandates. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern described these protests as 'obviously illegal' and 'morally wrong' (Gillespie & Breen, 2021).

However, as *The Conversation* commented in an analysis about the balancing act that Prime Minister Ardern needs to uphold freedoms protected by the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948*:

> Protesting is part of Aotearoa's identity. New Zealanders have protested against poverty, war, nuclear weapons, gender inequality and the loss of Māori land and customary rights. Several protests—including those against the 1981 Springbok [rugby] tour—have divided the nation. (Gillespie & Breen, 2021)

There is a major difference between Australian and New Zealand authorities in dealing with anti-COVID lockdown and vaccine protests. While in Australia, some COVID protests 'had gotten out of hand' and police suppressed them with rubber bullets, tear gas and pepper spray (Osborne, 2021), New Zealand police avoided suppressing the protests on the day. Instead they identified the organisers and quietly charged them later under public health violation regulations.

On 9 November 2021, in a Wellington anti-vaxxer protest march on the Beehive, New Zealand's symbol of democracy, there were scenes reminiscent of Donald Trump's supporters—albeit peaceful—in the lead up to the storming of the US Capitol in Washington on January 6. Writing in *Spinoff*, editor-at-large Toby Manhire commented on what he described as a 'new, ugly and dangerous' side to New Zealand. He wrote:

> The government and the media were variously decried on signs as Nazis, Communists, tyrants, terrorists, rapists and murderers (also: 'lying nerds'). From the crowd who walked from Civic Square to Parliament came slogans declaring, falsely, that ivermectin cures COVID, that the virus is a hoax, that a UN agenda conspiracy is out to get us all, that new Nuremberg trials were coming. 'Drain the swamp', blared one sign, in an exhortation that disappointingly amounted to an unimaginative parroting of Trump rather than a commentary on the capital city's plumbing issues. One gentleman

> in a Maga hat brandished a banner claiming that 9/11 and the Christchurch massacre were both 'inside jobs'. The solution: 'hang all involved'. There is, sadly, no vaccine for brain worms. (Manhire, 2021)

In a *New Zealand Herald* article, a plea highlighted what happens when misinformation infects someone with a commentary about a COVID-19 patient who had escaped from quarantine: 'The man's social media is filled with dodgy theories about vaccination and he apparently livestreamed his arrest' (Dirga, 2021). The author, Nik Dirga, who had been working as a fact-checking journalist for nearly two years for the Australian Associated Press (AAP), admitted in his column that he felt angry about how COVID misinformation was encouraging people to go down deep rabbit-holes and splitting up friendships and families about everything from lockdowns to vaccines. He wrote:

> One of the reasons people grab onto misinformation is that they're hurting. They want answers. The world has felt like it has become a terrifyingly random, scary place in the past two years. We all want a villain to blame. And the truth has become an increasingly flexible commodity in finding one. (Dirga, 2021)

A *Mediawatch* commentary by Hayden Donnell warned there was a danger that too much coverage on conspiracy theories and the activists spreading them meant that mainstream media had the potential to popularise the anti-vaxxers' misleading and distorted messages, as realised during the 2022 Parliament protest. [2]

> The reasons for these stories are clear. The unvaccinated are currently at the centre of our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our ability to return to some semblance of normality is directly tied to their willingness to go down to the local pharmacy to get a jab, and the government is introducing a series of increasingly stringent measures to compel them to literally take their medicine. The stories are popular, with strong opinions on both sides. (Donnell, 2021)

Coordinated social media campaigns and emailed threats or harassing phone calls to journalists or scientists are hardly new. Such campaigns have been prevalent in many jurisdictions, such as in the United States over topics like climate change, vaccination and the effects of gun violence (Gewin, 2018). However, a survey by *Nature* magazine has revealed that many researchers had reported that the abuse 'was a new and unwelcome phenomenon tied to the pandemic'. The *Nature* article pointed to some high profile cases, such as Dr Anthony Fauci, head of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, being assigned personal security guards after he and his family received death threats, and when Belgian virologist Marc Van Ranst and his family were

placed in a safe house to protect them from a threatening sniper. While the article acknowledged these well-documented examples were extreme, the survey indicated that two-thirds of researchers polled reported negative experiences as a result of their media appearances or their social media comments. And, disturbingly, 22 percent had received threats of physical or sexual violence.

As social media platforms have tightened their ability to shut down fake accounts and changed their policies to be more aggressive against fake content (such as Facebook via its Third-Party Fact-Checking Programme), 'agents of disinformation have learned that using genuine content—but reframed in new and misleading ways—is less likely to be picked up by AI systems'.

The complexities of misinformation are highlighted by a controversy over a cartoon by one of Australia's most beloved cartoonists, Michael Leunig, who was sacked by his newspaper for lampooning Victorian Premier Dan Andrews over his government's mandatory vaccination policies. It portrayed an anti-vaccine dissenter standing before a tank and syringe gun turret as a metaphor for the iconic and courageous Tank Man who defied a line of tanks during the Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing, China, in 1989 (Rodell, 2021).

As with most cartoons, this was satirical—at the low end of the misinformation scale—and Leunig had been the editorial page cartoonist at *The Age* newspaper since 1969. However, because of the sensitivity over 'vaccine hesitancy' and orchestrated protests against mandatory vaccination, he became 'cancelled', although he still draws cartoons for other publications in the stable. *Sky News* digital editor Jack Houghton was among a number of media people who expressed disquiet over his 'cancellation'. He lamented: 'Here is the worst thing about this entire saga: after decades and decades of service to a news organisation, the moment he doesn't toe the editorial line, he's ousted through a phone call' (Axing of Michael Leunig, 2021).

Research in New Zealand has shown that conspiracy theories about COVID-19 have 'dramatically escalated since Delta arrived' in the country in late August 2021. The Disinformation Project of the University of Auckland's Te Pūnaha Matatini has been monitoring misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 and the vaccine since February 2020 (https://www.tepunahamatatini.ac.nz/2021/11/09/mis-and-disinformation/). (See pages 138-161).

The project's report from 17 August to 5 November 2021 showed an unprecedented and violent 'trajectory of growth and spread that is increasing, widening, and deepening every week'. Much of the content which framed the COVID-19 response as a fight between the individual and the 'treacherous' state had been repackaged from US and Australia sources.

All 12 of the so-called 'Disinformation Dozen' who were exposed by the nonprofit research Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) for providing close to 73 percent of ALL disinformation on Facebook's anti-vaccination content are

in the United States. They are compromised by their business interests. (https://www.counterhate.com/disinformationdozen). They have been making money out of disinformation.

How do we best deal with this surge of global information pollution? A good starting point is the frameworks and analysis provided by First Draft director Claire Wardle. Along with Hossein Derakhshan, she produced a Council of Europe brief in 2017 entitled 'Information Disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policymaking' (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Although it predated the COVID-19 pandemic, it was dealing with the 'fake news' phenomena of the President Trump era.

First Draft provided a matrix for misinformation and disinformation that neatly applies to the theoretical and practical challenges related to mis-, dis- and mal-information—the three elements of information disorder. The matrix is split into two overlapping spheres, 'false' information, including both mis-information and dis-information, and 'intent to harm'.

In September 2020, Dr Wardle produced another report, 'Understanding Information Disorder', where she condemned the increasing 'weaponisation' of information and she condemned the use of the phrase 'fake news' as an 'unhelpful and increasingly dangerous phrase used to discredit and attack "professional journalism"' (Wardle, 2020).

> Most of this content isn't even fake; it's often genuine, used out of context and weaponised by people who know that falsehoods based on a kernel of truth are more likely to be believed and shared. And most of this can't be described as 'news'. It's good old-fashioned rumours, it's memes, it's manipulated videos, hyper-targeted 'dark ads' and old photos re-shared as new. (Wardle, 2020)

Disinformation, argues Wardle, is content that is 'intentionally false and designed to cause harm. It is motivated by three factors: to make money; to have political influence, either foreign or domestic; or to cause trouble for the sake of it'. When disinformation is shared, it is turned into *misinformation*. Misinformation is shared by people wanting to feel connected to their 'tribe'— 'whether that means members of the same political party, parents who don't vaccinate their children, activists concerned about climate change, or those who belong to a certain religion, race or ethnic group'. The third category is *malinformation.* The term describes genuine information that is shared with an intent to cause harm.

Dr Wardle has developed a typology with seven types of mis- information and disinformation ranging between low seriousness with satire or parody through to fabricated content and the high end of the scale.

> We are increasingly seeing the weaponisation of context and the use of genuine content—but content that is warped and reframed. As mentioned, anything with a kernel of truth is far more successful in terms of persuading and engaging people. (Wardle, 2020)

Climate Emergency, the Pacific and catastrophe

Along with the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the questions of our time is how to report the existential challenge of climate catastrophe—you notice how I am stressing the word 'catastrophe' rather than merely 'change'. That is because for the microstates of the Pacific it is already viewed as an impending catastrophe. Pacific Climate Warrior Brianna Freuan advocates for her people vastly better than I can express it. As she says, 'We are not drowning, we are fighting': https://youtu.be/9Y12ezfEZBA

Earlier in November 2021, we endured the underwhelming COP26 Climate Summit in Glasgow which was condemned as a 'failure' by the Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg, who branded the conference as a 'Global North greenwash festival' and said 'immediate and drastic' cuts to carbon emissions were needed. Other critics called it a 'betrayal'.

> The people in power can continue to live in their bubble filled with their fantasies, like eternal growth on a finite planet and technological solutions that will suddenly appear seemingly out of nowhere and will erase all of these crises just like that.

SCREENSHOT DAVID ROBIE

Figure 3: Tuvalu's Foreign Minister Simon Kofe stands knee-deep in the sea for his COP26 speech to draw attention to the Pacific's climate emergency, Glasgow, November 2021.

> All this while the world is literally burning, on fire, and while the people living on the front lines are still bearing the brunt of the climate crisis. (COP26: Greta Thunberg, 2021)

Ironically, the people most affected by climate change are the Pacific nations, yet only three of their leaders could actually be present because of COVID-19 lockdowns and protocols. Cook Islands Prime Minister Mark Brown, among those unable to be there in person, sent an appeal. He spoke bluntly about the need for dramatic change by the Global North, or Western countries, for climate financing after years of empty promises (Brown, 2021).

> After years of empty promises by major emitters, it's time to deliver on climate financing.
>
> The world is warming. The science is clear. Most large, developed countries need to take ambitious action to reduce their emissions in order not to impact us further.
>
> 'If they don't, there is dire consequence, and in turn a significant rise in adaptation cost to us, those that did not cause this problem.
>
> 'Some people call it paradise, but for me and thousands of Pacific people, the beautiful pristine Pacific Island region is simply home. It is our inheritance, a blessing from our forebears and ancestors.
>
> 'As custodians of these islands, we have a moral duty to protect it—for today and the unborn generations of our Pacific *anau*. (Brown, 2021)

Responses—a challenge to journalism schools

This sums up many of the problems facing the region. The challenge confronting many communication programmes and journalism schools located in universities or tertiary institutions is what to do about them, how to tackle the strain of an ever-changing health and science agenda, the deluge of disinformation and the more rapid than predicted escalation of climate catastrophe. One of the answers is greater specialisation and advanced programmes rather than just relying on generalist strategies and expecting graduates to fit neatly into already configured newsroom boxes. The more that universities can equip graduates with advanced problem-solving skills, the more adept they will be at developing advanced ways of reporting on the pandemic—and other likely pandemics of the future—contesting the merchants of disinformation and reporting on the climate crisis.

A report by the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development on balancing 'freedom of expression' with 'disinformation' on the internet has offered a useful framework for responses. It provided a typology of four categories (https://en.unesco.org/publications/balanceact)

1. *Identification:* Fact-checking and investigation

2. *Responses aimed at producers/distributors:* Such as law and policy.
3. *Production responses:* Editorial and community standards**.**
4. *Responses aimed at target audiences of disinformation campaigns: Such as empowerment*

Before I explore some specific examples of strategies, I would like to offer a context of my own trajectory. As a journalist, I have lived and worked in nine countries—mostly in developing nations in Africa and in the Asia-Pacific. This has shaped my world view as a journalist and academic—especially having worked as an editor with both a Western global news agency, Agence France-Presse, and Global South news services such as Gemini (Robie, 2016).

I have written several books on the politics and media of the region, many of them incorporating my professional experience (see Robie, 2014b, 2016; Robie & Marbrook, 2020). Also, I have developed several theories and models that I have explored in a series of papers and applied in my teaching, notably a *'talanoa' journalism'* model, a homegrown Pacific approach to practice and research (Robie, 2019). My emphasis has been on 'project journalism', creating high quality coverage of issues and challenging assignments on university platforms with high standards of journalistic integrity and to foster multi-university collaboration across national boundaries. This approach is explored in my book *Don't Spoil My Beautiful Face* about activism, media and politics in the Asia-Pacific region (Robie, 2014).

Over the years, we have collaborated with partners across Asia and the Pacific from China to Tahiti. Our strategies have included:

- a three-year climate change project, Bearing Witness (Robie & Marbrook, 2020);
- a Pacific Media Watch project, mostly in partnership with the University of the South Pacific (Robie, 2016);
- a weekly radio programme, Southern Cross, at 95bFM station at the University of Auckland (Robie & Krishnamurthi, 2020);
- a Climate and Covid project with Internews (Robie & Krishnamurthi, 2020); and
- a collaboration with the showcase platform *The Junction* established with the Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia (JERAA).

The Junction's mission is to:

- Publish high quality journalism by university students for wide audiences by aggregating content from students at university Journalism schools and by publishing original material.
- Achieve and maintain high standards of journalistic integrity and inquiry.
- Meet the dual aims of improving journalism pedagogy and serving the

SCREENSHOT DAVID ROBIE

Figure 4: A selection of David Robie's books on media and the Pacific: He highlights the methodology of 'talanoa journalism' as introduced by his 2014 book *Don't Spoil My Beautiful Face: Media, Mayhem and Human Rights in the Pacific*.

public through the publication of high quality content.

- Encourage new forms of storytelling through collaboration, networking and experimentation.
- Draw audiences back to the publications of participating journalism programs.
- Foster collegiality and cooperation among university journalism schools. (The Junction About, n.d.)

Finally, a tribute to all those Asia-Pacific media workers who are working hard against great odds in this pandemic and climate crisis era and who are making remarkable use of storytelling to try to make a difference for their people. Take Scott Waide, for example, just a few weeks ago he was the deputy news editor of Papua New Guinea's major television network, EMTV News. He resigned from his high profile job so that he could get closer to *grasruts* communities to tell their real stories and to get a better social justice deal for them. He uses a variety of platforms, articles on his Wordpress blog, videos on social media, his educator skills and his presence on the ground to know what is really happening. He says:

> We have to write our own narrative of positivity through the stories we tell and the stories we encourage our children to listen to. We have to pass on the wisdom of our ancestors to the generation of the future. We have to be the conduit for that change we want to see.

Among his recent narratives are his personal experience of nursing both of his ageing parents who suffered from COVID-19. A harrowing tale but one of great compassion was told by Scott while caring for his mother. Sadly she died from the virus a short time later.

Then there is the team in Papua New Guinea involved in the ABC's *'Sistas, Let's Talk'*—sharing health and survival knowledge with mothers and other young women. In Aotearoa New Zealand, there is the *'Let's Talanoa'* series with Dr Lesina Nakhid-Schuster and Rocky Lavea—30 second video clips sharing key helpful health information. These are the sorts of innovative initiatives that communication schools should be partnering with. Real media making a difference. And a free press in action.

Note

1. This full address presentation with visuals can be viewed on *Café Pacific* at YouTube at: https://youtu.be/9ehqVkSerpQ
2. These warnings by Nik Dirga, Hayden Donnell, Toby Manhire and others were later borne out by a 24-day siege of New Zealand's Parliament by more than 1000 anti-vaxxer, conspiracy theorist, alt-right and rightwing religious protesters, and a Donald Trump-aligned media outlet *Counterspin Media*, who claimed they were 'fighting for the freedom of all New Zealanders', between 6 February 2022 and 2 March 2022. As health and safety issues grew, the police took action, finally forcibly clearing the protesters from the parliamentary grounds and nearby streets in a day-long operation that resulted in clashes and the burning of a children's playground and tents by angry demonstrators. (2022 Wellington Protest, n.d.)

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Holding the line:
Rappler, Facebook, Duterte and the battle for truth and public trust

Commentary: *Rappler* is the only journalist-owned and journalist-led media company in the Philippines. In the aftermath of chief executive Maria Ressa's 2021 Nobel Peace Prize, this keynote address at the Asian Congress for Media and Communication (ACMC) outlines how the independent media group has harnessed social media and pressured Facebook and the tech giants that control the global information highway to do better and to give facts premium over profits. The address argues that the only way media can regain public trust in journalism is to regain their rightful space in the public sphere. This will not be able to be achieved in an environment where algorithms make value judgments for the public and where readers are served only information that they want or enjoy. Without journalists who will tell it like it is no matter the consequences, the future will continue to be one of alternate facts and manipulated opinions.

Keywords: ACMC2021, activism, algorithms, alternate facts, Arab Spring, authoritarianism, Facebook, Maria Ressa, media lawsuits, Nobel Peace Prize, Philippines, presstitute, Rappler, Rodrigo Duterte, social media, technology, truth to power

GLENDA GLORIA
Executive Editor, Rappler, Manila

A WARM hello from the 'Nobel Newsroom'. Ever since our CEO Maria Ressa was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize—the first Filipino Nobel laureate—some of us have started calling our office the Nobel newsroom. This immense pride that we feel isn't just because Maria is our CEO, it is that the prize went to two journalists who have faced the toughest challenges imposed by authoritarian states (The Nobel Peace Prize, 2021). More than that, the Nobel prize puts a global spotlight on the extraordinary dangers that we journalists face today.

You and I are no stranger to threats to media freedom—from repressive laws to libel suits to imprisonment to death threats. To many of us in the Global South, journalism has always been considered a dangerous profession long before media watchdogs started ranking countries around the world according to the freedoms enjoyed by their press. And yet, despite all that we have seen

RAPPLER

Figure 1: The founders of the Philippine news website *Rappler*, Glenda Gloria (from left), Lilibeth Frondoso, Chay Hofileña and co-winner of the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize Maria Ressa in the company's newsroom in Manila, Philippines.

and experienced, it's no exaggeration to say that this is the most challenging period for journalism. At stake today is our very existence, our relevance, and our ability to speak truth to power.

Not only are journalists under attack. Truth is under attack. Not only is the business model we grew up in under attack. It is either dying or dead, and the road to sustainability is more elusive than ever. Not only are we harassed and silenced for speaking truth to power. Power has consolidated itself using the same technology that once upon a time we thought would democratise access to information.

And this did not happen overnight. Instead, this came day by day, in painful increments of disruption, change, and emojis in between.

The best of times

The world used to be a better place. We established *Rappler* ten years ago with a core of a dozen journalists, artists, and technology specialists that came from two generations and various fields of work and discipline (Rappler's Founding Board, 2012; The Rappler Story, 2017) . The year 2012 was an opportune time to imagine, to risk, to recreate. The world was being disrupted by technology but it seemed to be disrupting for the greater good.

Democracy activists were still raving about the Arab Spring when social media broke the dam that sustained dictators. And Filipinos had just fallen in love with Facebook as their best connector with each other. In fact, our vision for *Rappler* then was to use social media for social change.

Fast forward to today, and we woke up one morning in a new world where our body of work is served on the public arena alongside the fakes and memes—and given equal importance. To be sure, the ground has been shaking in the last few years—triggered by technology, a mobile lifestyle, and the persistent yawning gap between the powerful and those in the margins.

What changed?

At *Rappler*, we felt the tremors months before the start of the campaign period for the 2016 presidential elections that Rodrigo Duterte would win. Aware that it was going to be the first social media-driven election, campaign teams resorted to building groups that relied on algorithms to spread campaign propaganda and an army of laptop warriors who are provided hate agendas every day (Etter, 2017).

We saw how the speed and spread of targeted distribution has changed the way people think and behave, how information is absorbed and who absorbs it, and how facts are manipulated to suit political ends. We saw how the disruption impacted on journalism, advertising and politics—shaking the foundation of these three.

In the Philippines under President Rodrigo Duterte, state power further constricted media freedom and diminished journalism in three tactics:

1. First was to create a climate of fear among citizens, not just journalists, by spreading half-truths and lies that create an alternate reality of imagined enemies.
2. Second was to kill online independent voices by consistently discrediting them and destroying their reputation through repetitive messages that falsely lump them with vested interests.
3. Third was to exploit resentment toward media around simple, unified messages: it is biased, it is corrupt, it is owned and run by oligarchs. Derogatory terms like the word 'presstitute', a play on the words 'press' and 'prostitute', have been purposely circulated within the platform for years by pro-Duterte administration social media influencers to vilify journalists and destroy public trust in news groups. In a report we published in June 2018, *Rappler* found at least 194 Facebook groups which used the word 'presstitute' in posts (Rappler Research Team, 2018). These groups had a total of 6.57 million members.

Today Facebook is the public sphere in the Philippines—a country where users spend twice as many hours on social media than the global average. No media network could claim as much reach or depth of influence in the daily lives of Filipinos. With 83 million Filipinos on Facebook every month (roughly 74 percent of the total population), Facebook remains the key attack vector vs journalists.

Real world impact

This has real world impact in the Philippines. Starting in 2018, the Duterte government and its satellites have filed at least 11 investigations and cases against *Rappler*, Maria Ressa, myself and other staffers (Johnson, 2018, Philippine court dismisses, 2021). We were threatened with closure. The presidential palace banned us from getting close to the President, and our reporters' access to key Cabinet secretaries and agencies was cut. To be a *Rappler* journalist is to earn the ire not only of the then President Duterte but the entire bureaucracy that he has controlled. It's been tough.

And then in 2020, at the height of the pandemic, Duterte's allies in Congress did not renew the franchise of ABS-CBN, the country's biggest radio and TV network and the only source of news in remote villages in the Philippines (Cepeda, 2020).

It didn't help that the lockdown already caused further decline in the use of traditional media. On the whole, according to the Reuters Institute report, use of television has slipped 5 points to 61 percent (Newman et al., 2020). The same report showed that online news consumption rose while social media as a source of news grew.

Why is this a concern? Because while most news groups are also active on social media, these digital spaces have also been used as platforms for launching the most virulent and relentless attacks against journalists and media organisations.

Moving forward

Is there hope? Three reasons to be hopeful despite everything:

1. Every crisis is an opportunity. In the last two years, we at *Rappler* managed to bounce back and continue holding power to account and exposing wrongdoing. Part of the reason is how our ownership structure was set up. *Rappler* is the only journalist-owned and journalist-led media company in the Philippines. We make decisions for the public interest even if it's bad for business. There is no businessman who would call us to kill this story or to offer a dialogue with the powers that be. The buck stopped with us. And we considered this ownership structure both as a privilege and a massive responsibility. For every attack hurled against us, we held on to the belief that backing down will not only weaken journalism but will also give the dictator victory on a silver platter. You yield an inch of your space to an authoritarian, and he will want more. At *Rappler,* we chose not to yield an inch; we did not compromise; we did not duck, we did not hide. That we have survived and continue to survive Duterte has been proof that guarding one's space—no matter how narrow—has its rewards.
2. Second reason to be hopeful is—for journalism to matter, the com-

munity must be a part of it. In our crisis years, our community stayed with us. We realised that we had a core base of audience that, while not massive, shared the same value that we believe in, which is the public's need for transparency and accountability on the part of those who lead and govern them. We tapped democracy partners in schools and universities, in the NGO community, in media and business. We held forums with them, joined protest rallies for press freedom and democracy, conducted briefings on the disinformation ecosystem and shared our studies on networked propaganda with them. We took time to explain to students and young professionals the interconnection between press freedom and democracy; that without truth tellers who will scrutinise government, those in government will be let loose to do whatever they want. At *Rappler*, we learned that when the going gets tough, hold the line, stick to your core, and have faith in your community of readers. *Rappler* after all has never been just about *journalism*. Our two other pillars are *community* and *technology*. In our worldview, the stories we write should be actionable by the communities we serve. And each innovation should not be just for the sake of innovation but to provide meaning and allow journalists to tell stories that move communities to act.

3. The third reason to be hopeful is that crisis challenges our mindsets. The attacks on *Rappler* scared away advertisers but also compelled us to diversify our revenue stream so that today, our revenues come not just from advertising but business research, grants, membership, programmatic ads, and special projects. We have not paywalled our site but we have content and activities exclusive to paying subscribers. Thankfully, we are now entering our third year of positive net income.

Beyond Duterte

But crisis management is just one part of the equation. We understood that the problem was more than Duterte, who has now been replaced by the ousted 1970s dictator's son 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr in the Philippines elections in May 2022, it was the environment where news is being pitted against fake news and where platforms would not distinguish the work of journalists from hired propagandists.

And so we led the pushback against Facebook by partnering with them as a fact-checking partner on one hand, and exposing the gaps in their algo and policies on the other. It is a strange relationship that both helps—and shames—Facebook. *Rappler's* pushback against Facebook, which we began in 2016 when nobody would dare listen, is now bearing fruit in terms of some key steps done by the tech giant, but we're a long way off from what we need.

We continue to pressure the tech giants that control our information highway to do better and to give facts premium over profits. Because the only way we could regain public trust in journalism is to regain our rightful space in the public sphere. We won't be able to achieve that in an environment where algorithms make value judgments for the public and where our readers are served only information that they want or enjoy.

Without journalists who will tell it like it is no matter the consequences, the future will continue to be one of alternate facts and manipulated opinions.

As we've experienced at *Rappler*, the battle to save journalism cannot be fought by journalists alone, and cannot be fought from our laptops alone. The battle for truth is a battle we must share—and fight—with other groups and citizens. Each time our freedoms are threatened, we should have no qualms engaging other democracy frontliners and participating in collective efforts to resist authoritarianism.

I believe we have the motivation and enough understanding of our world now to stop the tide of disinformation that fuels the spread of authoritarianism. In this environment, make no doubt: Journalism is activism.

Note

1. On 27 June 2022, three days before President Rodrigo Duterte stepped down as Head of State, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) again ordered the closure of Rappler. The Rappler editors vowed to fight on.

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Glenda Gloria co-founded Rappler *in 2011 and served as its managing editor until 2020 when she was named executive editor. She completed her journalism degree in 1985, a year before the end of the Marcos dictatorship. She has worked for the* Philippine Daily Inquirer, *The* Manila Times, *the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) and international news agencies. Between 2008 and 2011, she managed ANC, the ABS-CBN news channel. Among her authored books are* Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao, *with Marites Dañguilan-Vitug, a groundbreaking book about the conflict in Mindanao that won the National Book Award. She was a keynote speaker for the Asian Congress for Media and Communication (ACMC) conference hosted virtually by Auckland University of Technology (AUT), 25-27 November 2021.*
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Marcos, martial law and memory

The past in our future in the Philippines

Adrian E. Cristobal Lecture: I was a martial law baby. My generation grew up watching the unending spectacle of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos. Remember this was the 20th Century, long before YouTube and Netflix. I would have preferred to watch *Zombie Apocalypse* but that wasn't an option. There were only five TV channels and three newspapers, all owned by Marcos cronies. We didn't call it 'fake news' then but it was vintage 1970s propaganda—obvious and crude. I was in first grade when Marcos was first elected president. I studied across the street from Malacañang, in a school for girls run by the Sisters of the Holy Ghost. I remember that in the 1960s, the streets around the presidential mansion were busy, filled with traffic and commerce. On Thursdays, hundreds flocked to the church nearby to pray to St. Jude, patron of hopeless causes. I was barely in my teens when martial law was declared. Suddenly the streets were silenced. The palace gates were shuttered. Barbed wire barricades kept people away. The neighbourhood—the entire country—was hushed. Marcos was still president when I finished high school. He continued to issue decrees from his barricaded palace while I went off to college, graduated, and got my first job. My generation had reached adulthood with no memory of any other president.

Keywords: democracy, dictatorship, Ferdinand Marcos, human rights, investigative journalism, media freedom, Philippines, repression, torture

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I HAVE A VIVID memory of this evening 36 years ago, when I was standing outside the massive iron gates of Malacañang Palace. It was Day Four of the popular uprising against the Marcos regime. I was then a reporter for *The Manila Times*, a newspaper just reopened after having been shut down when Marcos declared martial law. Thousands of others were at the palace gates, too. We had all heard that the dictator had fled the country and wanted to see for ourselves whether that was true.

I remember being swept in a giant wave of people that crashed through the gates of the now abandoned palace. Everywhere were signs of a hurried retreat: documents tossed out of a window, emptied jewelry cases, bullets scattered on

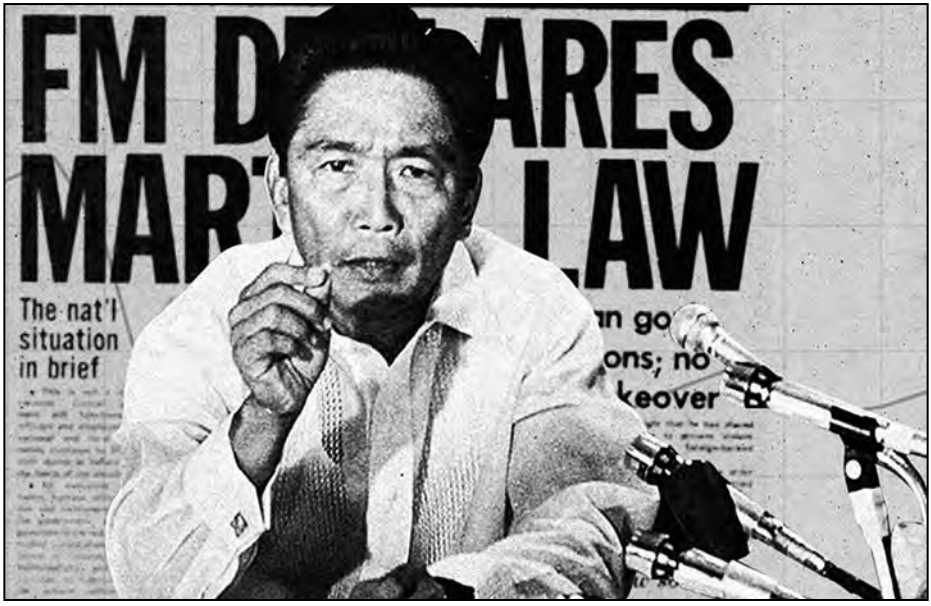

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Figure 1: Marcos was still president when I finished high school. He continued to issue decrees from his barricaded palace while I went off to college, graduated, and got my first job.

the floor. On the evening of 25 February 1986, I thought, like so many others, this is the end. The Marcoses had been expunged from our lives. Forever. How wrong we were.

Today I will talk about memory, about fathers, sons, and daughters. About the Marcos family and mine. And how, from one generation to the next, the word is passed.

I was a martial law baby. My generation grew up watching the unending spectacle of Ferdinand and Imelda. Remember this was the 20th Century, long before YouTube and Netflix. I would have preferred to watch *Zombie Apocalypse* but that wasn't an option. There were only five TV channels and three newspapers, all owned by Marcos cronies. We didn't call it 'fake news' then but it was vintage 1970s propaganda—obvious and crude.

I was in first grade when Marcos was first elected president. I studied across the street from Malacañang, in a school for girls run by the Sisters of the Holy Ghost. I remember that in the 1960s, the streets around the presidential mansion were busy, filled with traffic and commerce. On Thursdays, hundreds flocked to the church nearby to pray to St. Jude, patron of hopeless causes. I was barely in my teens when martial law was declared. Suddenly the streets were silenced. The palace gates were shuttered. Barbed wire barricades kept people away. The neighbourhood—the entire country—was hushed.

Marcos was still president when I finished high school. He continued to issue decrees from his barricaded palace while I went off to college, graduated, and got my first job. My generation had reached adulthood with no memory of any other president. Most of us didn't know that while we were growing up, thousands of dissenters had been tortured, killed, or jailed; that in faraway villages, the army had been let loose to pillage, rape, and murder; that the Marcoses were stealing our money and squirreling it in Swiss banks and Manhattan real estate.

We didn't read any of that in the news.

Instead, we were entertained. Muhammad Ali beat Joe Frazier in the 'Thrilla in Manila'." We had beauty pageants, the Bolshoi Ballet, Van Cliburn, international film festivals. We watched the Marcoses party with Brooke Shields and Cristina Ford. George Hamilton twirled Imelda to the tune of 'I Love the Nightlife'. Gina Lollobrigida photographed Ferdinand. Imee was being matched with Prince Charles. The Marcoses behaved like royalty so we were not surprised when, at yet another Marcos inaugural, the choir sang, 'And he shall reign forever and ever,' as the orchestra played Handel's *Hallelujah Chorus*. Marcos was the Messiah. How did we think we could get rid of him so easily?

Marcos myth-making

The truth is that the Marcos myth-making began long before I was born.(1) Not in my generation nor even my parents' generation. It began with my grandparents' generation. Today we blame social media disinformation and the textbooks that glorify or normalise Marcos and martial law. But the lies, evasions, elisions, exaggerations were sown almost a hundred years ago. If they are difficult to weed out now, it is because they are so deeply rooted.

My grandfather, Juan B. Coronel, was born in 1909. He was a school teacher in Sta. Cruz, Ilocos Sur. So was my grandmother, Victorina Pimentel. Marcos's parents, Mariano and Josefa, were more than 10 years older than my *lolo* and *lola*, and they, too, were school teachers. They were all among the first generation of Filipinos to be educated in English, in the public school system set up by the American colonial regime.

Mariano Marcos eventually left teaching and took up law and went into politics. In 1935, along with his friend and ally, Gregorio Aglipay, he ran in the first-ever election of the Philippine Commonwealth. Aglipay ran for president against Manuel Quezon; Marcos, as representative of Ilocos Norte in the National Assembly. Both of them lost, Mariano Marcos to his longtime rival, Julio Nalundasan.

Not long after the results were announced, Nalundasan's triumphant followers paraded around town in cars and trucks. One of them carried coffins with Aglipay's and Marcos's names on them. The revelers lingered in front of the Marcos home in Batac and shouted, 'Marcos is dead'. For the Marcoses,

this was, in the words of the Supreme Court, both 'provocative and humiliating' (Bonner, 1988, pp. 11-13; Killen (1986); *The People of the Philippines vs Mariano Marcos*, 1940).

We all know what happened next. The following night, Nalundasan was shot and killed. The principal suspect: Ferdinand Marcos, champion shooter of the ROTC rifle and pistol team. He had then just turned 18. A court in Laoag tried and found him guilty but he made an impassioned plea to be allowed to continue his law studies while in jail.

Ferdinand was bad-ass. Here was the valedictorian of his class, acting as his own lawyer and appealing the ruling while studying for the bar. He topped the 1939 bar exams, wrote an 830-page brief to the Supreme Court, and argued his case in an all-white sharkskin suit. He was acquitted and saved from the death penalty. By 1940, the wide publicity, given the case, had made him a legend.

If you were Ilocano like my grandparents, from a part of the country that was hard-scrabble poor; its people living on land wedged between mountain and sea, famous for their frugality and work ethic, and who valued family and honour, you would be cheering for him, too.

Up to now we don't know who killed Nalundasan. We do know that Jose P. Laurel, the Supreme Court justice who wrote the decision, was Marcos's law professor at UP. It was he who convinced the High Court to reverse the conviction by arguing NOT that Marcos was innocent but the country needed brilliant young people like him.(Bonner, 1988, Coronel, 1984). The justice's son, Jose III, was Marcos's classmate since high school and his Upsilon Sigma Phi fraternity mate. It was he who drove Ferdinand to Malacañang so President Quezon no less could congratulate him on his acquittal.

Jose Jr., Justice Laurel's son, would tell me all this when I interviewed him many years later (Coronel, 1984). Like so many other politicians of that era, he liked to tell the Marcos-Nalundasan story. It was legend. This was 1984, confetti was raining down on Ayala Avenue in the protests that followed the assassination of Senator Benigno Aquino. I was a neophyte reporter, and the old man was giving me a lesson on the longevity of political families. What I took from it was something else: their easy embrace of chicanery and political murder.

It was a lesson Ferdinand Marcos had learned at age 18.

No trust for historians

Marcos did not trust historians. 'History,' he wrote in his diary in 1971, 'should not be left to historians… Make history, and then write it.' (Rempel, 1993, p. xiv.). And that, he did.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Marcos was called, like so many young Filipinos, to defend Bataan. When Bataan fell, he joined the Death March and ended up a prisoner of the Japanese in Capas, Tarlac.

My grandfather also fought in Bataan and was in the Death March, but was so sick with malaria, he was left behind in the town of Hermosa. When he recovered, he joined the anti-Japanese resistance, was captured, and executed by the Japanese in his hometown in September 1944. He was only 35 years old.

For many years, my *lola* kept the documents that attested to her husband's service: This one said my *lolo*, Lieutenant Juan Coronel, a graduate of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) like Marcos, was sent with his unit to defend the coast of Bataan and surrendered to the Japanese at the foot of Mount Samat. It said he was spying for the guerrillas when he was captured. My father, the eldest son, then not quite 11, was the last in his family to see my *lolo* alive. He told us he went to the plaza just before his father was hanged, and there, my *lolo* entrusted him with the care of my *lola* and his two younger siblings.

Unlike Marcos, my *lolo* didn't get any medals nor were movies made about his war exploits. He also didn't have the protection of friends and family in the right places. Marcos did. According to US Army intelligence reports and a diary kept by a Japanese war interpreter, Mariano Marcos had welcomed the Japanese to Laoag and had spoken at a pro-Japanese rally in his hometown. Archival records show that Mariano Marcos was brutally executed by Filipino guerrillas in La Union in March 1945. Some accounts say that the guerrillas included members of the Nalundasan family (Hamilton-Patterson, 1988, p. 86-87; Montalvan, 2021). It could be that the older Marcos, like other nationalists, sympathised with the Japanese because they were at war against US colonialists. Whatever the case, some Marcos biographers speculate that Mariano's Japanese connections facilitated his son's release from prison in August 1941 (Hamilton-Patterson, 1988).

So what did Marcos really do during World War II? Like so many things about the Marcos family, the facts are hard to pin down. Marcos said he cheated death many times during the Battle of Bataan and afterwards, when he led a guerrilla unit, Ang Mga Maharlika, that fought heroically against the Japanese. In 1964, the American journalist Hartzell Spence published a glowing Marcos biography, *For Every Tear a Victory,* that detailed the young Ferdinand's cunning and battle heroics.

By the time he was campaigning for president in 1965, Marcos had 28 war medals, making him the most decorated Filipino war hero. But when the historian Alfred McCoy (1999) trawled US military archives in the 1980s, this is what they found: Marcos, unlike other decorated officers, got most of his medals by lobbying for them when he was already in public office, long after the war was over (Quezon III, 2016; University of the Philippines Third World Studies Center, n.d.). In 1963, according to McCoy (1999, pp. 169-170), then President Diosdado Macapagal, eager to get Congressman Marcos's support, awarded him ten medals in a single day (Gerth & Brinkley, 1986).

The records also showed that between 1945 and 1948, US Army investigators

had dismissed Marcos' claims: Maharlika never existed. Its exploits were exaggerated, fraudulent, and absurd. In 1950, the US Veterans Administration found that so-called Maharlika members were guilty of atrocities against civilians and were selling contraband to the Japanese (Gerth & Brinkley, 1986). Marcos himself, according to this document from the US national archives, was arrested by the US Army for soliciting funds under false pretences but was released at the intercession of General Manuel Roxas.

Medals at the heart of the Marcos Big Lie

Maharlika and the World War II medals are at the heart of the Marcos Big Lie, the foundation of the myth that helped elect him to Congress and later made him president. My father, Antonio Coronel, who was 32 at that time, was among the millions who voted for Marcos in 1965. He was Ilocano, after all, and a lawyer orphaned by the war. I could understand why Marcos, the dashing hero emerging unscathed and rising like a phoenix from the ashes of the Pacific War, would be so alluring for him and so many others.

My father was a *probinsiyano* (a villager/hillybilly?) who came to Manila to study. Higher education boomed in the postwar years. War reparations and aid revived the economy and provided jobs and education for a rising, urban professional class. In 1955, when my father graduated from law school, Marcos was in his second term in Congress. As the representative of Ilocos Norte, he was eloquent and feisty. The landed gentry who dominated the legislature considered him a promising upstart. He impressed those like my father who had no inherited wealth and saw their education and professional skills as their entree to society. In Marcos, they saw a reflection of their own ambitions. When he said he was destined to be president, they cheered him on.

When he ran for public office after the war, Marcos used his embellished war record to propagate the myth of his invincibility and inevitability. *Iginuhit sa Tadhana.* It is writ in the stars. This was the title of the 1965 movie, starring matinee idols Luis Gonzales and Gloria Romero, released before the election that made Marcos president. We'll return to this inevitability later.

Even as he introduced *Mad Men*-type advertising into a Philippine election campaign, Marcos also cultivated the legend that he had an *anting-anting,* a magic amulet. His commissioned biographer, Hartzell Spence, amplified this tall tale, writing that Marcos had inherited the amulet from Aglipay, the anti-Spanish and anti-American revolutionary who was a family friend and political ally. According to the legend, Aglipay himself made the incision to embed the *anting anting* on Marcos's back before the Battle of Bataan. This gave Ferdinand the power to appear and reappear and to restore the dead to life (Spence, 1964, pp. 3-4).

Marcos made Filipinos believe he was of mythic proportions. Through Aglipay, he was connected to the revolutionary and anticolonial tradition. At the same time, the fictional Maharlika linked Marcos to the noble datus of the

pre-colonial age. He was Malakas of the Filipino creation myth. After martial law, he commissioned nationalist historians to write *Tadhana,* a multivolume history that portrayed him and his New Society as the culmination of our nation's revolutionary and anticolonial aspirations (McCallus, 1989; McCoy, 1999, pp. 169-170). Marcos was the end of history. Until now, followers of the Marcos cult worship him in some villages in Ilocandia. They say he is the incarnation of Christ or of Jose Rizal and they have awaited his return.

Even those who didn't like Marcos imagined him to be more-than-ordinary, a Shakespearian figure. The Hamlet Marcos, agonising whether to declare martial law or to shoot at the protesters on Edsa in 1986. The Macbeth Marcos, egged on to murder by a power-hungry wife. The Richard III Marcos, who would kill and pillage everything that stood in his way.

If Marcos has such a hold on our collective imagination, it is in part because of the lies and half-truths he and his courtiers have told over and over again until they were accepted as fact. It is because they have sown so much confusion over the facts so that even now, truth seems elusive. The Marcoses have been at this since 1935. Let me say this again: The rewriting of history didn't begin after the fall.

This mythmaking is one reason why today, many believed we have been at the cusp of a second coming. The Second Marcos Coming. The Zombie Apocalypse.

Declaration of martial law

When Marcos declared martial law in 1972, he borrowed from the fascist playbook: Point to a threat and hype it so that people believe their safety and security are at stake and only the strongman stands in the way of perdition. As Marcos said in the martial law declaration, only he can 'save the Republic and reform society'.

When he was elected president in 2016, Rodrigo Duterte, a Marcos fan, would adopt the same fiery and messianic tone. Both men saw themselves as saviours. They believed the country needed a strong leader and disciplined people. They were willing to jail, torture, and kill to save society from unruly and dangerous elements. Even good citizens must be watched, and if necessary, gagged and muzzled. The slogan of the martial law years was "*Sa ikauunlad ng bayan, disiplina ang kailangan."* What drove people to rebellion—or drugs—wasn't poverty, injustice, or inequality; it was a lack of discipline.

Here is one example of what that discipline meant. Those among you who are older than 50 will remember, as I do, the days when Imelda Marcos fenced off large parts of the city to hide Manila's squalor. Even before martial law, many of Manila's poorest residents had been protesting against Marcos's infrastructure and 'beautification'' projects for demolishing their homes and destroying their communities.

Trinidad Herrera was one of the most effective and eloquent urban poor organisers. She was known internationally and had even met with both Marcos and the World Bank, the funder of government projects. When the Pope visited Tondo in 1970, she spoke on her community's behalf.

In April 1977, just before the Marcoses were slated to host a big UN conference, Herrera went missing. After more than a week of searching, her lawyer, former Senator Soc Rodrigo, found her at a detention cell at the Military Intelligence and Security Group. In a letter he sent to top officials, he described what had been done to her:

> She was ordered to remove all her clothes until she was completely naked; then she was made to attach and wind, by herself, around her left nipple, the end of one of two electrode wires. While electric shock was being applied on her nipple, one of the torturers was holding the other electrode in front of her vagina—uttering threats that if she still would not 'cooperate', he would attach [the] wire to her vagina. (Pedroso, 2014)

I never met Trinidad Herrera, but I have a vague memory of briefly meeting the two lieutenants, Eduardo Matillano and Prudencio Regis, who she said tortured her. Their lawyer was my father, Antonio Coronel, who often met his clients over breakfast at the family table.

Few torturers then or since have been brought to trial. But the case got wide publicity in the US, where Congress was debating whether to slash military aid to the Philippines because of human rights violations. The military was forced to bring Matillano and Regis to a court martial. My father defended them and they were acquitted (Wideman, 1977). Years later, he would also defend Marcos's chief-of-staff, Fabian Ver, when he was tried for the assassination of Senator Aquino, and, after the fall, Imelda Marcos, who was being sued for the family's legendary ill-gotten wealth.

I had frequent arguments with my father about his choice of clients. His answer always was: Even the guilty have the right to a proper defence. He was a criminal defence lawyer, he reminded me. His job was to defend criminals. He was called in AFTER a crime had been committed, unlike corporate lawyers, he said cheekily, who are consulted BEFORE the crime.

He was a charming rascal, my father. He could argue his way out of anything. He teased me about my objections to his clients but not to the shoes and dresses his lawyer's fees bought me. He also told me that Marcos had asked him to rein in his journalist daughter. He supposedly said something like, I can do that if you can restrain Imee. Being my father's daughter gave me some protection. Did it also give me the courage to do the kind of reporting I did, more courage than I actually had?

My father was not a Marcos loyalist. He wasn't blind to the excesses. But like a lot of smart men of his generation, he was drawn to Marcos, like moths to a flame. Adrian Cristobal, after whom this lecture is named, was a renowned literary figure before becoming Marcos's speechwriter. He brought other writers into the Marcos fold. Blas Ople, ex-socialist, ex-journalist, was among the smartest and most self-aware of all the president's men. He told me, not long before the fall, when there was fierce in-fighting in the Malacañang snakepit—Marcos is like a banyan tree that keeps everything under its shade, so nothing grows underneath it. And yet, he, too, couldn't leave the shade.

Smart as they were, these men could not resist the allure of power, the money and privileges that came with it, and the giddiness of basking in the sovereign's glow. Marcos knew how to flatter their egos. His ambition, his virility, charm, and wit, his ease with power were irresistible to a lot of men—and women, too. The appeal of the strongman, of fearsome and unaccountable power, is nearly universal.

The Yale philosophy professor Jason Stanley, whose parents fled Nazi Europe, wrote, 'Fascism is not a new threat, but rather a permanent temptation.' To fight it, he said, we must resist normalisation. Here I quote from his book, *How Fascism Works:* 'What normalisation does is to transform the morally extraordinary into the ordinary. It makes us able to tolerate what was once intolerable by making it seem as if this is the way things have always been' (Stanley, 2020, p. 190).

This brings us to Ferdinand Marcos Jr., whose platform, if he has one, is the normalisation of Marcos. Like his father in 1935, he is seeking to redeem the family honour and avenge his family's fall. Like his father, he is erasing and rewriting history. He is also propagating the myth of his electoral invincibility and the inevitability of his presidency.

Failed to hold the family to account

Those seeking to explain why another Marcos may become president say it is because we have failed to hold the family to account. We did not de-Marcosify the country. We sent the Marcoses to exile and then welcomed them back. De La Salle political scientist Julio Teehankee faults the political elites who helped restore the Marcoses and their allies to power through elections. He blames the weak party system that allowed for the 'authoritarian contamination' of our political life (Teehankee, 2021).

Sociologist Jayeel Cornelio of the Ateneo says the Marcoses are masters at selling fantasy and the promise of restoring greatness (Rivas, 2022). Others attribute Junior's stickiness simply to money, machine, and social media. They credit his image makers for marketing Junior as the pale, bland, harmless version of his father. Acceptable even to the pearl-clutching Cory matrons. Just as *pinakbet* (sauteed vegetable dish in shrimp sauce) without *bagnet* (crispy pork belly) is acceptable to vegans.

Some put the onus on the opposition for being disunited, underfunded, and weak. Others despair about Marcos nostalgia and magical thinking—the promise of a shower of Yamashita or Tallano gold at the end of the election. Many, especially among the educated, say it's because uneducated voters cannot see through the fog of disinformation. The hyper-educated point to world-historical forces—the erosion of democracy globally, the distrust of liberal elites, and the growing inequality that drive citizens to the autocrats' embrace.

All these explanations have the ring of truth, but they also have something else in common: They paint an unflattering picture of us and our fellow citizens. It's as if we are all passive receptacles of Marcos propaganda or social media manipulation. We've either been conned or seduced by the Marcoses. Or we're pawns of a history not of our own making. By telling you about my family's story, I may have succumbed to this, too. Guilty of the narrative that exonerates the Marcoses by saying all of us are at fault, we were all complicit. Or blameless because history is to blame (Rosenbaum, 1995). The fault IS in our stars.

But resisting normalisation means resisting disempowering narratives. It means not being content with the consolation offered by explanation. While agonising over these thoughts, I had a dream that I was desperately trying to write on a piece of ruled paper but there was no ink coming out of my pen. I was frantic, but the harder I tried, the more I failed. Either the pen wouldn't write or the paper would be too damp to write on.

You can interpret this dream however you want. To me, it was a nightmare of disempowerment, the sense that wherever I go, I cannot escape history, I cannot flee from Marcos. Even here in New York.

I walk down Fifth Avenue past Tiffany's and I think not of Audrey Hepburn having breakfast there but of Imelda Marcos shutting it down so she could shop undisturbed for HER jewelry with OUR money. Farther south, just beside St. Patrick's Cathedral, is Olympia Towers, where Imelda had a seven-bedroom condominium on the 43rd Floor (Drogin, 1986). Severina Rivera, a Fil-Am lawyer assigned to hunt for Marcos assets, told me she found paintings of old masters hidden under the beds there. One of them, by the French artist Fontin-Latour, was auctioned in 1987 for $400,000 (Trott, 1987).

At night, if you are in a tall building with a view, Manhattan glitters like a box of jewels, irresistible to Imelda. In the 1980s, she bought four buildings here, including this jewel near Central Park, with its copper pinnacle that lights up at night.

Some years ago, I sat in a Manhattan courtroom to watch the trial of Vilma Bautista, Imelda's personal secretary. In the 1980s, Bautista kept meticulous records of Imelda's shopping and the millions of dollars withdrawn from the Philippine National Bank in New York to fund her sprees. By the time I saw her, Bautista was a frail, broken woman who shuffled to the courtroom, always

dressed in black. The court said she had taken four Impressionist paintings from Imelda's town house, sold Monet's 'Water-Lily Pond' for $32 million, and lied about it on her taxes (McKinley Jr, 2014). In 2017, when she was 78, she started a six-year jail sentence. That same year, Imelda turned 88. Two years later she would celebrate her 90th birthday at a roaring party with 2,500 people at a sports stadium (Hundreds Get Food Poisoning at Imelda Marcos's 90th Birthday Party, 2017). And yes, hundreds of partygoers got food poisoning.

All this fuels my fevered nightmares. Marcos is a hungry ghost. He torments our dreams, lays claim to our memories, and feeds on our hopes. It's going to be okay, I hear the ghost saying. The second coming will not be a murderous tyrant. Just a cotton-candy confection spun by PR consultants and TikTok influencers. My son is not Macbeth. He's only Pinoy (relating to the Philippines or the Filipinos) Big Brother.

You will be in La-La Land, a country without memory, without justice, without accountability. Only the endless loop of one family, the soundtrack provided by Imelda.

It is time to hush this ghost. A Marcos return is inevitable only if we believe it to be. If we surrender our power and agency. If we accept explanation instead of action.

I have nothing personal against Ferdinand Jr. He is only a year older than me. I don't resent the fact that when he was 22, he was made governor of Ilocos Norte, while I was freelancing and trying to get a staff job in a newspaper. My father did write a letter introducing me to one of his editor friends. The editor didn't seem impressed by either him or me; I never got a response.

I am sleepless because of what the Marcoses represent—world-class plunder, torture, and murder—with no acknowledgment, no apology, no repentance, no attempt at restitution. Not even taxes paid on inherited stolen wealth. And yet, here they are, performing civility and restraint, telling us to chill.

On this night 36 years ago, I stood outside the massive iron gates of Malacañang Palace. In the months and weeks before that night, the most erudite observers were telling us there was no way Marcos would go away. But in 1986, we proved them wrong. Filipinos asserted their agency against the weight of power and the forces of history.

So today, wherever we are, we must remember this: We took down a dictator. Sure, we botched it afterwards but that doesn't change the fact that we ousted a tyrant. 1986 was an end even if not The End. It was a time of astonishment and possibility. We had a sense that history was being made and we had a hand in its making.

Make history, Marcos wrote in his diary in 1971, and then, write it. We made history and we can do so again. And this time, we should make sure WE write it. We should make sure we RIGHT it.

Note

1. Since this address was delivered, Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr, the dictator's son, and Sara Duterte, the outgoing president's daughter, won the presidency and vice-presidency, respectively in the election on 9 May 2022, becoming the first presidential and vice-presidential candidates to be elected by a majority since 1986, and the first presidential ticket to win together since 2004. This marked the return of the Marcos family to power for the first time since the People Power Revolution.

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Philippine journalists' perceptions on press freedom

The impact of international media campaigns

Abstract: Legally, press freedom in the Philippines is protected by the 1987 Constitution. However, media laws in the country, especially those referring to freedom of the expression and the press, tend to be inconsistent and volatile. In fact, the country continues to be low ranking in the Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index. In response to attacks on press freedom, international media organisations have stepped up to defend and support the Philippine press. Drawing from data gathered through 20 semi-structured indepth interviews with Filipino journalists, this study sought to examine the effect of the government hostility against media on journalists' perception of press freedom and their attitude towards interventions from international media organisations and coalitions. More specifically, it looks at the impact (or lack thereof) of global media coalitions and foreign media organisations in the country. Findings show that local media are appreciative of the support given by international media organisations in promoting media freedom in the country. However, journalists also noted that when only one segment of the media is targeted, it can lead to divisiveness among local media practitioners.

Keywords: ABS-CBN, ACMC, freedom of expression, Global Media Freedom Coalition, grounded theory, Maria Ressa, media development, media freedom, media law, media predators, Nobel Peace Prize, Philippines, press freedom, *Rappler,* Reporters Without Borders, Rodrigo Duterte, trolls

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Introduction

IN 2021, the issue of media freedom took the world stage when the Nobel Peace Prize was presented to two journalists: one from the North and another from the South. As announced on their website, the coveted Norwegian Nobel Peace Prize was awarded in 2021 to Philippine journalist Maria Ressa and

Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov, for their 'efforts to safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace' (The Nobel Peace Prize, n.d.)

Maria Ressa is the beleaguered CEO and founder of *Rappler*, a Philippine online news portal, which is currently facing numerous legal battles aimed at shutting the media institution and jailing its head (Talambong, 2021). While, Ressa's story was highlighted on the world stage, it is not unique in a country where press freedom has remained volatile throughout its short history as a democratic nation as evinced by the country's dismal ranking in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) Press Freedom Index (Reporters Sans Frontier, 2022).

The Philippines ranked 147th out of 180 (rank 1 being the freest) in 2022, a long drop from the rank of 90th when RSF first came out with its ranking system 21 years earlier (Reporters Without Borders, 2022; 2001). Moreover, outgoing Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte was profiled among the international media organisation's gallery of predators, i.e. those who have declared themselves to be 'at war' with media (Reporters Sans Frontiers, 2021a). An infamy not previously given to a Philippine head of state since the ranking began in 2001.

Meanwhile, several international media organisations and coalitions have expressed support for Philippine media through statements, global campaigns and project funding (ICFJ 2020, IFJ 2021).

This study hopes to contribute to the field on journalistic role performance by examining how journalists are affected by their perceptions of media freedom. The study of journalistic role performance is a concept initiated by Mellado (2014) to aid the examination of the interplay between the structure, agency, culture and political economy of the media. The approach allows researchers to observe journalistic ideals vis-à-vis factors affecting news production. As Mellado et al. (2014, 2017) point out, the independence of journalists can affect their professional roles and performance. The scholars note, 'Without autonomy, however, and with increasing forms of self-censorship, the roles that journalists may consider as important cannot be translated into an actual journalistic performance; hence, journalism eventually does not serve the purpose it deeply wants to fulfill in society' (Mellado & Hellmueller, 2017, p. 2).

Balod and Hameleers (2019, p. 2) noted that the Philippine media operated in a 'libertarian paradigm and liberal democracy', wherein journalists tended to operate as societal watchdogs, who monitor the use or abuse of power on behalf of the citizens. On the other hand, Tandoc (2017) found that Philippine journalism was influenced by external forces such as their audiences, new technology, and institutions such as the government. Given the growing threats to media freedom, the study sought to examine the effect of the government hostility against media on journalists' perception of media freedom, how this hinders the performance of their perceived roles and to what extent do interventions from international media development partners and media freedom coalitions help their performance.

CNN PHILIPPINES

Figure 1: President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines was included by the Paris-based media freedom watchdog Reporters Without Borders in its 2021 'press freedom predators' list.

The state of media freedom in the Philippines

By law, the Philippines can be considered as having the freest press in Southeast Asia. Patterned after the First Amendment of the US Constitution, Article III, Section 4 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution states: 'No law shall be passed abridging the freedom of speech, of expression, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and petition the government for redress of grievances.' The Philippines also has a Shield Law, i.e. *Republic Act 53* that protects a journalist from revealing his sources and most recently, a free dom of information law for the Executive branch, through Executive Order 2 (EO2), which was issued by President Rodrigo Duterte in his first 100 days in office in 2016.

While the Philippine government operates its own television and radio station as well as a news agency, the majority of the media companies in Philippines are privately owned. Unlike other nations in Southeast Asia, there are no licensing, registration or membership requirements for media organisations and media practitioners in the Philippines. For broadcast networks, the power of the National Telecommunications Commission is limited to the allocation of frequencies to TV and radio stations, and do not extend to supervision over content. Although, to avail of these frequencies, broadcast companies need to be given a franchise by Congress, which by law is good for 25 years and would need to be renewed by another legislative action. On the other hand, print publications and online media companies need only to register as business enterprises.

While the Constitutional provision and freedom of information laws theoretically safeguard free speech and freedom of the press, recent action accompanied

by a blatantly hostile attitude of the current government towards the media has caused a significant erosion of press freedom. Libel, which has always been used as a threat to media in past regimes, has remained a criminal offence instead of a civil one under the 82-year-old Article 353 of the *Revised Penal Code* of the Philippines. Since the late 1980s, Philippine media organisations have been pushing for the decriminalisation of libel (Pinlac, 2012).

The United Nations Human Rights Committee had called the Philippine government's attention to what it deemed were excessive libel laws in 2011 and again in 2020 (Pinlac 2012; Butuyan, 2020). The international body noted that Philippine libel laws violated the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), of which the country is a signatory (Butuyan, 2020). Under the Duterte government, however, this law was further enhanced under *Republic Act 4363*, which amended the *Revised Penal Code* to include not only the author, but also the editor and publisher in the offence; while, *Republic Act 10175* or the *Cybercrime Prevention Act*, elevates this to include online libel (Robie & Abcede, 2015).

Meanwhile, the touted EO2 was made inoperable during the pandemic (Ilagan, 2020); while the Duterte Administration supported the passage of *Republic Act 11479* or the Anti-Terror Law, which includes a provision that criminalises incitement to commit terrorism 'by mean of speeches, proclamations, writings, emblems, banners or other representations tending to the same end', in vague terms. Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) senior Southeast Asia representative Shawn Crispin noted, 'The legislation as written is a direct threat to journalists and should be rejected.'

However, the latest (as of this writing) State of Media Freedom Report of the Manila-based Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) noted that from June 2016 to April 2021 (i.e. during the Duterte Administration) there had been a record 223 attacks on the media. The CMFR report enumerates the attacks as follows: 19 journalists killed and eight attempted killings; 37 cases of libel; 77 instances of intimidation, of which 20 cases were online harassment and 15 were threats via SMS; 13 cases of physical assault and five of verbal abuse; 12 occurrences of cyberattacks; 12 arrests; three incidences of destruction of equipment; three bomb threats; three strafing incidents; three corporate legal suits; three accusations of fake news and three other cybercrimes; and 12 cases of being barred from coverage (CMFR, 2021). Some of the more significant attacks are as follows:

Killings

The spate of media killings since 1986 has contributed greatly to the country's low world press freedom ranking. During the Duterte Administration (2016-2022), the CMFR reported 19 journalists killed in the line of duty. All were male, 13 worked in radio, five in print media and one online. Nine of them were from Mindanao, seven from Luzon and three from the Visayas. None of them

worked in Metro Manila (CMFR, 2021). These numbers are included in the death toll of 88 journalists killed in the Philippines between 1992-present, all of them done with impunity (CPJ, 2022).

Intimidation and harassment

According to the Freedom for Media Freedom for All (FMFA) coalition(2020), intimidation was carried out in a variety of ways including the use of social media trolls. Trolling was 'weaponised', said the FMFA, to attack both the political opposition and journalists, among others. The coalition also observed that 'the most prominent of the Duterte propagandists were featured on podcasts by the Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) and later received appointments in government' (Freedom for Media Freedom for All, 2020).

Another popular form of harassment and intimidation by the current government is the so-called 'red-tagging or red-baiting' of journalists. Red-tagging has been defined as 'the act of labelling, branding, naming and accusing individuals and/ or organisations of being left-leaning, subversives, communists or terrorists (used as) a strategy...by State agents, particularly law enforcement agencies and the military, against those perceived to be "threats" or "enemies of the State"' (Pingel, 2014).

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has recorded multiple incidences of red-tagging of Philippine journalists. In a January 2021 report, the IFJ noted that two prominent Philippine journalists, including the Singapore bureau chief of Agence France-Press was red-tagged in a Facebook post of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (IFJ, 2021). While the post has been taken down, IFJ noted that red-tagging 'undermine[s] and endanger[s] media organisations and journalists perceived as being critical of the Philippines' Duterte government' (IFJ, 2021).

Several arrests of red-tagged female journalists were made in 2019 and 2020. These were Frenchie Mae Cumpio of Tacloban-based Eastern Vista; Paola Espiritu, the Ilocos correspondent of *Northern Dispatch*; and, Lady Ann Salem of *Manila Today*. Of the three women, Cumpio remains in jail.

President Duterte also forced two media organisations to remove their reporters, who had critical reports against him, from the Presidential Palace press corps (Elemia, 2020). He has also consistently verbally abused journalists and media institutions (CMFR, 2021). In several speeches in 2017, including his State of the Nation Address, Duterte called *The New York Times* 'hypocrites' and threatened to have the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* and *ABS-CBN* closed because of their negative coverage of his government's 'war on drugs', which he claimed were false reports (*Interaksyon*, 2017; Daguno-Bersamina, 2017).

Related, a DDOS (cyber) attack on two alternative media websites were traced to the Philippine Military. Despite denials by Army officials, the Computer

Emergency Response Team of the Department of Information and Communication Technology (DICT) were the ones who confirmed that the Internet Protocol of the cyberattack was that of the military (CMFR, 2021).

The case of Rappler

Because of the critical stance of *Rappler* against the current administration, its CEO and founder, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Ressa, has suffered several forms of harassment and false accusations from the government and Duterte cronies (Buan, 2019, Ratcliffe 2020). Among them are tax evasion; an attempted closure by the Security and Exchange Commission due to its financial structure; several libel suits and the news outlet's ouster from the Presidential Press Corps (Buan, 2019)

Ressa noted that the string of cases against her and *Rappler* began shortly after President Duterte denounced the media outlet during his State of the Nation Address in July 2017. He claimed that *Rappler* was 'fully owned by Americans', implying that they were violating the Constitutional prohibition against foreign ownership in media establishments (Ranada, 2017).

As of August 2021, Maria Ressa as CEO of *Rappler* had seven active cases filed in court against her and the company's other directors and staff. These included:

- An ongoing appeal process at the Court of Appeals for the June 2020 conviction of Ressa and former *Rappler* staff Reynaldo Santos, Jr. for cyberlibel.
- An ongoing case at the Court of Appeals against the Securities and Exchange Commission's revocation of *Rappler*'s licence to operate.
- Four consolidated tax evasion cases against Ressa and Rappler Holdings Corporation at the Court of Appeals also on the basis of SEC's closure charges.
- Another tax evasion case pending at the Pasig Regional Trial Court (Buan, 2019, Ratcliffe, 2020).

The case of ABS-CBN

At the height of the pandemic, in March 2020, Congress denied the franchise renewal of ABS-CBN, the country's broadcast network with the farthest reach. Various reports note that the Congressional committee in charge of franchises is composed of members who are allied to Philippine President Duterte (Gutierrez, 2020; BBC, 2020). The non-renewal of the franchise forced the network to go off the air when its 25-year franchise expired on 4 May 2020.

The franchise law for broadcast in the Philippines dates back to the Commonwealth era, i.e. when the Philippines was still considered a colony of the United States or what is also known as the American Insular government (AIG) era. *AIG Act No. 3846,* or the *Radio Control Act*, which became effective in 1931 and later amended during the Administration of President Diosdado Macapagal

in 1963, requires broadcasting networks to apply for a congressional franchise to operate television and radio stations for up to 25 years. ABS-CBN is one of the oldest networks in the country and was first given a franchise in October 1953. This was renewed in 1995 under the *Republic Act 7966*, which allowed them to operate until 4 May 2020. The closure of the ABS-CBN network resulted in the layoff of some 11,000 media workers (Rey, 2020).

It is not the first time that the network was shutdown. The studios of ABS-CBN were raided right after the declaration of martial law in 1972 and the network was forcibly closed.

International media campaigns

In July 2020, three prominent international media development partners—the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) —banded together to launch a campaign in support of *Rappler* founder, journalist Maria Ressa, who at the time was facing libel charges for a story that appeared in their online news site. Dubbed the #HoldTheLine campaign, the three organisations formed a steering committee that called upon media institutions around the globe to express support for Ressa and the independent media under attack in the Philippines (ICFJ, 2020). The campaign garnered some 60 founding signatories from around the globe, including prominent organisations such as Article 19; DART Asia-Pacific; Amnesty International and the Association for International Broadcasting.

In the same month, the Global Media Freedom Coalition (GMFC), which is 'a partnership of countries working together to advocate media freedom', issued a statement of concern regarding growing restrictions on Philippine journalists, focusing on Ressa. Founded in 2019, the GMFC is a coalition of 52 nation-states that are committed to press freedom. The Philippines, despite its Constitutional protection for press freedom, is not a member.

The case of the *Rappler* founder had been one of the highlighted examples of attacks against the media during the GMFC campaign's launch in July 2019, primarily because then-UK Special Envoy for Media Freedom Amal Clooney had taken on the role of Ressa's legal counsel (Clooney, 2020).

Myers et al. (2022) noted that apart from acting as a coalition, member states of the coalition also run media freedom interventions in the Philippines. For example, the United Kingdom media freedom activities in the Philippines include not only public fora and small grants to selected media not-for-profit organisations but also includes diplomatic dialogue with government officials (Myers et al., 2022, p. 67). Similarly, Canada, has the longest running intervention for local media via their support for the Jaime V. Ongpin Journalism Awards run by the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility through their McLuhan Fellowship Fund. They also give small grants for supporting media-related seminars

and workshops for journalists and/or journalism schools.

Meanwhile, the US Agency for International Development through the international media organisation Internews is currently supporting a five-year media development programme that includes several initiatives to bolster media freedom. Among their projects are a Fact-check Incubator, i.e. upgrading the fact-checking skills of journalists in selected media outlets and an academic study of popular Philippine social media platforms.

On the other hand, only the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) showed support for an August 2020 campaign to reopen ABS-CBN after its closure (IFJ, 2021).

Methodology

This study attempts to ground the study results on actual perceptions of Filipino journalists on media freedom and the role of foreign organisations. It is based on 20 semi-structured interviews conducted in mixed Filipino and English via video-conferencing or online audio-only calls, which were recorded and then transcribed. Respondents were targeted to include at least two respondents from widely circulating newspapers and online news media, popular broadcast networks and established community media. The initial target was 22 interviewees; but, one broadcast network disallowed the researcher from interviewing anyone from their newsroom. To provide anonymity, journalists interviewed were tagged via an assigned number and were referred as such in the study. The respondents' demographics are as follows:

- By position: eight editors/news directors and 12 reporters;
- By gender: 11 female and nine male
- By media outlet scope: 16 from national media outlets and four from the community press
- By medium: two online, nine broadcast, nine print

In seeking a research methodology that would provide an ontological and epistemological fit to the study and since it relies on an inductive approach, the researcher explored the use of the grounded theory framework of Corbin and Strauss (1990, 1998). Using the qualitative approach of Strauss and Corbin (1990), the researcher applied open coding, axial coding and selective coding in interpreting the data. Under this methodology, open coding is done by breaking up the textual data into parts, thus enabling the researcher to compare and contrast their answers in the in-depth interviews and allow a more open-minded interpretation of the data. This is followed by axial coding, wherein the researcher attempted to draw connections between codes and lastly, selective coding, wherein the researcher selected one central category that could connect the codes in the analysis. Finally, the researcher identified these overarching concepts into three major themes as seen in Table 1.

Journalists were asked to define media freedom in the Philippines and then rate it on a scale of 1-10 (10 being the freest). Then, they were grouped into three sets, those who rated it from 8-10 were labeled high, 5-7 were in the medium range and 1-4 in the low range. This was compared and contrasted to what they perceived were the barriers to a free press and to their perception of support coming from foreign media organisations and/or international bodies such as the Media Freedom Coalition.

Consistent with the Philippine constitutional provision on press freedom (Art. III of the Philippine Constitution 1987) and the liberal reputation of journalism in the Philippines (Myers et al., 2021; Balod et al., 2020; Meinardus, 2006) the perspective of the journalists interviewed—regardless of political leanings of their media outlet—was that media freedom is the ability to collect information and publish or broadcast that information without undue interference from authorities (Table 2). Journalist 9, a broadcast journalist, elaborated, 'media freedom is when you can speak the truth without fear of retaliation'.

This perspective informed their general perception that the Philippines still enjoyed the protection of the Constitutional mandate on press freedom; while, at the same time, respondents agreed that the various attacks on the media have created a 'climate of fear' or 'chilling effect' among the journalists. The

Table1: Perceptions of media freedom in the Philippines

Perceived level of media freedom	*Perceived or experienced hindrances to media freedom*	*Perceived Impact of Foreign Media organisations*
High level (Score of 8-10)	• chilling effect/ self-censorship • limits in coverage from govt agencies • harassment by trolls	• actual or felt support from international bodies/ media organisations
Medium level (Score of 5-7)	• chilling effect/ self-censorship • limits in coverage from govt agencies • harassment by trolls • limits from media owners	• support not felt but has knowledge that support—either moral or financial—for local media had been given
Low level (Score of 1-4)	• chilling effect/ self-censorship • limits in coverage from govt agencies • personal experiences of harassment, especially red-tagging	• support not felt and/or perceived lack of impact in support from inter-national bodies/media organisations

Note: The perception of media freedom and variables affecting this perception, such as support coming from foreign media organisations and/or international bodies.

Table 2: Philippine journalists' perceptions of media freedom	
Perceived level of media freedom	*How respondents rated media freedom*
High level (Score of 8-10)	2
Medium level (Score of 5-7)	14
Low level (Score of 1-4)	4

researcher noted that the journalists' perception on media freedom in the country was largely based on the perceived level of fear or chilling effect. Based on the abovementioned table, the journalists interviewed can be grouped as such:

Chilling effect

Journalist 11 pointed out, 'We sometimes hear the President [Duterte] himself make pronouncements against media and, of course, we all know that what the President says will also affect the way others in government act.'

This was echoed by Journalist 7, who noted that one limitation of freedom is the discrimination of government offices on certain media entities, such as banning *Rappler* from its coverage of the Office of the President.

Similarly, Journalist 1 said, 'the antagonism from the political leadership is felt by the [media] owners, that is the businessmen, especially in capital intensive media. So, they are extremely careful not to antagonize the political leadership.'

Journalist 12, who works for a media company that is owned by a known pro-Administration businessman said, 'despite your idealism—in reality—it depends upon the vested interest of your company or the media entity that you belong to. So, if you want to stay in your job, then you will have to cater to the limits imposed by the bosses.'

The majority of the interviewees attributed the 'chilling effect' to its effect on their employers and indirectly to themselves as a threat to job security. Several respondents pointed out that their caution stems more from pressure from the media owners that do not want their media outlet shutdown as in the case of ABS-CBN.

One of the reporters noted that the chilling effect has led to self-censorship. 'Yes, they [the government] can say we're still allowed to write what we want to write, to publish what we want to say; but, actually it is not true. Actually, many colleagues say that the chilling effect is in the newsrooms, i.e. reporters would think twice about the story angle or if the administration might be angered and retaliate,' he said in Filipino, adding, 'even the editors would change the angle or maybe the editors simply will not use my story.'

Red-tagging and harassment

Journalist 8 had a first-hand experience of being red-tagged by a so-called government consultant, who claims to be a former Communist Party of the Philippines-National People Army officer. He said, 'I've written many stories about people who were "red-tagged" who were eventually killed. So, it was disturbing for me and scary also that the stories that I write before about these people are happening to me directly.'

Journalist 12 agrees and points out that fear is greater among the community press. 'If a colleague had been killed, there is fear that you could be next or you will be more cautious so that you will not be next,' she said.

Three respondents said they had personally experienced being harassed by government and/or private entities such as trolls. Journalist 1 revealed that he has received a lot of hate messages on his social media pages. He said, 'I hate to say this, but there has been a push back from the public as influenced by the political leadership. You can feel the pushback, especially on social media, for me is very real and not trolls. A lot of it is honest push back, although, in a large way driven by disinformation and manipulation.'

Journalist 7 comments, 'I do not think I've seen it since the Marcos era, that the State is attacking the owners of newspapers, During the Erap [President Joseph Estrada] administration, government harassed media through advertising boycotts and libel suits. But this one really strikes at business, first *Rappler* and then ABS-CBN. They use legal means. Plus, the environment of killings and harassment, especially in the provinces. It is the overall context of the media environments that makes press freedom elusive right now.'

Limits to coverage

Respondents agreed that the pandemic had only served to worsen media freedom. In both a national media company and a community-based one, journalists and staff lost their jobs due to forced retrenchment as their company sought to cut loses due to a huge drop in advertising revenue. Journalist 5 admitted that they had to let go of 30 percent of their editorial workforce, leaving the rest of them with more work without any pay adjustments.

The issuance of Media IDs to only a select number of reporters during the lockdown also prevented journalists from going out of their homes to report the news. 'We were limited to attending press conferences via Zoom,' noted Journalist 9. This was concurred by other respondents. Journalist 10 added, 'because of the pandemic there are restrictions which also hamper media freedom in the sense that some of the press conferences are moderated. So, you're not free to ask questions and/or follow up questions. Sometimes, you're just asked to submit questions and they have the option of choosing which questions to answer and you cannot ask the follow-up questions.'

Public support for a free press

With regard to public support for a free press, most respondents agreed that it was not the same level of support as in 1986, right after the ousting of dictator President Ferdinand Marcos following the peaceful EDSA Revolt. Journalist 7 points out, 'this generation does not remember the Filipino press in 1986 that helped liberate the country. It is not so much as a lack of support but more of a lack of appreciation and even a lack of knowledge of the role of media.'

Journalist 1 added, 'unfortunately, you also have a large segment of the public that echo that antagonism that their leaders have for mainstream media.' Similarly, Journalist 11 laments, 'it seems like being a journalist these days is a thankless job because we are always the bearer of bad messages.' He added, 'In my view, the public trust of media is not in an all-time high. I think this trust is partly diminished because of the systematic effort to undermine media freedom by the government.'

On a positive note, Journalist 2 recalled, 'when we were feeling the brunt of Malacañang's ire, we received messages telling us to go on. I think there are many people and sectors who believe they also have a stake in a free press especially in an increasingly authoritarian government. I believe there is support, even if those sectors or individuals may not necessarily be loud about it, for obvious reasons.' Several respondents noted that public support is still there as seen in public rallies against the closure of ABS-CBN or the clamour to keep the press free when Maria Ressa was arrested (Westerman, 2019). Journalist 8 agreed that public support was still there, but many times it was given quietly through text or Facebook messages of support.

Global media interventions

In a general sense, all respondents welcomed the support for a free press given by the international community. Journalist 1 noted, 'the hardest thing for any embattled sector is to feel that you are alone especially if you are up against the powers that be. If you feel support multilaterally, not just NGOs but also from foreign governments then that is even better.'

Journalist 7 said, 'when you have the support of a global coalition, they will be your buffer. Some think that if you appeal for support from the outside, it will widen the breach with government further. But the breach is already there, so why not seek consolation and support outside?'

Journalist 10 said that the expression of support from the global community is 'very helpful, because any form of support for a besieged press'. The journalist believes that this sends a message to the government that they people are watching. Also, he noted that 'to see that many people are actually supporting us will actually encourage us to continue our fight to be able to continue exercising our profession'.

Journalists 6 and 12 opined that when statements are made by foreign media institutions, it boosts the morale of the local press and, at the same time, gives

the local press a reason to write a story on the importance of press freedom. However, they believe that this has little impact on changing the attitude of the government on the press.

Respondents from the community press are not that optimistic either. Journalist 5 said, 'they [international media development partners] can express support, but they are far away, so what can that do? We are the ones in this environment, the threat is around us, how far can an expression of support go?'

More than the statements of support, other respondents said that financial support for a beleaguered media was what they deemed most needed from global coalitions and foreign media organisations. Journalist 5 and 9 opined that the best help that can be given is funding for training, so that local journalists can improve their crafts or funding for youth fora and symposia on media freedom issues to make the younger generation, who had not experienced martial law, realise its value.

On the other hand, Journalist 11 noted that 'when you say something is foreign-funded, it immediately arouses suspicion. It can be used against you because they will say that those people or funders have an agenda that is why they are funding this or that'. Journalist 2 concurs, 'It's a two-edged sword. On the one hand, support of foreign institutions and coalitions in promoting media freedom is vital particularly in an environment of repression. On the other hand, it can sometimes be viewed by the government as interference, which is then spun [by government actors] to question the editorial independence of media organisations'.

Conclusion

Using grounded theory, this study sought to examine the effect of the government hostility against media on journalists' perception of press freedom and their attitude towards interventions from international media organisations and coalitions. Results showed that the journalists' perception about the level of press freedom in the country is largely influenced by perceived support for their work from their audiences and from the international community.

This has some bearing on the journalists' role performance even as those who perceive greater support for their work remain daring in their reportage of government. While, those with a lack of support become more cautious and self-censor their work. In the case of the journalist who was a victim of 'red-tagging', he opted to lay low and remain at home.

Results of the study showed that most journalists (except for a few outliers) experience the same 'chilling effect' from the hostile attitude of government towards media. Respondents likewise observed the same level of public or audience support for a free press, i.e. the mix between those who were silently supportive and those who were vocally mistrustful of legacy media. However,

they varied in their rating of the level of media freedom based on the amount of global support they perceived media coalitions and foreign media institutions. For example, the respondent from *Rappler* actually rated the level of media freedom in the high bracket; while the community journalist who was red-tagged or harassed, rated it very low.

The results also show that the political leanings of the media establishment affected the way they perceived support from the global community. Respondents from pro-government media more readily dismissed the impact of global support for media freedom than those from more independent media.

Based on this study, one can ask: Is the level of media freedom merely a perception, then? The answer is no. As discussed in the early part of this article, attacks against the media are real and increasing in recent years, taking new forms as the social media becomes a new space for abuse and harassment. Whether death threats received from trolls can translate to a reality is debatable but the truth about journalists being killed in the line of duty is not something new in the Philippines. In fact, it is one of the statistics that has kept the country low ranking in the RSF Freedom Index.

Moreover, the majority of the interviewees expressed the fact that they had heard about the UK-led global media freedom coalition only in the light of the support they had given to *Rappler.* Meanwhile, 16 of the 20 interviewees said that the only support they had received or media freedom activity that they had participated in were those organised by the Philippine media organisations such as the Philippine Press Institute (PPI) or the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) in recent years. Although, they may not be aware that some of those activities had received support from global media development partners.

What the study does show is that foreign media institutions and global coalitions have been selective in their open support and therefore, not always perceived by a local press that does not have access to them.

As observed by one of the heads of a Philippine media organisation during a forum of press freedom, 'the intervention of some foreign agency will highlight the divisions. We cannot do it in competition with one another. I think foreign support should come for the whole media industry, in terms of press freedom. If support is given only for one media outlet then this becomes divisive' (De Jesus, 2020).

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Pandemic in the complexity of the Digital Era

How online media in Indonesia construct the reality of COVID-19

Abstract: This article aims to examine the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic constructed by online media outlets in Indonesia as one of the primary sources of information during the crisis. It uses qualitative content analysis to determine how online media in Indonesia construct the reality of COVID-19. The country's eight most accessed online media websites are the objects of this study with a three-unit analysis: context, message, and tone. The result shows that Indonesian media coverage has predominantly emphasised the pandemic's political context over the health and economic context. Informants have predominantly been politicians; epidemiologists and scientists have been given little space. In this case, the media system in Indonesia through online news media were not able to play an optimal role in the early phases of the pandemic due to the tendency of this news construction.

Keywords: communication, content analysis, COVID-19, digital era, health journalism, Indonesia, online media, public health, qualitative research, risk communication

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Introduction

THE COVID-19 pandemic has become a serious global health crisis that has affected countries around the world without exception. The pandemic began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. Within three months, it had spread worldwide; by May 2020, it had infected five million people and killed hundreds of thousands (WHO, 2020b; Shereen et al., 2020). It rapidly became a complex and multidimensional issue. Although issues first emerged in public health, COVID-19 soon had economic, political, security, and social implications, as well as far-reaching effects on education and culture (Stewart, 2020).

As the infected were hospitalised, all others were required by quarantine policy to remain at home (Atkinson, 2020; Aulia et al., 2020). This pandemic, caused by the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), has transformed social life to an extent previously unimagined.

As a multidimensional problem, the COVID-19 pandemic has wrought responses from various elements of society—including media institutions. Around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has been subjected to widespread media coverage since January 2020. Taking the case of previous diseases, such as the bird flu, swine flu, SaRS, MERS, and Ebola, studies have previously sought to map the quantity and quality of coverage as well as the framing used by media (Lee & Basnyat, 2013; Shih et al., 2008; Ho, 2012; Chang, 2012; Vasterman & Ruigrok, 2013; Getchel et al., 2018). Media institutions occupy a vital position in modern society, being not only sources of information and knowledge but also shapers of public discourse, constructors of reality, references for policymakers, and providing guidelines for public behaviour and responses to ongoing issues. When combatting pandemics, the two most important weapons are vaccines and communication (Barry, 2009); in the latter, media institutions play their most vital role, as editorial decisions and coverage content shape communication about the crisis.

In Indonesia, the COVID-19 pandemic has trapped society in a complex and unfamiliar situation. This pandemic has proven far more dangerous to Indonesians owing to its unprecedented characteristics and limited available knowledge. Problematically, especially given Indonesia's population of 260 million, there has been a lack of transparency from the government, and the public healthcare system has been insufficient for the demands placed on it (Lokataru, 2020; VoA Indonesia, 2020). On one hand, Indonesia has an extraordinarily expansive media landscape, encompassing both conventional media and new media (Nugroho, 2012; Ambardi et al., 2014; Tapsell, 2017; Sukmayadi, 2019). As the number of Indonesians using the internet has increased rapidly, so has the number of online news media/news portals. As of 2020, there were approximately 43,500 news portals in Indonesia (Djauhar, 2019), which were being widely accessed. These news portals provide Indonesians with an essential source of information, an alternative to conventional television and social media (Tapsell, 2017).

Although digital media is society's primary source of information today, significant problems have emerged. Just as COVID-19 has spread quickly, so too has panic and fear (Shereen et al., 2020), and this requires a rapid response for which online media is best suited. However, the role of online news media in handling this pandemic is still questionable; it is even considered to be contributing to a new problem: 'infodemics'. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020a), an infodemic is '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'. Given the extent of their coverage and their hetero-

geneity, online media have contributed significantly to this information overload (Schmitt et al., 2018; York, 2013). At the same time, there is also an inherent conflict between the nature of science (which is slow) and the nature of news (which is fast), according to Nabi and Prestin (2016).

This study examines the role of online media in Indonesia in covering COVID-19 during the first four months of the pandemic (January–April), a crucial phase. The study seeks to examine how online media in Indonesia have constructed the reality of the pandemic through the news content they produce. Reading the media's construction of reality enables us to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the ongoing pandemic, as well as efforts to overcome this crisis and potential avenues for resolving future communication problems. At the same time, this study will also show the position of the new media in modern society's increasingly complex dynamics. According to Bakir (2010), 'methodologically, there is a need for more longitudinal, historical, contextual and interpretive studies of impacts of mediated risk at micro and macro levels, and more in-depth, comparative studies between different risk types across different media forms and genres' (p. 5). This article offers such a study, using the context of COVID-19 and its coverage in Indonesia's online news media.

Literature review

The media has played a role in various health crises (epidemics/pandemics) since the dawn of print media, and this remains true even in the digital era (Wilson et al., 2009; Covello, 2009; Jones & Salathé, 2009; Bennet, 2020; Haynes, 2020; Flanagan, 2020). The role played by the media has been closely intertwined with the production and dissemination of information and with the construction of public knowledge. In times such as public health crises, such as pandemics, the media offers a primary source of information and knowledge (Holland et al., 2012). Lee and Basnyat (2013) argue that media coverage of pandemics is most effective when presented using a thematic frame rather than an episodic frame.

The role of the media in times of pandemic may be understood, in part, through one of its fundamental activities: journalism. The quality of news coverage is strongly determined by internal factors, particularly the quality of journalism. Media institutions worldwide face serious internal problems when their journalism no longer reflects their principles as democratic social institutions, especially when significant changes occur (Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2020). During times of crisis, such as pandemics, the knowledge-based journalism concept offered by Thomas E Patterson (2013) may provide a beneficial analytical tool. This concept deals primarily with the media's position and practices before, during, and after disasters. Patterson (2013) argues that: 'Two types of knowledge would tip journalism in the direction of a reflective practice: "content

knowledge", which is knowledge of a subject, and "process knowledge", which is knowledge of how reporting methods affect news content and impact' (p. 184). Meanwhile, Nisbet and Fahy (2015) offer a concept of knowledge-based journalism wherein journalists serve three roles simultaneously: knowledge brokers, dialogue brokers, and policy brokers. The idea of knowledge-based journalism is also closely linked to the dynamic interactions between experts and journalists, which often become increasingly problematic during public health crises (Albæk, 2011, Holmes et al., 2009).

The media is a vital element of risk communication. Through media, it is possible to ensure and facilitate the public's access to complete and accurate information in uncertain and ambiguous times, including pandemics (Sellnow et al., 2009). According to Covello (2009), 'the media play a critical role in the delivery of risk information' (p. 147), as it is entrusted with 'reporting existing information, influencing the way an issue is portrayed, independently bringing an issue to the public's attention or restricting its coverage, and proposing solutions to a risk-related decision, including taking a stand on an issue' (Lundgren & McMakin, 2009, p. 208). In a digital society, the media's involvement in risk communication is inexorably linked to the advancement of internet technology and online platforms. Advances in internet technology have fundamentally transformed the landscape of risk communication. As information has become increasingly available to the general public (Scholl et al., 2018); this democratisation of information has been widely debated, both as a concept and as a practice. Although it cannot be denied that the new media has offered significant opportunities to advance risk communication, it is crucial to recognise that—despite its philosophical and technical excellence—the new media is not a panacea for all communication challenges and crises (Hallahan, 2009; Neuwirth, 2009). This can be attributed, in part, to the fact that the new media contributes to the information overload that must be avoided in times of crisis, such as pandemics. Furthermore, as Krimsky (2007) noted, risk communication in the internet age has contributed to the rise of disorganised scepticism.

The debate regarding the media and its role in health crises has ranged from the general to the specific issues. For example, several studies have found that the media tends to dramatise or exaggerate the effects of pandemics, thereby producing an excessive, sometimes inaccurate, and sensationalist portrait (Smith, 2006). Citing the anthrax case, Kittler et al. (2004) find that the 'information provided through the media was variable, often shallow, and not always validated by health authorities'. The media's shortcomings in its coverage are also highlighted by Roche and Muskatvitch (2003), using the case of the West Nile virus, and Speers and Lewis (2004), using the rubella case. At the same time, several studies have shown that the media have the power to sway public perception of health issues by choosing what to publish and the context in which to present information (Berry et al., 2007; Wilkinson, 2010).

A study conducted by Sandell et al. (2013) investigated the association between the framing of health messages in the media and the public's perception of risk and related behavior; Shih et al. (2008) note that the success of health crises depends significantly on the media's focus and presentation of the pandemic. The media's capacity to disseminate information has been examined through a multitude of pandemics and epidemics that occurred before COVID-19. Investigating the swine flu, for example, Jones and Salathé (2009) find that 'public health messages spread via social media will need to backed up by information spread via more traditional channels, which respondents list as being common sources of trusted information on the outbreak' (p. 6).

At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic is an entirely new phenomenon, one distinct from previous ones owing to the significant global impact and the specific characteristics of the virus. Further compounding the situation is society's increased reliance on new media and the increasingly digitised modern society. Society increasingly relies on new media as a source of information and knowledge. This situation offers essential context for understanding the role of the new media in healthcare crises such as pandemics. However, studies of the online media's role in health crises have been limited, as researchers have focused primarily on the role of social media and conventional media (newspaper and television).

Method

This research analyses media texts, which combines qualitative text analysis methods carried out by researchers and data aggregation performed by AI software that work based on specific algorithms. Therefore, this research uses a large amount of data presented with textual descriptions and statistics as supporting explanations and analyses. The research data comes from eight of Indonesia's most popular online news portals—*Kompas, Republika, Kumparan, Liputan 6, Okezone*, and Tempo.co, *Detik*, and *Jawa Pos*. These media fall into two categories: online media produced by mainstream media (television, magazines, newspapers) and online media with no traditional counterpart (i.e., media that have operated on the internet since their inception or 'digital-born'). *Kompas, Republika, Liputan 6, Tempo, Okezone* and *Jawa Pos* are in the first category, while *Detik* and *Kumparan* are the second.

News coverage data is collected by entering several keywords to identify headlines and news content. The keywords used include Covid19, Covid-19, Corona, Corona, Coronavirus, 2019-nCoV, Pandemic, and Wuhan. A total of 257,476 news items were identified as research objects (n = 257,476). Data were collected over four months, from January to April 2020. Two phases were identified: the first (January and February) covered the period before the first case occurred, while the second (March and April) covered the period after the

first infection case. This period is crucial because it is a decisive phase in dealing with a pandemic.

Analysis was conducted through three basic analytical units: context, messenger, and tone. Messengers were those persons cited in the story and included politicians, bureaucrats, academics, celebrities, religious/social leaders, and members of the general public. The software collect messenger data, and the researcher then identifies the primary sources (most frequently cited by the media) and categorises them according to their positions or professions. Researchers also double-checked the software results to prevent incorrect data, for example, related to variations in names published by the media. For example, for the name of the Indonesian Minister of Finance, some media use 'Sri Mulyani Indrawati', and others use only 'Sri Mulyani'.

Context refers to the background presented through stories' titles. Several types of context were identified: health, economic, political, socio-cultural, and others (see Table 1). These topics are determined based on how Luhmann (2000) describes media systems that respond to other systems by what he calls themes. This context analysis is not done by the software, but by a human coder. The software only collects news data (titles and summaries) from eight media. Therefore, eight coders analyse every media item. Previously, researchers conducted checks among the coders. Eight coders analysed the same medium and determined the gap was between the coders in determining the news context. This examination is carried out twice to ensure no confusion and differences in coders' perceptions in understanding each context's explanation. In the first test, eight coders examined the same 100 news items from one of the media and showed a similarity rate of 79 percent. The researcher then explained again and adjusted the definition of each context. The second test was carried out with 92 percent similarity between coders.

The tone of the news was ascertained by the software based on the news title, content, and statement analysis. The software determines tone by identifying and measuring words that will be defined as tone categories: positive, negative, and neutral. A positive tone is obtained when the news contains more words with positive connotations than negative and neutral words. The determination of negative and neutral tones also follows a similar logic. For example, the headline 'Corona virus outbreak, doctors in New York prepare for the worst condition' is news with a negative tone because of the number of negative words (corona, virus, outbreak, worst) is more than positive (prepare) and neutral (doctor, New York). Researchers also conducted a manual analysis of selected news items to complement this software analysis; samples were selected from both phases. Samples were selected through random sampling, with ten news items chosen from each news portal. As such, 80 news items were manually read or analysed by researchers.

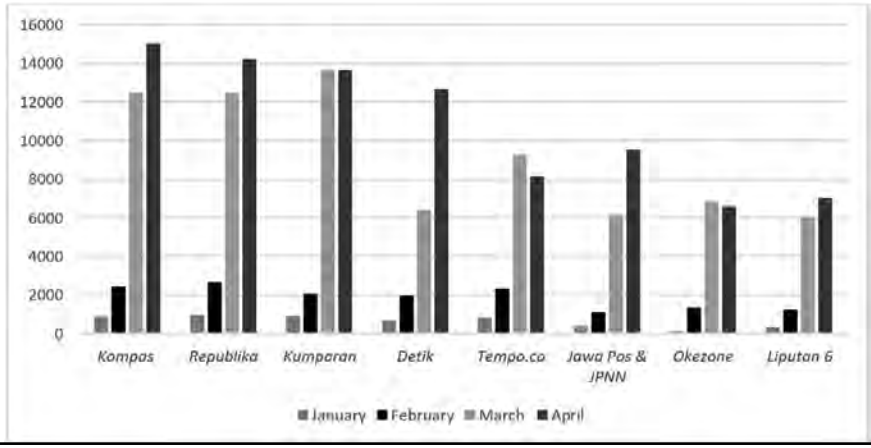
Table 1: News content definitions		
1	Health	Coverage deals with health issues, including the virus, the symptoms, the conditions in hospitals, the experiences of doctors, the availability of medicine and vaccines, etc.
2	Economy	Coverage deals with economic issues, including the economy, business, and enterprise (including tourism).
3	Politics	Coverage deals with issues related to government policies at various levels, as well as parliament and international relations.
4	Socio-cultural	Coverage deals with issues related to social relations, community dynamics, education, art, and religion.
5	Others	Coverage deals with other matters, including sports and entertainment.

Results

Based on a quantitative analysis of online news coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic between January and April 2020, there was a significant increase in coverage every month (as seen in Table 2 and Figure 1). Only two media platforms (Tempo.com and *Okezone*) saw a reduction in the number of news stories in April. This increased coverage included not only coverage of the pandemic as it is but also an exploration of COVID-19-related issues. In other words, news

Table 2: Total number of news stories on COVID, Jan - April, 2020						
No	*Media*	*January*	*February*	*March*	*April*	*Total*
1	Kompas	872	2448	12483	15035	30838
2	Republika	958	2670	12485	14216	30329
3	Kumparan	902	2053	13649	13671	30275
4	Detik	689	1951	6435	12668	21743
5	Tempo.co	827	2334	9280	8138	20579
6	Jawa Pos & JPNN	405	1104	6163	9541	17213
7	Okezone	117	1360	6849	6592	14918
8	Liputan 6	345	1216	6039	7024	14624
	Total	7,412	22,202	10,5224	122,638	180,519

Figure 1: Number of COVID 19 items, January-April, 2020



portals' coverage of COVID-19 included a range of topics, including health, economics, education, politics, policy, and tourism.

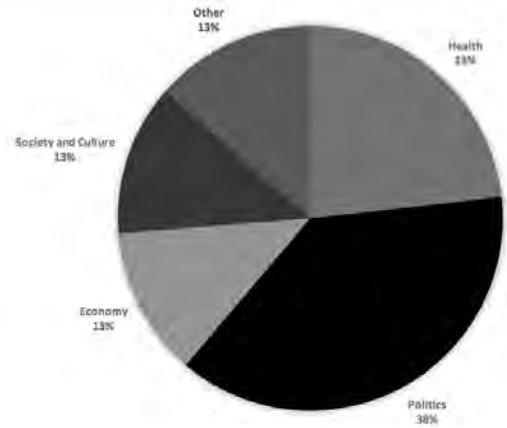
Context

Coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia was dominated by its political context, including bureaucratic and policy issues. Such a trend was identified in all studied media from January through May 2020. The health context was second most prominent, followed by the socio-cultural, economic, and

Table 3: Context of online media coverage, January - April, 2020

No	*Media*	*Health*	*Politics*	*Economy*	*Society & Culture*	*Other*	*Total*
1	Kompas	6720	10332	5020	4679	4087	30838
2	Republika	7147	11087	4115	3843	4137	30329
3	Kumparan	5345	13742	3722	4623	2843	30275
4	Detik	7482	7680	1650	3596	1335	21743
5	Tempo.co	5350	8477	2192	1489	3071	20579
6	Jawa Pos & JPNN	4487	6390	1526	1252	3558	17213
7	Okezone	1398	5002	1578	2307	4633	14918
8	Liputan 6	4027	5796	2825	1331	645	14624
	Total	41,956	68,506	22,628	23,120	24,309	180,519

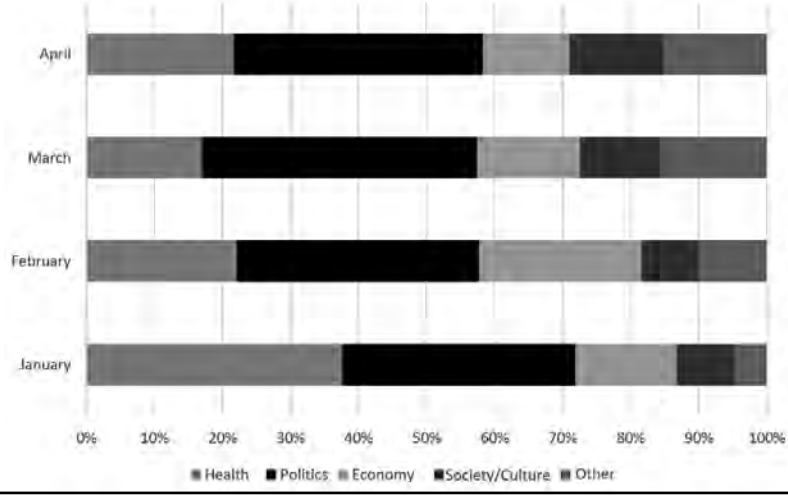
Figure 2: Percentage of online media coverage, January-April 2020



other contexts. The political context was found in 38 percent of the news stories reviewed, and the health context was found in 23 percent; the socio-cultural, economic, and other sectors each accounted for 13 percent. This information is presented in detail in Table 3 and Figure 2.

Analysed within a chronological context, it can be seen that the health context was dominant in January, and the political context dominated news coverage in later months (February through April). The other contexts (economy, socio-cultural, and other) remained relatively stable in March and April. Figure 3 shows the evolution of pandemic coverage between January and April 2020:

Figure 3: Comparison of online media news context by month



Messenger

A review of the stories published in eight media between January and April 2020 found that President Joko Widodo and Achmad Yurianto (the government's spokesperson for COVID-19 affairs) are the most quoted politicians. Although the media cited a range of informants, including politicians, bureaucrats, academics, and celebrities, the former two were the most frequently mentioned. Epidemiologists and public health officials, thus, have had limited space in online public discourses.

Although several epidemiologists have acted as messengers, including Pandu Riono (University of Indonesia), Dicky Budiman (Griffith University, Australia), Tri Yunis Miko Wahyono (University of Indonesia), Riris Andono Ahmad (University of Gadjah Mada), and Laura Navika Yamani (University of Indonesia), the amount of coverage is relatively insignificant. For example, between January and April 2020, Pandu Riono was only quoted in 92 stories published by the eight online media surveyed. Other epidemiologists are cited less frequently; Dicky Budiman acted as a messenger in 11 news stories, while Riris Andono Ahmad was quoted in 16 news stories. In the early months of the pandemic (February 2020 only), the Indonesian media frequently quoted American epidemiologist Marc Lipsitch and Chinese epidemiologist Zhong Nanshan. At least 116 news items cite Marc Lipsitch, and 70 cite Zhong Nashan. Similarly, the Indonesian media

Table 4: Top 10 in online media coverage, January-April, 2020

No	*Messenger*	*Position*	*Category*	*Number of news items*
1	Joko Widodo	President of Indonesia	Bureaucrats/ Politicians	5.857
2	Achmad Yurianto	Covid-19 Spokesperson	Bureaucrats	5.835
3	Anies Baswedan	Governor of DKI Jakarta	Bureaucrats/ Politicians	2.485
4	Sri Mulyani Indrawati	Minister of Finance	Bureaucrats	1.631
5	Ridwan Kamil	Governor of West Java	Birokrat/Politisi	1.589
6	Terawan Agus Putranto	Minister of Health	Bureaucrats	1.517
7	Donald Trump	President of the United States	Bureaucrats/ Politicians	1.186
8	Khofifah Indar Parawansa	Governor of East Java	Bureaucrats/ Politicians	1.143
9	Ganjar Pranowo	Governor of Central Java	Bureaucrats/ Politicians	1.088
10	Doni Monardo	Head of COVID-19 Task Force	Bureaucrats	1.068

also relied heavily on information from the World Health Organisation (WHO), particularly the organisation's director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. Table 4 presents the identified messengers in order of citation frequency:

Data shows an interesting dynamic, which may be attributed to a shift in the dominant messenger. In the early months of the pandemic (January and February), the primary messenger was the Minister of Health. In the second phase of the pandemic (March–April), President Joko Widodo and Achmad Yurianto (the spokesman of the Pandemic Management Task Force) were dominant. President Joko Widodo was quoted 134 times in January, 362 times in February, 3,361 times in March, and 2,000 times in April. Achmad Yurianto was quoted 31 times in January, 236 times in February, 3,292 times in March, and 2,276 times in April. Finally, Terawan Agus Putranto—the Minister of Health—was quoted 165 times in January, 552 times in February, 611 times in March, and only 189 in April. Table 5 identifies the ten most commonly cited messengers in Indonesian media by month:

Tone

Generally, coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in the eight surveyed Indonesian media between January and April 2020 was positive (rather than negative or neutral). A positive tone was identified in 62,321 items published over four months; a neutral tone was found in 59,154 items, and a negative tone was

Table 5: Top 10 in online media coverage by month

No	*January*	*February*	*March*	*April*
1	Terawan Agus Putranto	Terawan Agus Putranto	Joko Widodo	Achmad Yurianto
2	Joko Widodo	Joko Widodo	Achmad Yurianto	Joko Widodo
3	Retno Marsudi	Budi Karya Sumadi	Anies Baswedan	Anies Baswedan
4	Teuku Faizasyah	Retno Marsudi	Ridwan Kamil	Ridwan Kamil
5	Anung Sugihantono	Achmad Yurianto	Sri Mulyani Indrawati	Khofifah Indar Parawansa
6	Tedros Adhanom	Airlangga Hartarto	Terawan Agus Putranto	Donald Trump
7	Budi Karya Sumadi	Tedros Adhanom	Erick Thohir	Sri Mulyani Indrawati
8	Danang Mandala Prihantoro	Muhadjir Effendy	Ganjar Pranowo	Doni Monardo
9	Xi Jinping	Sri Mulyani Indrawati	Donald Trump	Yusri Yunus
10	Sri Mulyani I	Anung Sugihantono	Doni Monardo	Luhut Binsar P

Table 6: Online media news coverage tone, January-April, 2020

	January	*February*	*March*	*April*	*Total*
Negative	2503	6675	24723	25143	59044
Neutral	1448	4345	22861	30500	59154
Positive	1154	4112	25545	31510	62321

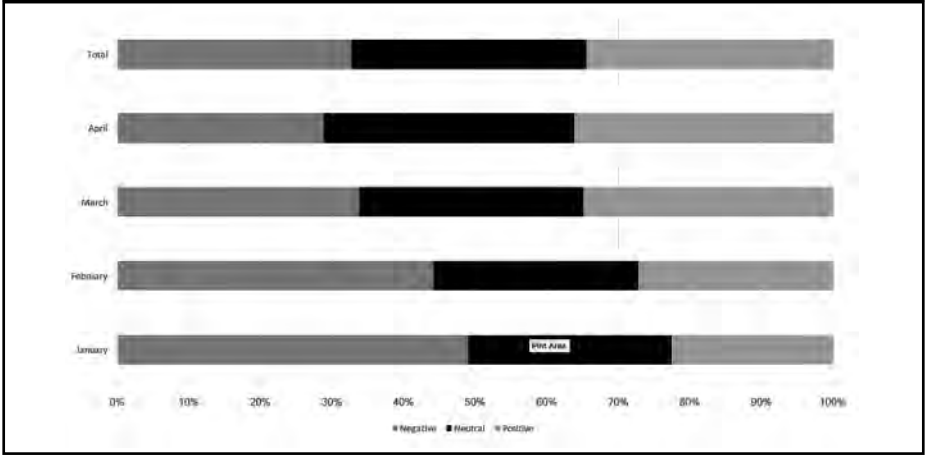
found in 59,044 items. This suggests that the tone was roughly balanced, as no significant differences were found. Interestingly, however, a tonal shift was identified. A negative tone was most common in items published between January and February 2020; coverage became increasingly positive in tone between March and April. Table 6 and Figure 4 provide a comprehensive portrait of tonal dynamics over four months:

News with a positive tone, among others, are entitled 'East Java provincial government recruits 470 new medical personnel to handle corona'; '250 Indonesians who will be evacuated from Hubei are believed to be in healthy condition', and 'Experts say masks are not the solution to prevent corona virus'. News with a negative tone, for example, include 'Mysterious pneumonia in China may be new coronavirus infection'; 'Impact of corona virus, Toyota Indonesia factory employees begin to take time off'; and 'North Bekasi sub-district head who died positive for corona, family isolated'. While the news with a neutral tone, for example, entitled 'Considering the profits and loss of travelling amid the corona virus'; 'Two scenarios of evacuating Indonesian citizens in Wuhan'; and 'COVID-19 and Sharia business'. Positive tone articles are generally related to efforts to deal with the pandemic, solutions, government successes, and health interventions. News with a negative tone usually contain an increase in the number of people infected, treated, and died, limited health facilities, or losses due to pandemics in various fields. Even so, this is not the main aspect of determining the news tone.

Discussion

The above results show several important facts and issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia, as well as the role of online media and new media. It is commonly hoped that, in times of crisis, the media will achieve not only broad coverage but also promote significant structural changes in society. From a cybernetics communication perspective, the concepts of disseminated media and success media hold that the media must disseminate information and stimulate discussion and promote continued adaptation (Luhmann, 2000). During a pandemic, institutions (including media institutions) significantly inform

Figure 4: Online news media coverage tone, January-April, 2020



society's success or failure in achieving public understanding and controlling the pandemic. As such, the media plays a central role in cultivating a mindset that can stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

The dominance of bureaucrats and politicians as messengers and the minimal space available for epidemiologists and other experts is a severe issue. By providing epidemiologists access to public channels, they will be given a platform for spreading credible information and countering potential misinformation. Where experts are absent from the media, it falls to the government to distribute information about risks and their likely management; in such a situation, the message can be poorly received, as the messengers may be poorly suited to the matter. When epidemiologists and other scientists are lost in the sea of COVID-19 information and coverage, significant problems may emerge, as underscored by several studies of journalist–expert relations (Lopes et al., 2012; Albæk, 2011, Holmes et al., 2009).

The dominance of government officials and bureaucrats as messengers in COVID-19 coverage in Indonesia does not indicate that the media has simply reproduced the government's perspectives and platforms (Castells, 2009). It is strongly correlated with fast journalism dominating all media (but especially online media). Exploring media coverage of the West Nile virus, mad cow disease, and avian flu, Shih et al. (2008) found that 'the event-oriented nature of epidemic hazards coverage, with updates on infected cases (consequence) and actions taken by the authorities (action) [is] the staple of news coverage' (p. 155). This study's portrait of pandemic coverage in eight Indonesian media outlets, including their messenger and context aspects, reinforces the argument that the media depends heavily on—or is sometimes even controlled by—the government in times of crisis. In some cases, governments have even directly involved prominent media

actors in their COVID-19 task forces (Duong et al., 2020).

As the epicentre of pandemics lies in the health sector, media coverage of pandemics must prioritise the use of public health experts and epidemiologists—be they employed by the government, universities, or independent research institutions—as messengers. By providing space for public health experts from a range of backgrounds, the media can provide diverse perspectives regarding the ongoing crisis. Experts' perspectives and solutions may differ, and thus a wealth of perspectives is necessary for a democratic society to ensure the achievement of a collective decision that is both ideal and inclusive.

The minimal space available to epidemiologists may also be attributed, in part, to the operational perspective employed by Indonesia's online media. Endeavors to position epidemiologists as the leading messengers have been hindered by the logic of online media itself, which prioritises the number of clicks/visits received by articles. This logic poses a significant challenge for journalism in the digital era. It is possible that politicians and bureaucrats, the main messengers of online coverage to date, are perceived as drawing the attention of larger audiences. From a technical perspective, journalists' minimal capabilities—as well as their limited time and energy—may compound this issue; this assumption warrants further examination but is outside the scope of this article. It is also necessary to understand that the ongoing pandemic has significantly affected media organisations, both in editorial and financial matters. The media sector faces significant uncertainty, which affects the quality of the news produced and the journalism undertaken.

The COVID-19 pandemic has become a multidimensional problem. As such, messengers must consist of more than epidemiologists and public health experts; they should include economists, psychologists, historians, artists, and experts in law, communication, and culture. The COVID-19 pandemic offers media actors an opportunity to strengthen their relationship with experts, and indeed in the digital era, such bonds are necessary for overcoming hoaxes and addressing disinformation. Examined from an ideal journalism perspective, media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia has yet to reflect the principles of knowledge-based journalism, one of which necessitates the inclusion of experts in media coverage.

This study has shown that the messenger aspect is correlated with the contexts of media coverage, including the dominant political context. Online media in Indonesia have tended to frame the COVID-19 pandemic as a political moment rather than a public health moment (crisis). Although this is not a fatal mistake, it is not unproblematic either. For instance, although the media must pressure the government to produce appropriate policies, its decision (conscious or not) to the forefront of the pandemic's political context in its coverage has created a distraction for the public from other essential issues. Collected data (Figure 3)

indicates that online media tended to highlight the health context at the beginning of the pandemic (January). However, beginning in February, coverage began to emphasise other pandemic elements. Why did this happen? The answer may be found in the internal dynamics of the media, as well as external factors.

Online media outlets lacked internal mechanisms for dealing with this situation. The COVID-19 pandemic has thrust the media—both in Indonesia and worldwide—into an unprecedented situation, and almost all aspects of the media sector have been affected. Indeed, the unprecedented nature of the pandemic does not justify the media's failure to fulfill its roles ideally. Problematically, the media has relied on the government as its sole source of information, even though (ironically) the Indonesian government initially stated that not all information would be made available to the public. The media has also extensively covered the 'conflict' between the central government and local governments, the coverage that may have worsened a counterproductive disharmony that has stymied pandemic mitigation efforts nationwide.

In April, Indonesia's tone of online media coverage shifted significantly when positive tones dominated the mediascape after three months of negative coverage. In the early months of the pandemic, a negative tone had permeated media coverage due partly to the lack of available information and the widespread confusion within the government and Indonesian society. This situation was reflected in the predominantly negative tone of coverage. However, the shift in tone in April does not mean that conditions had improved or that positive developments had occurred. This can be seen, for instance, in the increasing amount and breadth of news coverage. The negative tone of news coverage in the initial phase can be associated with conditions of uncertainty and ignorance of the threats faced. In contrast, in the second phase, the media focuses more on reporting to support efforts to deal with and prevent panic so that more positive news is raised.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has posed significant and complex problems, which may be partly attributed to the new media's increased number and dynamism. Complexity has increased as access to information has expanded, resulting in an information overload. During times of crisis, it is necessary to ensure that the information disseminated is correct and confirmed, thereby avoiding panic and cultivating trust; only then can social solidarity be created. The media, being involved in the construction of reality, must seek to reduce the complexity of the ongoing pandemic by providing accurate and truthful information through balanced, evidence-based, and regularly updated coverage (Covello, 2009). The media must adhere strictly to a code of 'inform or not inform', i.e., decide to spread important information and minimise the spread of irrelevant information. To do so, the media must establish strong relations with various experts, academics, researchers, and intermediary actors (including civil society actors). Such sources and the essential knowledge they convey can be blocked

out where there is an over-reliance on aggressive, communicative activity from official sources—as the data in this study have been indicating.

In times of crisis, the media system must serve its ideal role as a social system capable of stimulating other social systems. The public's limited awareness of the COVID-19 virus and its dangers is a serious matter, as it hinders efforts to break the chain of transmission. Efforts to educate the public have had limited results, as have efforts to stop transmission through social distancing. Ideally, the media should be able to guide the public towards a shared understanding, facilitate the achievement of collective action, and pressure the government to implement strategic, adaptive, and accommodative policies. It would be necessary for knowledge-based journalism to be practised by the Indonesian media. It must recognise that Indonesia is vulnerable to disasters, including not only the COVID-19 pandemic but also natural disasters. Indeed, it is predicted that the COVID-19 pandemic will continue, and society will be required to create a new normal. The media must thus seek to improve the quality and consistency of its coverage.

As a shared platform modern society uses to construct reality, the new media has played a significant role in creating a shared understanding. Risk communication, crisis communication, and emergency communication are all needed in times of pandemics (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005). Given that social panic cannot be avoided, the media's decision to simply convey the government's messages is problematic; ideally, it should serve to inspire and stimulate society and the government. Given the rampant spread of disinformation on social media, spread by individuals whose interests do not necessarily align with those of the public, it is necessary to ensure that journalists' output adheres to high-quality standards. Given the plethora of available information, succinctness in online coverage is particularly important in times of crisis.

Conclusion

This study offers a gateway to a more detailed understanding of the role played by the media, especially the online media, in times of crisis (including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic). This study has offered a general portrait of how online media covered the pandemic in its first four months in Indonesia. Further studies could use the instrument provided by Shih et al. (2008), using a more focused selection of data. At the same time, it is crucial to consider the pandemic's subsequent phases (for instance, after a vaccine becomes available or in the final months of the pandemic). A longitudinal study may guide future investigations of how the media operates in global crises such as COVID-19, which affect societies worldwide. It is also possible to conduct a comparative study using cases with different political, economic, and socio-cultural contexts.

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FRONTLINE

New Zealand's 23-day Parliament siege

QAnon and how social media disinformation manufactured an 'alternate reality'

Abstract: Fires burned across Aotearoa New Zealand's Parliament grounds and violent clashes broke out between protesters and police on the day the law enforcement officers moved to quell a 23-day anti-vaccination mandate siege of the House in February-March 2022 in scenes rarely witnessed in this country (Fires and clashes, 2022). The riot climaxed a mounting campaign of disinformation and hate speech on social media fuelled by conspiracy theories circulated by New Zealand activist media such as *Counterspin,* which emulated their counterparts in Australia and the United States. Vitriolic death threats against political leaders and attacks on journalists and the media on an unprecedented scale were a feature of the protests. Anti-government messages were imported alongside white supremacist ideologies. Researchers have described the events as a 'tectonic shift' that will have a significant and lasting impact on Aotearoa New Zealand's democratic institutions This commentary introduces three perspectives about the protests and disinformation ecology framed in the journal's reflexive series *Frontline*.

Keywords: democracy, disinformation, conspiracy theories, *Counterspin*, Donald Trump, *Frontline,* investigative journalism, journalism, New Zealand, QAnon, social media

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> Our country will not be defined by the dismantling of an occupation. In fact when we look back on this period in our history, I hope we remember one thing. Thousands more lives were saved in the past two years by your actions as New Zealanders than were on that front lawn of Parliament today. The sacrifices we were all willing to make to look after one another, that is what will define us, no protest, no fire, no placards will ever change that.
>
> —Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern on violence outside Parliament (2022)

IN 2012, *Pacific Journalism Review* introduced an innovative section called *Frontline* in an effort to encourage investigative journalism blended with a distinctive reflexive approach to practitioner research and analysis (Bacon, 2012; Nash, 2014, 2020; Robie, 2015; Robie & Marbrook, 2020). In the first edition of this series, the editorial declared that the journal 'showcases what the editors hope will be a regular feature' through 'journalistic practice juxtaposing with critical reflexion by the journalists involved' (Bacon & Morton, 2012).

Professor Wendy Bacon, one of the pioneers of the Australian Centre for Independent Journalism (ACIJ) which set a standard for university media investigations for 25 years, steered this initiative. She cited the views of Robert Rosenthal, then executive director of the Centre for Investigative Reporting in Berkeley, California. In his view, the world had seen one of the greatest transformations in information and technology in human history, and he added that 'we're in the middle of it; we're in the Petri dish now' (p. 7). Bacon and colleague Tom Morton wrote in the editorial:

> Universities are part of the new culture evolving in the Petri dish. In a time of such intense change and experimentation, journalists and the public should be able to expect that universities will play a role in testing new models and putting new ideas into practice. (Bacon & Moreton, 2012)

In that introductory edition, two *Frontline* articles were published: Karen Abplanalp's 'Blood Money' case study detailed the author's investigation into the New Zealand Superannuation Fund's investment in the controversial Freeport copper and gold mine in West Papua, at the time owned by an American corporation (Abplanalp, 2012); while the other, Nicole Gooch's 'Sulfate Sunrise', examined the Vale nickel mine at Goro, Kanaky New Caledonia (Gooch, 2012).

Abplanalp described the journalistic processes involved, and framed them within the context of peace journalism. Gooch reflected on the differing understandings that her indigenous and non-indigenous sources had of environmental issues and the need to locate the conflict around the mine in the broader political, economic and social context of decolonisation.

Many other *Frontline* articles have followed in the years since with the topics ranging from 'Cloud Forest', an investigation into court battles and competing environmental narratives in Solomon Islands (Davies, 2015); interrogating power and disrupting the discourse about Onslow and the gas hubs in the Pilbara region of Western Australia (Davies & Barndon, 2016); a Fiji and Pacific climate crisis journalism case study (Robie & Chand, 2017); reversing silences in West Papuan documentary (Lopez, 2020); a tribute to the 'bearing witness' and empowerment stance of journalist Jill Emberson (Altman & Bacon, 2020); and

THE GUARDIAN VIDEO FREEZE FRAME

Figure 1: New Zealand police dismantling the anti-vaccination and conspiracy theorist protester tent occupation of the Parliament grounds after a 23-day siege on 2 March 2022.

the making of the Bougainville conflict film *Ophir*—effectively banned from Australian mainstream media (Bacon & Gooch, 2021).

In this edition, *PJR* has approached *Frontline* with a different tack: Instead of practitioners reflecting on a creative or investigative work, we have gathered five contributors examining the 'tsunami' of disinformation that accompanied the infamous 23-day siege of Wellington's Parliament early in 2022 (Fires and clashes, 2022; RNZ, 2022). The journal commissioned articles by a Māori Television videographer (Rituraj Sapkota), who covered the Parliamentary occupation throughout February-March 2022; independent videographer and alt-right researcher Byron Clark, who provides a day-by-day analysis; and core research by the independent Disinformation Project team, Kate Hannah, Sanjana Hattotuwa, and Kayli Taylor.

The Disinformation Project research into the unprecedented protester occupation of Parliament grounds in February-March 2022 has examined how social media inflamed tensions and the role played by a dozen local Facebook accounts spreading disinformation that were at its heart (Hannah, Hattotuwa & Taylor, 2022). The team studied data from tens of millions of online posts, tweets and comments, alongside hundreds of hours of live-streamed footage from the protest.

In an article in *The Conversation*, Massey University sociologist and distinguished professor Paul Spoonley noted the slow realisation by commentators and the news media that the siege of Parliament was not 'simply an anti-vaccine mandate "protest" but something with more sinister elements' (Spoonley, 2022;

Kuo & Marwick, 2022). He also noted the toxicity of some of the politics on display, as well as the 'presence of extreme fringe activists and groups'. He continued:

> These politics have been developing for some time, heavily influenced by the rise of a particular form of conspiratorial populism out of Donald Trump's America, and by the networking and misinformation possibilities of social media. Internationally, researchers noted a decisive shift in 2015-16 and the subsequent exponential growth of extremist and vitriolic content online. This intensified with the arrival of conspiracy movement QAnon in 2017 and the appearance of a number of alt-tech platforms that were designed to spread mis- and disinformation, conspiracy theories (old and new), and ultranationalism and racist views. (Spoonley, 2022)

RNZ SCREENSHOT

Figure 2: Trump supporter flags at the New Zealand Parliamentary grounds protest in February 2022.

About 18 months earlier, journalist David Farrier had signalled a warning in an article in *The Spinoff* about how popular blues musician Billy Te Kahika (BTK) had plunged down a rabbit hole to end up as New Zealand's 'premier peddler of conspiracy nonsense'. As the star attraction at an Aotea Square rally in Auckland, BTK unleashed a rapidly growing movement (Farrier, 2020). What Farrier found particularly shocking was not just the conspiratorial beliefs that a growing number of New Zealanders held, but the 'speed with which these outrageous beliefs are being embraced' (LaFrance, 2020; Pettipiece, 2021). As Spoonley explained:

> I'm sure you can all think of people on your Facebook feed who seemed perfectly rational a month ago, but are now speaking about nothing else except kids trapped in underground tunnels, adrenochrome, and a shadowy cabal of global elites. On Saturday I accidentally happened upon hundreds

> of these people, gathered in the centre of Auckland to protest the government's response to COVID-19. There was talk of a new world order, Bill Gates, 5G and the fact that COVID was a manufactured crisis. (Farrier, 2020)

According to the independent Disinformation Project, the deluge of traffic on misinformation pages was at one point higher than that of pages operated by New Zealand mainstream media outlets combined—on one single day, 2 March 2022, they received 350,000 interactions compared with 247,000 for all of the mainstream media sites combined (The Disinformation Project, 2022). The project has been observing disinformation since the beginning of the pandemic, gathering qualitative and quantitative data from a variety of sites. Following the end of the occupation, the followers of anti-vaxxer disinformation were swept along on a Russian 'firehose of falsehood' based on spreading conspiracy theories about bioweapons facilities and paedophile cabals linked to a pretext for invading Ukraine ((Daalder, 2022; see Who's Who?, p. 114-116).

On the project's webpage profile (The Disinformation Project, 2022), the researchers say they have 'used mixed methods approaches to analyse and review the speed and spread of information disorders—and their impact on the lives of New Zealanders'. They argue that Aotearoa New Zealand is 'experiencing an infodemic with the COVID-19 pandemic' furthering the spread of misinformation and disinformation. This has been impacting on social cohesion and—over the longer term—the country's 'democratic fabric and electoral integrity'. Argues project director Kate Hannah:

> The Parliament Protest was a turning point in the way Aotearoa New Zealand perceives itself, and the role of misinformation and disinformation in that shift cannot be underestimated. From violative vocabulary to pace of content production, we are now studying information disorders at a scale and scope beyond what we studied at the start of 2022. (The Disinformation Project, 2022)

A colleague, Dr Sanjana Hattotuwa, a research fellow at the project, adds that 'data signatures associated with the protest on social media, pegged to misinformation and disinformation, [have] had no historical precedent. It is a tectonic shift in Aotearoa New Zealand's media landscapes, and information ecologies.' (The Disinformation Project, 2022).

'For those mainstream social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter, it is gathered using CrowdTangle, which is a Facebook-built tool for studying Facebook pages and groups,' Hannah explained in a RNZ interview. 'And then we also have a rich text approach. So, we analyse the content of some of those open posts, and also the content of things like flyers, billboards, placards, and signs, WhatsApp messages and emails that sometimes members

of the public send us as examples of misinformation that they have received or people they love have received.'

The project researchers had started to see a skew towards disinformation since August 2021. In an interview with RNZ's *Nine To Noon* programme (RNZ, 2022), Hannah said that

> [t]he whole country was incredibly interested in what was taking place at Parliament. And so many people were watching livestreams, and obviously from mainstream media platforms like Radio New Zealand, and the television stations to understand what was taking place.
>
> But what is so interesting and quite remarkable and something we need to think about going forward is this, how so many people were getting their information from places that were completely grounded in a different interpretation and a different reality of what was going on. (RNZ, 2022)

For the first extended period of time, online communities manifested as offline communities during the Parliament protests, argued Hannah.

> The experience of the people who were on the ground at Parliament, and those that they were communicating with who either wanted to be there or maybe had been there but had returned home because there was a lot of movement over that period of 23 days, was markedly different from the experience of those of us who were observing what was going on both online and offline.
>
> And so we get the splintered reality where people genuinely felt connected, supported. They were being fed, they were being looked after, they were being told that their own sense of loss or personal grievance had a political or social importance that connected into a bigger picture.
>
> Meanwhile, the rest of us were observing from the outside, seeing violence, death threats, harassment of schoolchildren, people who lived in apartments nearby feeling very unsafe, sort of dirt and destruction, so there were very different experiences offline and online over quite an extended period of time. (RNZ, 2022)

Misinformation has been creeping in to New Zealand for a couple of years, argued Hannah. Her team's research has indicated that the country was experiencing increasing amounts of 'US-style content' filtering into the country's information ecosystem since the American elections of 2020 (Binder, 2018, Clark, 2022; Kamola, 2021, Wong, 2020). There was a further key spike around the period of the 6 January 2021 insurrection at the US Capitol, when Trump supporters stormed Congress in a failed bid to overturn President Joe Biden's election, and then again throughout the rest of that year. In the Congressional inquiry in June 2022, Trump was accused of orchestrating the Capitol riot in an 'attempted coup'. Liz Cheney, the Republican vice-chair of the committee, said

Trump had 'lit the flame of the attack' (January 6 hearing, 2022; Trump accused of attempted coup, 2022). As Hannah explained:

> Because the US experienced lockdowns, mask mandates and vaccination ahead of New Zealand, there were pre-packaged sets of disinformation about those issues that linked those issues to a conspiracy around the role of the state. And those pre-packaged conspiracies were transferred into the New Zealand environment almost intact.

By the time New Zealand went into level 4 lockdown in August 2021, that material had become embedded within a small community that grew rapidly.

Australian journalist Van Badham, who had experienced the viciousness of internet trolls first hand went undercover to report on the geopolitical scale of the disinformation campaigns. Her 2021 book *QAnon and On* was a damning exposé of this century's most dangerous and far-fetched internet cults and their 'alternate reality' from the inside. In her final chapter she dissected the Capitol fiasco by 'definitely brownshirts—just ones that hadn't realised that their shirts were brown' (p. 405)—and speculated on the possible identity of Q.

> Whoever is behind the nonsensical Q posts, it's the audience of willing conspiracists who are the real authors of Q, as much as it is any congregation whose will to believe is what moulds and shapes a god. Yes, if Q didn't exist, it would be necessary to invent Q, if only because taking lease of people's 'eyes and ears and nerves' to manipulate them—as Marshall McLuhan predicted of new media—is always so much easier when those body parts are volunteered. If Q's author is its audience, the most important search is for who it is that most stands to profit from their fealty. (Van Badham, 2021, p. 400)

On her list of Q possibilities are *Breitbart* publisher and alt-right strategist Steve Bannon, or 'one of his talented minions' (Badham, p. 403; Richter, 2017), whose publications are reportedly linked to the *Counterspin* of New Zealand Parliament notoriety, or even former President Trump himself.

In New Zealand, as Prime Minister Ardern observed in her media conference at Parliament on 2 March 2022 after police had seized back control of the Parliamentary grounds in Wellington and cleared the adjacent inner city streets: 'One day it will be our job to try and understand how a group of people could succumb to such wild and dangerous mis- and disinformation'. (Ardern, 2022)

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The NZ Parliament protest

What the cameras in the crowd witnessed

Commentary: Aotearoa New Zealand's Parliament grounds have been reclaimed. All the streets around the buildings are again open to the public. Te Āti Awa have held a karakia to reinstall the mauri of the land. There is currently a rāhui over the Parliament grounds. It is time for healing. And moving on, writes a Māori Television videographer on reflection about the unprecedented hate directed at news media during the three-week occupation by anti-public health measures protesters. But after the unprecedented chaos that ended in a riot on Day 23—2 March 2022—he quotes a journalist who said, 'I was feeling sad ... And then I look at Ukraine and realise there are bombs going off next to all these journalists and camera operators. I got hit with a camping chair and am I going to sit around and complain about it?'

Keywords: alt-right, disinformation, hate speech, mainstream media, livestreaming, New Zealand, Parliament, Parliament, police, occupation, protest, rioting, threats, television

RITURAJ SAPKOTA
Māori Television videographer, Te Whanganui a Tara

I HAVE never had that fear before that I might get physically hurt,' says Patrice Allen, a Ngāti Kahungunu and *Newshub* camera operator based in Wellington.

'You're going down there, you don't know what it's going to be like. A person from *Wellington Live* got beaten up.'

Māori Television's press gallery videographer David Graham (Taranaki Whānui and Waikato) started working as a news cameraman in Wellington in 1989. He was there for the seabed and foreshore protests, and 'in the 1990s it was Moutua and Pakitore,' he recollects. 'But this is the most volatile one I have seen (RNZ News, 2022).

'Back then we [the media] were part of the show. They wanted us to be there. Now we are a part of the 'axis of evil', along with the police and government.'

Up against your own

'Now there are Pākehā calling you kūpapa [Māori warriors who fought on the-side of British colonial troops during the New Zealand Wars in the 19th century],' he says. He has just returned from filming with his phone in the crowd,

MĀORI TELEVISION

Figure 1: News camera-operators catching the action from their designated safe space—from the Speaker's balcony—during the Parliament protest in Wellington on 2 March 2022—the day the police forcibly removed the demonstrators.

and has heard protesters say things. Nasty things.

'Stuff like, "you should be ashamed of yourself. You should be ashamed of your whakapapa!"'

'I just don't engage,' says Graham. 'And I am not a random man with a camera here. I actually have whakapapa back to this marae on my father's side,' he says, referring to Pipitea marae where Taranaki Whānui laid down Te Kahu o Raukura as a cultural protection over the surrounding land that includes the Parliament grounds.

The protesters had lots of livestreams and many of them kept filming media camera-ops who were filming them. (David Graham found himself in one of the live feeds while a protester in the crowd heckled him.)

MANA NEWS LIVE SCREENSHOT

Figure 2: This stand-up by Māori Television's Parliament videographer David Graham was captured on a protester's social media grab.

Allen feels the mamae is stronger when it comes from your own people.

'This happened on the day of the last protests,' she says,

referring to the protests in November 2021 where the crowd threw tennis balls and water bottles at the media. She was filming a timelapse of the crowd leaving when a mother-son duo walked up to her.

'He was a big dude and he was really getting in my face. I was not feeling very safe. And I thought, "how can I diffuse this?"' So she asked them where they were from.

'And they were like, "where are *you* from? What are *you*?"

'Oh, Ngati Kahungunu, just over the hill in Wairarapa,' she replied. The man said something targeting not just her but also her iwi. 'And that just broke my spirit,' says Allen.

'It was one of the days I went home and cried.'

'We're the enemy now'

'We're the enemy now,' says Allen. 'And there is nothing you can do or say that will change their minds.'

Her teammate Emma Tiller thinks the camera can be a beacon in the crowd. 'As soon as you put it up, everyone knows who you are. And they hate you.'

And even though security cover has become standard practice for all news camera-ops filming in the crowd, there are times she feels vulnerable. 'It's hard to think back to protests when we were out there. We didn't have security with us. It didn't even cross our minds.

'But now who wants to risk the violence?' she says.

'They have thrown things at the police. If they can do that to them, what can they do to us?'

'The last time I had security was when I was filming in East Timor,' says Allen. It was a long time ago, she adds, and at a time and place when there were terrorists around.

'It's really bad because it's made it "us and them", media against protesters, and it's not supposed to be like that.'

MĀORI TELEVISION

Figure 3: The Speaker's balcony is empty on this day … a far cry from a few days earlier on Wednesday, 2 March 2022, when it was packed with camera operators and reporters as police cracked down on the occupation and cleared Parliament grounds.

'Difficult to turn off'

Sam Anderson, 22, is TVNZ's camera operator at the Press Gallery. 'It has been difficult to turn off,' he says 'I have been there [on the Speaker's balcony] from 9am to 6pm just streaming the whole day.

MĀORI TELEVISION

Figure 4: The balcony was allocated by the Speaker of the House to media workers as a safe space. David Graham (left) and Patrice Allen (third from left).

'It's all you are doing—copping the abuse, being yelled at, having your morality questioned.

'I sometimes hide behind the pillars from the frontliners who can yell all day.

'And throw that in with reading all the signs around you,' says Tiller.

'And they yell at you. And you go home and you can't switch it off.'

Anderson's teammate, Sam von Keisenberg, was on that balcony on 11 February 2022 when police made many arrests. Shortly after they arrested someone at the forecourt and the crowd was yelling at the police, a lady pointed a finger at him and said, 'You! You are a paedophile protector!'

'At first I was like, "that's new". But then she said it 50 times, as loud as she could, just at me.'

He pulled his camera off the tripod. 'It was getting to me,' he says. 'I have children. I would never protect a paedophile.'

His colleague asked him where he was going. 'Just to punch some lady in the face,' he said under his breath. 'And I walked out and just went to the bathroom.'

MĀORI TELEVISION

Figure 5: Throughout the protests, the signs have been as much anti-'mainstream' media as they have been anti-government.

Sweeping generalisations

'Sometimes you have to take a step back,' von Keisenberg says.

'I had never experienced hate [directed] at me before,' Radio New Zealand (RNZ) video journalist Angus Dreaver says. 'Especially this type, where they think media are traitors, and they want them to know.

'Four months ago, I was doing kids' TV.'

Dreaver thinks the generalisation works both ways. While the protesters see the mainstream media as a monolith and sweep them with one giant brush, 'it's important for us, conversely, not to see them that way.'

Von Keisenberg believes there were more moderates in the crowd than extremists. 'I always felt there were enough people around me,' he says. And that made him feel safe in the first week when he was filming undercover, knowing that 'if things did get violent, there would be some moderate ones who would stop them'.

He saw that in action, too. In his forays of the first week, when he joined the crowd unmasked to avoid attention. He saw a man there in his 70s wearing a mask.

'The first thing he said to me was that he was immunocompromised, which is why he was wearing the mask.'

'It's fine, mate. It's a freedom rally, do what you want,' von Keisenberg said. But another protester came up and 'tried to pull his mask off and started berating him, saying he had no identity. The mob mentality started and people around the gate joined in and started giving him grief.'

Von Keisenberg intervened. 'Oi! chill out man. It's a freedom rally, he's free to wear a mask!'

'A woman close by turned around and said, "Yeah, come on guys! leave him alone." And they did.'

Mainstream media

When people tell von Keisenberg that they don't watch mainstream media, his follow-up is, 'Well then, how do you know we are "lying"?'

'They say, "we get our news from Facebook, which is different". Yeah, different, because there aren't many rules around it,' von Keisenberg says.

'Mainstream media is held more to account than social media,' Allen says. 'But they think the opposite.'

Some of Dreaver's acquaintances have shared his photos on Instagram, in posts that read: 'Mainstream media are liars'. 'Bro, that's me!,' he says.

Trying to remain objective in the face of constant harassment is a real challenge.

'I am almost hyper-aware of that, where I am trying to capture the mundane and relax as much as the heightened states,' he adds. 'And I am trying to not let my anger affect the pictures I take or how I cover it.'

But for camera operators, the task ends once they take the picture. 'We only

aim for clear sound and sharp, steady pictures,' Graham says. 'The rest of the stuff is for other people to decide what to do with.'

Anderson thinks there are differences in perspectives within newsrooms. People who have watched the protests from a distance or from their desks often take a kinder view of the protesters, he says.

'But me and the other camera ops, we copped a lot of abuse over three weeks. We just have a more bitter taste in our mouths for this crowd.'

The PM in 'disguise'

There have been the fun moments, though, Anderson admits. There have been 'raves' with young people dancing on the frontlines and he found himself almost filming to the beat. And there was a protester who thought he was the prime minister in disguise.

'Now that is one theory I know is not true,' says his teammate von Keisenberg. But how does he know for sure?

'Because I have seen both of them in the same room at the same time.'

And von Keisenberg has had his fun moments in the crowd, too. In one instance when he was filming undercover, a woman went on the stage and started talking into the mic about electric and magnetic fields (radiation) and how crystals could block them.

'Bullshit!' von Keisenberg turned around and shouted.

'We are here for the mandates,' he added, not snapping out of character, and for the benefit of those around him who were listening to the woman speak.

SAM ANDERSON SCREENSHOT

Figure 6: A Reddit thread with a screenshot of a protester's post.

A potential for volence

'The vibe changed every few days, and that was because people kept coming and going,' von Keisenberg says. 'But there were always the elements who were there for whatever happened on Day 23.'

One camera op I spoke to said there had been a 'potential for violence' right throughout. And when someone like [former New Zealand First party deputy prime minister] Winston Peters visits the crowd and says 'the mainstream media have been gaslighting you for a long time,' it gives them validation, and lends credibility to their theories.

SAM JAMES/NEWSHUB

Figure 7: Emma Tiller on the Speaker's balcony.

But for those on the ground gathering news amid a hostile crowd, it exacerbates the possibility for harm.

Added to this potential of violence is the constant anticipation of things to come. 'You have to be always prepared for when something will happen,' as Tiller puts it. 'And that is exhausting.'

Emma Tiller describes her experience of the Speaker's balcony as, 'you feel like you have to be prepared for if something is going to happen, and that is exhausting.'

'The day things turn to custard, you want to be there on the ground,' Graham says to me a few days before the police operation. "You don't want to be at home watching it on TV.'

And turn to custard it did; the threat of violence became reality on Day 23. While the 'battle' raged between the police and the protesters, the media people found themselves being targeted.

Dreaver was in the crowd by the tent where a fire had started. 'A Mainstream! We have got a Mainstream here,' says a woman who spotted him, shouting.

Brandishing a camping chair, she tells him: 'Get out of here! Out! Out!' The riot police were advancing behind him and he stood his ground.

'She started hitting me on the back with it,' he says. 'She didn't have a lot of speed but it was still a metal chair.'

'It hurt a bit,' he reckons.

'Get out of here,' demands the woman who attacked Dreaver with a chair. 'Just go,' shouts a man standing beside her.

'Not everyone'

'There were some protesters who were trying to stop the violence. Even right at the end,' says Dreaver, recollecting how when some people were breaking up bits from the concrete slabs to get smaller throwable chunks, another person tried to physically get in the way and stop them.

'But the other guys had a metal tent pole and whacked him over the head with it.'

Throughout the three weeks of protests, there had been repeated calls from the protesters asking the media to talk to them. On the morning of Day 23 when I was filming from the Speaker's balcony, a TV reporter had just finished a live cross into the news bulletin.

A man's voice rang out from among the crowd, on the PA, inviting the

RNZ SCREENSHOT

Figure 8: 'Get out of here,' demands a woman who attacked RNZ's Angus Dreaver with a chair.

media on the balcony to 'come down and talk to real people and report the truth.' The same voice went on to berate us for wearing masks, behind which we were allegedly smiling smugly.

Less than a minute after the initial invitation, he followed up with another call to step down so he could put a fist through the mask.

'Why don't you come down to talk to us? Because getting bashed with a chair was always inevitable,' says Dreaver. 'It's crazy it took so long.'

Protesters whacked another protester with a tent pole as he tried to stop the violence. 'It didn't look as though it injured him, because the tent poles are quite light, but it looked quite gnarly,' Dreaver says.

The aftermath

Parliament's grounds have been reclaimed. All streets around the buildings are now open to the public. On Sunday—three days after Day 23, Te Āti Awa held a karakia to reinstall the mauri of the land. There is currently a rāhui over the Parliament grounds.

RNZ SCREENSHOT

Figure 9: Protesters whack another protester with a tent pole as he tries to stop the violence.

It is time for healing. And moving on.

'I was feeling sad last week. And then I look at Ukraine and realise there are bombs going off next to all these journalists and camera operators,' Dreaver says. 'I got hit with a camping chair and am I going to sit around and complain about it?'

The effect of these protests lingers. A week before Graham was filming the hau kainga at Wainuiomata—which was on high alert—and trying to keep the

protesters from entering and setting up camp on their marae, as have other hapū around the capital.

The crowd dispersed but did not vanish, and neither did their kaupapa.

'I have seen some of their kōrero online,' Graham says. The COVID-19 mandates might be gone soon, but 'there will be other stuff,' he reckons.

'It's definitely not over.'

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The NZ media and the occupation of Parliament

Commentary: There is little reason to doubt that groups like Advance New Zealand, Voices for Freedom and *Counterspin Media* have been funded in part by donations from 'the people' or 'everyday Kiwis'; New Zealanders are no less likely to disseminate misinformation—and fund that dissemination—than any other group. Nonetheless, questions remain about the role of foreign linked entities like Himalaya New Zealand on the fringe of New Zealand politics. Parliament grounds have been cleared and the grass will regrow, but the disinformation networks behind the protests remain. The role for media in the coming months, and likely years, will be to not ignore these disinformation networks (and not unwittingly provide content for them) but to investigate them and analyse the role they are playing in the contemporary 'post-truth' world.

Keywords: alt-right, anti-vaxxers, citizen's arrest, conspiracy theorists, Counterspin Media, disinformation, harassment, mainstream media, New Zealand, Parliament protest, post-truth, protesters, QAnon, violence

BYRON CLARK
Videographer and Independent Researcher, Christchurch

ON 4 February 2022, 200 protesters converged on the New Plymouth police station where former Taranaki Regional Council candidate Brett Power was making 'an official complaint' against New Zealand's Minister of Health Andrew Little. Power claimed that Little was culpable for any adverse effects of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine and liable to be arrested. Further, he claimed, incorrectly, that if the police did not arrest Little within 24 hours then a citizen's arrest could be made.

Protesters then descended on the offices of the *Taranaki Daily News* where they sang the New Zealand national anthem and chanted 'tell the truth!' The protest was reported on by the *Taranaki Daily News* (one of the Stuff media mastheads) which also noted that two district councillors spoke at the rally (Protestors March on New Plymouth Police Station, 2022). Also reporting on events was *Counterspin Media,* an online video programme which promotes itself as an alternative to 'mainstream media'.

The following weekend, *Counterspin* was broadcasting their coverage of a convoy to Wellington in opposition to vaccine mandates in a livestream that

RNZ SCREENSHOT

Figure 1: Brett Powers being arrested at the New Zealand Parliament protest on 9 February 2022.

lasted almost 14 hours. Correspondents were familiar faces to those who have been paying attention to New Zealand's conspiracy theorist fringe. In the north was Shane Chafin, the US-born former pharmacist who had previously been in the news for heckling Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern about alleged vaccine related deaths, causing her to move a press conference inside (Fisher, 2021). In the south was Heather Meri Pennycook, a former parliamentary candidate for the Advance New Zealand party, an alliance between former National Party MP Jami Lee Ross and conspiracy theorist Billy te Kahika. Pennycook had gone on to found the Agriculture Action Group, which targeted rural New Zealanders with conspiracy theories about climate change and United Nations Agenda 21 and Agenda 2030 (Clark, 2021b).

Counterspin hosts and correspondents were among the protesters who rallied outside Parliament, providing not just sympathetic coverage of the protest, but working to shape the course of action taken by protesters. In the early days of the occupation of Parliament grounds *Counterspin* had issued a 'Call To Action' with emails to subscribers: 'Everyone needs to mobilise and get to Wellington now!', 'Are you going to choose FREEDOM or Tyranny?', 'This is the fight between good and evil, for the future of our beautiful country'. Host Kelvyn Alp used his platform to criticise the Destiny Church affiliated Freedom and Rights

Coalition for taking a more moderate approach to protesting than he would prefer. On the February 9 livestream, he announced that at 3pm that day protesters would attempt to breach the police line in order to carry out the citizens' arrest of Health Minister Andrew Little.

Brett Power, who had travelled from New Plymouth, gave a speech that was streamed live on *Counterspin,* and then attempted to enter the Parliament building. He was arrested along with two others. The three were charged with obstruction. Power's speech and footage of his arrest would be repeatedly replayed during *Counterspin* livestreams in the following days.

Counterspin Media launched on GTV*,* a platform started by former Trump advisor Steve Bannon and dissident Chinese billionaire Guo Wengui, also known as Miles Guo. The pair also founded the New Federal State of China, a dissident political group opposed to the Chinese Communist Party regime. A report released by Graphica Research in May 2021 described Guo as being 'at the centre of a vast network of interrelated media entities which have disseminated online disinformation and promoted real-world harassment campaigns'. The report stated that the network 'acts as a prolific producer and amplifier of mis- and disinformation, including claims of voter fraud in the US, false information about COVID-19, and QAnon narratives' (Graphica, 2021).

Linked with GTV is the Himalaya Farms Network, which acts as a network of embassies for the New Federal State of China working to expand the movement and organise volunteer efforts. According to an interview carried out by Guo, The Himalaya Farms, of which the New Zealand branch is one of 23, have been instructed to find supporters, 'acquire local media', 'take advantage of your social network' and 'gather more wealth'. The Himalaya New Zealand website, which has since been revamped, previously stated, 'We aim to counter false narratives forced through left-leaning mainstream media and compromised key NGOs within New Zealand' (Clark, 2021a).

It was Tex Hill of Himalaya New Zealand who approached Alp and co-host/producer Hannah Spierer (who previously went by the pseudonym Sarah Smith) about starting a show on *GTV*, and organised a studio for them to use (Counterspin Media, 2021). A few months before this, Hill was among protesters outside the lower Queen Street branch of the ANZ bank which had blocked money transfers to GTV. Hill told *The New Zealand Herald* that he had successfully sent more than US$100,000 to GTV via the BNZ, but a smaller amount sent with an ANZ credit card bounced back after three weeks. The *Herald* noted that the previous week *The Wall Street Journal* had reported that the FBI was examining Guo and the money used to fund his media efforts in the United States, including his work with Steve Bannon (Parker, 2020).

In November 2021 New Zealand's Financial Markets Authority issued a warning to investors about GTV and other Guo linked entities, noting that GTV

was not licensed to offer investments to New Zealand residents. The US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) charged GTV with conducting an illegal unregistered offering of GTV shares and digital assets. Dozens of investors in GTV, almost all Chinese speakers, had sued the company and Guo (Financial Markets Authority, 2021). GTV shut down on 2 March 2022 amid Guo's ongoing legal troubles (Friedman, 2022).

Counterspin has continued after the demise of GTV, uploading their videos to the Canadian video sharing website Rumble, which is part of the network of websites operated by American conspiracy theorist Alex Jones. The hosts, who are also directors of the *Counterspin Media* company, vehemently deny receiving any funding from either Guo and Bannon or Jones. When confronted by a TVNZ1 reporter during the occupation of Parliament grounds, Alp claimed they were funded by 'the people'.

It is unclear whether *Counterspin* is receiving any funding from The New Federal State of China or its associated entities. Given that the show regularly and consistently propagates falsehoods, claims made by Spierer and Alp should not be taken at face value. The connections with Himalaya New Zealand are clear and the producers of the show were not using GTV by coincidence.

David Fisher of *The New Zealand Herald* was the first journalist to investigate Alp's background in light of the protests he had been encouraging. Two decades before starting *Counterspin,* Alp had founded the New Zealand Armed Intervention Force (NZAIF), an armed militia with the stated aim of overthrowing the New Zealand government.

In the intervening years Alp procured investments for a mining venture in the Solomon Islands via the Caratapa Group of Companies. The gold mine never eventuated and the company was in receivership from 2012 through to December 2020. Public records show that Alp himself was bankrupt from 2013 to 2019 (Fisher, 2022).

On February 22, RNZ spoke to one man who would talk to the media about his funding of the protest, Red Stag CEO Marty Verry, who had given a donation he initially described as 'not significant' via a website used to raise money to support the protest. The host pressed him on the amount he had donated and asked if he was happy to fund the alt-right, a question he evaded, though he did answer a further question asking if he was happy to fund people making death threats by telling the host that he was not (RNZ, 2022).

Appearing on RNZ again on March 3, following the protests' violent end, Verry told *Checkpoint* he regretted his donation. 'I haven't been at all impressed with the way it's evolved over time. I think a dangerous fringe got in there and started to take it over and I think it lost the support of the public.' (Red Stag boss regrets funding, 2022). RNZ noted that violent imagery and rhetoric was present from the beginning of the protest

No media questioned Verry about the relationship between his father, the late Phillip Verry, (Hartevel, 2020) and Kelvyn Alp. The senior Verry was a conspiracy theorist who blamed many of the country's problems on the Bank of New Zealand (BNZ). In 2002, he claimed BNZ owed him and his associates NZ$8.3 million following the failure of his import company, Khaya Holdings, which forced the sale of his 1600ha family farm. He had hired Alp as his 'negotiator' and Alp, along with other members of the NZAIF, had turned up during the night dressed in military garb at the home of BNZ managing director Peter Thodey (Hill Cone, 2002). Although the younger Verry's financial support for the protest could be a coincidence, this link to Alp should have been explored.

Disinformation online: Not a new problem

The occupation of Parliament grounds was the outcome of mis- and disinformation being disseminated online. Although the violent scenes on March 2 were unprecedented, the burning of property (primarily the property of protesters themselves but also Parliament's playground for children) was not the first time conspiracy theories had spurred people to destructive behaviour. In 2020, 17 cellphone towers were either set on fire or otherwise vandalised, causing hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of damage. While these acts have not been definitively linked to conspiracy theorists, they followed an increase in conspiracy theories spreading online that linked fifth generation mobile services (5G) to the COVID-19 virus (Pasley, 2020).

Sue Grey, the lawyer and Outdoors Party leader, perhaps best known for her opposition to vaccines, had been a propagator of disinformation about 5G. Following the alleged arson attacks on telecommunications infrastructure she wrote on her website

> People were angry about new cell towers well before the COVID-19 became an issue. It is not surprising that people feel frustrated when dangerous and unwanted technology is installed outside their homes. I do not believe this current spate of cell tower vandalism is directly related to 'corona virus'. It is more to do with frustration that the government we elect to represent us is not listening to us and acting for corporations rather than New Zealanders. (Grey, 2020)

Grey became a fixture on *Counterspin Media* during the occupation of Parliament grounds and was described by 1 News as a protest organiser. Grey had spearheaded legal challenges to vaccine mandates and provided legal representation to Destiny Church member Paul Craig Thompson, who was arrested alongside Bishop Brian Tamaki at an anti-lockdown protest held in defiance of a public health order prohibiting large gatherings (Kapitan, 2022).

Documents released under the *Official Information Act* in August 2021

show that in March 2020, two years before protesters would clash with police on Parliament grounds, the Electoral Commission had identified misinformation and disinformation as a critical risk in the upcoming election, noting several reasons that non-state actors may have an interest in influencing New Zealand's information sphere, including through spreading disinformation. The report advised that far-right or white nationalist groups may have an interest in New Zealand politics because of the terrorist attack on Christchurch mosques and the subsequent ban of semi-automatic weapons (DPMC, 2021).

When protesters stormed the Capitol Building in Washington DC in January 2021, prominent figures in New Zealand's populist right were cheering them on. 'Hold the line patriots!' tweeted Damien de Ment from his since removed Twitter account, adding in a subsequent tweet 'They cannot let rumbling discontent in NZ boil over like USA. They fear the boldness and righteousness of what Patriots will do to secure freedom for all' (Brae, 2021).

While de Ment has had his accounts removed from mainstream social media platforms (in addition to Twitter, his YouTube and most recently his Facebook account have been deleted), he has maintained a following on Telegram where he writes of 'Nuremberg' trials for politicians, journalists and others involved in the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out, claiming that following these 'common law' trials there will be executions. Notably, signs referencing hangings and Nuremberg trials were carried by the protesters outside Parliament in February 2022.

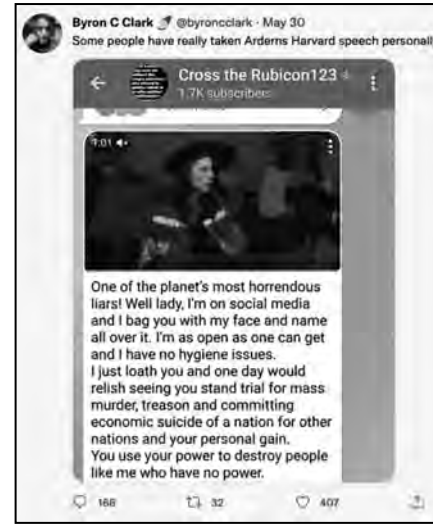
A report published in April 2021 by Tohatoha Aotearoa Commons and SMAT (Social Media Analysis Toolkit) investigating the spread of white supremacist, extremist, and conspiracy content on social media during the 2020 election, found that conspiracy theories related to the 6 January 2021 insurrection in Washington DC—when five people died—including those spread by hate groups, were cross-pollinating with New Zealand specific content. Concurrently, conspiracy theories related to COVID-19 and the public health response were influencing the discourse on electoral processes (SMAT & Tohatoha, 2021).

A report published by The Disinformation Project in November 2021 showed just how much online mis- and disinformation increased in the latter half of that year, noting that both posts and engagement 'drastically increased' since mid-August 2021 and 'show a trajectory of growth and spread that is increasing, widening, and deepening every week'. The report goes on to note that 'it is by order of magnitude more than the content speed and spread over 2020, and even in the first half of 2021' (The Disinformation Project, 2021).

These findings were widely reported in the New Zealand media at the time of the report's release. *Newshub* reported that much of the disinformation was being used to steer people 'towards extreme ideologies such as white supremacy and QAnon', and that on the Telegram channels studied by the Disinformation Project there was extreme misogyny targeting female politicians, researchers and

journalists, as well as Nazi imagery and photographs of hangings (Cook, 2021).

Quoting the report's lead author, Kate Hannah, *Newshub* also notes the 'closer link between COVID-19 disinformation and wider sets of fringe beliefs'. Stuff's coverage of the report pointed out that the COVID-19 outbreak and the rollout of vaccine were used as symbols to 'push various far-right and conservative views' and that 'Language specifically targeting individuals and minority groups has become more violent and graphic' (Broughton, 2021). Coverage in *The Spinoff* quoted Hannah at length:



BYRON CLARK TWITTER

Figure 2: An example of social media misogyny—continuing after the Parliament protest—directed at Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern after her memorable speech about democracy and gun control at Harvard University on 26 May 2022 when she received a standing ovation (*The Guardian*, 2022).

> We started noticing that there was a closer link between COVID-19 disinformation and wider sets of fringe beliefs. From August last year we noticed it was becoming two or three steps to take people through to white supremacist or far-right ideologies, QAnon material, extreme misogyny, incel material and transphobic material, and we started viewing COVID disinformation as one of the entry-level ideas that draws people down these further disinformation ideology pathways. (Reeve, 2021)

The February 2022 convoy was not the first far-right influenced anti-vaccine mandate protest to arrive at Parliament. *The Spinoff* editor Toby Manhire described a protest at Parliament in November 2021 as revealing 'a new, ugly, dangerous side to our country'. While that protest was peaceful compared to what would occur three months later, it was reported protesters told journalists they would 'get what's coming' (Manhire, 2021).

A violent protest was years in the making, and while not inevitable, it was highly predictable. A November 2021 intelligence report from the Combined Threat Assessment Group (CTAG) that was only released publicly after the events of the Wellington protests, had noted that the rise in threatening online rhetoric in relation to COVID-19 mitigation efforts meant the possibility of a violent protest could not be discounted (NZSIS, 2021).

This was the context in which the occupation of Parliament grounds took place. Journalists and commentators who ignored or downplayed that context

arguably contributed to the environment of misinformation. Political analyst Dr Bryce Edwards described protesters as merely 'eccentric' when speaking to Newstalk ZB, and said on RNZ's *Morning Report* that describing them as 'far right' was an unfair smear, which drew an unsparing response from Morgan Godfrey, who also appeared on the programme. 'Bryce is absolutely wrong to gloss over the involvement of the far-right, we have seen the involvement of *Counterspin Media,* we have seen the involvement of currents in society that I think the vast majority of New Zealanders will find very uncomfortable' (Mediawatch, 2022).

Newsroom, a publication that has arguably provided more in-depth coverage of New Zealand's far-right fringe than any other, published a video from lead investigations editor Melanie Reid titled 'A visit to freedom village' that provided sympathetic coverage to the protest and in particular the anti-vaccine group Voices for Freedom, which it described as one of the key players at the event (Reid, 2022).

Voices for Freedom was so pleased with the way the group was portrayed in the piece that they wrote in their email newsletter to supporters, 'In a time where balanced reporting has been rarer than a politician's tootsies on Parliament grounds, we were pretty happy with the final result', encouraging followers to share the story, which they did—making it at one point the most viewed page on the *Newsroom* website (Chapman, 2022). The misinformation network used by Voices for Freedom was now being used to promote coverage in the usually loathed 'mainstream media'.

Protesters and the funding

Reid did question the group about their funding. Co-founder Alia Brand spoke of small donations from 'everyday Kiwis', and Claire Deeks said a 'handful' of people had contributed toward the $200,000 used for a court case the group pursued (Reid, 2022). Reid did not question the group further to ascertain who that handful of large backers were.

Deeks was a candidate for the Advance New Zealand Party in 2020, and number three on the party list (this was not mentioned in the *Newsroom* video). The expenses return filed by the party after the 2020 election show that $10,000 was spent on 'campaign consultancy' from Doms Kitchen Ltd, a company set up by Deeks for her food blog Doms Kitchen (Advance New Zealand, 2021). Deeks has yet to be asked about what services her company provided to the party she was involved with in exchange for this sum.

Advance New Zealand has an underexplored connection to global misinformation networks. On 12 October 2020, a few days out from the election, co-leader Jami Lee Ross appeared as a guest on Steve Bannon's *War Room* show, in front of several flags—New Zealand and the New Federal State of China. Ross is described by Bannon as the first elected official to 'stand with the free men and women of the Federal State of China' (War Room, 2020)

A loophole in electoral laws meant that the unregistered New Zealand Public Party led by Te Kahika and forming a component of Advance New Zealand was able to collect $255,000 in donations without declaring their sources to the Electoral Commission, meaning the funding of Advance New Zealand is more opaque than for other parties (Shand, 2020).

There is little reason to doubt that groups like Advance New Zealand, Voices for Freedom and *Counterspin Media* have been funded in part by donations from 'the people' or 'everyday Kiwis'; New Zealanders are no less likely to disseminate misinformation—and fund that dissemination—than any other group. Nonetheless, questions remain about the role of foreign linked entities like Himalaya New Zealand on the fringe of New Zealand politics.

Monitoring the far-right

If journalists wait until the far-right are protesting in public to report on them they will be missing a lot of the story. Public actions can be crafted to present a certain image of these movements, and that image can be disingenuous—for example the 'carnival atmosphere' of the Wellington protest in its early days. On the burgeoning 'alt-tech' platforms where these events are organised people speak more openly about their beliefs and their aims. This space has been monitored thoroughly by The Disinformation Project (https://www.tepunahamatatini.ac.nz/) and SMAT (https://smat-app.com), it is also a space where any journalist covering the far-right should be.

Parliament grounds have been cleared and the grass will regrow, but the disinformation networks behind the protests remain. The role for media in the coming months, and likely years, will be to not ignore these disinformation networks (and not unwittingly provide content for them) but to investigate them and analyse the role they are playing in our contemporary 'post-truth' world.

Who's Who? Key figures behind the events at Parliament

Kelvyn Alp

Co-host of *Counterspin Media* alongside partner Hannah Spirer. A former soldier who once founded a militia with the stated aim of overthrowing the government. During the protests he advocated for militant tactics and criticised more moderate elements.

Phil Arps

A notorious Christchurch-based white supremacist. Known for being the first person arrested for sharing the livestream of the 2019 Christchurch mosque shooting. He was arrested in Picton after having told people he was on his way to a 'public execution'.

Chantelle Baker

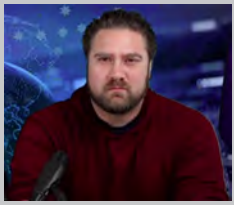
Described on her Facebook page as a 'news personality', Baker made a name for herself livestreaming the protests at Parliament, with engagement on her videos at times surpassing news media. Those livestreams became a significant vector for the spread of misinformation.

Leighton Baker

Former leader of the New Conservative Party and the father of Chantelle. He attended the protests and often tried to position himself as a mediator between the protesters and police. He was among those arrested in the final days of the occupation of Parliament grounds.

Karen Brewer

A Northland-based conspiracy theorist originally from Australia, where she was ordered to pay A$875,000 for defamation against a member of Parliament she accused of operating a child sex trafficking ring. She has a small but dedicated following who frequently protest outside the home of the Governor-General, calling on her to issue the writs for a new election.

	**Shane Chafin** A former pharmacist who now appears on *Counterspin Media* as a 'medical correspondent'. Chafin gained media attention after his persistent questioning of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern about alleged vaccine related deaths caused her to move a press conference inside.
	**Damien de Ment** A moderately successful YouTube personality up until his channel was removed for spreading misinformation. He has long called for trials and execution of politicians, journalists and others involved with the COVID-19 public health response. He attended the protests briefly and appears occasionally as a guest on *Counterspin Media.*
	**Brad Fluety** A prominent conspiracy theorist from Northland who occasionally guest hosts *Counterspin Media*. He was arrested during the protests and appeared in the Wellington District Court accused of encouraging protesters at Parliament to behave in a manner likely to cause violence, and then for failing to comply with police orders. He attributed protesters becoming ill with COVID-19 style symptoms to 'EMF radiation'.
	**Sue Grey** A lawyer known for her opposition to vaccine mandates, fifth generation mobile network technology, and the use of 1080 poison by the Department of Conservation. She was a frequent guest on *Counterspin Media* and other livestreams throughout the occupation of Parliament.
	**Liz Gunn** A former news reader for *One News* who has since made the transition to fake news. Throughout the protests she appeared frequently as a guest on *Counterspin Media.*

	**Elliot Ikilei** Former deputy leader (and for a brief period, leader) of the New Conservative Party, he provided sympathetic coverage of the protest on his media platform *The Daily Examiner.*
	**Brett Power** A Sovereign Citizen from Taranaki who attended the protest in Wellington planning to conduct a citizen's arrest of the Minister of Health, which he had announced outside the New Plymouth police station a few days prior after obtaining a case number from police.
	**Brian Tamaki** Self-ordained bishop of the evangelical Destiny Church, which is behind the Freedom and Rights Coalition. Bail conditions imposed on him for organising and attending protests during COVID-19 lockdowns prevented him from personally attending the protests in Wellington, though the Freedom and Rights Coalition had a strong presence.
	**Billy Te Kahika** The former co-leader of the now defunct Advance New Zealand Party. He did not attend the 2022 protests himself, but his new organisation, The Freedom Alliance, had a presence. Te Kahika had organised and attended numerous protests against COVID-19 related restrictions throughout 2020 and 2021.
	**Action Zealandia** A small white supremacist group which keeps the identities of their members hidden. According to their Telegram channel, members attended the protests. A video filmed from a construction site near Parliament was also disseminated by the group, leading to changes in security measures at Parliament.
	**Voices for Freedom** An anti-vaccination lobby group founded by Claire Deeks, a former candidate for the Advance New Zealand Party, with Alia Bland and Libby Jonson. One of the relatively moderate groups involved in the protest.

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The murmuration of information disorders

Aotearoa New Zealand, mis- and disinformation ecologies and the Parliament Protest

Abstract: The Parliament Protest from February 2022 to March 2022 was a significant online and offline event in Aotearoa New Zealand. Offline, its physical presence captured the attention of the nation and fuelled debates about ideas of legitimate protest in Aotearoa New Zealand. Online, its data signatures showed never-seen-before popularity with misinformation, disinformation, and extremist thought. In this working paper The Disinformation Project (https://thedisinfoproject.org/) incorporates quantitative and qualitative data analysis to explore the role misinformation and disinformation played in the nurture and nature of the protest on Parliament grounds. The article also explores how the protest was projected on social media, disinformation and misinformation ecologies associated with it, and lasting impacts on social cohesion, identity, news media and democracy in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Keywords: authoritarianism, democracy, disinformation, extremism, identity, misinformation, New Zealand, news media, Parliament siege, QAnon, social cohesion, social media, The Disinformation Project, transdisciplinary

KATE HANNAH, SANJANA HATTOTUWA and KAYLI TAYLOR
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> One day it will be our job to try and understand how a group of people could succumb to such wild and dangerous mis- and disinformation. And while many of us have seen that disinformation and dismissed it as conspiracy theory, a small portion of our society have not only believed it, they have acted upon it in an extreme and violent way that cannot stand. We have a difficult journey in front of us to address the underlying cause of what we have seen here today.[1]

Introduction

PRIME Minister Jacinda Ardern spoke these words on 2 March 2022, following the removal of protesters from a three-week occupation of Parliament grounds in central Wellington. The protest was notable to many in

Aotearoa New Zealand for the scenes of violence, arson, clashes between police and protestors, hostility and harms directed against journalists, and numerous arrests.[2] The occupation of Parliament grounds and subsequent disruption to much of the surrounding area within central Wellington began on 8 February 2022, as a collection of individuals and groups who had travelled by convoy from across the country, inspired by the Canadian trucker convoy protesting vaccine mandates. The duration and disruptive nature of the occupation, affecting businesses, schools, Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington, and the public service drew significant domestic and international media attention, particularly given strong interest in what has widely been perceived as Aotearoa New Zealand's success in managing the COVID-19 pandemic. While the longest and largest protest took place outside Parliament, there were other protests across the country in Dunedin, Wānaka, Picton, Christchurch, and Auckland.[3]

The months leading up to the protest—particularly the shift to COVID-19 Alert Level 4 across Aotearoa New Zealand in August 2021, the transition to the COVID-19 Protection Framework (traffic light system), increasing offline protest activity across the country, and the Omicron outbreak—exacerbated, entrenched and expanded domestic information disorders studied since the start of the pandemic. From November 2021 the vectors, velocity, and volume of mis- and disinformation in Aotearoa New Zealand steadily increased. Growing numbers of individuals subscribed to and engaged with mis- and disinformation across a range of social media platforms and products, including but not limited to Facebook Pages, Groups, public posts on personal Facebook accounts, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Telegram and TikTok.

The Parliament Protest also saw the use of new instant messaging apps, like Zello. The offline Parliament Protest coincided with an outbreak of Omicron, and almost-daily record case numbers. On February 6—Waitangi Day—when the convoys started from their respective locations, the Ministry of Health reported 208 community cases of COVID-19.[4] On March 2, when the physical protest outside Parliament was brought to an end, the Ministry of Health reported 22,152 community cases.[5] There were reports of COVID-19 cases among the protestors.[6] The protest was listed as a location of interest for COVID-19 on February 23, with all attendees considered close contacts.[7]

In our November 2021 public report, The Disinformation Project (TDP) described and analysed the nurture, nature and significant nodes of disinformation in Aotearoa New Zealand since August 2021. We noted a set of tipping points: shifts from vaccine hesitancy to vaccine resistance, increasingly competing ideas regarding state versus individual rights, and the normalisation of the targeting of individuals and communities with online and offline harassment. We also noted the prevalence of a range of tactics: the use of memetic material and testimony to spark humour and strong emotion, language usage and genre difference by

platform, and overall an increase in dangerous speech.[8] These tipping points and tactics played out with stronger emphasis during the Parliament protest. The Parliament Protest was unlike any other event, process or domestic development studied by TDP. The significance of the protest and its role in the embedding of information disorders will take years to fully understand. In this working paper, we look at the Parliament Protest and ask: how did Aotearoa New Zealand end up here? We expand on themes, tipping points, and tactics first described in our November 2021 paper and how they were reflected at the Parliament Protest. We conclude with implications for social cohesion, and steps forward.

Methods

TDP is a transdisciplinary research project which, since 2020, has studied publicly available data via social media, websites, and other source material, including contemporary academic research, to analyse the scope, scale and spread of mis- and disinformation in Aotearoa New Zealand. In our study, we use the following definitions:

- *Misinformation:* 'false information that people did not create with the intent to hurt others'
- *Disinformation:* 'false information created with the intention of harming a person,
- group, or organisation, or even a company'
- *Malinformation:* 'true information used with ill intent'[9]

These provide framing tools through which we code and analyse material, provenance, propagation, engagement, and potential offline impacts. Throughout this paper we refer to these inter-related, socio-technological, and inextricably entwined phenomena as mis- and disinformation, with the resulting impact on socio-political landscapes as information disorders. Mis- and disinformation are transmitted within and across platforms to far-reaching audiences. Producers of mis- and disinformation are often closely connected, or act in concert, cross-promoting each other's material or from common sources to reach wider audiences. We describe these complex phenomena as 'ecologies'—systems and networks that mirror and migrate content, discourses, language, beliefs, perceptions, and values across different platforms to audiences.

In line with the increasing spread of mis- and disinformation, the number of product and platform surfaces studied by TDP has continued to expand. We currently focus on, in no particular order, Telegram, Facebook Pages, Groups, public posts on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and any sign-posted content on the.nz ccTLD, other websites, or on platforms like Rumble, Odysee, Gab, and Gettr. The study of mis- and disinformation provenance, production and propagation across these platform and product ecologies has been conducted daily, since September 2021.

Platforms and genres

On March 2, Telegram served as a viral and vital vector to exchange tactical and strategic information. Simultaneously, Telegram channels were dominated by narrative frames projecting 'police brutality' and, consequently, promoting violence. This protest period also saw unprecedented divides in how pro-protest ecologies on Twitter engaged with anti-protest ecologies on the platform, and vice-versa. Depending on how they viewed the Parliament protests, Twitter users followed and engaged with vastly different and violently opposed narratives of the protest on the platform. Each narrative frame featured a specific ecology of hashtags, denoting strong affinity to, or dismissing those involved in, and organising, the protests.

TDP also studied preliminary data on how videos recommended on YouTube, based on viewing protest-related content produced by mis- and disinformation accounts on the platform (including livestreaming on it), pushed viewers towards content that was progressively more conspiratorial, and with more pronounced harms including around anti-vaccination, anti-mandate, INCEL, misogynist, hypermasculine, anti-authoritarian, Identitarian, and sovereign citizen content from the United States, United Kingdom, Europe and Australia. Following the end of the Parliament Protest, there was a drop in content production and related commentary— illuminating the inter-relationship between offline developments, and online ecologies. As the Parliament Protest showed, coordinated offline and online protests in the future will be more complex, diverse, dispersed, opportunistically collaborative, and stochastically realised.

Describing the complex meta-level scaffolding of disinformation operations, including Russian disinformation we have observed since mid-February, we draw from the theoretical approaches of Jacques Ellul, who identified two main forms of propaganda vectors: strategic messaging and tactical messaging. Strategic messaging, Ellul noted, was a long-term gaze, and consequently, resulted in investments that would bear fruit over decades, not days.[10] Seen from an ecological perspective, in the way TDP studies mis- and disinformation, this is not unlike seeding ideological frames around what is desired as an intended outcome, including the fundamental characteristics of Aotearoa New Zealand as a nation-state, and consequently, what is required to harvest this desired goal. Tactical messaging, on the other hand, is aimed at generating more immediate results, within a strategic messaging and ideological framework. TDP sees both strategic and tactical disinformation messaging constantly at play in Aotearoa New Zealand, aimed at (anti-democratic) long-term socio-political change as well as more immediate results through heightened tactical content production. These efforts result in, online, emotional contagions through reflexive sharing and reactions, and through the instrumentalisation of anger, antagonism and anxiety, give rise to, offline, the formation and cementing of attitudes, perceptions and behaviours without critical reflection.

During the Parliament Protest, researchers at The Disinformation Project studied complex nebulae of information disorders through livestreams from the protesters themselves, mainstream media coverage, and online discourses. Throughout the protest, from February 6 to March 2, TDP studied data from tens of millions of posts and comments on Meta/Facebook product and platform surfaces alone, alongside hundreds of hours of live-streamed footage, tens of thousands of tweets, hundreds of YouTube videos, and tens of thousands of posts and comments on Telegram. The total volume of material studied was much greater, embracing websites, and multimedia material hosted on alternative platforms.

Context

Since November 2021 and our first public report, there have been several developments and shifts in Aotearoa New Zealand's experience with COVID-19. On 3 December 2021, Aotearoa New Zealand shifted to the COVID-19 Protection Framework (traffic light system).[11] The three-tiered (Red, Orange, Green) Traffic Light system offered greater freedom to those who are vaccinated, while offering more restrictions on those who decided not to be vaccinated. On 20 December 2021, following provisional approval from MedSafe and consultation with the COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group, Cabinet approved the use of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine for ages 5-11.[12] Vaccine passes were not implemented for children aged 5-11, meaning regardless of vaccination status they could participate in all activities.[13]

From the time of the announcement of the vaccine rollout for tamariki, TDP observed elevated levels of volatility online. With the beginning of the rollout on 17 January 2022, this further intensified. The vaccine was described as 'poison', compared to D-Day, and heavily resisted. This resistance was based upon mis- and disinformation and COVID-19 denialism. A total of 120,000 children received their first dose of a paediatric dose of the Pfizer vaccine on the first day of rollout.[14] One misinformation super-spreader alleged that five children had collapsed at a vaccination site—something that was debunked by health professionals.[15] Nevertheless, the lie went viral across the mis- and disinformation ecologies studied by TDP, fuelling fear and tension surrounding the COVID-19 vaccine for children.

The shift to the Red tier of the traffic light system in response to the outbreak of Omicron across the country amplified mis- and disinformation production.[16] TDP's sustained study of information disorders since September 2021 gave us a unique perspective on the Parliament Protest, and its origins. Various issues and themes contributed to the mobilisation seen in the early days of the convoy, leading up to the occupation of Parliament grounds: the COVID-19 pandemic, the way fear and hysteria have been generated within the mis- and disinformation community, and the rise in conspiratorial thought. This long, grounded gaze

helped establish events of February 6 and thereafter not as the beginning of violative sentiment, but as an accelerated shift away from predominantly online violent ideation to offline confrontation and kinetic harms.

The Convoy and early days of the occupation of Parliament grounds

Facebook groups and Telegram channels dedicated to organising a domestic version of the Canadian trucker convoy emerged over the weekend of 29-30 January 2022. The protests in Canada, organised by truckers and conservative groups[17] were celebrated and virtue-signalled across domestic Telegram channels studied by TDP. Suggestions for a local version gathered increasing support and traction. By the beginning of February, plans had been drawn up for times and dates to leave Cape Reinga in the North Island and Bluff in the South. Alternative media platforms studied by TDP expressed interest in featuring the organisers to promote the convoy. The convoy was the most significant domestic event studied by TDP to date—including new irrigation patterns around the seed and spread of content, the pace of production, various vectors used for content production, virality, cross-pollination within and between social media ecologies, and levels of engagement.

Convoys left Cape Reinga, and Bluff at 6.30am on 6 February 2022.[18] The ability of the convoy organisers to control route, pace, messaging, and personnel during the travel towards Wellington was limited. Communication channels were unclear, and an organised Spotify playlist was disrupted by those opposed to the protestors.[19] This period of the convoy also saw a shift to the use of Zello—a walkie-talkie like communications and instant messaging app allowing for the easy sharing of voice and text messages. The use of Zello for coordinating offline protest activity of this nature was a first in Aotearoa New Zealand, and soon became a site of conflicting communications, methods of protest, modes of assembly, strategies, tactics and information, especially among those present at Wellington and Picton using it. Protesters arrived at Parliament on February 8 and set up camp on Parliament grounds. On February 9, anindividual attempted to arrest Minister of Health Andrew Little for his alleged crimes in relation to the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine.[20] February 10 saw a significant escalation of tension between police and protesters, including 120 arrests.[21] The offline developments coincided with high levels of online content production—including livestreams from producers on Parliament grounds, audio notes, photos, and video. The study of this material revealed a clear disconnect between controllers of the Convoy's Zello channel, and other official Telegram, Twitter, and Facebook accounts, with how the Convoy was presented, promoted and perceived by others present.[22] These same groups present in front of the Beehive, were simultaneously fighting among themselves.[23] The Convoy's chats offered prosocial commentary, including repeated calls for calm, asking for the police to be treated

with respect, and to not engage in antagonising behaviour. However, online calls from other mis- and disinformation producers and the offline behaviour of protesters was highly violative, instigating kinetic violence, and consequently, amplifying volatility offline, by stoking anger, anxiety and antagonism, online. This significant divergence and its instrumentalisation is important to understand within the context of the Convoy and subsequent Parliament Protest. Communication and intentions varied greatly among producers of mis- and disinformation, self-proclaimed leaders and organisers, creating complex, confusing and chaotic environments for protesters on the ground and those outside.[24]

Within this miasma of competing and complementary content, the most viral content often featured pushback against politicians, political parties, government, judiciary, and Parliament. Some individuals, like Prime Minister Ardern, were consistently targeted with extremely misogynistic, vulgar, violent, and vicious commentary and content. While mainstream media coverage focussed on the Parliament protesters physically present in front of the Beehive (or elsewhere around the country, like Picton), there was comparably little recognition for the mis- and disinformation undergirding the protests, online and on social media. This online world and its impact on offline discourse is the focus of TDP's research.

Early on February 10, there was a breakdown between the original goals of the convoy[25] and the strategies encouraged by an influential disinformation media super-spreader on social media. Discourses from the Convoy official accounts, especially on Zello, promoted non-aggression, asked protesters to treat police respectfully, and remain calm. Simultaneously, however, the Convoy's original focus on mandates was becoming increasingly less significant and giving way to far-right narratives of individuals and groups who used the protest as an opportunity to radicalise people, erode social cohesion, and push forward their own parochial agendas. Our warning in November 2021 that anti-vaccination and COVID-19 mis- and disinformation were being used as a Trojan Horse for the norm-setting of far-right ideals was fully realised during the Parliament protest.

Platform and product growth

Our November 2021 working paper analysed the increasing role of Telegram as a significant wellspring of harms in Aotearoa New Zealand, including mis- and disinformation. Subscribers to around 140 accounts TDP studies daily continue to increase at pace. On 31 December 2021, the total number of subscribers across the channels and chat groups studied on Telegram, allowing for duplication, totalled 243,341. By 14 January 2022, there were 258,370 subscribers. The number rose to 270,873 by January 28. By February 11, TDP recorded 307,613 Telegram subscribers: an increase of nearly 27,000 in just two weeks. By March 4, this number increased to 353,377.

The sustained and significant rise in followers highlights the reach and appeal

of mis- and disinformation promoted on Telegram, featuring text, photo, video, memetic, and audio material—in other words, an enclave of harmful content that is not dependent on off-platform hosting.

Beyond Telegram, Facebook Pages and Groups saw rapid increases in popularity. February 2022 alone saw more followers added to the mis- and disinformation ecologies on Facebook than from September 2021 to January 2022. The same growth trend held for Instagram account constellations promoting mis- and disinformation.

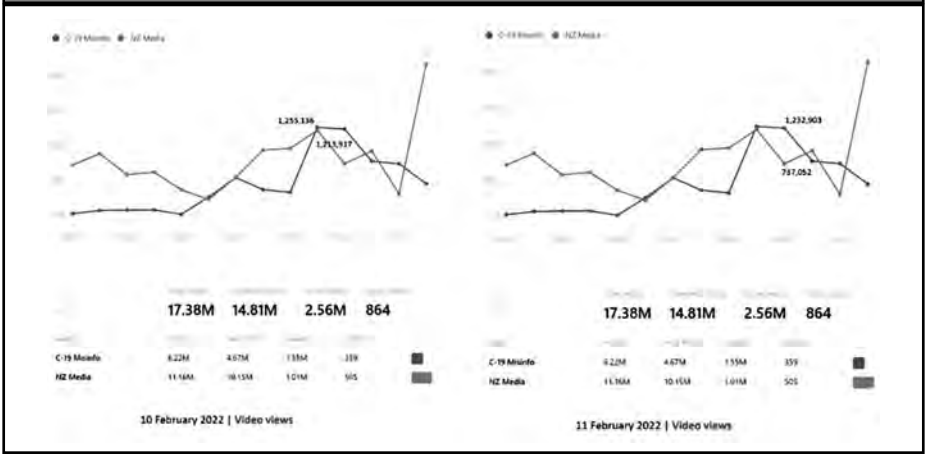
On 2 March 2022, saw content engagement signatures that were unprecedented, eclipsing the anomalous trends studied by TDP after February 10. March 2 is more consequential in several ways, including how just one Facebook Page belonging to a domestic misinformation super-spreader generated the most and second-highest engaged with posts from 1-3 March among ALL public Facebook Pages in Aotearoa New Zealand.[26] TDP had never before studied a single misinformation super-spreader account on Meta platforms dominate engagement in mis- and disinformation ecologies, and furthermore, eclipse engagement by the country's mainstream media on the same platform.

There are fundamental implications, out-of-scope for this report, around what this means for the country's information ecologies in general, and consequently, the perception of and engagement with a shared reality, as a cornerstone of democratic stability and electoral integrity. These are epochal shifts—in large part, because Aotearoa New Zealand had till the protest onset, enjoyed a media landscape that never had mis- and disinformation communities challenge mainstream media engagement. Significant shifts—over two consecutive months—suggest that if these patterns even loosely hold, significant sections of the country's population will no longer be predominantly informed about critical, offline developments, as well as underlying causes, motivations, intentions and drivers, through professional, accurate, impartial journalism or official, government sources.

The Parliament Protest was the single greatest offline accelerant to engagement around and growth of Facebook Page and Group based mis- and disinformation ecologies since TDP's focus on information disorders at the onset of Alert Levels 4 and 3 lockdowns caused by outbreaks of the Delta variant of COVID-19 in our communities. This pattern held with Instagram as well, which is a significant issue. In many countries and contexts, Instagram is used by a much younger demographic than Facebook Pages and Groups who may not understand the harms they are exposed to because of following, trusting and sharing updates from mis- and disinformation accounts. The duration of the protests saw 88,900 new followers to Instagram mis- and disinformation accounts studied by TDP. To put that into perspective, February alone saw more follower growth than September 2021 to January 2022 combined.

Splintered realities

Figure 1: NZ video views on Facebook on 10-11 February 2022



These graphs (Figure 1) show the video views on Facebook for mis- and disinformation producers and the country's mainstream media with official Pages on the platform studied by TDP, on February 10 and 11, respectively. For the first time, mis- and disinformation producers gathered more video views than all of the country's mainstream media Pages combined. On February 11, video content by mainstream media was viewed less than the day before, while engagement with mis- and disinformation accounts remained about the same.

Figure 2: Most used phrases in Instagram posts 10-11 Feb 2022

These wordclouds (Figure 2) highlight the most commonly used phrases in posts to Instagram on February 9-11. The wordcloud on the left is from the constellation of accounts studied by TDP on the platform promoting harmful mis- and disinformation. Those on the right are from mainstream media accounts on the platform. Wordclouds illuminate, through key phrases and what they mean, or (re)present, how a particular community, or ecology, perceives and seeks to define an online or offline development. Here we find not just

fundamentally different vocabularies, but diametrically opposing worldviews. Mis- and disinformation ecologies are heavily laden with conspiratorialism, COVID-19 denialism, and other harms, including from QAnon wellsprings in the United States, imported into Aotearoa New Zealand.

From February 1 to March 4, mis- and disinformation accounts studied on Instagram received higher engagement than accounts from mainstream media. This is important to consider given a younger demographic uses the app, including as a news and information vector.

During the Parliament Protest, offline events resulted in older conspiracy theories gaining more visibility and traction. These included beliefs in chem trails, vaccinations administered through the water supply, and electromagnetic fields making people feel ill.[27] Some protesters took to wearing hats made from tinfoil as protection.[28]

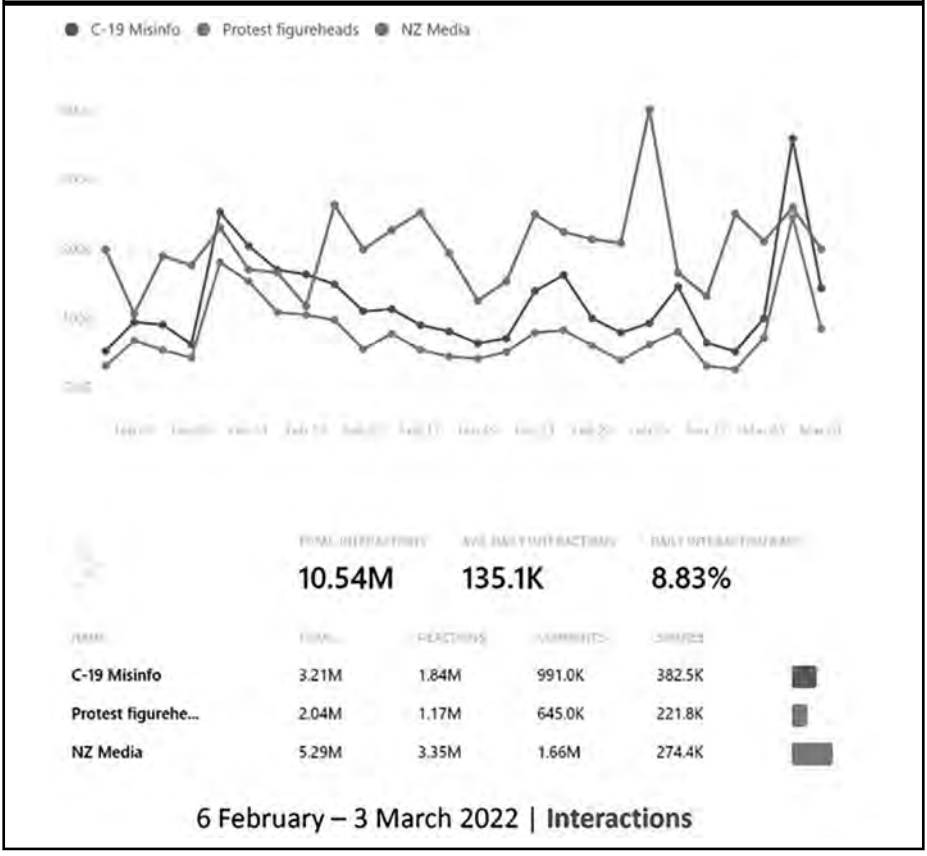
The online engagement with mis- and disinformation Facebook pages was beyond anything TDP had studied previously. Aside from the virality of videos noted above, interactions illuminate appeal, and responses. On February 10, the Pages studied on Facebook generated 252,917 interactions. Mainstream media pages (reviewed for comparison) generated 230,624 interactions. For the first time in TDP's study of information disorders in Aotearoa New Zealand, mis- and disinformation producers on Facebook generated more interactions than mainstream media. Mis- and disinformation pages remained dominant over the next 72 hours.

The same pattern was studied again on March 2. Mis- and disinformation pages on Facebook generated 357,089 interactions, compared to mainstream media's 247,620 interactions. The gap between each ecology's interactions increased from 22,293 on February 10 to 109,469 on March 2. There is no prior point of comparison for these data signatures. In calling these developments a tectonic shift in the country's information and media landscapes, we understand these metrics as evidence of an entrenchment of splintered realities in under a month, with spikes in engagement closely aligned with offline developments, led by police enforcement actions.

The narrative frames, language, and perspectives differed greatly from mis- and disinformation pages to mainstream media pages. Depending on which ecology they trusted as providing a true and accurate capture of the Parliament Protest, New Zealanders were presented with radically different narratives of the protest, at complete odds with each other.

The graph below (Figure 3) Facebook interactions around a cluster of mis- and disinformation pages studied, 12 protest figureheads,[29] and mainstream media from February 6 to March 3. Aotearoa New Zealand's 'misinformation dozen' on Facebook were responsible for a considerable proportion of posts and engagement during the Parliament Protest. On March 2 alone, 73 percent of interactions in the mis- and disinformation ecology were generated by just a dozen accounts.

Figure 3: Facebook interactions, February 6 - March 3 2022



TDP sees these, and related developments during the protest, as significant, unprecedented shifts in the country's media and information landscapes, impacting on the integrity of democratic discourse, social cooperation, the negotiation of difference, perceptions of trustworthiness, and truth.

International conspiratorialism

As the Parliament Protest came to a violent end on March 2, frames emerged suggesting that 'Antifa' activists were supporting offline violence. The use of 'Antifa' as a narrative frame to deflect attention from the perpetrators of the violence who were part of the Parliament Protest reflected how any violent confrontation, Neo-Nazi graffiti, QAnon, MAGA, or pro-Trump sign, violative language, and antagonism was deflected during the entirety of the protest—blamed on external players, deemed false flags, alleged to be staged, or presented as a conspiracy to undermine what was projected as a peaceful protest.

Multiple alleged screenshots from the alleged Antifa New Zealand Facebook

page were circulated on Telegram, Facebook and Twitter. There were clear discrepancies. The number of engagements (likes, reactions, comments, and shares) on the various screenshots did not align with timestamps. TDP examined the screenshots through a process that surfaced if they had been manipulated (i.e., Photoshopped). Every photo that claimed 'Antifa' was to blame for the fires, was heavily manipulated. One of Aotearoa New Zealand's leading misinformation producers on Facebook was a key source seeding the false attribution of violence to 'Antifa', including over Facebook livestreams viewed, at the time, by tens of thousands of concurrent viewers, and more widely shared. Just as right-wing media platforms in the United States alleged 'Antifa' had infiltrated the Capitol Hill protesters and fuelled tension on 6 January 2021,[30] mis- and disinformation producers in Aotearoa New Zealand alleged 'Antifa' were responsible for fires and rioting in the dying moments of the Parliament protest. Both lies have been debunked.[31] Despite this, the narrative around a domestic 'Antifa' movement went viral within Aotearoa New Zealand's mis- and disinformation ecologies. This false narrative, which spread within minutes on March 2, was cemented further on March 3, and by March 4 overwhelmed anybody who dared question it. This loss of a grounded, factual, accurate narrative about individuals who instigated the violence on 2 March 2022 is concerning. The government's own Combined Threat Assessment Group (CTAG) raised concerns during the Parliament Protest, warning of the potential for 'act[s] of extremist violence'.[32] They further warned about the possibility of protest attendees being radicalised while attending the Protest, warning that the threatening rhetoric espoused by some protesters could become the dominant narrative.[33]

The impact of Russian mis- and disinformation

Even before the invasion of Ukraine, RT News repeatedly featured the Parliament Protest. RT's editorial line is, quite explicitly, to amplify 'anything that causes chaos'[34] in what academic studies have called 'one of the most important organisations in the global political economy of disinformation'.[35] RT is not just linked to Russian disinformation and propaganda, but also significant COVID-19 misinformation,[36] leading to de-platforming of accounts from YouTube in Germany. Generating unprecedented engagement, a post on the Parliament Protest was seen nearly 110,000 times on Telegram, on a channel with over 233,000 subscribers. RT News featured the protest in several other posts.

Just a day after the invasion of Ukraine, imported Russian propaganda dominated domestic anti-vaccination, and anti-mandate mis- and disinformation ecologies studied by TDP. Small, niche accounts on Telegram irrigated harms that, very quickly, were featured in much larger and more influential channels and groups, through cross-pollination of content. Though the provenance of much of the content was foreign, the text and (conspiratorial) spin framing the original

material was pegged to domestic frames, often linked to the protests. In other words, a pro-Kremlin gaze with violent, visual content from Ukraine was used to generate attention around the Parliament protests. Posts featured the Ukrainian flag as a symbol for paedophiles, a trope and visual metaphor that was popular in the anti-vaccination Telegram ecologies already imbricated with QAnon conspiratorialism. Pro-Putin content studied was also profoundly toxic, with foundations emanating from, and promoting, hyper-masculinity, and deep misogyny.

In mid-March, one of Aotearoa New Zealand's leading misinformation producers on Facebook produced a video on the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. The video featured the false claim of bio-weapons factories in Ukraine constructed and funded by the United States, and promoted claims consistently made by Russian propaganda, since the start of the invasion, that Putin was guided by a desire to destroy these factories. Using Candace Owens as an authoritative source on the issue, and as an example of apophenia, a spurious connection was drawn between bio-labs and bio-weapons by referencing the gain of function research associated with Chinese bio-labs, in the context of COVID-19. The strategic script was designed to promote a pro-Kremlin narrative frame, among this producer's followers, and a wider community. TDP found this video, and pro-Kremlin narrative frames on Ukraine seeded by other domestic disinformation producers as very concerning. This content undermined the role of facts, evidence, international law, and normative democratic frameworks. An older mis- and disinformation framework to amplify vaccine resistance and hesitancy, was now a narrative infrastructure employed by disinformation producers to promote pro-Kremlin propaganda, that in turn, helped cement anti-vaccination, anti-mandate and anti-government perspectives.

By the end of March, in what was a sustained and stark content signature, every domestic Telegram channel studied had pivoted to a near-exclusive framing of the Ukraine war through pro-Putin and pro-Kremlin frames. QAnon conspiratorialism and content on these channels and pro-Putin propaganda was a distinction without a difference. We also saw the migration of tactics—from the import of disinformation from wellsprings outside Aotearoa New Zealand, to Russian disinformation's adoption, and adaptation, as a strategic toolkit, or blueprint. Content from QAnon sites in the United States, Russian propaganda channels and platforms, correspondents and individuals affiliation with Russian propaganda channels, an array of foreign nationals in Ukraine producing content on the war through pro-Kremlin perspectives, conspiratorial and disinformation producers from the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia, and pro-Trump and pro-MAGA channels and individuals in the United States seeded on small, niche channels, and then, rapidly, cross-pollinated to larger channels, remain key features in the irrigation of explicitly pro-Putin disinformation in domestic ecologies studied.

Language and frames

Language, imagery, and framing features within narratives have become increasingly violent and anti-social, as we noted in August-November 2021. Language at the Parliament Protest once again revealed the entrenchment of violent expression, misogyny, and other hallmarks of dangerous speech as the norm. Increasing violence, conspiratorialism, and a divergence between the sentiments and attitudes offered by mis- and disinformation producers and mainstream media were notable.

Targeting of communities and individuals

At the Parliament protest, violence became visible to a wider section of Aotearoa New Zealand's society. Threats against visible figures such as politicians and the media were increasingly reported upon by the mainstream media—highlighting that the protest was not merely a 'festival atmosphere' but a home to violent extremist thought and action. As we discuss later, there were—and are—risks that members of the crowd who were exposed to extremist, dangerous speech will begin to adopt those positions.

In addition to the targeting of public figures, passers-by also experienced targeting, intimidation and violence. Two students from Wellington Girls' College wrote about the harassment they and their friends had received—violence and threats that eventually resulted in the school moving online.[37]

We have studied how public figures experience harmful attention and hate speech from those within mis- and disinformation communities.[38] We noted that figures like the Prime Minister, as well as women across government, academia, public service, journalism, Māori leadership, and any form of public life are targeted in a sustained, significant manner. Since November 2021, the production of hateful and violent expression has become more heightened, and also more visible to the wider public, migrating from enclaves of hate within Telegram, to commentary that is vicious, vulgar, and violative, on Meta/Facebook platforms as well as Twitter, and YouTube commentary.

Violent threats were further directed towards Members of Parliament. Mis- and disinformation producers said things like 'they [politicians] all need to be carted away', 'your days are numbered' [directed to politicians] and describing politicians as 'filth and scum' and 'lame ducks'. This fits against a backdrop of increasing threats against politicians.[39] TDP has observed the growth of this volatility for many months, growing at pace.

In addition to this, journalists received—and wrote about—their experiences of targeted abuse and harassment at the protest. *One News* journalist Kristin Hall described the hostility shown towards media, politicians, and the public as having a 'different tone' than previous protests she had covered.[40] Māori leaders were also attacked, as were members of academia and public service.

Disinformation producers instigating offline violence in Aotearoa New Zealand, and at the Parliament Protest, used two techniques—'plausible deniability' and 'conversational implicature' to encoding violence. These calls for violence are performed in ways that allow violent intent to be communicated, transmitted and acted upon, while maintaining—for legal and other purposes—distance from long-tail and downstream consequences, online and offline.

Plausible deniability and conversational implicature are two techniques used by charismatic religious and populist political leaders in the Global South, implicated in significant offline violence, Islamophobia and even genocide in countries and contexts like Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and India.

Conversational implicature is the act of implying what is said, without explicitly saying it—dog-whistling, encoded or thinly-veiled—especially with content that appeals to, and is aimed at, violent extremist rhetoric. This speech frame allows room for a 'reactive reversal' if the audience does not respond well to what is implied.[41] Since what is implied is not explicitly stated, this leaves the intended audience in a 'grey zone' within which some listeners are more likely to hear and act on the coded intent. Plausible deniability and conversational implicature were used prior to the Parliament Protest, during its offline events, and have been used afterwards to distance instigators of violence from the consequences of their calls.

Implications

We noted in November 2021 the risk that COVID-19 denialism and anti-vaccination discourse was being used as a kind of Trojan Horse for norm-setting and norm-entrenchment of far-right ideologies in Aotearoa New Zealand. The Parliament Protest show TDP's prediction to be true. Mis- and disinformation in Aotearoa New Zealand continues to work to create shifts in Aotearoa's social and political norms. Key mis- and disinformation producers affirm and promote an idea of Aotearoa New Zealand that pulls away from progressive values of social inclusion, justice, and equity that are increasing in social and political discourse. Instead, they long for systems that promote New Zealand European identity, traditional gender roles, and a patriarchal family structure.

This sets a concerning precedent for Aotearoa New Zealand—something worth both acknowledging and working on to help resist and counter. These issues were not magically resolved following the dissolution of the Parliament Protest—mis- and disinformation and conspiratorial thought continues to impact on the lives and actions of our communities. The ongoing implications of this, and for how Aotearoa New Zealand moves forward, should not be underestimated.

The Parliament Protest has and will impact on Aotearoa New Zealand's political and social norms. The divergent perceptions of the protest by protesters themselves and the subsequent splintering of narratives around provenance,

purpose, presentation and pertinent productions have profound implications for social cohesion, and the way difference is negotiated, online and offline.

These splintered realities reflect the experience of other countries. Regarding the Ottawa protest, Canadian journalist Andrew Coyne wrote that a shared reality was being challenged.[42] He said that protesters and those who were denying vaccination had removed themselves from the systems through which knowledge was transmitted, and thus were vulnerable to people looking to manipulate them.[43] Similarly, events of 6 January 2021 in the United States resulted from a lack of shared narratives: polling found that half of Republicans believe the storming of the Capitol was a non-violent protest, or the work of left-wing activists to discredit Trump.[44] Further, 60 percent of Republicans believed the 2020 US Election was 'stolen'.[45] These beliefs have significant impacts for the way Americans interact, the way government operates, and beliefs in electoral integrity. The path dependency of splintered realities in Aotearoa New Zealand will follow a similar socio-political trajectory.

TDP maintains that the mis- and disinformation which fuel this splintering of reality will grow apace, entrenching cultish mindsets and algorithmically amplified divergence, leading to information disorders not unlike what we can see internationally—on both sides of the Atlantic since 2016, around the Capitol Hill insurrection, and for years prior in Global South contexts. These underlying drivers of information disorders and offline consequences can be understood by what Dutch psychologist Nico Frijda called the 'law of apparent reality', whereby emotions are generated by events perceived as real, and the intensity of emotions depends on the degree to which they consider the event to be real.[46] An inability to distinguish between real, fictive, and imagined events is a consequence of information disorders and the expansion of online mis- and disinformation into offline realities. These are significant challenges facing Aotearoa New Zealand society and government that must be addressed.

The pandemic has contributed to increased attention to ideas around social cohesion. A May 2020 report highlighted that at the time, Aotearoa New Zealand was experiencing high levels of social cohesion despite the pandemic but noted that social cohesion could deteriorate.[47] Subsequent analysis, including TDP's November 2021 report, and work led by Paul Spoonley in December 2021, made it clear that existing inequalities across education, health, and ethnicity threaten to undermine social cohesion and collective wellbeing.[48]

A lack of shared narratives poses significant risks to memory-making. In her writing on history and memory, Sarah Churchwell argues that myths can influence the remembering of history.[49] Contemporary myths are known by many names—conspiracy theories, fake news, and moral panics, but they all have significant implications for understandings, meaning making, and historical memory.[50] This has significant implications for Aotearoa New Zealand as we move forward from

the Parliament Protest and shore up social cohesion. For Aotearoa New Zealand to operate within democratic, inclusive, and progressive values many in this country celebrate, continued efforts towards social cohesion are required.

Social cohesion relies on trust and cooperation between people with different values and identities.[51] At the He Whenua Taurikura hui in June 2021, TDP director Kate Hannah stated that Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and the partnership relationships the realisation of Tiriti justice enables, are the necessary starting point for any discussion or development of a strategy which seeks to address and make redress for the impacts of online harm, hateful and violent extremism, and disinformation for Aotearoa New Zealand. It is from a position of the partnership that Te Tiriti provides that Aotearoa can make a global contribution to these pressing and intermediate issues.[52]

Conclusion

Disinformation highlights differences and divisions that can then be used to target and scapegoat, normalise prejudices, harden us-versus-them mentalities, and justify violence.[53] This is now the case in Aotearoa New Zealand; disinformation and its focus on difference are at risk of cementing themselves within how we interact with one another. We have discussed the highly divergent understandings protesters had of the Parliament Protest, its physical manifestations and founding ideals; further strengthening our warning in November 2021 around how mis- and disinformation related to COVID-19 acts as a Trojan Horse to push followers towards more violently exclusive, supremacist, xenophobic, racist, far-right and extremist ideologies. We saw this play out at the protest. The ostensibly original and more moderate goals of the Convoy were pushed aside and replaced with extremist narrative frames, including calling for the armed storming of Parliament, the execution of public servants, academics, journalists, politicians, and healthcare workers.

The online enclaves of mis- and disinformation production in Aotearoa New Zealand cannot be treated as a minor incursion to an otherwise equitable society. On multiple occasions mis- and disinformation pages studied on Facebook received greater engagement than mainstream media—with serious implications for how people understood the protest and what took place. The end of the Parliament Protest did not signify an end to conspiratorial thought in Aotearoa New Zealand Covid but we must end our complacency in recognising these harms and their potential outcomes. Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the relationship it creates are our starting point when responding to mis- and disinformation, and online extremism in Aotearoa New Zealand. Renewing efforts for social cohesion, honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and reflecting critically on our past, our shared present, and our ideas for the future must be the starting point to re-building trust in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2022 and beyond.

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Afghanistan, the Taliban and the liberation narrative

Why it is so vital to be telling our own stories

Commentary: In the context of a liberation narrative, an Afghanistani broadcaster and cultural affairs adviser now living in Aotearoa New Zealand, examines the problems with this narrative when applied to the recent controversy around a pregnant New Zealand journalist in Afghanistan and her conflict with the New Zealand government and the MIQ system. Firstly, this narrative relies on the assumption that 'there isn't anyone in Afghanistan who can write in English and tell the stories of Afghanistan to the world'. It also relies on the assumption that a foreigner can tell Afghanistan's story. Secondly, to the extent that it creates an expectation of unconditional gratitude on the part of its 'beneficiaries', this narrative denies the value of immigrants in society. The author argues she personally contributes to building social cohesion in New Zealand's multicultural environment. More generally, New Zealand's economy and workforce rely on immigrants, as has become increasingly apparent in the face of COVID-19 restrictions. The media's liberation narrative fails to do justice to the value and importance of this contribution. The author argues that the antidote is a narrative characterised by diversity and solidarity, that builds up and builds on the voices, experiences and wisdom of Māori and Indigenous, minorities and immigrants.

Keywords: Afghanistan, balance, COVID-19, diversity, fairness, immigration, journalism, liberation narrative, Māori, minorities, MIQ, New Zealand, refugees, representation, Taliban, white privilege

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IN FEBRUARY 2022, I raised my voice (Samarqandi, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c) to bring attention to the reality of the situation in my homeland, Afghanistan, in response to media coverage (in New Zealand and elsewhere) that exploited and trivialised that situation, and dangerously mischaracterised the Taliban (Bellis, 2022a). I was very careful about what I said and how I said it, and I was nonetheless prepared for the criticism that comes with speaking out publicly about a controversial issue. What surprised me, however, was the nature of that

Trivialising the Taliban is not the way to force New Zealand to change its Covid quarantine rules

Muzhgan Samarqandi

Tue 1 Feb 2022 03.57 GMT

My heart goes out to Charlotte Bellis but the treatment of women in Afghanistan is not comparable to the situation in New Zealand

Under the Taliban, women in Afghanistan are not allowed to work or study. Photograph: Héctor Retamal/AFP/Getty Images

My name is Muzhgan Samarqandi and I am from Baghlan, Afghanistan, but living in New Zealand with my Kiwi husband and our son. Like Charlotte Bellis, I too was a broadcaster in Afghanistan, back when this was possible for a woman without being a foreigner.

Figure 1: A Muzhgan Samarqandi opinion article featured in *The Guardian* on 1 February 2022.

criticism (*1News* Facebook, 2022), and the prevailing support for a particular narrative, that excludes minority voices like mine, and our perspectives. It points to a lack of diversity and representation in New Zealand media, and a resulting lack of balance and fairness.

For context, my open letter as published by *The Guardian* on 1 February 2022, is included here in full:

> My name is Muzhgan Samarqandi and I am from Baghlan, Afghanistan, but living in New Zealand with my Kiwi husband and our son. Like Charlotte Bellis, I too was a broadcaster in Afghanistan, back when this was possible for a woman without being a foreigner.
>
> Charlotte says that she was forced to leave her previous home in Qatar, where she was a journalist with Al Jazeera, after becoming pregnant, since

FOX NEWS SCREENSHOT

Figure 2: Headline on a report featuring New Zealand journalist Charlotte Bellis in an interview with Fox News presenter Bailee Hill.

it's illegal for unmarried women to become pregnant there.
With New Zealand's borders closed, she returned to Afghanistan, the only other country she had a visa to live in. Charlotte says the Taliban granted her 'safe-haven' and her multiple attempts to obtain emergency MIQ visas to allow her to return to give birth in New Zealand were—until Tuesday—unsuccessful.

As a mother, my heart goes out to Charlotte, and I sincerely hope she and her partner get to New Zealand so she can give birth at home surrounded by her family.

As someone who has travelled for study and work and love, and who does not share the same passport as their significant other, my heart goes out to everyone stranded overseas, and I sincerely hope they can all get home and be reunited with their loved ones.

But as an Afghanistani woman, who has only recently emigrated from Afghanistan to New Zealand, I have to speak up. I almost did so when Charlotte interviewed Abdul Qahar Balkhi, the Taliban spokesperson with the Kiwi accent in a story for Al Jazeera [in 2021]. Although her story raised allegations of Taliban killings and violence following their takeover, I felt she went easy on him. For example, at the end of the interview, she asked what he had to say to those who called the Taliban 'terrorists'. He said people didn't really believe they were terrorists, but this was just a word the US used for anyone who didn't fall in line with their agenda. There were no further questions.

This was a man who in 2012, as a member of the Taliban's 'com-

munications wing', claimed responsibility on behalf of the Taliban for an attack on innocent civilians. A man who has admitted the group committed crimes against humanity. It made me so upset to see him get away with answers like that. But then my energy was taken up just coping with the reality of what was happening to my friends and family in Afghanistan.

But now, when I read Charlotte's letter and see the media and social media responses, I see the situation in my country being trivialised, and it makes me angry.

Charlotte refers to herself asking the Taliban in a press conference what they would do for women and girls, and says she is now asking the same question of the New Zealand government.

I understand there are problems with MIQ. And I understand the value in provoking change with controversy. But what I don't understand is how someone who has lived and worked in Afghanistan, and seen the impact of the Taliban's regime on women and girls, can seriously compare that situation to New Zealand.

Afghanistani women who resist or protest the regime are being arrested, tortured, raped and killed. Young girls are being married off to Talibs. Education and employment are no longer available to them. A 19-year-old girl I know from my village, who was in her first year of law last year is now, instead, a housewife to a Talib. There are so many stories like this.

Charlotte says the Taliban have given her a safe haven when she is not welcome in her own country. This is obviously a good headline and good way to make a point. But it is an unhelpful representation of the situation. One commentary on Instagram, reposted by Charlotte, suggested her story represents the truly Muslim acts of the Taliban, which the Western media

FOX NEWS SCREENSHOT

Figure 3: 'Journalist: Taliban helped me, my country won't'. How Fox News tagged a Bailee Hill (left) interview with Charlotte Bellis.

have not shown. This makes me angry.

If a person in power extends privileges to someone who doesn't threaten their power, it doesn't mean they are not oppressive or extremist or dangerous.

The Taliban distort Islam and manipulate Muslims for their political gain. They violate the rights of women and girls, and it is offensive to compare them to the New Zealand government in this regard.

New Zealand is no paradise, I have experienced my fair share of racism here, and I am sure the MIQ situation can be improved. But relying on the protection of a regime that is violently oppressive, and then using that to try to shame the New Zealand government into action, is not the way to achieve that improvement. It exploits and trivialises the situation in Afghanistan, at a time when the rights of Afghanistani women and girls desperately need to be taken seriously.

My first observation is that my letter was received by media with scepticism and published with caution. The same cannot be said of Bellis's letter, which was widely published and well received, without any questioning of her claims about the Taliban or her travel options. Evidently, a media platform and publication are more easily and widely accessible to journalists like her. For example, the first editor who contacted me about my letter asked if it was legitimate, if I had really written it, and if my story was real. She needed some convincing about my story and my lived experience with the Taliban.

My second observation is that my letter was published with a preference for a narrative other than my own. Some of the headlines used, in which I had zero input, sensationalised the issues at hand and undermined my efforts to draw attention to my homeland. One example is 'Afghanistani mother responds to pregnant Kiwi journalist's plea' (Samarqandi, 2022a). My letter was not about Bellis's plea to get home, but specifically her mischaracterisation of the situation in Afghanistan.[1] Also, when I requested use of the term 'Afghanistani' to refer to myself and to all people of different ethnicities from Afghanistan (rather than 'Afghan' which refers to a particular ethnicity), one media outlet said it had never heard this term before and, without asking for permission or further clarification, proceeded to use 'Afghan'.

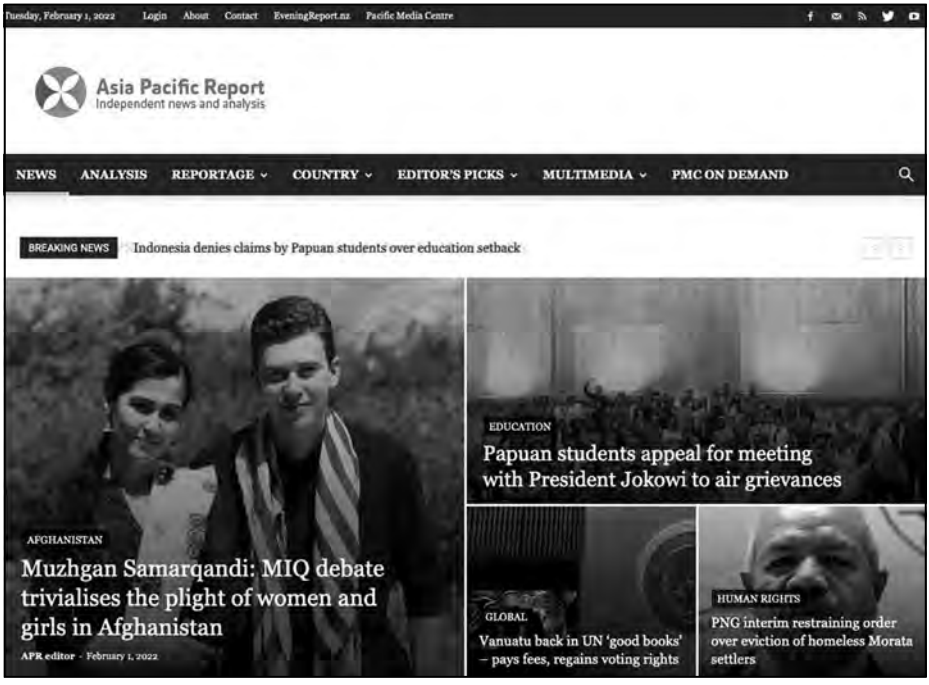
The degree of editorial discretion exercised, to the exclusion of my identity and preferences, gave me the impression that my narrative was nothing more than an interesting annotation or footnote, being used to add colour and intrigue to a story that sells, with little commitment to addressing the real issues in question. As another example, some of the outlets that published my letter illustrated it exclusively with pictures of Bellis (Samarqandi, 2022a).

My third observation is that a lot of the criticism I faced, for raising my voice, reflected a perception that I am lucky to be here and should 'shut up and be grateful or go home'. While the wording of such criticism was more aggressive than

anything I have experienced before (and far more aggressive than my paraphrasing above), it is a perception with which I am, by now, very familiar. A lot of people (some hostile, some well-meaning) often tell me how lucky I am to be here, how great it is here, how happy I must feel to be here, and how awful it must have been in Afghanistan.

I left Afghanistan in 2019, to pursue a future with the man I love. I did not leave, nor come to New Zealand, to escape the situation in Afghanistan. Some people have had to do so, from Afghanistan and other parts of the world. But that does not mean their journey is reduced to escapism, their identity defined by victimhood, or their experience characterised exclusively by trauma. For me, the greatest trauma has been the racism I have experienced in New Zealand. So, while I am grateful for the welcome and opportunities I have received from many people, I reject the narrative perpetuated by the media, which Rafia Zakaria calls the 'liberation trajectory', that suggests 'it's so great here and so bad over there' (Malik, 2021). I also reject the notion that my gratitude should preclude my critical engagement on important issues, especially those concerning my homeland.

My heart lies in Afghanistan. I miss the solemn and expressive landscape and language. I miss the culture of hospitality and festivity. I miss the poetry with which we communicate, the music and colour with which we celebrate,



ASIA PACIFIC REPORT SCREENSHOT

Figure 4: Muzghan Samarqandi in *Asia Pacific Report* on 1 February 2022 about how the New Zealand MIQ debate 'trivialises the plight of women and girls in Afghanistan' since the Taliban seized back power on 15 August 2021.

and the generosity with which we create community. Of course, I also miss the food. I have seen and been subject to many horrible things growing up in Afghanistan, but my prevailing experience is of the beauty of life centred around family and community, which has instilled a faith in humanity and in the future of my country. I long to return, and to plant the feet of my son in the soil of his motherland, so he can grow tall and strong and confident in his cultural identity, and learn to breathe freely and taste the world with his mother tongue. Until I return, I carry and am carried by the spirit of my homeland.

My Afghanistani identity and lived experience, and my investment in the future of Afghanistan, should give me the right to comment on its current affairs, if not the credibility to do so with authority. However, in the context of a liberation narrative, my speaking up renders me an ungrateful beneficiary, who has been saved from damnation in Afghanistan and is now daring to criticise one of the 'emblems' of this Western liberation movement: a brave white woman voluntarily subjecting herself to the dangers of such a hellhole, to report our story to the world (Malik, 2021).

There are obvious problems with this narrative. Firstly, as Rafia points out, it relies on the assumption that 'there isn't anyone in Afghanistan who can write in English and tell the stories of Afghanistan to the world'. It also relies on the assumption that a foreigner, with no lived experience of our reality, can tell our story. Secondly, to the extent that it creates an expectation of unconditional gratitude on the part of its 'beneficiaries', this narrative denies the value of immigrants in society. Personally, through my work as a cultural adviser, I both pay taxes and contribute to building social cohesion in New Zealand's multicultural environment. More generally, the economy and workforce rely on immigrants, as has become increasingly apparent in the face of COVID-19 restrictions. The media's liberation narrative fails to do justice to the value and importance of this contribution.

As a side note, there was a strong message of support from Māori, in response to my letter, which was picked up and amplified by Māori media personalities like Mihingarangi Forbes, Tania Page and Tina Ngata. This is significant because, in one sense, Māori have the most valid reason to be hostile to immigration, and stand to lose the most from it, when their interests are already marginalised in a policy context. I can only assume this prevailing support reflects their own culture of hospitality, which I have experienced before on a personal level. For example, the first time I met Sir Taihakurei Durie, he greeted me with a mihi that was at least 10 minutes long, acknowledging my culture and its rich history and literary tradition, and honouring me with a welcome that warmed my heart and steadied my feet, and fortified my pride in my identity.

But I also think this message of support from Māori might be informed by a sense of solidarity. For example, Tina Ngata wrote a Waitangi Day reflection about colonielle oppression, referring to 'women who benefit from and exploit

colonial patriarchy' (Ngata, 2022). During this reflection, she drew attention to Bellis's mischaracterisation of the situation in Afghanistan, alongside an instance of racial profiling of a young Māori woman by an older white woman, in a Farmers Department Store. She then made insightful observations about power, privilege, and the perpetuation of injustice through the failure to dismantle racist structures. I think this points to a narrative characterised by a *solidarity* trajectory, as the antidote to that of colonial liberation.

However, as Ngata (2022) noted, notwithstanding my efforts to draw attention to the reality of the situation in Afghanistan, and the harm done by Bellis's mischaracterisation of the Taliban, and notwithstanding the eloquence with which Rafia illustrated the privilege at play, the liberation narrative prevailed. This narrative denied any racism and continued to celebrate Bellis as an emblem and champion of women's rights. Bellis's lawyer told me on Twitter I was guilty of exactly 'what I had accused her of', by 'attacking a woman', and told long-time women's rights activist Sahar Fetrat that she 'needed gender training'. The question is not why someone like him apparently failed to comprehend the issues at hand (perhaps they were too far removed from his reality), but rather why the media afforded such extensive coverage to him and his perspective (DuPlessis-Allan, 2022; Ensor, 2022; Nixon & Bhan, 2022; Neilson, 2022).

I think this is because the interests represented by Bellis and her lawyer are presumed to represent the interests of New Zealand.[2] Indeed, they are valid and important interests, and perhaps those of the majority, but they are not the exclusive interests of the diverse people that make up New Zealand. There are some awful stories of people stranded overseas, unable to return home to give birth, attend funerals, see family, and be reunited with loved ones, as reported in the media (Cook, 2022; Fallon, 2022; Macdonald, 2021; MIQ room release, 2022). These stories need to be heard and engaged with.

However, there are also many awful stories of the difficulties, sometimes arbitrarily imposed, often aggravated by racism, that immigrants face to get into New Zealand, and to navigate the immigration system. These stories also need to be heard and engaged with, but the media tends to focus on those immigration stories that reflect New Zealand in a positive light and fit within a liberation narrative. Even some of the immigrant success stories are framed as 'success thanks to immigration support' when they are in fact in spite of a lack of support.

For these stories to be heard, especially those that involve an inconvenient or complicated truth, the media needs to allow them to be told by the individuals themselves. If their English makes this difficult, translators can and should be used. Otherwise, their truth is suppressed, and their stories appropriated in service of the liberation narrative, and what Rafia calls a 'cultural ranking', that suggests bad things only happen in the countries immigrants come from, not in New Zealand (Malik, 2021).

This starts with recognising that immigrants and non-citizens living in New Zealand are also an important part of the fabric of society, who contribute to the economy and community, and have a voice with valid concerns. It is also about recognising that our diverse society is interconnected with people and cultures around the world. In this context it becomes about visibility and equality, and that means creating a platform for diversity of voice and dismantling racist structures *within the media*.

My final observation is, without a diversity of voice in the media, an understanding of the reality of the situation in Afghanistan and elsewhere escapes the general public, to the detriment of discourse and engagement. For example, after my letter was published, I was featured on RNZ's *The Panel*, during which ex-Attorney-General Chris Finlayson said, whenever outsiders like Britain or Russia have tried to get involved in Afghanistan, they have left in body bags (NZ Afghanistani broadcaster speaks out, 2022). He concluded that getting involved was pointless, and that it is better to let Afghanistan 'go to the devil'.

Britain and the Soviet Union *invaded* Afghanistan (Satia, 2021). Even the US relied on former warlords to protect its own interests, which fuelled corruption and undermined democracy, and Pakistan trained and supported the Taliban (Bennett-Jones, 2022). The history of my homeland is as a battleground for foreign interests. Afghanistan already went to the devil, and its name is Colonialism. Getting involved in Afghanistan now is not pointless, as Finlayson suggests. Rather, it is desperately needed, but it means undoing colonialism. And this is where we need a narrative characterised by a solidarity trajectory, and a diversity of voice in the media.

After the coverage of Bellis's MIQ predicament had ended, she published an op-ed titled '23 million Afghans face starvation—where is the world?' This piece included reference to the plight of women activists and school-aged girls, and the Taliban's 'very limited tolerance' for anyone who questions its authority, which suggested she had seen and taken on some of the criticism directed at her open letter. However, while she defended her role as a foreign journalist, 'to amplify Afghan voices and mirror their reality into your homes', she failed to include such voices in her article, and she and the New Zealand media fail still to understand the importance of the people of Afghanistan *telling their own stories*.

This perpetuates the liberation narrative and the problem identified by Rafia in that, 'When news about Afghanistan does manage to break through this Western apathy, it usually involves Westerners themselves (Zakaria, 2022). To counter this, we need a narrative characterised by diversity and solidarity, that builds up and builds on the voices, experiences and wisdom of Māori and indigenous, minorities and immigrants.

Notes

1. On 7 May 2022, Taliban officials announced a crackdown with women and girls being expected to stay home. If they did venture out, cover up in encompassing loose clothing that only revealed their eyes—preferably, a burka, reported National Public Radio (NPR) News. (Hadid, 2022). Women on TV were required to at least wear masks, if not veils, to cover their faces, and in a protest dubbed #FreeHerFace on social media, men on Tolo News also wore masks in solidarity with their female colleagues (Joya, 2022).
2. On 27 April 2022 the High Court ruled that MIQ unjustifiably breached New Zealanders' rights from September to December 2021. Former COVID-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins apologised to Charlotte Bellis, but said this did not extend to the government's MIQ system generally.—Bellis apology doesn't mean MIQ unjustified, says Hipkins (2022, June 22). Retrieved from https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/469597/bellis-apology-doesn-t-mean-miq-unjustified-hipkins

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Muzhgan Samarqandi worked as a broadcaster for Arezo TV in Mazar-e-Sharif and GIZ in Baghlan, Afghanistan, between 2012-2017. She met her New Zealand husband at a peace-building conference centre in Panchgani, India, in 2017, and lives in Aotearoa with her family, working as an interpreter and cultural adviser.
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‘Don’t rock the boat’

Pervasive precarity and industrial inertia among Queensland journalists

Abstract: While considerable academic attention has been paid to the effect of industry turbulence on journalists’ perceptions of their professional identity and the normative values of journalism over the past two decades, there has been less focus on how transformations wrought by digital incursion, corporate economising, and the rise of neoliberal ideologies might have injured journalist’s industrial agency. This article argues that journalists’ willingness to assert or advance their industrial rights at work has been diminished in Australia by the increase in precarity that has arisen as a result of shifts in the media landscape. It argues disruption has created precarious working environments in which uncertainty and fear drive an unprecedented and almost universal sense of self-preservation that has detached journalists from industrial engagement and the mechanisms that support safe and secure working conditions—to the detriment of the journalism industry and the public it serves.

Keywords: Australia, collectivism, digital disruption, fourth estate, industrial relations, journalism, MEAA, precarity, Queensland, unions, workers’ rights.

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Introduction

THE JOURNALISM industry has faced rapid and seismic changes over the past two decades that have reshaped the professional and occupational practices of its practitioners. While journalism has always been at the mercy of market forces and technological change, the pace, scale and impact of those changes since the turn of the millennium have had consequences on an unprecedented scale. Mass layoffs, masthead closures and the demands of digital first publishing, the 24/7 news cycle, multi-skilling, social media and audience metrics, among other things, have created a news media ecosystem where journalists are frequently expected to do more for little (if any) extra pay. It is an environment where injurious and exploitative conditions such as long hours, poor remuneration and poor training, coupled with work/life bleed and expectations to self-skill and self-brand are often dismissed as simply *de rigueur* for contemporary journalism work.

This article is drawn from research examining the perceptions of a select,

but broadly representative, group of Queensland journalists in relation to their industrial literacy and their capacity to effect change in the workplace in Australia. It reveals that a pervasive sense of precarity among working journalists is a significant factor in their reluctance to demand compliance with, or advancement of, their workplace rights. This sense of precarity is strongly linked to instability and change in the industry over the past two decades and their fear of being sacked or blacklisted or suffering career stagnation within an extremely competitive job market. The research suggests the result is a workforce practised in self-preservation, underpinned by a combination of fear and professional pride, that normalises injurious or exploitative working conditions. As a workforce, journalists are thus industrially disempowered and disengaged from the very instruments and processes that might offer relief, including the journalists' trade union.

None of this serves journalists or the industry well. A workforce that lacks industrial will or courage cannot negotiate or advocate for the industrial infrastructure that supports good journalism—such as adequate staff levels, training, representation, or resources.

Literature

There is a significant body of research that acknowledges deficiencies in the employment conditions of working journalists in the trans-Tasman region, particularly with respect to salaries, workloads and unpaid or undervalued overtime. Australian research over the past two decades from the likes of Zion et al. (2016) and O'Donnell (2017) point to corporate cost-cutting, increased workload demands, social media expectations, the 24/7 news-cycle, new technologies, and role recalibrations as the root causes of declining conditions. Zion et al. attribute a 'rapid downturn in journalism wages in full-time positions' to the 'industry trend to produce news at lower costs, such as Fairfax's offshore outsourcing of editing functions to Pagemasters in New Zealand (Christensen, 2014)' while also acknowledging 'anecdotal Australian media reports about the decline in remuneration to freelancers (Buckingham-Jones & Ward, 2015)' (2016, p. 131). Karen Meehan makes similar observations in her research on self-employed journalists, noting they endure 'poor work conditions, isolation, slippery contractual arrangements and inconsistent rates of pay' (2001, p. 107). Meehan argues this creates cheap labour which also jeopardises the job security and work conditions of salaried employees. Molloy and Bromley's study of young online journalists highlights concerns over 'heavy workloads, insufficient training and uncertainty about roles' (2009, p. 79) while Neilson's New Zealand study identifies the pressure on journalists to engage in 'unpaid or under-compensated' (2018, p. 549) digital labour (social media, online engagement) to retain jobs or improve future employment prospects.

These work conditions and labour practices are exploitative or injurious. The term exploitation in this research is used in a moral sense, more suggestive of misuse than use. While acknowledging the term's roots in Marxist theories around workers selling their labour for less than its value, it shifts focus to the actions of the exploiter using someone unfairly for their own advantage (Wood, 1995). This study also uses the word injurious to describe labour practices which cause injury. In this context injury can also be applied more broadly to non-material artefacts including knowledge or rights, not unlike its use in law (FWC, 2018).

Union rights and collectivism

At last count there were 5,500 unionised journalists in Australia, including 1,400 who classify themselves as freelancers (MEAA, 2017). This is a relatively small percentage in an industry that in the 2016 Census boasted 14,000 practitioners (Fisher et al., 2020), yet it is on par with broader national trade union figures in that it represents a membership in steady decline. Trade union membership in Australia has fallen significantly over the past two decades, a situation well documented by scholars (Bray, Macneil & Spiess, 2021; Curtin, 2019), political analysts (Bishop & Chan, 2019) and the Australian media itself (Bonyhady, 2020; Bowden, 2017). In the early 1980s about half the Australian workforce was unionised, but by 2020 it was estimated that only 12.7 percent of men and 15.9 percent of women counted themselves as members (ABS, 2020). At an industry level, the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) lost 31 percent of its membership between 2003 and 2017 (Gilfilian & McGann, 2018), with membership particularly low among young journalists who generally consider unions outdated (O'Donnell, 2021).

Dorney (2018) attributes falling union membership to legislative changes to labour laws and industrial relations; the increase in part-time and casual employment and technological and organisational change. Other analysts and scholars (Bray & Macneil, 2011; Cooper et al., 2009) point to the Howard government's introduction of individual Australian Workplace Agreements in 1996 and the attempted overhaul of the industrial relations system via the WorkChoices legislation in 2005 as key causes.[1] They argue this anti-union agenda caused irreparable damage to worker powerbases by creating a cohort of individuals whose wages and working conditions were no longer tethered collectively to that of their colleagues.

Industrial inertia and the impact on good journalism

An examination of journalists' working conditions, perceptions of precarity and their industrial agency offers plenty to unpack at a practitioner level, including but not limited to the impact on their physical and psychological health, and their material wellbeing. But there are also implications for the potency and

integrity of the wider profession. This article argues that the workforce's capacity to fulfill its Fourth Estate obligations and produce robust journalism, generally considered matters of professional practice, should also be considered through an industrial frame.

Henrick Örnebring (2018) maintains that quality journalism is contingent on having an empowered, secure journalistic workforce, and argues the connection between precarity and quality reporting needs greater attention. He claims: 'Many of the key concepts and heuristics that journalists used to describe and make sense of their work (e.g. professionalism, objectivity, democratic role and verification) are contingent on a high degree of contractual stability' (2018, pp. 109-110). Nick Davies (2009) asserts that tensions around deskilling and excessive workloads for example, are compromising good journalism practice including the basics like cultivating sources, fact checking and independent truth seeking. Other scholars and analysts (Carr, 2014; Dwyer, Wilding & Koskie, 2021; Hayes & Silke, 2019; Murtha, 2015; Tandoc & Thomas, 2015) argue Fourth Estate imperatives are under attack from web metrics and payment models that link a journalist's job security or financial compensation to online traffic or engagement. They argue it encourages journalists to favour click- or cash- generating content over stories less likely to attract traffic, which can include labour intensive, but critical, investigative reportage. The MEAA, meanwhile, in its submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Future of Public Interest Journalism addressed logistics, arguing 'there just aren't enough journalists available to report on what needs to be covered in order to have an informed society' (MEAA, 2017, p. 8).

Methodology

A semi-structured focus group methodology was adopted for this study drawing on Morgan's assertion that 'the hallmark of focus groups is their explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group' (1997, p. 2). However, the 'unconscious competence' (Dwyer, 1996, p. 16) of the journalist participants, necessitated recalibration of the standard focus group structure, resulting in a 'co-active' construction that leveraged the research cohort's natural curiosity and interviewing expertise to encourage cross questioning in a multi-interviewer format.[2] The co-active approach allowed the researcher to steer proceedings and put participants in the role of content experts who not only fuelled discussion but actively engaged in questioning. Furthermore, insider knowledge acquired over 20 years as a professional journalist allowed the researcher to draw on shared understandings to grease the wheels of conversation.

Sampling and data collection

A total of 13 Queensland working journalists were interviewed in five focus

groups—two conducted online and three face-to-face. While focus groups of between four and 12 are generally considered standard for communications and media research (Krueger & Casey, 2014; Morgan, 2019), there are studies in this field (Fitzsimmons & Smith-Frigerio, 2020; Park, Freeman & Middleton, 2019; Wei-Ern, 2019) which have successfully used groups of this size to extract rich qualitative data.

Multi-purpose, maximum-variation sampling techniques were used over three stages to select the bulk of the participant group. The researcher then used snowball recruiting to secure additional participants to ensure a representative sample across seven fields: gender, age, cultural identification, employment roles, career stage, work locality and work medium.[3]

Each participant was assigned an alphanumeric identifier and was categorised for comparative purposes as either an owner-operator who produces content for their own publishing or broadcast platforms; a permanent worker employed under either award or contract; a freelancer who engages in freelance work by design, or an irregular worker who undertakes backfill, locum and short-term work until they can secure more stable employment.

Five focus group sessions were conducted, recorded and transcribed. A thematic analysis of the transcripts was conducted manually rather than digitally owing to the qualitative nature of the research and the loosely structured co-active interview method. Eight data sets were identified, including three of which were relevant to this article: Exploitation, Precarity, and Industrial Agency.

Findings and discussion

The focus group interviews elicited three key findings:

- That the sense of precarity is pervasive across employment arrangements, even those which might be considered traditionally stable.
- That this sense of precarity and uncertainty drives an unprecedented sense of self-preservation that contributes to forbearance of injurious or exploitative working conditions.
- That this sense of self-preservation has detached journalists from industrial engagement and external mechanisms that support and advocate fair, safe and sustainable working conditions.

This study concludes that journalism and its Fourth Estate mandate are poorly served by a precarious and industrially disempowered workforce and that a workforce that is secure, properly remunerated and properly resourced is better placed to produce good journalism.

Exploitation and injurious work

The journalists interviewed for this research had all experienced exploitative or injurious working conditions. Workload pressures and the failure to acknowledge the impact of high performance demands in a heavily scrutinised environment

was the issue most discussed by the focus group members. For salaried workers the charge centred around quantitative content demands and multi-platform production, or, put simply, the push for content to be produced faster, in greater quantity and in more formats. Several respondents said they did not have enough time to produce content as comprehensive or expansive as they would like. Some respondents suggested workload pressures were pushing good journalists out of the industry, including both later-career practitioners unable or unwilling to keep pace with technological and delivery changes and new-starters expected to perform like seasoned practitioners straight out of the gate.

For freelance and irregular workers workload pressures manifest as the need to manage multiple projects and be adaptable and flexible to meet the expectations of an increasingly competitive market swollen by securely employed journalists engaging in 'side-hustles' to build personal brands outside their newsrooms. The low rates of freelance pay meant that securing enough work to earn a living wage often meant taking on workloads which, in addition to content production, might also involve self-funded, own time training or drafting pitches and briefs with no guarantee of a contract.

> **J13:** I feel like we're constantly taken for granted, that (adapting to change, upskilling) is part of the job, and (we're not) paid anymore for it or even acknowledged for it, you know?

The companion issue to workloads was the normalisation of work-life crossover. Of all the issues, work-life bleed was the one most readily dismissed as being simply part of the job' and yet, based on the discussions, it was also one of the most likely to have an adverse effect on wellbeing. Respondents reported fatigue, stress, headaches, difficulty sleeping, relationship strain, parental guilt, anxiety and burnout linked to excessive hours. One of the more common threads in conversations around work-life bleed, was the matter of out-of-hours online engagement. The pressure to perform online and the pervasiveness of measurable metrics was a common theme regardless of employment arrangement. Journalists working in structured newsrooms were most likely to speak of clicks, likes and comments, while freelancers and owner-operators tended to reference subscriber and follower metrics. On the surface metrics as a gauge for audience engagement seems benign enough, and while there are professional concerns around content prioritisation, the industrial reality is that securing acceptable metrics is not only a highly competitive, individualistic pursuit that undermines collective endeavours, it also requires the donation of significant unpaid personal time and is increasingly tethered to job security and employability.

> **J7:** You've got to have a guaranteed social media presence and a certain amount of followers… before you can be offered a gig these days. They

won't go, 'Okay, this is a good story.' They'll look at how many followers you've got.

While some work-life bleed was considered perfectly reasonable given the 24-hour nature of news, several participants were critical of the prevalence and pervasiveness of work intrusions and the normalisation of being 'always on' (J3).

> **J1:** Did you know at (my work), I have never once ever had an overtime request rejected. You just don't get told to put them in.

> **J3:** (T)here's never a stop and start…you've always sort of got to be on. And it bleeds a lot more. Like here we have a text group work message thing, it's all on our personal phones and literally you're getting text messages at all hours.

Journalists in permanent roles with rostered hours were more outspoken on work/life bleed than their freelance counterparts, possibly because rosters make it more conspicuous, or perhaps because unlike freelancers who are the apex beneficiaries of their own labour, the un- or underpaid labour of salaried employees ultimately benefits the employer. Even owner-operator participants admitted to working outside what might be considered normal working hours, despite arguably having greater autonomy over their time.

Journalists under pressure

Participants were clearly aware of the potentially injurious nature of these kinds of working conditions. The issue of mental health was raised in discussions of stress and burnout at one end and trauma and PTSD at the other. Burnout was viewed as a direct consequence of workplace practices and expectations that exploit a journalist's professional pride, work ethic, and fear of job loss or career stagnation. Almost all the journalists said they felt stressed beyond healthy levels throughout their career and said it was not uncommon to see stress affecting their colleagues.

> **J5:** The breakfast presenter I used to work with, she left basically after wanting to kill herself. She was an amazing journalist, amazing. (**J4:** Was that work burnout?) Yeah, 100 percent.

> **J1:** (You) get to a point that's like, well shit what do I do now? I can't keep doing this forever because physically, mentally, emotionally, socially... I don't feel like I can, and it's bad for you, you know?

Discussions around extreme mental health matters was particularly robust among late-career and veteran journalists, many of whom recalled seriously inadequate

mental health support in their early careers and had a work history that included, or continues to include, reporting traumatic events. The discussions among this cohort were remarkably frank, with one journalist breaking down completely as they discussed their own tipping point.

> **J11:** I've been seeing a therapist for about five years now. Not the same one, and on and off. But I've become a regular user in the last two years.

Precarity and the journalistic calling

The obvious question is why journalists put up with these conditions when there are avenues in industrial instruments and law that might offer support or recourse.

The research group rationalised their forbearance of exploitative or injurious conditions broadly through two frames—professional convention and fear-driven compliance. Under the convention frame, participants argued journalism is not, and has never been, a traditional nine-to-five job, asserting that poor conditions were *de rigueur* for the industry and a convention endured by generations of practitioners as simply a reality of journalism work. Several participants conceded that accepting and embracing these conventions made them complicit in their own exploitation, but justified this by describing journalism as a calling, with some stating that being a journalist was 'who they are' not 'what they are'. Ambition, the adrenaline rush of a good story and the satisfaction of a job well done were all raised as justifications for working beyond agreed workplace conditions.

> **J4:** There's nothing like the taste of blood. When you got one of the bastards on the ropes, it's like, I fucking gotcha, and I'm going to expose you for the rat that you are. You pulled 18-hour days, back-to-back, and you'll do it with joy because you got the bastards. You might only get that a few times in your career, but that can sustain years of the drudgery of little league football and the crap you don't care about. And then you hang on till the next one.

That being said, they also conceded that this mindset made them vulnerable to exploitation.

> **J13:** I think (professional) pride can be easily exploited. Our bosses know that. It's one thing to be dedicated, it's another thing to be exploited.

The compliance frame, by contrast, was underpinned by fear. All participants described the current journalism job market as being more competitive and precarious than a decade ago, feeding the fear that raising a grievance or asserting their workplace rights might jeopardise stable employment or career progression. In this sense, enduring poor conditions was a matter of self-preservation.

> **J7:** (We're) afraid to lose jobs. If you piss-off two newsrooms, there's only one newsroom left in, Brisbane, really, because you wouldn't work for (channel x), you know. Also, there's the blacklist—we (freelancers) can get locked out of newsrooms; we can get blacklisted.
>
> **J3:** I've seen stuff in different newsrooms … that lots of people are unhappy with and lots of people whinge about, but no one wants to stand up. I think it comes down to whether they feel like they have power or not.

For owner-operators the sense of precariousness grew from the vagaries of market forces and the real-life consequences of making poor returns from their own substantial financial and personal investment. These participants were acutely aware of their 'all or nothing' position.

> **J6:** I've gone from being on a very nice income to at one stage not knowing how I was going to pay my rent. I was pretty much down to zero.… I haven't paid any superannuation for a year and a half. So, it's been quite worrying and stressful … particularly being a mum.
>
> **J9:** You've got no fallback. It was extremely precarious (for me) because we really were sweating on everything going right… there is no other option, it's all over red rover... well I suppose I could always become a dishwasher.

The sense of insecurity pervading salaried journalists' conversations—a group who might usually feel insulated by their more secure positions—was palpable. Their sense of security was often contingent on being able to perform despite excessive workloads and stress, 'not rocking the boat' and, in some cases, not claiming rightful entitlements like overtime payments. They feared being thrust back into a super-saturated job market.

> **J2:** A lot of people used to be worried about job security, but I said… you are a good journalist, you'll always find a job… But as we know, when the big slides came, that was no protection… It's scary. I don't feel totally secure because I'm just an old dog in a young person's game.
>
> **J11:** (We've) had a level of staff turnover in the newsroom that in any other organisation…would've been an investigation. (It) was a… really highly insecure environment for everyone.

This subset of participants often used terms like lucky or fortunate to describe their permanency, in many cases attributing it, in part, to timing, location, and having useful industry contacts, as much as skill and work history. One noted

that as the market was awash with unemployed journalists of a similar calibre and work history they were grateful for their permanent position.

Agency and avoidance

Discussions around addressing exploitative or injurious conditions often highlighted the tension between recognising the need to stand up for their rights in the workplace and the reality of the power structure at work. For most of the research cohort, power in the workplace was distributed in traditional hierarchical newsroom configurations. Salaried participants generally positioned themselves in what might be described as a moderately submissive position of power, entrenched in traditional newsroom and organisational power structures and without the resources, capacity, or confidence to take a more assertive position. Some respondents confessed to a sense of impotence—of having to accept a lack of power as a fait accompli.

> **J10:** I just feel like at the end of the day, people have so many deadlines they just go, 'I'll deal with that another time. I'll deal with myself being exploited another day.'

Several participants also framed their individual capacity to push back against poor working conditions in terms of having a 'good boss' or a 'good' working relationship with them. Veteran and late career journalists with more experience of workplace politics and industrial and collective activity were more likely to question poor conditions, but many conceded they chose their battles carefully. Perhaps unsurprisingly, case-hardened union members were the most likely to advocate taking ownership of individual power; while those who might collectively be called 'subaltern persons' within the workplace, specifically First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse workers and working mothers, felt that entrenched power imbalances in the industry made rocking the boat a riskier proposition for them than for others.

In an environment where objecting to poor conditions was generally considered unwise, participants were resigned to enduring them. The result was a work environment where workers remained industrially non-confrontational, adopting a policy of self-preservation described variously as 'flying under the radar' or 'keeping (one's) head down'. They endured these conditions by drawing strength and purpose from their professional ethos and in the knowledge they were experiencing a continuum of conditions that was almost a rite of passage.

This concession to powerlessness and self-preservation can be seen as both a cause and effect of journalists' disengagement from the industrial and collective mechanisms that might assist them in asserting their mandated rights and advocating for improved conditions. This includes disengagement from the peak collective

industrial organisation for journalists—the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA). All but one participant had been an MEAA member at some point during their career and eight out of the 13 still were. About half of the cohort rated their experience with the MEAA as positive, but almost as many believed the union was weak. While many respondents, particularly the mid- to veteran career groups said they valued the union's place in labour relations, perceptions of its power to make changes in the workplace were generally poor.

> **J4:** I'm not particularly enamoured by the union. I mean, the concept of unions has eroded in this country…they've become an unworldly beast of their own and a bit of a toothless tiger.
>
> **J5:** Some of the journalists I've talked to … they've gone to the union for support and not received what they thought they'd signed up for. That makes me lose faith....
>
> **J1:** I had my first visit from the union in my 10th year at (my workplace).

For some respondents, particularly more senior practitioners, the union's perceived weakness reflected the general decline in union power across Australia. A lack of collegial cohesion was also identified as a contributor to decline, with some regional respondents pointing to the difficulty of organising small or geographically dispersed newsrooms. Social isolation due to the de-centralisation of newsrooms in the early 2000s and the working-from-home arrangements that arose in response to the COVID-19 pandemic also loomed large in conversation.

Interestingly, despite the perceived weaknesses of the union—including its small powerbase and stretched resources—the MEAA continued to be regarded as part of a journalists' professional toolkit. This might have been dismissed as nostalgia had it only been the case for the more senior journalists, but this view was also persistent among most of the younger early and mid-career cohort. It was an interesting observation given O'Donnell's (2021) claim that younger journalists tend to view unions as outdated.

Of course, the union is not the only mechanism practitioners might use to take collective action to advancing workplace rights, though as J4 noted it is the 'default model'. However, all models rely on the willingness of the workers to organise and work collectively, something many participants said might be difficult to achieve as it requires resources and someone willing to put their neck out (J3).

Evidence of industrial disengagement was also observed in discussions around participants' knowledge of industrial instruments and their provisions. As a collective, the journalists conceded they were not industrially literate. Many confessed to having poor personal knowledge of their industrial rights

and instruments—a thread most common among early and mid-career journalists (particularly permanent employees), with most unable to recall when they had last seen a copy of their award or collective agreement or only having read their contract as a matter of process at the time of their employment. Participants who stated they did have a reasonable understanding of their workplace rights were generally journalists who had sought or received union assistance for a workplace grievance.

Conclusion

While this study cannot attest to the quality of journalism or the vigour of the reporting produced by the journalists interviewed, there was ample evidence in the findings that described working conditions consistent with those considered a risk to quality journalism and critical reporting. For descriptions of shrinking newsrooms, the resulting paucity of journalists and the workload constraints and expectations on those who remain all feed into Davies' (2009) concerns around newsgathering practices. The research participants' narratives around the centrality of online metrics as determinants of newsworthiness and measures of employability and their attendant intrusions on personal time, recall warnings from the likes of Hayes and Silke (2019) and Carr (2014) about the lure of producing populist content. In the same vein, the low wages, insecure work and systemic inequity identified by subaltern journalists as participation barriers for those at the disadvantaged end of the employment spectrum—a space most often populated by minorities and women—contributes to what former president of the Australian Human Rights Commission Gillian Triggs describes as the scarcity of diverse voices in the media (Triggs, 2017, as cited in Rodrigues, Niemann & Paradies, 2021).

A decline in quality journalism and non-representative newsrooms compounds the already formidable task of asserting the value of journalism in public discourse already awash with distrust.[4] The reasons are manyfold but are captured broadly by Fisher et al. (2020) who identify impartiality, sensationalism, relevance and lack of depth in reporting as factors creating low levels of trust in Australia. Hanitzsch, Van Dalen, and Steindl (2018) cite public perceptions of the media as elitist and open to political influence. If this is the case, then the perpetuation of newsrooms delivering rushed journalism and favouring clicks over newsworthiness and staffed by people benefiting from systemic privilege, but ultimately being too disempowered to effect change, is clearly injurious to the profession and democracy itself.

Threats to quality journalism such as job security, understaffing, poor training and productivity demands are all industrially negotiable or contestable. Grievance processes, compliance campaigns, industrial action and enterprise bargaining are among a raft of industrial mechanisms which could be used to resolve substandard

workplace conditions and help address integrity issues by default. The sticking point is that in order to be effective, the industrial approach requires a collectivised, empowered and engaged workforce. As the findings of this study suggest, precarity, fear and self-preservation cultivated by two decades of industry upheaval have reduced journalists' industrial operativeness almost to the point of inertia.

The concept of journalism as the Fourth Estate and its democratic imperative of holding power to account is grounded in discussion of the corollaries of industrial disruption on professional identity and the normative values of journalism (Hampton, 2010; McNair, 2012; Schultz, 1998; Ward, 2009). There is a case to be made for increasing the focus on journalist's industrial health, not simply to 'improve the lot' of practitioners weighed down by exploitative and injurious working conditions—a worthy cause in its own right—but also to explore the cause and effect of disengagement and disempowerment and its bearing on good journalism. Furthermore, there is an opportunity to investigate the potential for re-engagement and empowerment which, given the centrality of journalism to democratic accountability and an informed citizenry, and flagging public perceptions of journalism's value and purpose, might offer industrial solutions for issues of professional integrity.

Notes

1. WorkChoices, among other things, restricted collective action, banned pattern bargaining, reduced unfair dismissal protections and reduced the role of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC).
2. Dana Dwyer describes this as a journalist's natural skill and desire to question.
3. While demographic coverage was reasonably distributed, it must be noted that union membership figures were aberrant. Union density among Queensland journalists is around 49 percent (M. Rae, personal communication, January 14, 2022), however current union membership within the research group was 61.5 percent, with 92 percent having been members at some point during their career. This was attributed to the nature of the research being of greater appeal to journalists with broader exposure to collective apparatuses or industrial matters.
4. According to the Roy Morgan Image of Professions survey for 2021, Australian Newspaper Journalists were rated 'very high' or 'high' for ethics and honesty by just 15 percent of the surveyed population—a five percent drop since 2017; television journalists are down from 17 percent in 2017.

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Chinese New Zealanders in Aotearoa

Media consumption and political engagement

Abstract: This article outlines work in progress on a project concerning interactions between the Chinese community in New Zealand, ethnic Chinese media, mainstream English language media, particularly around the New Zealand 2020 general election. A wealth of past research has discussed ethnic Chinese language media in New Zealand, the Chinese diaspora, and general elections. This study will go beyond previous research to include mainstream English language media as part of the media resources available to Chinese New Zealanders considering participating as voters in general elections. For Chinese New Zealanders, understanding the diversity of media in New Zealand is likely to have a positive effect on their voting decisions, and encourage more thinking about government policies.

Keywords: China, Chinese New Zealanders, ethnic Chinese media, migrants, New Zealand, mixed method research, political engagement, political news, qualitative research, quantitative research, voting behaviour, WeChat

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Introduction:

THE INTENTION of the project outlined in this article is to contribute robust ideas to the environment of future New Zealand general elections on how the full range of political parties can reach and inform minority voters. I hope the research also encourages immigrants or minorities to express their ideas and to make their voices are heard when they are participating in politics and voting actively. The target audience is Chinese New Zealanders because China is New Zealand's largest trading partner, with two-way goods and services trade now exceeding $32 billion a year and there are more than 200,000 Chinese migrants living in New Zealand (RNZ, 2021). The ethnic and mainstream media—print, radio, audio-visual, online and social media—help migrants access a variety of information and news to fit into mainstream society and to share the diverse values of New Zealand's other communities. Further-

more, politicians in New Zealand share party policies, news, and information on media platforms to attract voters.

In July 2021, the New Zealand government launched the Ministry of Ethnic Communities, a government organisation intended to improve the well-being of New Zealand's ethnic minorities, promote inclusiveness, and build a more diverse community in Aotearoa New Zealand (Manch, 2021).

Since the 1980s movement to make the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi have legal and practical consequences, New Zealand has increasingly been governed under a bicultural model, between the Tangata Whenua[1] and the government. However, as New Zealand's demographics have changed through immigration in the 20th century, beginning with Pasifika people and then with various other ethnic groups, the concept of multiculturalism has also become increasingly important (Robie, 2009). As diasporic communities become established in New Zealand, and as their members become residents and citizens, they started becoming involved in politics (McMillan & Barker, 2021). They also started developing their own media resources. For instance, Pasifika immigrants to New Zealand from the 1960s onwards have become involved in film, television, radio, and the

Table1: Pacific Islands MPs in the NZ Parliament, 2020

Pacific Island MPs in the current New Zealand Parliament		
Arthur Anae	National	List
Barbara Edmonds	Labour	Mana
Kris Faafoi (resigned 2022)	Labour	Mana, List
Anahila Kanongata'a-Suisuiki	Labour	List
Anae Neru Leavasa	Labour	Takanini
Terisa Ngobi	Labour	Ōtaki
Jenny Salesa	Labour	Manukau East
Aupito Su'a William Sio	Labour	List, Māngere
Teanau Tuiono	Green	List
Tangi Utikere	Labour	Palmerston North
Poto Williams	Labour	Christchurch East

Source: New Zealand Parliament, 2020

stage (Hardy, 2017) and now in Parliament, as seen in Table 1—10 members in the current House since Communications Minister Kris Faafoi resigned.[2]

With the growth of immigration since the beginning of the 1960s, the Asian community is now the fourth largest ethnic minority group in New Zealand. The latest data indicate that Chinese and Indian immigrant populations have grown the most in size in the last 20 years, with both exceeding 200,000 migrants over that time (Stats NZ, 2018, Nadkarni, 2020, and Galikowski, 2019). By contrast, although there are more than 240,000 Chinese in New Zealand, there is only one Chinese MP (NaiSi Chen) in the Parliament (Auckland Council, n.d.). Former Labour MP Raymond Huo and National MP Jian Yang, who had been members of the previous Parliament since 2008 and 2011, both announced their retirement from politics within days of one another in July 2020 (McCulloch, 2021). National Party broadcasting and media spokesperson List MP Melissa Lee is a Korean New Zealander. In my conversations with other Chinese New Zealanders, they have mistaken her for a Chinese New Zealander.

Research in Europe has shown that in democratic societies, the media has a significant role in the political environment (Enikolopov, Petrova & Zhuravskaya, 2011). According to the website of the Queensland Parliament (2015) media play three important roles in the political and governmental areas of society:

- Communicating government decisions;
- Discussing government resolutions;
- Providing opportunities for decision-makers to speak in public.

In a democratic society, low voter turnout from specific sub-communities does not motivate political parties, candidates and governments to make voter-friendly decisions and Asian, especially Chinese immigrants, turnout is consistently lower than for other minority groups in New Zealand general elections (Baker & McMillan, 2017).

A previous study shows that people of Asian ethnicity had a low voting turnout in New Zealand elections (Baker & McMillan, 2017). Even though during election campaigns political parties advertise through ethnic Chinese media, an early study suggested that the advertising does not motivate many Chinese New Zealanders to vote (Li, 2013). Political engagement allows the ruling party to understand the needs of the electorate and give voice to the community. For migrants who do not speak English, information is partly from ethnic media or other channels' conversations.

Further, Shrestha & McManus (2018) have indicated that community general engagement activities or events are becoming important in the 21st century. There are two benefits of community involvement in politics: the first is that each person and ethnic community has their values, faiths, life experiences and cultural backgrounds. So, getting involved in politics allows people to experience the intersection of different cultures, ideas, and concepts and to learn about the

strengths of that ethnic communities. The second benefit is that the group is made up of individuals and these immigrant or ethnic minority communities make up a significant proportion of some voters. These are likely to have a major and increasing say in determining the electorate and party vote (Dunn, 1977; Fonseka, 2020).

For example, in Auckland's Takanini constituency, more than half of the 41 percent of Asians were Chinese New Zealanders and some party candidates were trying to attract Chinese voters (Fonseka, 2020). For instance, they were experimenting with how to communicate with minority voters, how to understand their perspective, and so on. Paul Spoonley said: 'the impact of immigrant voters in the 2020 general election was huge. With a 300,000 increase in net migration from 2013 to 2020, mostly made up of people of Chinese and Indian descent, and with non-citizens allowed to vote, i.e. more than one year living in New Zealand and permanent resident visas, the government does not have much data on the voting behaviour of these people' (Spoonley, 2020). These immigrant or ethnic minority communities make up a significant proportion of possible voters and are likely to have a major say in determining the electorate and party vote (Spoonley, 2020).

The representation of different ethnic groups in government can be seen as having a balancing effect on political power, leading to fairer policy making (Ministry of Social Development, n.d.). Asian representation in Parliament has been levelling off in recent elections, with 5 percent in Parliament after the latest 2020 general election and only 4 percent in Parliament after the 2014 general election (Spoonley, 2020; Ministry of Social Development, n.d.). As diversity grows in New Zealand, how and why do various ethnic minority and migrant communities participate in voting, and do they acknowledge their right to vote? Another question is which parties and candidates they vote for. This has become critical, especially as minority engagement in voting and the representation of all ethnicities in government becomes a key indicator of social inclusion and acceptance (Spoonley, 2020).

It is my belief, and therefore a motivation for my research, that it is important for migrants, particularly new arrivals, to access New Zealand's electoral process and to understand their voting choices, because new immigrants tend to become more involved in electoral activities when they migrate to Western democracies. The media play a watchdog role in democratic elections and one of the ways that voters get election information is through the media. The media can enable immigrants to access accurate information about significant issues such as electoral processes and party policies to assist them to make educated decisions (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, 2012; Norris, 2000; Bilodeau et al., 2010).

The contemporary public sphere includes multiculturalism, multi-ethnicity, and multilingualism, which are now common characteristics around the globe

(Yu, 2018). Yu's research emphasised that ethnic media can be useful in helping immigrants to settle in their new country, understand the political process, and converse within their communities. As ethnic media provide primary information in their mother tongue for minority members of non-English speaking countries, it is important for them to understand and access elections and make their voting choices in Aotearoa New Zealand (McMillan & Barker, 2021). Ethnic media is important within the community, but what about the general society? Will ethnic media be competitive with mainstream media (Yu, 2018)? In my research, I will look at the issues in relation to which ethnic Chinese media and mainstream English language media can better serve immigrants and New Zealanders. These avenues can be used to help immigrants understand the New Zealand media landscape, access diverse information, synthesise news, and vote in the future general election.

Therefore, ethnic media cannot only provide news for minorities but also, ideally, they can provide some of the types of information listed above. Thus, new residents and citizens can know about which government decisions are in the process of being made and understand why they are being made.

In practice, whether the focus is on politics or on other areas of life, there are barriers in New Zealand's mediasphere to helping ethnic communities feel part of the national polity. Ethnic minority news rarely appears in the mainstream English language media and newsrooms do not make for a diverse range of stories, whether for Māori or other ethnicities (Smale, 2019). In the field of film, both Pākehā and Māori are often active on screen introducing their cultures, while Asians are rarely seen on screen (Zalipour, 2015). New Zealand's bicultural society attracts migrants to settle down in Zealand (Galikowski, 2019).

Ethnic media therefore can make up for some of the lack of awareness or missing coverage of ethnic issues in mainstream English language media (McMillan & Barker, 2021). Li's (2013) and Hoyle's (2020) articles illustrate that the lack of coverage of some small and medium-sized parties during the election drew complaints from some Chinese New Zealanders, who also wanted to be informed about the policies of the various political parties and then make their voting decisions. In fact, the two major political parties in New Zealand, especially the National Party, have too-long dominated the front pages of the ethnic Chinese language media (McMillan & Barker, 2021; Li, 2013; Hoyle, 2020; Hoyle, 2014).

Ethnic Chinese media

Ethnic media are defined as media created by and for ethnic and linguistic minority communities (McMillan & Barker, 2021). The earliest ethnic Chinese newspapers focused on domestic Chinese news from mainland China. The history of ethnic Chinese newspapers in New Zealand is a long one; the first ethnic

Chinese newspaper in New Zealand, *Man Sing Times* was published from 1921 until the 1940s.[3]

The ethnic Chinese language media are also diversifying and growing rapidly (Lin, 2007) with traditional media such as radio, television, and free newspapers numbering more than 20 outlets in the Auckland area alone (Niche Media, n.d.), including three main TV stations in both Mandarin and Cantonese. Multiple print publications are published with a frequency ranging from monthly to six days a week; there are also three Freeview stations and eight paid subscription channels on the Sky Asia platform. New media are growing rapidly, with the best developed being *SkyKiwi*, which regularly appears in Hitwise's (4) top 10 websites (Niche Media, n.d., ppp. 5-7).

With the influx of immigrants since the 1990s and the advent of the internet, more and more ethnic Chinese language media have run into problems—a lack of local resources to cover the whole of New Zealand, the lack of a team of professional journalists, and a lack of local knowledge. (Sun, 2006).

Many Chinese internet users in New Zealand tend to use the Internet or digital platforms to access information, with Chinese being the highest internet user group in New Zealand (*Sun*, 2006).

Here are some of the current nationwide ethnic media outlets:

Auckland:
TV: TV33, TV28, and TV29.
Mainly Print media: *New Zealand Chinese Herald* and *Mandarin Pages*.
Radio: AM936 (*936* and FM99.4 (*LOVE FM)*.

Hamilton:
Print media: *Asia Pacific Times* and *Waikato Weekly Chinese*.
Radio: Access community radio – FM89.0.

Wellington:
Print media: *Home Voice*

Christchurch:
Print media: *New Zealand Messenger*

Digital or social media platform: *Sky Kiwi*, *Hougarden* and *Go KiWi*. In addition, the National Party, the Labour Party, and Current Chinese MPs have all launched *WeChat Official Account*, a popular social media for the Chinese diaspora.

Generally, the ethnic Chinese language media mostly covers events in the Chinese community, translates mainstream English language media news, provides recruitment, trade information, and hosts large numbers of advertisements for businesses and services etc. The Auckland ethnic media fact sheet illustrates that approximately 71 percent of Asians living in New Zealand consume media

in their own language, including Chinese, Indians and Koreans (Ethnic Media Information New Zealand, n.d.). Some publications' news coverage relies on contributions from the Chinese community members and the coverage is partly free, in addition to what journalists report. In Li's (2013) research, it was found that the ethnic Chinese media mostly help new immigrants to learn how to settle and live in New Zealand early.

Previous research about Chinese New Zealanders' media consumption and political engagement

Li's doctoral study (2005), later published as a book, *A Virtual Chinatown* (2013), predominantly researched radio programmes and newspaper reports and analysed focus group interviews conducted at election time. The author's main conclusion is that the target audience for the ethnic Chinese language media is new immigrants. Li (2013) noted that, due to the private model of the ethnic Chinese language media, its revenue is dependent on advertising in both newspaper and radio programmes, resulting in a large number of advertisements dominating other kinds of content including reporting. Even if media operators want to change the status quo, they are limited by funding, infrequent interaction with mainstream English language media, and the lack of special training institutions for ethnic Chinese media journalists to learn professional skills.

In relation to the media consumption and political engagement section of Li's research, the focus group discussion found that the first things Chinese and Koreans do when they migrate to New Zealand is to settle in a new home, find a job, send their children to school, and so on. Political participation was listed as a non-essential item in this context. In terms of quality of political coverage the Chinese media did not do a comprehensive job in their coverage according to Li's research. Most of the radio programmes or newspaper content that she monitored was biased towards parties with Chinese candidates, such as the National Party or the Act Party. Some anchors on both television and radio openly expressed their support for the National Party in their programmes, which caused complaints from some listeners. Some audience members felt that being a programme host and openly expressing party affiliation in the programme could be taken as unduly leading public opinion. Other listeners wanted to know about the policies of middle or small-sized parties but were unable to do so because they did not understand English. Also, much of the ethnic Chinese media was dominated by advertisements for the National Party and the Act Party in the 2005 election.

Wang & Guo (2011) examined ethnic Chinese traditional media in New Zealand and identified some characteristics, including these:

- Most ethnic Chinese language media are privatised, with no specific media approval system, and most of the staff are mainly part-time.
- The content is adapted to the local Chinese community, mainly in

> simplified and traditional Chinese characters, and focuses on Chinese community news and information about Chinese policies, etc. Because most of the reports on mainstream New Zealand society are translated directly from the mainstream English media, the community aspect of free newspapers is evident. (Wang & Guo, 2011, pp. 14-22)

Hoyle (2020) researched the 2008, 2011, and 2014 general elections and McMillan & Barker (2021) researched the 2017 general election. All three of their studies also confirmed the incompleteness of the New Zealand ethnic Chinese language media's messaging. A comprehensive analysis of the three New Zealand general elections in 2008, 2011, and 2014 shows that the ethnic Chinese language media coverage was sympathetic towards the National Party and that the former National Party MP (Jian Yang) often dominated the front pages of the ethnic Chinese newspaper and other media (Hoyle, 2020). On the other hand, negative news about the New Zealand First Party was constantly in the news in Chinese. Researchers believe that biased reporting is a distraction in relation to voters' choices (Hoyle, 2020). Hoyle noted that the typical sample of past studies was approximately two to three media outlets based in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch but did not include WeChat Official Account articles.

McMillan and Barker's recent study (2021) confirmed Li's finding that, in general, ethnic Chinese language media, when providing information about political parties and photos of party leaders, mentioned and depicted more frequently the National Party and its leaders than the Labour Party. In terms of party policy, however, reports from the Labour Party outnumbered those from National Party (McMillan & Barker, 2021, p. 3).

Despite previous research showing that the ethnic Chinese media favours the National Party, no one paid attention to the lack of research on the diversity of instruments of research and methods. According to previous polls, Chen (2020) found that only 62 percent of Chinese New Zealanders supported the National Party in the 2020 general election, compared to 71.1 percent in the 2017 general election. One of the reasons for this is that some National Party supporters voted for the Act Party in the 2020 general election. Labour's support among Chinese New Zealand voters is the same as in 2017, at 21 percent (Chen, 2020). In future data collection, the researcher will analyse why National Party supporters had turned to the Act Party during the 2020 election, and which of the Act Party's policies appealed to Chinese New Zealand voters.

WeChat only appeared in New Zealand after 2011. WeChat was first released in 2011 (Scoop Independent News, 2017). It is China's version of WhatsApp and currently has more than 1.17 billion total active users (Iqbal, 2021). Until now, most of the research on Chinese New Zealanders' media consumption and political engagement has been conducted on ethnic Chinese newspapers, radio, and news websites and has omitted online platforms. The use of social media

such as WeChat by the Chinese community has been identified as an innovation by this study. According to a brief overview of current findings, 90.4 percent of respondents access WeChat or followed related WeChat accounts.

The majority of New Zealand-based Chinese media and the WeChat Official Accounts of the two main political parties were created between 2017-2019. Some of them were licensed to Chinese technology companies to manage and operate the WeChat Official Account, for example, the National Party WeChat Official Account and the *New Zealand Chinese Herald* WeChat Official Account were licensed to Chinese technology companies such as Nightingale Tech. The Labour Party and some New Zealand ethnic Chinese media WeChat Official Account were licensed to Newrank.cn.

Scope and design of research project

Quantitative studies obtain information from large population samples (Mclntyre, 1998). Tichenor and Mclntyre (1999) highlighted the fact that quantitative surveys can get general information from a large number of people.

In an unpublished Master's thesis about Asian community voter turnout, Li (2020) suggested that multi-language survey studies combined with research methodologies, either quantitative or qualitative, could help enhance our understanding of the non-voting Asian community. Phoebe Li (2013) noted that she conducted no interviews with media personnel and had only two informal conversations with media owners and therefore professional information from advice in the field may differ from what consumer-participants think. Hoyle (2020) pointed out two research gaps, firstly, to determine how ethnic Chinese media owners' opinions affect their political coverage. Secondly, future research could analyse political news and opinion coverage published on WeChat Official Accounts. Hoyle had earlier suggested (2014) that future research could involve more media outlets not previously researched to improve the quality of understanding of the Chinese diaspora, ethnic Chinese media, and political engagement.

Some New Zealand political parties are using WeChat to communicate with the Chinese community. Here is the interface of the WeChat Official Accounts of the two major political parties both in New Zealand (Figures 1, 2 and 3). Other middle or small political parties in New Zealand have not yet released any WeChat official accounts.

Figure 1 (right) is the National Party's profile on the WeChat Official Account, writing about the party's policies concerning Chinese:

> To improve communication and engagement with the Chinese in New Zealand, to promote policies, to listen to the opinions and suggestions of the Chinese community, to help the Chinese live and work in New Zealand, and to strengthen relations with the Chinese people and between New Zealand and China. (Translated from the Mandarin content)

Figure 2: Labour Party WeChat Official Account screenshot.

Figure 1: National Party WeChat Official Account screenshot.

Figure 2 (left) is the Labour Party's profile on its WeChat Official Account:

> To enhance communication with the Chinese community and strengthen interaction and mutual visits with the Chinese community. (Translated from the Mandarin content)

Figure 3 (right) is Current MP Naisi Chen's profile on the WeChat Official Account:

> New Zealand's generation Y (90s) Chinese New Zealander Member of Parliament takes you through every aspect of New Zealand. (Translated from the Mandarin content)

Figure 3: Current Labour MP-Naisi Chen's WeChat Official Account screenshot.

Not only have the two major political parties launched WeChat Official Accounts, but the Act Party also has a news section on its own official website displayed in Simplified Chinese to help immigrants who do not understand English understand Act Party policies.

The experimental section of the research is divided into three steps. At the time of writing, only the first step has been carried out: to undertake the quantitative study. These studies describe specific aspects of a given population and are subjective (Kraemer, 1991). The researcher has distributed a 200-item questionnaire to Chinese communities, organisations and individuals, potential participants in Auckland, Christchurch, Wellington, and Hamilton to name but a few cities where the Chinese community congregates. The classification 'Chinese New Zealanders' that I am working with includes people from the places of origin that Ip lists as well as New Zealand-born Chinese. According to Ip (2021) the census number of residents born by 2013 China or associated territories were around 89,000 from Mainland China, 7,000 from Hong Kong and 8,900 from Taiwan. My questionnaire is bilingual, in English, and Simplified Chinese. The aim is to allow participants who do not speak English to convey their thoughts.

The questions asked about Chinese New Zealanders' media consumption and 2020 general election engagement, covering the whole of New Zealand. The sample of this quantitative study is not representative of every Chinese New Zealander, but it is hoped that the study will provide an indication of the extent of Chinese New Zealander's media consumption and political engagement.

I am in the process of analysing data. More details about quantitative study results will be published in the future.

Future qualitative study

The second part of the study is qualitative, aiming to interview, either remotely or face to face, 20 survey-participants who have agreed to participate in in-depth interviews to further explore their perceptions of politics and media in New Zealand. Finally, there will be interviews with media experts, owners, and 10 politicians. Reich (2015) explains that qualitative research allows researchers to create a connection by communicating deeply with participants.

Focus group interviews are an important part of qualitative research; however, for this project I have decided only to undertake individual interviews, to ensure the privacy and anonymity of those individuals. During the focus group interviews, some people's opinions may be swayed by other participants or some participants may be shy about expressing themselves (Kitzinger, 1995; Burnette et al., 2017).

To sum up, in this study the researcher is adopting a mixed-method approach by generalising past studies. The quantitative study is being conducted first, followed by a qualitative study in the hope of obtaining comprehensive and accurate data.

Conclusion and future research

The voting system in New Zealand is different from some Western countries. Most Western countries only allow citizens to vote, but in New Zealand a permanent resident visa holder or Australian, Niuean, Tokelauan, and Cook Islander who has lived in the country continuously for 12 months or more has the same voting rights as a New Zealand citizen (Electoral Commission, n.d., pp. 2-3). Most previous studies and data are less specifically focused on this classification of permanent resident voters. Since this is a large group of potential voters, political parties are interested on focusing on these minority voters in the hope of getting more votes from them.

This practice of encouraging relatively new immigrants to participate in elections can seem curious to new immigrants from mainland China because of the different social and ideological systems in China and New Zealand. Therefore, ethnic Chinese media can provide a bridge across this strangeness and provide a connection between migrants and New Zealand mainstream society. I hope this research will provide new data and information to increase understanding of media consumption among Chinese diasporic communities in New Zealand. Participants will have the opportunity to share their experiences and voice their concerns, which, comments up to this point show, is an opportunity they appreciate.

Notes

1. In New Zealand, Tangata Whenua is a Māori term that literally means 'people of the land'. It can refer to either a specific group of people with historical claims to a district, or more broadly the Māori people as a whole.
2. Immigration and Broadcasting Minister Kris Faafoi resigned from Parliament on 16 June 2022 and there will soon be 10 Pasifika representatives in the current Parliament (Lasona, 2022).
3. In 1921, Sun Yat-sen started a self-proclaimed military government in Guangzhou and was elected Grand Marshal. The Chinese Nationalist Party Wellington branch supported Sun Yat-sen's Republic of China and the Northern Expedition. This is the origin of the first Chinese language newspaper in New Zealand.
4. Hitwise is a web traffic calculation company that selects the most popular websites on the web based on anonymous web usage data provided by ISPs from 25 million internet users worldwide, combined with its own expert measurement methods. The company provides first-hand web data to help internet companies deepen their customer relationship management.

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PHOTOESSAY

Visual peregrinations in the realm of kava

Abstract: The author has been documenting the use of kava in different parts of the Pacific for several years, particularly in Tonga and in Auckland where its use is popular among members of communities that consume kava as part of their cultural tradition, and more recently a growing non-traditional user group. In this article, he reflects on his project to document the use of kava through photographs, the evolution of its use in traditional and non-traditional settings and discusses the most recent scientific studies of the drink.

Keywords: culture, documentary, drugs, Fiji, kava, New Zealand, photography, Tonga, traditions, Tuvalu, tradition

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I HAVE been photographing and documenting kava sessions in the contemporary and traditional context around the Pacific for the better part of a decade. My connection to kava started casually nearly 20 years ago, but now it runs deep through connections with my wife, children and Tongan in-laws. My experiences drinking kava in a variety of contexts and my weekly engagements with kava itself add to and maintain this connection. I have a deep respect for kava and the cultures that have given this plant to the world.

Kava today is at a crossroads between tradition and contemporality. The drink is entering new spaces and new cultural contexts and non-traditional kava drinkers are increasingly using kava as an alternative to alcohol. I aim to accurately document kava culture through photography as it evolves in traditional and non-traditional communities and adapts to changing and challenging times.

I first became aware of kava as a 19-year-old university student in Scranton, Pennsylvania, when a friend of a friend's girlfriend (who was a known on-and-off heroin user) visited our flat with a small bottle of gel capsules labelled 'kavakava extract'. The label was accompanied with a byline claiming that this supposedly natural product would help the user relax in the 'Polynesian style'. She asked me if I wanted to try some and even though they seemed harmless enough, I declined as my knowledge of her relationship with illicit drugs bred a degree of distrust. While I didn't investigate kava further, the name and concept of what

kava is somehow left a lasting impression..

In 2004, I was travelling around the Pacific for the first time and I again came across a mention of kava while doing some preliminary research before a trip to Fiji. The source of tourist information (which I do not remember) described kava as something along the lines of a 'sleep-inducing hallucinogen' to which many Fijians were addicted. The guide also said that depending on where you went in Fiji, you might be obliged to drink it with locals. The description of kava made me feel somewhat uneasy at the prospect of having to drink it, but I would later learn that the information I received was mostly false and that the spreading of misinformation around kava was all too common.

My first experience with kava took place during a visit to Lawai village, just north of Sigatoka on the island of Viti Levu, Fiji. When the group I was with arrived in the village, we were ushered into a small, one-roomed house where some local men and women welcomed us with a kava ceremony. I could sense the deep significance of this drink to the Fijian people, but I harboured some reluctance as I was served the first shell of the bitter brown liquid. My tongue immediately turned numb and I eventually felt quite relaxed, but I did not feel as if my mental capacity was diminished. I certainly was not hallucinating. I had a few more shells with my hosts and I left feeling content and thankful to be welcomed into this community in such a special way. I probably would have kept exploring kava on my own after leaving the Pacific, but I did not know where to get it back in the United States. Even if I could get it I didn't know how to make it, so it stayed in the back of my mind once again.

In 2008, I was back in Aotearoa New Zealand where I met my wife, 'Anau. She was born in Tonga, raised mostly in Māngere, South Auckland, and comes from a long line of kava growers and businesspeople. Her father Sione paid for the whole family to migrate from Tonga in the 1980s with money he made growing, pounding and selling kava within the Tongan community. A weathered old sign reading *'Kava Tonga fakatau 'i heni' ('Tongan kava for sale here')* still stood in their front yard the first time I visited the family home in Māngere, and kava drinkers would often come in the early hours of the morning to buy kava powder from Sione.

'Anau and I married in Tonga in 2010, and we shared our first shell of kava, as per tradition, on our *Sāpate 'Uluaki* (first Sunday) as a married couple. While in Tonga we became accustomed to Sione firing up the overwhelmingly loud kava pounding machines just after sunrise most mornings at the family house in Longolongo, Nuku'alofa. The machines made sleep impossible, but I came to appreciate the mesmerising rhythm of electric motors lifting and dropping the solid steel poles which pulverised the dried kava roots into powder. Today, the sound of those machines and the smell of kava in the humid tropical air fill me with nostalgia.

A social and ceremonial drink

EVERY culture around the world seems to have a distinctive beverage, alcoholic or otherwise, that represents its collective essence and values. Kava, a beverage made from the Piper methysticum plant that is unique to the Pacific, serves as both a social and ceremonial drink while also serving as a definitive icon of identity throughout the Pacific.

Dr Vincent Lebot, one of the world's most prolific kava scientists, describes kava as 'a handsome shrub that is propagated vegetatively, as are most of the Pacific's major traditional crops. Its active principles, a series of kavalactones, are concentrated in the rootstock and roots. Islanders ingest these psychoactive chemicals by drinking cold-water infusions of chewed, ground, pounded, or otherwise macerated kava stumps and roots' (Lebot et al., 1992, p. 1). The effects of kava are best described as soporific, relaxing and calming, while not clouding the drinker's mental faculties. Kava is often wrongly assumed to be alcoholic, but kavalactones (the active ingredient in the prepared kava beverage) lack 'the excitability, euphoria and loss of inhibition experienced with alcohol intoxication' (Aporosa, 2015, p. 60).

From a traditionalist perspective, the communal characteristic of kava is the key element of the kava experience, as is the bitter taste that results from mixing only kava and water. Lebot says: 'We want to promote kava for what it is, a very healthy traditional beverage.'

Products such as capsules, extracts, kava candies etc aid in the removal of the community aspect of kava drinking and, even though they contain kava, are therefore not conducive to the full experience (Aporosa, 2019, p. 5). It is because of this that some commentators have argued that these 'designer kava preparations' are not technically 'kava' (Bian at al., 2020, p. 23; also see Aporosa et al., 1022, p. 5).

Having grown up in a rural town in Pennsylvania, the Tongan language and way of life was completely foreign to me. I knew that I would benefit from gaining a better understanding of the culture into which I had married, so I asked my wife and in-laws for advice on where to start. The obvious answer from their perspective was for me to attend *faikava*, or informal kava sessions with members of the Tongan community. At first I was reserved at the prospect of entering a sacred cultural space as an outsider, but I was humbled to be welcomed in as a brother. In addition to learning some Tongan words and songs, I learned that kava itself is about community, respect, civility and inclusivity. Kava to me was, at first, just part of a cultural exchange, but I inadvertently deepened my interest in kava as a plant and a drink. This interest manifested itself in the form of photography and I took my camera to most kava sessions that I attended.

As my travels took me to other parts of the Pacific I noticed many intricate differences in kava drinking practices which I felt were important to docu-

ment. Before long, I had created a substantial body of photographic works that documented kava culture across a number of islands, cultures and communities. I observed that some Pacific Island nations have very strong kava cultures that have remained seemingly unchanged for thousands of years, while others seem to have little or no connection to kava left. In my readings I learned that kava traditions in some places were all but erased by early Christian missionaries who saw kava as a threat to their efforts of separating indigenous people from their ancestral ways in order to 'eliminate competition with other gods' (Pollock, 2009). In some cases kava cultivation was banned (Biodiversity for Sale. Dismantling the Hype about Benefit Sharing, 2000) and the drinking of kava was replaced with alcohol, with often devastating social effects .

Several societies have made concerted efforts to reclaim and reinstate their kava cultures, such as Vanuatu, for example, where kava drinking was abandoned in some places for almost a century. Vanuatu gained independence from Britain and France in 1980 and kava has since become a national symbol of the country that has been promoted by the government as an alternative to alcohol (Pollock, 2009). Kava is a major export crop in Vanuatu where it is often referred to locally as 'a diamond' and a 'gift from the ancestors' for its ability to vastly improve the country's economic prosperity (Heaton, 2021). According to Pacific Trade Invest Australia (2021), Vanuatu exported A$48.4 million of kava in 2021, with projections that predict exponential growth in years to come (Industry Focus: Kava, the Green Gold of the Pacific, 2021). Other Pacific Island nations are reporting upward trends in kava exports to markets in Aotearoa New Zealand where there are many communities of traditional kava drinkers as well as the United States where non-traditional kava bars have become trendy. As of 1 December 2021, Australia began the second half of a two-year kava pilot programme which will allow commercial importation and sale of kava as a food product. Many Pacific Island kava growers and exporters hope that this programme will further expand and create additional export markets in the region (Kava Pilot Program, 2021).

Regardless of the proliferation of kava bars in the United States and elsewhere, people outside the Pacific (and some within it) are largely unaware of kava's existence. To those who are familiar with kava, there is no simple or easy way describe it accurately to those who are new to it. From its genetic history, botanical properties, cultural significance and use in contemporary society, there are many intricate details to discuss and expand upon. Here in Aotearoa New Zealand, the supposed 'Capital of Polynesia', the public perception of kava generally takes an overall simplistic form that is often riddled with common misconceptions. The two commonest are that kava tastes like mud and does nothing and that kava is an addictive drug like alcohol and opioids that causes irreversible and devastating damage to the user's health.

Deeper public discussions reveal that there exists a plethora of other common

misconceptions and misunderstandings about kava. Waikato University's Dr Apo Aporosa has been combating the spread of kava misinformation for many years through articles in academic journals and mainstream media. A chance meeting between Dr Aporosa and myself at the 2016 Kava Research Symposium at Waikato University led to a friendship and an evolving collaborative relationship on research-based visual documentation of kava culture and practice. I have contributed many photographs to Dr Aporosa's research publications, media articles and public health awareness campaigns on kava. Dr Aporosa and I also co-authored a research article for the *Waikato Journal of Education* titled 'The Virtual Faikava: Maintaining Vā and Creating Online Learning Spaces During COVID-19' (Henry & Aporosa, 2021) which expands on the phenomenon of kava spaces as 'cultural classrooms' (Fehoko, 2015) that moved into the online space in response to the COVID-19 lockdowns that started in 2020.

My goal through this long-term photographic project is to document the human elements and community aspects of kava that make it unique, along with the changes that contemporary kava use is undergoing. It is important to document and understand the ways in which new groups of kava users are incorporating kava into their own identities and lifestyles. I also aim to simply document kava as it exists now, while also dispelling common misconceptions about kava culture and consumption through visual documentation of kava drinking practices from around the Pacific. This includes Aotearoa New Zealand where an estimated 20,000 people drink kava on any given Friday or Saturday night (Aporosa, 2015).

Most of these kava drinkers are members of traditional communities where kava drinking is a long-established cultural practice, but there are growing numbers of Pākeha and Māori who have adopted kava drinking into their weekly routines as an alternative to alcohol. A number of Pasifika women-only kava clubs, such as the Silent Whistle Kalapu (Tongan word for club) in Auckland have also established themselves, squarely challenging the notion in some circles that kava spaces are exclusively for men (Henry & Aporosa, 2021). The occurrence of women participating in kava consumption is not a new phenomenon, according to Tecun & Siu'ulua (2020, p. 450), who argue that women traditionally took part in kava ceremonies in many parts of the Pacific, such as Fiji, Tonga, and Sāmoa. In some cases they still do or are re-claiming their place in kava circles.

Aporosa and Forde provide compelling evidence for a deep historical connection between Aotearoa New Zealand and kava, stating that

> Māori probably voyaged to Aotearoa via Te Au Maohi [the wider Rarotongan island group] where kava was also central to the culture; kava was easily transported during voyaging; and kava is uniquely linked to mana, safe travel, acknowledgement, hosting, trade, apology, medicine, and a journey that was likely to put early Māori voyagers in contact with other Pacific peoples en route to Aotearoa. (2019, p.78)

Kava drinking and driving safety

APOROSA has conducted research on the effects that kava has on driving safety. During his most recent study, 20 kava drinking participants consumed 100ml of kava six times an hour for six hours to simulate the typical amounts of consumption during a Fijian kava session (see Figure 3). A somatosensory tool that 'measures strategic, tactical and operational aspects of brain function' was conducted at the beginning, middle and end of the kava drinking session. The results showed that 'the kava consumed [by active participants] had no statistically significant negative impact on their focus, accuracy, timing perception, plasticity or fatigue, when compared with the control [non-kava drinking]group' (Aporosa et al., 2022, p. 5). However, in the sixth hour of the study, a negative impact on the brain's ability to keep track of events, known as 'Temporal Order Judgement' was noted. More importantly, the study demonstrated that even at high use volumes, kava's impacts on cognition is vastly less impactful and very different to the effects of alcohol, cannabis, hallucinogens and narcotics' (p. 11).

They argued that it was 'difficult to believe that Māori abandoned kava in Hawaiki, leaving behind this cultural keystone species when heading south to Aotearoa approximately 900 years ago' (p. 78).

It is important to unpack the concept of kava's classification as a keystone species and what this classification entails. Tecun (2019, pp. 205-206) regards kava as having been central to Maori social, political and spiritual life, describing it as a symbol of cultural identity that featured heavily in language, ritual, ceremony and stories. He went on to argue that

> Kava is a cultural keystone plant species across much of Oceania, and not only does it correlate with the expansion of *mana* (potency, honour), it is mana, and thus can have the effect of rendering the *tapu* (protective restrictions, set apart) of individuals *noa* ('neutralisation of protective restrictions) as they ingest it, while simultaneously making them tapu because they have imbibed mana. The antidepressant and soporific effects of kava are evidence of mana, as the anxiety levels go down and mental clarity remains, and the state of noa reveals truths otherwise restricted. (2020, pp. 174-175)

In my travels around Aotearoa and the Pacific Islands, I have photographed kava drinking practices in order to showcase the importance of kava to those who partake of it, as well as the diversity of contexts, kava drinking spaces and drinking protocol and practices. Despite the differences that exist, the element that consistently underpins all kava spaces, whether you are sitting on the floor with crossed legs like the Tongans, or standing with a shell full of kava behind one of Port Vila's many *nakamals* (kava bars) is that of respect (Aporosa et al., 2021). I have been fortunate to drink kava and take photographs in many different places with different communities and as long as alcohol is not present alongside kava

(which it rarely is), the principle of respect is universally upheld. Kava drinkers often engage in deep or intense discussions on controversial topics, but verbal abuse and physical confrontations are exceedingly rare. Lemert (1967) observed that 'disorderliness almost never accompanies kava drinking' (p. 56), and it has been said that kava takes away the user's ability to harbour hatred (Aporosa, 2019). Given kava's 3000-year track record and its demonstrated ability to impart civility, level-headedness and a sense of community, this unassuming and bitter beverage from the Pacific could be the remedy our divided world needs.

Regarding the future of this long-term kava documentary project, Dr Aporosa and I are currently working on publishing a *kava table* (rather than coffee table) book that will showcase photographs and accounts of contemporary kava culture from across the Pacific. I still have to visit a few important locations for shooting photos yet, namely Pohnpei, Kosrae, Hawai'i, and Papua New Guinea. However, we will work on this goal over the next couple of years to make the book a reality.

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Figure 1: A virtual kava session during New Zealand's first Level Four COVID-19 lockdown in April 2020. The photo was taken in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, while those shown on the computer screen are in Auckland.

Figure 2: Professor Hūfanga Dr ‘Okusitino Māhina pauses to drink a shell of kava while on an academic writing retreat with Dr Sione Vaka. Waiheke Island, Auckland.

Figure 3: Aporosa has conducted research on the effects that kava has on cognition which he applied to driver safety (Aporosa et al, 2022). Twenty kava drinking participants consumed 100ml of kava six times an hour for six hours (See Kava drinking sidebar, page 211).

Figure 4: Women mix kava before participating in a talanoa on the Pacific pay gap with representatives from the New Zealand Human Rights Commission, Auckland, New Zealand.

Figure 5: Three men drinking kava in Funāfuti,Tuvalu. Kava is a popular drink in Tuvalu with most kava powder being imported on weekly flights from Fiji.

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Figure 6: A group of kava drinkers congregate to drink kava on a summer evening outside of the Fale Pasifika building at the University of Auckland. The kava session was held to commemorate the completion of the 2019 Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania conference where the world's leading kava researchers presented their findings.

Figure 7: A film crew wraps up a day of shooting with a kava at contemporary urban kava lounge in downtown Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand.

Figure 8: Jake Punimata (left) and Nid Satjipanon drink kava while at a gathering to show solidarity for West Papuan Independence in Auckland, New Zealand.

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JEANZ (Journalism Education and Research Association of New Zealand) holds an annual conference which includes the opportunity to submit abstracts and papers for blind peer-review and presentation/discussion during the event. The 2022 conference will be hosted by Massey University. The venue will be announced soon and anyone interested in the conference can email the convenor Bernie Whelan at b.whelan@massey.ac.nz and you will be kept informed.

OBITUARIES

Vale Peter Lomas – a checkered journalism legacy

Abstract: Tributes flowed for the death of New Zealand-born *Fiji Sun* publisher and chief executive Peter Lomas. He spent much of his life in Fiji and the Pacific and, according to his newspaper, 'He was an industry pioneer and one of the last surviving old school "newspaper men" of the Pacific, someone who lived and breathed the news business and practically lived his life in the newsroom'. He was a former editor of *Islands Business*, the *Fiji Daily Post*, and worked as a training consultant on the *Samoa Observer*, *Solomon Star*, and Elijah Communications in the Cook Islands. In 2001 became the fulltime media development training coordinator for the Suva-based Pacific Islands News Association (PINA). This obituary by a Fiji-born media consultant offers a more nuanced profile of his *Fiji Sun* tenure.

Keywords: accuracy, balance, credibility, editors, fairness, Fiji, *Fiji Sun*, integrity, newspapers, obituary, PINA, publishers, Samoa, Solomon Islands

GRAHAM DAVIS
Media consultant and independent writer, Sydney

THERE was lavish coverage in the *Fiji Sun* and in the wider Pacific in March 2022 on the death of its publisher and CEO, Peter Lomas, who died at the Colonial War Memorial Hospital in Suva after what the newspaper described as a short illness and whose funeral took place on March 15 (Delaibatiki, 2022; Doviverata, 2022; Ligaiula, 2022). Yet in true *Fiji Sun* style, its readers didn't get the full story about Peter Lomas any more than they get the full story about anything (Davis, 2022).

In Fiji more than most places, the principle of not speaking ill of the dead often means that the more contentious aspects of people's lives are invariably buried along with the person. The staff of the *Fiji Sun* can be forgiven for being sentimental about a man to whom many of them owed their careers and who had some tremendous personal qualities that have been reflected in their tribute cover- age. Yet as Shailendra Singh—the coordinator of journalism at the

FIJI MEDIA ASSOCIATION

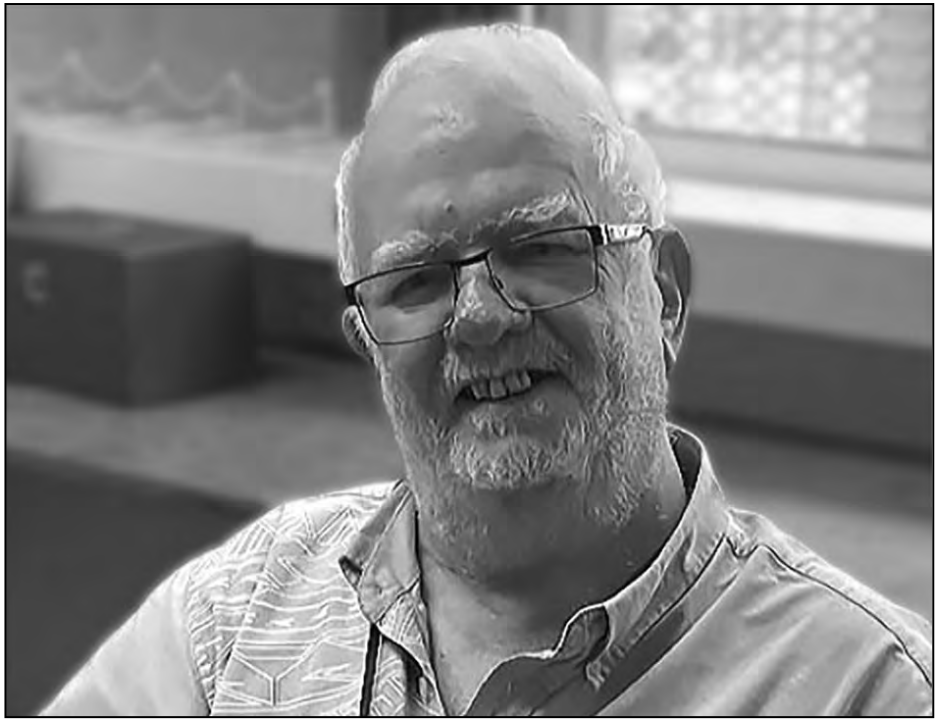

Figure 1: Fiji Sun publisher Peter Lomas: 'The wrong turn he took threatens his legacy, if not destroyed it.'

University of the South Pacific—observed in the *Grubsheet* column when his death was announced, Peter Lomas's 'key role in the development of journalism in Fiji since the 1970s had both positive and negative' aspects. While he was 'a fine newspaper man' who 'trained generations of Fiji journalists', Dr Singh observed that 'the wrong turn Peter Lomas took threatens his legacy, if not destroyed it'. His full statement:

> The end of an era which had both positive and negative sides to it. Peter Lomas was a pioneer of the print media industry in Fiji. A fine newspaper man. He played a key role in the development of journalism in Fiji since the 1970s—in both positive and negative ways. No one in Fiji knew the print media industry as well as he did. He trained generations of Fiji journalists. A Kiwi who made Fiji his permanent home. Regrettably and unfortunately, the wrong turn he took threatens his legacy if not destroyed it. I am sad to learn of his passing. (Singh, 2022)

While the foremost journalism educator in Fiji did not elaborate, every journalist in Fiji outside of the *Fiji Sun* newsroom knows precisely what Dr Singh is talking about. And that is the manner in which Peter Lomas—in a conspiracy

against his readers—abandoned his duty to them to report without fear or favour and secretly handed over the columns of the *Fiji Sun* to the FijiFirst government.

The only hint of this in the *Sun's* coverage was the following passage in Rosi Doviverata's hagiography: 'Foreign journalists and governments, Peter believed, were fixated on the history of coups and would never acknowledge, even after free elections saw Frank Bainimarama win in a landslide, all the good things that were happening in Fiji, including corruption being largely rooted out'(Doviverata, 2022).

There is a supreme irony in that statement. Because Peter Lomas was at the centre of one of the most glaring examples of corruption in the Bainimarama era—a conspiracy involving the FijiFirst government and the CJ Patel group to deceive the Fijian people by portraying the *Fiji Sun* as an independent newspaper when it has long been controlled by the Attorney-General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum. Worse, there is money involved. Public money.

The AG gave the *Fiji Sun* an exclusive and lucrative contract to carry government advertising, including notices of vital public interest that also ought to be in its competitor, *The Fiji Times*. And in exchange, the AG tells the *Fiji Sun* which stories to cover, which stories not to cover, and actually dictates content to his main conduit at the paper, its managing editor news, Jyoti Pratibha, who he also appointed to the Council of the Fiji National University.

When *Fiji Sun* readers access these stories, they do not know that they have been placed on the instructions of the AG. And, worse, the *Fiji Sun* routinely ignores coverage of the opposition to the extent of it being a propaganda organ for the ruling party. When there is public money being exchanged as part of this arrangement and the quid pro quo is kept secret from the Fijian people, that is corruption, pure and simple. This makes a mockery of Peter Lomas's claim that corruption had been largely eradicated under the Bainimarama government and significantly taints his legacy.

So by all means, acknowledge the *Fiji Sun's* tribute to its late publisher and celebrate his contribution to Fiji. But the truth demands a more balanced accounting of his legacy. Lomas's brother, the New Zealand television journalist, David Lomas, said Peter always believed in 'the ABCs of journalism—*accuracy, balance* and *credibility*. These were his mantra' (Ligaiula, 2022). Yet the truth is that in the final analysis, Peter Lomas failed to meet the standard he set for himself.

'Accuracy' in the *Fiji Sun* has long been accuracy as seen by Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum. 'Balance' in the paper has been non-existent for many years, as it slavishly favours the FijiFirst government, ignores or attacks the opposition and turns a blind eye to all manner of stories the government doesn't want publicised, such as the influence of the Grace Road cult in Fiji (Tahana, 2019). All of which means that the 'credibility' of the *Fiji Sun* as an accurate reflection of the 'facts of the matter' in Fiji is non-existent. It has sold its soul to Aiyaz

Sayed-Khaiyum in arguably one of the greatest betrayals of journalism and of public trust in Pacific history.

I happen to have had a great deal of time for Peter Lomas on a personal level. As many Fijians can attest, he was mild-mannered, kind, recognised talent and promoted it, and had a great love for Fiji. But like Shailendra Singh, my duty as a journalist of four decades' standing is to accurately reflect the facts. And these are the facts that you will not read in the *Fiji Sun* or anywhere else for that matter in the collective 'isa' that accompanied his death:

1. Peter Lomas created a parallel universe for his readers in Fiji—the 'facts of the matter', according to Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum as opposed to the true facts of the matter. What you read in the *Sun* has never been an accurate reflection of events in the country. And that is a betrayal of journalism and its overriding principle of the public's right to know.
2. He blurred the lines between news and opinion in the *Fiji Sun* so they are one and the same—all pro-FijiFirst—when in any credible newspaper, the division between straight reporting and opinion is clearly defined and alternative views are sought and reflected.
3. He took orders from Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum not only to promote certain stories, but to bury others. In the lead-up to the 2018 election, he even took orders to bury the results of the Western Force opinion poll that showed a collapse in the government's support. He told me this personally at a meeting we had at the Grand Pacific Hotel in the election aftermath at which the columnist, Nemani Delaibatiki, was also present. I was shocked and expressed strong indignation, not only for the blatant corruption of the journalistic process, but because suppressing the poll was counterproductive. When Fiji was hit by rain on election day, FijiFirst supporters stayed at home, assuming the government was a shoe-in when it barely scraped back into office with 50.02 percent of the vote.
4. Peter Lomas developed a relationship with the Chinese dictatorship that was bad for journalism and bad for Fiji. He facilitated the publication of stories in the *Fiji Sun* from the Xinhua news agency that were favourable to China when its assertive, sometimes belligerent conduct in the region requires proper scrutiny, not propaganda. In yet another glaring instance of journalistic corruption, the *Fiji Sun* turned a blind eye to the Chinese assault on a Taiwanese diplomat at the Grand Pacific Hotel (GPH) on Taiwan's national day in October 2020. They knew the facts but suppressed them.
5. Worse, Lomas sent *Fiji Sun* journalists to China for training when the entire world can see that the Chinese practice of journalism is to reflect the will of the Chinese Communist Party, not the will of the people.

> This practice—which has grave long term implications for journalism in Fiji—must be reversed if there is to be any hope for the preservation of proper standards at the *Fiji Sun*. Combined with its chronic political bias and lack of balance, the *Fiji Sun's* editorial conduct under the ownership of the CJ Patel Group deserves to be the subject of an independent investigation in the event of a change of government.

So farewell, Peter. You were much loved by many and admired for your personal qualities by many, including me. But I have to agree with Shailendra Singh—the foremost journalism educator in Fiji—that later in life, 'you took a wrong turn that threatens your legacy, if not destroys it'. And that is very sad indeed.

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Graham Davis is an award-winning investigative journalist with dual Fiji-Australian nationality. He became a communications consultant and who was the FijiFirst government's principal communications adviser for six years from 2012 to 2018. He continued to work on Fiji's global climate and oceans campaign until the end of the decade. This obituary was originally published on the author's blog Grubsheet Feejee *on 16 March 2022.*
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Vale Robert Robertson, a 'son of Fiji and the Pacific'

Abstract: While most University of the South Pacific academics were united in their opposition to the 1987 and 2000 coups in Fiji—and many of them suffered in various ways from the 1987 coup—the 2006 coup was divisive in that quite a few senior USP academics and former academics (mostly Indo-Fijian) gave tacit and active support to it, believing in coup leader Voreqe Bainimarama's rhetoric of anti-corruption and racial equality for all in Fiji as his justification. Historian and prolific author and writer Professor Robert Robertson highlighted through his books, scholarship and academic activism the injustices inflicted by the coups and globalisation on academics, journalists and the marginalised, beginning with *Fiji: Shattered Coups* (1988), co-authored with his journalist partner Akosita Tamanisau. This essay profiles an academic who 'planted deep roots, metaphorically and literally, in the DNA of Fiji and the Pacific.'

Keywords: Academic freedom, Australia, diversity, education, Fiji, globalisation, human rights, media freedom, New Zealand, obituary, publishing, scholarship

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ON JUNE 10, 2021, many in the international community mourned the death in Melbourne, Victoria, of a former University of the South Pacific academic in history and politics, Professor Robbie Robertson, whose life's work focused on many painful themes that are relevant still for Fiji and for the region. While he was a citizen of Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia, he could legitimately also be called a 'son of Fiji and the Pacific,' judging by the quantity and quality of academic work he did on Fiji and the Pacific, all imbued with a deep passionate commitment to ordinary working people, regardless of race, class or creed.

With USP having gone through the throes of Fiji's expulsion of an 'expatriate' vice-chancellor who was exposing skeletons left behind by the previous administration, it is no coincidence that 40 years ago, Robertson was also denied a work visa by the Fiji government because he and his partner Akosita Tamanisau (then a journalist at a very different *Fiji Sun***)** were researching the hidden side of the Rabuka coup.

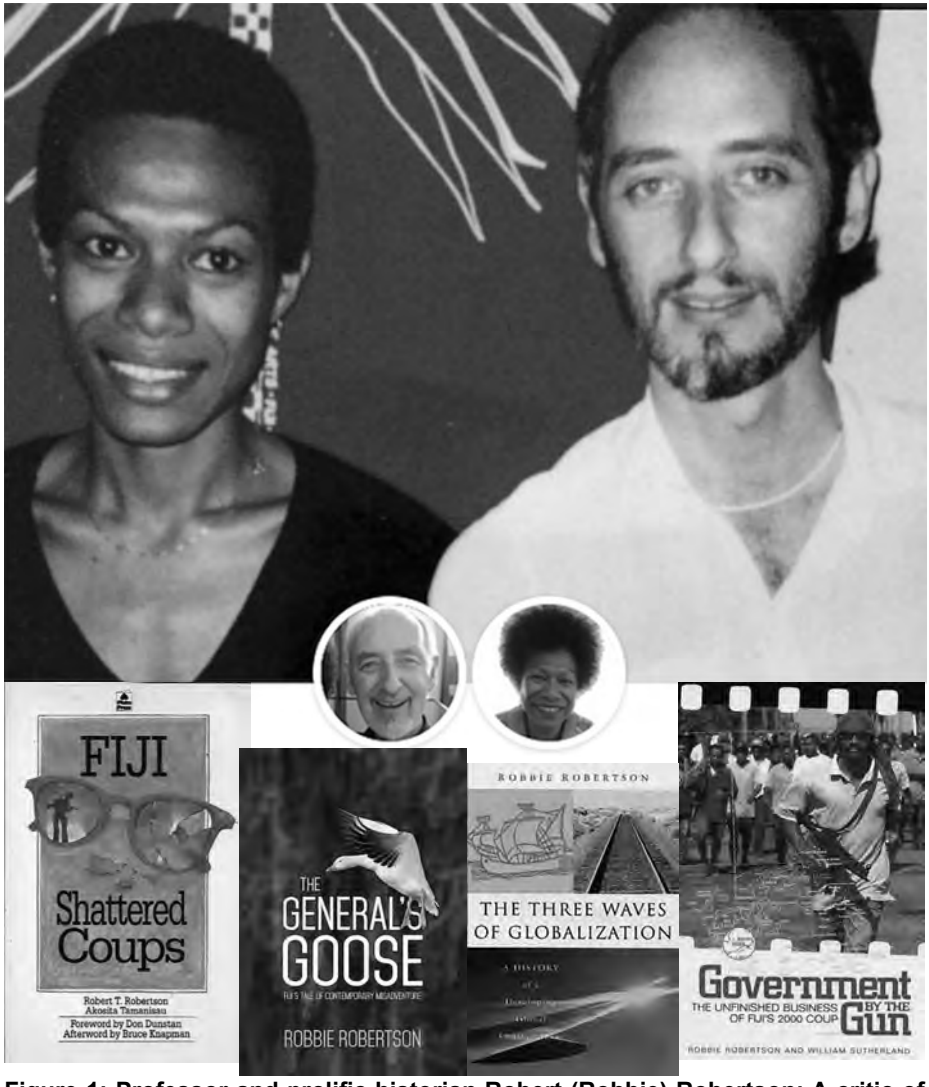

Figure 1: Professor and prolific historian Robert (Robbie) Robertson: A critic of media, uneven Pacific development and globalisation. Pictured in the coup year 1987 with Akosita Tamanisau by David Robie (insets by DevPolicyBlog, 2021) with their book *Fiji*: *Shattered Coups* and some other Robertson titles.

With so many of our people's contorted preoccupations with who is local, Fijian, or Pacific Islander, USP and the Fiji public can ponder on the great contributions made by this 'expatriate' academic, Robbie Robertson, to the intellectual life of Pacific students, staff and the wider regional community.

Robertson also brought international academic experience to USP, having worked for Australasian universities like Otago University, La Trobe, ANU, James

Cook University and Swinburne University of Technology. He was also on the editorial board and a contributor to *Pacific Journalism Review.*

As many of his former USP friends and academic colleagues recall with great nostalgia, Robertson also loved living life to the fullest, socialising merrily with family and friends at USP and in the drinking holes of Suva. Robertson also planted deep roots, metaphorically and literally, in the DNA of Fiji and the Pacific with his decades of joyful partnership with Akosita (Jita) Tamanisau, whose own commitment to community in Fiji and Bendigo not only helped steer Robbie's ship of life, but also provided the greatest of care during his last months.

A quality academic

Robertson was a graduate of Otago University, also my alma mater, but just a couple of years after me. From his earliest days he opposed senseless wars, rejecting the New Zealand military draft for service in Vietnam, much to his parents' chagrin.

As Vijay Naidu (head of the School of Development and Governance at USP) remembers, Robertson was recruited to USP in 1980 as a lecturer in history. Naidu introduced him to the sights of low-cost housing and squatter settlements that was the emerging evidence in Fiji, as elsewhere, of the uneven development of capitalism and globalisation that Robertson later wrote about.

Robertson became a close friend of William Sutherland, another USP lecturer in history and politics and a close adviser to the Bavadra Labour government which was brutally removed by the Rabuka coup in May 1987. Deemed an enemy by the post-coup government, Sutherland was forced to flee Fiji. Robertson and Tamanisau then began gathering the underbelly stories of the 1987 coup and soon came under the malign surveillance of the Rabuka authorities. Robertson's work permit was rescinded.

Getting married to Akosita in a rush, Robertson was forced to leave Fiji. He and Akosita were welcomed by *PJR* founding editor David Robie in Auckland, then Helen and William Sutherland in Canberra, before settling in Bendigo where he began teaching at a campus of La Trobe University (Robie, 1988).

A USP academic expelled

It is interesting how powerful dictatorial Fiji governments use the same language when illegally expelling dissident academics of whom they disapprove. Few at USP today will remember that in the early 1970s, there was a professor of mathematics, Theo MacDonald (then also supervising my own aborted Masters in Mathematics), who was a radical teacher inspiring students into social activism.

When a powerful politician's car, in a rush to get to Nausori Airport, mowed down a pedestrian, anonymous pamphlets were strewn around Suva documenting that terrible breach of human rights of an ordinary citizen. Professor MacDonald,

who had to fly to Australia with his sick daughter, was held responsible for inciting the pamphlets and banned by the Alliance government from returning to Fiji. The massive protests by USP students and some staff were ignored by the then USP management.

Vijay Naidu recalls that, similarly, when Robertson's work permit was revoked by the Rabuka government in 1988 on the grounds that he was a security risk, they also had to flee to Australia. Attempts to relocate Robertson to Vanuatu proved futile.

However, it is worth noting that when the current vice-chancellor, Professor Pal Ahluwalia was expelled by the Fiji government in February 2021, it was also on the grounds that he was a security risk to Fiji, but really for exposing the skeletons left behind by the previous VC. This time the reactions of the other Pacific member countries of USP were different. At the invitation of the USP chancellor, Nauru President Lionel Rouwen Aingimea, Ahluwalia relocated to Nauru and the USP Council has now relocated him to Samoa. This is some progress of sorts, but the expulsion need not have happened in the first place.

Perhaps Fiji and USP can take heart that Robertson was eventually allowed to return to Fiji and USP where he worked for several more years as Professor of Development Studies contributing to teaching, researching, writing and publishing in the 2000s.

Books on the Fiji coups

One of Robertson's lasting legacies to Fiji was his thorough examination of the military coups of 1987, 2000 and 2006, generating much academic debate among supporters and opponents of each of the coups. Robbie and Akosita Tamanisau co-authored *Fiji: Shattered Coups* (1988) about the 1987 Rabuka-led coups and their hidden underbelly with much evidence contrary to the alleged objectives of the ethno-nationalists which were espoused even by some senior USP academics.

Robertson and Sutherland then co-authored the readable *Government by the Gun: the unfinished business of Fiji's 2000 Coup* (2002), again shedding more light on the behind-the-scenes events which gave the lie to the ethnonationalist propaganda. More recently in 2017 through ANU Press, Robertson published *The General's Goose: Fiji's contemporary tale of misadventure* (2017), trying to make sense of the 2006 coup in the context of the previous coups.

While most of we USP academics were united in our opposition to the 1987 and 2000 coups (and many of us suffered in various ways from the 1987 coup), the 2006 coup was also divisive in that quite a few senior USP academics and former academics (mostly Indo-Fijian) gave tacit and active support to it, believing in Bainimarama's rhetoric of anti-corruption and racial equality for all in Fiji as his justification.

Over the last three years, I discussed with Robertson at length my personal belief that his 2017 book *The General's Goose*, while a great source for students and academics, offered too generous a perspective on the fundamental causes of the so-called 'Bainimarama revolution' and 'Clean-up Campaign'.

I felt that in discussing the origins of the 2006 coup, it did not give sufficient weight to its genesis in the 2000 coup, and specifically Bainimarama's nonchalant disregard of military intelligence gathered by Colonel Vilame Seruvakoula giving details of the impending coup, his ambivalent policies regarding salaries and rations continuing to go to the CRW soldiers holding hostages in Parliament (the Evans Board of Inquiry Report), nor of the responsibility for the subsequent deaths in military custody of five CRW soldiers allegedly involved in the 2000 mutiny, but possibly innocent.

While they are well documented in Robertson's book, insufficient weight was given to the views of Police Commissioner Andrew Hughes, US Ambassador Larry Dinger and New Zealand High Commissioner Michael Green. Neither was sufficient weight given to the long years of brutal censorship after the 2006 coup which culminated in the rigidly managed elections of 2014 which used a rigged electoral system that only gave the appearance of racial equality (Robie, 2018). Robertson was not a slave to his ego or his views and we agreed to disagree, while respecting each other's views, as true academics ought to do.

I personally believe (and Akosita agrees) that if Robertson had had the time to do another book on where Fiji is today, his perspectives on the 'Clean-up Campaign' might also change, given what the Fiji public knows today about the massive corporate financing of a certain political party during the elections of 2014 and 2018, and the health and economic disaster that has been visited on Fiji through the COVID-19 pandemic by those still wielding power.

International works

It is important for USP students and staff who have just gone through the trauma of seeing their expatriate vice-chancellor expelled from Fiji, to appreciate what good expatriate academics bring to the USP community.

This is easily seen from the international books Robertson published over the years: *The Contemporary Era* (1984, USP); *The Making of the Modern World* (1986, Zed Books, London); and *The Three Waves of Globalization* (2003, Zed Books). He was working on another book of global interest (*Civilization or Globalization: how we became modern*) at the time of his death and it was close to completion. He also wrote chapters in books and academic articles about a whole range of issues affecting Fiji, Vanuatu, New Zealand, China and the Pacific.

USP students and staff today must ponder on their good fortune in being taught by excellent international academics like Robbie Robertson who could have worked for much higher salaries and perks in the metropolitan universities

where he later became a professor and a head of departments and faculties.

Robertson was Associate Professor of History and Development Studies at La Trobe University and also served at ANU and the University of Otago. His last two posts were at James Cook University (JCU) in Townsville and Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne. At James Cook he was professor and head of the School of Arts and Social Sciences. It was my good fortune that with his assistance and that of the then head of the Cairns Institute, Professor Hurriyet Babajan, I was granted a visiting professorship after I was been pushed out of USP in 2011. Both Biman Prasad and I are still adjunct professors at the Cairns Institute, giving us a scholarly link to higher education in Australia.

When informed of Robertson's death, the Office of the Vice Chancellor at JCU (professor Sandra Harding) promptly replied:

> Robbie Robertson provided significant leadership at James Cook University during his time as Professor and Head of the School of Arts and Social Sciences … [He wanted] education to be inclusive, conscientiously promoting the democratisation of higher education . . . . a potentially liberating force that should be available to all who could benefit. Those who knew and worked with him at JCU have stories of his tenacity, strength of character, support for others and dignified approach in all matters, a man of great integrity … a very genuine and kind human being. His professional and academic colleagues are saddened by the news of his passing.

On learning of his death, the Vice-Chancellor of Swinburne University of Technology praised his contribution as Dean of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities from 2014-2019. Professor Pascale Quester said his leadership was valued by staff and students:

> Robbie was known for his reflective and measured demeanour. He was admired at Swinburne for his scholarship and sustained advocacy for academics across teaching, research and leadership in the School of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities. He offered myriad large and small career opportunities for school staff, both academic and professional, during his time as dean. [We] acknowledge Robbie's significant contribution to the university and thank him for his dedication.

Contemporaries at USP

Robertson's USP and regional contemporaries also had similar views to the two Australian VCs. Professor Biman Prasad (former dean of FBE at USP and current MP and leader of the National Federation Party) wrote: 'Robbie will be missed by all his academic colleagues, friends and students. His writings on Fiji will remain his legacy and will remind all of us of his concerns about Fiji and its future.'

Dr Jacqueline Leckie, a former lecturer at USP, fondly remembers Robertson as her tutor at Otago University when she was a student. She recollects that he was instrumental in her first lecturing job at USP. She recollects, 'I learned so much from him as a colleague and he was so supportive professionally... [he] shared a sense of political outrage—and also hope—and how to pass on that passion in an academic way to our students.'

Former USP lecturer in history and politics Dr Claire Slatter accurately observed that 'Robbie was one of those rare, warm, unpretentious, open-hearted, amiable scholars, who enjoyed teaching, researching and writing . . . Although a historian, he delved into analysing Fiji politics, especially coup politics.'

Dr Ganesh Chand, an economics lecturer and contemporary of Robertson and later Vice-Chancellor of Fiji National University and currently VC of Solomon Islands National University, recalls that Robertson was a good friend and adviser on many things, academic and non-academic. He appreciated that Robertson contributed articles to the nascent *Journal of Fijian Studies*, edited by Dr Ganesh Chand and also published a book with his Fiji Institute of Applied Studies.

Dr David Robie, formerly of USP and founding director of the Pacific Media Centre, recalls Robertson's 'tremendously inspiring, creative and well-lived life … [He] opened the door to an academic career while I could retain my links to independent journalism.'

Professor Stuart Firth remembers Robertson's 'endless curiosity and background knowledge' for all his tasks. Professor Yvonne Underhill-Sem of Auckland University remembers a 'beloved Pacific scholar' whose writings remain to 'enrich new generations of Pacific scholars.'

Akosita Tamanisau

Robertson was supported enormously by his soulmate Akosita (Jita) Tamanisau, daughter of the great Fijian musician, Eremasi Tamanisau. Akosita felt equally strongly about defending democracy and freedom as about music and the arts. After her days as a USP student, Jita wrote for the *Fiji Sun,* was a stringer for *South* Magazine and Gemini News wire service and co-authored *Fiji: Shattered coups* (1988) with Robertson. She recollects attending the 'dinner parties at the Sutherlands, the Naidus or at Jacqui's, attending political meetings and public lectures and very often unwinding at the Golden Dragon night club or at Traps.'

She loved Robertson's profound thirst for knowledge and his quintessential ability to share his insights with respect and wit. She said that not just academics but journalists were also the targets of the military government.

Akosita began a long period of community involvement in Bendigo, working with issues surrounding family violence, drugs and alcohol and homelessness. She began a women's musical group, the *Wahine*, supporting each other through their trials and tribulations.

Last words

The last words belong to Robbie Robertson himself, who with considerable humour put together words and images for his own end, *Vale Robbie,* that was later played at his wake. Robbie recorded:

> Fiji has changed me in ways that I think would never have been possible had I only lived in NZ or Australia ... aside from a host of dismal unempathetic politicians who cannot accept change and have no vision for a better future, my only other disappointment is in the apparent conservatism of my own supposedly once radical generation. A big thank you to all who gave me such a wonderful life ... and [quoting Gorbachev] nothing trumps the meaning of life than to love a woman and to be loved by her ... I am so glad I experienced this love and the love of my sons Julian and Nemani.

Vale Robbie Robertson!

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Soul-searching and revealing memoir charts milestones

Flair and Loathing on the Front Page, by Jim Tucker. New Plymouth, NZ: Jim Tucker Media. 2022, 283 pages.

NAMES make news' is a mantra drummed into the head of every young reporter and heaven help those who can't identify a vital quote or face.

It is a lesson that veteran journalist and educator Jim Tucker never forgot.

The evidence of that lies in the pages of *Flair and Loathing on the Front Page*, the first part of his memoir spanning a career that began in Taranaki in 1965 and which has gone full circle. Tucker is a regular columnist on the *Taranaki Daily News* after serving as a metropolitan newspaper reporter and editor then becoming one of New Zealand's foremost journalism trainers.

His memoir is full of names, peppered like shot fired from close range.

This is not name-dropping in the traditional sense. There is no attempt to impress with tales of brief encounters with the rich and famous (although some surface from time to time). Rather, the author has used the pages to chronicle the inhabitants of New Zealand newsrooms he encountered over the first 22 years of his career—reporters, photographers, subeditors, editors, contributors, librarians, secretaries, technicians and a few whose roles are difficult to describe.

There are literally hundreds of people named in the book, each emphasised by bold type at first mention. To complete the record, the memoir ends with lists of staff on various publications with which Tucker was associated or, as in my case, was in competition.

In so doing, he has provided what may well be a unique record of a slice of journalistic history in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. Certainly many of those who were in the trade at that time will be gratified to find themselves finally acknowledged in print. It was an age when reporters and some photographers had bylines, if they were lucky, but no-one else in the news process was publicly recognised.

Tucker's book, however, is much more than a staff directory. He offers a personal perspective on newsroom

dynamics and, from his time with *New Zealand News* in Auckland, a revealing behind-the-scenes view of a publishing empire that went from the heights to oblivion.

He begins by establishing his (proud) provincial credentials, an all-too-brief encounter with Massey University and a move into journalism because (rather ironically for a man who would spend his second career there) it did not require a tertiary education.

His early mentors at the *Taranaki Herald* included Derryn Hinch who went on to blaze a fiery trail through Australian broadcasting, Richard Long who became editor of *The Dominion* then chief-of-staff for New Zealand National Party leaders Bill English and Don Brash and June Litman who was the paper's 'screaming skull' chief subeditor. He says Litman 'knew so much about the language she once sent off to *The Times* of London to claim the five quid they offered to anyone who could spot an error (they paid out)'.

This section of the memoir is full of tales about provincial reporting assignments, many with his photographer brother Rob who went on to establish his own national reputation as a press photographer and picture editor. Many of the tales are self-deprecating, a feature of the book which, in a number of cases, suggests Tucker is a little hard on himself.

He is justifiably proud, however, of his efforts to report environmental woes in Taranaki, including an 11-part investigation into water pollution in the region written while he was the *Taranaki Herald's* chief reporter.

However, it is in the second section of the memoir that he makes his most significant contribution to recording the history of the New Zealand newspaper industry.

In 1976, Tucker moved to Auckland and a reporting position on *The Auckland Star*. I had left the newspaper a few years before his move and we became professional rivals (but friends). The editorial executives on his arrival were the same ones I had left behind and his descriptions of *Star* editor-in-chief Geoffrey Upton, editor Ross Sayers and news editor then deputy editor Pat Booth ring true with me.

Booth was a driving reporting force, responsible for some of the stories that define not only *The Auckland Star,* but New Zealand journalism—the battle for justice on behalf of Arthur Allan Thomas and the Mr Asia drug trafficking investigation are the most famous, but there were others. Tucker describes him as 'the best editor the *Star* never had' and blames his failure to gain the editor's chair on a belief among the NZ News directors that his views were too left-wing.

I'm certain Tucker is right but the board misunderstood Booth. Much of his crusading journalism took place in the Muldoon era and what was seen as Left-leaning was, in fact, a fierce determination to hold power to account.

Tucker offers valuable insights into Booth's motivation, influence, and fallibilities. He recounts how a sense of fair play led Booth to 'spike' a list of supposed Communists that Prime Minister Rob Muldoon had

apparently sourced from the SIS in a move chillingly redolent of Senator Joe McCarthy.

He tells of Booth's dominance of editor Keith Aitken's news conferences and his misguided posting of a weekly staff bulletin that not only named the praiseworthy but criticised those whose work was below par. The bulletin created animosity in the newsroom, although Tucker says Booth was oblivious to it.

'Some felt overlooked and others thought undue recognition went to people who didn't deserve it. Some of those criticised became embittered.'

Tucker had his own differences with Booth—and other editorial executives—when he became picture editor and began advocating for better (that meant bigger) display of pictures than the *Star* allowed. His advocacy was not misplaced. He had a team including some of the best photographers in the country and newspapers elsewhere were responding to the inroads of television by bold display.

His battles led to real antipathy between himself and the paper's subeditors and provide a useful example of the dynamics of a newsroom in which each department seeks to have its way.

In 1981, Tucker transferred to the *Star's* sister publication, the *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, whose editor Jean Wishart had an expressed preference for male news editors. He describes the legendary Wishart as 'the best, shrewdest and most enlightened editor I ever worked for', in spite of her refusal to run a profile on Dr Ian Scott who was the first openly gay candidate in a New Zealand election.

'Ah yes, Dr Scott,' she told Tucker. 'I won't be using that…I don't think New Zealand is quite ready.' Scott went on to lose the seat to National's Aussie Malcolm by a mere 117 votes.

During Tucker's time at the *Weekly* (which he describes with obvious professional admiration for the women who made up the bulk of the writing team) Brierley Investments Limited had acquired ownership of New Zealand News. Much of the remainder of the memoir is devoted to his time back at *The Auckland Star* which had the corporate raider's sword of Damocles hanging over it.

Tucker never met BIL's chairman Ron Brierley or even talked to him. He says that, to his knowledge, Brierley never attempted to interfere in editorial decisions. Years later, of course, the one-time glory boy of finance was jailed in Australian over possession of child abuse material. It also cost him his knighthood.

Tucker recounts, with feeling, the infamous 'Redundancy Day' when more than 80 people lost their jobs in a BIL-ordered cull. While those targeted for redundancy were meeting with their immediate bosses, the managing director addressed the remainder of the staff at an Auckland function centre. Midway through his speech, newly redundant printing staff burst in and the meeting descended into chaos.

The Auckland Star was facing the same fate that was befalling afternoon newspapers in many countries. It had

become a financial basketcase, although its death throes did not occur until after he left for a new career at what was then the Auckland Technical Institute. The memoir records the darker incidents of that time but is also full of anecdotes of the invariably lighter moments.

Tucker became deputy editor then editor of the *Star* and pursued some enlightened editorial policies. For example, he led the newspaper's support for the Homosexual Law Reform Bill after an approach by the official hairdresser to the Miss New Zealand Contest, Raymond Henderson. An astute and successful Auckland businessman, Henderson was present at the celebration of Tucker's investiture as an Officer of the Order of New Zealand in May 2022.

The Saturday late edition of the newspaper—the *8 O-Clock*—went and in its place was created the *Sunday Star.* Tucker does not take all the credit for its creation. Indeed, he says 46 ideas incorporated in its final design came from almost that number of people. However, he sells himself short. Under his initial editorship (while also editing the daily paper) the Sunday newspaper became an immediate success and lives on as the *Sunday Star-Times.*

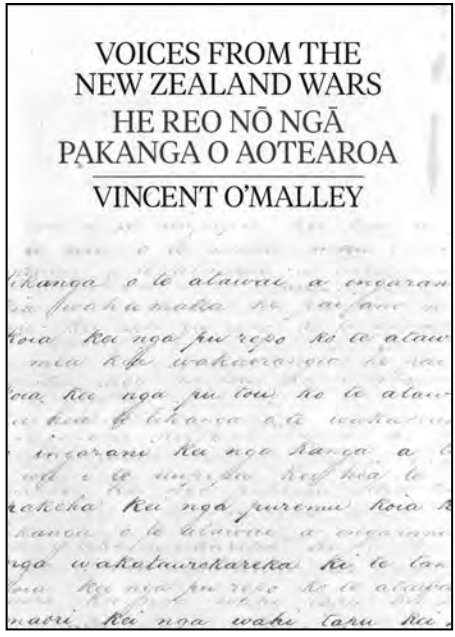
Jim Tucker's memoir charts his milestones, but it is also soul-searching and personally revealing. He dwells on his self-perceived short-comings, but readers should not make too much of them. Certainly, they do not detract from the significant role he has played in New Zealand journalism.

An e-book version of Tucker's book is available by emailing him at jimtuckermedia@gmail.com. A print version that will include Part 2 is due out by year's end.

DR PHILIP CASS is editor of Pacific Journalism Review.

Multiple voices shed new light on New Zealand Wars

*Voices from the New Zealand Wars. He **Reo nō ngā pakanga o Aotearoa***, by Vincent O'Malley. Wellington, NZ: Bridget Williams Books. 2021, 420 pages. ISBN 9781988587790.



HISTORY and journalism are two very closely linked art forms. Journalism has often been described as the first draft of history, especially war, although veteran BBC journalist John Simpson is credited with saying that it is more like some rough notes scribbled on the back of a napkin that is then thrown out of the window while the restaurant is under fire. When enough time has passed we can discover which news reports about a war were right and we can take stock of the whole field of literature that has arisen around it, from newspaper and journal articles to diaries and other manuscripts. The different voices all contribute to our understanding of an event. Even if they are sometimes wrong about details or argue from points of view with which we may disagree, they provide nuance and understanding of how people responded to momentous events. Bridget Williams Books has published a highly readable and highly recommended collection of memoirs, letters, journals, diaries official accounts and newspaper reports covering what we now call the New Zealand Wars, which ranged from 1845 and 1872.

Drawing on sources in both English and Te Reo, many of which have not been published before, this book provides a wide spectrum of views that will help readers form a picture of the many inter-related conflicts that made up the wars.

It is well worth noting the opposition to the wars from within the ranks of the Pākehā elite, many of whom saw government policy as being deliberately designed to provoke war and give than an excuse to exterminate the Māori. Some, such as former Chief Justice Sir William Martin, saw dangerous precedents in the British government's treatment of its nearest colonial subjects, the

Irish, arguing that the brooding sense of injustice that prevailed in Ireland over the seizure of land would be duplicated in New Zealand.

Such a sense of injustice was recorded in a letter to the government signed by 256 people from Poverty Bay who suddenly found their land confiscated, two years after the fighting had stopped, or as they eloquently put it 'the blood [had] long since become dry'. Their petition, in which they asked the Assembly to give heed to their troubles, was to no avail.

Some politicians were racked with guilt. Here is Canterbury politician Henry Sewell:

> I cannot express my sense of indignation at the wrong done to these unhappy people whose doom may now said to be sealed, for of course they will resist and resistance will be treated as rebellion and bring with it confiscation of their lands and final extermination. I write this with shame and remorse at having been instrumental in placing power in the hands of men whose first act is thus grossly to abuse it.

Journalists, too, could be equally partisan, as evidenced by journalist Samuel Crombie-Brown's account of the attack on Parihaka, which he described as an outrage.

These were wars of sovereignty and it is important that Māori voices are heard. Unlike the situation in Australia where there is no surviving written record of a contemporary Aboriginal view of the Frontier Wars, Māori were able to record their experiences, often afterwards at the request of the government.

Thus it is possible to see the development of Māori views on the growing conflicts with the colonial forces and to hear their descriptions of important events.

As an example, Hori Ngatai gives a remarkable account of his part in the Māori victory in the battle of Gate Pa, probably the best known single event of the war. The version given is a translation of answers given to questions by Gilbert Ma and has obviously been edited into a narrative, but it still provides a vivid insight into what happened and how the Māori, having defeated the British, were able to withdraw and regroup during the night.

Voices is a remarkable book and one that should be widely read. It is beautifully produced and illustrated with more than 150 pictures.

Highly recommended.

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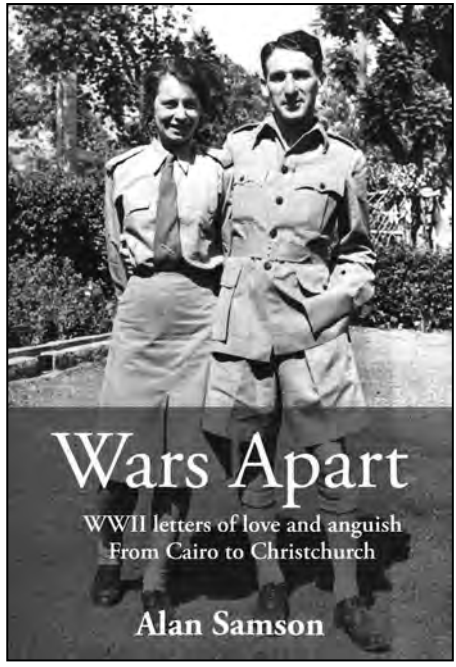
Parents' letters trace story of triumph and tragedy from Egypt to New Zealand

Wars Apart: From Cairo to Christchurch – WWII Letters of Love and Anguish, by Alan Samson. Wellington, New Zealand: Writers Ink, 2021, 274 pp. ISBN: 9780473531393.

IN his newly released *Wars Apart: WWII Letters of Love and Anguish from Cairo to Christchurch*, retired award-winning New Zealand journalist and academic Alan Samson tells the love story of his parents through the letters and photographs they exchanged while they were stationed in the Middle East during the Second World War.

They later migrated to New Zealand and their story continued from Cairo to Christchurch. Cairo was the place in which his parents began their story, which continued as they adapted to the diversity and triumphs of a new life in New Zealand.

A journalism lecturer who taught at Wellington's Massey University for more than a decade and a former



Pacific Journalism Review reviews editor, Samson uses his academic research skills and journalistic expertise in telling this story of love and anguish, hope and despair, of his own mother and father who had distinguished service records with the South African and British armies.

Both were English, yet his mother, Gwen, enlisted while in South Africa and became personal assistant to the two most senior South African officers, Field Marshal and Prime Minister Jan Christiaan Smuts and General Francois Henry Theron. His father, Norman, on the other hand, was a senior member in the organisation and transport of troops in Britain. They gained permission to marry in Cairo in 1943, were briefly united, but were rarely able to be together thereafter.

Towards the war's end, Gwen was repatriated home to the UK because of her pregnancy.

Norman was a civil engineer by profession and participated in the restoration work of London's St Paul's Cathedral and New Zealand's Rimutaka rail tunnel – then the country's longest - which opened to traffic in 1955. When he returned to the UK from the Middle East, possibly because of the horror of war that he witnessed, he attempted to commit suicide and was placed in an asylum.

The couple were divided again, but their letters of love and anguish continued unabated. It was not until 1947 that the couple were united at last and emigrated to New Zealand. Yet the post-traumatic stress of war continued to haunt them. Norman died of pemphigus vulgaris, an auto-immune blistering disease whose cause was possibly attributed to his wartime service.

Alan was 10 and his brother, Ken, 14, when his father died. Their mother died of lung cancer in 1980 when the author was in his early 30s. Her death was also attributed to her war service in the Middle East with the South African army due to her heavy smoking under the stress of war. She was an accountant and feminist activist.

At his mother's death, and 'amid a meagre collection of her mainly-chipped ornamental treasures', the author ran across an old suitcase in which there was a pile of old documents and photographs, together with 'a muddle of ancient letters that had been squirrelled away' since well before his birth. Many of the handwritten letters were difficult to read and that made the busy practising journalist Alan put them away.

It was not until the author's retirement from his academic career that he examined the 200-odd letters, most of which were air posted letters from Cairo during the war years. Most of the letters between his parents were stamped 'Passed by Censor'. While many of the letters were written when they were both serving in the Middle East, there were more from the period when his mother was repatriated to her father's home in Aryshire, Scotland.

If you like to picture military history with some anguish and passion, then this book is for you as it captures the war in images and words. It is divided into 10 cantos, with each canto exhibiting a theme, beginning with canto titled 'A Love Story Unfolding: Cairo to Christchurch' and ending with canto 10 'Haere mai Aotearoa', the Māori words for 'welcome to New Zealand'. Throughout the chapters, the author skilfully places the letters in the framework of the war and other historical stages, a process which he characterised as 'a voyage of discovery'. In doing so, he tells us the story of the dire problems encountered by under-supported soldiers upon demobilisation—an issue which war historians never debated in their textbooks.

The extent of his parents' hardship shocked Alan, particularly knowing that his father was unable to cope with his return to jobless Britain and was voluntarily institutionalised in two

asylums. However, the author also tells his parents' story of enduring love as recorded in their surviving letters and a wide range of previously unpublished historical photos, most from the Samson family collection.

He said the letters they exchanged offered him a social history story about the intensity of his parents' feelings and about their mutual affection which never faded. He argues, though, that he could not write explicitly about the war, but there was 'scope for reading between the lines' about it. One should stress here, though, that when Samson wrote this book his intention was not to pay tribute to just his parents, but to all those who lived and died during the war period.

If anyone had wanted to bring to the attention of readers the agonies and sorrows of war in a personalised manner, they could not have done it better than Alan Samson in *Wars Apart*. His chronicle of the dialogue that went between his parents through their letters is a superb personalised account of a critical period in history. As he put it: 'The adversity—and triumphs—they experienced as they laid down new roots in Christchurch is very much part of a thread that began in Cairo during World War II.'

Indeed, rarely have we come across intellectuals like Samson digging to tell us a story hidden in their ancestral history. Kudos is due to him for genuinely and intelligently bringing to light the suffering and anguish that the war inflicted on his parents and the many others like them whose stories have not yet been told. Their lives behind the lines is a story worth telling, and Samson tell it all well. A future Kiwi scholar could perhaps also endeavour to document how New Zealanders stationed in the Middle East perceived the region through the lenses of its place and people.

While reading about the war is not new to us, readers will find Samson's account both intriguing and engaging. The book's letters and album of photos offer us a window through which we can see the despair and love of a British couple involved in war. The book is a long overdue addition to the modern historiography of that period and a valuable reading for those seeking a different view and a moral appraisal of how the most destructive conflict in human history affected citizens.

Samson's dedication of his book to his brother and their children echoes the passion that bonds New Zealand families—a reality which I, a Cairene, witnessed while living there. It is also worth mentioning here that the author, whom I taught journalism with at Massey in 2003 and 2004, and his brother Ken, came full of passion to visit Egypt in 2005, touring and discovering the old and new in its capital, in the city where their parents married. They exhibited in their visit a great desire to discover places in Cairo, the city where their parents met and corresponded to each other.

Perhaps they also wanted to pay tribute to their fellow New Zealanders who died in the Land of the Nile. More than 1100 of the 7240 Commonwealth

soldiers buried in Egypt's El-Alamein Cemetery on the Mediterranean coast are New Zealanders. Once Alan and Ken completed their visit to Egypt, they moved south to discover the beauty and culture of sub-Saharan Africa.

This spirit of Kiwi adventure is best told in Samson's 2021 book *Me And Me Now: A 1970s Kiwi Hippie Trail Adventure*, in which he records his adventures as a young New Zealander and latent journalist travelling through the Southeast Asian countries of India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan in the early 1970s.

A review of *Me. And Me Now* is on page 265

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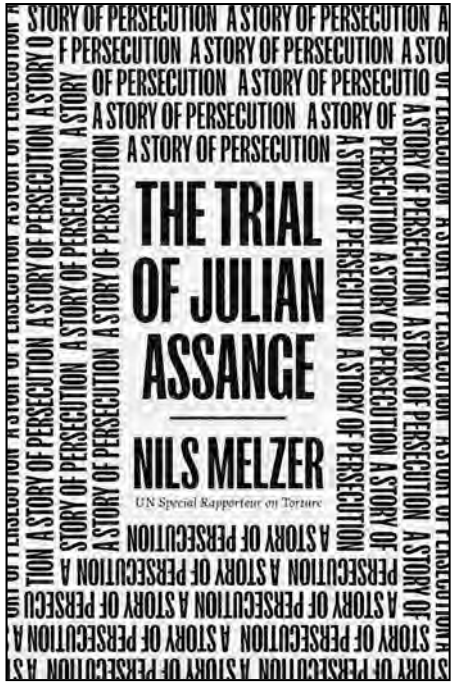
Julian Assange: Persecuted and abused for exposing dirty secrets of the powerful



The Trial of Julian Assange: A Story of Persecution, by Nils Melzer. Brooklyn, NY: Verso. 2022, 368 pages. ISBN 9781839766220

IT IS easy to forget why Julian Assange has been on trial in England for, well, seemingly forever.

Didn't he allegedly sexually assault two women in Sweden? Isn't that why he holed up for years in the Ecuadorian embassy in London to avoid facing charges? When the bobbies finally dragged him out of the embassy, didn't his dishevelled appearance confirm all those stories about his lousy personal hygiene?

Didn't he persuade Chelsea Manning to hack into the United States military's computers to reveal national security matters that endangered the lives of American soldiers and intelligence agents? He says he is a journalist, but hasn't *The New York Times* made it clear he is just a 'source' and not a publisher entitled to First Amendment protection?

If you answered yes to any or all of these questions, you are not alone. But the answers are actually no. At the very least, it's more complicated than that.

To take one example, the reason Assange was dishevelled was that staff in the Ecuadorian embassy had confiscated his shaving gear three months before to ensure his appearance matched his stereotype when the arrest took place.

That is one of the findings of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer, whose investigation of the case against Assange has been laid out in forensic detail in *The Trial of Julian Assange*.

What is the UN's Special Rapporteur on Torture doing investigating the Assange case, you might ask? So did Melzer when Assange's lawyers first approached him in 2018:

> I had more important things to do: I had to take care of 'real' torture victims! (p. 10)

Melzer returned to a report he was writing about overcoming prejudice and self-deception when dealing with official corruption. 'Not until a few months later,' he writes, 'would I realise the striking irony of this situation.'

The 47 members of the UN Human Rights Council directly appoint special rapporteurs on torture. The position is unpaid—Melzer earns his living as a professor of international law—but they have diplomatic immunity and operate largely outside the UN's hierarchies.

Among the many pleas for his attention, Melzer's small office chooses between 100 and 200 each year to officially investigate. His conclusions and recommendations are not binding on states. He bleakly notes that in barely 10 percent of cases does he receive full co-operation from states and an adequate resolution.

He received nothing like full co-operation in investigating Assange's case. He gathered around 10,000 pages of procedural files, but a lot of them came from leaks to journalists or from freedom-of-information requests. Many pages had been redacted. Rephrasing Carl Von Clausewitz's maxim, Melzer wrote his book as 'the continuation of diplomacy by other means' (Britannica, n.d.).

What Melzer finds is stark and disturbing:

> The Assange case is the story of a man who is being persecuted and abused for exposing the dirty secrets of the powerful, including war crimes, torture and corruption. It is a story of deliberate judicial arbitrariness in Western democracies that are otherwise keen to present themselves as exemplary in the area of human rights.
>
> It is the story of wilful collusion by intelligence services behind the back of national parliaments and the general public. It is a story of manipulated and manipulative reporting in the mainstream media for the purpose of deliberately isolating, demonizing, and destroying a particular individual. It is the story of a man who has been scapegoated by all of us for our own societal failures to address government corruption and state-sanctioned crimes. (pp. 2-3)

The dirty secrets of the powerful are difficult to face, which is why we—and I don't exclude myself —swallow neatly packaged slurs and diversions of the kind listed at the beginning of this review.

Melzer rightly takes us back to April 2010, four years after the Australian-born Assange had founded WikiLeaks, a small organisation set up to publish official documents that it had received, encrypted so as to protect whistle-blowers from official retribution. Assange released video footage showing in horrifying detail how US soldiers in a helicopter had shot and killed Iraqi civilians and two Reuters journalists in 2007.

Apart from how the soldiers spoke—'Hahaha, I hit them', 'Nice', 'Good shot'—it looks like most of the victims were civilians and that the journalists' cameras were mistaken for rifles. When one of the wounded men

THE CONVERSATION/KIRSTY WIGGLESWORTH/AP

Figure 1: Julian Assange displaying his ankle security tag in 2011 at the house where he was required to stay by a British judge.

tried to crawl to safety, the helicopter crew, instead of allowing their comrades on the ground to take him prisoner, as required by the rules of war, seek permission to shoot him again.

As Melzer's detailed description makes clear, the soldiers knew what they were doing:

> 'Come on, buddy,' the gunner comments, aiming the crosshairs at his helpless target. 'All you gotta do is pick up a weapon.' (Collateral Murder, 2010)

The soldiers' request for authorisation to shoot is given. When the wounded man is carried to a nearby minibus, it is shot to pieces with the helicopter's 30mm gun. The driver and two other rescuers are killed instantly. The driver's two young children inside are seriously wounded.

The US army command investigated the matter, concluding that the soldiers acted in accordance with the rules of war, even though they had not. Equally to the point, writes Melzer, the public would never have known a war crime had been committed without the release of what Assange called the 'Collateral Murder' video.

The video footage was just one of hundreds of thousands of documents that WikiLeaks released in tranches known as the Afghan war logs, the Iraq war logs and cablegate. They revealed numerous alleged war crimes and provided the raw material for a shadow history of the disastrous wars waged by the US and its allies, including Australia, in Aghanistan and Iraq.

Melzer retraces what has happened to Assange since then, from the accusations of sexual assault in Sweden to

Assange taking refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy in London in an attempt to avoid the possibility of extradition to the US if he returned to Sweden. His refuge led to him being jailed in the United Kingdom for breaching his bail conditions.

Sweden eventually dropped the sexual assault charges, but the US government ramped up its request to extradite Assange. He faces charges under the 1917 *Espionage Act,* which, if successful, could lead to a jail term of 175 years.

Two key points become increasingly clear as Melzer methodically works through the events.

The first is that there has been a carefully orchestrated plan by four countries—the United States, the United Kingdom, Sweden and, yes, Australia—to ensure Assange is punished forever for revealing state secrets.

The second is that the conditions he has been subjected to, and will continue to be subjected to if the US's extradition request is granted, have amounted to torture.

On the first point, how else are we to interpret the continual twists and turns over nearly a decade in the official positions taken by Sweden and the UK? Contrary to the obfuscating language of official communiques, all of these have closed down Assange's options and denied him due process.

Melzer documents the thinness of the Swedish authorities' case for charging Assange with sexual assault. That did not prevent them from keeping it open for many years. Nor was Assange as uncooperative with police as has been suggested. Swedish police kept changing their minds about where and whether to formally interview Assange because they knew the evidence was weak.

Melzer also takes pains to show how Swedish police also overrode the interests of the two women who had made the complaints against Assange.

It is distressing to read the conditions Assange has endured over several years. A change in the political leadership of Ecuador led to a change in his living conditions in the embassy, from cramped, but bearable to virtual imprisonment.

Since being taken from the embassy to Belmarsh prison in 2019, Assange has spent much of his time in solitary confinement for 22 or 23 hours a day. He has been denied all but the most limited access to his legal team, let alone family and friends. He was kept in a glass cage during his seemingly interminable extradition hearing, appeals over which could continue for several more years, according to Melzer.

Assange's physical and mental health have suffered to the point where he has been put on suicide watch. Again, that seems to be the point, as Melzer writes:

> The primary purpose of persecuting Assange is not—and never has been—to punish him personally, but to establish a generic precedent with a global deterrent effect on other journalist, publicists and activists.

So will the new Australian Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, do any more

than his three Coalition and two Labor predecessors to advocate for the interests of an Australian citizen? In December 2021, *Guardian Australia* reported Albanese saying he did 'not see what purpose is served by the ongoing pursuit of Mr Assange' and that 'enough is enough'. Since being sworn in as Prime Minister, he has kept his cards close to his chest.

The actions of his predecessors suggest he won't, even though Albanese has already said on several occasions since being elected that he wants to do politics differently.

Melzer, among others, would remind him of the words of former US president Jimmy Carter, who, contrary to other presidents, said he did not deplore the WikiLeaks revelations:

> They just made public what was the truth. Most often, the revelation of truth, even if it's unpleasant, is beneficial. […] I think that, almost invariably, the secrecy is designed to conceal improper activities. (*The Elders*, 2013)

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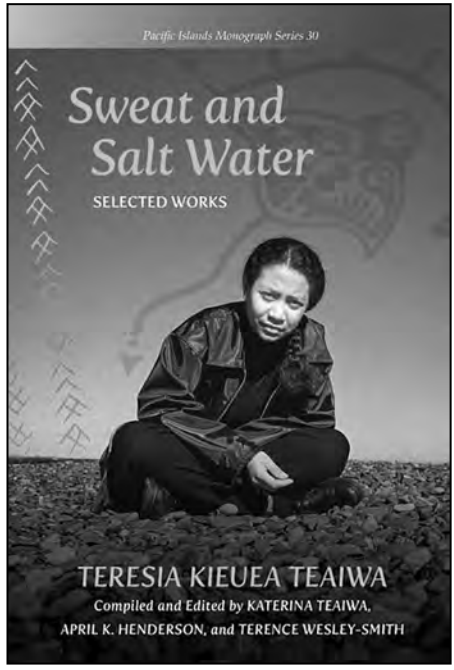
A skilful weaving of Teaiwa's creative legacy

Sweat and Salt Water: Selected Works: Teresia Kieuea Teaiwa, compiled and edited by Katerina Teaiwa, April K. Henderson and Terence Wesley-Smith. Pacific Islands Monograph Series. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. 2021, 286 pages. ISBN 9780824890285.



SWEAT and Salt Water: Selected Works is a collection of texts written by Banaban, I-Kiribati, and African-American Pacific studies scholar and educator Teresia Kieuea Teaiwa, which was put together by her sister Katerina Teaiwa and friends and colleagues April K. Henderson and Terence Wesley-Smith. Described by Katerina as '[a] true labour of love and occasional, intense grief', the book was published posthumously. While, as the editors note, 'it is impossible to contain or present the dazzling spectrum of Teresia's published work in just one volume' (p. xvii), the selected texts were originally published between 1992 and 2017 and as such provide an idea of the variety of Teaiwa's intellectual and creative writing across her career.

Indeed, we can find Teaiwa's earlier work *Microwomen: US Colonialism and Micronesian Women Activists* (Teaiwa, 1992), in which she argues that a 'woman-centered view of history and politics is vital for an accurate understanding of the power dynamics and change involved in colonialism' (p. 106) and demonstrates that 'women's assertion of their interest is very much a part of decolonisation' (p. 105). The book also includes some of her most recent research on women soldiers from Fiji, in which she demonstrates that 'militarisation in the Fiji context has not been solely a colonial project but has also been part of an indigenous nationalist turn and is now in a post-/neo-colonial phase of development' (p. 148).

The texts are organised around three thematic sections: Pacific Studies, Militarism and Gender, and Native Reflections, reflecting the focus of

her research at the time of her death: 'research into theory, practice and pedagogy of Pacific Studies' and 'research into gendered dynamics of militarism in the Pacific' (Salesa, 2018, p. 98). The editors have also compiled a bibliography of Teaiwa's work spanning from 1992 to 2018.

In his series editor's note, Tarcisius Kabutaulaka writes that Teresia Teaiwa 'has not really gone away. She is still with us in another form and can be seen through our mind's eye. […] She continues to speak to us through her works and the relationships she weaved in this life' (p. vii).

This cannot be more evident than in *Sweat and Salt Water*. First, because the framing of the book from Kabutaulaka and Sean Mallon's foreword to the editors' introduction and their careful selection and compilation of texts demonstrate that this was indeed a labour that could only be fueled by love. Teaiwa's writing is characterised by the relations she skillfully weaves in her work, in the form of stories such as the 'Yaqona/Yagoqu' chapter, citations of academics and students, footnotes, and dedications, such as in her poem 'How Does Change Happen (For Jully Makini)'.

In fact, each one of her texts draws us into an ocean of relationships, which guides us through not only her own work and life but also that of other intellectuals, teachers, students, poets, artists, activists, and persons who have crossed her path.

While I have myself never had the chance to meet her, it is through her work and her commitment to making connections that I encountered Suzanne Ouneï, a Kanak feminist and pro-independence activist who had a significant impact on my political imagination and relation to my home country Kanaky-New-Caledonia.

In 'The Ancestors We Get To Choose', she explains how she was herself introduced to her and other important activists and theorists of sovereignty and independence in the Pacific in Haunani-Kay Trask's first decolonisation seminar at the University of Hawai'i, where she was doing her MA in history (p. 225).

This specific chapter is also a genealogy of Pacific studies scholars that is 'patriarchal, masculine, and significantly white' (p. 226), but who have significantly shaped the field. It is a call to engage more 'broadly with theory and theorists of all kinds' (p. 231) in order to practice sovereignty, self-determination and intellectual agency. Teaiwa asserts:

> I do not like theory when it is used as a weapon. I especially dislike theory when it is used like a silencer on a gun. I prefer to see and use theory as a frame, a magnifying glass, a key, a plow, a sail, an oar. (p. 226)

It is through this lens that one should read *Sweat and Salt Water*.

The pieces selected also allow us to testify to the playfulness of her writing and thinking, through for example the use of the metaphor of the body to theorise Indigenous Pacific participation in

the military-industrial complex or the metaphor of the classroom as a canoe.

Each section of the book also includes at least one poem, which constitute chapters in themselves, reflecting Teaiwa's assertion that creative work should be taken as seriously as critical work (Salesa, 2018, p. 101). This is further exemplified in her teaching practice in which she prioritises student-centered and collaborative learning.

For example, in 'Charting Pacific (Studies) Waters' she explains 'Akamai', a creative option which offers students the opportunity to exhibit or perform their major assignment artistically. Her pedagogy encourages students in Pacific studies to value the learning process as much as the destination of achieving their qualifications and to see learning as a lifelong project.

The book reminds us of the generosity and integrity of Teresia Kieuea Teaiwa in her willingness to implicate herself, share personal stories and the passion that animates her writings. Her work embodies and 'invites a more intimate approach to knowledge' (p. 53). A thousand words is not sufficient to express how the book gracefully illuminates her commitment to critical scholarship and to interrogate power in all its forms, but also her deep commitment to ethics and collaborative learning.

Teresia Kieuea Teaiwa's work opens what the Kanaky-New Caledonia-based Ceméa (Centre d'Entrainement aux Méthodes d'Education Actives) Pwärä Wäro calls 'the fields of possible', in that it moves its readers not to remain passive in the education we receive and give, to challenge our theoretical comfort zones, to remain critical even when it goes against the grain, and more importantly, to always put collaboration at the centre of our endeavours. As series editor Kabutaulaka comments: 'This is Teresia's gift to us' (p. viii).

Reference

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Teaiwa, T. K. (1992). *Microwomen: US colonialism and Micronesian women activists.* In Rubinstein, D., (Ed.), The proceedings of the Eighth Pacific History Conference (pp. 125-141). Mangilao: University of Guam Press.

BOOKSHELF

DR PHILIP CASS is editor of Pacific Journalism Review.

Account of 1953 royal tour has much to teach about how we saw the world

Royal Tour Picture Album, by Elizabeth Morton. London, UK: *Sunday Graphic*/Pitkin Pictorials Ltd, 1953. 104 pages.

ONE of the joys of travelling the world and collecting books is the historical oddities that turn up in the most unexpected places.

I have a splendid copy of the complete works of Shakespeare dating to the Second World War, completely reset, so the frontispiece notes, due to the original plates having been 'destroyed by enemy action'. One wonders at the perfidy of the Luftwaffe in trying to blow up the Bard.

I have a copy of Grove's encyclopaedia of music from the 1930s which notes with disdain that attempts to make jazz respectable by using an orchestra have failed—and this written several years after Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. The same volume also contains a section on the influence of Jews in classical music, noting such important 'Hebrew' composers as Mahler.

Both these volumes came from a secondhand bookseller near the bus station in Suva: relics, I suppose, of a long departed British colonial administrator.

Each of these volumes is a window into the past and into attitudes and ideas that have long vanished.

In the year of Queen Elizabeth's Platinum Jubilee it was therefore timely to find a copy of the *Royal Tour Picture Album*, a lavishly illustrated record of her 1953 tour of the Commonwealth in my local Salvation Army shop.

The 1953 tour seems to have been a strange affair, a tour of places rarely visited by royalty alongside some more important but equally far-flung outposts of the Commonwealth. It was rather like Iron Maiden playing in Christchurch or Caracas.

The Queen and Prince Philip visited Bermuda, Jamaica, Panama, Fiji, Tonga, New Zealand, Australia, what was then Ceylon, Aden, Uganda, Tobruk (Libya), Malta and Gibraltar.

The African segment seems to have been beset by security issues and Britain would eventually be expelled from Aden and Libya, where the Queen paid tribute to the defence of Tobruk during the Second World War.

What is intriguing is the concentration on the small island states in the Caribbean and the Pacific, places which did not, at the time, seem to have afforded much material benefit to the UK (although the Fijian soldiers who served in the British army and the *Windrush* migrants might argue otherwise), but which could be relied upon to provide a loyal, colourful and exotic welcome.

It is the Pacific that takes up most of the pages here. There are some splendid colour plates (one suspects some of them are actually hand tinted) showing, among other things, Her Majesty and the Secretary for Fijian Affairs, Ratu Lala Sukuna, in Albert Park in Suva, surrounded by Fijians with their gifts for the visitors—50 newly killed pigs, 50 cooked pigs, 10 tons of bananas and 50 metres of tapa cloth.

It is the depictions of the local people that intrigue after so many decades. Some of the Indigenous peoples, like the Tongans, are well defined (at least in the somewhat patronising terms of the day), others are projected as members of a happy, multi-racial Commonwealth (the various inhabitants of Fiji) and others, like the First Nations peoples of Australia are very awkwardly presented, with little or no information or explanation about who they are or why they are there. Given the things we know now, some of the images raise disturbing questions to which we may never know the answers.

It is unclear whether the author, Elizabeth Morton, accompanied the tour or simply worked from a pile of press releases and newspaper clippings. The book was co-produced with the *Sunday Graphic*, which closed in 1960, so she may have worked for that masthead. Whatever the case, she was clearly eager to present Fiji as a multi-racial success story. While we are told that the royal vessel, the SS *Gothic*, was greeted by canoes manned by 'fuzzy haired warriors' we are also told that 'Fijians, Indians, Chinese and Europeans' all cheered the Queen.

Later they visited Lautoka where they received 'a tremendous welcome from the Indian sugar-cane workers'. Alas, it would only take a few more decades for that multicultural vision to be shattered by the first of the coups that have bedevilled Fiji

From Fiji, Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh flew to Nuku'alofa in a TEAL Solent Mk IV flying boat, the *Aranui*, which is now in the MOTAT aviation collection in Auckland.

Despite only visiting for two days, the royal visitors were given a hearty welcome.

She and the Duke were greeted by Queen Salote, who had entranced the British when she visited London for

Queen Elizabeth's coronation. When the Tongan monarch rode in an open carriage oblivious of the rain, her fortitude drew the admiration of the crowd and prompted both Noel Coward and Flanders and Swan to make jokes that are probably unrepeatable today.

Despite preserving its independence, Tonga had strong ties with the United Kingdom. During the Second World War, when the then Princess Elizabeth was driving an ambulance, Queen Salote raised enough money to buy three Spitfires for the RAF.

After being greeted at the wharf by Queen Salote, the Queen and the Duke drove through the rain into the capital where people from all over the kingdom, including its remotest islands, gathered to greet her.

Ex-servicemen marched through the streets and at the *mala'e* the British visitors were waited on by members of the Nobility as they and 2,000 guests tucked into a banquet of pork, chicken crayfish, lobsters, yams and pineapples.

A *Sipi Tau* (the Tongan equivalent of the haka) was given in honour of the visitors.

That night they slept at the royal palace and were wakened in the morning by a serenade of nose flutes.

After breakfast they attended service in the Wesleyan church that was full to overflowing.

In her speech, Queen Elizabeth said: 'Never was a more appropriate name bestowed on any lands than that which Captain Cook gave to these beautiful islands when he called them The Friendly Islands.'

The photographs accompanying the report are of the kind we have become used to: The Queen and her party enjoying local hospitality, receiving gifts and inspecting local curiosities, including Tui Malila, the tortoise said to have been presented by Captain Cook in 1777. The tortoise died in 1966.

And how were the Tongans presented? It is worth reading, 70 years later, Morton's description:

> The Tongans are a simple, happy, devout people. They share their fervent loyalty between their own Queen and the Sovereign Head of the Empire and Commonwealth which since 1900 has protected their 1,000-year-old independence. Their land is rich and fertile, their seas teem with fish; for longer than they can remember there has never been poverty or unemployment in their paradise. Queen Elizabeth II came to them as their friend from afar whose navies guard their shores and whose peoples buy all the bananas, copra and coconuts they produce.
>
> They welcomed the Queen and her husband with sincere and abandoned joy and gave them a feast that was fabulous in its lavishness. But before this began there was a simple little ceremony on the quay at Nuku'alofa shortly after the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh landed. Five-year-old Mele Siuilikutape, granddaughter of Queen Salote, came shyly forward and, with all the dignity and grace of her ancient race, presented the friend of Tonga with a basket of wild flowers.

This passage lays out a vision that was very familiar, an Island paradise presided over by a wise local ruler loyal

to Britain and a people forever grateful for the protection of the Royal Navy. Was it only slightly more than 50 years since Kipling had prophesied: 'Far-called, our navies melt away?' In another 30 years Britain would barely be able to scrape together enough ships to rescue the Falklands from the Argentine invaders.

Queen Elizabeth visited Tonga again in 1970 and 1977.

When Prince Harry visited Tonga in 2018 he read a message from his grandmother: 'To this day I remember with fondness Queen Salote's attendance at my own Coronation, while Prince Philip and I have cherished memories from our three wonderful visits to your country.'

From Tonga, the Queen travelled on to New Zealand, where, according Mortonson, 'the Maoris, once the most warlike and adventurous of the Polynesian races, now live in peace and understanding with the people of British stock'.

Later, she writes: 'The Maoris gave their first vociferous welcome at Waitangi, an historic spot on the placid waters of the Bay of Islands. Here in 1840 the Maori chiefs met Captain William Hobson – who became the first Governor of New Zealand-and signed a treaty acknowledging Queen Victoria as their sovereign.' It is possibly not too much to suggest that some modern readers might bridle at this interpretation of the Treaty of Waitangi.

From New Zealand, the Queen travelled on to Australia. Here too we have a picture of a predominantly white nation, but unlike New Zealand the Indigenous people remain in the background; if not unacknowledged then certainly unexplained. Clumsy as the writing about Māori might seem to us today, it is a reflection of the Pākehā view of the day and Māori representatives are present and clearly indicated in several photographs.

In Australia, the identified Indigenous face practically disappears. Here is a colour photograph of 'fearsome looking Torres Straits Islanders armed with bows and arrows and wearing elaborate feather head dresses' providing a guard of honour in Cairns.

Here is a group of Aborigines from the Northern Territory who had been shipped to Toowoomba in Queensland where they 'performed native dances'. Here are two Aboriginal girls in 'immaculate white dresses' curtseying to the Queen, but they have their backs to the camera. They have no identity. In the background an Aboriginal dancer looks on.

Here, though, is six-year-old Beverley Joy Noble, from the Kurrawong Native Mission in Kalgoorlie, Western Australia, presenting a bouquet. One wonders whether she was one of the Stolen Generation.

There are other, unexplained photographs. There is a picture of the royal party in Busselton in Western Australia where they were greeted by a Boy Scout troop—most of whom seem to be Indigenous Peoples, but nothing is said about who they are or how a multiracial troop evolved.

And last but not least, there is an entirely unexplained picture of the

Queen reviewing 'soldiers and sailors from Australia's Island Territories'. These vaguely determined people are clearly members of the Pacific Islands Regiment (PIR) from what was then the Territory of Papua and New Guinea.

The *Royal Tour Picture Album* is a glimpse into a world that simply never existed for much of today's population. However, this does not make the book simply a curiosity. Indeed, for the curious, the book is a joy because of what it contains. It preserves images and ideas and views that need to examined, not just for their historical value, or as a mark of how far attitudes have changed, but as a warning that in 70 years our descendants will look upon our own world—and us—and wonder with equal puzzlement at why or how we behaved and thought as we do.

These photographs are from the *Royal Tour Picture Album's* section of the Tongan visit. Because Queen Salote was such an imposing figure she dominates many of the photographs. It is also likely that she was featured so heavily because she was so well known in the UK from her visit to Queen Elizabeth's coronation.

Figure 1: Her Majesty Queen Salote welcomes Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth to the Kingdom of Tonga at the start of the British monarch's 1953-54 visit.

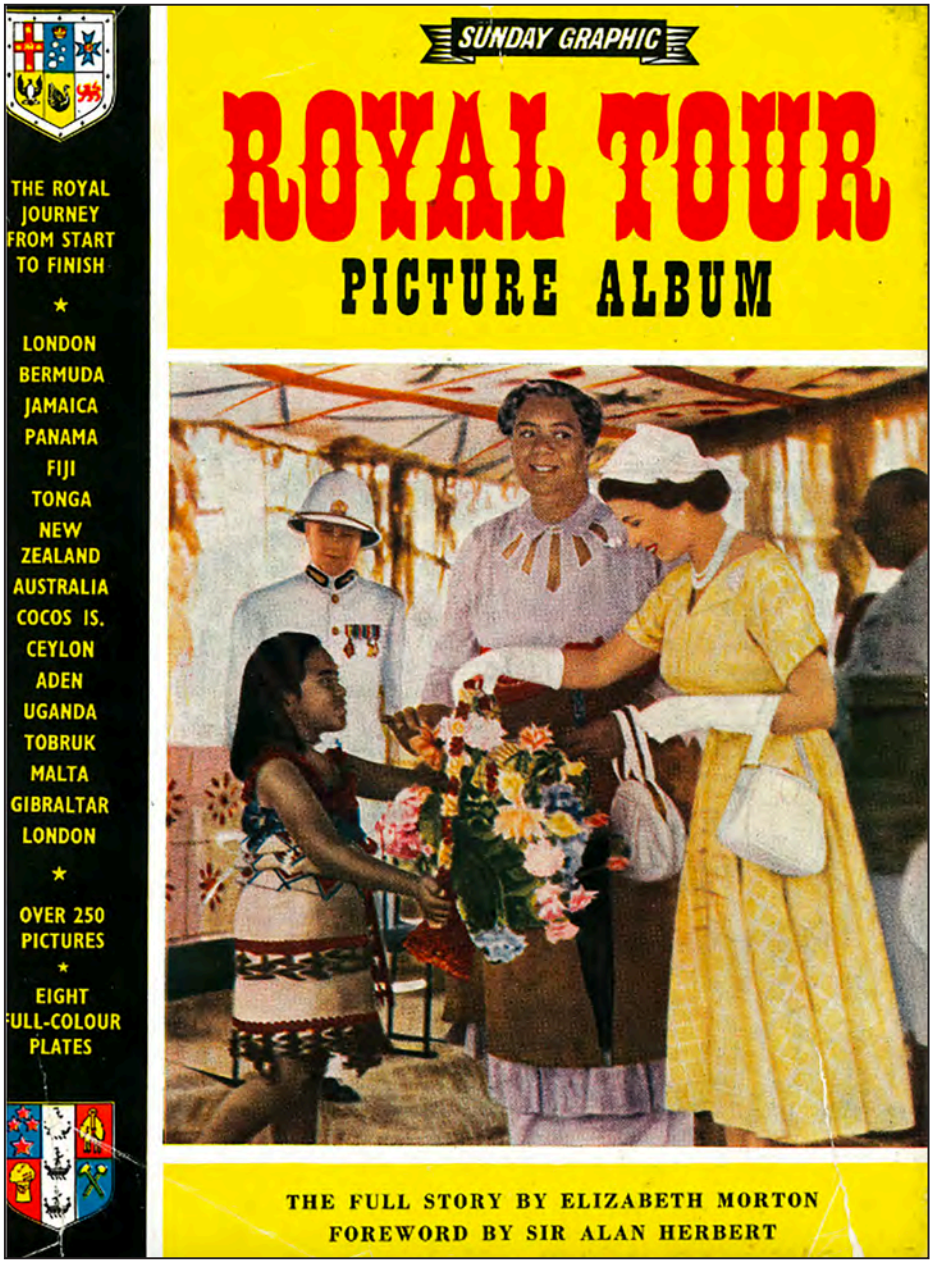


Figure 2: The *Royal Tour Picture Album* cover Queen Elizabeth II accepts a garland of flowers from Salote's grand daughter, Mele Siuilikutape while the Tongan monarch watches.

Figure 3: Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh share a banquet with their Tongan hosts. The visitors were waited on by members of the Nobility.

Figure 4: Members of the crews of the SS *Gothic*

Figure 5: This member of the welcoming party which perfomed the Sipi Tau for the royal visitors caught the royal photographer's attention as he bicycled home with his daughter running beside him.

Figure 6: These Tongan musicians serenaded the visitors with wooden nose flutes on the Sunday morning of their visit. Later they attended a Wesleyan church service, which was attended by about 2000 people.

Figure 7: Queen Salote leads the royal procession to the mala'e where a banquet had been prepared. Crown Prince Tungi, who was also the Prime Minister, accompanied the Duke.

Figure 8: Queen Salote, Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh inspect Tui Malila, the tortoise said to have been presented by Captain Cook in 1777. The tortoise died in 1966.

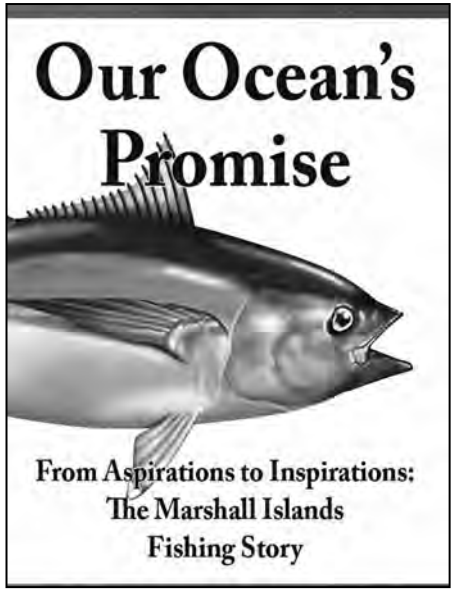
Figure 9: Queen Salote farewells Queen Elizabeth as she prepares to board the royal barge that will take the royal party to the SS *Gothic*.

NOTED:

DR PHILIP CASS is editor of Pacific Journalism Review.

'All we want is a fairer share'

Our Ocean's Promise: From aspiration to inspiration: The Marshall Islands Fishing story, by Giff Johnson. Majuro: Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority, 2021, 200 pages.



THIS lavishly illustrated history of the development of commercial fishing in the Marshall Islands will be of interest to anybody concerned with economic development and sensible management of fishing stocks in the Pacific.

For many islands their offshore economic zones and fishing fields have been a source, even potentially, of wealth. However, overfishing and the loss of fishing stock through legal agreements, leasing arrangements and outright piracy have been a problem for many island states in recent years.

The question has been how to manage this for the benefit of each nation. This book shows the path the Marshall Islands took and the financial growth that resulted. In 2010 returns from tuna fishing were US$4 million. By 2017 they were U$30 million.

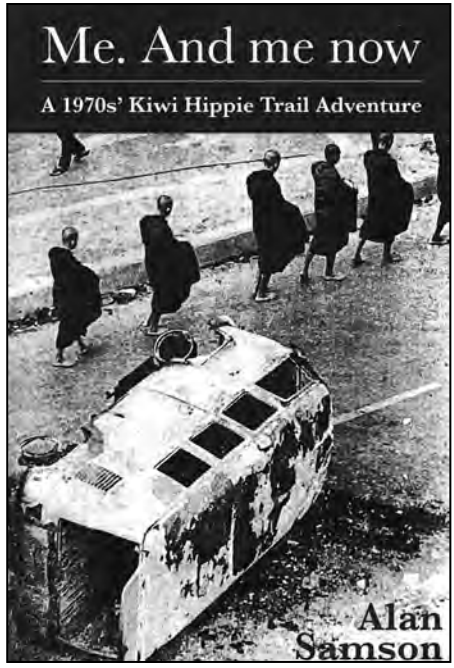
A desire to benefit directly from the island's nation's marine resources was paramount in the minds of the country's fisheries programme, as it worked under the Parties to Nauru Agreement.

Dr Transform Aqorau, who was founding CEO of the PNA office in Majuro, approvingly cites one Marshallese negotiator as declaring: 'All we want is to get a fairer share of the benefits from our tuna resources—now is that wrong?'

The Marshall Islands Marine Authority has been involved in a range of activities to promote the industry, from promoting work experience through schools, partnering with the US, Australia, New Zealand and France to monitor fishing stocks, establishing facilities for approved operators and transforming the industry from one where the government simply sold licences to one where the country is more and more involved in the whole tuna supply chain.

Disease, drugs and valuable lessons on the hippy trail

Me. And me now. A 1970s Kiwi hippie trail adventure, by Alan Samson. Auckland: Writers Ink, 2021. 296 pages.



FOR young New Zealanders the OE (Overseas Experience, often pronounced 'oey') is a part of their life. The point, however, is that they return. It is a strange phenomenon, but it seems that for many young New Zealanders, there is something inexplicable that calls them back.

So it was with Alan Samson, a former *Pacific Journalism Review* reviews editor among many journalistic accomplishments,whose wanderings around Asia make up the bulk of this book.

Curiously, however, his return seems to be of as much concern as his wanderings. The end of the book is weighted with the story of his sudden determination to get home at any cost because he was desperately ill, and of his recuperation and eventual transformation into a journalist.

His book is a fascinating glimpse into a world that was, despite the ever-present threat of nuclear Armageddon, much freer than it is now. You really could wander around the world, hitching and walking and staying in guest houses, sheltering from the rain and local conflicts and seeing a world immensely different from anything you had ever known.

Occasionally familiar faces would drift past. Samson encountered David Attenborough—who had briefly abandoned his army of porters and BBC camera crew—twice in Indonesia.

He met Tenzing Norgay, whose fellow porters looked puzzled when he declined their assistance as he strode on perilous mountain paths towards Nepal and seems to have been accompanied (or encountered) on a regular basis a fair number of other young white people doing exactly the same thing, but possibly with more interest in opium and the local prostitutes.

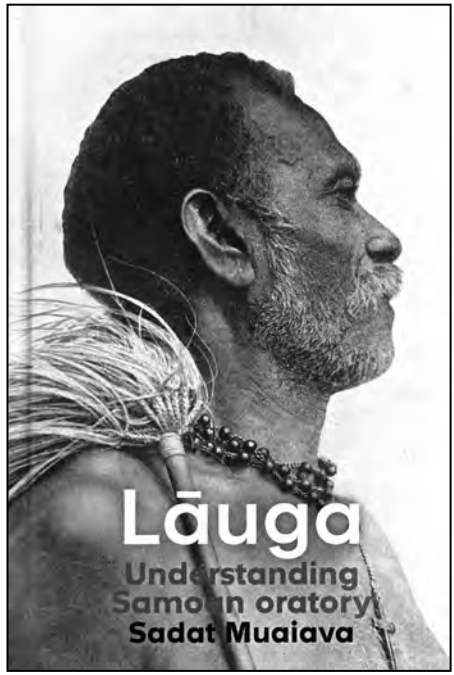
Eventually the stress of travel, poor food and disease caught up with him and he sent a telegram (remember them?) home announcing his return. He was so ill that he was quarantined in his mother's house for six months.

Still, Samson clearly feels it was all worth it, if only because it let him see so much of the world, to experience so many countries and to accustom him to having to understand so many viewpoints just to survive.

A fascinating book about a fascinating time.

New guide to Samoan oratory

Lāuga: Understanding Samoan oratory, by Sadat Muaiava. Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2022. 336 pages.



THIS beautifully produced book is a guide to the art of Samoan public speaking that is embedded in the practices of chiefly speeches (*lāuga fa'amatai*) or sermons (*lāuga fa'alelotu*). It is intended to guide those who may be asked to speak at significant occasions, especially those within the Samoan diaspora who may have lost some of their familiarity with this significant cultural skill.

The author provides instructions and guidelines for those unfamiliar with or even intimidated by the idea of speaking formally and explains how and under what circumstances protocol and social relationships guide their performance and their audience's expectations.

Because lāuga draws on many sources for information, the book is balanced with examples and personal recollections. It also looks at related rituals and cultural performances such as welcomes and acts of atonement. For non-specialised audiences Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's apology for the Dawn Raids using a traditional Samoan gifting ceremony, the Sua, will probably be the most familiar.

It includes Minister for Pacific Peoples Aupito William Sio's speech in support of the apology and the presentation of gifts that accompanied it. This provides an example of the power and use of words and the significance given to them in Samoan culture.

The minister said: 'She has humbled herself for the sake of the Pacific people of Aotearoa—an act of aroha. She has covered herself with a fine mat as act of humility. She has asked forgiveness for the wrongs committed by others.'

Then he went on to say: 'Our elders say "stones turn to dust, but words live

on" . . . Like the Sua gifting custom we present to you the manifestation of the words of today's apology. May our words continue to live on and offer strength and confidence to all future generations of Pacific Aotearoa.'

Faux footnotes and a false frontispiece

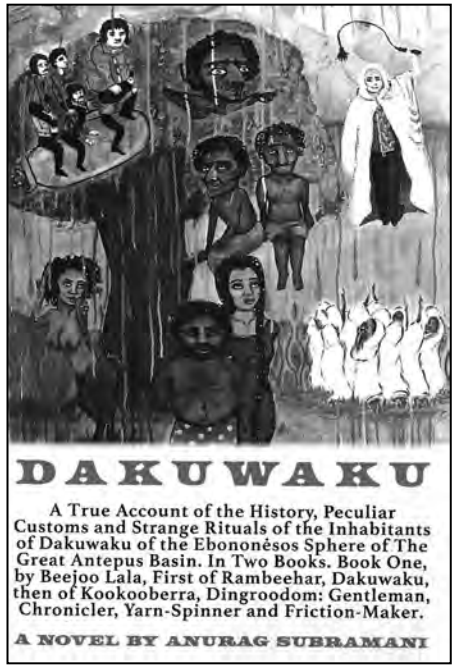
Dakawaku, by Anurag Subramanai. Honolulu: Lo'ihi Press, 2021. 327 pages.

THIS book tries very hard to be very clever, with a thousand literary, Pacific and other allusions dripping from every page and a writing style that is (I think) intended (perhaps) to mirror the comic prose of Swift and Boswell.

There are copious faux footnotes, a false frontispiece, addenda, exhortations to the reader and other literary devices that have not been seen since the steam press was invented. It is, in short (possibly) an attempt at what we used to call a picaresque novel in first year lit.

It is clearly intended to be very clever and very creative and is, alas, utterly impenetrable.

I suspect that it was intended (maybe) to be a sort of Indo-Fijian version of *Tales of the Tikongs* with much satire and a vast cast. Alas, I suspect that the satire—and indeed much of the book's meaning—will be apparent to nobody but the author (who, incidentally, apparently has a pet mongoose called Slinky).



Too much is going on and too much has been attempted for the average reader, or at least one with limited patience, to persevere much beyond the 12th footnote on page 51 about the life of Chin-Choonamma who caused a great scandal by becoming the kept woman of the up and coming Khattakuttu MadRapper Samir K.Chambee.

It is to be earnestly hoped that the author's next project, a people's history of Fiji, will be blessed with greater clarity.

Pacific
Journalism Review

Vol 29(1&2) July 2023

Unthemed edition call for papers

Pacific Journalism Review: Te Koakoa is calling for unthemed papers for the next double edition to be published in mid-2023.

We are seeking papers that fall within our broad remit of covering journalism, media and communication issues in the Pacific region, including Timor-Leste and West Papua. We also welcome submissions from colleagues in the near Asia Pacific region, including the Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines.

PJR is interested in promoting the work of photojournalists and documentary makers and would welcome submissions of portfolios accompanied by an exegesis article explaining the significance of the work and the author's experiences while preparing the work. A special *Frontline* section addresses investigative journalism and reflective journalism-as-research.

The deadline for submissions is 31 March 2023.

The double blind peer-reviewed journal has five main sections:

- *Research articles* (6000 words);
- *Commentaries* (industry insights, developments and practice – 1500-3000 words,
- *Frontline* (investigative journalism and reflective journalism-as-research – 6000-7000 words);
- *Forum* (up to 800 words); and
- *Reviews* (books, documentaries and online developments – 800-1500 words, commissioned by the editors).

The APA-based style guide is at: https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/pacific-journalism-review/style-guide

Submissions must be uploaded to the OJS open access website for *Pacific Journalism Review* on the Tuwhera indigenous research portal:
https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/pacific-journalism-review/

Pacific Journalism Review updates on the *PJR* Facebook page:
https://www.facebook.com/PacificJournalismReview

Pacific
Journalism Review

Notes for contributors

Te Koakoa; 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 Asia Pacific Network 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.

Main sections:

• *Research:* Academic research and analysis papers (up to 6000 words)
• *Commentary:* Industry insights, developments and practice (1500-3000 words)
• *Frontline*: Reflective journalism research (up to 6000 words)
• *Reviews:* Books, films, online developments, multimedia (800-1500 words).
• *Noted & Books:* 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 committee.Submissions are double blind peer refereed.

Editorial deadline for next issue:

31 March 2023. Submissions should be filed through the new submissions website on Tuwhera: **ojs.aut.ac.nz/pacific-journalism-review/**
Correspondence should be emailed to the editor,
Dr Philip Cass:
PJReview@aut.ac.nz
Pacific Journalism Review

Style: Use *APA (American Psychological Association) Style* for author-date system of referencing. See style guide at **www.pjreview.info**

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Cover: Women mix kava before participating in a talanoa on the Pacific pay gap with representatives from the New Zealand Human Rights Commission, Auckland, New Zealand. © Todd Henry

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